

Epistemic Violence against Female Academics in Nigerian Federal Universities

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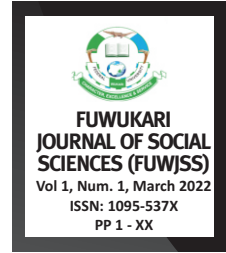
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Abstract

Within Nigerian federal universities, there is a collapse of gender equity into chauvinism as the dignity of female academics is no longer guaranteed in the interests of scholarship. This is entrenched in institutional structures and processes that distort female academics from recognizing the loss of their autonomy, self-confidence, agency and intellectual courage as credible producers of knowledge. Drawing data from eight (8) key female informants, who share their life stories at Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Federal University Wukari, University of Ibadan and University of Jos, this paper engages intersectionality theory to expound how gender inequality in both the Nigerian university system and the Nigerian society is rooted and expressed in systemic and institutional structures and processes that complicate the autonomy, self-confidence, agency and intellectual courage of female academics. Findings established a reversion to silencing scholarship where female academics in Nigerian federal universities are silenced and marginalized as producers of credible knowledge and the female academics themselves are saddled with the burden of proving this violence without knowing where to turn for help. The paper concludes that a focus on sexual harassment alone as

violence against female academics in Nigerian federal universities only addresses micro-dynamics without revealing layers of human interactions that hold precious possibilities for creating institutional structures and processes truly responsive to principles of democratic citizenship and academic freedom. The paper recommends gender sensitization within the Nigerian university system which should extend to Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education Trust Fund and National Universities Commission.

Key words: Silencing, Epistemic violence, Gender, Academic freedom, Intersectionality

Introduction

Nigerian federal universities are increasingly becoming gendered spaces where the production of knowledge appears to favour masculinized power, thereby undermining the autonomy, self-confidence and agency of female academics, who are credible contributors to knowledge production. Even though women are not formally excluded from Nigerian universities, the apparent “equality of access” (Mama & Barnes, 2007, p.2) within Nigerian universities is utopic, as numerically and culturally, Nigerian universities are still highly male-dominated spaces (Olonade, Oyibode, Idowu,, George, Iwelumor, Ozoya, Egharevba & Adetunde, 2021). Ideally, Nigeria universities were supposed to aspire to lead in the realization of the people's quest for full democracy and social justice (Mama & Barnes, 2007). Just like most other African universities, Nigerian federal universities reflect lack of commitment to academic freedom and social responsibility in taking female academics seriously in the intellectual sphere (Tsikata, 2007; Finchilescu & Dugard, 2021).

Ajayi, Chantler and Radford (2022) reveal that dominant trends within African societies over the years assumed women to be weak, subordinate and inferior. Also, Olonade, et. al. (2021) argue that gender inequality in Africa is perpetuated when the work and roles of women are unrecognized and unappreciated. They argue that the existing patriarchal structure in Nigeria restricts women's roles such that women

occupy fewer public sector positions regardless of their educational qualifications. In the same light, Law and Bruckert (2020) contend that violence against women has often been a source of vibrant debate and has a historical record from when women's rights movement gained attention on issues of women inequality and violence. Interestingly, discussions and policies have further strengthened the provision against harassment of women by men. Women face violence in the workplace and victimization by even male state actors (Law & Bruckert, 2020), including civic spaces of universities where academic freedom and scholarship are fundamental norms (Akoleowo, 2022). Bagelman (2020) and Columbo (2020) argue that there are embedded structural practices and processes that hinder women from reaching their highest potentials. Barnes (2007) shows that the postcolonial African university space has remained a subversive symbol of the colonial-era where institutional structures and processes still favour male academics over female academics.

Globally, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is a comprehensive and fundamental women's rights bill established in 1979 by the United Nations (UN) to promote gender equality and women's rights protection (Mackay, Meryl & Louise, 2010; UN General Assembly, 1993). To the CEDAW, discrimination against women includes any distinction, exclusion or restriction made based on sex, which nullifies women's enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms in political, economic, social, cultural, and civic domains (Tournadre, 2022). In the literature, issues of gender-based violence, organizational culture, post-colonial political history and educational theory have been largely described and theorized (Tournadre, 2022; Barnes, 2007 & Mackay, Meryl & Louise, 2010). However, the subject of gender and institutional culture in Nigeria's federal universities remain fuzzy and uncertain. Hence, this paper interrogates where the lines of power and exclusion reside within Nigeria's federal universities. The paper discusses nuances embedded in institutional structures within Nigeria's federal universities that make knowledge production within this civic space a combative and aggressive process for women, as worthy candidates in this space are those who survive attackers (Tournadre,

2022).

The paper is divided into four major sections. The first section reviewed related literature around themes of gendered violence and social order in the Nigerian society, alienation, gender and knowledge production in Nigerian Universities. Patriarchy was described here as a set of social relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations that enable men to dominate women (Makama, 2013). It was stressed in this section that the material base of patriarchy is men's control over women labour power, which is maintained by excluding women from accessing necessary economically productive resources and by restricting women's sexuality (Makama, 2013). The section explains that the alienation and violence that female academics suffer in Nigerian federal universities is rooted and expressed in institutional structures within the Nigerian society. The second section of the paper is the methodological approach which is rooted in qualitative research methods involving eight (8) key informant who provided information through interviews at Federal University Dutsin-Ma (2 interviewees); Federal University Wukari (2 interviewees); University of Ibadan (2 interviewees) and University of Jos (2 interviewees). Information provided are personal experiences of the female academics who served as informants. The third section of the paper discussed lived experiences of silencing scholarship in Nigerian federal universities where participants in the study recognized that gendered dimensions of institutional cultures in Nigerian federal universities have impacts on marriages and family life of female academics, their participation in governance structures of the university, their mentoring relationships and on other aspects of their everyday life as university academics. The section also discussed institutional cultures and career trajectories of female academics in Nigerian federal universities where it was affirmed that both historical and socio-economic developments within the Nigerian society have profoundly shaped the Nigerian federal university system. The fourth section of the paper is the conclusion that iterated that epistemic violence against female academics is a foundational characteristic of the Nigerian federal university system which range from the violence and inequalities that female academics suffer from both students and

staff members, to violence and inequalities they suffer from the male-centred approaches in the Nigerian federal universities governance structures, which deny female academics privileges to establish themselves as credible participants in the knowledge production enterprise.

Gendered Violence and Social Ordering in the Nigerian Society

The Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2021) states that in all societies, women and girls are vulnerable to physical, sexual or psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture. Their report points out that all forms of violence against women have continued to increase in Nigeria with a prevalence of spousal physical or sexual or emotional violence from 24.5 per cent in 2013 to 36.2 per cent in 2018 (NBS, 2021). The term gender-based violence refers to any types of acts of violence caused by unequal gender relations (Cohn & Rae, 2020). The variety of forms and patterns of gender-based violence covers physical and sexual violence, sexual harassment, enforced sexual prostitution and pornography, and sex trafficking (Cohn & Rae, 2020). The Nigerian educational system has demonstrated forms of gender-based violence where the colonial project of the feminization of maleness has continued (Makama, 2013). This resonates with Barnes' (2007) argument that post-colonialism has been marked by a search for a 'new man' in which educational institutions, including universities have become places to mood 'new men'. In this way, Nigerian universities are not static, gender-neutral spaces to which women have been benignly and invisibly added. Instead, these spaces and places are intricately marked with codes for man-as-thinker, man-as-aggressive-debater, man-as-athlete and boys-becoming-men (Mama & Barnes, 2007, p.2). George (2007) argues that the addition of women to this men's club is not only a statistical, but also an extremely meaningful social and symbolic exercise. The Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics' (NBS, 2021) report shows that there are currently more women than ever before in Nigeria in paid and self-employment as Nigerian women are now seen to take centre stage in profitable ventures such as private businesses and formal career of all kinds such as banking, insurance, finance, academia, law, engineering

and medicine. Emphatically, the report recognized that despite this seemingly positive development, many Nigerian women are not reaching the top of their careers in their chosen careers due to the patriarchal order of the African society (Ajayi, Chantler & Radford 2022).

Makama (2013) describes patriarchy as a set of social relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among men which enables them in turn to dominate women. Makama (2013) further points that the material base of patriarchy is men's control over women labour power. She showed that control is maintained by excluding women from accessing necessary economically productive resources and by restricting women's sexuality. Makama (2013) goes on to note that Nigerian women, like their counterparts around the world, face a lot of discrimination that limit their opportunities to develop their full potential on the basis of equality with men. They are far from enjoying equal rights in the labour market, due mainly to their domestic burden, low level of educational attainment, poverty, biases against women's employment in certain sectors of the economy or types of work and discriminatory salary practices (Makama, 2013).

Ajayi, Chantler and Radford (2022) believe that the African society views men and women as not equal. The dominant trend has over the years assumed male superiority while women are seen as weak, subordinate and inferior. Olonade et.al. (2021) argue that patriarchy is highly pronounced in almost all African societies and that in nearly all human communities, there is one form of inequality or the other. They contend that gender inequality in Africa is perpetuated when women work including domestic chores, child caring and even some economic contributions, and the roles women perform are unrecognized and unappreciated. Women are seen as less and their work is also valued as such compared to male colleagues who hold the same positions (Olonade et.al., 2021). Women exploitation in Nigeria is even seen in manners that the younger they are, the more violence they tend to experience (Olonade et.al., 2021). This can even be seen in the recent school abductions that have taken place in the Nigerian society with the sad cases of the Chibok girls in 2014 and the more recent abduction of female students in Kaduna in May 2022 (Ali, 2022).

A study carried out by Ajayi, Chantler and Radford (2022) suggest that violence against women (VAW) in Nigeria is a consequence of systems of domination that structurally and interpersonally place women in a subordinate position to men, increasing their vulnerability to domestic abuse, sexual abuse and violence. This is rooted in the patriarchal system found in the society which further reveals itself in gender inequalities and disadvantages. Law and Bruckert (2020) argue that violence against women has often been a source of vibrant debate and has a historical record from when women's rights movement gained attention on issues of women inequality and violence.

Alienation, Gender and Knowledge Production in Nigerian Universities

Gender studies scholars constantly make reference to the marginalization of women (Makama, 2013). If one may ask, could this be the distinguishing feature of gender studies? Or is it merely a reflection of the patriarchal systems of modern society? Drawing from Mafeje's (1971) disposition that objective reality is very difficult to disentangle from subjective perception, almost in the same way that epistemic violence against female academics in Nigerian universities is hard to disentangle from the endemic gender inequalities within structures of the Nigerian society. When it comes to epistemic violence against women in Nigerian universities, explanations converged among Liberal feminists, Marxist feminists, and African feminist. With Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality theory, these various explanations of violence against women blend to explain the social meaning attached to gendered violence and social order in the Nigerian society. Crenshaw (1991) uses the term intersectionality to define overlapping identities and social categories such as race, gender, sexual orientation and associated systems of subjugation and oppression. Since then, the term has been used as a theory in various fields of research including sociology, political science and law (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). Intersectionality is the understanding of a person's background in more than one aspect to get a better grasp of who he or she is and what conflicts or freedoms he or she has in order to advance social change (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). Hankivsky (2014) noted that

through the lens of intersectionality, inequities are never the result of single distinct factors. Rather, inequalities are the outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations and experiences. Thus, intersectionality focuses on the consciousness of people and experiences (McKinnon 2013), and illustrates that no social group is the same especially when their lived experiences and multiple identities can bring about advantages and disadvantages concurrently (Simien 2007). Kohlman and Dickerson (2008, p.126) claim that intersectionality provides a unique lens of analyses that does not question difference; rather, it assumes that differential experiences of common events are to be expected. On the other hand, Few-Demo (2014, p.169) argues that intersectionality theory is simultaneously “political, symbolic, categorical, relational and locational.”

In understanding the alienation and violence that female academics suffer in Nigerian universities, this paper engages the intersectionality theory to shed more light by showing that gender inequality in the Nigerian university system and in the Nigerian society in general is rooted and expressed in institutional structures. The forms of intersectionality range from relational intersectionality approach which emphasizes that individuals negotiate both institutional practices and cultural discourses; to locational intersectionality approach which depend heavily on standpoint theories to show how identity categories and social positions are created when multiple forms of subordination or oppression occur (Few-Demo, 2014). Both relational and locational intersectionality help to explain social phenomena in specific social settings especially in terms of how values and ideologies influence identity constructions. This is in ways that social location categories such as gender and class intersect with the relational positions of individuals which include institutional structures and systems to create new societal norms (Few-Demo, 2014). Thus, this looks at the negotiations, interactions and intersections of patriarchy, gender and occupational roles, decision making, lived experiences as well as social order in the lives of female academics in Nigerian federal universities. This is in tandem with Finchilescu & Dugard's (2021, p.2768) position that gender-based violence, including epistemic violence against female academics in Nigerian federal universities, is not only about

harmful individual behaviors but also the underlying social ordering within which such behaviors are performed and tolerated.

Marginalization of Females in Nigerian Universities

Several scholars have alluded to the fact that females are being marginalized in Nigerian universities (Akoleowo, 2022; Makama, 2013; Mosadioluwa 2022; Abiodun-Oyebanji 2011). Varying factors have been adduced for the low number of women academics, including sexual prejudices (Akoleowo, 2022), socio-cultural and religious beliefs (Ogbogu, 2011). These reasons all border on gender marginalization, and as studies have established, while university systems present as gender-neutral institutions, women are not only underrepresented in the academia, they are also marginalized when existing gender stereotypes are internalized and acted out in the decision-making processes, plans and programs of the university (Akoleowo, 2022, p. 167). Akoleowo (2022) argues that this is not covert knowledge in higher institutions and several universities in Nigeria. A 2011 study on females in Nigerian universities confirmed that women were underrepresented in university management due to the fact that women were not given the same opportunities as their male counterparts in recruitments, promotions and conducive environments for growth and empowerment (Abiodun-Oyebanji 2011). Although this narrative tends to be changing in recent times, as Mosadioluwa (2022) argues that more females are seen to be representatives in some selected Nigerian university management positions. Another study conducted in 2016 in Southwest Nigeria further confirmed that women were marginalized in Nigerian universities due to their inability to acquire higher educational qualifications that will position them for senior management posts and higher pay (Eboiyehi, Fayomi & Eboiyehi, 2016). Other factors identified were religious factors, the patriarchal nature of the university system and women's involvement in domestic chores and child caring (Eboiyehi, Fayomi & Eboiyehi, 2016). From the foregoing, it can be established that marginalization and inequality are evident in Nigerian universities leading to unequal access of knowledge production.

Methodological Approach

The research design for this study is rooted in qualitative research methods which ensured that symbolic representation was achieved through the inclusion of full range of dimensions and the group relevant to the study. Data collection involved eight (8) key informants who are female academics at Federal University Dutsin-Ma (2 interviewees); Federal University Wukari (2 interviewees); University of Ibadan (2 interviewees); and University of Jos (2 interviewees). Data derived through interviews summed up as life-stories of these female academics. Of the participants in the study, 6 are between the ages of 30 and 40 and information on their career progression indicates their academic ranks as Lecturers I and II. These female academics can be said to be midway into their career as wives, mothers and employees (academics). The other 2 study participants were older (in their 50's and 60's), and at the height of their academic career (Reader and Professor) as well as at the height of their status as wives and mothers. The data analysis took an inductive approach which allowed for the descriptive and detailed analysis of collections of stories and provides a framework that recognized interrelationships between interpreters and interpretations. Themes were identified through the principle of internal homogeneity. This approach enabled the analysis to unearth epistemic violence from the perspective of female academics themselves who daily experience this form of violence in Nigerian federal universities.

Lived Experiences of Silencing Female Scholarship in Nigerian Federal Universities

Being a qualitative study, the paper conceives of the phenomenon of lived experiences of female academic staff in Nigerian federal universities to describe the experiences of a person through a life event which only the actor can adequately communicate. A lived experience is a subjective recounting of an experience that is real for the actor (Mapp 2008; Petitmengin, Remillieux & Valenzuela-Moguillansky, 2019). Participants recognized that gendered dimensions of institutional cultures in Nigerian federal universities have impacts on marriages and family life of female academics, their participation in

governance structures of the university, their mentoring relationships and on aspects of their everyday life as university academics. All participants agreed that as regarding their marriages and family life, the challenges of marriage and children have an impact on their knowledge production capabilities. Although participants differed on how they experienced the impacts of marriage and family as academics. However, they noted that the ages of children, marital status and who a female academic is married to, are all important factors in determining the productivity level of a female academic in the knowledge production enterprise. There was a connecting narrative among participants that affirms that female academics that planned their childbearing tend to be more focused and organized as academics than those female academics that do not plan their childbearing.

Table 1: Summary of Participants' Characteristics

| Pseudonym | Age Bracket | Gender | University of Affiliation | Position |
|------------------|--------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| D.V | 40s | Female | Federal University Dutsin-Ma | Lecturer I |
| D.J | 40s | Female | Federal university Dutsin-Ma | Lecturer I |
| D.R | 40s | Female | Federal University Wukari | Lecturer I |
| M.E | 30s | Female | Federal University Wukari | Lecturer I |
| D.A | 40s | Female | University of Ibadan | Lecturer II |
| P.A | 60s | Female | University of Ibadan | Professor |
| P.P | 50s | Female | University of Jos | Reader |
| A. K | 40s | Female | University of Jos | Lecturer I |

Source: Key Informant (life-story) Interviews, 2022

One of the participants, D.V. recounts that organizing the lives of three children under twelve years old, coping with sickness, their school *runs* and extra-curricular activities, along with a full teaching load and heavy committee commitments are challenges that confront female academics in Nigerian federal universities . In the case of M.E. who is married to a fellow male academic, she bewailed that even being married to a fellow male academic has not been useful in helping her navigate the complications of the Nigerian federal university system, as her husband still exert enormous power over her to control and restrict how she spends her salary and which male colleagues she has to relate with. D.J. and D.A., female academics in their mid-forties, described the stagnation of their Ph.D research work and publication during their

childbearing and rearing years. They agreed that once these child-bearing and rearing years have passed, women academics settled into more productive periods of their career. Nonetheless, they pointed that by this time these female academics are older and they will miss certain career development opportunities (including Ph.D and postdoc scholarships) due to age limits placed on such opportunities. Some of these opportunities usually come with limits on age of applicant or number of years from when the PhD was completed, some peg it at 5 years from completion of PhD or 45 years of age.

Participants admitted that though the conditions of service in most Nigerian federal universities did not force a blunt choice between work and family; however, these conditions of service are not conducive for the career progression of female academics. Especially with Nigeria's pro-natalist cultures, female academics are expected to marry and have children, with this, M.E. revealed that female academics usually receive “tons of conflicting advice from senior colleagues” about when and how to marry and have children. M.E. believed that the greatest challenge of epistemic violence against female academics in Nigerian federal universities lies in the failure of the institutional cultures of these universities to clearly distinguish between male and female academics and a firm belief that this is the correct approach. M.E. emphasized that the institutional cultures and conditions of service in most Nigerian federal universities see an academic as a gender neutral individual. Thus, there are no measures in place to support female academics during intensive periods of childbearing and the rearing of young children. Participants insist that apart from the maternity leave that female academics enjoy, Nigerian federal universities' apparent neutrality on gender issues puts female academics in a more disadvantaged position, than their male counterparts (especially regarding promotion criteria where a female academic's innovative caregiving responsibilities at both the family and community levels do not add up to her promotion as an academic).

D.V. lamented that the everyday life experiences of female academics in Nigerian federal universities include the persistent perception that the “real” academics are male. She explained that there is a common practice in Nigerian federal universities were more

challenging courses and even positions (that demand extensive traveling and long meeting) are given to men under the guise that female academics are already overburdened with domestic and ceremonial roles, such as organizing refreshments for academic meetings and organizing parties for 100 level and graduating students. Also, female academics are normally called “Mummy”, “Mama” “Madam”, and Auntie”, while their male counterparts are never addressed as “Papa” or “Uncle”, but male academics are usually addressed by titles such as Mr. Dr. Prof. and “Oga”, signifying their academic positions and accomplishments in larger society and cultural accomplishments. Participants allude that this practice reinforces gender inequalities as female academics are expected to still fulfill their “motherly” and “wifely” roles even within the university system. Aligning with M.E., all participants grumbled that the most difficult part of Nigerian federal universities' institutional culture is the denial of the existence of gender inequality and discrimination at Nigerian federal universities.

P.P. identified her major challenge as an academic as being able to balance her domestic role as a woman and as a female academic. For her, being also married to a public servant complicates her burden as a woman and female academic, as she has to always create time to attend to her academic expectations and responsibilities and at the same time play the role of a mother and wife to a public personality. This was particularly challenging during the period she served in an administrative position as Head of Department, where she could not do much research because of the overbearing burdens of being a woman, mother, wife to a public personality and a female university administrator. P.P. and A.K particularly stressed that male academics do not have the same conflicting roles in the home front as female academics. They pointed that female academics do not normally have the freedom and liberty to choose to undertake on research fieldwork without the consent and cooperation of their husbands. On the other hand, male academics are normally free at all times to undertake research fieldwork with or without the consent and cooperation of their wives. The male academic can just “*order*” his female academic wife “*control these children*” while he leaves the home to do his research which earns only him academic honors and not with his wife who has

contributed to provide the support and enabling environments to attain these academic honors.

Institutional Cultures and Career Trajectories of Female Academics in Nigerian Federal Universities

The study findings affirmed that both historical and socio-economic developments within the Nigerian society have profoundly shaped the Nigerian federal university system. It was pointed that the University College, Ibadan emerged during the colonial period as a liberal college for the training of predominantly male elites. With post-colonial transformations, which have focused on Africanization and economic liberalization policies, the university space in Nigeria continues to experience gender discriminatory practices that distort female academics from recognizing the loss of their autonomy, self-confidence, agency and intellectual courage as credible knowers. Participants affirmed that Nigerian federal universities cannot be understood without their context and environment, as these universities are shaped by internal processes and national contexts. Participants identified that the low level of women participation in tertiary education as academics is due to a function of gender inequalities within the Nigerian society. Tsikata (2007) had argued that the demographic and sociological character of academics in a university is an important aspect of the institutional culture of such a university. Participants reminisced that the first generation of academics in Nigerian federal universities, particularly in University of Ibadan, were trained to pay less attention to transforming the structures and practices which actively discriminate against women and reproduce combative and exclusionary intellectualisms. Participants believed that it was this group of academics that trained succeeding generations of academics in other federal universities who emulated them in paying less attention to transforming structures and practices which actively discriminate against women. The study's findings sturdily aligned with Tsikata's (2007, p.22) argument that in African university campuses, there is a "chilly climate for women students", the "marginalization of women administrators and scholars", and "the institutional privileging of their male counterparts and of masculinist expectations and practices".

Among the interviewees, M.E. is pessimistic about her

prospects and she is not really “keen” in being promoted in a “hurry”. She complained that she has not received excellent departmental support for her promotion and career progression. Although she has been promoted once, she is already looking at other options, outside the university system, because of her dissatisfaction with the Nigerian federal university system. D.V. was very knowledgeable about how the Nigerian federal university system works and confident of her eventual career progression, even though she acknowledged that things were moving a little slower than she expected. She counted herself “lucky” to earn some departmental and faculty leadership positions. However, she pointed that she earned these leadership positions because none of the men was willingly to take up these appointments.

A. K. bemoans the fact that female academics in Nigerian federal universities suffer a double income burden both as academics who have to pay for their research and publications; and as wives who have to financially support their husbands considering the harsh economic realities that all Nigerians confront. With the Nigerian federal government not adequately funding research and publications in universities, A.K. said that it is difficult for female academics to seek resources for research and publications especially as they lack the time to conceive grant proposals because they are always saddled with domestic chores/roles as well as lecturing, marking of examination scripts, and attendance of academic meetings. In this way, the commitment and priority of Nigerian female academics in federal universities is not really for the love of scholarship per se, but to be gainfully employed in order to financially support the family. A.K. iterated that:

“The fact of the matter remains that not all men are gainfully employed and the economic situation in the country demands that sometimes two incomes must come into the home. Now the woman uses those resources that she has, (which should be contributing to the home front) to pay for researches and conferences as well as to publish papers and you see that all of these expenses may hinder her from progressing at the right time, getting her promotions.... Also women may not be able to travel easily to conduct research where a man would just be able to sleep anywhere, make adjustments on the road, women will have to think twice about making those kinds of adjustments”.

(A.K. Key Informant (life-story) Interview, Unijos, May 29, 2022)

Narratives of contrapower harassment as used by Finchilescu and Dugard (2021) also emerged in the study. As used by Finchilescu and Dugard (2021), contrapower harassment refers to a form of harassment in which a target who usually has higher status and power in an institution is harassed by a subordinate who has a lesser status or less power. A.K. narrated that contrapower harassment is prominent in Nigerian federal universities against female academics. She gave instances that contrapower harassment against female academics in Nigerian federal universities manifest in incivility against female academics by especially more matured, tall and rich students, in forms of disruptions in class, disrespect and even physical assault of female academics. She highlighted instances where:

“...a colleague of mine once mentioned how students in class don't pay much attention to her because they feel or think they're taller (than my younger colleague who isn't married)... I have had an issue of harassment when I found a student in exam malpractice, I asked him to fill his exam malpractice form but he refused (he was taller than I am and bigger). It had to take the intervention of my male colleagues and the security team to get him to fill the form and even at that he refused to carry out any of the instructions I gave him...Another female colleague was assaulted physically because the student she caught in exam malpractice thought she was bigger than her, this was by a female student but we know she wouldn't have done that to a male colleague...”

(A.K. Key Informant (life-story) Interview, Unijos, May 29, 2022)

Participants believe that maintaining an academic position as a female academic in a Nigerian federal university is a more herculean challenge than gaining employment into the university system. They uphold that female academics in Nigeria's federal universities are squeezed by what Mohanty (2003) and Morley (1999) termed macropolitical forces, which female academics have little or no direct control over. Accordingly, it is the market, rather than the quest for truth that provides the ethical and moral framework for university education. In this way, both academics and students relate as consumers in a

market place and not as citizens in a democratic knowledge production space.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Epistemic violence against female academics is a foundational characteristic of the Nigerian federal university system, this ranges from the violence and inequalities that female academics suffer from both students and staff members, to violence and inequalities they suffer from the male-centred approaches in governance structures of Nigerian federal universities. Nigerian federal university knowledge production space is an inequitably gendered space in which female academics have to work harder to establish themselves as credible knowers. In spite these inequalities and violence against female academics, authorities of Nigerian federal universities are still unable to recognize and take appropriate steps to address the violence and inequalities that female academics confront as knowledge producers. In this way, female academics in Nigerian federal universities are compelled to conform to norms and accept inequalities against them as normal. Female academics are expected to fulfill their social roles as mothers and wives, and then to still take on mothering roles to both students and male colleagues at school. Within Nigerian federal universities, sexual harassment is the commonest route through which institutional cultures and policies respond to epistemic violence. In this light, the focus on only sexual harassment as violence against female academics in Nigerian federal universities only addresses micro-dynamics without revealing layers of structural undercurrents that trench violence and inequalities against women in an 'open space' like a university. Constructs of sexual harassment have only resulted in the feminization of male academics within Nigerian federal universities' spaces as sexual harassment is only addressed through codes and disciplinary procedures that see male academics as aggressive and this has become conflictual in understanding the intensity of violence against female academics in Nigerian federal universities. The paper therefore recommends that gender sensitization within the university system should be an established perpetual act until it becomes a norm which extends to all administrative establishments related to the universities, including the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education

Trust Fund (TETFUND), National Universities Commission(NUC) and other related organs.

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