In A Man's World: The Experiences of Women in Academic Employment in Nigerian Universities

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated in loving memory of my dear father, Chief(Engr) Chukwuemeka Festus Patrick Umekwe (Snr), whose enduring values of hard work, resilience, kindness, and unwavering integrity continue to inspire and guide me. His legacy of compassion, dedication, and love has left an indelible mark on my journey, shaping the person I am today.

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ABSTRACT

Current statistics reveal that even with the increasing numbers of female graduates in Nigerian universities, women academics remain grossly underrepresented, in particular at senior academic and administrative levels. Women in academic employment, even where they exist in large numbers tend to be saturated at the lower rungs of the academic career hierarchy. Women constitute 24% of the academic workforce and only 15% of professoriate. These statistics suggest that not only are women numerically underrepresented in academic employment, but their progress is also often slow and stifled by a range of barriers and challenges. This thesis explores Nigerian women's experiences in academic employment to ascertain the specific barriers that operate to limit their career progression. The study set out to investigate how the gender gap in university based academic work is perpetuated. From a post-colonial feminist perspective, the central assumption is that African women were doubly colonised by imperial and patriarchal ideologies which permeate African institutions and operate to limit women's choices, agency, and career aspirations. Semi-structured interviews with 24 women employed at four universities, reveal that although academic women in Nigerian universities are privileged by virtue of their academic qualifications and profession, their lives are marked with glaring contradictions. The possession of higher education and participation in academic employment comes with personal and social gains, although also come with a range of dilemmas. Women's academic identities are not often constructed in line with the model of a typical male career trajectory which assumes a linear path from graduate school to professorship. Many of the women in this study report meandering academic career paths, giving priority to their traditional roles as wives, mothers, and primary care givers. Given that the male career mystique is still the taken for granted model which is used to gauge the performance of both male and female academics, women's progression in academia is consequently stalled. Women lack mentors, have excessive academic workloads, and work a never-ending shift. All of which work to exclude them from important networks and hinder their capacity to engage in activities which are required to build the capital necessary for advancement in academia. The implication is that many women are stuck at a low rung as a result of overwhelming socio-cultural and institutional limitations that work together to make aspiration to senior levels of the academic career hierarchy either unsustainable or undesirable. Even with this reality, their narratives suggest that they are not passive victims, many of these women employed strategies such as seeking family support and time management to navigate their careers, cope and advance to senior positions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents some of the important issues that make it necessary to study the lives and experiences of female Nigerian academics. The study proceeds from the argument that Nigerian women have been disadvantaged since Western formal education was introduced into Nigerian society in the colonial era. Even in postcolonial Nigeria, gender inequality in education and employment remains a major feature of the Nigerian political economy. Women continue to be underrepresented in the Nigerian educational system, particularly in higher education, and in respect to employment in teaching and education, women's share of the workforce is lowest at university level.

This study is concerned with women's underrepresentation in academic employment in Nigerian universities. The study is significant in a range of ways. First, it responds to the recognised need to explore and understand the experiences of various groups of African women within firm theoretical foundations, linking lives and experiences to wider Nigerian society. A second strength is the contribution of an 'insider and outsider' perspective in investigating the experiences of academic women. This thesis contributes to the limited but growing database of research on the lives of African women, which is important in the struggle for gender equality across the African continent. It is also important to end what postcolonial feminists refer to as 'discursive violence' against women in previously colonised contexts. In this chapter, the nature and scope of the problem under study are identified within a clear discussion of the purpose, significance, and methodological approach of the study. Finally, the chapter outlines the overall structure and organisation of the thesis.

1.1 Background to the Study

> As gatekeepers, academic women have the potential to play a critical role in shaping tomorrow's woman today. It is therefore important to understand their history and ideological commitment to improve the status of women in the academy. (Lie and O'Leary, 1990: 17)

Equality between women and men is a struggle that is ever-present in both developing and well-advanced societies. In Nigeria, advocates of gender equality claim that one

way to achieve greater participation and integration of women into mainstream society is through the provision of equal educational opportunities. However, studies by Currie *et al.* (2002), Baker (2012), Morley (2014), Burkinshaw and White (2017) and UNESCO (2018) warn that even though women's access to higher education has dramatically increased in both developed and developing countries, enrolment should not be confused with equality. The argument is that, as equality of access is approximated, achieved, or even exceeded, women become segregated into distinct areas of study and this constitutes a major mechanism in producing a sexual division of labour, particularly at professional levels (Robertson, 1986; Kelly and Slaughter, 1991; Stromquist, 1991). In Nigeria, as in many parts of Africa, the fact that women are increasingly embracing academic opportunities is undeniable. Women's enrolment at graduate and postgraduate levels has increased dramatically in recent years, but their full participation in all aspects of the society is far from being realised (Mama, 2003; Ojejide, 2003; Yusuff, 2014). Although women make up increasing numbers of students, graduates and new academic staff, academic life remains overwhelmingly *a man's world* (Ojejide *et al.*, 2006). There seems to be a mismatch between the aims of Western formal education and societal expectations (or stereotypes), and in many cases the possession of Western formal education presents new dilemmas for African women (Robertson, 1986).

At the time when Western-style formal education was introduced in Nigeria in the mid-nineteenth century, it was solely to develop male manpower to achieve the imperialist agenda (Fafunwa, 1974). Formal education was only extended to women nearly three decades after its inception, following a backlash against their exclusion. The aim was to ensure compliance. The African woman was encouraged to uphold African culture while simultaneously internalising Western patriarchal ideas of domesticity. Even more puzzling is the fact that those who plan African women's future as equal partners with men ignore how these clear contradictions and blurred distinctions affect women's educational and professional aspirations (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003). Time and again education is prescribed as the basis on which policies and plans for Nigerian women's advancement must be based. A failure to acknowledge the overt and subtle ways in which African culture and patriarchal values of domesticity limit women's choices about what to study, and how far they should go in school, render these policies and programmes superficial at best. The lives of many African

and Nigerian women are shaped both by indigenous culture and by Westernisation, systems wthat exist side by side, at times with obvious contradictions and at times with blurred distinctions (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003).

Within a patriarchal social order, Nigerian academic women must negotiate their place as subordinate to men. In so doing, women experience tension and conflict as they try to adapt, adjust, and actively shape their own social realities within the family and the university. Compared to most women in Nigeria, academic women are privileged by virtue of their position and higher education. However, they are still disadvantaged compared to their male counterparts. Academic women carry a heavy burden of expectation and are constantly judged in and outside the university based on domestic indices. They are expected to be 'good' wives and mothers. They are expected to take care of almost all domestic responsibilities and at the same time be as productive as their male colleagues (Ojejide, 2003; Ogbogu, 2009). Women who do not conform to these distorted ideals and expectations are perceived as incompetent and sometimes scoffed at as unfeminine. Female academics have always been a minority and are more likely to be concentrated at lower levels. They are unequally represented within higher education institutions, and far less likely to be among the faculty in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects than in arts and social sciences (Settles *et al.,* 2006; Smith, 2018).

Underrepresentation is not peculiar to Nigeria. Evidence from around the world suggests that women are underrepresented in university teaching and research (Bagihole Baker, 2012; O'Connor, 2013; Morley, 2014). Moreover, the further up the academic career hierarchy, the lower the proportion of women (Morley, 2013; Johnson- Turner, 2014). The underrepresentation of women in academic employment is a recurring theme in research on gender and higher education in developing nations in Africa and South Asia (Ojejide, 2003; Mama; 2003; Yusuff, 2014). In developed Western nations, although experiences are relative, similar patterns of underrepresentation exist for women academics (Letherby, 2003; Probert, 2005; Bagihole, 2002; Morley, 2014). Research suggests that although women's representation among university students, graduates and academics has increased since the 1970s, gender continues to influence work patterns, aspirations and experiences (Baker, 2013). This holds true even in developed nations such as the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, where there have been decades of social

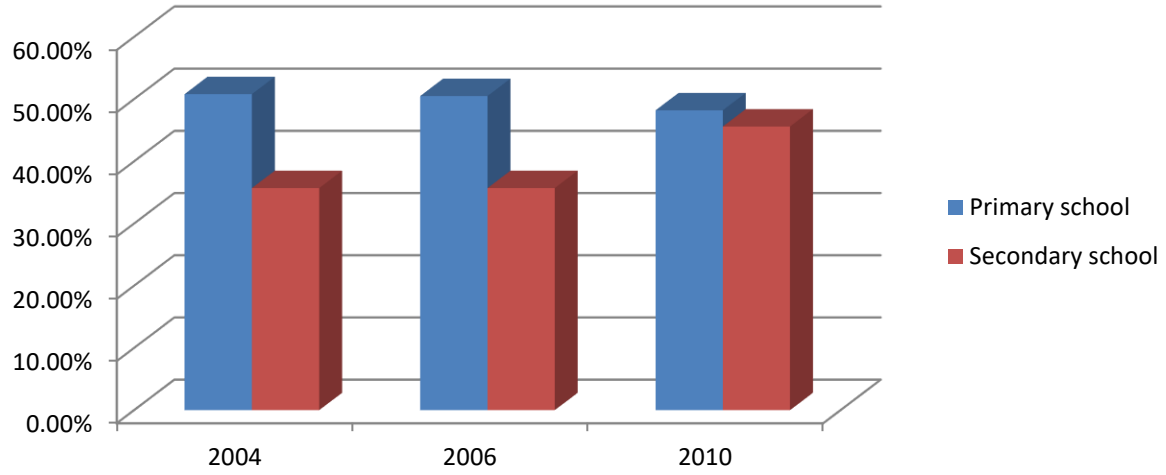
change, equality initiatives and family-friendly policies (Bagihole, 2003). Among male and female academics in many countries, notable differences continue to exist in work location, discipline specialisation, job security and satisfaction, rank, and career development. Academic work remains gendered; even in light of the changing nature of higher education, the university context, and the academic profession, the gendering of academic work persists in different forms (Hughes, 2002) The university has not escaped the current restructuring of priorities, strategies and goals that many workplaces are currently witnessing. This process of restructuring has severe implications for gender equity and some scholars have questioned whether it promotes or counteracts gender equity (Baker, 2013). This PhD study aims to provide some explanation for the gap in academic career outcomes between men and women in Nigerian universities. It aims to gain a deeper understanding of the causes of persisting gender disparities in academic employment, through an exploration of the lived experiences of academics in selected public and private universities. Such an understanding is crucial for devising and implementing effective policies to promote gender equality and to reap its benefits in the shortest time possible.

It is hoped that this research will go a long way towards filling the gap in current knowledge of the nature, extent and root causes of women's underrepresentation as academic and managerial staff in Nigerian universities. Studying gender disparities in respect to opportunities, participation and security has become vital in developing economies, particularly in Africa, because of the potential negative effects on both sustainable growth and poverty reduction. This is evident in the way that gender equality now constitutes an aim of most poverty alleviation and sustainable development strategies (Tchouassi, 2012). It is also one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Through teaching and research, universities can produce skilled and seasoned professionals whose knowledge and leadership constitute the potential to change people's lives. Equalities-oriented research, moreover, can generate the cutting-edge knowledge required to deal with pressing issues of food security, climate change and the effects and causes of poverty (Roberts and Ajai-Ajagbe 2013). The inextricable link between higher education and development has been long recognised by leading thinkers in the education and development sectors. The Association of Commonwealth Universities in 2010 recommended the inclusion and explicit recognition of higher education in future

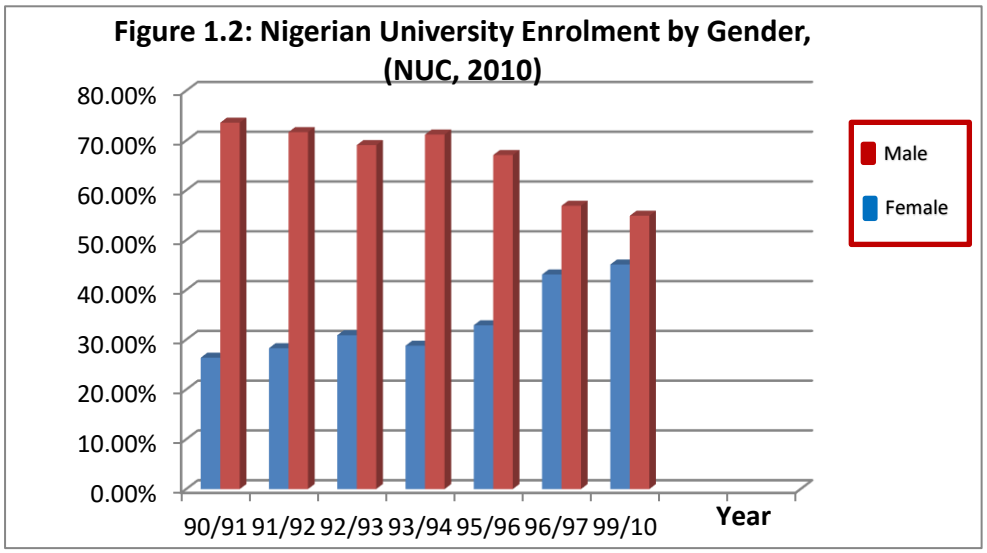
development goals. Currently, however, the gross underrepresentation of women in the Nigerian university workforce has complex and far-reaching implications for the Nigerian university system. Not only does it deprive universities of talent, it undercuts the performance of female students through the limited number of female role models.

Several theoretical explanations have been advanced for the exclusion of women from senior positions in society and in the education system. Different approaches define the problem differently. They focus on a range of reasons, from the idea that women are intellectually inferior, through the presence of disabling family-career role conflict, to embedded sex discrimination and gendered socialisation, or to the functionalist notion that the sexual division of labour is a social necessity. Other arguments have focused on the operation of capitalism and patriarchy (Walby, 1990; Acker, 1992). In Nigeria, however, many argue with a sense of pride that discrimination against women does not exist, since the Nigerian constitution approves equal educational opportunities for women (Tuwor and Soussou, 2008). Reference is frequently made to the fact that women are employed in important political positions in the armed forces, in the government and in the private sector (e.g., Yusuff, 2014). However, how many women are in these positions? Are they solely tokens? What decisions do they make, and what (if any) power do they have? Although there is a long history of women's labour market participation in Nigeria, women are still excluded from certain occupational categories due to formal and informal barriers (Anugwom, 2009). Formal barriers include lack of education and technical training, and the configuration of labour laws. Informal barriers include, culture and religious practices, difficulties in combining domestic work and life, as well as the attitudes and biases of employers and colleagues (Oyekanmi, 1991). Though changes in Nigerian society brought about by education, technology, globalisation, and international relations have increased women's participation in both the private and public sectors, many professions are still largely dominated by men – medicine, law, engineering, banking, academia. Women increasingly account for a significant percentage of the teaching force at nursery, primary and secondary levels (see figure 1), but this is not the case at university level (Ogunleye 1998; Ogbogu, 2011).

Figure 1.1: Percentage of Female Primary and Secondary School Teachers in NIgeria, (World Bank, 2010)



From the inception of university education in Nigeria, women have been grossly under-represented. Even with a massive increase in the number of higher education (HE) institutions and the emergence of private universities in the 1990s, the situation has not changed much (Pereira, 2007). Nigeria had one university in 1948. It now has 120 (sixty federal, forty state, and twenty privately owned). In terms of student enrolment, there have been recorded improvements, with female participation increasing from about 26% in 1991 to 45.1% in 2010 (Figure 2). Yet, several scholars have argued that enrolment should not be confused with equality. They contend that, as equality of access is achieved, approximated, or even exceeded, women become segregated into distinct areas of study and this constitutes a major mechanism in producing a sexual division of labour, particularly at professional levels (Robertson, 1985; Kelly and Slaughter, 1991; Stromquist, 1991).



Despite increasing enrolment, a gender gap still exists, and women are a very long way from participating on the same footing as men as academics and other senior positions in Nigerian universities (Ogbogu, 2011). The first female member of academic staff was employed in the department of history at the University of Ibadan in 1960; over fifty years later, women made up just 27% of academic staff at Nigeria's premier university (University of Ibadan, 2012). In Nigeria as a whole, women's share of university academic employment was just 18.6% in 2012/13 (Alechenu, 2012; NUC 2013, and see figure 3). Moreover, while a study conducted across thirty universities in all six geo-political zones in Nigeria showed increasing participation by women in university decision-making, women barely made up 30% in any of these positions, as shown in figures 4 and 5 (Aladeshelu, 2010). Women's share of university academic employment in Nigeria reached 23.6% in 2018/19 and yet women accounted for just 15% of professors (National Bureau of Statistics, cited by Africa Check, 25/5/2022).

Figure 1.3: Gender Composition of Academic Staff in Nigeria (NUC, 2010; Achelenu, 2012)

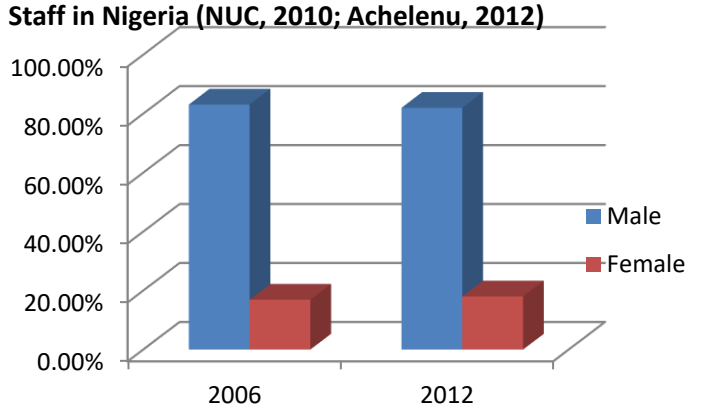


Figure 1.4: Women's Membership of University Governance (2009)

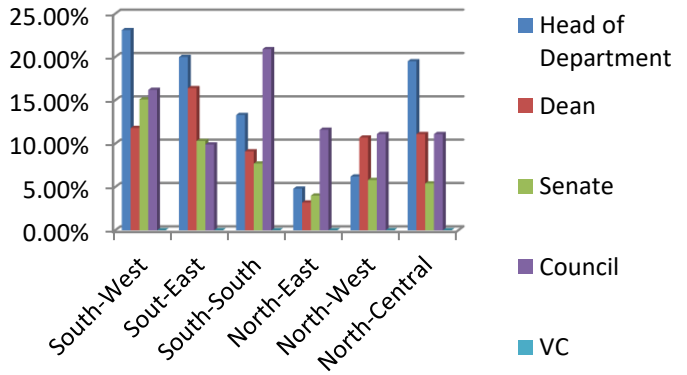
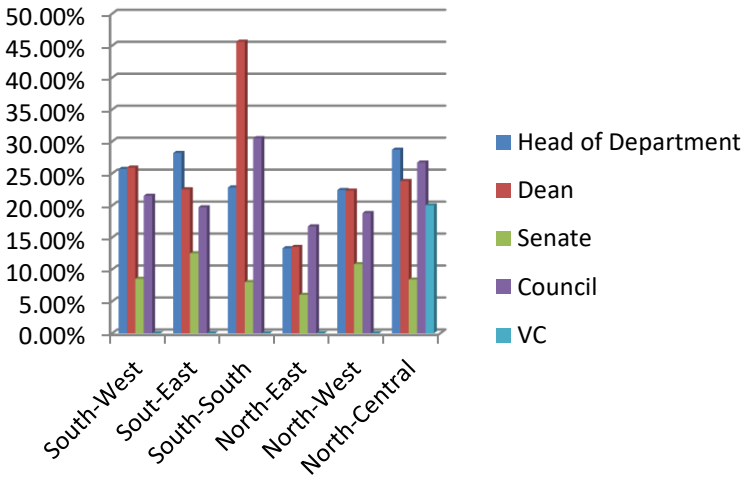


Figure 1.5: Women's Membership of University Governance (2013)



Women do not fare much better on the political scene. Despite numerous promises to improve their participation in political party manifestos, women's participation is dismal. This is also the case with ratified conventions protecting women from discrimination: the promises remain on paper. For example, the manifesto (2015:2) of the ruling party, the All Progressive Congress, states its commitment to:

> *guarantee that women are adequately represented in government appointments and provide greater opportunities in education, job creation and economic empowerment; Recognize and protect women's empowerment and gender equality with special emphasis on economic activities in development and in rural areas. Promote the concept of reserving a minimum number of seats in the National Assembly for women.*

Women's representation in top public offices has not improved. Currently, women make up just 7 out of the 109 members of parliament (6%) (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2017). Of the 36 cabinet members, only six are women (Vanguard, 2017). Again, this highlights women's poor participation in policy- and decision-making. These statistics suggest that women continue to lag behind men in access to education, professional career opportunities and leadership positions. Merely increasing the number of women in the education system or in the labour force cannot lead to gender equality. The central argument in this study is that although education and formal employment are crucial elements in the struggle for women's emancipation in Nigeria, the extent to which they can improve women's status and representation depends on the conditions under which formal education and paid work are acquired and utilised. This study explores and attempts to unpack academic women's experiences as they struggle to navigate the complexities associated with advancing a career in a male-dominated university environment and a male-controlled social order. In line with feminist and postcolonial feminist perspectives, this study argues that the attempt to understand the lives and experiences of any group of women cannot be isolated from their lives in the wider society. This study attempts to unravel academic women's experiences by capturing the multiple enduring tensions created by interlocking hierarchies of subordination in all spheres of Nigerian society.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

While there is a substantial body of literature on academic women and their career progression in Western countries such as the UK, Australia, Canada, and the USA (Morley 2013; Morley and Walsh, 1996; Bagihole and White, 2011; Acker, 1990), there is a dearth of studies that investigate how experiences and opportunities for women and men in academic employment in Nigeria compare. The few studies that have been completed focus on university governance (Akinsanya 2012; Pereira 2007) and the experiences of female students in universities (Odejide, 2005). The consequence of the scarcity of research on women's experiences in higher education in Nigeria is that there is insufficient data to serve as a basis for rectifying the longstanding gender imbalances in higher education. Morley (2005) argues that in developing countries, including Nigeria, there is rarely an intersection between gender, higher education, and development, resulting in a void in terms of policy, literature and research. This scarcity of published literature does not imply inactivity on the part of academic women, but answers regarding their underrepresentation in academia are limited. Manuh (2005) argues that to better understand women's poor participation in academia and to develop effective strategies to improve their representation and experiences, more stories of women's lived experiences in their own words are needed. Their narratives can further our understanding of their identities and self-images. It is therefore imperative that academic women's experiences are explored. As role models and opinion leaders, they directly and indirectly impact on female students and younger women's perceptions of themselves, and how far their formal education can take them.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Chua et al. (2000) argue that much of the research on women in postcolonial contexts silences women's voices in two ways: by portraying women as passive and docile victims who lack agency, or by failing to analyse the role that they play in both public and private spheres. The misrepresentation of non-Western women raises crucial theoretical and practical questions within feminist research. One lies around how we can research the lives of non-Western women in postcolonial contexts in ways that consider cultural specificities. Another relates to how research can become a means of social change, calling for reflexivity in decolonising knowledge production (Diversi and Finley, 2010). Considering these questions, this study aims to investigate how the gender gap in university-based academic work is perpetuated and why this should matter to academics, universities and society in general. Of concern is the extent to which formal Western education empowers women to question their situations, challenge stereotypes and take charge of decisions regarding their careers and social life. To achieve the aim of this research, the study sets out the following objectives:

- To assess the early experiences, events, influences and circumstances that shape academic women's career paths in Nigeria.
- To identify and explore the factors that drive or depress Nigerian women's academic career progression as well as the strategies employed to navigate a male-dominated academic terrain.
- To explore academic women's agency and power through a postcolonial feminist lens and to make visible the complex and multifaceted differences that intersect with gender to shape Nigerian academic women's experiences within patriarchal arrangements.
- To reveal important positionality issues associated with conducting research that seeks to privilege academic women's voices and experiences in a male-dominated society.
- To examine the implications of women's under-representation in the academic workforce for the universities and their constituent communities, and for Nigerian society.

To achieve these objectives, several questions were formulated to guide this research. These questions allowed for flexibility so that the topics for discussion were not unduly

limiting for research participants. The interview style was conversational, allowing the respondents to share personal views and secrets. The following are the research questions.

- How do academic women describe the early experiences that shaped their academic careers?
- What factors, if any, drive women's academic career advancement?
- What barriers, if any, stall women's academic career advancement?
- How can women's experiences explain the unequal gendered outcomes in academic employment?
- What strategies do female academics employ to navigate the male-dominated academic terrain in Nigeria?
- What resources or strategies need to be implemented to help academic women in Nigerian universities fully participate and achieve their full potential in academia?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study of the experiences of women in academic employment in Nigerian universities has theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions to make. It provides an important framework for understanding the longstanding gender inequality in higher education in Nigeria. My interest in this issue was driven by the paucity of literature on women in Nigerian higher education. According to Morley (2005: 210), the West

> has produced a sizeable amount of published quantitative and qualitative data and critical literature on gender, whereas lower-income countries have had to rely on some gender disaggregated statistics and quantitative studies often funded by international organisations.

The consequence of this paucity of literature is that the experiences of female students and staff in higher education in lower income countries remain relatively hidden.

Women number around half of the Nigerian population and their contribution to socio-economic advancement is greater when their dual roles in the productive and reproductive system are considered (Williams, 1993). However, their participation in decision-making within formal and informal structures and processes remains

insignificant (Allanana, 2013). The gross underrepresentation of women in academic employment in Nigeria raises the issue of whether the talents and leadership potentials of women are adequately harnessed. Although statistics tell us that women are a minority in academic employment in Nigerian universities, there remains a need to explain the processes that give rise to such unequal outcomes. This doctoral study employs qualitative in-depth interviews with academic women in selected universities in Nigeria to contribute to the under-researched area of the career experiences of women academics in Nigerian universities. Also, Pereira (2007) argues that in-depth studies of women's roles and empowerment (or its absence) in Nigerian universities are needed in greater numbers, to achieve a transformation of the university system in the direction of greater gender equity. This makes it imperative to examine the HE environment and to explore the experiences of female academics, as well as factors that may drive or depress career growth and leadership in Nigerian universities.

The significance of this study lies in revealing the personal experiences and perspectives of female Nigerian academics on how the educational system and an academic career impact their daily lives. The study is unique, as it considers a group of highly educated women whose voices have been neglected in much of the research on women in developing nations. Many of the studies that address issues of women's employment and status in developing nations, particularly studies of African women, focus on women among the rural and urban poor; for example Kinsman (1976), Eshiwani (1985), Robertson (1985) Parpart and Staudt (1989), Stamp (1991), Hansen (1992), Musisi (1992), Nzomo (1993), and Gordon (1995). Some of these studies focus on the impact of culture and colonial education on African women's lives. Others focus on issues of access and attainment in formal education. Only a few studies focus on higher education and even fewer focus on the lived experiences of a specific group of women in higher education. Researchers have often ignored highly educated women because international bodies continue to prescribe education as a panacea to all social ills in developing countries. Education is thus perceived as an unqualified good: the more of it, the better. It is assumed that once women are highly educated and incorporated into the labour market, all their problems are solved.

This study therefore makes a substantive contribution to knowledge by revealing how a primary aim of formal Western-style education in Africa has more to do with ensuring moral regulation, social integration, and control than with promoting

individual or collective liberation. This study also contributes to knowledge about the diversity of Nigerian women's experiences, as it dispels Western stereotypes of Africa as mainly a region of illiteracy and deprivation. Unlike studies that are merely descriptive and concerned principally to provide long lists of the causes of women's poor participation in higher education and work, this study makes a theoretical contribution by revealing that the problems Nigerian women (particularly Nigerian academic women) face are not accidental but rather a calculated product of the ways in which vested interests are served within the existing social order. Moreover, unlike studies that blame women for their predicament, this study reveals how women's problems are located in the social system and the institutional environment, and that these limit women's choices and agency.

Furthermore, this study makes a significant contribution by showing that women in developing nations of Africa are not a homogenous group. They experience gender differently based on ethnicity, level of education, age, religious affiliation, marital status, and class. The voices of the women in this study show that women occupy multiple positions in the society. Some occupy elite positions by virtue of their higher education and professional careers but because of their gender, they are subordinate to men, in common with other Nigerian women. The social and economic power that a professional career gives them means that they can still control underprivileged women and men (domestic servants, secretaries and drivers), and yet are not spared from assault at the hands of underprivileged men.

Perhaps the greatest strength of this study lies in the fact that it presents an insider and outsider perspective. As a woman, born, raised, and educated in Nigeria, I bring a crucial ingredient to the analysis of Nigerian women because I share a similar background to my research participants. I easily identified with these women on many levels and the important cultural elements that shape their lives are familiar to me. As an outsider (a researcher in England), I could be critical of gender relations in my culture, which I had previously taken for granted. I therefore acknowledge, based on the tenets of feminist research, that my experience as an insider and my knowledge of the world are important and inseparable from the research process (Stanley and Wise, 1981). This study is qualitative, informed by feminist theory, and takes place in a natural situation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The nature of this study allowed for face

-to-face interaction with my research participants, while offering the flexibility of progressively focusing on issues as they emerged.

Finally, while this study contributes to the existing knowledge on women's experiences of higher education in Nigeria, the research journey has also contributed significantly to my intellectual development, in particular in the field of gender relations. Before I embarked on this PhD journey, my knowledge of gender and feminist studies was shallow and far from articulate. It is my hope that this study will contribute to the current debates on gender relations in Nigerian society, provide a database with in-depth and specific information for policy-makers, planners, university leadership and gender advocacy groups, as well as provoking more research in this field.

1.5 Methodological Approach

This study focuses on the experiences of academic women in Nigeria. At the time of the empirical research there were 120 universities in Nigeria: sixty federal, forty state and twenty private universities. 24 academic women across two private and two public universities were interviewed. This study does not include academic women who (at the time of primary data collection) were on study leave, sabbatical, maternity leave, or any other form of leave. All the research participants were permanently employed and working at their university during the fieldwork period (December 2015 – August 2016_. Although the interviews were semi-structured, they were mostly conversational in nature. Three participants were interviewed over Skype and all interviews were tape recorded. I also made notes throughout the interviews, and collected and studied relevant documents, such as statistical information, magazines, newspapers, university calendars, university regulations and acts, and virtually anything that would contribute to strengthen the study. The interviews were (wo)manually transcribed and analytical categories emerging from the data (Mason, 1996) were coded using the NVIVO 10 data analysis software. Further details of the empirical research and approach in data analysis can be found in Chapter Three.

1.6 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis comprises eight chapters. **Chapter One** has discussed the nature and scope of the research problem, the purpose of the study, its significance, and the general structure of the thesis. **Chapter Two** is the first of two literature review chapters. It reviews relevant literature on women's status in education and employment in Nigeria. The chapter contributes important background information necessary for making sense of academic women's experiences. **Chapter Three** reviews relevant literature on academic women from the Global North and the Global South. I argue that there are gaps in the literature, particularly a scarcity of qualitative information on developing nations and that this study aims to fill some of these gaps. A theoretical framework is also presented. **Chapter Four** explores the experience of conducting feminist research in Nigerian universities. In line with tenets of feminist research practice, I present the methodological approach to this study and reveal the complexities associated with conceptualising and conducting the study. The chapter also discusses the perspectives I bring to this research by virtue of my social location as both an insider and outsider. In **Chapter Five**, the first of three data analysis chapters, I explore the experiences of the women in my interview group. I discuss the critical early factors and influences that my research participants indicated as shaping their decisions and careers. **Chapter Six** explores the factors that drive or depress the academic career development of the women in my study. I argue that women's careers progress more slowly in comparison to men's and that women must contend with a host of career barriers in academia. **Chapter Seven** presents an explanation for the unequal outcome and slower progress of women's academic careers. It is not possible to understand the professional lives of these academic women without understanding their experiences in private spheres. At every stage, their options and decisions are influenced by events and experiences in their private lives, which in turn impact on their career and experiences in the public sphere of their paid employment. In the concluding **Chapter Eight**, I summarise the findings of the research, highlighting and reiterating its significance and suggesting areas for future investigation. This chapter concludes with a reflective account, which I believe is important in feminist research. Letherby (2003) argues that most researchers attempt to separate the self from the research process and only reveal personal information pertaining to the research in

the initial pages, which are detached from the entire work. This informed my decision to include a reflective account of my experience of carrying out this research.

CHAPTER TWO. RESEARCH CONTEXT: WOMEN, EDUCATION AND WORK IN NIGERIA.

2.0 Introduction

Women are a minority in many aspects of professional life, including the academic profession. In fact, the major theme in the literature on women in higher education has been the absence or presence of women as students or in positions of leadership (Pereira, 2007). Recent research on gender and academic careers continue to stress that, despite the progress made in improving women's career chances in academia, women still come second to men on a range of indicators (Baker, 2013). In recent years, gender equality had received increasing attention in Africa. However, international comparisons by the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index reveals that Nigeria ranks 118 overall in the world and generally African countries perform poorly in terms of economic participation, education, health and political empowerment (World Economic Forum 2009). While under-representation may indicate discrimination against women (Hoobler and Wayne, 2011), it can also reflect a number of factors such as labour market conditions, political landscape, policy environment, access to education and cultural values (Arbache *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, to better understand how and why gender disparities persist in academia, this chapter situates academic work within the larger context of changing socio-economic and political scenery, and then discusses women's participation in Nigerian education and work.

2.1 Brief socio-economic and political background

With an estimated population of 193 million people, Nigeria is the seventh most populous countries in the world (UN, 2015) and the most populous country in Africa (National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). It is usually referred to as the giant of Africa owing to its economy, vast natural resources and large, multi-ethnic population. Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups: three major groups (Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa) are the most populous and politically influential. Nigeria is a former British and colony operates a mixed legal system made up of the English common law, traditional law and Islamic law, although Islamic law is only applicable in the Northern region, which has a predominantly Muslim population. Nigeria is made up of six geo-political

zones: south-east, south-south, south-west, north-east, north-west and north-central. The country Is split roughly in half along religious lines of Christianity and Islam, although a minority still practice indigenous African religion. Christians predominantly reside in the south-east and south-south regions, while Muslims mostly live in the north-east and north-west regions. The south-west and north-central regions are mixed, with both Christians and Muslims.

While Nigeria has the potential for rapid economic growth and development, with its rich human and material resources, its economic performance has been described as erratic, dismal, truncated and largely unimpressed (Ajayi, 2002; Iyoha and Oriakhi, 2002; Kayode, 2004; Ekpo, 2008). In 2014, Nigeria took over from South Africa as Africa's largest economy. Prior to its return to democratic rule in 1999, the country endured several years of military rule and poor economic management, resulting in a prolonged period of economic stagnation, rising poverty level and the decline of public institutions (Iweala and Kwaako, 2007; Saint *et al.,* 2003). Human development indicators were comparable to those of the least developed countries, as widespread corruption continued to undermine the effectiveness of various public expenditure programs. Also, infrastructural bottlenecks created because lack of public investment mired private sector activities.

2.2 The status of women in Nigeria

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2017), women make up nearly half of the population of Nigeria, at 49.2%. The majority of Nigerians (about 64%) live in rural areas and are engaged in agriculture or fishing. More than half of rural dwellers are women, who are predominantly engaged in agriculture. Women are involved in vital areas of the economy, such as food production and distribution (Manuh, 1995). Despite the fact that Nigerian society places great value on women's childrearing and caring roles, fertility rates have declined since the 1980s. The World Bank (2017) reports that between 1980 and 1990 the fertility rate in Nigeria declined from 6.7 births per woman to 6.1 births per woman, and 5.4 births per woman in 2017. Declining fertility levels are the product of a combination of factors. First, literacy levels have improved as a result of sustained efforts to improve access to education for girls, based on the recognition that women's circumstances and the general socio-economic improvement of nations can be achieved by empowering women with education

(Caldwell, 1979; Palmer and Almaz, 1991; Stephen, 1992). Informal groups and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have made great strides in encouraging female education in all parts of the country, especially in the northern region where girls' education is problematic because of early marriages in line with Islamic tradition. Improved access to education has translated into greater educational achievements and improved access to the formal economy. Other factors that have contributed the declining fertility levels in Nigeria include the availability of better healthcare and improved access to family planning services, launched by the government in collaboration with NGOs both locally and internationally. It is now common in Nigeria for women with higher education qualifications to leave marriage until their late twenties or early thirties, which is a departure from the past where women were married as soon as they completed primary education, or when a marital request was received from a suitor – whichever happened first.

However, women still lag considerably behind men in education (Ezeani, 1996), although the gap is closing. Compared with men, Nigerian women have lower literacy levels, 52.6% compared with 71.3% (World Bank, 2018). Women are expected to work to contribute to the welfare of their family and household, but as will be discussed later in this chapter, women are more likely to be found in the informal sector. Okeke-Ihejirika (2003) argues that the predominance of women in the intermediate and informal sector is indicative of the sexual division of labour, which assigns the burden of household responsibilities to women. Consequently, many women find it relatively easier within the informal sector to deal with domestic responsibilities while engaging in economic activities. Although women occupy few decision-making roles in the formal power structures, gender permeates and impacts on their experiences. However, women do occupy decision-making positions in religious and cultural life as community priestesses, spirit mediums, healers and prophetesses; for example, "[i]n Matrilineal communities, royal women were queen mothers and perform constitutional, political and ritual functions, in these positions, they are held in high esteem and their gender is almost forgotten" (Manuh, 1995; 97).

Nigerian women's participation in politics is dismal. For too long, women have been excluded from, discriminated against, and under-represented in governance. Since returning to democratic governance in 1999 following years of military rule, no woman has been elected as president, vice president or governor in any of the

country's 36 states, suggesting that women continue to play a subordinate role in politics. Even though women account for nearly half of the country's population, only 6.5% of senators are women, 7 out of 109. Also, women make up only about 6% of members in the house of representatives, 22 out of 360 members. Women who occupy decision-making positions in formal power structures are constantly reminded of their cultural and religious obligations, which requires that they relinquish governance to men while they concentrate on the domestic front (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003). Stereotypes around the roles that women should and are capable of occupying provide the basis for the marginalisation of women in politics, while men are perceived as experts in politics.

In recognition of the gender gap in decision-making in virtually all sectors of the formal economy, especially in policy formulation and governance, the National Policy on Women was formulated in 2000 and later replaced in 2006 by the National Gender Policy. The National Gender Policy calls for affirmative action on the greater inclusion of women in politics, but progress has been very slow. In 2010, the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill, which aims to tackle "all forms of discrimination" against women and promote gender equality in politics, education, employment, marriage and inheritance, has been given very little attention in parliament since its introduction. Advocates for gender equality in politics have argued that having women on decision-making platforms is vital, especially when decision-making affects women themselves.

In recent times, non-profit organisations have begun to organise in advancing women's cause and for the first time in the country's history, in 2019, six women contested the presidential elections, compared to one presidential candidate in 2015. Over 230 women contested senatorial positions; more than 500 contested seats in the house of representatives; 74 vied for governorship positions and nearly 2,000 contested seats at the state assemblies. Also, women accounted for nearly half (47%) of over 84 million registered voters. Although these figures indicate that the landscape is gradually changing, many have argued that unless Nigeria adopts a quota system, as in countries like Senegal, Rwanda and South Africa, progress in terms of women's participation in politics will be very slow. Also, because of the restrictive and limiting nature of cultural stereotypes, many have argued that challenging these deeply held beliefs about gender roles in necessary for women's progress in all spheres of the society. Below, I briefly describe some aspects of the Nigerian and African culture,

with particular focus on marriage and its implications for women. This sets the tone for a deeper understanding of my research findings.

2.3 Nigerian culture and women's status

"Culture is a non-generic, changeable and permanently incomplete system of lessons and acts we get to learn over time and use to navigate our worlds" (Ratele, 2007: 65). Many studies have highlighted the dominant role that culture plays in the lives of African women, permeating every area of their lives and shaping their choices, decisions and paths (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003; Wilson-Tagoe, 2003; Badoe, 2003). An important social and cultural factor that impacts Nigerian women's lives is marriage. As in many African societies, Nigerian society carefully stipulates rules and regulations for the process of socialising men and women into adulthood, with marriage being a primary rite of passage, especially for girls (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003). However, attaining marital status is only the beginning. In marriage, women are expected to conduct themselves in certain ways or face grave personal and social consequences. However, Nzegwu (2001), argues that even though there were other forms of social inequality in pre-colonial Nigerian society, gender was not an organising principle.

Nzegwu (2001) and other scholars of African history argue that colonialism, the introduction of Christianity and Islam as well as the process of state formation, ensured the systematic introduction of a patriarchal system. Early studies on Africa's colonial history portrayed elite women as a privileged group by virtue of their status as housewives to male breadwinners, a position that raised them above their sisters in the informal sector (Lloyd, 1974). In fact, the impression created by the few studies on the domestication of African women in the early stages of colonisation was that an elite woman basked in a life of bliss and leisure with a bevy of cheap domestic labour at her disposal. According to Bujra (1983),

> [i]n Africa, petty bourgeois wives seem rarely to be immersed in domestic concerns. To begin with, they almost universally employ domestic servants to carry out all the dirty work of the household and to nurse and tend young children, allowing bourgeois wives the leisure to act as ornaments to their husband's success. And to free themselves to work in high-income white-collar or professional jobs. (p. 35)

Critics have, however, challenged Bujra's claims; Parpart (1990), in a historical review of Nigerian women's participation in domestic and paid work, argues that even though many elite women in the nineteenth century were not engaged in formal employment,

they worked hard managing the domestic front. According to Parpart (1990), at the turn of the twentieth century, many elite women had to find other sources of income to supplement household income because they were not fully supported by their husbands. Okeke-Ihejirika (2003) contends that much of the income of male breadwinners was directed to extended family members. The fact that rural women and women who were involved in trading in urban areas were burdened by domestic oppression has never been contested, but despite evidence that even elite urban women were burdened, enviable impressions of elite African women as a highly privileged group endured well beyond the colonial era.

It is noteworthy that African women's entrance into the elite circle, whether by marriage or formal employment, is not something any group of African women is adequately prepared for. They must contend with a hybrid of expectations influenced by both indigenous and Western values (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003). The lives and experiences of Nigerian women, especially career women, reflect foreign influence on Nigerian culture. The enduring influence of colonialism on the social, political, and economic structures in pre-colonial Nigerian societies is well-known. Colonial structures allowed the male elite to negotiate the nature of indigenous patriarchy in the new society, thrusting Nigerian women into a new subordinate role (Mann, 1985). Mann (1985) argues that imperialism and colonial rule unfavourably affected women's status in colonial Nigeria, which continues to endure in postcolonial Nigerian society. She argues that

> the expansion of trade created new opportunities for women in commerce, but in most places, men took the lead in import-export business and women engaged in petty trading or local commerce. Colonial governments ignored or failed to see women's political roles and undermined their political influence and continued to undermine women's autonomy and economic independence through the spread of Christianity and western education. (p. 78)

Another major factor that significantly affected African women's lives was change in the marriage institution (Mba, 1982). With the spread of the Western 'nuclear' model as superior and the different marriage customs of various indigenous ethnic groups, it became difficult to find a set of common legal codes guiding marriage. As Western legal rules were imposed onto indigenous law, "a relationship that was hardly

symmetric but, in many ways, symbiotic, made it possible for the ruling class to inscribe patriarchal continuities that served men's interest without any of the indigenous checks and balances that protected women," (Okeke-ihejirika, 2003: 33). At first, under Christian marriage law, women had no inheritance rights and there were strict rules enforcing monogamy. A new marriage law in 1884 strengthened the legal status of wives with strict monogamy rules and provisions for divorce and inheritance. However, as a result of the loopholes in the double standard of customary law and Victorian attitudes towards marriage, men evaded making a monogamous commitment. Since both systems affirmed women's subordinate status in marriage and their moral responsibility to society, marriage was and continues to be a major site for the oppression of women (Boserup, 1997).

Even in postcolonial Nigeria, marriages continue to be characterised by both Western and indigenous features. This is reflected in the strict expectations of monogamy, the continued prevalence of the 'bride price' and the pressure to produce male heirs. The bride price or dowry system in Nigeria, like the practice of *lobola* in South Africa, is a powerful cultural practice that influences gender relations in the family. Many young women understand marriage as "an unquestionable expectation embedded in culture and tradition" (Reddy, 2011: 39) and this is reflected in the social stigma attached to being unmarried in Nigerian society. Marriage and procreating are still a major basis for social organisation and interaction, and men and women are expected to fit their assigned roles. For women, however, the premium placed on getting married supersedes all other forms of personal and social success, a premium that rises with age. Many Nigerian women, both educated and uneducated, continue to see marriage as the goal and their topmost priority with the hope of strengthening and securing their position in the union with children (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003).

With respect to procreation, women's position and the security of a Nigerian marriage depends to a great extent on the ability to bear children. Nigerian women are aware of the societal expectation to reproduce and most importantly produce a male heir. Inability or assumed inability to bear children could jeopardise not only her marital status, but her material wellbeing. Therefore, not only do women place marriage at the top of their priority list, but they must also contend with the pressure of strengthening the union with children. Women who pursue careers struggle to balance new aspirations with rigid responsibilities associated with their primary role as wives,

mothers, and companions (Parpart, 1990). Although some archival records show some cases of women in colonial times who had established careers before marriage, most Nigerian women have to make considerable adjustments in their career to accommodate their domestic responsibilities. For Nigerian women, especially those in the formal economy, opportunities for social mobility are narrow, because they are forced by a combination of factors to comply with the status quo. They are expected to embrace Western notions of good homemaking and sound morals while complying with the myths and expectations associated with indigenous tradition.

The implication of the co-existence of Western ideals and indigenous culture for women is the reconfiguration of society's construction of morality. Long after colonialism, male-female competition, rather than cooperation, forms the basis for defining success. Women's ambitions and capacity to compete with their male counterparts is restricted by cultural dictates, especially as regards female chastity and fertility. Okeke-Ihejirika (2003) states that "the impression was soon created that educated women might not easily defer to their husbands and the popular belief that women who postponed marriage in order to further their education were prone to sexual immorality" (p.37). These beliefs became very popular, discouraging parents from educating their daughters. In postcolonial Nigeria, this is reflected in the sexist attitudes towards women who defer marriage and childbearing in favour of educational and professional pursuits. Imperialism and colonialism presented formidable challenges for Nigerian women and African women; however, women have sought ways to either resist or negotiate their position. Although, they are placed in a weak bargaining position, Nigerian women continue to use every available avenue to negotiate and contest the social expectations, restrictions and limitations society sets for them. One important avenue that women use to negotiate their subordinate position is education and the next section sheds some lights on women's participation, opportunities and issues in the Nigerian education system, with particular focus on HE.

2.4 Women and education in Nigeria

In the introductory chapter, a brief account of the history and development of education in Nigeria was presented, from which it can be deduced that in Nigeria, education is seen as a vital tool for women's development and contribution to economic development. This is reflected in the commonly quoted African proverb attributed to prominent African scholar J.E.K. Aggrey (1875-1927) that "if you educate a man, you educate an individual and if you educate a woman, you educate a family (nation)". This maxim is repeatedly drawn on in motivating global development efforts to offer education opportunities for women. However, Seun (2013) argues that the basic assumption of this adage is problematic in that it further disempowers women and reinforces patriarchal stereotypes. This is reflected in the fact that, despite the belief that female education empowers a family and nation, many African nations, including Nigeria, continue to record low female literacy rates and disparity in formal education enrolment. A review of existing literature on gender inequality in the Global South reveals several important themes useful for understanding women's position in education in Africa and Nigeria in particular. These include *the dilemma of female education, cultural beliefs and stereotypes, the family and the domestic front and the role of the school.*

2.4.1 The Dilemma of Female Education: Access, Representation and Barriers

The link between education, African women's empowerment and their participation in social development has been of great interest to researchers, policy-makers and international development organisations since the 1960s (Egbo, 2005). As noted, much of the research on education in Africa focuses on access and attainment due to the recognition that education is an important prerequisite for social development. This assumption of a symbiotic relationship between education and social development has been the basis for most social policies in Africa and other less developed nations, resulting in massive educational expansion in Africa over the last several decades (UNESCO, 2010). Although this expansion has meant that more women are accessing educational opportunities, equal participation in education and the employment is yet to be achieved. Statistical data in Chapter One show that women's representation and political visibility in Nigerian educational system, particularly at tertiary level, is low.

Although women's representation as students at primary, secondary and university level has dramatically increased, their participation is still weak where it matters most. The status of Nigerian women is shaped by both indigenous cultural norms and colonial legacies. Education was first introduced to boys, as colonialists needed to train local workforces to achieve the colonial agenda. As an afterthought and to prevent the oppressed (women) from revolting and disrupting colonial affairs, education was grudgingly extended to girls, but the aim was solely to train young women for a life of domesticity, to become suitable wives for men who could focus on working (Mba, 1985). Amadiume (1987) corroborates Mba's assertions and reveal there was a strong male bias in both colonial government education programmes and mission policies. Influenced by dominant patriarchal capitalist Victorian ideology in nineteenth-century Europe, Nigerian men were equipped with skills oriented towards public life, while women were prepared for a life of domestication. Amadiume (1987) argues that missionaries introduced the idea of Christianity with churches headed by male bishops and archbishops, and schools governed and dominated by men.

The transplantation of a British Victorian model of woman and what she could do glorified women's subordination, an ideology supported and popularised by Christian biblical teachings. Nigerian women's marginalisation was normalised and naturalised as divinely ordained and these ideas were decreed into Nigerian common law. Male power and control were subsequently translated into state power. The popular sexist expression "a women's place is in the kitchen", a sentiment that remains deeply held by Nigerians, stems from this gendered ideology. It is no surprise, then, that the extent to which education can empower African women to participate in the formal economy freely and fully has been contested since the 1960s when many African countries attained independence.

On one side are those who call for increased access to educational opportunities for women, based on the assumption that, without education, women are limited in their capacity to maximise their full potential on an individual, institutional and national level (Stromquist, 1990, UNESCO, 1991). Consequently, women are left on the margins of society, excluded from full participation. This view has been the backbone of moves to improve women's access to formal education as a key goal in many developing countries, including Nigeria, over the past five decades. Female enrolment at all educational levels have significantly improved (Saint *et al.*, 2003;

Ojobo, 2008). However, despite increased participation, gross gender disparities in educational attainment, experiences and labour market outcomes persist. On the other side are those who accept education as an important catalyst for women's empowerment but argue that both formal and informal education are drenched in male values and patriarchal ideologies that silence women and legitimise their subordination to men (Odora, 1993). Proponents of this view argue that the suppression of women's voices greatly limits women's ability to question and transform the prevailing male-biased system. Women and the society in general are indoctrinated and accultured into accepting male domination and women's subordination as normal and natural.

A third strand relates to the preceding argument but shifts from the idea of institutional structures that oppress women by suppressing their voices to one of women's critical awareness of their social position. Proponents of this perspective draw from the ideas of Freire (1970) and argue that, despite women's educational, economic and professional achievements, their status has not been transformed and the patriarchal structures and cultural norms that devalue their status are rarely challenged. Hollos (1998), for example, reports that even with higher education and employment in the formal wage sector, some educated urban women in Nigeria were less empowered within the domestic front as a result of "increasing submission to their husbands and a decline in their autonomy" (p. 271). According to Hollos (1998), one reason for this is that even though educated urban women are economically active, they contribute less to the household their husbands and consequently become subsumed as dependants. For critics such as Odora (1993), Freire (1970) and Hollos (1998), access to education is not tantamount to social advancement for African women, partly because of the gendered ideology and deeply held stereotypes that limit women's ambitions and aspirations.

2.4.2 Cultural Beliefs and Stereotypes

Another serious dilemma for educated African women is societal attitudes and deeply held stereotypes about who women are and what they can and should do. Societal attitudes towards what is commonly believed to be women's role and status in most developing African nations is often cited as a barrier to women's full and equal participation in education. Many studies reveal stereotypical expectations for girls and boys. Okpalaobi (2011) argues that boys are groomed and expected to be providers

or ‘breadwinners’, while girls are expected to aspire to marriage and raising a family. As a result, some parents, particularly those that are economically under-privileged, are discouraged from investing in girls’ education, which is seen as unnecessary in them to play their domestic and reproductive roles successfully. Even when girls do enter the education system, their learning is based on a gendered curriculum of subjects that complement a domestic role and rendering women disadvantaged in the labour market (Hatem, 1983; Rihani, 1983). Also, some cultures insist on controlling women’s sexuality and thus on reaching puberty, some girls are withdrawn from school to get married, while others are thrown out of school in cases of pre-marital pregnancy (Lockheed and Verspoor, 1989; Okpalaobi, 2011). Thus, the educational system (and its processes) reproduces gender inequality.

2.4.3 The Family and the Domestic Front

In Nigeria and indeed many parts of Africa, the family is an important site for gendered socialisation, which helps to fuel and perpetuate continued inequality in the educational system. Within the family, girls’ enrolment in school is determined by various factors such as the socio-economic status of the parents, their level of education, cultural beliefs, ethnicity, and residential area. These factors also influence how long girls remain in school (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003). Historically, female enrolment in Nigeria has been low and although this has improved significantly in recent years, dropout rates among girls are high particularly among those from low socio-economic backgrounds. Traditionally, educating a female child was rarely seen as essential but recent studies suggest that this perception has dramatically changed, and female education is now considered important for national development; however, the expectations for women regardless of their level of education has not changed much (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003).

Chlebowska (1990) argues that female education is rarely perceived as important because more value is placed on domestic and caring roles, especially by mothers**.** Crehan (1984) argues that even when girls enrol in school, their performance is usually marginal, because they must carry a disproportionate amount of domestic responsibility. Odusola’s 2006 studies corroborate these arguments by Chlebowska (1990) and Crehan (1984) and argue that in recent times parental support for women education has increased, but the academic performance of female students is still low

when compared to their male counterparts. Studies by Stromquist (1990), Rathgeber (1991) and Okeke-Ihejirika (2003) argue that girls from socially and economically advantaged families were more likely to access education and advance to tertiary levels. Also, the area of residence is closely linked to family and home background. In many developing nations, including Nigeria, studies by Abraha *et al.* (1991) and Chlebowska (1991) show that accessible education is more likely to be available to girls who reside in urban areas and retention rates are much higher. In rural areas however, the opposite is true: fewer girls have access to educational opportunities and dropout rates are higher. Mama (2003) argues that for too long the dropout rates of girls and the gender imbalance in African educational systems have been blamed on girls and women, turning a blind eye to the host of institutional factors at play. It is therefore important to consider the pivotal role educational institutions play in reinforcing and reproducing gender inequality in the Nigerian education system.

2.4.4 The Role of the School and Quality issues in the Education System.

Nigerian educational institutions, which are often assumed to be neutral and merit-based, play an important role in the reproduction of gender inequality in the education system and the labour market, as has been well documented (Rathgeber, 1991; Slaughter, 1991; Pereira, 2002; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003; Mama, 2003). Mama (2003) points out that, despite the absence of formal exclusion, women's access to education as students and employees has remained slow and uneven, especially in HE. The persistence of this problem is commonly attributed to external social and family factors, but Mama (2003) suggests that the institutional cultures of African schools are permeated with unfair sexual and gender dynamics. Similarly, Okeke-Ihejirika (2003) argues that although Nigerian educational institutions are important avenues for social mobility, they are also vehicles for the perpetuation of cultural and foreign forms of gender oppression. Ifegbesan (2010), in a study of post-primary school teachers in Nigerian schools, found that teachers directly and indirectly promote gender stereotypes. Educational systems not only reinforce traditional gender roles, but also strengthen and support attitudes towards deeply held gender stereotypes.

Mama (2003) argues that, when it comes to gender inequality, we must look beyond enrolment as women accessing education is only the first hurdle in the journey towards equality. The nature and quality of female experiences in the educational

system greatly impacts educational outcomes. In many educational institutions, gender differentiation manifests qualitatively within and across disciplines; women tend to be better represented in arts, humanities and social sciences and under-represented in natural sciences. Science subjects are generally promoted over arts and humanity courses by governments and institutions themselves, partly due to the recognised importance of science in helping the nation modernise. The promotion of science as superior coupled with the under-representation of women in science combine to support deeply entrenched male superiority. Also, while efforts are continuously made to increase female representation in STEM fields, very little attention is directed to getting more men into traditionally 'feminine' fields such as nursing, teaching or home economics. The predominance of girls and women in traditionally 'feminine' fields is usually presented as a result of 'value free' decisions and preferences, downplaying the impact of socialisation in shaping and framing girls' choices (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003). Even when formal policies aim to improve educational access and opportunities for girls and women, these policies are often moderated by informal but highly influential socialisation processes that hinder women from aspiring to and venturing into male-dominated fields (Rathgeber, 1991).

This gendered channelling into distinct fields is a major mechanism for reproducing and preserving a sexual division of labour at professional levels. At primary, secondary and even tertiary educational levels, the ideology of domesticity and motherhood is constructed and reconstituted through the hidden curriculum: the way in which learning is shaped and organised. At a very young age, girls are socialised and conditioned them to believe that, regardless of their ambitions or aspirations, their success is defined in domestic terms. These messages are internalised and carried into adulthood, impacting female choices and outcomes. As a result, women who deviate from the norm and enter traditionally male fields are regarded as unfeminine, unmarriageable, and often socially deviant (Amadiume, 1987). This pattern of socialisation and conditioning is further aggravated by stereotypes in textbooks used for teaching and instructions in schools. In their studies, Etim (1988), Harber (1989) and Obura (1992) show that textbooks used in developing countries in the Global South portray gendered ideologies. Women are portrayed as mothers, domestic workers, submissive and dependent, while men are active, independent, and strong leaders. In subtle ways, these textbooks, presented as value-

free are in fact political as they further lend support to predominant gender stereotypes and potentially limit girls' educational and occupational aspirations.

Another important way in which gender inequality is reinforced through the educational system is the lack of role models. Although teaching is portrayed as a feminine career, this is only true at primary and secondary levels especially in developing countries. Even at primary and secondary levels where teachers are more likely to be female, men are largely responsible for decision-making, again sending gendered messages. In confronting gender inequality, educational institutions must become conscious of the ways in which their seemingly gender-neutral workings perpetuate gender inequality. Merely increasing female access and representation is not enough to solve the problem: a conscious attempt to dismantle systems which reinforce gender ideologies and inequality is of paramount importance. According to Freire (1990), education can only be liberating when it confronts and addresses questions about the daily lives of students. Gendered education limits creativity and potential by enslaving the minds and capabilities of students. Even with increasing access to formal education, women are not favourably positioned in the labour market. Women's participation in the formal economy continues to be fraught with barriers and problems. The section below provides a brief account of the issues around women and work in Nigeria, relevant for understanding academic women's experiences.

2.5 Women and work in Nigeria

The labour market context of any country represents the avenue where human labour is traded and rewarded. The labour market plays an important part in economic development and in determining the socio-economic status of individuals and households. An understanding of the history and evolution of the Nigerian labour market is necessary if one is to understand and appreciate the contemporary Nigerian context holistically. Here, I briefly discuss the evolution of the Nigerian labour market and how it has responded to strong economic growth since 2001. Although Nigeria achieved independence from the British colonial government more than five decades ago, the influence of colonial policies in the labour market remains important.

The colonial labour market was characterised by overt discrimination. The labour policy was guided by the Conciliation Act (1934). During the colonial era, Africans were not defined as employees and therefore had no rights to organise or be

associated to any forum that determined employment conditions. As a result, the indigenous people were forced onto unproductive land and pressured to earn a living through wage labour. Wage labour also become more important with the introduction of poll tax and other rural levies. This system ensured the availability and constant supply of cheap labour for industry, mining, and commercial farming (Ncube, 2015). Skilled jobs were reserved for white and foreign workers and Africans were not employed in skilled jobs, nor were they given any meaningful training. By the 1950s when the manufacturing sector began to grow rapidly, the benefits of a stable and permanent labour force began to outweigh the benefits of unreliable casual labour. As a result, internal labour markets and African labour unions began to emerge; however, the labour unions were used as a medium for exerting control rather than protecting workers' rights (ILO, 1978: 6).

Currently Nigeria faces a growing employment crisis and regardless of its growth performance, unemployment has not fallen materially since 1999. While the number of jobs seem to have grown in line with the labour market, many of these jobs have been created in family agriculture. Between 2010 and 2014, about 53% of the total population resided in rural areas, which partly explains why the agricultural sector has the highest participation rate in the Nigerian labour market. Labour markets in developing countries, Nigeria included, are characterised by high unemployment, high informal employment with its associated low productivity, relatively high levels of employment in the government sector (including public enterprise) and low female participation (National Manpower Board, 1998). Until 2008, agriculture accounted for over 70% of total employment in Nigeria. Following the introduction of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) in 1986 and the reforms by the democratically elected government since 1999, the Nigerian labour market changed dramatically. One notable feature is that, as in many other developing and even developed nations, it is highly segregated along gender lines.

While Nigerian women have been reported to be more involved than men in the informal economy, particularly in all areas of agriculture, this is not the case in the formal labour market (Adeyokunu, 1981). Women continue to suffer bias and discrimination in the labour market and are also excluded from policy-making (Anugwom, 2009). According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2020), although labour force participation rates for men and women are declining, women are

on average less likely to participate in the labour force than men. Women's labour force participation rate fell from 57% in 2005 to 48.5% in 2020 while that of men rose from 63.5% in 2005 to 65.7% in 2020 . The report goes on to suggests that the gender gap in the labour force is caused by a range of factors: structural barriers and cultural restrictions, increased time spent in education and lack of employment opportunities, particularly for young women, and the fact that women spend a disproportionate amount of time on unpaid childcare and housework. Also, the report notes variation across regions.

Although increased participation in the labour market has been linked to increasing access to education in many countries, in Nigeria, it has been reported that there has been no direct link between education and employment (Anugwom, 2009). The participation of women in formal employment does not correspond with the percentage of women with formal education. Also, women are more likely to participate in the informal economy, which does not require an education. Women's participation in the formal economy in Nigeria is argued to have improved in the post-colonial era. Okeke-Ihejirika (2003) argues that in colonial Nigeria, while there were no formal exclusionary measures keeping women out of important positions, women were kept out of the middle and higher ranks of the civil service by substantially lowering their chances of acquiring and using tertiary training and credentials. As a result, until the 1960s, women in the formal sector were rare (Anugwom, 2009). Denzer (1995) notes that the colonial administration's refusal to employ women for over a century after its inception discouraged many ambitious Nigerian women. In Denzer's terms,

> [c]olonial officials were quite explicit in their reasoning, they did not want to risk unsettling male civil servants who might resent female competition. On this point the male chauvinism of the colonialists coincided with African male chauvinism to limit opportunities for women. (p.8)

Even in post-colonial Nigerian society, gendered restrictions in paid employment continue to keep educated Nigerian women out of key positions. Anugwom (2009) contends that industrial development and urban growth in the late 1960s after independence boosted women's participation in the formal economy. Afigbo (1981) reveals that, prior to this time, women were largely seen as a reserve of mental and physical resources, needed only in emergencies to help national development.

Interestingly, the increase in female labour force participation in the forty years post-independence has been credited to the impact of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), especially on family and household income (Pearson, 1999; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003). The SAP not only created widespread waves of economic inflation, but also resulted in the decline of social support, and cut subsidies, which had serious repercussions in terms of real wages. However, this increase in female participation seems to be reversing, going by ILO statistics highlighted above.

The introduction of SAP in the mid-1980s led to declining wages and household income, forcing women out of the home to seek paid employment for their own economic security and to contribute to the sustenance of their families (Catagay and Ozler 1995, Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003; Anugwom, 2009). This meant many women entered the labour market in large numbers seeking work for a wage, regardless of the status of the work. For women, even if the paid work they are engaged in is not equal in status to that of men's, work in whatever form enhances their prestige and offers them economic independence from families and partners. In fact, Wambui Wa Karanja (1987) noted a rise in Nigerian men who now prefer marrying women engaged in paid employment, as their income not only supplements the men's income but also enhances male prestige. Also, it is now very common among Nigerian women to return to formal education after a prolonged absence to improve their employment prospects, at the urging of their husbands (Ekong, 1986; Okeke, 1994).

As women entered the Nigerian labour market following the SAP in the 1980s, they were mostly concentrated in the teaching professions particularly at elementary level. Women were believed to have a natural flair for teaching children as this resonated with their childcare roles. It is also noteworthy that women's participation is also largely dependent on their choice of marriage partners: for some women, their husband may discourage them from seeking formal employment despite their qualifications. It is common to find women with prestigious academic qualifications sitting at home because they are married to wealthy businessmen who cannot entertain the idea of their partners working outside the home (Anugwom, 2009). This suggests that many women engaged in paid employment in in the formal sector are propelled by the need to supplement household income or earn money in the absence of a male breadwinner, as is the case for unmarried, divorced, or widowed women.

Notably, there are structural inequalities in the Nigerian labour market. Generally, the structure and organisation of formal employment in Nigeria mirrors many features typical of Anglophone Africa. The educational system supplies much of the workforce in the formal sector. The Nigerian workforce can be categorised into four main categories: unskilled (such as cleaners, janitors, gardeners), junior rank (clerical and administrative staff), middle rank (supervisors and junior entry-level professionals) and managers and directors at the top of the hierarchy. (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003). Even unskilled workers are expected to have at least a secondary school education and until the 1970s, promotion was largely seniority-based. A common feature within the formal labour sector is a huge wage disparity between low- and high-ranking jobs, reflecting racial inequalities embedded in the colonial civil service (Denzer, 1995). These inequalities also reinforced gender segregation, with women at the bottom of the ranks and in sex-typed positions. Bujra (1983) notes that men in most colonial countries benefitted from the social inequalities that operated during colonialism. Also, most positions in the Nigerian formal sector are fulltime with little or no adjustment in the established daily schedule, except for shift workers. Although there are variations across the country, typically, working days are eight hours long, except for primary and some secondary school teachers whose workday is tied to school hours and ends at midday. While many firms maintain a typical 9-5 schedule, those in the private sector work longer hours (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003). Although several policy measures in postcolonial Nigeria have remedied the gross gender discrimination in employment, women still must contend with overt and covert discrimination (Anugwom, 2009). Women are entitled to three months of maternity leave on full pay; however, many private firms pay half the basic salary or no pay at all. It is also common to find private firms who dismiss women for pregnancy and maternity-related reasons. Married women, especially working mothers, bear the brunt of discriminatory practices.

Besides these overt forms of discrimination, Nigerian women must also contend with subtle and more pervasive exclusionary and discriminatory patterns, which are deeply ingrained into the structure of the labour market. As Okeke-Ihejirika (2003) notes, the typical Nigerian work setting is designed to exclude women and even unmarried women without conflicting marital and familial obligations are barely tolerated. Top-ranking and key decision-making positions are usually male-dominated, and many work environments are organised around ‘unofficial expectations’ that are

hostile to women and work to keep qualified women away. While the technicalities of the job may be gender neutral, the politics and dynamics of male bonding may not accommodate women. These problems suggest that women's full participation in the Nigerian labour market cannot be realised in a culture where patriarchal counter-influences are overwhelming. The socio-cultural factors generated by patriarchy not only influence women's educational aspirations: they also impact their capacity to utilise the knowledge and skills acquired through formal education for full participation in the world of work.

2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter explored and provided important contextual issues that are necessary for understanding the status and position of women in Nigerian society. The chapter highlighted how gender inequality is linked to political and socio-economic context. Colonialism is argued to weakened women's power bases and reinforced their subordinate status through the fusion of Western patriarchal values with indigenous culture. In spite of the fact that women's participation in employment increased after colonialism came to an end in the 1960s, the prevailing culture of male dominance led to a decline in their participation rates in the early 2000s. The chapter also revealed women's low participation in politics and key decision-making sectors of Nigerian society. Also noted was the role of culture in the private and public lives of women. Marriage in the Nigerian society is considered an important goal for women to aspire to, with a stigma attached to being unmarried.

Education is one area in which women's participation has consistently improved since Western formal education was first extended to women by the colonialists. The chapter notes that, even with increased access and participation in education, gender segregation in education and employment persist. One reason for this is the impact of patriarchal values. Deeply ingrained beliefs and stereotypes about women and men and their respective roles in the private and public spheres continue to limit the progress of women in all spheres of public life, from politics to employment. In fact, the higher level of female participation as university students is not reflected in the proportion of women working as lecturers and researchers at universities. Women seem to leak out of the academic pipeline. The next chapter reviews literature on female academics in the Global North and South, providing theoretical perspectives from which to make sense of the empirical data.

CHAPTER THREE. FEMALE ACADEMICS

3.0 Introduction

The research is situated within the broader context of gender in education and employment in Nigeria. Some crucial contextual factors and issues which provide a foundation for understanding, explaining and analysing Nigerian women's academic employment experiences were discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 provides some understanding of the political economy of Nigeria and discusses the historical and current nature of women's participation in the formal and informal economy. Essentially, this research is concerned with exploring how women are disadvantaged throughout their academic career journey in order to explain persistent inequality in academic employment. One of the objectives that flows from this question is to ground the study in what is already known about women's experiences and progression in higher education; this is the primary aim of this chapter. This chapter is organised in three main sections. The first part begins with a review of the literature on female academics in the Global North and then moves on to review available literature on female academics in the Global South. The commonalities and areas of divergence within the literature are then highlighted and summarised to conclude the first section. The theoretical framework that informs this study is presented in the second part of this chapter.

Although there are differing socio-economic and cultural realities between nations in the Global North and South, there is some common ground. Formal education, including higher education, in Nigeria and many African countries has a long colonial connection and thus was modelled on Western societies, and colonial legacies remain strong even in the postcolonial Nigerian educational system (Imam, 2012). As a result, the aims, statutes, culture and ethos of the university tend to mirror colonial and neo-colonial prejudices. Despite this historical connection, this study does not in any way claim that the experiences of academic women in Nigeria and academic women in other regions, particularly the Global North, are homogenous. Nevertheless, I strongly believe that insights from research conducted on academic women in the Global North are important to show the diversity and similarities of experiences of women in higher education.

Ongoing academic conversations on gender inequality in education and work in developing African nations suggest that formal education is considered an important tool for national development, but women's participation remains marginal. Similar patterns of gender disparity exist all over the world, regardless of cultural, religious, political and regional differences. Research on educational access and attainment identify several factors that impede women's education, including parents' socio-economic status and level of education, area of residence, availability of and access to schools, type of schools available to girls and the quality of teachers. Typically, women do not spend as many years in education as men, and even when they do, the gender differentiated curriculum prepares them for stereotypical occupations.

The literature indicates that there are tensions between education and employment. Due to the gender segregated nature of the labour market, there is no guarantee that an educational qualification will get women the same jobs as men. In countries like Saudi Arabia, government policies enforce gender discrimination and division (Hakem, 2017), whereas in countries like Nigeria where government policies emphasize equality of opportunity, women's subordination regardless of their educational achievements is perpetuated by strong systematic socialisation in educational institutions, workplaces and society in general (Anugwom, 2009). As shown in this chapter, knowledge gaps exist within the literature on women's participation in education and employment. For instance, many of the studies in this area deal with educational access and attainment, with little or no attention paid to the daily lived experiences of women in the education system or at work. Moreover, existing studies identify a long list of barriers to women's full participation in education and the labour market, with little attempt to link these impediments to a coherent explanatory framework. My argument in this chapter is that a coherent explanation for longstanding gender inequality in education and work is not possible without an understanding of the mechanisms employed by the greater social system in normalising this inequality.

Research in the Global North has focused extensively on the complexities of structural, psychological and attitudinal impediments to gender parity in male dominated organisations (Morley, 2005). A range of structural-institutional, social, cultural and ideological factors have been identified as barriers to women's academic career advancement (Luke, 2001). In the Global South on the other hand, research

progress in this field has been slow and the literature scant as a result. Morley (2005) argues that the literature on higher education in the developing world is mostly characterised by a gender-neutral approach. Gender often appears as an analytical category in relation to access and representation, while the qualitative experiences of women remains largely unresearched (Ojejide et al., 2006). Despite the feminist emphasis on the importance of locally situated analysis, there is still a paucity of research on the cultural politics of advantages and disadvantages that impacts women's academic career trajectory in non-Western nations (Luke, 2001).

3.1 Experiences of Female Academics in the Global North: Key Themes and Debates

Research on women's experiences in developed nations have uncovered a range of structural-institutional, socio-cultural factors and ideologies that impede women's academic career advancement (Luke, 2001). A review of extant literature on women and academic career experiences in developed nations such as the UK, US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand suggests that the under-representation of women in academia remains a cause for concern among universities and policy-makers (Bagues *et al.,* 2017). Indeed, research has largely focused on identifying and understanding the manifold direct and indirect barriers to women's progression in higher education, and on developing policy and programs to eliminate these barriers and support women's academic career development. Burton (1997: 143) summarises these barriers as follows:

- cultural barriers
- women's lack of participation in decision-making
- staffing policies and practices – the interpretation of the merit principle and criteria for selection and promotion
- labour market and location factors
- research culture
- gaps between policy and practice
- work-family incompatibilities
- lack of women applying at particular levels and in particular areas of work
- lack of resources for equal employment opportunities to function

- inadequate integration of equal employment principles into university restructuring and strategic planning

The factors listed above were based on an analysis of equity reviews and more than twenty years later, these factors are still a central focus of most gender equality research in higher education. Although my research focuses on Nigerian academic women, the literature from the Global North is important in understanding women's struggle in navigating a male dominated academia. Several explanations have been proposed to explain women's under-representation, particularly at higher-level positions. Metaphors such as the glass ceiling and sticky floor (Booth *et al.,* 2003), leaky pipeline (Allen and Castleman, 2001), chilly climate (White, 2001; Morley, 2006) and more recently labyrinth (Eagli and Carli, 2007) have been coined to capture and describe women's representation at different levels of the academic hierarchy. The following section describes the literature in greater detail, within some overlapping but distinct themes.

Key Themes

Three main themes have been identified within academic conversations on women's under-representation in academia in the west. The first and by far the most dominant theme within Western literature is institutional barriers and constraints. The second theme relates to the connection between organisational practices and gender dynamics in the private spheres largely informed by work-life balance literature. The third theme focuses on globalisation, neoliberal social and economic policy as well as the gendered impact of higher education reform. I explore each theme in turn.

3.1.1 Institutional Constraints

According to Toren (2001: 1), metaphorically, women's careers can be described as follows: at the entrance an iron gate, then a sticky floor, at the top a glass ceiling, and in-between a hurdle track. The subsequent paragraphs articulate how some of these metaphors are used to describe the institutional factors that contribute to women's unequal employment outcomes.

The Leaky Pipeline

The ‘pipeline’ was originally used as a metaphor to describe an unavoidable delay between policy change and organisational change. The main idea behind the pipeline argument is that, with increased educational achievement by women coupled with the decline in gender discrimination in hiring, promotion and tenure, women’s status in higher education improves slowly but steadily. The assumption is that a pipeline will produce gender equality in due course (Dobson, 1997; Baker, 2012).

The ‘leaky pipeline’ criticises the pipeline argument and describes the steady attrition of girls and women along the educational and academic career pathway (Bilimoria and Liang, 2012). Researchers argue that the pipeline argument ignores the fact that a gendered and political space exists that causes the pipeline to ‘leak women’ (Xu, 2008). The pipeline argument also assumes a linear path of career progression for women, when in reality women are less likely to experience linear academic career trajectories (Baker, 2012). In academia, the leaky pipeline describes the progressive disappearance of women from high participation as undergraduate students to significantly low participation rates at postgraduate levels, particularly postgraduate research (Bell and Bentley, 2006). Even with postgraduate studies, there are leaks at every stage of the journey toward and through academia and more women than men leak out. Blickenstaff (2005) and Specht (2006) also examine the extent to which the pipeline operates in STEM and find that getting more women into academia is only a partial solution to women’s under-representation. There are a host of other factors such as family responsibilities that contribute to the low numbers of women in academia, particularly in senior positions.

Another important area of focus has been women’s capacity to undertake research, given that research completion and output is critical for career progression at all stages of an academic career. A 2008 study of the experience of 2,000 PhD graduates revealed marked gender differences in initial motivation, experience and outcome (Dever *et al.*, 2008). Research suggests that, throughout the PhD process, not only do women receive less support and encouragement, they also report less engagement with a professional community, earn less on completion and are positioned less favourably in terms of career development. Also, Baker (2012) argues that academic women report little time or opportunity to complete PhDs due to heavy teaching loads and care responsibilities. Furthermore, Morley (2014) highlights that

women remain extremely under-represented in higher education leadership roles, in research leadership positions and as successful applicants for research grants.

Literature from the Global North also highlights how female academics and researchers are impacted by higher education reform. A major debate within this research is that, despite the growing possibilities and opportunities for building a research career, women's progress is sporadic with new and emerging limitations. Dever *et al.* (2006) explore the 'double-edged sword' of workplace flexibility in terms of women's research production capacity. Findings suggests not that women are incapable of successfully conducting research, but that excessive workloads are required, alongside (often) a requirement for travel including international travel, which is difficult for women with caring responsibilities. Keogh and Garrick (2005) explore the detrimental impact of casual employment and the precarious possibilities it creates for career advancement. Bassett and Marshall (1998) argue that one of the impacts of increasing casualisation of the academic workforce, particularly at lecturer level, is the creation of a large group of marginalised academics, the majority of whom are women. Not only does this limit their opportunities because of the values implicit in university culture, it also allows little scope for engagement in the research necessary for career consolidation. The invisibility of casual women academics is a popular theme throughout Western literature (Fletcher *et al.,* 2007; Crimmins, 2015).

All the issues discussed above contribute to the 'leakiness' of the pipeline. Researchers have argued that the widespread belief in the pipeline theory is in itself a hinderance to women's progress as it disguises the existence of real and longstanding issues as well as the need for proactive strategies for change. Allen and Castleman (2001), for example, argue that the pipeline theory ignores the micropolitics at play in academia that negatively impacts women's ability to advance in institutions in which the benchmark for progression is based on masculine ideals. Although academia is often hailed for its emphasis on merit for promotion and progression, women are forced to navigate their academic career within a hostile (or 'chilly') climate.

Micropolitics and the chilly climate

The term 'chilly climate' was initially coined by Sandler and Hall (1986) to describe the hostile environment in US higher education institutions in the 1970s. The term has gained popular acceptance as "a shorthand for women being frozen out of the status

and reward systems in their institutions" (Eveline 2004: 99). Empirical evidence suggests that institutional climates have remained chilly and, in some respects, may be deteriorating (White 2001; Eveline & Currie, 2006). Maranto and Griffin (2010) revealed that faculty women perceive more exclusion from academic departments with a low representation of women and argues that the chilly climate is a complex phenomenon, with multiple causes. Morley (2006) contends that there are subtle and complex ways in which women are held back in higher education institutions. Universities are often perceived as neutral (Currie *et al.,* 2002), but Morley (2005) argues that the university is an institution of contradictions, one that offers opportunities for progression and at the same time is complicit in social divisions. The university, like other workplaces, has been described as a major site of gender politics in which gendered power is relayed in everyday practices. Micropolitics has been defined by Blasé (1991:1) as being

> about power and how people use it to influence others and to protect themselves. It is about conflict and how people compete with others to get what they want. It is about cooperation and how people build support among themselves to achieve their ends.

Morley (1999) suggest that the study of micropolitics has become an important tool for organisational and feminist research to expose the 'dark side' of organisational life and institutions, where power relationship can be identified through rumour, gossip, humour, denials and alliance building (see Chapter 6). The chilly climate argument is based on the idea that universities are highly gendered in their practices despite the appearance of gender neutrality. This apparent neutrality masks the extent to which the masculine working model is the norm and makes it invisible, marginalising women as the 'other' (Ward, 2001). This operates through notions of merit and success in universities that are more closely aligned to what men do well (Carrington and Pratt, 2003)., Henry (1994) argues that universities were founded upon elitist values that flourished alongside patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism. Universities "soon became associated with the image of ivory towers […] a place where prestigious groups of wise, usually white men pontificated about society away from the pressure and harsh realities of life" (p.42). Itzin and Newman (1995) argue that globally, university culture values and reproduces the concepts of career, academic achievement and institutional

and intellectual work based on male life trajectories and paths to success are structured on traditional male traits and characteristics. Patterns of patriarchy (gendered male power and control) are deeply entrenched in the structures of universities, in committees, staffing patterns and informal lobbying groups.

Also, Currie *et al.* (2002) maintain that universities, despite being perceived as neutral, are in fact gendered organisations that value activities that reflect male patterns of socialisation: individualist rather than collective, competitive rather than cooperative, based on power differentials rather than egalitarian principles and linked to expert principles rather than collegial support. Morley (2005) argues that higher education reveals the structure of social inequalities, their ethical issues and policy formulation. The university has also contributed to public debates around various forms of discrimination but few universities have scrutinized their own practices of reproducing social inequalities. The study of micropolitics seeks to reveal how ideals of merit are devised and women's capital=building capacity is subverted through everyday interactions and decision-making. There are both direct and indirect manifestations of gendered structures that work against women in academia. For example, Bagihole (2002b) argues that women are more likely to be victims of bullying or sexual harassment. Kjedal *et al.* (2005) explore how gendered organisational cultures and practices persist within the formal rules of equality policies. They argue that while teaching allocations might appear fair and equitable within an established formula, closer scrutiny reveals how women are often allocated lower status teaching responsibilities that are more labour intensive, resulting in a never-ending cycle over overwork in relation to promotion opportunities. High teaching loads leaves less time for research, conference attendance and other activities that are favoured highly in promotional practices. This is one of the indirect expressions of gendered power structures that work against women. What appears to be a gender-neutral process is in fact highly gendered and disadvantageous to women.

Sticky floors and glass ceilings

Metaphors such as sticky floor and glass ceilings are used to explain how the gendered pay gap in universities operates. The 'sticky floor' metaphor describes situations in which men and women who have similar experiences and qualifications may be appointed to the same pay scale or rank, but women are appointed at the

bottom of the scale and men further up (Francesconi and Zoega, 2003). The ‘glass ceiling’ describes transparent barriers to further advancement once women have attained a certain level within an organisation (Baxter & Wright, 2000; Hiau, 2005). Eagly and Carli (2007) refer to the glass ceiling as ‘a goal that is within sight but is somehow unattainable’ (p.63). These metaphors are often used together to describe how women remain concentrated at lower ranks in occupational hierarchies, resulting in a gender pay gap. The gender pay gap is an important theme in the literature. For example, Hiau (2005) compared salaries in the private and public sector and found that both ‘sticky floors’ and ‘glass ceilings’ contribute to differences in earnings at different ends of the career hierarchy.

Research also reveals gender differences in initial appointment levels. Although there are limitations in what data can reveal about the link between discrimination and women’s initial appointment levels compared with men’s, there is evidence that men are more likely to be appointed early in their careers at a higher level that women. Probert (2005), in a study of an Australian university found that 50% of women were initially appointed at Level A, the bottom rank, compared to 40% of men initially appointed at that level. Probert (2005) argues that men are also more likely to successfully bargain about their appointment level. In the US, similar patterns were found by West and Curtis (2006) in a national review of progress on equity indicators in US universities and colleges: findings suggest that women are often hired on lower salaries than men on the same appointment level, showing that women are short changed and disadvantaged in their academic careers. Although the available data on wage differentials show and describe gender differences in pay, it does little to explain it. There are three dominant explanations for the gender pay gap. The first cites differences in human capital: level of education, years of experience and relevant skills (Becker 1985; Dobson 1997; Ward, 2001). However, gender differences in human capital decline as women’s educational attainment levels increase, which has been dramatic in both developed and developing countries. Thus, differences in human capital are no longer useful in explaining unequal outcomes for men and women (Van Staveren, 2007). A second, closely related explanation is that women make different choices, valuing family over career progression (Hakim, 2000). The third view is that women are disadvantaged by institutional barriers (Bagihole, 2002b; Acker, 2006).

These section that follows highlights some of the institutional barriers to women's academic career advancement.

Promotion is another important focus of investigation. Probert (2005) argues that female academics progress more slowly through the ranks than their male counterparts as a result of either direct discrimination or systemic/indirect discrimination, operating through gendered concepts of merit as discussed above. The literature suggests that promotion criteria and guidelines are based on a traditional male model and as such women's progression is impacted negatively in the struggle to meet these requirements. Caretta *et al.'s* (2018) study on early career female academics stresses that academic employment is very demanding. To thrive in the increasingly competitive academic marketplace, academics must meet expectations in line with neoliberal practices. A PhD is not sufficient in itself to develop a successful academic career: female academics must proactively develop and diversify their skills set, show evidence of external funding applications and success, have publications in highly ranked journals and participate in research conferences (Hawkins *et al.* 2014). Academic women's ability to meet these expectations is impacted by family relationships, child-rearing and other caring responsibilities (Caretta *et al.,* 2018).

In a similar vein, Aiston and Jung (2015) argue that research productivity is highly prized in high education employment and promotion largely hinges on research output. Research continues to reveal a gender gap in terms of research output, usually in favour of men. Many factors have been cited in the literature to explain this gap. One popular and common explanation is the impact of domestic responsibilities. Ropes-Huilman (2000) argue that women are more likely to be influenced by gender stereotyping to undertake the role of caretakers or 'academic mommies'. Academic women tend to be heavily involved in pastoral care, committee work, teaching, quality assurance and audit processes at the expense of decision-making roles and the research necessary for career advancement (Hughes *et al.*, 2007; Morley, 2007). Also, lack of suitable mentors and exclusion from important networks have been cited as explanatory factors for the gender gap in research output (and, by extension, promotion) in academia. Studies in the UK, Australia, US, Canada and much of the Global North have found that academia is a prestige economy (Blackmore, 2012) with great emphasis on research as necessary for academic promotion (Baker, 2012; Macfarlane 2012; Fitzgerald, 2014). Morley (2014) also notes that "research

performance is implicitly associated with the prestige economy in higher education and is a pathway to academic seniority and an indicator for promotion" (p.116).

In support of Morley's assertion, DeWitte and Hudrlikova (2013) argue that the importance of research excellence, particularly in developed higher educational systems in the Global North, is reflected in the increasing importance of global rankings that favour research-intensive universities. The research productivity of universities is assessed by ranking organisations based on statistical aggregate on the quality and quantity of faculty publications (Hallinger, 2014). The importance that contemporary higher education institutions attach to international standings, coupled with the culture of performance audit, mean that universities demand tangible, measurable outputs with emphasis on both the quality and the quantity of academic publications (Baker, 2012). The fact that academic men tend to fare better in a research productivity-oriented culture is well known. Previous research confirms that there is a gender gap in research productivity. Tower *et al.'s* (2007) multidisciplinary study on gender-based research productivity found that, on average, female academics publish less than their male colleagues. There are obvious and significant implications of this gender gap in research productivity in a promotion system that often favours research over teaching and service (Baker, 2012).

Aiston and Jung (2015) compared and analysed the gender gap in five economically advanced countries (USA, Germany, Finland, Japan and Hong Kong). The findings revealed that female academics publish significantly less than their male colleagues in Finland, USA and German, with relatively high rankings on a range of gender equality indicators. Hongkong, although not included in the Global Gender Report, is a society in which women's position and status is largely defined by their roles as wives, mothers and homemakers (Luke, 2000). At every level of the academic career hierarchy, men published more than women and this gap is even more prominent at senior levels. This holds true with respect to disciplines: in the sciences, men fare better than women in terms of research output, which is not surprising, since STEM is a male-dominated field. However, even in humanities and social sciences, with high female participation rates, the gap in research publication persists.

A popular explanation for this gap is that women have marital and child-rearing responsibilities that impact on their research output. Senior academic women are even more likely to have more caring responsibilities (for children or parents). Findings from

Aiston and Jung's study disproves this hypothesis (2015): it was found that with respect to research output, on average, married academic women are more productive than single academic women. More surprising is fact that women who reported career interruptions in the US, Finland, Japan and Germany had greater research outputs than their female colleagues who had no career interruptions, except for those in Hong Kong and women in STEM in the US. Aiston and Jung's'study suggests that marriage and family factors do not necessarily impact research output negatively, even though marriage and family factors have been repeatedly cited as impacting women's research output (see Chapters 6 and 7). However, Sax *et al.* (2000) found in a survey of over 8,000 academics in the US that family variables had no significant impact in predicting the research productivity of academics. While there is a debate regarding the explanatory factors for the gender gap in research output, research suggests that a gender gap in research output does exist. The primacy of research output and productivity over teaching in universities in the Global North disadvantages women, who consistently publish less than their male colleagues.

On the institutional barriers to women's advancement in British universities, Bagihole (2006) asserts that, although there appears to be a great ambition and desire for promotion among academic women, few achieve this. Women's promotional ambitions and aspirations doesn't always match their expectations due to a combination of subjectivities and hidden criteria associated with promotion processes. Also, Bagihole (2006) argues that women's disadvantaged position in terms of promotion is worsened because women lack mentors, role models and are excluded from informal networks. Finally, other factors found in the literature that negatively impact women's promotional aspirations include workload allocation and the fact that women are less successful than their male colleagues in securing research grants. All these factors work together to limit women's research productivity and even with an excellent teaching track record, promotion is slower for women within universities.

3.1.2 Care Responsibilities and its Impact on Careers

The impact of caring responsibilities on the academic careers of women has received much attention within the literature. The main argument is that childcare responsibilities affect the career-family challenges that academic women face, i.e., the battle between the tenure clock and the biological clock, reduced mobility for faculty

women with children and the illusion that a flexible academic schedule permits one to perform all the responsibilities of a fulltime academic and a fulltime parent (Comer and Stites-Don, 2006). Probert (2005) maintains that the “impact of care responsibilities” should be the starting point not only in explaining women’s poorer outcomes in higher education, but also in effectively directing policy and strategy. There is now an extensive database on ‘work and family’ literature, explaining the impact of family responsibilities on women’s careers. In a policy context, work and family policies have been formulated to support employees to balance the competing demands of work and family life. The notion of ‘work and family’ has been criticised as too narrow in scope, suggesting that care is only the concern of heterosexual women with children and implying that there is a fine distinction between these two aspects of life. As research in this area progresses, the use of the term ‘work and life’ gradually replaced ‘work and family’, signalling a conceptual shift based on three major arguments.

First, the term ‘work and life’ is broader in scope, encompassing the care responsibilities of childless people and those who live in a family context unlike the traditional nuclear model (Pocock, 2005). Secondly, ‘work and life’ implies that the boundaries between work and life are porous and there is often a spillover between these two (Pocock, 2007). In the context of increased flexibility facilitated by advancements in information technology, the encroachment of work into all spheres of life is inevitable (Eveline and Currie, 2006). Thirdly, Pocock (2007) argues against the use of metaphors like ‘balancing’ or ‘juggling’ to capture the relationship between work and life and the need to achieve harmony between the competing demands from both spheres. She suggests that the term ‘collision’ is more accurate a description. These understandings inform a broader conceptualisation of care that is not limited to the care provided by parents to children. This is particularly important in academic employment where the pastoral care for students, as well as care within collegiate networks, is a central feature of academic work.

Higher education institutions in the Global North have introduced measures to help women cope with familial care. For example, women in the UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, Germany and a host of other nations are entitled to paid and unpaid maternity leave, flexible working arrangements and in some cases support to help with research productivity after maternity leave. There has been great discussion about the extent to which these measures level the playing field in

academic employment (Probert, 2005) since women are more likely to carry an unequal burden of responsibility in the domestic division of labour. Research confirms that men tend to have greater human capital in terms of experience, and that this is connected to childcare. The unequal burden of domestic and family care leave women with less time to build the necessary capital for academic career progression. Probert *et al.* (2000b) argue that accepting that the household is a critical space in which female faculty must negotiate their career development does not suggest that workplace interventions are irrelevant. This reality seems to be the case for academic women in all disciplines, including STEM. Cochran *et al*. (2013) in a study of gender barriers in academic surgery and medicine found that marriage, childbearing decisions and the challenge of childcare significantly hinder the professional development of female surgeons. Also, findings from Schroen *et al.'s* 2004 survey of 317 academic general surgeons revealed that 1 in 4 of the female academic surgeons reviewed reported that they had never been married, compared to 1 in 25 of their male counterparts. These suggest that female academic surgeons are much more likely to postpone the decision to start a family until they had completed their residency and fellowship training. Similarly, Zhuge *et al.'s* 2011 review of the impact of the glass ceiling for women in academic surgery found that more than a quarter of female academics had not had children by the age of 40 and there was a consensus among those who had children that childbearing decisions slowed their career progression.

There is much evidence that women assume unequal responsibility for care. Within the literature in the Global North, it is well recognised and acknowledged that care responsibilities shape women's career choices, aspirations and outcomes in academic employment. Time use data reveals that women undertake most of the childcare and housework and there are also gender differences in terms of preference for working hours and care responsibilities (Drago *et al.*, 2006; AIFS, 2007). Research also indicates that for women, marriage and partnership comes with increased unpaid work responsibilities, while the opposite is true for men (Craig, 2005). Also, even with men's increased participation in parenting and unpaid domestic work (Dienhart, 2001) and the exponential entry of women into paid work over the past 50 years (Vohlidalova, 2017), responsibilities for care have not changed much. These responsibilities vary according to life cycle, ethnicity and socio-economic status, and policy conditions such as the cost of childcare also directly impacts women's employment (Leahy &

Doughney, 2006). Furthermore, debates around work-life issues and work-life policy formulation are highly gendered and men are not only largely invisible but also silent (Pocock, 2005) despite calls for widening participation in this debate. For many academic women and professional women in general, the main strategy for managing work-life conflict is part-time work (Pocock, 2005). Most life events have very little impact on the working lives of men, while women's working lives fluctuate considerably with the childbirth, the illness or death of family members and other critical life changes (Drago *et al.,* 2006).

Women in academic employment carry a burden of care that is significantly different from men, in both families and at work. Outside work, Probert (2005) notes that female academics with children are more likely to be the primary carer. In their role as academics, research suggests that women are more likely to spend more time on student welfare and pastoral care and less time on career-building activities (Bagihole, 1993; Wilson, 2005; Probert, 2005; Baker, 2013). This unequal care burden in both work and life spheres impact women's research output and productivity. According to Probert (2005) this is also reflected in the fact that women are more likely to demand more time (rather than money, which mean tend to be more likely to ask for) to improve their research output. Despite the momentum in the debate around work and life policies, the difficulty in managing work-life conflict is worsened by broader conditions. Eveline (2004) finds that many women are either delaying childbearing decisions or choosing not to have children at all and attributes this to the 'contraceptive' effect of higher education. Recent evidence suggests, however, that this trend is changing (Lunn, 2008). Longer working hours, teaching workloads and rising childcare costs further complicate the work-life conflict. In higher education, this situation is quite contradictory as because women are often attracted to academic employment due to its flexibility and the opportunity to work from multiple locations.

Literature suggests that universities in the Global North have continuously implemented programmes and strategies to support women's work-life struggle. For tenured women, maternity leave provisions are generous compared with women in the Global South, as discussed below. There are also strong and active unions in countries such as the UK and Australia, working to improve women's employment conditions. Regardless of policy efforts, universities have been described as greedy institutions who want all their employees' time (Coser, 1974). Compared to other

sectors, academic work affords a high degree of discretion and autonomy in terms of when, where and how one works, but this does not translate to less work (Coates *et al.,* 2008). The pressure to complete a PhD and to meet the constant demand for research publications means that work is not confined to standard hours. While this may be the case in other sectors, the boundaries between work and non-work time are particularly blurred for academics (Walters and Bardoel, 2006). With advancement in information and communications technology breaking down barriers to how, when and where work can be undertaken, the extension of work beyond standard working hours is now the norm. This 'extensification' (Eveline and Currie, 2006) of work has detrimental impacts on the personal lives of women, who may even forgo sleep (Acker and Armenti, 2004). This is further worsened by higher education reforms in the UK, US, Germany, Australia, Canada and other countries in the Global North. In the UK and Australia for example, higher education reforms have intensified workloads and increased teaching loads. Even with work and family policies in place, research suggests that these policies are undersubscribed and underutilised, with a range of barriers limiting women's ability to use these policies. Walter and Bardoel (2006) cites excessive workload as inhibiting the utilisation of work and family policies. Even with generous leave entitlement, performance criteria, poor communication about entitlements, workplace cultures and lack of institutional commitment limit their use.

There seems to be consensus within the literature regarding the critical impact that responsibility for care has on women's capacity to compete for promotion in academia. There is also much evidence of suggest that the challenges associated with navigating work and life conflict have far-reaching implications for the health and wellbeing of female academics (Coates, *et al.*, 2008). Acker (1996) writes about how women academics are doing good and feeling bad. On the one hand they work very hard to do a good job, be good colleagues and teachers and to nurture their students. On the other, they feel dissatisfaction and disappointment because their efforts are often undervalued and unnoticed, and because there is an unfair division of labour and they are constantly under pressure to work harder. This results in high levels of stress, anxiety and frustration for female academics. As noted above, unequal responsibility for care is widely acknowledged as important in understanding and explaining women's career trajectories and unequal outcomes, reflected in the amount of studies focused on examining the impact of care on women in academic

employment. Managing the conflicting demands of work and life is complicated and worsened by the changing nature of higher education in the face of globalisation and internalisation. This is an important theme within the Global North literature and will be briefly discussed in the next section.

3.1.3 The Impact of Globalisation

Over the last decade, higher education has changed dramatically as education has evolved into a global trade facilitated by advancement in information and communication technology, and new forms of community and knowledge exchange (Luke, 2000; Shaw, 2013; Currie & Vidovich, 2009). Research suggests that the globalisation of markets combined with institutional disadvantages exacerbate women's positions as outsiders in higher education. In the Global North, these disadvantages are nuanced depending on the welfare state and the country-specific employment regime. Hofmeister *et al*. (2009) argue that in some countries globalising forces may foster women's employment by improving access and participation levels due to increased workplace flexibility. Yet, in other countries, particularly those who have achieved higher levels of women's fulltime employment, globalisation-induced work restructuring can damage job security. The key question asked by researchers in this area is whether globalisation has the potential to close the gender gap through the integration of more women into the labour market, or whether it may weaken the position of women in the labour market by exposing them to precarious employment. The literature on the impact of globalisation on women's academic careers in the Global North can be summarised into three distinct areas of focus: the broader impacts of globalisation on work, the impact of neoliberal reform, and the gendered impacts of 'new managerialism' in OECD and commonwealth counties in this region.

With respect to the impact of globalisation on work, there is ample evidence in the literature to suggest that the nature of work has evolved in several ways due to the impact of globalising forces. Labour relations and women's employment in modern OECD-type countries has witnessed radical changes in the face of globalisation (Mills and Blossfeld), 2005). By globalisation, I refer to four mutually reinforcing processes: firstly, the declining importance of national borders for all kinds of economic transactions with increased competition for capital, labour and goods; secondly, increasing interconnectivity through advancement in information and communication

technology (ICT) almost resulting in a 'borderless' world and giving rise to more options of flexible work restructuring and the emergence of real-time international competition between welfare states (Mills and Blossfeld, 2005); thirdly, tougher tax competition between welfare states accompanied by deregulation, privatisation and the liberalisation of domestic industries and markets, resulting in a significant rise in other forms of work such as, part-time work, temporary work, work designed into reduced hours or marginal work that not only replace fulltime jobs but also erode employment rights and conditions; and fourthly and finally, increasing emphasis on the exposure of institutions to an unpredictable world market exerting pressure on organisations to become more proactively adaptable and flexible to environmental changes (Hofmeister *et al.,* 2009). These pressures impose great uncertainty on employers who constantly have to compete, cutting costs to the detriment of wages and commitments to employees (Kalleberg, 2000).

These changes in the nature of work in the past decade or so encourage and enhance flexibility, and women are more likely (whether by choice or by default) to move into such positions because of their structural location between competing demands (Mills, 2004). On the one hand, women are primarily responsible for the household, a role that has remained relatively stable over time and across national context (Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001). Women are in a disadvantaged position as a result of their primary responsibility for the domestic front, together with the fact that women are more likely to experience career interruptions at various points in their working lives to tend to domestic and childcare issues, making it difficult for women to compete with unencumbered workers (men) for fulltime secure positions (Brines, 1994). On the other hand, women are increasingly involved in paid work and with the trend towards a knowledge society accelerated by globalisation, there has been a shift from women participating in relatively unskilled jobs to more skilled service jobs. However, a critical issue is how far the integration of qualified women into skilled jobs goes together with more flexible and precarious employment (Hofmeister *et al.,* 2009)

In terms of the impact of neoliberal informed sector, Thornton (2005) argues that higher education reform and university management has been informed by neoliberalism. Neoliberalism in this context refers to a political economic ideology that has become dominant in recent years through its adoption and implementation throughout OECD countries. Commonly associated with the work of economists,

Hayek (1941), Friedman and Friedman (1962) and Buchanan (1975), its core values rest on the idea that the economy is driven by vested interest of individuals and effective resource allocation is done through the market, a commitment to free trade and *laissez-faire* policy that allows the market to regulate itself (Olssen & Peters, 2005). An important area of focus in the literature has been an examination of the gendered impact of neoliberal values, which emphasise self-interest, profit generation, outputs, outcomes, accountability and excellence (Olssen and Peters, 2005). Also there have been debates about how university restructuring in the face of neoliberalism has resulted in a corporatized HE system and the implications in terms of equal opportunities (Blacmore & Sachs, 2003; Thornton, 2008).

Finally, globalisation and neoliberalism has given rise to “new managerialism” as universities have increasingly become corporatized (Eveline, 2004). Some of the impact of this new corporate style of management in neoliberal universities cited in the literature include increasing academic workloads and increased surveillance (Williams, 2004). There are direct and gendered impacts of increasing workloads on health and wellbeing and research has sought to uncover how these conditions impact female academics specifically. Raddon’s study on academic mothers (2002) examines the dilemmas associated with building a successful academic identity and being a good mother. Eveline and Currie (2006) explore the impact of work ‘extensification’ facilitated by advancement in ICT. Wolf *et al.* (2003) explore how university practices are more problematic for women due to the simple “logistics of age, the biological clock, the tenure clock, the physical demands of pregnancy and childbirth and the gendered expectations of family obligations” (p. 113). Other important themes in this area include workplace bullying (Thornton, 2004), research output and productivity (Eveline, 2005) and women’s concentration in lower paid and insecure positions (Lafferty and Fleming, 2000).

Overall, the Global North literature suggests that higher education reform and new managerialism in the face of globalisation and neoliberalism have far-reaching implications for the nature of academic work, and for women in particular.

3.2 Experiences of Female Academics in the Global South

Over the past three decades, significant progress has been achieved in the struggle for gender equality in employment, reflected in the rate at which women are now

steadily entering occupations and professions that were previously male preserves (European Commission, 2008). Research and available statistics suggest improved and increasing access to education and training equips women with the necessary qualifications and skills to aspire to high-ranking roles in public service, commercial enterprise, trade unions and academia (Hatcher, 2003). Despite these advancements, there are still gender disparities, with women facing relatively larger barriers in their professional career pursuits (Akande, 1999). This has led to extensive empirical attempts to uncover these barriers and formulate strategies to narrow the gender gap.

Since the 1980s, there has been a proliferation of women's and gender research in Africa (Lewis, 2002; Mama, 1995, 1996; Manuh, 2001; Nzomo, 1998; Pereira, 2002). This outgrowth of scholarship can be attributed to several factors, including (but not limited to) the Global North women's movement, "the influence of the [women and] development industry, national political [and economic] conditions, the crisis in African education and the emergence of state feminism" (Mama 1996: 4). Several studies have attempted to reveal the nature of statistical under-representation of women in academia in the Global South (Akilagpa, 2002; Bennett, 2002; Pereira, 2002; Zeleza *et al*., 2005). Earlier studies focused on access and representation, however with intensified research attention in this area, more focus has been directed at exploring, understanding and explaining the gender gap in academic employment. Structural, economic, institutional and social factors have been identified as constraints for academic women in a traditionally male-dominated environment. In reviewing the literature on academic women in the Global South, a number of themes emerge, related to issues of representation (Pereira, 2002; Bennett, 2002; Osongo, 2002), fields of specialisation (Morley, 2006), gender-based stereotypes and discrimination (Tamale and Oloka-Onyango, 1997; Osongo, 2002; Mama, 2003; Prah, 2013), sexual harassment (Osongo, 2002; Denga), the impact of care & family responsibilities (Aluko, 2003; Ogbogu, 2011; Boateng, 2018), the overarching influence of patriarchy and the denial of the existence of gender based discrimination in universities (Ojejide, 2003; 2004. These themes are explored below.

Throughout the literature on academic women in the Global South, it is acknowledged that women are statistically under-represented at every level of academic employment and particularly in senior academic and administrative

positions. Authors agree that experiences of higher education are highly gendered and social relations within universities reveal inequalities in power relations evident in the statistics of access, employment, decision-making, welfare and access to research and professional opportunities (Ojejide, 2004; Morley, 2006; Ogbogu, 2011). Research on academic women such as Ojejide (2003), Morley(2006), Yusuff (2014) in Nigeria, Boateng (2018) in Ghana, Kharam & Afiouni (2014) in the Middle East, Raburu (2011), Kamau (2011) in Kenya, and Maokela (2003), Petersen & Gravett (2000), Mama (2003) and Johnson-Turner (2014) in South Africa all seems to agree that not only are women a minority in academic employment, but they are also disproportionately found in the lower, less secure positions in the academic hierarchy. These studies also indicate that, despite women's increasing access to higher education, women's representation thins out at doctoral level onwards.

The statistical under-representation of women where it matters most in academic employment has led several authors to refer to academia in the Global South as a man's world (Ojejide, 2003), where male career ideals are the norm and women must work had to navigate a host of challenges and barriers in the pursuit and advancement of their academic career. In a study of gender politics in African HE, Mama (2003) argues that although there are no formal exclusionary measures preventing women's participation in post-independence African universities, universities across the continent remain male-dominated, both culturally and numerically. This limits women's progression (Britwum *et al.*, 2013). Assie-Lumumba (2005) argues that African universities play vital but contradictory roles in the sense that they are "frontiers of discovery" and at the same time "guardians of past heritage" (p.5). Male domination continues to endure in postcolonial African universities. While this is gradually changing and the available statistical picture indicates that women's entry into higher education as students is growing, their participation in academic employment has remained low and their progress slow. According to Mama (2003), the exclusion and marginalisation of women is noticeable in both administrative and academic positions but is most prominent at senior academic and research positions.

Once women enter HE, gender differentiation manifests qualitatively within and across various disciplines. The Global South literature suggests that not only are women grossly under-represented in academic employment, just as the case in

universities in the Global North, women are much more likely to be found in social sciences, arts and humanities and their participation in STEM fields is dismal (Mama, 2003). Due to the dearth of reliable and comparable data, analysts tend to focus on the disparities in primary and secondary enrolment rates at the expense of tertiary education and this is reflected in studies by Assie-Lumumba (1993) and Namuddu (1995). Ajayi *et al.* (1996) predicted that gender parity in HE enrolment will be achieved by 2000 based on the incremental gains recorded in primary and secondary school enrolment, but more than two decades later, gender parity is still a pipedream. Some scholars attribute the persisting gender differentials to higher female drop-out rates, but Mama (2003) argues that there is little statistical evidence to support the assumption that women are more likely to drop out. Further, the idea that gender parity has not been achieved because of women's higher drop-out rate suggests that the responsibility for achieving parity is on the women or those who drop out, rather than HEIs (Mama, 2003). Similar to the pipeline argument in the Global North, it is often argued that the gender deficit in universities in the Global South, particularly in African universities, is a result of insufficient pools of women with the necessary qualifications. Mama (2003) holds a contrary view, arguing that there are many qualified women and men who never enter HE, suggesting that the gender deficit might be partly sustained at the gateways of universities, through the apparently neutral admissions processes that determine those who are actually admitted from the pool of qualified applicants. The persistence of this problem coupled with the absence of formal exclusions hindering women's participation suggests that there is a need to look beyond the numbers for answers (Mama, 2003). The implication is that women become stuck at the bottom of the career hierarchy, a position often associated with the heaviest workload. Several reasons have been cited for the longstanding gender inequality in HEIs in the Global South, particularly in African universities. One of the most commonly and easily cited reasons is external social and familial factors. The existing literature reveals some of the ways in which women's continued sexual and reproductive responsibilities hinder their ability to compete with men, whose success to a very large extent relies on the domestic exploitation of women (Tamale & Oloka-Onyango, 2000).

A recurrent theme within the literature on academic women in the Global South relates to the challenges academic women face to balance the demands of work and

family life. Despite the progress women have made in professional pursuits, in much of the Global South, particularly in African societies, the primacy of women's domestic role as mothers and carers prevails (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003). As a result, there is now a growing body of literature aimed at exploring, revealing and explaining the challenges professional women face in balancing the demands of professional and domestic spheres. Aluko (2009), in a study of two hundred female professionals in academia and banking, found that academic women at junior and senior levels struggle to balance the daily demands of work and family life. Aluko (2009) argues that conflicting demands on their time impact their mood at work negatively. Similarly, Whitehead and Kotze (2003) argue that professional women's physical and mental wellbeing as well as career performance and success is largely impacted by their ability to balance multiple life roles. In a study of the challenges of work-life balance among academic women in South Africa, Jenna (2013) argued that the flexibility of academia presents a dilemma for academic women: it helps to achieve a work-life balance but also compounds the conflict between work and non-work domains.

In their study of academic women in South African universities, Petersen and Gravett (2000) argue that women's academic careers are constrained by factors such as lack of time, excessive workloads and lack of adequate childcare. Not only does society expect women to carry the burden of domestic care, universities offer little or no support with mediating the impact of the double burden on women's capacity to advance their careers (Boateng, 2018). While some have suggested that it is women themselves who prioritise family or domestic concerns at the expense of their careers, Muasya (2016) points out that role expectations in the home and work domain are influenced by societal norms and expectations and non-conformity to these expectations or norms can lead to role conflict. Boateng (2018), in a study of academic women's experiences in Ghanaian universities, found that rather than choosing between work or domestic concerns, academic women find ways to cope and meet the competing demands of their dual roles of carer and academic women. As a result of cultural expectations, academic women find ways to ensure that their career responsibilities do not interfere with their domestic responsibilities. For many academic women, domestic concerns are often prioritised over career-building activities.

Mama (2003) argues that responsibility for explaining women's poor representation in academia lies with HEIs. To Mama (2003), as a result of claims of neutrality and meritocracy in universities, women's poor participation and slow progress in academia is often easily blamed on factors external to the universities, such as those discussed above. She argues, however, that despite institutional claims of administrative neutrality, unequal sexual and gender dynamics are pervasive in the institutional and intellectual culture of universities in developing African nations. Ojejide (2003) argues that, despite the obvious unequal power relations within the university system, women are wary of supporting affirmative action, mainly because of the assumption of merit-based recruitment and promotion processes. Similarly, Ojejide *et al.* (2006) assert that affirmative action is often perceived as discriminatory and counterproductive, hence the constant denial of differential treatment of male and female staff in universities. Women often attribute their struggles to personal choices and rarely seek or demand organisational support. Also, in a study of women in academic medicine, Han *et al*. (2018) revealed that the gross under-representation of women in leadership positions made it difficult for younger academics to identify women as role models or mentors, resorting to men for mentoring relationships for career advancement support and advice (see Chapter 6).

According to Mbanefoh (1995), Nigerian women who find themselves in professional and management positions often experience loneliness and isolation and consequently resort to "coping strategies such as accessing family support, ignoring male prejudices, 'proving oneself' and utilising good time management" (Ojejide, 2003: 459). Also, Johnson-Turner (2014) in a study of the lived experiences of women higher education administrators in sub-Saharan Africa found that family and faith was crucial to the career success of female administrators in HE. Not only do women rely on the direct support of their family members, they also consider family values as critical success factors (see Chapter 6). Johnson-Turner (2014) suggests that the women in her study considered their deep religious faith a crucial support factor. Another strategy cited in the literature in the Global South is the use of domestic help (see Chapter 6). However, Okeke-Ihejirika (2003) found in a study of professional women in Nigeria that even when women employed domestic help, they still play a supervisory role to ensure that domestic chores and concerns are taken care of. The literature on the Global South suggests that women's academic career advancement is slow

compared to their male counterparts because women must work a double shift, while men focus intently on their academic careers. Balancing the demands of work and family life has been cited as critical for the career advancement of female academics, but research suggests that, for many academic women, this may mean foregoing promotional opportunities or opting out of activities necessary for building the capital necessary for promotion. Whitehead and Kotze (2003) contend that work-life balance is a life-process with a cyclical nature and a useful tool for achieving personal growth. They argue that it is not "one single ultimate experience" but a series of individual experiences unfolding over time (p.77).

There is ample evidence in the literature that universities operate in ways that reproduce gender inequality and injustice instead of challenging it, creating an environment that excludes women. Based on this understanding, this study draws on post-colonial feminist perspectives, as these not only recognise the gendering of structures and processes but also respect the diversity and plurality of women's experiences. In the section that follows, the dominant perspectives on gender relations and segregation in employment are examined. The problems associated with their applicability are highlighted and post-colonial feminism is offered as an alternative.

3.3 Dominant Perspectives

Each perspective has had a major influence on how gender inequality is explored, understood and explained. The core difference in each of these theories is the relative priority given to individual agency, the nature of structures and the relationship between agency and structure in shaping employment outcomes. It is clear that there are persistent disagreements about the reality of gender inequality, why it exists, how it is reproduced and if it matters. Below, I discuss these ideas to give some background to the perspective that informs this research.

My perspective is informed by insights from feminist perspectives, but I rely on postcolonial feminist thought and argue that, indeed, African women's experiences cannot be fully captured and explained through the lens of Western feminism as a result of colonial history. Postcolonial feminist theorists argue that women in previously colonised countries suffer from "double colonisation", simultaneously oppressed by both colonialism and patriarchy. Nnaemeka (2003) argues that theorising may be

'empty' if fails to connect with or refer to environmental or contextual realities. While Nnaemeka (2003) suggests that engagement with theory is important in scrutinising, deciphering and identifying everyday practices, she argues against its abuse, particularly the ways in which theory, as a site of political struggle, raises concerns about "invention", appropriateness and applicability. Because this study examines the experiences of women in higher education in Nigeria, drawing insights from theories built on the experiences of women in postcolonial societies is appropriate.

Approaches to understanding gender relations can be characterised as informed by three dominant and contradictory perspectives. The first is institutional theories that have had the greatest influence on the literature in this field in, formed broadly by Marxist economic theory and theories of patriarchy (Burton, 1985; Bagihole, 2002b; Bergmann, 2005; Eveline, 2005; Acker, 2006). At the other end of the spectrum are neoliberal perspectives that focus on individual agency and how inequality is reproduced by individual decision-making (Hakim 1996, 2000, 2004). The third approach is informed by postmodernism (Spivak, 1988; Harding, 1987; Butler, 1993, 1997; Millen, 1998). Inequality, from a postmodern perspective, is a focus on how gender identity is constructed and experienced across diverse contexts.

A dominant approach in the literature on gender equality in higher education largely hinges upon neoclassical economic theory that suggests that differences in human capital (levels of education, years of experience, skills) are good explanations for unequal gendered outcomes (Becker, 1985; Dobson, 1997; Ward 2001). Closely related to this idea of difference in human capital is the concept of choice or preference. Hakim (2000) claims that unequal gendered outcomes in employment are due to differences in men and women's choices that lead to differences in individual investment in education and training. The central argument is that women do not aspire to career advancement but prefer to combine household responsibilities and care with paid employment (Hakim, 2000) In this view, the only way to achieve gender equality is for women to change their 'choices' (Burton e*t al.,* 1997). This view is based on neo-classical economic theory, which argues that the economy is driven by a central actor, 'the Rational Economic Man', whose aim is to achieve greatest satisfaction by making self-invested decisions about what to buy and sell as well as its value (Folbre, 2004). Individual decisions are often based on a rational assessment of cost and benefits and the claim is that men are more likely to invest in the development

of human capital on the basis that such investment will yield greater financial returns. Women 'choose' to place greater value on roles outside the labour market for roles within communities, mostly as mothers and carers for families. An underlying idea is the fact that Hakim (2000) believes that women are now better positioned and liberated to make 'genuine' choices from three patterns (home-centred, work-centred and adaptive), but consistently 'choose' the adaptive pattern of combining care and household responsibilities with part-time work.

Despite strong criticism of this view, it has remained influential and strong due to its alignment with popular adoption by governments of free-market ideologies. VanStavern (2007) criticised the human capital theory, arguing that, while this view tells us that differences in human capital exist, it fails to explain why. There are other factors at play, such as indirect discrimination, which the human capital/choice theory fails to explain. Some of the assumptions central to the human capital approach to explaining gender inequality have been extensively criticised. Firstly, the unrestricted freedom of individuals to make decisions based on clearly formed preferences. In critiquing the human capital/choice perspectives, feminist theorists highlight the ways in which freedom is gendered (Folbre, 1994). Women's 'freedom' is constrained compared to men, particularly those women who carry much of the burden of domestic responsibility (Leahy & Doughney, 2006). Secondly, human capital theorists have been criticised for assuming that individuals make rational 'choices'. Folbre (1994) argues that 'rational' is also a gendered term, as rationality is associated with an objective, dispassionate masculine approach as opposed to a subjective and emotional feminine approach. The fact that women have a greater tendency to see their own self-interest as linked to the wellbeing of others, particularly in their role as mothers, means that the concept of 'rationality' in decision-making is flawed (Nussbaum, 2000). A third argument against the human capital theory relates to the assumption of clearly formed and preconfigured 'preferences' related to biological sex, which inform individual choices. Doughney (2007) argue that such an assumption disguises how far preferences are shaped by experience, habit, customs and circumstances, all of which are highly gendered and combine to shape aspirations, expectations and desires. In other words, individual preferences are an adaptation of what they perceive to be possible, what they understand and what they have experienced. Doughney (2007) applies Aesop's fable of sour grapes as an analogy,

describing how women's preferences are framed and shaped (when a fox cannot reach a bunch of mouth-watering grapes, it decides that the grapes must be sour in order to reconcile itself to the idea that it cannot have the grapes. In the same vein, women who 'choose' not to pursue leadership roles or aspire to advancement may later tell themselves that the experience would have been 'sour' (Noble and Mears, 2000). Whether or not this perception is realistic, based on hard assessment of the situation, or whether it is at fault, may be impossible to conclude. The argument here is that preferences and 'choices' are influenced by a range of conditions that shape whether or not something is perceived as desirable and/or attainable. Despite the influence and dominance of 'choice' theories, this approach is inadequate in the sense that it does not sufficiently explain the role of agency and also attempts to 'naturalise' gender inequality by rationalising gendered labour market differences as an outcome of choices that are decided freely based on individual preferences. Below, I discuss an alternative perspective: institutional theories (which, despite the popularity of the human capital theories, have remained important in much of the literature on women in higher education).

A dominant assumption within the literature on women in higher education is that unequal employment outcomes for women are a result of unequal treatment by systems and organisations (Mama, 2003; Probert, 2005). This idea is broadly informed by Marxist economic theories that argue capital accumulation relies on the exploitation of resources. The main focus of this perspective is how individual choices are constrained by structures that serve dominant interests. Women and ethnic minorities are particularly vulnerable to exploitation as they are positioned in the labour market as cheap and dispensable, to be exploited when demand for labour is high. This idea is closely related to 'reserve army' and 'dual labour market' theories (Cockburn, 1991: 84). In this model, labour market and institutions are segmented into groups, with differing access to opportunities and even with comparable attributes, groups are rewarded differently. (Kirton and Green, 2000). A central argument is that the survival of capitalism hinges upon a gendered, unequal division of labour (Acker, 2006).

Feminist theories of patriarchy are linked to labour market segmentation theories but grew largely from a critique of Marxism as failing to account for the gendered nature of the labour force (Kirton and Green, 2000). Bradley (1989) describes patriarchy as a "system of social structures and practices in which men

dominate, oppress and exploit women" (p.55). The idea of capital accumulation, which is central to capitalist mode of production, combines with patriarchy to reproduce gender inequality. As such, feminist scholars argue that patriarchy is an important factor in explaining unequal outcomes for women. Feminist theorists support this assertion with the fact that the segmentation in the labour market by gender and ethnicity has been resilient over time. Cross-cultural research suggests that female subordination is a common feature across cultures, with women ascribed different and subordinate economic roles within most communities (Fenton *et al.*, 1999).

Theories of patriarchy were central to the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and '70s. Through this lens, gender, class and ethnicity are situated within hierarchies of oppression. Organisations are understood as critical sites for reproduction of unequal gendered relations. The gendered division of labour is sustained by defining women as 'different' and their 'difference' does not align with masculine models of authority (Rindfleish, 2002). In this perspective, the solution to gender inequality lies in the elimination of oppression by challenging the structures that reproduce inequality. Also central to the feminist theories of patriarchy are the subtle ways in which women are oppressed and disadvantaged in a system that deploys social constructs in a gender-neutral way. Example, the concept of excellence or merit in the academia is a social construct defined by dominant interests. Although used in a gender-neutral way, concepts of merit or excellence continues to be based on masculine ideals, such as 'positivist research' in fields that are science-based and linked with industry needs (Morley, 2005a). Also, 'the ideal worker' is also modelled on masculine ideals as a detached individual with freedom to pursue an uninterrupted career path and commit to work, free from the need to assume primary care for others (Leahy, 2007). Notably, while feminist theorists do not all agree about the causes of and solutions to gender inequality (Letherby, 2003), there is consensus that women's unequal outcomes are a result of the dominant position of masculinity within societies and institutions. Second wave feminism has been criticised for over-dependence on the male and female categories in explaining gender relations, and for casting women as 'helpless victims' of capitalist economies, particularly as a result of the importance attached to the role of structure in driving individual agency.

Since the 1980s, feminist theorising progressed in line with broader social theory in the development of postmodern and post structural views associated with

Foucalt (1967, 1977, 1978). Feminist theorising developed from second wave feminism informed by theories of patriarchy to third wave feminism informed by postmodernism. Like Marxism, there are many forms of postmodernism, resulting in wide-ranging insights. Three major theoretical strands have emerged in third wave postmodernism-informed feminist theory: heories of intersectionality, post-colonial theory and theories generated by younger feminists (Mann and Huffman, 2005). Again, while there are clear differences between the arguments in each strand, a common idea within postmodern feminist theories is the call to abandon an essentialist and humanist assumption of 'reality' and universal claims on truth that assume the authority to speak on behalf of others (Yeatman, 1994).

Initially, criticisms of second wave feminism were from intersectional theories which argued that feminist insights and practices are based on a white, heterosexual, middle-class and able-bodied notion of womanhood as the norm, resulting in the marginalisation of the experiences of 'other' women (Carby, 1987; Jeffreys, 1987). Intersectional feminist theorists argue that patterns of domination and exploitation also exist between women and do not agree with the second wave feminist idea of oppression as shared by all women (Mirza, 1997). Postcolonial feminist theories, which largely inform this study, built on intersectionality in showing how women in the developing world are commonly portrayed as a homogenous group, disguising the complex power relations in which gender was only one dimension of oppression (Mohanty, *et al.,* 1991). The failure of feminist theory to acknowledge difference in women's oppression was made prominent by Mohanty (1988), who highlighted how some western feminist writing engaged in discursive colonialism by projecting 'Third World' women as monolithic subjects. Parashar (2016) argues that it has now become common knowledge that difference is not just between the West and non-West but also within these geographies and temporalities and any form of universalism is a form of discursive violence that writes out histories and mutes voices.

The goal of postcolonial theory is to give voice to the unacknowledged voices recovering from decades of colonial rule and oppression. This theory informs this study of female academics in the former British colony of Nigeria, as women's status and experiences in Nigeria are impacted by both colonialism and patriarchy. Born out of resistance to the exclusions and generalisations of second wave feminism, postcolonial feminism is a critical approach, theorising about gender inequality in

former colonial contexts by scrutinising colonial legacies and their persevering effects on women and gender relations (Zuckerwise, 2014). Despite the diversity of social and political convictions among postcolonial feminists, they all share a commitment to deal with the literal and symbolic forms of violence that emerge from universalist assumptions about women, including the idea that they are all united as a sisterhood. Narayan and Harding (2000) argue that postcolonial theory is shaped by its imperialist origins and challenged the notion of 'independence' in formerly colonised contexts by highlighting the enduring consequences of colonialism. By delving into the past, postcolonial theory attempts to identify and explain problems associated with colonialism and neo-colonialism. In examining the conditions of women in formerly colonised contexts, postcolonial feminism focus on issues relating to cultural identity, language, nationalism and the position of women as former colonies become independent (Rosser, 2007). The notion of 'double colonisation' is central to postcolonial feminist perspectives, based on the argument that African women were doubly colonised by imperial and patriarchal ideologies (Aschroft *et al.*, 1995). They must struggle to resist the control of colonial power as both women and colonised citizens (Peterson and Rutherfold):

> in this oppression, her colonised brother is no longer her accomplice, but her oppressor. In his struggle against the coloniser, he even exploits her by misrepresenting her in the nationalist discourses. Not only that, she suffers at the hand of Western feminists from the colonising countries who misrepresent their colonised counterparts by imposing silence on their racial, cultural and political specificities and in so doing, act as potential oppressors of their "sisters". (Tyagi, 2014: 45)

Postcolonial feminist theorist attempts to understand the "intersections of gender, nations, class, caste, races, culture and sexualities in different but historically specific context of women's lives by relying on rigorously historical and dialectical approach" (Kim, 2007: 112). To the postcolonial feminist, women's subordinate position in society continues to endure because patriarchy still dominates postcolonial relations. Feminist postcolonial work offers a gendered conceptualisation of colonialism and

postcolonialism (Kim, 2007). In formerly colonised contexts, decolonisation exacerbated the disparity in advancement between men and women (Rosser, 2007; McClintock, 1994). Rosser (2007) reveals that “as new nation states are constructed, women in formerly colonised nations experience discriminations along race, class and gender due to the entanglement of patriarchy with colonialism” (p.244). This backs up McClintock’s assertion that “in a world where women do two-thirds of the world’s work, earn 10% of the world’s income and own less than 1% of the world’s property, the promise of ‘post-colonialism’ has been a history of hopes postponed” (p.298). According to Pala (1977: 13),

> African scholars and especially women, must bring their knowledge to bear on presenting an African perspective on prospects and problems for women in local societies. Scholars and persons engaged in development research planning and implementation should pay attention to development priorities as local communities see them.

My research aims to give silenced others a voice. By interviewing women in academic employment in Nigeria, I sought to highlight the importance of women’s voices on the issues that affect them. Oyewumi (2005) argues that the African women’s movement and self-assertion are not adequately captured and represented in feminist discourse and this can be traced partly to colonial forces and practices. African women have been perceived as voiceless victims and Kolawole (1997) opposes such a distorted perception of African women, arguing that African women are not only speaking out but are also actively engaged in deconstructing misrepresentative, distorted images of African women. This is reflected in findings by Rosser (2007) that some African women have extended definitions of motherhood beyond the biological to the communal, providing “new models of femininity independent of patriarchal and western definitions, make these women exemplify the survival and integrity of their culture and people” (p.244). In giving ‘silenced others’ a voice, postcolonial feminism is wary of condemning traditions and cultures (Spivak, 2001).

Despite its usefulness in understanding women’s issues in former colonised contexts, postcolonial feminism has been criticised as an intellectual project advanced

by scholars from the Global South based in the Global North. Appiah (1992) argues that “postcolonialism is the condition that we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: of a small, Western-style, Western trained group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of the world capitalist at the periphery” (p.432). Spivak (2001), however, views postcolonial studies as a fresh opportunity to liberate and enable the ‘other’ to experience and articulate specificities of itself that fall outside dominant discourses. Postcolonial feminism provides a practical lens with which to understand the experiences of women in Nigerian higher education. From fieldwork to analysis, I was guided by feminist and postcolonial feminist ideas. In fieldwork, I paid particular attention to issues of voice and how the women in this study told their stories. Through the process of member-checking, I worked with the women in my study to ensure that the sense made of their stories and experiences was in line with the messages they intended to send.

While women’s educational attainment and participation in paid work has increased (and in some cases, exceeded rates among men), in many countries women continue to experience labour market disadvantages, shown by occupational gender segregation (Patton, 2015). Gender segregation is the tendency for women and men to work in different occupations, resulting in different experiences and labour market outcomes (Kulis, 1997; Blackburn, 2005; Rubery, 1999; Anker, 1998). Occupational gender segregation is vertical and horizontal and an understanding of these different forms is vital in explaining their causes. Horizontal gender segregation refers to women/men being under- or over-represented in certain occupations or sectors (Blackburn 2005), resulting in certain jobs being labelled ‘men’s’ or ‘women’s work’; for example, the concentration of women in customer service occupations in the UK (Durbin 2007). Vertical or hierarchical gender segregation refers to the under- or over-representation of women/men in occupations or sectors at the top of a hierarchy based on certain desirable attributes (Blackburn *et al.,* 2002).

In most labour market contexts, men tend to dominate in high-paid jobs that offer higher security with more favourable employment conditions, and women dominate in low-paid jobs (Crompton, 1997). Rubery (1999) argues that horizontal occupational segregation contributes to the gender pay gap because of the low value attached to the work of certain occupations. A variety of theoretical perspectives explain occupational gender segregation and specifically, women’s situation in the

labour market. These include human capital and rational choice theory (Becker, 1985 and Hakim, 1991) with roots in neo-classical economics, and feminist perspectives (Kanter, 1997; Hartmann, 1981) including dual systems theory (Walby, 1990) and intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1989).

Human capital theory proposes that women invest less in their education and training because they tend to specialise in domestic work (Becker, 1975, 1985), drawing heavily on individual variables and suggesting that the individual is primarily responsible for developing his/her human capital by investing time and resources into gaining education, training and experience that they expect will yield returns by improving their performance and labour market prospects (Becker, 1985; Collin & Young, 2000). Human capital theory asserts that occupational segregation exists because women invest less in training and skill acquisition because they anticipate lesser returns than their male counterparts due to career breaks in order to have children (Mincer and Polacheck, 1974). Businesses are also less likely to hire women as they anticipate a lower return on investing in them, although that calculation may be the basis for recruiting women as a 'numerically flexible' component of the workforce (Atkinson, 1984).

Furthermore, low investment in human capital prevents women from accessing careers at the top of the occupational hierarchy and women are also more likely to be interested in occupations compatible with their family life. Men, however, invest more developing their human capital and they tend to be oriented towards occupations with high responsibilities and productivity, yielding greater organisational rewards such as promotion and opportunities for leadership. The consequences of these choices are that women will tend to be heavily concentrated in occupations that require less human capital investment, less productivity and where the penalty for career breaks is minor (Wharton 2005). Human capital theory provides a narrow explanation, especially because, despite increasing educational attainment among women in most parts of the world and almost surpassing that of men (Forster 2001), occupational segregation is still pronounced. Scholars such as England (2005), Rosenfield and Spenner (1992) have criticized human capital for emphasising individual or personal factors, ignoring power relationships and other structural factors. Moreover, the theory tends to consider women a homogeneous group, ignoring the heterogeneity of women and their choices.

Feminist perspectives offer alternative explanations. Feminists such as Hartmann (1981) and Walby (1986, 1990) argue that women had been systematically excluded from better jobs by, and for the benefit of, men. They argue that patriarchal structures and exclusionary practices contribute to women's minority status in employment. These patriarchal structures also led to the rise of the 'male breadwinner belief', assigning men roles outside the home (Crompton, 1997). Feminists argue that gender is socially constructed in a way that privileges men and marginalises women, resulting in unequal labour market outcomes. With deeper questioning of the pervasiveness of gender inequality, feminists have developed complex insights on gendered work, paid and unpaid, resulting in different strands of the feminist perspective such as liberal, radical, social and postmodernist perspectives and intersectionality. While these differ in explanations for gender segregation/inequality they all imply in some way that the material conditions of women's lives are disadvantaged compared to men's (Letherby, 2003). Feminist theories argue that gender and gender roles are socially constructed, and that gender segregation exists because greater value, privilege and power is attached to men's roles and less to women's roles (Oakley, 1990). Intersectionality accounts for the complexities associated with gender inequality by attending to the multiple disadvantages faced by women based on their race, ethnicity, and class (Maynard, 1994). Feminist perspectives challenge the conventions that label work outside the home as masculine, assigning women roles within the home: mother, wife, housekeeper (Oakley, 1990). This study therefore draws on feminist theories to explore how gender permeates the career experiences of men and women in Nigerian universities.

3.4 Conclusion

Over the past few decades, women's experiences in academia have received much research attention, both locally and internationally (Acker and Feurverger, 1996; Prah, 2004; Ojejide, 2003). This has translated into a large body of international, interdisciplinary literature on academic women, overlapping with research on women in leadership, women in education and women in management (Morley, 2006). Much of this large body of literature is based on the experiences of female academics in the Global North, generated by intensive research efforts aimed at exposing the unequal and often hostile experiences of women in higher education. In the Global South,

although attention is now being paid to the unequal gendered outcomes and experiences of women as students and as academics, there is still a dearth of literature on women's experiences in HEIs (Ojejide, 2004; Ojejide *et al.*, 2006). Much of the research in the Global South has focused on access and statistical representation, with little examination of the complex factors that impact the daily lived experiences of women in academia (Morley, 2005). Literature concerning the nature of women's participation and experiences in the Global North and South revealed a range of overlapping issues. A common theme running through the literature is the impact of domestic responsibilities, and a common barrier to the career advancement of women academics in both the Global North and South is their dual roles of production and reproduction (Ojejide *et al.*, 2006; Prober, 2005).

CHAPTER FOUR. DOING FEMINIST RESEARCH IN A MALE-DOMINATED WORLD

4.0 Introduction

The aim of this study is to examine the experiences of academic women in Nigerian universities and how they make sense of their experiences in a male-dominated university and society. The fourth objective of this research is to reflexively reveal the important positionality issues associated with conducting research that seeks to privilege academic women's voices and experiences in a male-dominated society. In accordance with the feminist theories I drew on to explore women's academic careers, I have adopted a feminist methodological framework in selecting, describing, and analysing my approach to data collection for this study. In this chapter, I adopt the feminist principle of reflexivity in presenting the methodological choices and the realities of conducting research aimed at privileging women's experiences in a male-dominated profession. Reflexivity sits at the heart of feminist research, encouraging self-analysis and openness about the researcher's position in relation to the research design and process. In much of my initial reading and thinking about my research design, I noticed a huge difference in the writing up of research projects. On one side are conventional researchers and writers reluctant to write about the personal in books and journal publications, intending to present knowledge as objective, value free and 'clean'. On the other side are feminist researchers and authors like Perriton (1999), Bradley (2013), Letherby (2003), and Lather and Smithies (1997), who challenge traditional ways of writing in the interests of opening other ways of representing the accounts of women by sharing unabashedly personal experiences. I agree that it is important to fully embrace the subjectivities of the researcher. Not only does this enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative data, it also ensures that important details about the research design are not lost in the interpretation, write up and presentation of the accounts of research participants (Geertz, 1993).

Feminist contributions to qualitative research methods have inspired increasing awareness and consciousness of the power relations in fieldwork and data collection and encourage researchers to be conscious of the gender dynamics in the interaction between researcher and the researched. In her initial writings on the feminist approach to research, Oakley (1981) criticises the traditional approach to interviews, arguing

that guidance on how to conduct these was not only based on patriarchal values but also works to reproduce unequal gender relations.

I now proceed with revealing the practicalities of conducting research on the lived experiences of the Nigerian academic women in this study. I begin by explaining my preference for a feminist critical perspective and why I chose semi-structured interviewing as the data collection technique for this study. I then give an account of how my own life history, family and educational experiences inspired and influenced my choice of research subjects and approach in methodology. I then discuss introspectively and retrospectively the details and complexities of negotiating research access, the dynamic nature of power-relationships in the research process, giving voice in quoting and interpreting the accounts of the women in the study, as well as the ethical dimensions of conducting feminist qualitative research.

4.1. Qualitative Feminist Methodology

In my attempt to explain why women are underrepresented in academic employment by exploring the lived experiences of academic women, it seemed appropriate to adopt a feminist methodological framework, collecting and analysing data in line with feminist research principles. Much of the research methods training I had taken as part of my undergraduate and master's programme was careful not to over-complicate issues by revealing 'ways of knowing' and methodological choices beyond those associated with positivist and interpretivist worldviews. Although I was clear about the general purpose of my research, I experienced some confusion in choosing a methodological approach.

I gathered from the feminist research texts I read in the early stages that there is no single feminist methodology: feminist research approaches are diverse in emphasis and methods (Letherby, 2003). I concur with Mies and Shiva (2014) that if women's studies is to be an instrument of women's liberation, we cannot uncritically use positivist, quantitative research methodology. Although I was convinced that the feminist critical theory framework resonated with the general purpose of my research, I experienced a great deal of anxiety due to the use of theoretical jargon in research method books, articles and the classroom. I sometimes felt excluded from classroom conversations when graduate research methods tutors used terms and phrases that I did not understand. The fact that everyone else seemed to understand made it difficult to ask for clarification. However, a feminist theory reading group organised by my

supervisor Harriet Bradley and two PhD colleagues gave me a safe space to ask questions about feminist critical theory, and my knowledge continued to grow.

My alignment with feminist critical theory as a theoretical lens was fraught with some challenges. During the early stages of my PhD, most of my PhD colleagues from Nigeria, who were mostly males, had negative attitudes towards feminism. Their idea of feminism was reduced to the most objectionable elements, such as 'anti-men', anti-marriage' and 'anti-women raising children'. This made me embarrassed and I often shied away from using the term feminism, and instead preferred to use the term 'critical theory' when asked about my research. The attitudes of my male PhD colleagues reflects the negative view of feminism that persists in many societies and Nigeria in particular. I could not agree more with the feminist critical perspectives on how traditional malestream approaches to knowledge production reinforce women's oppression by undermining the socio-economic, psychological, and political oppression of women (Tyson, 1999). Not only did I observe first-hand the impact of culture and socialisation on the anti-feminist bias, I became more conscious of how this negative and unconscious bias works to blind us to the seriousness of the issues central to feminism. There were many points throughout this research process that affirmed the importance of this study on the lived experiences of Nigerian women academics and the need to produce knowledge about women from the perspectives of women. Being confronted with negative bias and attitudes towards my feminist choices was one such moment.

Peile and McCouat (1997) note that, although we are not always conscious of our beliefs about the workings of the world, human behaviour or how we gain knowledge and our values, these beliefs impact on the kind of theory we adopt and our approach to theory development. The choices we make in relation to our paradigmatic beliefs are constrained by our context and the dominant paradigms operating in this context. Thus, paradigmatic choices and knowledge development are not only socially structured, but also politically driven; we favour some views and suppress others (Karger, 1983). The fact that feminist researchers accept that all research is political and feminist research specifically begins with the political commitment of knowledge production aimed at improving the lives of women (Letherby, 2003) and means that we need not mask the political nature of research. It was refreshing that these important elements of research were addressed in the books

and articles I read and in the face of criticisms and microaggressions regarding the nature of my research, this strengthened my resolve to approach this study from a feminist epistemological and methodological stance for several reasons.

First, feminists are highly critical of the ideals of “pure objectivity” and “value neutrality” associated with positivism, which has been the dominant paradigm for research, and of the view that there is one objective truth waiting to be discovered and therefore one best method for a detached researcher/observer to use in order to discover this truth (Crotty, 1998). This philosophy is inconsistent with my view that, when it comes to knowledge about the experiences of women in academic employment, their struggles and coping strategies, there is no one best truth. Rather, knowledge about such an issue is relative but also unequal (Skeggs, 1994), and situated in the subjective meanings that women have about their situation within academic employment and their private lives. Therefore, since there are multiple perceptions of what is true, knowledge about women’s experiences can be best understood in multiple ways. Feminist theorists have developed a range of methodological approaches spanning disciplines and the fact that there is no single feminist method has been repeatedly echoed by feminist scholars.

In exploring the lived experiences of women in academic employment in Nigeria, semi-structured qualitative interviews seemed the most appropriate method to collect empirical data. Although qualitative in-depth interviewing is commonly associated with the feminist stance, to the extent that scholars like Kelly *et al.* (1996) have implied that it is *the* feminist method, I selected a semi-structured interview strategy because, despite its shortcomings of poor representation and over-generalisation, it is most suitable for obtaining subjective accounts of academic employment experiences. As Letherby (2003) noted, the key difference with feminist research is not the methods used, but how methods are used, the questions that are asked, the location of the researcher within the research process and within theorising. All feminist activity is a form of activism, with the goal of changing the world by promoting women’s equality, so generalisation is not a core concern here. The aim is not to obtain a representative sample from which to make generalisation but rather to gain insights about what the women feel and think about their personal and professional experiences.

Secondly, borrowing the words of Tyson (1993), I consider myself a recovering patriarchal woman, a woman recovering from patriarchal programming. Throughout my upbringing I have internalised the norms and values of a system or culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles. Although at many points in my early life I questioned the traditional gender roles, I still held many unconscious biases about women and men that were confronted as I encountered feminist critical theory on a deeper level in the initial stages of my PhD. For example, I had been completely unconscious about the inclusive pronoun 'he' used in academic texts for both male and female authors and how it impacted on the fact that I subconsciously thought all academic authors were male throughout my first degree. This reflects a deeply entrenched cultural attitude of seeing male as universal that ignores women's experiences and blinds us to women's worldview. Knowledge production attempts aimed at universalising experiences threaten the goal of feminism, which is to change the world by promoting women's equality (Harding, 1987).

Thirdly, theoretically, feminists reject the notion of "value-free research", which is a core positivist research principle. They argue that all research is value-laden and call for consciousness of the impact of gender on every aspect of human production and experience, including the production and experience of knowledge. Methodologically, feminism calls for the application of feminist principles to overcome the limitations and biases of traditional positivist research. One principle of feminist research, reflexivity, which is based on the view that knowledge cannot be separated from the way in which the knowledge is produced (Olsen, 1980), calls for openness about and acknowledgement of the relationship between our ways of knowing (methodology) and the knowledge produced. One form of feminist research reflexivity is auto/biographical writing. Feminist research reflexivity refers to the practice of critically reflecting on one's own positionality, biases, and experiences within the research process (Brennan and Letherby, 2017). It involves acknowledging and examining how the researcher's social location, including their gender, class, race, and other intersecting identities, influences their understanding of the research topic and the ways in which they collect, interpret and present data (Parsons and Chappell, 2020). Auto/biographical writing, which involves using one's own life experiences as a basis for research and analysis, can be a powerful tool for feminist researchers to engage in reflexivity. By examining and documenting their own experiences,

researchers can explore how their gendered identities can shape their understanding of feminist issues and influence their research process (Sampson, *et al.,* 2008). Autobiographical writing allows researchers to critically reflect on the ways in which their personal experiences intersect with larger social structures and power dynamics.

Finally, in presenting this chapter, I have deviated from the constraining university requirements that a methodology chapter be written in strict separate sections of research philosophy, methodology, methods, data, and so on. Throughout this chapter, I not only embed reflexivity in making known the personal, I also take a first-person voice as an active participant in this research. I have attempted as much as possible to write in a way that the women I interviewed (and others who engage with my research) can understand and learn from: not just the findings, but also my experience of doing feminist research in a male-dominated culture. I embed reflexivity throughout this chapter in presenting the methodology and methods applied in this research, carefully reflecting on who I am as a woman and as a researcher, why and how I did this research, the effect this had on me, and how my history may have influenced my interpretation of the account of the women I interviewed. In doing so I draw on the power of feminist autobiographical writing. In their autobiographical works, Brennan and Letherby (2017) counter criticisms of auto/biography as self-indulgent, academically, and intellectually weak. In Brennan and Letherby's words, "auto/biography enables us to read the contextual into the personal and it is an epistemological approach that acknowledges the significance of the personhood of all involved" (2017: 156). In other words, a self-conscious auto/biographical approach is academically rigorous as it highlights my social location as a researcher and makes clear my role in the process of constructing rather discovering the stories and experiences of the women in this study. In the section that follows, I begin by making known important aspects of my life which not only inspired this study but also influenced my experiences of doing this research as well as the sense I made and the connections I drew from the stories of the academic women who participated.

4.1.1 The Self and Feminist Research: Introducing Myself

Because knowledge is both an individual and social product, I begin this chapter by introducing myself and making overt where I sit within this research. This is important because the knowledge I was able to gain about female Nigerian academics was not only influenced by the method and techniques used but also enabled and limited by my history, personal and social influences, as well as my academic interests. These are important elements in knowledge production that are often left to appendices, prefaces or completely left out of academic books and journal articles (Hesse-Biber, 2007). To situate myself, I am a Nigerian woman in my early thirties, born, raised, and educated to first degree level in Nigeria. Both my parents were educated to first degree level. I grew up among brothers and my father, who was a well-travelled engineer, constantly reiterated the importance of education, particularly for a girl child, if she was to achieve her full potential. I was brought up in an upper middle-class family and was fortunate to have private education throughout my early years. After completing my secondary school education at a single-sex boarding school and attaining good grades, my father thought that, at the age of 14, I was too young to be sent off to university. He employed me as an administrative assistant at his engineering firm while I took computer programming lessons. When I reached 16, an age when my father felt I was sufficiently mature and sensible to go to university, he sadly passed. I remember vividly that one of my greatest fears at the time was whether I would be able to further my education. As far as I could remember, my father was the only person in my family who consistently promoted the importance of education to me.

The family problems and cultural complexities associated with the demise of a male breadwinner delayed my plans to enter university. Fortunately, my mother, who separated from my father long before his death, stepped in and at 17 years old I gained admission to study Sociology. At that time, Sociology was not my first choice of discipline. The subjects I wanted to study were Law or Economics. I was very excited to start my degree programme, but I remember feeling a bit ashamed to tell my friends and family that I had gained admission to study Sociology. While I had little idea of what Sociology entailed, the then President of Nigeria had made negative remarks about the subject. He proposed that those who studied social science courses such as Sociology were uneducated people with no real skills to offer and needed to return to university to be re-educated. With such a statement from the country's Premier, I

was determined to change to Economics and Statistics after my first year. Little did I know that my relationship with Sociology was to last much longer than I expected. To say that I fell in love with Sociology would be an understatement. With every lecture, I felt I was gaining some explanations for (if not answers to) the myriad of questions I had about my life as a girl growing up in a stigmatised 'broken home', my parent's failed marriage and the incessant issues in my country. At many points I felt disgusted that the President would utter such ignorant remarks about a course and a group of people (sociologists) who had the potential to transform my country. I no longer felt ashamed of studying Sociology and being called a sociologist: instead, I felt angry that Sociology and sociologists were undervalued.

During my undergraduate studies I was drawn to women and gender studies. My experience of growing up in a home where my mother was a victim of male superiority further heightened my interest in women and gender studies. Although my mother was one of the fortunate women at the time to enrol at the university right after marriage, by the time she had graduated, the marital crisis had deepened and eventually ended in a separation, leaving all five children behind. She was overpowered by a culture that gives men total power and privilege in all aspects I found Sociology stimulating and challenging and some of the ideas and issues I was exposed to became important to me and inspired my doctoral research. As a young girl, I never really understood why my mother left her marriage and children. I was highly judgemental. But I slowly began to understand from studying Sociology that there are forces, strong enduring forces, that sometimes render women powerless and that limit the choices and decisions they are able to make. As my knowledge of sociological theories and gender studies grew, I began to ask questions: I was slowly becoming gender conscious. I began to take note of women's absence in certain domains as well as their over-representation in traditionally feminine domains. I went on to complete my undergraduate dissertation on girls' education in Nigeria. Although I gained some insights on issues and challenges of female education in Nigeria, however, I did not feel that my research was sufficiently deep or critical.

Upon graduation, I had very little clarity about what I wanted to do. I was unsure whether there was a place for a sociologist in my society. I went on to work in a bank for my compulsory national youth service, after which I felt it would do me a lot of good to leave my comfort zone and I left Nigeria for the UK to study for a master's degree

in International Human Resource Management. This was the first time I had gone far away from home on my own. While I have always had unanswered questions about women's experiences, especially about their visibility in professions considered elite and leadership positions, during my postgraduate studies in England, this internal questioning continued, exacerbated by the observable differences in women's visibility, status and position in the UK and Nigeria. Although in hindsight I am aware that, beneath the surface, British women contend with a range of issues and challenges, at the time that compared to the status and position of women in Nigerian society, British women could be considered relatively privileged. Again, as my knowledge on gender issues continue to grow, I have realised that it is problematic to describe any group of women as privileged. This is because, even though women might share some similarities, there are differences between and among women that make some more privileged than others in some respect. In reflecting on this experience, it becomes even clearer how recognising these personal contexts in auto/biographical writing within academic research can bring to light more perspectives on feminist issues (Brennan and Letherby, 2017)

My interest in researching women's careers and lives grew partly from the insights gained from my Sociology degree, that explanations for women's issues and status in Nigeria were more sociological than biological. By the time I embarked on my PhD, I was mainly motivated by the fact that there was certainly something problematic about the choices women were making regarding marriage and children at the expense of their independence and careers. This was before going on to investigate, in a detached manner, the ways in which women had made wrong choices. As my PhD progressed and I embarked on research and methodology training, I gradually developed a consciousness about my role in knowledge production. I began to align with the critical theory research paradigm and the more I read about feminism and feminist research in practice, the more I was drawn to its ideas and principles. It was refreshing and empowering to know that I no longer had to deny that my research interest was inspired by many factors, such as my gender, family background and experiences.

Also, it was liberating to learn that acknowledging the values inherent in my research, as well as the impact of gender on produced knowledge, was critical if I was to research my topic from a feminist epistemological standpoint (Oakley, 1998). The

entire research process from design, fieldwork and writing up has been a messy process of to-ing and fro-ing, of learning, unlearning, relearning and redesigning and in tandem with feminist research principles, I continue to share unabashedly, the messy and private details that impacted my attempt to produce knowledge about academic women who took part in my research as well as how this research has impacted on me personally and professionally. By the time I approached the field in search of participants and data, some of the initial challenges I experienced in the early stages of my PhD, such as understanding and clarifying my research focus, finding relevant, literature and grasping methodological issues, began to pale in comparison to the issues I experienced in negotiating access, recruiting participants and interviewing. I describe these experiences and issues below.

4.2 Research Design

4.2.1 Negotiating Access: Gatekeeping Prospects and Challenges

At the time I decided to conduct this research, I was what I would describe as a novice and naïve researcher. Although I didn't expect the research process to be seamless and straightforward, I was not experienced enough to handle many of the challenges with which I was confronted in my attempt to gain access and select my study sample. I knew that conducting research for women in Nigeria would be met with some reservations, but I was unprepared for the defensive and aggressive response I received when I mentioned my research aim, particularly to male academics or gatekeepers. Nkealah (2006) argues that the fact that in Africa feminism is often interpreted as being anti-male, anti-culture and anti-religion presents a problem for female African writers and researchers. Many female African researchers tend to disassociate themselves from the feminist movement even when their research promotes a feminist agenda. This was somewhat the case for me: I was not very confident using the term 'feminism' or 'feminist' as I was afraid of the negative response and backlash. Below, I discuss some of the challenges of recruiting participants for this study, challenges which I believe not only affected the direction and outcome of this research but also impacted me personally as a researcher.

I had lived all my life in Nigeria for 24 years before embarking on my postgraduate studies in the UK where this research was supervised and, in some sense, I was an insider in the culture I was researching. While it is true that an insider

status offers opportunities for the researcher, in my case, my position as an outsider, a foreign student, made it challenging to access participants through gatekeepers. For example, Cooper and Rogers (2014) contend that the 'insider' role is a powerful reflexive position used to gain deeper engagement. But although this was true during the interviews with many of the women in this study, this was not the case when negotiating access. On many occasions I felt powerless and worried after discussing my research with gatekeepers. Even though I completely avoided mentioning 'feminism', as soon as I mentioned women, the response and defensive attitude I received made me feel that I was seen as a traitor, brainwashed by foreign influences and attempting to disrupt the balance and status quo. I was confronted with comments such as "women have no problem", "are they complaining?" and "you women are never satisfied; you complain about staying at home and now you complain about working". These responses threw me off balance. I was not sure how to handle these issues at the time, although in hindsight I wish I had been more confident and maybe I could have done more to build trust with gatekeepers.

4.2.2 Experience with Gatekeepers

As pointed out by Lincoln and Guba (1985), building, and maintaining trust is a vital aspect of qualitive research, without which it may be very difficult to collect rich data. This is particularly true with respect to gatekeepers because they allow or restrict access to research participants. The influence and power of gatekeepers has been well researched, and the challenges researchers face in accessing research participants through gatekeepers are well documented (Clark, 2011; McAreavey & Das, 2013). These challenges are further exacerbated in the process of building trust and rapport with gatekeepers for research on gender power relations, especially where gatekeepers hold onto patriarchal ideologies. The complexities and dynamics involved in the gatekeeping process certainly impacted the pace, direction, and strategy of my research, to the extent that I had to change research strategy. Several scholars emphasise that, despite the challenges of negotiating with gatekeepers, they play a vital role in accessing a study population that may be difficult to reach (Andoh-Arthur, *et al.,* 2017). I was forced to abandon my original plan to recruit participants through gatekeepers due to time and financial constraints and because I felt it would deter interested participants from getting involved.

My experience was not new; many feminist researchers write about the fact that negotiating access through gatekeepers, particularly male gatekeepers, can be problematic and complex. Letherby (2003) contends that recruiting through male gatekeepers may discourage participants from taking part in research. When participants feel that gatekeepers may have access to the information they share in interviews, not only could this deter them from participating, but it could also lead to a significant level of bias even if they decide to take part (Cotterill, 1992). This is especially true with research on the personal experiences of individuals in the public sphere (employment, education, etc.). Also, Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000) explore the intersection of gender, danger and data in qualitative inquiry. They critically examine the challenges and ethical considerations that researchers face when studying sensitive topics related to gender. They reveal the unique vulnerabilities and risks associated with qualitative research on gender-related issues.

Initial efforts to seek access began in the early stages of formulating and clarifying my research topic. I kept in touch via email with two of my contacts, who were senior lecturers at one of the public universities that became one of the case studies in my initial research design. At the time, the aim was to recruit participants from two private and two public universities. During our conversations, it was clear that, to use the universities as case studies, permission and access would need to be formally requested. From my contacts, I garnered that request for access was to be sought from the registry office, which is the central administrative unit of the university. All attempts to secure an appointment via email and telephone at the registry office proved unsuccessful, which meant I had to wait until my planned initial fieldwork trip.

By December 2015, about 18 months after I began my PhD, I travelled back to Nigeria to formally seek access to the case study universities. In hindsight this was a process that I should have begun in the very early stages of my PhD. My first visit to the registry office was not successful; I met an administrative assistant and explained briefly the purpose of my visit. I ensured that I followed the ethical guidelines set out by UWE and went prepared with signed introductory letters, information sheets and consent forms. After my initial discussion with my first point of contact, I realised that my expectations about gaining formal access were unrealistic. I was not successful in meeting the registrar. After discussing my experience with my contact at the university, they promised to put in a word for me to at least secure an appointment. During my

third visit to the registrar's office with the help of my contact, I was able to secure an informal appointment with the registrar. Although I was asked to come at a certain time, the administrative personnel warned that the visit was unofficial and should be as short as possible. I arrived at the registrar's office promptly and waited longer than I expected before being told the registrar was not in office that day. The deputy was in and I could meet with him. This encounter with the deputy registrar was tricky; at first, he was very welcoming, and we exchanged pleasantries. I made every attempt to be as polite and professional as possible, while still maintaining some sort of informality. Based on the knowledge that, as negotiation in Nigerian culture is strengthened through informal relationship-building, I made efforts to use interpersonal and communication skill in building rapport with gate keepers. I mentioned that I was an alumna of the university and he asked questions about my time at the university and life after. I happily answered and shared information, and he also revealed that he too was an alumnus of the university who had risen through the ranks by sheer hard work. He seemed interested when I first mentioned that my research was about the career experiences of academics in Nigerian universities and asked to see the information sheet. He read out the title and after reading further on about the aim and focus of my research, our conversation took a different turn. He was not impressed by the fact that it was mainly about women's experiences. He went on to ask whether I was told by the women that they had problems at the university. He began to speak of how hard he had worked to get to his current position and reiterated that the university is for everyone, male or female, but that the challenges in the university require hard work. He spoke about the fact that the university does not condone discrimination and does not discriminate against women, before leaving the info sheet on the table. At this point, I was perplexed and anxious, and recall nodding as he spoke.

Retrospectively, I lacked the experience to navigate the hostility with which I was confronted. Not only did this force me to change my approach to selecting participants for this research, but I had to abandon the case study strategy completely and recruit participants through my contacts at the university in which I had studied for my first degree. In hindsight, I could have considered the nuances of my culture and adjusted my research objectives and questions to cover the experiences of academics, male and female, and then go on to recruit far more women than men after gaining official access. My initial plan was to recruit and incorporate participants from

diverse ethnic, religious and disciplinary backgrounds, which would have been feasible via formal official access. I understood that I would need to allow more time and money to cover travel costs. I had to come to terms with the fact that my initial research plans and expectations of gaining access and recruiting participants were entirely different from the reality. After my experience with the deputy registrar, I was highly conscious of the cons of recruiting through official means. Like many feminist researchers, I found that recruiting through organisational gatekeepers especially could discourage potential participants, especially women, for reasons such as lack of trust in authority and the thought that research outputs might be subject to vetting by gatekeepers. (McAreavey, and Das, 2013), My plans were revised, and I had to consider recruiting participants via snowballing, relying on participants' word-of-mouth and referrals.

4.2.3 Snowballing and Participant Selection

Although my experience of recruiting participants through contacts was more straightforward than my experience with gatekeepers, there were many challenges with which I still had to contend. I planned to interview both men and women and it was refreshing and encouraging when many of the women I had approached through my contacts showed interest in my research. I cannot deny that my insider status was particularly useful in cultivating a relationship with the women I approached: throughout my fieldwork experience, I dressed in traditional attire and I believe this made the women feel as though I was one of them. Not only were they willing to participate, they were eager to introduce me to their colleagues. Most of the time, when I spoke about the objectives of my study to potential participants, there was a huge gender difference in the responses I received. I won't say every single woman I approached was excited, but there was something encouraging about the way women responded to my research. They were willing to be interviewed and many were kind enough to invite me to their homes for the interview. I recall how excited one of the women in my study was upon hearing from her colleague (one of my contacts) that I was researching academic women's experiences. She mentioned that it was good for a change to be on the other side of the research, as she was used to being the researcher.

Eventually, through contact snowballing, I managed to get the consent of 24 female academics who were willing to participate in my research. While most of my

participants were recruited face-to-face through word-of-mouth, I also managed to gain the mobile numbers and email addresses of other potential participants. I went prepared with consent forms and information sheets, but adopted a flexible approach in how I handled the consent forms. I was fully aware of the nuances in my culture, so I knew that although I had to get my participants to sign the consent forms, being overly strict and programmatic may be interpreted as lack of trust. However, it was also helpful that all my participants were academics and understood the importance of research ethics and gaining informed consent, so it was never a struggle to get them to sign the consent forms.

As a result of my insider status and age, many of the women, especially the older women academics, sometimes referred to me as their daughter, which is quite common and culturally acceptable. While this was an advantage in terms of building trust, for me it came with some disadvantages. Within feminist research, it is often argued that the researcher occupies a more powerful position than the researched, making it imperative for feminist researchers to strive to remove the power imbalance (Hesse-Biber, 2012). However, the very fact that respect for seniority is valued highly in my high-power distance culture (Hofstede, 1991), compounded by the fact that many of the women called me their daughter meant that I always felt much less powerful than my participants. Regardless of this, the support I received from the women gave me courage and confidence, even though my level of confidence was fluid throughout the fieldwork, dropping and increasing at different levels and with different experiences. I found that my confidence waned significantly during my encounter with male participants.

Unfortunately, my experience of approaching and interviewing men was far from positive. I managed to recruit ten men and interviewed seven of them, but only one of the interviews with a man lasted an hour: they were simply not interested. Although to some extent, their attitude towards my research objective was not surprising because of my experience with gate keepers, it negatively impacted the courage and confidence I managed to build. Some openly joked about how it was a waste of time to spend long years doing a PhD on such a trivial topic. In their work on gender and danger in qualitative inquiry, Treweeek and Linkogle (2000) highlight the potential harm that participants may experience due to their involvement in the research, such as emotional distress and exposure to personal information that could

be used against them. My experience of interviewing men provided valuable insights into the embodied and emotional experience of the research for all involved. First, interviewing men revealed how gender norms and societal expectations influenced their attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions of my research. Secondly, it revealed the real danger that both participants and researchers may be exposed to during the research process. I had great insider knowledge on the prevalence of sexual harassment in universities, so I decided to take extra care when meeting with potential male participants, especially with my dress. Although I made sure I wore professional outfits, I tried to dress in the most unflattering outfits, without makeup or jewellery in a bid to deter sexual predators. Prior to this, I was keen on interviewing men, to explore the comparisons between their experiences and those of women.

Within research ethics literature, there is a much bigger focus on respondent safety vis-à-vis researcher safety. Letherby (2003) discussed four types of danger that researchers may be exposed to: physical, emotional, ethical, and professional. Some of the dangers may be heightened due to the gender and perceived physical vulnerability of the researcher, female and novice researchers are typically at greater risk than male researchers (Peterson, 2002). I decided not to stop interviews with male participants, even after I was sexually harassed by one of the men I interviewed. After making sexual advances, he insisted he wanted to be interviewed at his private residence. I knew exactly what that meant, and I had to stop. Unfortunately, in my culture, sexual harassment is taken lightly, especially if it does not end in physical assault. As a novice researcher, I was inexperienced in navigating the situation and at the time the only way I could guarantee my safety was to avoid exposure altogether, hence my decision not to continue interviews with male participants. There are implications for research ethics and training. For instance, Fenge *et al.* (2019) argue that researchers' voices regarding the emotionally disturbing situations they are exposed to when researching sensitive topics or marginalised groups remain relatively silent. Although ethical principles of practice include discussion around the protection of both researcher and participants. Yet, in practice, researchers' experiences are less acknowledged. My experience of the embodied and emotional nature of research is an excellent resource for those who train social science researchers. It is also a useful reminder of the responsibility that research institutions have in helping social science researchers who face dangers in their work.

The decision to remain silent about my sexual harassment experience was one to which I had carefully given much thought. I was well aware that sounding the alarm or reporting sexual harassment, even to the female academics who were very supportive would attract unnecessary attention that would eventually be detrimental to whatever progress I had managed to gain at the time. Victims of sexual harassment, especially women, are often blamed for their experience and it was not an issue I was prepared to deal with. For me, sweeping it under the carpet and moving on was my only option. I remember feeling quite depressed at the level of 'normalised' sexism women had to deal with. Although my experience of recruiting and interviewing male participants was not at all encouraging, it strengthened my conviction on the importance of my research and the need to share the voices and stories of the women.

As stated earlier, initial contact was established with two female lecturers at a federal university of which I am an alumna. Prior to the start of my PhD, while on holiday in Nigeria, I had informal conversations with these two women, who were my tutors during my undergraduate studies. I expressed my interest in researching academic women and informally solicited their support in recruiting participants. After my PhD studies began, I maintained contact via telephone and email; not only were they interested in taking part in the project, but one in particular was keen on supporting me in gaining formal access and introducing me to other contacts in proposed case study universities. Through these contacts I was able to reach and gain the contacts (telephone numbers) of other academic women in my alma mater. One benefit of my insider status as a Nigerian woman was that I knew seeking informed consent virtually would be problematic, as many of the women would prefer a formal face-to-face introduction, especially the older women. With is in mind, I decided to refrain from seeking informed consent via email. It was not surprising to read that, for varied reasons, working-class women are less likely to respond to requests for research in written form (Glucksmann, 1994). Informed consent was sought face-to-face upon my arrival in Nigeria in December 2015 for fieldwork.

Unfortunately, upon my arrival in Nigeria in December 2015, the main contact who had offered to help me gain formal research access through the university academic registry sadly passed, away after a brief illness. By this time, I had managed to recruit sixteen women and three men and began gaining informed consent. I took with me on every visit to the field consent forms and my research information sheet,

which outlined the purpose of the study, the nature of the research, how the data would be used and the right to withdraw at any time (Ritchie and Lewis, 2008). I ensured all interested participants read the information sheet and signed the accompanying consent forms. I understood signing the consent form was not a complete guarantee of participation as I made it clear that participation was voluntary and participants were free to opt out of the project at any point in the process, even after signing the consent form. Some of the participants were interviewed a couple of days or weeks after signing their consent, so to ensure that I still had informed consent, I presented the signed consent form prior to interviews and asked for confirmation that they were still interested in taking part. Before each interview, I also gave each participant a data collection sheet to collect demographic and other relevant nominal and ordinal data such as their current position, level of education, age, number of years in higher education, number of children, and religious and ethnic background.

Before each interview began, I made sure the consent form was clear and verbally re-iterated the fact that interviews would be tape-recorded with a tape recorder or the recorder on my phone should the tape recorder run out of power. I also verbally stated that their identity would only be known to me and pseudonyms would replace their real names in data analysis for the purpose of anonymity and confidentiality. I also clearly informed participants that they were free to end the interview at any time and that I was open to answering questions about me, the study or interview questions prior to each interview. Interviews with the women ranged from one hour to nearly two (an hour and 43 minutes). The research information sheet, the informed consent document, the data collection sheet, and the interview guide are in the Appendix.

4.2.4 Semi-structured Interviews

As stated earlier, a major reason I selected qualitative semi-structured interviews as the data collection tool was to be able to explore my research participants' feelings and thoughts, as well as their career histories and the day-to-day details of their personal professional lives. Interviews gave me the opportunity to explore the context-specific thoughts of the women in my study, enabling me to tell their story in their own words, which is an important element of feminist research: giving voice (Oakley, 2004). In qualitative research, interviews can take many different forms, such as life histories, oral narrative, in-depth interviews and biographical interviews. An interview can also

take place with one person or within a small group, often called a focus group discussion. Whatever form an interview takes, it involves recording either on tape or on paper the words of others (May, 1998).

An interview gives the interviewee the opportunity to tell their lived experiences as they are, and this is not only seen as participatory in nature but also a useful tool for gaining insight into the lived experiences of 'silenced women' or other oppressed groups (Montell, 1999). Oakley (2004) adds that it is important that the interviewer and interviewee relationship is non-hierarchical if we are to be open during interview. Her perspective was inspired by her experiences with malestream research paradigms, in which interviewers are assumed to perform masculine traits, including objectivity, detachment and authority, while interviewees are recruited into positions characterized by feminine traits including compliance, obedience and submission to authority. Against this background, Oakley (1981) argued for new ways of practising and thinking about the dynamics of interview relationships. Since then, feminist researchers have debated, explored and sought to reshape relationships with those they encounter during fieldwork, generating a rich and varied literature on power relationships and giving voice in interviews.

Many qualitative feminist researchers have emphasised the importance and power of interviews, using the method to produce rich and previously untold stories. They do this by imbibing core feminist principles, one of which is the importance of listening and reciprocity, a willingness to give of oneself during the interviews. During the interviewing process, having read the interviewing experiences of reflexive feminist researchers like Oakley (1981) and Letherby (2003), I approached the interviews with a willingness to answer questions from participants. If my interviews were to be participatory in nature, then answering questions and giving out personal information, research interests or political commitment could not be considered wrong; after all, my participants were letting me into their personal and professional lives. Like many feminist researchers, I found that, on many occasions I had to answer many questions. Many of the women I interviewed expected me to be knowledgeable about the multiple demands on a Nigerian woman's time. One of the participants who shared a similar family background to my own, particularly being the only female among brothers and having to do much of the domestic work, mentioned that it was the case for most girls and wanted to know if I shared the same experience. I was open about the fact that I

too grew up an only female child among boys and about my experience of doing domestic chores while the boys were allowed to go and play. Also, one of my participants who had a daughter my age asked about the postgraduate admissions process I had undergone for my master's degree in England and again I willingly shared information. Although traditional approaches to interviewing advises the researcher to stand back and interview objectively, I found support within feminist research praxis and I believe that holding back from answering participants' questions goes against the core aims of feminist research, which is one of emancipation.

Oakley (1981) believes that interviewing should be a mutual interaction; this gives participants more control and they play an active role in the research process, thus breaking down the hierarchy between researcher and participants. The need to break down hierarchy between the researcher and researched in feminist research stems from the idea that not only are issues of power at play in the research process, but that these issues are also complex. Giddens (1985) notes that power is an element of all relationships and this is true for research relationships. Many feminist researchers have shed light on power relationships in research. Letherby (2003) notes that the assumption that the researcher is always in control and in a more powerful position in the research is not always correct. In my experience the balance of power varied; there were certain elements over which I had control, for example, the research design, the design of the interview schedule, the question I chose to ask first, the topics I probed, the tape recorder and the authority these came with. I also had control over the sense I made of the stories, the analysis and final presentation of the data collected. Morley (1996) also calls on feminist researchers' consciousness of the micropolitics of power in interpersonal relationships and the need to refrain from taking advantage of the power and control we have as researchers. There were some occasions where interviews were interrupted by interviewees' colleagues or students. I was careful to pause the audio recording, even when interviewees discussed issues relevant to my research, and only continued recording with the permission of interviewees. However, I didn't always feel in control throughout the interview process, and there were many occasions where my interviewees held the balance of power.

First, the fact that I was a PhD student, interviewing female academics who were not only older but also more experienced and knowledgeable meant that on many occasions I was in a less powerful position. Approaching this research with

feminist principles in mind made me conscious of how I viewed my research participants. They are not objects and I have been very careful even in my writing up not to refer to my participants as subjects or respondents, suggesting passivity. I prefer to refer to them as participants or women, because they are actively involved in the production of knowledge about their lived experiences as academics. Secondly, another feminist research principle that had an important bearing on the research process and knowledge produced about academic women is positionality. The position of the researcher in the research process is an important element of consideration in qualitative research. Positivist ways of knowing instruct that there is an objective reality and "impersonal and neutral detachment is an important criterion for good research"(England, 1994: 242). Smith (2007) disagrees and argues that the position and identity of researcher matters, and it is problematic to suggest that a researcher can stand outside of the research. Smith (2007) contends and I concur that, rather than claiming an objective stance, researchers must consider and be prepared to account for their own position in relation to the research and the researched. Before engaging in this research, I spent time reflecting on my own upbringing, educational and work experiences as a Nigerian woman. In my interview field notes, I recorded some of my reactions to some of the shared experiences I had with my interviewees. Although researchers like Husserl (1913) argue that approaching interviews in this way could be distracting and suggest the act of bracketing; I found that reflecting on my position was useful and impacted my listening skills positively.

While bracketing requires us as researchers to deliberately set aside our beliefs and experiences of the issue under study, before and during the research process (Carpenter, 2007), reflexivity calls for consciousness and awareness of our social position for a better understanding of our role in the cocreation of knowledge (Berger, 2015). On the experiences of women in academic employment, I do not agree that bracketing is practical. How could I possibly detach myself from trying to understand the experiences of women in male-dominated culture, when I had grown up in the same culture and internalised values that limit my own choices and decisions? Creswell (2007) notes that bracketing is problematic because as researchers we bring some assumptions as we interpret research participants' narratives, which determine what we acquire, assimilate, exclude and reject in our attempt to construct knowledge. At many points in this research process, I experienced internal conflict between

bracketing and reflexivity, possibly because much of my research training reiterates the importance of 'standing back' to avoid bias (Saunders *et al.,* 2016).

Throughout my higher educational experience, moreover, the instruction has always been in favour of writing in a third person detached manner, in order to have an academic voice. Much of what I had learnt resonated with bracketing, setting aside personal theories, research presuppositions, inherent knowledge and assumptions as separate from what is observed in the research process. On the other hand, reflexivity, which is highly encouraged in qualitative and feminist research, requires researchers to be aware of the impact of their personal ontology on the research (Berger, 2015). While my own personal experiences of gender made it quite problematic to bracket, I struggled with revealing the personal for fear that my research would lose academic or scientific credibility. But how could I bracket, given that I have experienced gender at varying levels and in multiple contexts? How could I bracket and set aside shared personal memories and knowledge?

Reflexivity allowed me to consider and analyse my own personal identity and experiences, highlighting the most significant aspects of my identity, in this case, my gender and nationality, upbringing and status as a foreign student and how these influenced my assumptions about gender and the questions I asked in my interviews. For example, would I ask the same questions if my respondents were not Nigerian women? Reflexivity allowed me to think about how my own positionality impacted my research agenda. Moreover, I found that reflexivity was better suited for my data collection method, which was qualitative interviews. Adopting a reflexive stance allowed me to pay attention when important comments were made by participants superficially and to explore these comments in more detail. Like Hesse-Bibber and Piatelli (2012), I agree that due to the conversational nature of interviews, reflexivity fosters a deep understanding of research participants' perspectives

The participatory nature of interviewing makes it a valuable feminist tool in knowledge production and researchers have a range of options in deciding what approach to take with interviews. These can be structured, unstructured or semi-structured (Mason, 1998). The interview is a useful qualitative research tool that allows participants to detail their lives through stories (May, 1999; Mason, 2002). I conducted qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews in which I asked questions prepared in advance but also asked probing questions to explore participants' cues in more detail.

Semi-structured interviewing allowed me to think up questions in advance based on a review of literature on gender and academic work in the Global North and South. Qualitative feminist research has constantly highlighted the importance of reciprocity and willingness on the part of the researcher to disclose personal information or political commitments (DeVault and Gross, 2007). In the sections that follow, I discuss the interviews, the questions, and the process in more detail.

4.2.5 Sample Size and Participant Selection

A vital element of this feminist qualitative research design is the research population. Within qualitative research, the usual suggestion in respect to sampling is that researchers include a reasonable number of participants while trying as far as possible to capture the essence of the issue being studied (Patton, 2002). Unlike quantitative research, it is not common practice for qualitative research scholars and researchers to prescribe a definite number of research participants. In deciding on the research population, I interviewed until I reached a threshold that Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as the point of redundancy or the point of saturation (Mason, 2010). As stated earlier, I recruited women for this through snowballing, and found that after some interviews, without needing to ask for a referral, they referred me to other colleagues and acquaintances whom they felt would be interested in taking part. I was also able to recruit more women by asking interviewees directly for referrals. I was keen to ensure that my research participants were as diverse as possible, to discover and capture different academic work experiences as well as nuances of age, marital status, ethnicity, and religion. But I soon found that recruiting a diverse population to study would require a lot of resources, notably time and money. Cannon (1992) suggests that, coupled with the snowballing technique and recruiting through word-of-mouth, researchers committed to incorporating respondents from diverse backgrounds must be prepared to explore other options, such as speaking at meetings and newspaper advertisement. By the twentieth interview, I began to feel as though I had reached saturation, but I decided to keep interviewing. Like Mason (2010), I felt that new data would add something new to the study; however, Mason also suggests that new data may not always lead to more insights in qualitative study because of the relative unimportance of frequencies.

> *Frequencies are rarely important in qualitative research, as one occurrence of the data is potentially as useful as many in understanding the process behind a topic. This is because qualitative research is concerned with meaning and not making generalised hypothesis statements.* (Mason, 2010: 1)

Even when I felt I had reached saturation, I sought participants who might serve as negative cases. For example, all the women I had interviewed by the 21st interview were either married or never married: only one widow and one divorced woman had

entered the study. Many of the women spoke of the challenges of domestic burdens while their husbands had more spare time, but did not want to be labelled as rebellious. I was keen on finding participants who had rebelled, as I felt it might offer new perspectives. It was not always possible to know in advance if a participant would provide a fresh viewpoint, but there were some participants I targeted intentionally and tried to reach because I felt they had this potential. Marriage and domestic responsibility are often cited as important factors impacting women's professional careers, so I was particularly interested in interviewing unmarried, married, separated, and divorced women. The participant who had remarried some years after a previous marriage ended in divorce, and the woman who had been widowed offered different viewpoints, especially as regards the women's agency.

The literature on academic and professional women, postcolonial feminism and intersectionality provided some direction as regards the diversity of women's experiences and I was interested in exploring the similarities and idiosyncrasies of the experiences of the women in my study. Also, the literature and feminist theory coupled with my thoughts and intuition were vital in the generation of interview questions. Although the positivist approach to knowledge production is highly critical of the researcher allowing their thoughts or instincts to guide the formation of research instruments, with the usual prescription that the researcher should strictly draw hypothesis from theory and take an objective stance in generating the questions asked in the data collection instrument, many qualitative research theorists suggest that the questions qualitative researchers ask should be generated in relationship with the literature as well as the thoughts and insights of the researcher (Seale *et al*., 2004; Rapley, 2004). As will be discussed in the next section, in exploring the experiences of academic women in this study, in line with qualitative interview principles, I utilised two main types of questioning techniques: open-ended, perspective-widening questions, and content-mining probing questions. Open-ended questions gave the women in my study the opportunity to reveal their thoughts and perspectives, while content-mining questions gave me the opportunity to probe and explore issues raised by interviewees that I felt were important. The main open-ended questions utilised are now discussed.

4.3 Interview Questions

To achieve the primary goal of capturing the meanings participants attached to their experiences, I adopted a semi-structured approach. This was mainly because this was my first major experience of interviewing and I was interviewing academics who were themselves more experienced researchers. I was also guided by a list of pre-approved questions based on an extensive literature review, while leaving open opportunities for spontaneity. As noted in Chapter Three, although there are many studies of academic women in the Western world, studies of academic women in Nigeria and Africa are few and far between. However, because of the difficulty associated with generalising the experiences of female academics in the West to those of African women, an evaluation of women and work in Nigeria was conducted, as well as the review of literature. This proved useful in coming up with questions that would yield rich information about the plight of female Nigerian academics. An important theme within the literature on women's education and work in Nigeria is the importance of education for women's careers. There is, to some extent, a consensus that access to higher education and paid work gives women some degree of social mobility on a personal level. Their educational credentials provide a sound prerequisite for any tangible contribution to nation-building.

The interviews were made up of four open-ended questions aimed at capturing the interactions between structure and agency. As discussed in Chapter Three, there is a longstanding debate over the primacy of structure versus agency as the starting point for explaining occupational gender segregation (Becker, 1985; Wharton, 1991, Evetts, 2000). I wanted to understand how far these women could make choices about their careers within the context of structural forces that impose limits. On this basis, I identified individual characteristics that I understand as shaping agency. These include characteristics such as age, education and career background, parental status, length of employment, cultural background, and family status. Individual career history was identified as a major consideration in understanding how interviewees' current positions and choices were arrived at. As well as these agentic forces, it was important to understand how the women's working lives had been negotiated within existing structures and the opportunities and difficulties that these presented. Adopting a narrative style, the interview questions were broadly structured around four areas, with follow up questions. The questions I formulated allowed for flexibility and did not limit

topics for discussion with the participants. The order in which the questions were asked varied from one participant to the other depending on the nature of their story/responses and their preferences. The questions are briefly described below.

4.3.1 How did you get here?

At the start of the interview, the first question all participants were asked was *How did you get here?* I explained that I was interested in understanding the events, influences and circumstances that had shaped their career to date. I suggested the starting point might be their early education, and explained that I was interested in understanding the key events, the role of families and the key people who had influenced them to take up academic careers, the choices they had made and why they had made them. I wanted to hear about the schools they attended, the subjects they studied, and what they liked and disliked the most about their schools. The purpose of this question was to understand the historical progression of each person's career, and to identify critical aspects of identity and circumstances that shaped their career choices. These include, family background, age, care responsibilities, religious affiliation and key influences (such as mentors). The purpose of asking such a broad question was that these details would flow from each person's story and the participants could control the level of detail. Some key characteristics of the participants became clearer as they told their story of 'becoming academic'. For example, some mentioned their age, as such information was contextually important in speaking about their career history. For those participants who did not mention their age, I could make a 'close enough' estimate based on the timing of key career events.

For some of the participants, their story involved talking about traumas, losses, disappointments, their health issues or those of their families, experiences of oppression or lost opportunities. I was very clear to invite interviewees to stop if any aspect of their history was upsetting, although generally the response was a desire to continue. There were mixed emotional reactions as interviewees recalled their story: laughter, tears and feelings of gratitude upon reflecting on how far they had come. I was also interested in gaining some insights into the early educational experiences of these women and what (if any) role these played as they navigate academia. Reviewing literature on women's education and work in Nigeria from precolonial to present times revealed important elements of the Nigerian political economy that limit Nigerian women's ability to construct a career. Education was identified as vital for

women to access employment, and, in most studies of Nigerian and African women, education was identified as crucial for women's advancement. Thus, the essence of this question was to understand the background and early educational experiences of the research participants as well as their journeys to becoming academics.

4.3.2 Can you please tell me about your current position?

Nigerian academic women occupy a privileged position in society by virtue of their possession of formal education and access to formal employment. However, there are certain important factors that influence women's decisions about what to study, but that also limit how far education can take them. I was interested in understanding what benefits academic women realised from their education as well as the pressures and dilemmas they face as highly educated women. I wanted to understand not just how their formal education contributed to the attainment of their academic career but also the opportunities and dilemmas it presented for them. This broad question was intended as an open-ended probe into the current circumstances of their working life. I explained that I was interested in details of their responsibilities, their workloads, job satisfaction with their work, and the challenges, hindrances, opportunities and the relationships between their work and other responsibilities. Again, their responses varied according to circumstances and led to conversations about the key changes within the university that had impacted their working lives. Another important point of discussion for some participants was the impact of the NUC directive implemented in 2009 that all university lecturers without a PhD would be stripped of their jobs.

4.3.3 What are your plans for Promotions/Long term or Short Career Aspirations?

As with the two previous topics, depending on the participants' responses up this point, the question was modified. This question was particularly important for understanding why women are marginally represented from senior lecturer levels and above. The rationale for discussing long- and short-term career aspirations and promotion plans was that, over the course of the interview, I gained some understanding about their current plans for promotion and their reasons for seeking or not seeking promotion. For those who had plans for promotion, I was interested in what their motivations were, their perceived chances of success, potential barriers to their promotion and their

alternative plans if their promotion fell through. For those clearly not planning on applying for promotion, I was also interested in their reasons and feelings.

4.3.4 What impact has your gender had on your academic career?

The rationale here was to identify the extent to which the participants understood their own experience as being gendered. I was interested in understanding whether they perceived their experience as equitable. Did they have any feelings of unfair marginalisation? I also wanted to find out whether aspects of their progression within academia could be generalised to the experience of other women and men. I was particularly interested in their understanding of whether there are new or persistent barriers to women's progression in academia. I also asked participants about the requirements for promotion at their university and provisions the university made to improve their working conditions and experience. I wanted to understand the extent to which these women felt that there is a level playing field for them and their male colleagues within their institution and the academic profession in general. I also wanted to gather useful information regarding their views of what could be done at national and institutional level to foster women's academic careers.

4.4 Interview Process

Approaching the interviews with a set of preconceived questions gave me an important list of themes to explore during the interviews. As participants responded to the questions, I listened carefully and noted important probing points, which I explored in more detail. Three interviews were by Skype, while the remainder were face-to-face. All interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the participants and notes were taken after each interview. I realised that I was spending a lot of time taking notes after each interview, and experienced some confusion around what was important to note and what could be left out. I chose to note taking suggestions from Patton (2002) who insists that researchers should focus on taking strategic and focused notes rather than verbatim notes. So, I simply noted down some of the ways participants behaved when they spoke about certain issues as well as details concerning interruptions during the interviews and how participants reacted to issues central to the interviews when the tape recorder was off. I also made notes reflecting on how the interview went and highlighted action points for improvement in subsequent interviews.

In line with the tenets of feminist epistemology, it is very important to acknowledge how my position as both an insider and outsider influenced this study.

As discussed earlier, research is value-laden. As researchers, we bring our own implicit values to our research, which influence every stage in the research, from the choice of topic, research strategy and methods to the interpretation and presentation of findings (Olsen, 1980). Although there are different perspectives within feminist methodology, there is consensus that knowledge is situated and produced by positioned actors (Letherby, 2003). The social and political context of this research, to a large extent, shapes and constrains what is reasonable to know and believe. Therefore, what is known and how this knowledge can be known is subject to the position, situation, and perspective of the knower. Thus, it is not possible to deny my influence as a scholar and subject, an insider and an outsider in this study. Many times I felt that my insider/outsider status came with both advantages and disadvantages.

First, during recruiting and interviewing of participants, my position as a Nigerian woman and researcher kept me mindful of sensitive issues. I was aware of some of the ways in which the system of male dominance influences women's lives, but also conscious of the fact that male dominance and women's subordinate position is accepted as divinely ordained and normal. So, I was careful not to ask questions in ways that suggested that I was trying to challenge the status quo. Also, my position as an insider was useful in building rapport. I understood everyday slang and knew that respect and formal greeting is valued highly in my culture: walking into a room without formally greeting everyone would be frowned upon. I was also aware that informality was vital in building and maintaining relationships. So, while I ensured that I greeted everyone I approached formally, which was useful in securing the favour of participants and potential participants, I was responsive to informal chat and cues. As both a Nigerian student and a feminist researcher, I understood that disengagement was not a realistic possibility (Oakley, 1990), firstly because it is not conducive to establishing rapport and secondly because refusing to engage is exploitative.

As a feminist researcher, however, I was concerned that it was also important not to exploit the relationship and rapport I built with my participants. To minimize exploitation, I ensured that all participants had control over the research process. I left it to the women to decide where they wanted to be interviewed and made it very clear that I was very flexible with timings and location. For the men, I had to employ different tactics: although they decided where they wanted to be interviewed, I gave closed options (in their office, or in a café on campus): based on insider knowledge, I knew

that leaving the options open with the men would only result in dilemmas that I was not prepared to deal with. I told all the men that I had a curfew at home and had to be there by a set time. This was not the case, but I said this to protect myself.

Also, because of my insider status, I easily identified with the women I interviewed, as mothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, sister-in-law, and friends. I was very familiar with many of the important cultural elements shaping their lives. I was equipped with an enormous amount of information about African women, Nigerian women, and academic women before collecting data, but my own view as an insider in this culture was the main starting point of my inquiry. I was born, raised, and educated to first degree level in Nigeria, before embarking on postgraduate studies in England. Unquestionably, it is one thing to live in a culture and a totally different thing to examine how that culture has shaped one's life, especially regarding the often overlooked and taken-for-granted patterns of subordination and oppression entangled in everyday life. As I probed into the lives of the women in this study, on many occasions, I was reminded of my own lived experiences as a Nigerian woman. We shared stories, laughed and joked about common problems, joys and hopes. The women used inclusive language and addressed me as one of them. For instance, to drive home a point, they sometimes called for my tacit support as an insider, using expressions such as "I'm sure you know how our universities are", "you know as I do how our men are", "you know our culture doesn't permit us to", "as you know, men/women do not or are not expected to" and so on. There was an implicit expectation that, as one of them, I should understand their cultural knowledge. When necessary, like Oakley (1981) and many feminist researchers, I invested my own personal identity by answering their questions and sharing my knowledge. On occasions, they shared very personal details and secrets, because of the confidence and trust that I was one of them. However, there were times when I felt uncomfortable, particularly when they shared their secrets. They also tacitly expected that I reciprocate by not using the information in any way that could be detrimental to them.

Although I was an insider in all the ways mentioned above, I was also an outsider. As a researcher, I was aware of the need to maintain a critical distance from my data, although it was very clear to me that some of the useful connections I came up with in the data analysis were inspired by commonalities. Our shared experiences have also been a source of encouragement and strengthened my conviction of the

need to share the stories of the academic women in this study. Nevertheless, I believe that coming to this study from two cultures made a difference.

First, as an outsider pursuing my graduate studies abroad, I could step away from my own culture and critically examine a way of life in which I was born and bred. I also had to be careful about the meaning I attached to the academic women's narratives as well my interpretations of social relations in my culture, knowing fully well that gender domination and women's subordination is relative to time and space. Secondly, being an outsider, a researcher, only collecting data for a short period in Nigeria to return overseas for my studies made the women feel that in some way I was foreign and would be far away from them in no time. Because of this, they divulged information to me that they wouldn't necessarily discuss with others, not even colleagues or partners. One of the participants revealed to me that at some point in her marriage, after the birth of her two children, she had a contraceptive implant without her partner's knowledge because she knew he wouldn't approve and she didn't want another child. In her opinion, it was a way of keeping her marriage and family intact as well as keeping her career on track. Other participants mentioned things like a private bank in the name of their child, or a very close friend whom their partner was not aware of. The fact that I was in transit to England gave the women some freedom in their exposure and expression. They felt less threatened as I was detached from university politics. In a way, they were confident that I couldn't damage their reputation or social and public image.

Another important element I noticed during the interview process is hierarchy. According to Oakley (2004), "finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of the interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchichal" (p.222). I had read many feminist texts that suggest issues of power are central to feminist research. Many authors believe that the researcher is in a more powerful position and must take care to approach research in a way that breaks down the hierarchy between researcher and researched. The problem with this view is that it does not consider the ways in which researchers, especially in non-Western countries could be in a much less powerful position by virtue of age and seniority. Throughout the research process, from gaining contacts to interviews, I never felt or believed I was in a more powerful position.

First, all the women I interviewed were older than I was, and seniority is central to relationships in my culture. On Hofstede's (1983) national culture framework, Nigeria is a high-power distance culture where seniority is valued and impacts on many professional and personal relationships. Younger citizens are expected to show respect to people; it is not only uncommon to refer to older citizens by their first name, but also considered disrespectful. During conversations with older citizens, younger citizens must be conscious of their verbal and non-verbal expressions and take care not to express themselves in ways that might be deemed disrespectful. This, combined with the fact that my research participants are academic women, made me feel in a much less powerful position. I recall feeling nervous during the first couple of interviews, worried that I might say the wrong thing or ask the wrong questions and risk ruining my research relationships. These research dynamics meant that I had to constantly labour emotionally during my interactions with many of the women in my study. I didn't feel this way with the much younger women and felt a bit more relaxed.

During my interactions and interviews with participants I was very conscious of my identity and the impression participants had of me. At times I felt I was trying to manage their impressions through my appearance and the way I conducted myself and spoke with the participants; this came with some advantages and disadvantages. At every visit, I dressed in traditional outfits, and like Letherby (2003), I agree that dressing and appearance makes it easier for both researcher and participants to feel comfortable. The fact that I was a student in England (outsider) dressed in local outfits was met with a lot of admiration. Some of the women mentioned that it was good to see that I had not lost my 'Nigerian-ness'. Also, conversations about my outfit were useful in establishing rapport in many of the interviews with both men and women. In fact, on some occasions, I passed the contact details of my dressmakers to women, making me feel like I was giving something back for their contributions.

However, the fact that I had to manage impressions affected my confidence during my interactions and interviews. As described, there is assumption that the researcher is always in control of the research and holds the balance of power (Oakley, 1997) but this was not the case for me. First, the fact that I was interviewing academic women who were more experienced researchers made me feel nervous that my inexperienced interviewing skills were being judged. Also, the fact that I had to manage my identity and show a lot of respect made me very conscious of the fact that many of

my participants were older and, on many occasions, I felt less powerful than my participants. In hindsight, I believe that I could have designed my research in such a way that interviews were conducted in two phases, one face-to-face interview and a follow-up that was virtual or a telephone interview with some of the older and more senior women. Approaching the interviews in this way would have been useful, especially in terms of my confidence with the more senior and older women.

4.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was an iterative process as is common with qualitative research. After the first batch of interviews with sixteen women, I began transcribing audiotaped interviews before going back to the field six months later to interview more women. As part of my ethical obligation to protect the identity and confidentiality of my participants, I assigned pseudonyms to each interviewee so that participants could not be identified. Some of the transcribed interviews were taken back to the field and given to participants to review, a process referred to as member checking in qualitative research (Creswell and Miller, 2000). I asked these participants to check for any errors and gave them the opportunity to share any further thoughts. I tried not to push this as I already felt they had done me a huge favour by taking part in the first place. A key narrative that began to emerge as I transcribed the interviews was lack of time and excessive workloads. On the one hand, I subscribe to the idea of member checking as it enhances the trustworthiness of the data, but there is an assumption that participants would be interested in (and available to undertake) this process. In my case I had mixed feelings about the process, as I felt I would be taking up more of their time and these women repeatedly cited in the interviews that time was in very short supply. I did mention during interviewing that I would do member checking, but familiarisation with data coupled with my growing knowledge of feminist approaches to research made me confident that it was ethical to give them the opportunity to member check while making clear that I was in no way compelling them to do this. Many seemed happy to read their transcripts and no changes or additions were made.

4.5.1 Generating Themes and Sub-themes.

Thematic analysis was employed in analysing interview narratives. To Bogdan and Biklen (2003), analysing qualitative data entails “working with the data, organising it,

breaking it into manageable units, synthesising it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned and deciding what you will tell others" (p.54). May (2002) argues that an important aspect of qualitative research is how to construct and present a convincing argument from qualitative data. Likewise, Mason (2002) suggests that qualitative data analysis is an iterative process and should begin during fieldwork and end when findings are reported and analysed. I worked through several stages of data analysis. From the beginning, I made daily efforts to transcribe each interview in detail, but this was a very tedious process and became unfeasible, so I began listening carefully to each interview with the purpose of identifying ideas, events, themes, and patterns that were repeatedly stressed. Identifying emerging themes at this early stage was useful in identifying gaps and discrepancies in the data.

Once interviews were complete, it would have been less time-consuming to employ someone to transcribe the data, but my financial resources were limited. Listening to the interviews gave the opportunity to familiarise myself with the raw data. Interviews were in English although sometimes the women used local slang and jargon. When they spoke in proverbs, I made sure to ask them to explain the meaning. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there is a tendency for qualitative research to generate large amounts of textual data that are difficult to analyse systematically. In this case, the best approach is to go through the data and identify some main themes that can be used to categorise the remaining data (Saunders *et al.,* 2009)

The next phase of data analysis began by using highlighters to manually identify segments of data. As I carefully read the transcripts to become familiar with the data, I began to identify ideas, words, patterns of behaviour, way of thinking and strategies as they emerged. I then began to assign codes to the data. Where responses were similar, I categorised them under headings (codes). In qualitative research, coding refers to the identification of common ideas, themes, and patterns within the data (Mason, 2002). Once this was done, I began to read and re-read through the initial codes to identify and compare emerging broad themes. The codes were sorted into potential themes, then reviewed. At this stage some themes were discarded, especially where there was insufficient data to support them. When I was certain of the number of themes, I then proceeded to name and define them themes.

In analysing and making sense of the interview data, I was conscious that, despite my attempt to involve the women in my study in the data analysis through

member checking, their active role was over, and I now had full control narrating their stories. I was also aware that my beliefs, values, experiences would in some way impact on the explanation, interpretations, connections, and judgments made of the interview data. I completely agree with Morley (1996: 139) who argues that "researchers are people themselves with their own values, beliefs and prejudices". In analysing the data, I attended to themes and issues that were central to the research questions, and I tried as much as possible to highlight areas of similarity and difference within the narratives. I also tried as much as possible to look out for perspectives and variations, but some participants had much more to say than others; while some participants derailed more than others and spoke about issues that were not particularly related to the research focus. In the data analysis chapters that follow, it will be clear that some participants' life histories and experiences are easier to follow than others. As much as I tried to include responses and comments from different participants, the attempt to focus on key themes is reflected in the fact that I only present a fragmented picture of the academic career experiences of some of the women in this study. While it may be fair to argue that my analysis may not tell the entire story or paint a perfect picture of what of the life of an academic woman in Nigerian universities, I do believe that my work contributes to understanding the lives of professional women in a male-dominated space.

Data analysis was both time consuming and emotionally taxing. Although I was conscious that data analysis is iterative and expected a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, my experience was complicated by personal challenges. During the period of interviewing, I was unmarried, and I recall reflecting particularly on comments by my participants about how marriage and children impacted their careers and choices. By the time I began organising and coding interview narratives, I was married and pregnant with my first child. I found myself working in hermeneutic circles, compounded by the fact that I could see many similarities between my life and the life of the women who shared their stories with me. I was very aware that my socially constructed considerations and ideas had a great impact on my interpretation and representation of the narratives. Shortly after I began putting the data together, I experienced a miscarriage. I recall the guilt I experienced and how this complicated data analysis. I began to experience some of the feelings expressed by women in my study about the fact that in my culture women are only celebrated for their marital and reproductive success (as opposed to

professional success) and for many of the women in my study this meant delaying career progression. But I also experienced much confusion around these feelings. Was I experiencing these feelings because I had listened to participants' experiences, or was I simply attributing my feelings to my participants? There were many points at which I had to pause and question whether I was imposing my own views on their narratives. To help with this, I decided to record my reactions and feelings about the narratives I was exploring in the comment section on the interview transcripts, and this was useful in achieving as much as was possible of what Perakyla (2004) described as the unmotivated exploration of data. By engaging in progressive subjectivity (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) through conscious monitoring and anticipation of my prior and emerging assumptions and interpretation, I believed I tried as much as possible to avoid giving privilege to my personal values, beliefs, experiences, and feelings.

4.6 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

For this study, the central focus in terms of data quality was achieving trustworthiness. In qualitative research trustworthiness can be achieved in several ways and researchers outline a variety of strategies; for example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four criteria for achieving trustworthiness, while Creswell (1998) outlined eight strategies. Central to all these strategies is the fact that trustworthiness is related to procedures for verifying the credibility of qualitative research strategies. Not only did I find Creswell's eight strategies easier to follow, but the fact that it also includes reflexivity, that is, clarification of the bias of the researcher, aligned with feminist research principles. Creswell outlined the following as important in achieving trustworthiness: sustaining prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer review or debriefing, sample case analysis, reflexivity, member checking, rich and thick description, and external audits. In ensuring that the findings of the study closely matched the women studied, I followed some of Creswell's principles. First, as outlined earlier, I engaged in member checks to ensure the accuracy of the narratives and perspectives of the women in my study. I also valued the voices of the women in this study by using their own words to build thick and rich descriptions of their experiences.

Furthermore, I abided by ethical principles in this study by giving thought to the ethical issues associated with research and in particular researching women. Before embarking on fieldwork, I sought ethics approval from the appropriate body within my

university. An ethics approval form detailing the objectives of the research was completed and submitted to the ethics committee and approval was granted. Prior to gaining ethics approval, I participated in two classroom-based research methods courses, Discovering Research Methods and Ways of Knowing. These courses enhanced knowledge about research and the importance of ethics in research. To ensure ethical guidelines were upheld, before each interview, each participant was handed an information sheet (Appendix A) with time to read the objectives and purpose of the study and the opportunity to ask questions before proceeding. Also, a consent form approved by Ethics Committee (Appendix B) was handed to all participants prior to interviewing, interviews only began after participants had read and signed the consent form. Participants were assured of the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of their data. Participants were also assured that notes and recordings would be destroyed once the research is completed. One problem I encountered during interview was interruption by students or colleagues, which meant that I had to pause the recording. Another issue was the fact that after an interview was over, some participants began speaking about issues that I felt were important but could not be recorded. Patton (2001) argues that an interview for research purposes is not meaningful if it is not captured.

Although I do not subscribe to the universality of ethical principles, there are sets of ethical guidelines central to conducting research within most professional institutions that I believe are important to consider and adhere to. There were several ethical issues associated with this research project, which I not only had to consider but address. I was particularly conscious of ethical issues, especially as feminist research is emancipatory, and I made every effort to ensure that the women who participated in this research were not coerced in any way to reveal information that made them uncomfortable.

4.7 Chapter Summary

One of the main goals of feminist research is change (DeVault and Gross, 2007). This research was inspired by questions about the status of women in university roles and I felt it was important to influence and further women's full participation. The consciousness-raising potential of feminist research inspired my epistemological and methodological decisions. The fourth objective of this study was to reveal important

positionality issues associated with conducting research that seeks to privilege academic women's voices and experiences in a male-dominated society. In this chapter, I employ the feminist research practice of reflexivity to show the complexities of researching women's issues in male-dominated institutions and society at large.

The next three chapters share the academic career journey and experiences of the 24 women who took part in this study. I am reminded of the need to be "cognizant of how our representations of other women will operate as ideology" (DeVault and Gross, 2007: 89). As such, I know the voices of these women will linger after this study. I understand that the way I share their stories will create a representation of them. Thus, in making sense of their narratives and determining the meaning attached to their experiences, I rely on their own words.

CHAPTER FIVE. BECOMING WOMEN ACADEMICS: GENDERED PATHS, GENDERED ASPIRATIONS

5.0 Introduction

> Academic career paths are assumed to be linear pipelines, typically starting from a PhD studentship to a postdoctoral researcher and through promotion progresses to a permanent lecturing post and then to more senior positions such as senior lecturer, reader, and professor. In reality, however, academic career trajectories are varied and much more complex, shaped by a host of institutional and social factors. (Wolfinger *et al.*, 2009)

This chapter draws upon interview data to shed light on women's journey into the academic profession, and to explain their limited participation in academic employment. The first objective of the study was to explore the early experiences, events, influences, and circumstances that shape academic women's career paths in Nigeria. I was keen to understand the nature of their early formal and informal educational experiences and what impact these experiences had on their present working lives. As stated in Chapters 2 and 3, although there are similarities between African women's experiences and those of women in the Global North, African women's experiences differ significantly as a result of culture, religion and historical conditions such as colonialisation. Hence, I draw upon postcolonial and feminist theories as useful lenses in examining the experiences of the women in this study.

Like their female counterparts in the Global North, these women's experiences are impacted by patriarchy (Durbin, 2015) but also made more complex by the hybridised culture created through the fusion of Western and indigenous culture made possible by imperialism and colonialism (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2013). As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the interviews were organised around four broad themes: career history, current working lives, career aspirations and perceptions of gender bias. This chapter focuses on career history. In representing the narratives of the women in the study, I recognise that I cannot tell their stories as well as they do. However, I have done as much as possible to capture the essence of their narratives by going back and forth through hours of audio tapes and long pages of transcripts. By grounding the

narratives of the women in thick and rich descriptions, I hope to capture the essence of their thoughts and stories. It is important to note that the stories of the 24 women in this study reflect a diversity of lived experiences and provide very useful insights into the experiences of Nigerian academic women. While their narratives may resonate with many female Nigerian academics, these women do not speak for all academic women in Nigeria. This chapter is structured by two main themes: non-linear career paths and education as a double-edged sword.

5.1 Non-Linear Career Paths

I wandered my way into the university. (Eloho, Senior Lecturer, Sociology)

I think I was destined to teach, but not at university level. (Alma, Associate Professor, Sociology)

The aim of this study is to examine the experiences of academic women in Nigerian universities and how they make sense of their experiences in a male-dominated university and society. As part of the core objectives, this research set out to assess the early experiences, events, influences, and circumstances that shape academic women's career paths in Nigeria. The quotations above reveal the realities of becoming academics for nearly all the women in my study. While there are nuances in individual experiences, a central theme in 22 of the 24 interviews was the fact that the journey to an academic career was staggered, disorderly and atypical. Literature suggests that academic career paths are different for men and women (Baker, 2013). For many African women, the academic career path is far from linear, marked by interruptions at one or several points (Tsikata, 2006). My findings corroborate these interpretations. The voices of the women in this study suggest that, for women, the journey to becoming an academic is not straightforward, orderly or linear. It is argued here that women's academic identities are not often constructed in line with the model of a typical male career trajectory i.e., bachelor's degree, master's degree, PhD, post-doctoral fellowship, lectureship, senior lectureship, associate professorship and professorship.

Although there were some generational differences, many of the women in this study neither conform to nor identify with this male model of becoming an academic. Only four women in this study (Nancy, Ayo, Naomi and Grace) reported clarity on their

career decisions early on and progressing in the typical order. For the majority of women in this study, an academic career was never their initial choice. The decision to become academics was made later in their lives. None of the women at senior lecturer level and above followed what is thought to be a traditional academic career path. Most of them started out in fields without any requirements for a PhD, such as primary and secondary school teaching and administrative jobs, working as lab assistants, librarians and assistant lecturers. These women were usually older when they achieved their PhDs, in their late thirties, forties or fifties. The associate professors interviewed were appointed associate professors significantly late; none of them reported being an associate professor before the age of fifty. Although one of the younger women (Ayo), currently an assistant lecturer, reports a clear progression from undergraduate to postgraduate study, it is not possible to conclude that her academic career will develop without any interruptions. It was clear from interviews that there were many roads to academic employment.

Most of the women interviewed 'wandered' into academia by accident or chance, influenced by key people in their lives such as teachers, parents and partners. Two main points were identified within the interviews. First, there are gender differences in the career trajectories of academic women and their male colleagues. Second, many of the academic women in this study did not independently choose to become academics; their decisions were influenced by a significant other in their lives, typically a man (the emphasis on male influence and support is discussed in more detail in the last section of the chapter). The women in this study often referred to men in their lives (fathers, husbands, partners, lecturers, relatives, and friends), who in one way or the other encouraged or pushed them to become academics. Toffoletti and Starr (2016) argued that in socio-economic contexts with enduring stereotypical gender roles in the private spheres that permeate organisational cultures, professional women are often expected to manage the difficult task of work-life balance. As a result, women tend to choose careers that accommodate their role as primary caregivers (Wattis *et al*., 2013), often deviating from the traditional career progression pattern, tending to follow discontinuous, interrupted, non-linear career paths (Lewis *et al.*, 2015). Herman (2015) refers to such atypical career trajectories as "frayed careers" or "career-scapes" to capture women's propensity for multiple career identities and flexibility over their life course.

The career trajectories reported by many of the women in my study corroborate these descriptions. For these women, becoming academics appeared to be a decision made later in their lives, often after working in other occupations that were deemed "family friendly". Even after the decision to enter academia, many reported multiple interruptions, often for domestic and family reasons and often after marriage and having children. None of the female academics at senior lecturer level or above in my interview group followed the traditional career path where there is a clear transition from PhD completion to lectureship and so on. Many of the women in this study spoke of *meandering* paths to their academic careers without well-defined goals. More than half of the women in this study, mostly younger women, were privileged to progress directly from secondary school to university in pursuit of a degree, while about 40% of the women, especially those in their fifties did not get into university immediately after secondary school. Most were married straight after secondary school or got a job, with no plans whatsoever to become academics. Those who had some form of tertiary education report attending teacher training, nursing, and other technical colleges where they learnt a skill stereotypically believed to be ideal for women, while waiting for a suitable partner. Moreover, an overwhelming majority of the women in this study who were privileged to attend university straight after secondary education graduated without specific career plans. Most of them felt immediate pressure to marry soon after graduating. The majority of the women in this study got married straight after either secondary school or university. In the words of one of the women, a senior lecturer, who at the time of interviewing had worked at the university for last thirteen years,

> *In a way, I wandered my way into the university … it had never been part of my plan. In fact, if someone had told me years ago that I will be a university lecturer, I would have laughed at them.* (Eloho, Senior Lecturer, Accounting)

Many of the women in my interview group were like Eloho and reported developing an interest in academia after a chance exposure to one form of academic work or another. Bola's experience is one example:

> *I did not plan it, I didn't choose this job, I believe it chose me ... my final year project supervisor often asked me to help him with exam invigilation and marking. I was his unofficial assistant, that was how I developed interest in lecturing.* (Bola, Senior Lecturer, Statistics)

Most of the women in this study began their career outside academia with no intention whatsoever of building an academic career. For most of the women, developing a career was not their primary goal; getting married and having children was considered more important. Even when career development was considered, the expectation was that it did not prevent them from playing their primary roles. In the words of one of the women, an associate professor in Sociology:

> *It was difficult to plan anything, for me I had to watch my husband and make decisions based on his plans and timings. After leaving studies twice to relocate with my husband, I decided to wait until the children were older to take up any schooling again.* (Maggie, Associate Professor, Sociology)

The narratives above support findings in the literature which suggest that women tend to choose careers that are accommodating of their primary roles as caregivers (Wattis *et al.*, 2016). Some of the women mentioned that university teaching work was suggested as something they could fit around their domestic and childcare responsibilities. However, this perception of academia was based on the notion that working as a university teacher was somewhat like working as a secondary school teacher, who finishes work after lectures and gets time off work during the school holidays. Many of the women, especially those who had previously worked in schools, revealed that the academic workload took them by surprise. Women's entry into higher education not only threatens the domestic balance of power but may also overturn the broader social arrangement that accords great respect to women through marriage. As such, these academic women carefully negotiate the options available to them and the possible threats as they navigate the academic career path. They must make conscious or subconscious efforts to ensure that their professional aspirations remain within the confines of their marital obligations. One of the women reported that her husband's myopic perception of the university as a relatively stress-free workplace created tension in their marriage when her actual experiences at her job didn't match his expectations. She speaks of her troubled marriage:

> *Sometimes I work till 2 or 3 am before going to bed but because he was hardly at home, it was not a cause for concern. I tell you maybe I overdid it but this man became a stranger, someone who once encouraged me to reach for the*

sky was complaining when I was doing my best. (Maggie, Associate Professor, Sociology)

Maggie explained that she got into a series of arguments with her husband when he did not approve her decisions to travel for research or conferences. She felt that she had lived much of her life for him, and he wasn't prepared to fully support her in her career. After she got over the shame of divorce, she decided to end the marriage. Now remarried, she speaks of her new relationship as having a better balance than her previous marriage, where she had to make all the sacrifices. She also stressed that she was fortunate to be married again, because being married earns her the respect of her male colleagues. Even in contemporary Nigerian society, women who aspire to improve their social status cannot afford to ignore the deeply held perception that "a husband is a shelter": other means of social mobility cannot replace the importance of marriage and procreation. This corroborates Muhammed's (1985) assertion that Nigerian society not only tells women they are failures if they fail to attract a marriage partner; it also prevents them from deciding that marriage is unimportant by barring unmarried women from other forms of social success. Despite the tensions that marriage could create for working women, for many of the women in my study, marriage came with some advantages, giving some of the women access to significant others who influenced their career choices and trajectories.

Other than two early career women academics who decided to become academics without being directly nudged by a significant other (albeit with the agreement of their partners), all the women interviewed were advised or encouraged to consider an academic career by someone close to them. Many of the women in this study referred to men (fathers, husbands, partners, lecturers, relatives, and friends) who in one way or another encouraged them to become academics. They embraced the opportunity to take on an academic career when it was suggested to them. For some of the women who were encouraged by their husbands, it was because their partners were successful professionals, businessmen and politicians who believed their wives had to be educated to improve their social standing. For others, their partners and significant other(s) perceived a career as a teacher in the university as suitable for women, offering the flexibility and time to cater for family needs. The interviews explored and analysed here reveal the many ways in which women were

influenced to take up academic careers, but also reveal the complexities and tensions experienced by some of the women because of unrealistic expectations about an academic career. Many of the married women in this study revealed that, while marriage comes with many expectations that may hinder women's professional aspirations, it also has its advantages. Some women reported spouses who were supportive both financially and emotionally. Marriage also afforded many of the older women a readily available supply of relatives to help with domestic duties, enabling them to focus on their developing their careers.

> *I was one of the lucky ones who had a man [husband] to sponsor me because I did not come from a rich home.* (Nnenna, Senior Lecturer, Sociology)

> *Marriage was a blessing for me because my husband was supportive, financially and otherwise. He really encouraged me during the difficult years of raising kids alongside [doing my] postgraduate studies.* (Alma, Associate Professor, Sociology)

> *Not only did he [husband] cover all the costs of [me] studying up to PhD level, because we were financially stable, but many of his relatives also lived with us, which was very helpful especially with the children and housework.* (Bola, Senior Lecturer, Statistics)

The voices above all echo the importance of spousal support. Also worth noting is the fact these women report being introduced to their husbands during their secondary school education or soon after, and their marriages being arranged by parents. Arranged marriage is quite common in many Nigerian, African and Asian communities. Western feminists have long been critical of the institution of marriage (Mill, 1996), arguing that arranged marriages can often hinder personal agency (Kingston, 2004). However, from a postcolonial feminist lens, it can be argued that many African women are able to navigate marriage in ways that can be beneficial to them (Pande, 2013). The interview narratives above reveal how the women in this study benefited from their marriages, with many reporting help from extended family, and connections with influential people through marriage that proved useful in securing admission into the

university and employment upon completion of studies. Kachi and Maggie's comments below are good examples:

> *After he [husband] passed, his brother who at the time was a professor of economics suggested I look towards getting a job as a lecturer at his university … After my BSc, with his help I was able to secure a lecturing role.* (Kachi, Senior Lecturer, Geography)

> *He suggested I move upwards from my school teaching job. I did my Master's as a part-time student and even though it was not easy, it was not too stressful. At the time, it was just me, my daughter and my husband in a big house filled with other distant relatives who took care of all the housework. It was also his suggestion to enrol for my PhD abroad because he worked offshore and was hardly at home … through his contacts I got to know about my first lecturing job, applied and was successful*. (Maggie, Associate Professor, Sociology)

This supports claims within the literature on Nigerian women's issues, discussed in Chapter 2. The perception that Nigerian and African women's acceptance as adults is greatly determined by their marital status persists (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003; Mama, 2003). Thus, their primary roles as wives, mothers and companions to men enhance their social status and command the highest social regard. The social pressure on Nigerian women to marry is enormous and many argue that this is a way of sustaining the very foundations of social organisations (Anugwom, 2009). Most Nigerian families, even in contemporary Nigerian society, groom young girls to see marriage as a way of gaining social acceptance. This, coupled with the pressure to procreate soon after marriage, adds further pressure on them to consider finding a suitable partner as a major prerequisite to other forms of social recognition. Although marriage is equally regarded as the natural and proper status for adult men, they are not as urgently pressured as women, and neither are they held to similar standards of social recognition. For women, their lives must revolve around their husband and children and, to ensure women conform, immediate and extended family members make it their business to improve and protect young girls' marriage prospects, either by encouraging them to choose assumed feminine subjects or jobs, or discourage them

from treading perceived masculine paths. As young girls, their lives are monitored by family members who pressure them at certain crucial stages, for example after secondary school or after tertiary education, to ensure they do not stray into unacceptable paths that may hinder their marriage prospects.

All three unmarried women in this study expressed their ultimate desire to find a suitable partner, get married and raise a family. Their desire to get married and have children does not mean they have no interest in life beyond the domestic front, but it was important to them that whatever interests they pursued accommodated their aspirations to be wives and mothers. Even the few who were keen on furthering their studies and developing a professional career put it off in favour of finding a suitable partner. There was a general feeling that women should not be "too educated" before marriage and that held true even for the younger academics. Some of the interviewees spoke about the fact that, if a woman was too educated, it could hamper her chances of finding a suitable partner. One of the interviewees, a senior lecturer in her early forties who at the time of interviewing was unmarried and had been working at the university for about ten years, commented that she didn't feel she had achieved all she wanted and was looking forward to finding a suitable partner and settling down.

> *When marriage was not forthcoming, I decided instead of just waiting to further my studies ... It is still my hope that I will get married and have children of my own before it is too late to do so…for now, I'm not interested in becoming a professor, all the men will run away [laughs]* (Naomi, Senior Lecturer, Computer Science)

Due to the circumstances surrounding the academic career journeys of the women in this study, many of them completed their PhDs later than their male colleagues. In fact, some of them report taking too long to complete and attribute this to the slow progress of their career. One of the women in her early fifties, currently a senior lecturer in Geography, referred to the fact that I (the researcher and her interviewer) was already doing a PhD. According to her, it was rare in her time to have a young woman doing a PhD. She said:

> *If I considered it as early as you [the researcher], maybe I would have been a professor by now [laughs]. My progress here has been slow but certain. I had to take it in my stride, because my job as a lecturer was not something I*

considered early in life. My PhD was a heavy cross, a burden I had to carry along with raising my three children as a widow. (Kachi, Senior Lecturer, Geography).

This was a common narrative across the interviews, except for two women in their early thirties who secured lecturing jobs right after completing their first degree. They both decided to enrol for postgraduate studies in their respective fields immediately after completing their first degree and are both working towards completing their PhDs. One, who is currently an assistant lecturer in the Faculty of Education, decided to enrol for her Master's after completing her one -year compulsory National Youth Service administrative staff within the faculty. According to her, she decided to become an academic to discredit prejudices about her abilities. She described a negative experience that was very upsetting but challenged her to pursue an academic career:

A colleague once joked that I looked like an office assistant and that drove me to enrol for my Master's degree and when the assistant lecturer role came up, I applied for it…. I have been an assistant lecturer for nearly two years now, but I know that as soon as I complete my PhD, I will move up gradually. (Ayo, Assistant Lecturer, Primary Education Science).

The other interviewee who also looks to be following the conventional academic career path was offered a job as a lecturer after graduating with a first-class degree in accounting. She felt she was fortunate to have received a job offer when jobs are hard to come by. She spoke about how she struggled to pay her way through university, making do with very little financial support from her parents, and has been determined to succeed to make sure she escapes the life of poverty into which she was born.

I remember one of my father's friends yelled in disbelief that he was selling property to send a daughter to school. "She will end up in another man's kitchen", he said. I am the oldest of four girls. I studied hard in school to make sure that one day, my parents will reap the reward of their sacrifice. I am going all out to prove my father right, and all those old men who mocked my father for sending me to school, I am waiting to see their faces. (Nancy, Lecturer, Accounting)

Nancy considered herself fortunate as well as hardworking. For her, the driving force behind her academic success was to lift herself and her family out of poverty and to discredit prejudice. In her words:

> *I knew I always wanted to go to the university, but I was not sure if my parents could afford it. I remember back then in secondary school, my principal always told us that we cannot inherit success, we must work hard to be successful. I always told myself and I still tell myself, if success cannot be inherited, then I do not have to inherit poverty and die in it. This kind of thinking has pushed me to work very hard.* (Nancy, Lecturer, Accounting)

Nancy and Ayo seemed to be moving along the typical academic career trajectory, but it is not possible to conclude that they will continue to progress in a linear fashion. While they may be different from the other women in this study in the sense that they seemed to have greater clarity that they wanted an academic future, they also in some way stumbled upon university employment. It was not something they considered early on in their educational life. Karlgaard (2019) refers to academics who take the non-linear path as *non-traditional* or *alternative academics* and argues that career development is often complicated because many, particularly women, may be tied to a particular geographic area because of family obligations or a partner who is unwilling to move. This rings true for many of the women in my study. These women are considered privileged and empowered by virtue of their robust educational achievements and profession. However, their agency and career choices are still restrained by enduring socio-cultural factors. An important theme that emerged from the stories of the women in this study is the fact that education is both empowering and limiting and in the next section the ways in which education empowers and hinders the career journey of the academic women in this study is revealed.

5.2 Education: A Double Edged Sword

> *The surest way to keep a people down is to educate the men and neglect the women. To educate a man is to educate an individual, but to educate a woman is to educate a nation.* (Dr. Kwegyir-Aggrey, 1875-1927)

The age-old African proverb above rests on the fundamental belief that education is beneficial to all but also incorporates the notion that educating women has greater benefits enjoyed by a wider context – the family and the nation. Traditional systems of education are typically conceived as liberating forces, especially in the context of African women. Marginalised by gender and other socio-economic factors, education is often hailed as pivotal to their socio-economic advancement. As a result, postcolonial development policies in Africa have been largely based on the assumption that education and social development are inextricably linked (Egbo, 2005). Often the benefits of education are lauded by those who plan women's futures as equal partners with men and make no mention of the dilemmas and issues that education presents for women. Interview findings reveal that, while formal education comes with many benefits, its liberating potential is limited. Many of the women in my interview group reflected on the nature and form of education they received, and its psychological and cultural implications. Interview narratives expose many of the tensions they must cope with because of their highly educated status.

This section analyses the benefits and dilemmas of education for the women in this study. In telling the stories of how they became academics, many of these women had to recall early educational experiences. I was also interested in understanding how their education shaped their career and how these women were empowered through formal education to take control over their personal and professional lives as well as their goals and aspirations. To get pertinent data, when asking the women how they came to be academics, I mentioned that I also wanted to hear about their early education and higher education: how they felt about their education and what role it played and continues to play in their personal and professional lives. The voices of the women in this study revealed that formal education seems to be both a blessing and a curse, or a double-edged sword. On the one hand, formal education played a significant and positive role in the personal and professional lives of these women, aiding the development of their academic careers. On the other hand, their formal education rendered them aliens in their own culture. Interestingly, their stories exposed a range of dilemmas that they struggled with as formally educated women. Their comments highlight the importance of education, because it is linked to employment and an improved quality of life. Those who lack formal education, specifically higher education, are bound to be excluded from the society's mainstream.

Formal education has been regarded as the most powerful weapon for empowering women; it enhances their independence in decision-making, gives them authority within the home and offers self-reliance, as well as emotional, economic, and social freedom (Appiah and Atiase, 2015).

In recalling their formal education, the women raised many important issues about the nature and quality not just their own education but also of the educational system overall. Interview narratives reveal that each woman, in her own way, suggested that educational experiences from primary to university level left lasting imprints on their lives. Their present careers, their hopes and aspirations are impacted in many ways by the type of schools they attended, the knowledge they could and could not access and, pivotally, the gender ideology inculcated into their consciousness throughout their educational experiences. Based on my analysis of the women's responses, I concur with Okeke-Ihejirika (1999) and Ojejide (2002) that academic women are privileged by virtue of their possession of formal education. Indeed, formal education has played and continues to play a positive role in their social advancement and career aspirations. Despite the positive returns these women receive from formal education, however, formal education alone does not guarantee social and career advancement. Rather, the way in which women can negotiate and exploit these educational assets is key, because, while formal Western education provides an avenue for social mobility, it is also a vehicle for perpetuating foreign and indigenous forms of gender subjugation. One very important question which resonated from their responses was whether it is possible for people, especially African women, to be formally educated in Western terms without being alienated. Undoubtedly, formal education has proved to be a powerful tool in shaping women's lives and careers. However, because the Western type of formal education was introduced in Nigeria to further the interests of colonialists, it continues to be used as an ideological tool to ensure that gender stereotypical roles and occupations are willingly accepted, particularly by women. To ensure that these gendered roles and occupations are reinforced, women are encouraged to study subjects that do not threaten their femininity or their roles as wives, mothers and homemakers. That is, they are educated to be better wives and mothers. I argue here that the kind of education that women receive cultivates in them dependency, passivity, conformity and helplessness. They are discouraged from questioning superiors, those in authority and the social

arrangements that reinforce an unequal balance of power between men and women. The formal education women receive does very little to encourage critical thinking and while the positive impacts formal education has had on their lives cannot be denied, the dilemmas that they face because of their education cannot be overlooked either.

Every interview mentioned the positive part formal education played in making these women successful academics. Personal, intellectual and economic benefits of their formal education were highlighted throughout the interviews. The intellectual and economic powers they gained by virtue of their higher education are very important bargaining tools for negotiating power and privilege in their social and domestic lives. The fact that they are highly educated women does not mean they can totally opt out of their domestic responsibilities, but it puts them in a much better position than their uneducated counterparts to negotiate shared household responsibilities with partners and extended family members. With respect to the economic benefits realised from their education, three key subthemes were identified from the data: better employment prospects, financial independence and higher household income. A majority of the women felt that their chances of finding decent jobs in the formal sector were greatly enhanced by their educational qualifications. Their access to and participation in formal employment gave them a degree of financial freedom and made it possible for them to contribute to their overall household income.

The voices of these women explicitly and implicitly suggest that their academic careers would never have been possible without their education, especially higher education, motivating them to work and to aspire to higher levels in their career. There seemed to be a broad consensus that having a PhD means that they are more likely to have prestigious jobs, and this indirectly disqualifies them from informal sector employment or blue-collar occupations. As discussed in Chapter 2, women are more likely than men to work in informal employment but women who are highly educated are more likely to be interested in formal employment (Parpart, 1996; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003; Pereira, 2007). For most of these women, their education afforded them the opportunity to progress from semi-formal and low-skilled jobs to an academic career, which is considered a prestigious profession. Most of the women in this study said that they had invested a lot of time and energy in their education and felt that they had to utilise whatever knowledge and skills they had acquired, rather than sitting at home

and letting these go to waste. One of the interviewees explained that a life of fulltime domesticity has been ruled out because of her educational qualifications.

> *But why would I spend all those long years studying, primary, secondary, first degree, Master's and then a PhD, just to sit at home? I don't think that is ever possible for me again. Having a PhD comes with great expectations, you cannot be seen to be wasting all those years of hard work.* (Alma, Associate Professor, Sociology)

For Alma and many of women interviewed, there was a sense that being a highly educated woman does not mean that you can opt out of domestic responsibilities, but they could not easily opt out of their professional lives either. Eloho, for example shared her feelings of gratitude for having escaped a life of complete domesticity:

> *I am not sure I would be able to cope with the monotony of being a fulltime housewife without a choice to go out and work… of course, there are days when I do not feel like doing anything, but those days are rare, so I am very lucky to have a career and without my education, I would have not had the opportunity to choose.* (Eloho, Senior Lecturer, Accounting)

Nancy, a Lecturer in Accounting, who recalled her parents' experiences of struggling to fund her education, also ruled out a life of complete domesticity:

> *It has opened many doors for me, there are many women out there who for one reason or another had to give up their job and professional career to tend to issues at home, but that is no longer an option for me. What is the point of going through all that stress – first degree to PhD – to then surrender to life as a domestic goddess*? (Nancy, Lecturer, Accounting)

Similar sentiments were shared by Maggie who believed that while all women, especially married ones, must carry domestic burdens, professional women are more likely to play supervisory roles within the home compared to their non-professional counterparts. Her narrative suggests that, because professional women are more likely to be financially independent, they are more able to afford domestic help to do the day-to-day domestic tasks.

The truth is in the end we are all judged by how well our children have turned out, so the job at home continues to be a fulltime job for all of us. The only difference is the level of involvement. The cleaning, cooking, shopping, and everyday mundane tasks, I delegate … I know that I am fortunate to be able to do that, not just because my husband can afford it, but because I can afford it too. (Maggie, Associate professor, Sociology)

Similar sentiments were shared by Alma:

The children are all grown up and I really cannot afford to do everything around here myself. I have been very fortunate to have help here. When I was studying abroad, it was stressful and difficult combining studies with looking after the home and kids, even though my husband was helpful. … with all the university work I do now, that kind of life is not possible. I enjoy cooking, but time is [a] luxury, so I happily delegate [that work]. (Alma, Associate Professor, Sociology)

Many of the women who are able to play supervisory roles in the domestic realm are not just privileged by virtue of their marriage to economically well-off spouses; they are also well aware of their own privilege, not just by virtue of their highly educated status and professional careers, but their seniority. While it is true that African women typically bear the burden of domestic work, regardless of professional status (Rathgeber, 2004), all the women in this study who are able to delegate domestic responsibilities are in their fifties, with grown up children. Many of the younger women complained about being overburdened by domestic work (see Chapter 6).

Interviews also revealed the numerous financial and economic benefits the academic women in my research have realised because of the access to paid employment that their educational achievements afford them. The women in my study are not ignorant of the social expectations to which they must adhere, and they also accept to a certain extent their limited capacity to fully embrace and pursue their career ambitions, regardless of their educational status. Most of the women in this study, however, referred to the fact that African women are acquiring higher education in greater numbers and pursuing professional careers once deemed exclusive to men. They pointed out that younger women are becoming sufficiently brave to delay

marriage and to work towards establishing a career before getting married. Interview comments revealed how education is seen as providing an avenue for women to divert their attention to, away from seeking a suitable spouse. According to one of my research participants, Naomi, furthering her education had paid off. Initially after her first degree she had felt she was losing out when most of her peers were settling down to raise families. When a suitable spouse was not forthcoming, however, and at her father's advice, she decided to carry on studying.

> *Now I can say it was a blessing in disguise, I am grateful that I did not stop there. I'm sure my life might have been very different. I am not saying it is not possible to have a family and a career, but it is not that straightforward when they are in the picture. For me there are many ways I can contribute in my family that compensate for the fact that I am not home all day.* (Naomi, Senior Lecturer, Mathematics and Statistics)

Naomi's interview suggests that being educated afforded the opportunity to build a career, earn a living and contribute to her family. For many of the women in this study, the financial independence of being a highly educated woman makes it possible for them to contribute to family income. Beyond the financial benefits of their formal education, many of the women also reported personal benefits such as increased self-esteem and greater fulfilment. For many of them, being highly educated offers a healthy departure from a life of full-time domesticity. According to Grace, one of the senior lecturers in my study, clear progression from graduate degree to postgraduate studies and finally securing and progressing in her academic role made it easier for her to deal with the familial and societal pressure to marry. In her words:

> *Whenever I hear an insensitive comment about my unmarried status from friends, family members and even strangers, I remind myself how far I have come…this is my life…having a successful career gives me a lot of confidence.* (Grace, Senior Lecturer, Sociology)

Despite the numerous ways in which education has benefitted and continues to benefit the women in the study, there are also contradictions and dilemmas associated with their educated status, which they must deal with in both their personal and professional lives. Not many of the women spoke immediately of the dilemmas they face and it was

not something they had thought about critically. However, as I probed further and asked about the issues they confront as educated women, they began to think and speak about it. This may be because of the schooling process does little to encourage critical thinking, which has then influenced how women perceive their everyday realities. Freire (1973: 15) notes that

> *There is no such a thing as a neutral educational process. Either education functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.*

The stories of the women in this study reveal that their early schooling clearly played a significant role in the professional paths they now follow. There seems to be some sort of agreement in their responses that formal education played a big part in reproducing certain values, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions necessary to ensure that life choices and decisions were based on gender stereotypes. Even before schooling yeas, these stereotypical messages (both direct and indirect) were received from parents, care givers and religious teachers. Other interviewees suggest that a range of influential gender messages affected them in many ways: some positive and empowering, others inhibiting and discouraging. Some of the women I interviewed spoke about parents who created an expectation that girls and women could do anything they set their minds to. One of the interviewees, who is an academic in a male-dominated field, mentioned that her father (also an academic in the same field) encouraged her to challenge deeply held stereotypes about hard sciences being unsuitable for women.

> *I remember when he [her father] bought a pair of trousers for me as a little girl, my mother nagged and nagged about how girls should not wear boy's clothes … I think she was worried that he didn't treat me differently from the boys…. Then when I started secondary school, my teachers scolded me often. They would say 'you need learn to sit like a lady [i.e., put your legs together]', 'you play too much, don't you know you are a girl?', 'why do you behave like a boy?' I think you cannot escape it, if you manage to escape it at*

home, you will be taught in school that we are different. (Ladi, Senior Lecturer, Computer Science)

Many of the women in this study mentioned various ways in which they were discouraged from choosing subjects that were deemed 'masculine'.

In my first year of senior secondary school, when we were allowed to choose subjects, I decided to choose science subjects because I really enjoyed basic science, mathematics, and basic technology. My mother kicked against it seriously. She said I was not planning for my future and that those subjects would be too hard for me to even complete secondary school on time. But I had a strong belief in myself and my abilities. I was one of the few girls in science class but thank God for the way my father brought me up to believe in myself. (Ladi, Senior Lecturer, Mathematics and Statistics)

Also, because many forms of formal education and training below tertiary level can enable access to paid jobs that do not impede women's ability to perform their domestic responsibilities, a majority of the women in my study expressed a preference for a *family-friendly* career, flexible enough to allow them to spend significant time with their children and family. Some extracts from the interviews shine a light on this point.

I think I was destined to teach, but not at university level. I knew I wanted to become a school-teacher or an administrator, because I knew that kind of work would give me time for my family. (Alma, Associate Professor, Sociology).

Eloho's narrative echoes a similar sentiment:

When my husband was relocated to the University teaching hospital, I got a job as a librarian at the university. It was a very convenient job: I went to work after dropping off the children at the University staff school and finished work in good time to get them back home. (Eloho, Senior Lecturer, Accounting)

The nature of the formal training the women received did a lot to ensure conformity to deeply held gendered stereotypes, beliefs and attitudes that preserve unequal gender relations in society. Both African and Western scholars have exposed the exploitative,

silencing, alienating and oppressive nature of Western formal education. Barthel (1985), for example argued that it was clear that the colonialists were more interested in African men than women, as African men were more important to them in furthering the interests of the colonial economy. Barthel (1985) and also Camaroff and Camaroff (1988), Marshall, (1988), Musisi (1992), Mama (2002) and Okeke-Ihejirika (2003) all share the view that one of the consequences of the colonialists' greater interest in the African man was a strong male bias in government educational policies, because of the need to expand the colonial economy. In fact, the colonial administrators only began to consider female education seriously during the second stage of colonial history, about five decades after British imperialists first occupied Nigeria (Barthel, 1985). At that time, colonial infrastructure had already been laid and education policy for males had taken shape. Even in post-independence Nigeria, formal education continues to oppress, alienate and silence women. One of the older interviewees who began her early education during the colonial period explained that not only were options limited for women but there were many restrictions on what they should do, what they should say and how they should conduct themselves.

> *I remember storming out of the staff room when one of the teachers in my teacher training days touched me inappropriately … I was scolded for getting angry and walking off like a boy. I remember the head teacher said "don't you know you are a woman?" I'm sure you have been told that more [times] than you can count. He said, "you are a woman you cannot get angry, you must always be calm no matter what or no one will listen to you".* (Grace, Senior Lecturer, Sociology)

Ladi, a senior lecturer in Mathematics and Statistics, a predominantly male field, spoke of herself as a fighter, a go-getter and a no-nonsense academic. She argued that women are pitted against one another at all levels of education, and that this destroys the trust, confidence and bonding that might otherwise develop. It makes it very difficult for women to organise collectively in private and public spheres. Women are made to feel inferior in school, especially by teachers who characterize them as insufficiently serious, spending time on idle talk and gossip. The message, in short, is women's morality needs to be regulated. Speaking with a lot of resentment, Ladi recalled:

> *Because I grew up among boys, I was very playful and loud and when I was in secondary school… a co-educational secondary school we were made to sit beside a boy … I didn't understand why every girl sat beside a boy. When I asked my teacher if I could sit by my best friend, he refused and said it is for our benefit that girls are not allowed to sit with girls, because all we do is gossip and lose focus and end up failing.* (Ladi, Senior Lecturer, Mathematics)

Whether or not these messages were well-intended, their implications are not in the interests of girls and young women. I argue here that these messages and attitudes are internalised by women as young girls and carried all the way into their professional lives, with long-term repercussions regarding how women see and treat each other. Such messages suggest that, if women are interested in succeeding in their formal lives, they must carefully avoid other women and liaise with men. This shows some of the covert, and sometimes subtle, mechanisms by which patriarchy preserves itself. There has been much feminist writing exposing how blame aids in the perpetuation of male dominance. For example, in cases of domestic violence and sexual harassment, female victims are often blamed for provoking their abuser. Easteal *et al.* (2015) use the term 'flaming' to refer to the ways in which victims are blamed and women's issues are trivialised or downplayed. Berns (2016) argued that, by placing the blame or responsibility on women, the role men play in women's subordination is obscured. Thus, the blame strategy waters down any attempts to situate the issue of women's subordination within a patriarchal framework. Academic women's resentments towards female colleagues were expressed by some of the women in this study, and the comments below from the interviews with Ladi and with Nana reveal some of the ways in which women devalue relationships with other women.

> *I have female friends but most of my professional colleagues are men. I tend to get along with the men better. They are not sentimental and can take a joke. With women, they take everything you say personally and like to talk about irrelevant and vain things. Most of my conversations with the women academics in this university are usually about one wedding or the other or one new fabric or attire or a TV programme, husband, children, family. But you see men … they have less time for such trivial conversation. Honestly, they challenge me intellectually, I have very intelligent and constructive*

conversations with them, they are very focused and serious-minded. (Ladi, Senior Lecturer, Mathematics & Statistics)

I get on well with my colleagues, but I am very careful and there are some that you cannot trust. Our problems as women are caused by women ourselves. If I have confidential issues, I prefer to speak to my male colleagues about them, because they will not speak about it in the common room. But with women, they carry the gist everywhere and everyone will be talking about it. It makes me uncomfortable, so sometimes I keep to myself. (Nana, Senior Lecturer, Business Administration)

Examining these comments critically, it becomes clear that education has not only empowered these women to take up traditionally male-dominated careers but also gives them some level of independence, economic autonomy, and a voice. However, we need to bear in mind that much of what is taught in formal education is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is a powerful tool for raising women from the shackles of poverty and inequality. On the other, it may cause women to be victims of continuous criticism for abandoning cultural and traditional values. The academic women who shared their life experiences in the research interviews here also reveal the overt and covert biases that not only reinforce gender segregation but make higher education and employment an endeavour many women pursue with substantial reservations.

5.3 Conclusions

This chapter set out to explore interview findings on the early experiences, events, influences, and circumstances that shape academic women's career path in Nigeria. Interview data revealed two overarching themes: the prevalence of a non-linear career path for women academics; and the empowering *and* limiting potential of education for women academics. My research interviews revealed that academic women typically do not take the traditional academic career path, but something more unstructured and unplanned, with long-term impacts on the women's career choices, plans, direction, and pace of progression. Analysis of the interview data also revealed the importance of *significant others* in shaping career choices and paths. For many of the women in my study, parental and spousal support was instrumental to their career choice and journey. Notably, most of the women participating referred to the influence of significant male figures such as their fathers, husbands, or both.

This study adopts a general feminist perspective but situates the analysis of the academic women's experiences within a postcolonial feminist theoretical framework. On the surface, it may appear that the significant male in the lives of the academic women enable their academic careers by inspiring and encouraging the women to pursue them. Examining the women's experiences through a feminist lens, however, exposes the mechanisms through which the complex system of male dominance in personal and social relations is perpetuated. First, these women are encouraged to take up academic careers because of the assumption that academic work involves teaching, which is considered a suitable role for women. Although previous research suggests that career choices are partly determined by an assumed gender fit – that is, whether a role is perceived as appropriate for one's gender or otherwise (see Renger *et al.,* 2020) – it is problematic to assume that the women have a choice. They choose from the limited options that fit socially acceptable feminine roles. In fact, many of the women in my research began their careers in traditional feminine professions, before venturing into academia at the encouragement of a significant other. Also, the fact that these women rarely mention their mothers as influential on their academic career choices shows how the gendered division of labour and gendered socialisation has ensured that patriarchy endures. As women are socialised to be homemakers, many mothers focus on raising their daughters to be good homemakers and avoid doing anything to encourage them to take up a career that could distract them from performing such a role.

Furthermore, interview findings revealed that the nature of socialisation and education that the women received presented dilemmas for them to negotiate in a male-dominated university academic world. One of the younger interviewees used the term *cultural wiring* to refer to the difficulty in detaching from her domestic role. While gender roles are rapidly evolving, albeit slowly in African nations, women are still expected to make most of the sacrifices in keeping house. This is the case even in modern dual-income households, to which all the married academic women in my study belonged. One of the important mechanisms through which patriarchy is preserved is socialisation, the process of internalising the norms and ideologies of society. As women are 'wired' culturally through the socialisation process, they internalise messages about their primary roles. This hinders them from detaching from domestic and childcare burdens compared to their male counterparts. This is true even in the Global North: research in the UK, for example, shows that women do 60% more housework than men (Burkeman, 2018). The social expectations placed on women not uncommonly mean that their career progression is slowed, as they make compromises in their effort to have a career and raise a family.

Regardless of the path each woman in my study actually took, the women's narratives echoed the value of education, the positive role of marriage and the importance of significant others in the journey to becoming academic. Formal education opened doors, gave them access to paid employment, and presented opportunities to connect with important people who influenced their career choices and decisions. As discussed in Chapter 2, the African education system inherited social inequalities rooted in history, thus restructuring gender relations within and outside the family to the detriment of women (see e.g., Mohajeri *et al.*, 1994). Formal Western-style education was grudgingly extended to women to prevent any dissent from women that could hinder imperialist goals (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003). Because of this, the nature of the education women received focused on preparing them for their primary roles as wives and mothers, who must take up the burden of household responsibilities. Postcolonial feminists have continued to argue that colonialism and imperialist expansion weakened some of the power bases and indigenous systems of support that gave women some level of agency in decision-making and access to opportunities (e.g., Robertson, 1987). The erosion of women's power bases and agency persists even in postcolonial decision-making systems, rendering women

subordinate to men in both their private and their public lives. In their private lives, women must contend with cultural expectations for marriage, childbearing and a gendered division of labour. In public life, they must contend with many hurdles and barriers to their full participation in paid employment and politics.

From the interview data analysed in this chapter, it is apparent that, for most of the women who participated in my research, marriage is an important part of their lives, a goal to which unmarried women academic aspire and for which they may even delay career progression. From a Western feminist viewpoint, it may appear that these women are powerless and held back by marriage, but postcolonial feminists highlight the importance of capturing the particularities of social contexts, including the meanings that women attach to their lived experiences. Thus, from a postcolonial feminist viewpoint, I avoid depicting these women as powerless victims of social oppression. Kandiyoti (2010: 80) states that "women strategize within a set of concrete constraints that reveal and define the blueprint of the patriarchal bargain of any given society". For many of the women in my study, marriage and education presented many tensions, which they were obliged to navigate carefully, but they came with benefits as well. Many of these women found ways to cope and navigate a male-dominated academia and progress, albeit slowly. The next chapter reveals the experiences of being academic women, discusses and analyses the factors that drive and hinder these women's progress as well as the ways in which academic women assert agency and navigate their academic careers.

CHAPTER 6. BEING FEMALE ACADEMICS: CAREER CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES

6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the second objective of this doctoral research study, which is to explore the factors that drive or delay women's academic career progression in Nigeria, and the strategies these women employ to navigate male-dominated academia. The chapter unpacks the experiences of academic women as they struggle to develop their academic careers. Chapter 5 revealed that the journey to university academic employment is beset with many challenges and complexities. This chapter follows on to discuss and analyse the current working lives and experiences of the women who participated in the research.

As Chapter 4 explained, the current working lives and experiences of these female academics was one of four broad themes that structured the research interviews. I was particularly interested in understanding whether the women's possession of degree-level education and their subsequent entry into academic careers had given them status and participation equal to their male university counterparts, or otherwise. I was interested in the detail of the women interviewees' current academic positions, their day-to-day experiences of working in the university, the problems they faced and opportunities they identified as available to them. To obtain pertinent data, I asked about the responsibilities attached to their roles and workload, the expectations of them in respect to research and publications, their university's hiring and promotion processes, and the women's involvement in academic activities both within and beyond the university.

Initially, I attempted to group the women in my research into categories: those who expressed satisfaction with their academic employment or career and those who did not. As the analysis progressed, however, it became clear that each of the women identified both satisfying and dissatisfying experiences. The interviews revealed factors that made their careers challenging and factors that they evaluated as having positively supported or boosted their aspirations. Throughout the interviews, there was a general view that women's careers tend to develop more slowly than those of male academics. A pattern across the interviews was for women to blame themselves for the slow progress of their careers. In terms of career-boosting factors, three themes emerged from the data: family support, marrying well, and informal mentoring. The

dominant themes relating to career challenges included societal expectations of women, demanding workloads, and family responsibilities. My analysis of the interviews argues that, while the women reported positive factors that drive their careers, they also identified a host of career-constraining influences and experiences. They referred to the strategies through which they attempted to navigate the challenges they face. Notably, even the positive impact of their coping strategies could be diminished by powerful constraining factors. The chapter begins with a discussion of the career-enabling factors and concludes with a discussion of the coping strategies reported by the women in my study.

6.2 Career-enabling Factors

Research suggests that there are gender differences in how academics account for their success (Fox and Ferri, 1992; Jasko *et al.,* 2020). Fox and Ferri's analysis was based on a national survey of academics in universities in the US, while Jasko *et al.* considered men and women in STEM in Poland. My study concerns women academics in Nigeria. Nonetheless, the findings bear some similarity, in that female academics are generally less likely to assign their success to internal factors – attributes they themselves possess – and more likely to cite external factors. Throughout my interviews, when the women spoke of opportunities and positive experiences, they appeared to give much of the credit to external factors and other people such as family members and/or their partners. When they spoke of challenges and barriers, they seemed to nominate themselves as largely to blame.

Many women also stated that attaining their current position would not have been possible without some of the positive factors enabling them to remain in fulltime academic positions and push forward their careers, albeit slowly. Most of the women in my study proposed, in one way or another, that the challenges they had contended with were mediated positively by one or more of three factors: the support of their family; the fact that they had 'married well', which is to say had been fortunate to have supportive spouses; and the support and advice they received from informal role models and mentors. These career-enabling factors are discussed below.

6.2.1 Family Support

In a study of the career development of African American women in professional employment in the US, Pearson and Bieschke (2001) found that family plays an

important role. Factors such as a family emphasis on education, the relationships between family members, and the family's social and economic resources were found to significantly shape women's career development. My research, conducted in Nigeria, reveals some similar patterns. One theme resonating from the stories of the women I interviewed is the role of *social capital* in the form of support from parents, spouses, other family and family members. The narratives of the women interviewed suggest that having access to some or any of these social capital resources is instrumental for maintaining an academic career. This corroborates interpretations in the international research literature that both hard and soft forms of social capital can impact career development positively. Hard forms of social capital include the ability to acquire key information and resources to advance one's career, or having instrumental ties, such as knowing 'the right people' (Burris, 2004). Soft forms of social capital are developed from supportive relationships that provide a sense of belonging and career satisfaction (Van Emmerik, 2006). Previous studies suggest that access to both hard and soft forms of social capital in university academic employment is gendered (Fox, 2005; Monroe *et al.,* 2008).

Many of the women in my study intimated that family support had been an influential form of social capital at almost every stage in their career. Parental, spousal and/or extended family support for these women had played a positive role in their career development. Several women I interviewed spoke of having been supported by family members at the early stages of their careers, both financially and in other ways. In addition, some of the younger women stressed that their careers would not have been possible had their fathers not supported them financially and psychologically. Fathers' support has been cited in some literatures as vital for female educational and career development. Baker (2012), for example, in a study of academic women and the gender gap in Australia, found that there was a likelihood for girls with educated fathers to aspire to greater educational and professional heights.

None of the older women in my study reported parental support at the early stages of their career. This is illustrative possibly of the fact that in traditional Nigerian society, it was common for parents to ensure that their female children remained attractive for potential eligible suitors. Higher education and paid employment - particularly in a career deemed masculine – might be considered an obstacle to their daughters' chances of attracting a husband (Mann, 1985). Although this attitude is

gradually changing, many parents are still wary of their female children achieving academic prowess that could diminish their chances of 'marrying well' (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003). A consequence of this fear could be that parents are deterred from supporting the educational and career aspiration of their daughters. Among the younger academic women in my study, however, and especially those with highly educated and liberal parents, the reverse was the case. This suggests ways in which gender intersects with other factors (including age and perhaps socio-economic class) to shape women's experiences.

Some of the women in my research spoke about the influential role their fathers played in their careers. For some, this was in the forms of financial and psychological support. Grace, a senior lecturer in Sociology referred to her father's influence in her decision to undertake her doctorate. Another woman spoke about how her father had raised her to appreciate the value of education, and even though her decision to become an academic was not directly shaped by him, his constant encouragement and unwavering support was crucial to her career development.

> *At the time, money was never the problem; as long as you showed interest, my old man was ready to support you financially to any height of education […] none of my siblings were as interested in academics as much as I was. My father praises my academic achievements, and it is very encouraging.* (Ladi, Senior lecturer, Mathematics & Statistics)

> *My father has been my number one supporter for as long as I can remember. Because he is also an academic, he has always been my mentor and the reason I have always had clear goals here […] and thanks to him I have been able to focus on growing professionally and keeping my sanity even with the pressure from all corners of my family to get married.* (Grace, Senior Lecturer, Sociology)

> *I laugh every time he calls me 'prof'. I try to explain that I'm not a professor yet. But even as a little girl, my father always called me 'prof' because I have always been very focused academically. He has always inspired and motivated me …* (Nana, Senior Lecturer, Business Administration)

> *[W]orking here is not always a smooth sail, it can be very challenging. But knowing I am adding value to the lives of young people keeps me going. My dad always says education is the best gift you can give to children, and he was relentless in giving it to all of us […] I always remind myself that this is not just a job, it is an opportunity to give lifelong gifts.* (Uzo, Lecturer, Actuarial Science)

Ladi described how financial support from her father had assisted her education and career and how it continues to be useful to her in many ways. She was able to progress directly from her undergraduate years to her Master's degree and then onto her PhD. Her father's willingness to sponsor her, a female child, meant that she was shielded to a certain extent from many of the pressures and societal expectations placed on women, especially the pressure to get married. Ladi said that having support and backing from an important male figure in her life had countered the pressures from those who strongly hold on to stereotypical views about how far women should progress educationally and professionally. Grace's story echoes similar sentiments. The fact that her father has been her academic mentor and continues his support helps her to stay focused, even in the face of opposing societal expectations.

The experiences of the women described in this section are substantiated by findings in the literature on family support and women's careers. Focusing on the Global North, Schulenberg, Vondracek and Crouter (1984) found strong links between college women's career orientation and their fathers' influence and attitude towards career roles. Scheffler and Naus (1999) argued that a father's affirmation positively impacts women's self-esteem and emotional development. In the Global South, Cubillo and Brown (2003) found that familial support, with particular emphasis on paternal support, was a positive influence on women's pursuit of education and career progression. The narratives I gathered tended towards much the same point. Ladi, for example, a Senior Lecturer in Mathematics and Statistics, confided that:

> *I felt confident in my plans to carry on studying. It was like he protected me from the pressure from friends and relatives about marriage.*

Ladi's father encouraged her to aspire to great educational heights, which made her academic career possible, notwithstanding the counter-pressures of societal expectations for girls and women. Nana shared a story that is similar in respects,

although she has not been as materially privileged as Ladi who comes from a wealthy family. Nana explained that her father's decision to sponsor her education was a huge source of encouragement, not least because she knew very well how little his income was. She continues to draw strength and encouragement from this, even though

> *the sacrifice was too much and it was painful to watch him struggle and sell things to make sure he supported me. My father was not educated, but he knew the value of education […] he had so much faith and belief in me and that has really driven me to continue to strive to succeed. (*Nana, Senior Lecturer, Business Administration)

Nana spoke of how it was a great relief for her father and for herself when she was offered a scholarship to support her Master's qualification. She implied that the scholarship was due to her hard work, inspired by her father's encouragement and his willingness to prioritise her education among the family's expenditure. Nana experience illustrates a point made by Van De Werfhorst, Sullivan and Cheung (2003), among others, that opportunity to pursue education to the highest level is greater for individuals with family financial support, unless there is access to scholarship funding.

Grace, a Senior Lecturer in Sociology, spoke about her father, who is himself an academic, and how pleased he has been that at least one of his children has opted for the same career. She felt that it did not matter to him his daughter has followed him and not one of his sons. Grace spoke about how her father supported her decision to become a lecturer and how she continues to benefit from his assistance and advice.

> *When I decided to become a lecturer, he was not surprised but he was very happy. My PhD was not an easy ride, but he was very supportive: he read all my draft chapters and we discussed them.* (Grace, Senior Lecturer, Sociology)

Grace referred to the mentoring role her father continues to play, as an academic much more senior to her in age, years of experience and status, and how he continues to assist her. She spoke of having had unrealistic expectations about a university career when she was younger – what it would involve, what it could offer - and how her father's role as mentor had made her expectations more realistic. He was open and honest about how academia works. For example, he did not hide from her the fact that, as much as the quality of teaching is important, the number and quality of

research publications in practice is considered more relevant for promotion. Moreover, Grace said it was from her father that she had learned that in the university world

> *is not just how much of your stuff you know, but also how much of the rules of the game you know. There is a lot of politics here, too much politics, in fact everything is politics, the hours you teach, the lecture rooms you are allocated, the money you get for research [sighs], I can go on and on …*
> (Grace, Senior Lecturer, Sociology)

Such insights appear to support findings from the literature on the importance of mentoring and how it enhances 'insider knowledge', productivity and progression among groups qualifying in the academic profession (e.g., Nick, 2012 and Thomas, 2014, both of which focus on Global North contexts). Thomas argued that when mentoring is positive and effective, it can enable younger academics to access informal insights about the rules of progression from people who have been in university academic employment for some time and have advanced through the career structure. Certainly, Grace stressed the positive impact of her father's support on her decision to follow in his footsteps. She insisted that having an academic as a role model and mentor, always willing and ready to offer professional and expert advice as well as personal support, encouraged her to strive for academic excellence and continues to boost her career. It is noteworthy, however, that not all female academics have relatives in senior positions who are willing and able to act as informal mentors, and this may negatively impact their progression potential within academia. For example, Nnabuike *et al.* (2021) stress that access to mentors in academia can help new academics build capacity and contribute to career success. This goes to show how women can be disadvantaged in multiple ways and how gender may intersect with other factors to shape women's experiences.

Also much has been written in the Global North regarding how mentoring can support the progression of women in traditionally male fields. Dennehy and Dasgupta (2017) argued that professional women who have access to mentors experience more belonging, motivation, higher levels of retention and greater career aspiration. The implication is that those women without access to informal mentoring miss out on valuable knowledge, and may be less likely to succeed in their academic careers and/or face greater obstacles in advancing. This can lead to unequal and under-

representation of women in academia and can perpetuate gender-based inequalities. Informal mentoring also has the potential to reproduce power and privilege. This is acknowledged in studies that are otherwise very positive about mentoring. Younger women qualifying as academics may be vulnerable to bullying or sexual harassment, for example (Thomas 2014).

Many stories of fathers' support for academic career were notable among the younger women in my study. Some of the older of the women reported little or no parental support when they embarked on their career, and some were very much discouraged. An example is Maggie, an associate professor of sociology, who spoke about how her parents had tried to dissuade her from higher education. She recalled how her mother could not understand why it was necessary for her to spend so much time qualifying for one degree after another. Maggie suggested that, while her mother was not educated herself, she was not against the idea of gaining an education. The issue was rather that

> *[s]he just did not like the idea of her daughters being ambitious with their studies or career. There is nothing she did not say or do to try to discourage me from going back to school. To her, even if I was bent on going back to school or pursuing a career, it was better to leave it till the children were all grown.* (Maggie, Associate Professor, Sociology)

Maggie felt guilty every time her mother urged that she should leave her studies until her children had grown up. Her own point of view was that the only purpose in that would be attaining a degree purely for the sake of it, rather than to attain employment and develop a career. Maggie noted that the support of her husband reduced the pressure that she felt her mother and other elderly female relatives were exerting on her to defer her studies.

> *If my husband had not supported me, it would have been very hard to ignore the stereotypical comments. Honestly speaking, I lived constantly with the fear that if any of my children turned out bad, people would not hesitate to put all the blame on me. But thank God, they are doing OK. I have not lost. Many of our women tell themselves that they can wait for all the children to grow up before returning to school and at the end of the day they just get a degree for*

the sake of getting it, or they just forget about it. (Maggie, Associate Professor, Sociology).

The importance of fathers' support for daughters' education was apparent in the interviews, particularly those with the younger research participants. The most obvious explanation is that Nigerian society remains strongly patriarchal (Makama, 2013). Thus, the supremacy of the father within the home is representative of wider society, while mothers tend to have responsibility for their daughter's future domestic status; that is to say, their marriageability and ability to keep a home (Ojobo, 2008). This is a possible explanation for Maggie's difficult experience with her mother. Beyond the financial and psychological support that the women in my study reported from their fathers, most also referred to help and support from parents and extended family as vital for relieving them of their domestic duties such that they were able to continue academic employment. Interviews reveal some of the various forms that support took.

[H]aving one relative or the other around to help with the kids and housework means I can allocate some of the time spent on housework to my research. (Ayo, Assistant Lecturer, Primary Education Science)

Some of my younger cousins are very helpful when they come over during the holidays. There's always someone visiting from my husband's side or mine and I use the opportunity to get on with my work. (Chika, Lecturer, Accounting)

[M]y mother always brings one relative or the other; it is not possible to do all the work at home yourself and still have time for this job. (Alma, Associate Professor, Sociology)

They [children] come with their own baggage and the dynamics in the home are different, but how else would I have managed when my kids were younger? Now at my age, I don't bother with the nitty gritty, I just supervise. Thank God for large families and relatives. (Maggie, Associate Professor, Sociology)

Family responsibilities and the gendered division of labour within households are factors that constrain women's career advancement opportunity in most countries

(Seemann *et al.*, 2016). This is particularly true for women with young children and when public provision of childcare is limited or non-existent. Many of the women in my study in Nigeria thought access to some form of domestic help, especially from family members, had a positive impact on their working lives and chances of career progression. At the same time, many of the married women referred to their male spouses as providing little or no support with domestic work. Older women in particular were likely to give this type of account; younger women who were married/co-habiting were more likely to refer to some degree of domestic work-sharing. Spousal support of course can take more forms than assisting with cooking or cleaning. It is interesting, however, that most of the married women interviewed argued that being married to a supportive man is key to building and maintaining a successful career, but only a few referred to a spouse assisting with domestic work.

6.2.2 Marrying Well

A central theme in debate is the potential of marriage to make or break a woman's career. In this chapter so far, the importance of family and in particular fathers' support for enabling daughters' academic careers has been considered. Now the discussion turns to the influence of husbands and male partners more broadly in relation to their spouses' career and its development. Before turning to the findings from the interviews and the data analysis, it is important to clarify the parameters of the investigation.

At first glance, 'marrying well' may suggest a concern with the experiences of married academic women alone, but in fact it includes the experiences of unmarried women in my study. In the process of assigning preliminary codes to the data and searching for themes and patterns, this theme was first defined as the importance of spousal support. With further analysis, it became apparent that single women made remarks within the interviews relating to marriage. As I considered the patterns within the data, the theme was redefined to include codes relating to the ways in which marital status was relevant to the pursuit of an academic career, such as the career boosting and/or disabling potential of being married, as well as comments from unmarried women regarding marital prospects and wishes.

As noted in Chapter 5, while many women interviewed in this study stressed how fortunate they were to have the support of their husband in respect to their career, the resounding message in their stories was that it is difficult for a woman, especially in Nigeria, to build and maintain a successful career in any field without a supportive

partner. This is a common challenge that many women face, not just in Nigeria but in many other countries as well. Despite advances in gender equality, traditional gender roles and expectations around care-taking and domestic work still have a significant impact on women's ability to succeed in their careers. A lack of support from a partner can make it even more difficult for women to balance professional and personal responsibilities, which can negatively impact their career advancement (Wani, 2023). Also, the narratives of the unmarried women in this study suggest that while the social expectations and premium attached to marriage put them under pressure too, that pressure is mediated by the fact that they are aware that making the wrong marital decision could be detrimental to their wellbeing and the progress of their careers. These findings about the importance of spousal support resonate with ongoing academic conversations about spousal support (Rosenbaum and Cohen, 1999; Dickson, 2020; Ayentimi and Abadi, 2022; Wani, 2023).

> *I married a very educated and supportive man, else I would not have returned to school.* (Eloho, Senior Lecturer, Accounting)

> *We argue a lot about his laziness when it comes to helping out around the house, but my husband has been a constant source of encouragement.* (Ayo, Assistant Lecturer, Primary Education Science).

> *He is a typical African man when it comes to housework, but he is very willing to pay for the help and thank God his income means we can afford the domestic help we need, so I am not overburdened with housework.* (Bola, Senior Lecturer, Sociology)

> *My husband has always been a sounding board, always there to listen, offer advice and encouragement […] he is my cheerleader and I'm very grateful for that he [is] supportive of my career.* (Chika, Lecturer, Accounting)

Critically analysing these stories above, I argue that male spouses are less willing to do the 'dirty work' because of patriarchal norms and expectations around gender roles and the division of labour deeply entrenched in many societies, including postcolonial societies such as Nigeria. By enforcing strict gender roles that assign women to care-

taking and domestic work while men prioritize paid work outside the home, patriarchy privileges men and disadvantages women (Walby, 1990). Gender roles are often reinforced through socialization, media representations, and other cultural norms that shape people's beliefs and behaviours. As a result, men may be unwilling to support academic women with housework because they believe that this type of work is not their responsibility, and/or that it is not valued or important.

The importance of spousal support was also acknowledged by two of the unmarried women. In different ways, they spoke about the societal pressure to get married and how the quality of a prospective spouse was of great importance:

> *[A]s a single lady, the pressure to marry is too much, from family, pressure from friends, colleagues, especially the men always make one comment or the other reminding you that you are single [...] it is impossible to forget your singlehood, there's always a daily reminder here [in the university] and everywhere. The quality of marriage is very important for me and my career, I cannot just rush in because of the pressure.* (Naomi, Senior Lecturer, Computer Science)

> *I will not settle with an intellectually incompatible man […] our people say behind every successful man is his wife […] the man a woman is married to may also break or make her career.* (Ladi, Senior Lecturer, Maths & Statistics)

The importance of a supportive spouse was echoed throughout the interviews and there were generational differences in the form of support these women expected and received from their male partners. For the older women who reported spousal support, it was financial and psychological; for the younger women especially, it was mostly to do with household responsibilities. The older women academics in this study seemed to have no expectations that their husbands would help with domestic duties; in fact, one of the women considered it out of place to expect her husband who had worked so hard to support the family and her career financially to take up any domestic role:

> *He works very hard to provide for everyone in the family. Home should be a place of rest, not more work.* (Bola, Senior Lecturer, Sociology)

Bola spoke about how she owed her current position to the support of her husband who not only believed in her but encouraged her to go to university and supported her

financially all the way through. For Bola, her husband's financial support was key to ensuring that she didn't have to drop out of school for any reason. Although she spoke of how difficult it was to study and build her career with kids, she was privileged to be able to afford domestic help and other live in relatives with the support of her husband:

> *the help is important. They cannot play your motherly role for you, but the workload at home is significantly reduced […] I know some men are very particular about whose food they eat, for instance they insist it must be prepared and served by their wives, but no, my husband is different, he has always been very understanding and knows that I cannot do all the work myself, it is not possible, even if I wasn't a career woman.*

Others spoke about how their husband's belief in them and understanding gave them a confidence boost that has remained vital ("*he has always been supportive from the beginning, financially and otherwise*", Eloho, Senior Lecturer, Sociology). Only three participants spoke about how their husbands helped with school run and shared domestic responsibilities. In fact, for one among them, Chika, her husband never helped at home and preferred instead to socialise after work. Chika spoke of how she negotiated to ensure he pulled his weight: "*it made no sense that we both work fulltime, but he does nothing at home. We both contribute financially, I demanded he played his part".* When probed further, Chika spoke about the tensions and conflict she had to contend with in getting her partner to share domestic responsibilities.

> *Of course it wasn't easy, but if society has said that women's place is in the home and I'm out there building a career, doing something we are told women cannot do, isn't [it] obvious that men can also go against these unfair rules? Initially he reluctantly agreed to do the school runs and help out with homework, then slowly began to appreciate the value and difficulty involved with trying to balance work and family demands. I believe we should not let men go scot-free, as working wives and mothers we must demand the sharing of domestic responsibilities.* (Chika, Lecturer, Accounting)

Chika's narrative illustrates how gender relations in Nigerian households are changing, albeit slowly. Younger women with career ambitions find ways to negotiate the sharing of domestic responsibilities. In the current economic climate, the 'sole' male

breadwinner model is gradually eroding, and women are now taking up some of the financial responsibilities in the home. It is also becoming increasingly difficult for families to afford paid domestic help, which means the domestic work is solely the responsibility of the woman. Young women are increasingly demanding their spouses' support with domestic responsibilities to be able to balance fulltime employment and family responsibilities. As more women enter the workforce and attain higher levels of education and career success, they may also be seeking more balance in their personal lives (Zimmerman and Clarke, 2016). This could include a desire for their partners to share household duties and child-rearing. If a partner is unwilling or unable to meet these expectations, it could lead to conflict and strain on the relationship. In fact, the rising divorce rate in Nigeria has been termed the "quiet revolution" (Searcey, 2019). Although divorce is a complex issue with many contributing factors, including cultural norms, economic challenges, and individual personalities and values, the increase in divorce rates in Nigeria could also be partly due to changing gender roles and economic pressures. Notably, that even when domestic responsibility is shared, women still carry much of the burden and this is reflected in the stories presented earlier in this chapter, and below.

> *[A]s it is, the responsibilities are so much, I never run out of my to-do list but it helps a lot that he takes some of the burden. (*Ayo, Assistant Lecturer, Education*)*

Sharing domestic responsibilities can be a source of conflict in dual income families in Nigeria, as in many other parts of the world. When both partners work outside the home, they may struggle to balance the demands of work and family life, and this can lead to tension and disagreement over household chores and responsibilities.

Additionally, cultural norms and expectations can be a source of conflict when it comes to household responsibilities. Some men may feel uncomfortable taking on certain tasks traditionally seen as women's work, while some women may feel pressure to conform to traditional gender roles even as they pursue a career. It is important to note that divorce rates in Nigeria are still relatively low compared to countries in the Global North, such as the US and Britain (Clark and Brauner-Otto, 2016), possibly because divorce is stigmatised in Nigerian culture. Thus, it is carefully

avoided by many women, including professional women like Chika, who instead find ways to cope and negotiate sharing of domestic duties. For many of the women in my interview group, the mere fact that their husbands consented to their careers in the first place was a sign of his support, which was not only crucial in the formative stages of their career but continues to be vital. For these women, support from spouses in the form of financial backing, enthusiasm about career opportunities, providing reassurances in challenging moments as well as encouragement to take up new roles and challenges have been crucial to their careers.

Walby's (1990) concept of public and private patriarchy is useful in explaining the contradiction of individual male support (fathers, spouses, male colleagues) for the careers of women within patriarchal society such as Nigeria. According to Walby, public patriarchy refers to the gender inequalities and power imbalances that exist in the public sphere, manifested through practices such as gender pay gaps, under-representation of women in senior positions and discriminatory policies. Private patriarchy, on the other hand, refers to the gender inequalities and power imbalances that occur within the private sphere, primarily in the family personal relationships. Walby's work furthers our understanding of how patriarchy operates in societies and how it intersects with other forms of inequality. For example Walby (1990) introduced the idea of "patriarchal contradiction," which refers to the ways in which different aspects of patriarchy can conflict with one another. In the context of individual male support for women's careers reported in this chapter, there can indeed be a patriarchal contradiction at play. While on the surface individual men may express support for women's careers and equality, this support can sometimes coexist with underlying patriarchal norms and power structures that limit women's opportunities and reinforce gender inequality. According to Walby (1990), this contradiction might manifest in many forms. For instance, some men may publicly express support for women's careers and gender equality as a way of appearing progressive or to conform to changing societal norms. However, this symbolic support may not necessarily translate into concrete actions that challenge the structural barriers women face in the workplace. Similarly, men may support women's careers on an individual basis but resist broader efforts to challenge gender norms and achieve systemic change. This can lead to tokenism, where a few women are allowed to succeed while the overall gender hierarchy remains intact. Male support for women's careers, as revealed in this

study, may be limited to the public sphere, where they recognise the importance of equal opportunities and benefits for women. However, this support may not extend to challenging the power dynamics within the private sphere, where traditional gender roles and expectations are often reinforced. Some men may support women's careers in the public sphere only because it aligns with their own interests and benefits, enhancing their overall economic productivity or improving their own reputations, while maintaining the privileges and power associated with private patriarchy.

Patriarchal societies often emphasize male control and dominance. In this context, some men may support women's careers as long as they perceive themselves to be in control or as long as women's success is framed as being contingent on male approval or benevolence. As women make strides in their careers, some men may feel threatened by the shifting power dynamics and respond with resistance. This can manifest as subtle forms of discrimination, microaggressions, or efforts to undermine women's achievements. This particular contradiction is reflected in the difficult marital experience of Maggie (Associate Professor, Sociology). Finally, men may face social pressure to demonstrate progressive attitudes in the public sphere due to evolving societal expectations, but within the private sphere, where social norms and traditional gender roles are deeply entrenched, they may conform to patriarchal norms. In summary, public and private patriarchy are useful lenses for understanding high male support for women's careers in patriarchal societies like Nigeria. While men may express support for gender equality in the public sphere, the persistence of private patriarchy and traditional gender roles can create a contradiction. Addressing this contradiction requires challenging and transforming both public and private spheres. It is therefore important to recognize that individual support for women's careers by some men does not necessarily indicate the eradication of patriarchy or the absence of gender-based discrimination and inequality.

Individual male support may also be a potential indicator of the beginning of a breakdown of patriarchy. However, it is important not to assume that the isolated examples of some of the women academics in this study indicate a comprehensive breakdown of private patriarchy. Patriarchal systems are deeply ingrained and can persist even in the face of surface-level changes. Achieving lasting and meaningful gender equality requires sustained effort across multiple dimensions of society,

including legal, economic, cultural, and interpersonal realms. Even as changes occur, there can still be tensions and contradictions within patriarchal systems that need to be addressed to achieve true gender equality. Below, I discuss interview findings relating to the ways in which the lack of mentors and role models present challenges for the career advancement of the women in my study.

6.2.3 Informal Mentors and Networks

Mentoring is a key factor affecting women's career trajectory and lack of effective mentoring has been argued to contribute to the gender gap in academic career outcomes in the US (Blood *et al.,* 2012). Mentoring can be both formal and informal (informal mentoring relationships are those which evolve naturally from shared admiration, values and interests). Many women in this study lack appropriate mentors. Responses suggested a lack of formal coaching or mentoring schemes for students and for staff in universities in Nigeria. However, some of the women in my interview group, particularly those in the public universities, spoke of how they were helped by their informal mentors. It is also important to note that, in all cases where the help of a mentor was mentioned, the mentors were men. It seemed that the women in this study are typically obliged to rely on male mentors. Chika spoke of how she avoided many senior male lecturers because of their propensity to demand sexual favours, but also mentioned a few men in the department she could trust and ask for advice. She speaks below about informal mentoring, which she considers has helped her career:

> *they cannot all be trusted, but there are some responsible and diligent ones, a few I can relate to as friends and brothers […] Prof has always supported me, he knows how the system works and he advises me accordingly.*
>
> (Chika, Lecturer Accounting)

Eloho, who worked as a library assistant before enrolling at the university, spoke of her access to informal mentor support:

> *Because of how close I was with some of the senior lecturers and professors, I was nicknamed 'prof'. I accompanied him [my mentor] to some of his lectures, but to help distribute course handouts to his students. I was an apprentice without even knowing. He encouraged me to enrol for my Masters […] with his connections, I got the assistant lecturer job here and the rest is history.* (Eloho, Senior Lecturer, Accounting)

Grace, whose father is also an academic, spoke about the positive impact of having informal mentors. She knew it was important to seek out and network with experienced academics within her own department to gain valuable insider knowledge:

> *He [my mentor] was very supportive even with his very busy schedule, possibly because he and my father are very close and have worked here for such a long time. He always made jokes about how I will struggle with progressing here if I continue to accept every task thrown at me […] he tells me the truth about how this system works, the real rules, not the ones they write in your official contract.* (Grace, Senior Lecturer, Sociology*).*

Grace recalled the earlier stages of her career with a lot of humour and credits her informal mentors and networks for enabling her to learn the rules and progress quickly:

> *When I first started here, I was always willing to take onboard many roles outside my main duties. I took on many ad hoc projects. In fact, I made myself readily available to help cover absent lecturers' sessions, even though I had a big workload myself. I always left here very late at night with a lot of unfinished work. Prof made me understand that to progress here, learning to respectfully turn down some request is key.* (Grace, Senior Lecturer, Sociology).

To some of the women, having a mentor meant they had useful advice about research and publications.

> *You get good advice from them about where to publish and how, very useful and helpful information.* (Oby, Lecturer, Political Science)

> *Everyone is busy here, but if you are lucky to find someone who is willing to support you, my supervisor' experience has been very helpful. I'm grateful*

> *that he is willing to answer some of my naïve questions.* (Ayo, Assistant Lecturer, Primary Education Science)

It is clear from the interviews that networking and informal mentoring opportunities had to be initiated by the women. It is also noteworthy that many of the senior academics these women looked to for support were men. When I noticed this pattern of reliance on male support and probed further, my interviewees suggested that women were likely to trust the advice and support of those who were not in direct competition with them. Nneka, for example, mentioned that her senior male colleagues are well established in their careers and more likely to share career-boosting information than those in the same position as her and women like her.

> *Sometimes my colleagues may feel that sharing information may make them lose out on the opportunity, but prof […] he has been here so long, he has his two feet on the ground. He is more secure in his position because of his many years of experience.* (Nneka, Senior Lecturer, Geography).

Nneka's comment is indicative of the ways in which male-dominated academia continues to reinforce and reproduce gender inequality. Since women are a minority, particularly where it matters most (i.e., in senior and leadership positions), early career academics are more likely to seek guidance and support from men as they seem to be more successful. Kalbfleisch (2000) argued that both men and women tend to prefer mentors of the same sex. However, there are fewer women in higher level positions available to mentor women. Moreover, a commonly cited barrier associated with women's mentoring is that, because women have less power and influence in the workplace than their male counterparts, women mentors are possibly perceived as less able to propel a protégé to career success (Hale, 1995). Nneka reflects this.

It is also illustrative of the system that it pits women against each other as they see other women as competitors rather than people with whom they can collaborate. These narratives indicate how women rely on informal mentoring from older male

colleagues who have more experience in academia. However, they seemed more likely to rely on the men in their departments for informal advice.

While these informal mentoring relationships are important for women, the extent to which they are effective in boosting women's capacity to achieve their long-term career goals are questionable. One common element in the dominant approaches to networking is the importance of understanding the realities of the mentees (Hawkins, 1980; Whitmore, 1980). It is well acknowledged within the literature as well as throughout the interviews that the realities for academic men and women are drastically different. Academic women must contend with a lot of limiting social expectations and responsibilities. This raises questions of how effective informal advice, suggestions and guidance can be when it comes from mentors who can barely understand or relate to the realities of their informal mentees. Chapter 8 makes some recommendations on improving formal mentoring for female academics. In the section that follows, interview data relating to the career challenges of academic women are discussed and analysed.

6.3 Career Challenges

> *There is the problem of being in very small minorities functioning in a male environment. They suffer from isolation and exclusion from their male colleagues, and challenges to their authority from male students. They have fewer support systems, with few role models or mentors, and little access to communication networks…The majority become convinced that the concept of a women academic is problematic. This leads them to put pressure on themselves to perform better than male colleagues, and to avoid being identified with other women.* (Bagihole, 1993: 431)

The quote above perfectly captures the experiences of the academic women in my interview group. Analysis of the interview data revealed multiple that women's career progression is seriously impacted by the tensions associated with family caring responsibilities. This is discussed in the section that follows.

6.3.1 Family Responsibilities

A common theme that resonates within the literature on academic women in both the Global North and South is the tension women experience in combining academic work with family care. In line with feminist perspectives, I argue that the women in this study, like many other African women, face greater pressure than men because of the gendered division of labour within the home. Women are saddled with the greatest

share of responsibility within the family; not only are they tasked with the responsibility for successfully running the home, but they are also blamed when things go wrong. Many of the women in my study are not only burdened with family responsibilities, but must also bear the emotional burden, feelings of guilt and a constant fear of failing in their personal and family lives. Many of the women I interviewed seemed conscious of the fact that their careers could be blamed for any failures and mishaps on the domestic front. This impacts many of the choices they make and contributes to the slow progress of their careers. These findings are not new. Adebayo and Akanle (2014) argue that, due to traditional family roles and other roles ascribed to women, their academic careers progress slowly or stagnate. For example, Rita struggled to fight back tears as she recalled the loss of her child:

> *It was hard, I blamed myself, my mother-in-law was the most insensitive, even though my husband never blamed me, I somehow felt he thought it was my fault too […] even in death, our society is very cruel to women and even more cruel to working women […] but it could have happened to anyone, even a stay-at-home mother*. (Rita, Senior Lecturer, Geography)

Rita did not go into great detail about her loss and in line with feminist research principles, I decided not to probe further, leaving it to Rita to decide how much detail she was willing to share. Rita spoke about how the guilt affected her personally and professionally. Her story is a perfect example of the constant fear and guilt professional women in Nigeria must contend with. Okeke-Ihejirika (2003) argues that Nigerian professional women must carefully negotiate their choices and potential social threats as they navigate their careers. Regardless of their level of education and professional status, their aspirations must not be seen to impede their marital and childcare obligations. And as Achebe (1981: 7) points out,

> *Nigerian society has prescribed to the woman the narrow roles of helpmate and mother[…] this restriction is for all women, whether educated or not. I say this because even for the educated women, whose aspirations and awareness have been raised (whatever demands her newly acquired status make on her), society persists in the expectation that she gives her traditional role primary focus. In fact, where she plays a role outside the family, the double message is*

'go ahead, provided that you do all the cooking, look after the children and carry out all your traditional duties credibly'.

Women's primary roles as mothers and caregivers are considered more important than any other role they perform, and it seems they must pay a high price for deviating from societal norms and expectations. For Rita and many other women in this study who were socialised as young girls to believe in the primacy of their domestic roles, the fear of failing in their most important jobs limits their career ambitions and choices:

> *I started my PhD about 12 years after my MSc, because I got married right after my masters and had 4 children within that 12 year period […] so for over 12 years, I was stuck in one position. I could not make up my mind […] after my first child, I wondered, should I go, should I wait? […] 12 years and 4 children later, I was still asking same question, to go or not to go.* (Nana, Senior Lecturer, Economics).

Nana's narrative reveals the way in which childcare responsibilities can cause women's careers to stagnate. Alma, Bola and Chika shared similar stories of being held back, consciously or unconsciously:

> *The most difficult time for me was when the kids were young. I was always thinking about, what if? What if something happened because I was away, what if they don't turn out fine, will my career be worth it? (Alma, Associate Professor, Sociology)*

> *[I]t's a big struggle. A big big struggle. I want to be successful here, but it comes at a great cost. I'm still a senior lecturer and it looks like I will retire at this level but am I content? Yes, I am. I cannot educate the future generation here while neglecting my own. Charity, they say, begins at home.* (Bola, Senior Lecturer)

> *[W]e cannot have it all, there are compromises we must make, I try to be reasonable. At this particular time, travelling away for a long period is risky, my kids are still little. It means I cannot attend every conference, I cannot always put in a paper. There is the option of sending them to boarding schools, but what if something goes wrong?* (Chika, Lecturer, Accounting)

The fact that many of the women make compromises that slow their career growth must not be interpreted as lack of ambition or agency on their part: these women find ways to confront their fears and take risks. The stories below are indicative of the ways in which women still make career-boosting decisions, despite societal expectations.

> *[B]y the time I finally decided and got the scholarship, my husband was sceptical […] he was not going to move abroad with me […] he was not going to stay with the children. If I had to go, I had to find a way to take the kids. I eventually decided to go and it caused a lot of tension in the marriage, but I had to finally do it […] my mother stepped in and helped with three of the children and I travelled with my last one who was still very young […] even though I was married to this man, our children were my complete responsibility to care for. I thank God all went according to plan.* (Nana, Senior Lecturer, Economics)

> *I remember when I was trying to complete my master's degree. Whenever I had exams and had to leave my baby at home, I insisted my husband stayed home. The baby was too young and I didn't feel comfortable leaving him alone with a nanny. It helped with the guilt.* (Chika, Lecturer, Accounting)

In Nana's case, having children certainly meant that her career progressed very slowly. These findings find support in the Global South literature, which suggests that African women carry an unequal share of domestic responsibility. In line with patriarchal ideologies, children bear their father's name but the responsibility for their upbringing and care rests primarily on women. This is the same for all women, whether in formal employment or not. Women who pursue careers in the formal economy must find ways to balance the conflicting demands of home and work life and many times, women make sacrifices, to the detriment of their careers (Mama, 2003; Ojejide *et al.,* 2006). All the married women in my interview group spoke about the challenges and difficulties associated with juggling the multiple roles they had to play. Most of the older academics, especially those with grown-up children, recalled the difficulties they experienced when their children were younger. Although most still support their older children, their responsibility is much less acute and they do not have to contend with the tensions and difficulties in terms of career decision-making that those with very

young dependent children must deal with. For the older women who may have fewer domestic responsibilities now, the burden of bearing an excessive load of care responsibilities in the early stages of their career has contributed to slow career progress. Amina spoke about how she completed her PhD in her fifties and how she now has time to travel for conferences without feeling guilty.

Even with no childcare responsibilities, women are expected to care for their husbands, who can sometimes be demanding. For example, Amina said,

> *When I was away for a conference last year and my mother-in-law was very ill, my husband wanted me to come back earlier than planned to help […] my husband is the first son, he felt it was his responsibility, plus the fear of what people will say about his wife not being around […] I stayed till the end of my conference […] but I had to be wise in dealing with the issue.* (Amina, Senior Lecturer, Library and Info Science)

Many others among my interviewees spoke of how they struggle to balance work and family demands.

> *[I]t is very stressful, kids, lectures, school runs, hospital runs, pregnancy, conferences, research […] [It is] very challenging.* (Chika, Lecturer, Accounting*)*

> *I have so many research ideas, so many, but I need to find the time. I'm still not sure how I fit my work here at the university and my family needs into 24 hours. I owe time everyday […] my lists are endless.* (Oby, Lecturer, Political Science)

> *[S]ome days I feel like it is possible to do everything at once, but the reality is that some things must wait. My career is important, the children are important, the family is important.* (Ije, Lecturer, Economics)

> *[Y]ou cannot focus only on one thing if you want to be successful. For me I know I have to manage all three, work, children and family. It is very, very challenging but I try to prioritise as I go.* (Ayo, Assistant Lecturer, Education)

> *[H]onestly, academic work is different, it is not the typical nine-to-five, it is endless and requires constant sacrifice here and there to get to the peak. The reality for us [women] is that some of us will have to wait till we have less responsibility at home to nurture any major plans.* (Uzo, Lecturer, Actuarial Science)

The narratives above summarise the challenges of combining an academic career with family responsibilities. The fact that academic work is challenging because it differs from other kinds of jobs was acknowledged throughout the interviews and throughout the literature (see e.g., Schuster and Finkelstein, 2006; Acker and Armenti, 2004). Many women in my study spoke about how working in a knowledge-based environment created expectations that contribute to the challenging nature of the job. Alma, for example, spoke of how academic work required a lot of sacrifices because academics are not only required to lecture and teach but also research, publish, and attend seminars. Many of the women spoke about how research and publication is not only expensive but also time-consuming. To cope with the conflicting demands of academic work and family responsibilities, women are forced to prioritise and while most women carry on with academic work, they accept the reality that progression may have to wait until they have fewer responsibilities.

6.4 Surviving in Academia: Coping Strategies

Despite the challenges that academic women are obliged to contend with as they navigate male-dominated academia and society, their resilience and positive outlook is inspiring. It was obvious throughout the research interviews that these women had found ways to cope, rather than looking to their institutions for support. Interview narratives revealed some of the strategies women employed to minimise the tensions, conflicts, anxieties, contradictions, and dilemmas they confront in their daily lives. They had a strong desire to achieve their personal, social and career goals. To understand how these women survive, I asked them how they have managed to maintain their careers. I asked women with children how they balance the conflicting demands on their time, and I asked others how they cope with advancing their career in a society that places greater value on marital status than professional achievements. These and many follow up questions were triggered by the fact that all the women in my research placed much emphasis on the tensions between their personal and professional lives.

I wanted to know why they were reluctant either to abandon a difficult and unsupportive working environment or their marital relationships, which added to the challenges they had to contend with in their careers. Most importantly, I was interested in understanding how they dealt with the complexities associated with the many roles they had to play as academics and as mothers, wives and women. From the answers and stories shared, three main strategies were identified. The first and most commonly cited was reliance on divine help and religious networks. A second fairly frequently cited strategy was what I call appeal to 'the power of time'. Third, most of the married women mentioned that having access to domestic help did a lot to strengthen their capacity to sustain their careers. Throughout the interviews all the women considered the help of divine forces to be more important than any other coping strategy. Their stories suggested that they strongly believed that it was only through God's help that they were privileged in the first place to pursue a career in a society that defines women's success in domestic terms. Although these strategies did not eliminate the challenges the women faced, they were instrumental in mediating the impact of the challenges. These strategies are discussed in turn below.

6.4.1 Divine help

All the women in my study spoke about the importance of their faith in both their personal and professional lives. Their narratives reveal how their faith and devotion to God keeps them positive and enthusiastic. Many of the women spoke about how their faith in God gives them the emotional stability required to successfully navigate their careers, run their homes and nurture their children. Some of the interviews provide excellent insight into the ways the women in my study drew positive energy.

> *I would not be here without God's grace. When everything gets too much to bear, I always remember to get on my knees and ask God for help. When people ask me how I manage, how I have come this far, I always give all the glory back to God.* (Alma, Associate Professor, Sociology).

> *I have never thought about quitting because with God everything is possible.* (Amina, Senior Lecturer, Library and Information Science).

> *Before I make any decision about my family and my career, I always seek God in prayer, I rely on his guidance, it makes all the difference.* (Ije, Lecturer, Economics

> *I don't joke with my Sunday worship, it is important to me, when the pressure of work and family weighs me down from Monday to Saturday. On Sunday no matter how tired I am, I get everyone ready, we head to church, my strength is renewed, God's grace covers so much.* (Maggie, Associate Professor, Sociology)

> *[Y]u know sometimes there's so many issues with my husband my children but I continue. I come here, focus on my lectures, attend conferences with so much on my mind. Without God's help [sighs], it would be difficult.* (Nana, Senior Lecturer, Economics)

The voices of these women indicate the immense strength and support drawn from their faith. Their faith and belief in a greater power gives them the resilience to stay focused when faced with challenges beyond their control. This is true for every single woman in my interview group. Every participant in one way or another spoke about

how God's support and guidance was the most important strategy in balancing the conflicting demands of their personal and professional lives. From their stories, it seemed that their faith in God was an important source of strength, helping them deal with disappointment in their careers and personal lives. When their applications for grants, promotion or scholarships were unsuccessful, they accepted it as part of the 'divine plan'. Their positive cognitive appraisal of every disappointing situation as ordained by God was a form of stress inoculation therapy (Miechenbaum, 2017) which ensured that they experienced less emotional stress and were able to advance with a positive outlook. Finally, their faith in God was also crucial in ensuring that they could cope with working hard and managing their time.

6.4.2 Hard Work and Time Management

Another important coping strategy cited throughout the interviews was time management. To many of the women in my interview group, conscientiousness, prioritising, planning and excellent time management are crucial to being a successful academic. It was stressed throughout the interviews that academic work is more challenging than most jobs in the formal labour market because of the need to keep their knowledge in their field up-to-date and relevant, and the different challenges of teaching, administrative duties, research, publications, conference attendance and engaging with the academic community. This was true for both married and unmarried women. Their narratives suggest that maintaining academic employment is not possible without good organisation and focus. Their stories reveal a culture among women to 'work harder', which supports findings in previous research in the global north that academic women lose sleep in order to keep up with academic work and family life (Acker and Armenti, 2002).

> *[C]ompleting my PhD was the most difficult challenge for me, it seemed impossible to write, lectures, the children, I had to create time, so I slept for 3-4 hours at night, that was the only way.* (Nana, Senior Lecturer, Sociology)

> *I have no choice here, you have to work hard, this job is not for the faint-hearted. Putting in the extra time is key.* (Grace, Senior Lecturer, Sociology)

[I]t takes good planning and working smart, I am very organised, everything is planned, from school runs to bedtime, everything is scheduled. (Chika, Lecturer, Accounting)

*[I]t can be tiring, sleepless nights are inevitable, but it pays off in the end, the publications are rewarding. (*Alma, Associate Professor, Sociology)

When I have a deadline for paper submissions, I wake up very early in the morning before the children wake up and I write, write, write. (Uzo, Lecturer, Actuarial Science)

There is too much to do, multi-tasking is very important, good planning, time is the most powerful tool, so I use it wisely. (Maggie, Associate Professor, Sociology)

These interview excerpts illustrate the importance of working hard and time management. To keep up with the demands of their careers and family lives, these women resorted to planning, sacrificing, creating time, managing, working long hours, working at odd times and borrowing family time either by sleeping late or waking very early. The sexual division of labour on the domestic front in Nigerian society make it almost impossible for women to commit to their careers without making sacrifices. The need to plan, work harder and sacrifice time was echoed throughout the interviews. Quina *et al.* (1998) in their research on the glass ceiling for academic women found that women in higher education have to work harder to prove themselves because their competence is often devalued. Also Deem and Ozga (1997) argue that, because universities are gendered, women must show outstanding abilities to gain recognition and promotion. Despite the time management strategy they adopted, women reported working longer hours to cope in male-dominated academia.

6.5 Conclusions

This chapter set out to address the second objective of this doctoral research study, which is to explore the factors that drive or delay women's academic career progression in Nigeria and the strategies female academics employ to navigate male-dominated academia. This chapter discusses and analyses interview findings on the experiences of academic women as they undertake academic work in Nigeria. Interview data revealed that women's careers tend to develop at a slower pace and are hindered by factors such as societal expectations, family care responsibilities and demanding workloads. These challenges were in some way mediated by career-enabling factors, such as family support, spousal support, and informal mentoring. Despite the difficulties and challenges the women faced, they found ways to cope and navigate a working environment in which patriarchal values are deeply entrenched. Working harder, time management and reliance on faith were coping mechanisms employed by many of the women in this study to navigate their working lives.

In terms of career-boosting factors, interview findings revealed a pattern of giving credit to external forces, such as parents, spouses or other significant persons. Spousal support was found to influence their current working lives positively. Academic conversations within the Global North and South suggest that spousal support is indeed spousal support is an important contributing factor to women's career success (Heikkinen and Lamsa, 2016; Yasmin and Husna, 2020; Wani, 2023). Many of the married women in my study share similar stories of financial support and encouragement from their spouses. However, on the domestic front, many women reported that their spouses were unwilling to share home and childcare responsibilities. Those who were financially privileged supported their wives by paying for and supporting a bevy of extended relatives who relieved them of the burden of domestic tasks, but supervising domestic work still fell largely on the women. It was therefore not surprising to find that family responsibilities were a significant career-disabling factor. Throughout the interviews, there seemed to be very little expectation for male partners to share domestic responsibilities. Only three early career academics, Chika, Uzo and Ayo, all in their thirties at the time of the interviews, spoke about sharing of domestic responsibilities with their male partners. Again, as noted in Chapter 5, men are often unwilling to do the 'dirty jobs'. In a patriarchal society such as Nigeria, men are socialised to accept the primacy of their role as providers and breadwinners as a result, men are more willing to take on leadership roles in their

spouses' life as a result. For academic women, this can be extremely challenging, because, coupled with fulltime academic teaching and research work, they are disproportionately burdened with domestic duties.

Consequently, societal expectations that place greater value on traditionally masculine traits and roles, such as being a breadwinner, than on traditionally feminine roles, such as being a homemaker, are reinforced. The implication of bearing the burden of domestic responsibilities coupled with excessive academic workloads is that women's careers progress slowly. The stories here suggest that women's experiences of academic employment involve a lot of 'coping' and 'adjusting' to fit within a system that makes no adjustment for women. The reality for the academic women in my study is that they must find ways to navigate and develop their careers. They often resort to simply working harder, thus conforming to existing structures and accepting the status quo of male dominance in academic employment.

CHAPTER SEVEN. EXPLAINING UNEQUAL OUTCOMES FOR ACADEMIC WOMEN IN NIGERIA

7.0 Introduction

In the last two chapters, some evidence useful for exploring the core research questions was provided. In Chapter 5, interview findings relating to the career history of the academic women in this study was unpacked. In Chapter 6, barriers and enabling factors impacting the women's career progression were discussed. As noted, women are under-represented in senior academic and senior administrative positions in Nigerian universities. At the time of this research, women made up only 24% of academic staff in Nigerian universities and only 15% of the professoriate. With this in mind, this research sought not only to explain their under-representation but also to explain their slow progress through the academic ranks. To understand women's promotional aspirations and plans, I was particularly interested in the women's perception of their promotion prospects and their experiences of applying for promotion. Drawing on interview data, this chapter explores the fourth research question: how can women's experiences explain the unequal gendered outcomes in academic employment in Nigeria? This chapter pulls together and builds upon interview findings discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 to provide an account of women's disadvantaged status and slow career progression in Nigerian academia. In Chapter 5, the nature of women's participation in academic employment and their journey into academia was explored. Chapter 6 focused on the factors that foster or stall women's academic career progress. The findings from these two chapters provide significant insights into the gender gap in academic employment. This study finds that even before women enter academia, they are systematically disadvantaged by feminine socialisation within a highly patriarchal social order, permitting limited opportunities for them and defining their success in domestic terms. Women's disadvantaged position is further fuelled within male-dominated universities, with institutional cultures and processes designed based on masculine ideals.

I argue that unequal gender relations combine with institutional practices to create subtle and overt barriers to women's participation and progression in academic employment. These barriers operate at all levels of the academic career hierarchy but for the women who took part in this research, these barriers were most intense at

senior lecturer level. I conclude that there are, firstly, institutional and, secondly, socio-cultural factors that contribute to unequal outcomes for women in academia.

7.1 Institutional Factors

Interview findings reveal an array of institutional factors hindering women's academic career progression in academia. In making sense of the ways in which institutional barriers contribute to the slow progress of women's academic careers, I particularly draw on the works of Burton (1997), Bagihole (2006) and Thornton (2008) from the Global North literature, and Mama (2003) and Ojejide *et al.* (2006) from the Global South literature. The main argument here is that institutional barriers operate through organisational practices that sets the masculine model of academic work as the norm. performance in academia is thus benchmarked against masculine standards that work in favour of men and to the detriment of women's careers progression. Interview findings revealed that the institutional barriers to women's progress in academic employment are not always obvious. Some of the women in my interview group spoke about the fact that no one is accorded special treatment and there is some level of equality and fairness in the allocation of duties in their departments. Currie *et al.* (2002), in a study of American and Australian universities, and Ojejide *et al*. (2006), in a study of Nigerian universities, each refer to this perceived equality and fairness as 'denial'. Although a few of the women maintained that they were disadvantaged by institutional arrangements regarding promotion, some of them felt that university management should not give any special considerations/favours to women. There was a sense that their slow progress in academia was somehow their fault own, because they were women and made different choices. These sentiments were unsurprising, since academia is perceived to be a merit-based institution, thus camouflaging the many ways in which it works to disadvantage women. Some of the women were not very conscious of the fact that standards are based on masculine ideals, which presents a problem for women for women's career aspirations. In terms of institutional factors, interview findings reveal a strong theme, unconventional career trajectories, this is discussed in the section that follow.

7.1.1 Unconventional Career Trajectories

A standard or conventional career path in academia is usually linear, beginning with a Bachelor's degree, postgraduate studies and a PhD, before progressing to a junior academic position. Within Global North literature, it is acknowledged that the academic career path is intolerant of unconventional career paths (Itzin and Newman, 1995; Baker, 2012). The linear pathway is the traditional model of entrance and progression for men in academia, whereas women are less likely to follow this pattern, tending instead to experience a disordered entry into, and progression through, academia. First, women tend to enter academic employment later than men, within disciplines that are predominantly female-dominated. For countries of the Global North, this has been identified as one of the critical contributory factors to women's slow progression in academia (Baker, 2012). Interview findings suggest that this was no different for the women in this study. Two of the women interviewed were early career academics, each in their early thirties; all other female interviewees described a 'disordered' path into academia, often beginning their career in a range of traditionally female occupations, such as nursing, primary and secondary school teaching or administration. Alma (Associate Professor, Sociology), who gained her postgraduate qualification overseas in Canada, where gender segregation in the education system is not as pronounced as in Nigeria, reported that entry into academia was delayed by migration and family responsibilities.

Many of the reasons cited by the interviewees for the decisions made in their early career aligns with those reported in the Global North literature (Cross & Linehan, 2006; Lyonette, 2008; Baker, 2012). Many of the women interviewed were drawn to traditionally feminine occupations due to factors that included inadequate career advice, gendered socialisation and expectations, accessibility, and notions of convenience (based on the assumption of their parents that these traditionally feminine occupations were compatible with home and family life). It appears that many of these women were 'accidental academics' who stumbled upon academia by chance or at the nudging of a significant other. Kachi's narrative below reveals the unplanned nature of the career decision-making processes:

> *[B]eing a university lecturer never crossed my mind, it was not one of my options – during my teacher training program, I felt I had done the right thing,*

*there were a lot of women, everybody felt it was a good training for us […] you know, not too time-consuming. (*Kachi, Senior Lecturer, Geography)

Kachi reveals women's channelling into traditional feminine career paths, in her case training to be a schoolteacher. This resonates with ideas about how gendered processes operates. Lawson (2007), for example, argues that "society is constituted by a set of positions into which agents, as it were, slot" (p.146). Most of the women in this study simply 'slotted' into occupations regarded as a natural progression based on their gender, age and ethnicity. The options available were based on societal expectations and with little or no active resistance, many of the women progressed into socially approved gender appropriate roles and educational paths.

It is apparent from the stories of these women that the path to academia is a not straightforward one. These women had no clear career map or plan and navigated their academic career journeys around their family lives. For example, Maggie shared her experience of having to plan her life around her children and family.

I always planned around my home and children, but my husband decides, and it is final, we go where he goes, we live where he wants to live, if his job takes him to [a particular] space, we either move with him or I stay behind and hold the fort. I made many sacrifices along the way before venturing into academia. (Maggie, Associate Professor, Sociology)

Ada, a senior lecturer, echoed a similar experience of having to organise her educational and working life around her family.

I spent nearly 20 years trying to get one degree or the other. I first enrolled at the university after three children and took breaks after my last two children, and I tell you studying and caring for five children was very challenging. (Ada, Senior Lecturer, Mathematics & Statistics)

When probed as to whether they had any regrets about the sacrifices made for family while their educational and career plans took a backseat, narratives revealed some generational differences in the acceptance of the expectations placed on women. For example Ada, in her early fifties, had this to say;

Not at all, I have no regrets at all, I am thankful that my children are all grown up and successful and I'm also fortunate to have come this far in my career, we cannot have it all, I would have regrets if I neglected my children to pursue a career. If my sacrifices mean that I end my career as a senior lecturer, I am content with that.

It was clear from the interview data that all the women had full knowledge of the societal expectations placed on women as the primary caregiver and homemaker, but not all the women accepted these expectations. Some of the younger women seemed to speak in protest of these expectations and thought of them as unfair. For example, Uzo, a Lecturer in Actuarial Science in her thirties, spoke about how she had to fit in her extra workload at odd hours to accommodate domestic and childcare demands, while her husband could just focus on his professional life without domestic distractions.

I don't think it is fair that we both have to work, and I'm expected to deal with all the concerns at home. Even when I try to ignore the distractions at home, I tend to feel guilty because of 'cultural wiring' but I'm doing my best to make sure that my son is raised differently. (Uzo, Lecturer, Actuarial Science)

Ayo, an Assistant Lecturer at the time of the interview, also in her thirties, echoed similar sentiments.

They tell us, we can now have it all, career, family, kids. I think it is misleading, very misleading. Many of my male colleagues can take up roles and explore research opportunities giving little or no thought to the home front.

Anugwom (1999) endorses the assertions of the women in this study. She argues that, for contemporary Nigerian women, marriage is still the goal, which most are drawn to for both personal and social satisfaction. It was obvious that, at the early stages of many of the women's lives, they found greater fulfilment in getting married and raising a family than in developing a career. A majority left jobs or opted out of education as soon as it conflicted with family life. For some of them, it was only in looking back and in considering how different their careers would have been if they had given much

thought, focus and time to planning their professional careers that they wished they had done things differently. For example, one of the women who is currently a senior lecturer referred to this, after pondering how long it took her to complete her PhD.

> *Planning is very important, knowing what you want early on and coming up with a plan is very important. But I planned based on what I knew back then, and my knowledge was limited, so were my plans.* (Chika, Lecturer, Accounting).

Other narratives below give examples of how women meander into academic employment:

> *I think enrolling for my undergraduate programme was a big step, I was noticed and offered a job. the push to study for my PhD was because I was already working here […] but if I was not offered the job after my degree, I would have ended up somewhere else*. (Eloho, Senior Lecturer, Accounting)

> *When marriage was not forthcoming, I decided instead of just waiting to further my studies and that is how I started working in my department immediately after my master's degree.* (Naomi, Senior Lecturer, Computer Science)

> *I had to take it in my stride, because my job as a lecturer was not something I considered early in life.* (Kachi, Senior Lecturer, Geography).

The voices above reveal the unplanned nature of women's academic career development; however, it should not be assumed that all the women interviewed were passive about the direction their employment took. Some of the interviewees spoke of being actively discouraged from pursuing career goals that were not deemed feminine. Ladi, one of the senior lecturers, aspired to train as an engineer, and actively discouraged through the constant reminder that the goal and expectation was that she should be a 'good' wife and homemaker. Rita was discouraged by her mother from studying medicine and encouraged instead to study nursing. She was also told that studying medicine would make her unattractive to potential suitors and persuaded to take up a more traditionally feminine option. Many of the women mentioned, in one

way or another, that they were conscious of being prevented from aspiring to careers that were perceived as too ambitious:

> *[M]y brother left for overseas to study medicine and every time I read the letters he sent home, my interest in studying medicine grew stronger and stronger […] I remember telling my mother I wanted to be like my brother and save lives, but she always rebuked me and discouraged me […] she said my brother is a man and can afford to spend long nights at the hospital […] but as a woman, who is going to look after your home? She encouraged me to go for nursing or teaching instead.* (Rita, Lecturer, Biomedical Science)

Rita's experience shows the nature of direct and indirect resistance that women were confronted with when their aspirations did not conform with traditionally acceptable feminine roles. From a very young age, these women had internalised messages about who they could be, how far they could go and what success means for a woman (Okeke-Ihejirika, 2003). These messages reinforced their sense of obligation and duty, which in turn limited their agency. The impact of the choosing a socially acceptable 'feminine' subject varied across the interviewees and it is not clear whether these choices enabled or hindered their career development. For some of the women, these choices translated into wasted time and unhelpful delays in commencing an alternative career path. For others, it provided a pathway into academic employment, especially in fields that were expanding into the higher education system, such as education, business studies, social work and nursing. The interview quoted below is an example of how some of the women felt their early career choices delayed their career development, as well as ways in which it provided possibilities to delve into other fields.

> *My parents really wanted me to become a nurse, especially my mother, she always said if she had the opportunities that were available to us [younger women] in her time, she would have trained as a nurse […] it was as if she was trying to relive her dreams through me. I was the first child and first daughter, there was pressure to be a 'good example' to all my younger ones, so I never tried for once to complain, I agreed and went on to train as a nurse […] they [my parents] were very proud […] I have always hated hospitals, I was never going to be a successful nurse […] it wasted my time. Oh! At least some of the*

experience and knowledge I gained helped me when [I] decided to specialise in sociology of medicine. (Hauwa, Senior Lecturer, Sociology).

Other interviewees reported similar experiences. Some, like Hauwa, felt the 'diversion' from their later, academic career path had taken too long, while others felt they had wasted only a few years. For all these women, however, the result was later entry into academic employment, sometimes not until their late thirties or even, as in Hauwa's case, their early forties. Late entrants to academia like Hauwa seemed to have completed their PhDs more rapidly than younger women among the interviewees, possibly because their children were older and more independent by the time they embarked on their studies. Interviewees indicated some difference in family attitudes towards female education, also age-related. Those who grew up between 1950 and 1975 reported that education was regarded as a huge privilege because of the gender differentials in access to it in that period. Women who grew up after 1975 reported that their parents were increasingly aware of the importance of female education. Across generations, however, and even in highly educated families, the choice of field for women was reported as very much based on deeply held stereotypes. Flo, an Associate Professor, grew up before 1975:

Growing up in Nigeria is very challenging for a woman […] as a young girl you don't need anyone to tell you that you were completely different from the boys, as you grow it becomes very obvious, that they [boys] can do anything and we [girls] are limited in the things we can do […] this applies to everything. Oh! […] From play, to school, to work […] in fact, the only place we were allowed to do anything was at home […] at home you are expected to be an expert in everything, but that's where it ends […] when the boys are playing, I'll be at home with mom learning one thing or the other […] learning how to tend to my home when they time comes. (Alma, Associate Professor, Sociology)

Alma had strong feelings about her experiences. She was intimating that the choice of a career for a woman is thought secondary and much less important than primary domestic goals. Irrespective of the career a woman 'chooses', the duties and expectations of a mother and wife are emphasised. The unplanned nature of women's decision-making combined with a delayed career start has meant that many women

are then not strategically positioned for promotion, which might explain why very few women progress to the professoriate before retirement.

7.2 Socio-Cultural Factors

7.2.1 Socio-Cultural Attitudes

Interview findings support some of the findings within the literature on women's employment in the Global South. Anugwom (2009) argues that growing educational and professional opportunities for women in Nigeria have done little to narrow the gender gap in the labour market, and factors such as the patriarchal nature of the institutions within the labour market, as well as attitudinal and psychological dispositions, have been cited as some of the reasons for this. Women's participation in employment has been fraught with obstacles and women have to contend with the fact that men see themselves as the rightful owners of the formal economic sector, a position supported by abundant socio-cultural practices and attitudes. Interview findings reveal that socio-cultural attitudes and dispositions are a major contributory factor to unequal outcomes for women in academic employment. This factor operates in two ways: the attitudes of academic women to work, and the attitudes of male academics towards female academics. In terms of the former, the narratives of the women in my interview group reveal that academic women approach their academic work with distorted attitudes detrimental to their career progress. Many of the women spoke of 'working hard' to prove themselves. This approach makes it difficult for women to turn down unrealistic work demands from their department. Many of the women mentioned, in one way or the other, that multitasking was important in getting things done. This was disturbing, in the sense that they felt it was important to prove their male colleagues wrong. When asked how they coped with the conflicting demands of academic work, family life and other work-related responsibilities, some of the responses quoted below indicate women's counter-productive attitude to work:

> *[A]part from managing and planning your time wisely, hard work is also very important, this work is demanding and many times I have to work late into the night to make sure lecture notes are up to date, marking and grade sheets are up to date.* (Chika, Lecturer, Accounting)

> *I had to work very hard to get to where I am now, when I was first appointed here, I was one of the very few women in the department and hard work is important to prove that we too are capable.* (Alma, Associate Professor, Sociology)

[M]any people have this belief that we [women] cannot build a successful home and hold a career at the same time […] it is not true, you shouldn't believe them – as long as you are determined, it is possible – it is difficult, but it is possible – I work hard and many of the women here too are hardworking, even with all the hard work, the men, our men are too proud to acknowledge that some women are better. (Grace, Senior Lecturer, Sociology).

These narratives illustrate the fact that academic women desperately need to show and prove that they are hardworking, determined, committed and capable of shouldering work-related pressure and stress. For many of the women, it seems that asking for additional support might cause them to be labelled incompetent, or that they are not determined enough to cope with the demands of an academic job. Interviews also revealed that academic women also contend with unfavourable socio-cultural attitudes from senior male colleagues, and sometimes students. The women in my interview group seemed to echo the fact that, regardless of their achievements and track record, senior male colleagues were determined to see them only as wives and mothers, or potential wives and mothers. Most of the women had encountered sexist academics who not only questioned their credibility but also downplayed their achievements as less significant than their traditional nurturing roles.

Often, women's achievements were attributed to the result of sexual relationship with a senior male colleague. Interview narratives suggested that their worth and capability was undermined and devalued, sometimes jokingly, by male colleagues. Intelligent and hardworking women who are successful in their academic pursuits are often criticised and wrongly accused of using sexual favours to solicit high grades or better positions. For some of the women, attitudes like this dampen their worth and discourages them from aspiring to greater heights; for others, it means that they settle at senior lecturer level and feel that aspiring higher that may be too ambitious. This resonates with the some of the findings in the literature in the Global South, that even as students, girls and women were expected to fail in exams, when their performance exceeded these low expectations, their success was often attributed to the fact that either the grading system was relaxed for female students or that they had exchanged sexual favours to gain unfair advantage. These negative attitudes

towards women as students are carried into their working lives and because of the intellectually challenging nature of academic employment, female academics must contend with being undervalued and undermined as knowledge producers as they navigate through a highly male-dominated environment. This negative socio-cultural attitude towards academic women combines with other factors discussed previously in this chapter to keep women down and out of academic employment. In the next section, I discuss how women's career progression is stalled by the burden of care.

7.2.2 The Burden of Care and Demanding Workloads

It's not a double shift: it's a never-ending shift. (Alma, Associate Professor, Sociology)

Almost all the academic women interviewed in this study agreed that their academic careers progressed at a much slower pace compared with their male counterparts because of societal expectation placed on them to perform a multitude of domestic roles alongside their academic work. Chapter 3 noted that this study adopts a broad definition of care to include care on the domestic front (time dedicated to ensuring that family members' physical and emotional are met) and within academia (the care of self, colleagues and students). Throughout the literature both in developed and developing nations, unequal responsibility for care has been repeatedly cited as a major contributory factor to the stunted career development experiences of women (Brooks, 2006; Probert, 2005; Skinner *et al.,* 2007; Hobbler *et. al.,* 2011; Durbin, 2012; Kiaye and Singh, 2013). In respect to the impact of disproportionate caring responsibilities on women's career progression, the findings of this research are not that different. Interview findings reveal that this is a major factor that hinders career progress. Within much of the Global North literature, it is suggested that those with fewer care responsibilities are much more likely to aspire to promotion. The findings of this study differ, in that the relative lack of caring responsibility also negatively impacts women's progression, although in differing degrees. This is largely as a result of the traditional African society's view of women. In Nigeria, women are expected to be caregivers, regardless of their position in the society: there is a deeply held belief that it is their primary responsibility. These societal views shape the attitudes, values and self-image of women. Interview findings reveal the extent to which a relative lack

of caring responsibility can psychologically impact women and deter them from seeking promotion for fear that they become too 'unfeminine' for a potential spouse.

For most of the women in this study, their career paths and progression were affected in one way or another by the unequal burden of care. Having family or childcare responsibility contributed to delays in career progression for most of them, and this is a factor that affects women more. African men and in particular Nigerian men (with a few exceptions) do not compromise their own career or personal interests to share or take primary responsibility for care. The burden of care placed on women, coupled with the cultural obligation to put family first, means that women are more likely to make compromises, usually at the detriment of their career aspirations. This is a very important factor that shapes women's capacity to build the capital necessary for career progression in academic employment.

7.2.2.1 Care of Family

As discussed in Chapters 4, twenty of the women who participated in this research were married at the time of the interviews**.** 21 had at least one child, while 15 women still had dependent children of school age or younger. Those who had no children of school age or younger had older children who relied on them to care for grandchildren. In line with existing research, the care of children greatly influences the possibilities for career development especially for mothers, including many of the women in this study. These women find themselves constantly negotiating social prescriptions. There appears to be a basic contradiction between what is expected of a successful academic and what is expected of a successful mother/woman. The mother/woman is expected to be nurturing and concerned with relationships and wellbeing, while the academic is expected to be independent and productive. These expectations are equally demanding, time--consuming, require great levels of sacrifices and trade-offs, at many at times one at the expense of the other. The interview quoted below gives the words of Kachi, who at the time of the interviews had no dependent young children of school age or younger. She recalls the difficulty she experienced in trying to compete her PhD with conflicting demands on her time:

> *[M]y PhD took several years to complete […] it was almost an impossible task, in fact at the time, I had all my three children close to each other […] one year*

between the first and the second and two years between the second and the last one […] at one time I thought it was better to put my PhD on hold until they all start school because it was just impossible to devote any time to it […] by the time they had started school, I realised that the work does not reduce, in fact it is more […] even when they can dress themselves up and feed themselves, I still had to help with the homework, resolve conflicts between the children and other relatives who lived with us […] it was like a trap, it doesn't stop. I had to start my PhD all over again by the time they got to secondary school, that was the only way. (Kachi, Senior Lecturer, Geography)

For all the married women with children like Kachi and most women in my interview group, the responsibility for care was assumed primarily by themselves, never shared equally between spouses. Not only did these women carry an unequal burden of childcare and domestic care, they seemed to have little or no expectation of their husbands or partners to share the domestic workload. For most of the older women, their husband's responsibility was limited to financial provision. The interview excerpts below reveals some of the ways in which women accept the burden of care as normal:

As a woman, you can do everything you can but you cannot escape housework. Infact, some of us are fortunate to have a family and a career at the same time, some women are not very lucky when it comes to marriage. I always count myself lucky […] my husband does not have any problem with my career […] as long as it does not interfere with my responsibility as a wife and mother […] but it is not that easy […] it has not been easy […] men cannot cope with the amount of burden we [women] bear […] and here you have to be professional, so you cannot bring your domestic troubles here [...] you leave them at home till you return […] but it is not just physical work, it is also emotional and otherwise […] somehow you learn to balance things..i just had to manage somehow […] we are responsible for the home, this part [a career] is just a bonus, you have to find a way to make sure the home is intact. Our culture doesn't celebrate a woman's career success if her home is in tatters. (Nnenna, Senior Lecturer, Sociology)

Nnenna shows how women accept the primacy of household care responsibility as normal. From a very young age, girls internalise stereotypes about gender roles, which might explain why most of the women hardly expect any support from their husbands with domestic work. This research reveals that Nigerian academic women tend to see housework as an obligation, a duty handed down to them by virtue of being women. In Nigeria, as discussed in Chapter 2, societal expectations and the institutionalisation of gender-based discrimination produced by colonialism cause sex differentials in every sphere of the society, beginning with the family. Through the socialisation process, the family perpetuates and reinforces the gendered division of labour and, by extension, gender discrimination. From a very tender age, girls are trained to be good housekeepers regardless of their level of education. Postcolonial feminist theories articulate the ways in which African women were colonised by both imperial and patriarchal ideologies. When education was first introduced in Nigeria, there were no plans to include girls; the extension of educational opportunities to girls was only a second thought. This may explain why African women perceive their access to education and a career as a privilege, one which must not be pursued at the expense of their domestic role. This also explains why most of the women, particularly the older ones, had no expectations that their husbands would help with family or housework.

However, some of the younger women spoke about the unequal burden of caring and domestic responsibilities with a lot of reservations. Unlike the older women, they expected some support from their partners, although they did not expect that the burden be shared equally. Many of these younger women had negotiated with their partners to relieve some of their domestic burdens, with differing levels of success:

> *[O]ur culture is very unfair to us [women]. I was encouraged to work hard and study hard to be successful, [but] how can you work hard with all the unrealistic expectations placed on us [women]? […] to make matters worse, they openly profess that no unfair advantage is given to anyone here […] everyone is promoted on merit, I think it is unfair […] because if I was absolved of all my household responsibilities like all the men around here […] there's a lot more that I can do.* (Nancy, Lecturer, Accounting)

> *[M]y husband now helps a little here and there at home […] I still do most of the work, but I had to demand that he helped […] on a typical day after work, he*

goes off with the boys, I have to deal with the chaos at home on my own […] I had to put my foot down, but in a very smart way. Oh! (Chika, Lecturer, Accounting)

Research reveals that the burden of care of family members slows women's careers. Repeatedly, the academic women in this study complained that Nigerian men are relatively free of these burdens as they are not expected to participate in exhausting domestic tasks. Nancy, Chika and other young women in this study managed to negotiate some degree of shared domestic responsibility and it seemed they were content with whatever help their husbands were able to offer. Their narratives suggest that asking for an equal share of family care responsibility would be unrealistic, because cultural norms permit men to completely ignore the burden of childcare.

It is also important to note that having children and family to care for did not mean that these women ruled out progression, but it was a major hindrance to career progression. Although they did not have to stop working fulltime or stop working altogether during their children's early years, it was a distraction from focusing solely on work. Although it might be argued that these women made the choice to focus more on their caring responsibilities at the expense of their careers, this was a highly constrained choice, that did not apply to men in similar household circumstances. Ije's, who had three young children of school-age, is just one example of the ways in which daily care of children impacts on women's ability to advance their careers:

[O]ur men are lucky […] they have nothing to worry about […] even though they have families, they have much more freedom and opportunity to focus on their work, because, you know, they have a wife at home who takes care of everything else for them […] It is not the same for us – we work just as hard as the men here and then we get home and we have even more work waiting for us […] even when you have help […] because of our culture, you are still trying to manage everything and worry about everything. It is not a double shift: it is a never ending shift. (Ije, Lecturer, Economics)

Ije's words illustrate how women are constrained in their academic careers because of a dominant cultural ideology that defines their primary responsibility as a wife, mother and helpmate. Thus, their careers were perceived as secondary and only

considered important if they were able to successfully run the home and raise responsible children. All the women in this study mentioned that their husbands had their own work responsibilities, which meant they were often absent; even when they were present, they were an added burden, an additional 'child' to cater to. For most of these women, care responsibilities ruled out any prospects of progression. Interviewees at Lecturer I & II level with childcare responsibilities were pessimistic about the chances of completing their PhDs when they considered the conflicting demands on their time. One of the senior lecturers, Ladi, voiced her concerns about her heavy teaching workload and demanding childcare responsibilities and how this hinders her from finding the time to intensify research output necessary for promotion. For the women in my interview group, responsibility for care was not limited to those with younger dependent children. Almost all the women, regardless of their marital status, had significant care responsibilities for adult children, partners, extended family members and/or parents at some point in their working lives that greatly hindered their progression. For example, Angie spoke about challenging experiences as a result of illness, which disrupted her career as she had to care for family members.

It is noteworthy that most of those who help these career women shoulder their domestic and childcare responsibilities are also women, showing how women can be both enablers and disablers of the progress of other women. Women are more likely to be an important source of paid and unpaid domestic help and in Nigeria, it is common to have extended family members who live in the households of financially privileged breadwinners (Mberu, 2007). Many of the academic women in this study are not only privileged by virtue of their profession but are also either middle class or upper class. For some, their access to paid employment gives them this privilege, and for others, it is marriage to wealthy spouses. Their status gives them access to both paid and unpaid domestic help, who are mostly women. Despite the importance of domestic work, it is often undervalued and underpaid (Cockburn, 1991). Feminist research has revealed the covert and overt ways in which domestic work reinforces women's subordinate status in private and public spheres, thus making domestic work more visible. Consequently, through a feminist lens, it is apparent that as women rely on the unpaid domestic support of other women, they become successful and progress their careers at the expense of other women. Thus, the mothers, grandmothers, sisters, sisters-in-law, aunts and other female extended family

members who toil for the success of academic women reinforce traditional roles. This is one example of the many social costs of career women's success and a medium through which patriarchy is preserved. By giving priority to men in private spheres and freeing them of caring responsibilities in the domestic division of labour, patriarchy creates many obstacles for women to advance in the public sphere.

7.2.2.2 Care of students and colleagues:

Women are not only burdened with the duty of care in the domestic front. The findings of this research align with research that suggest that women also do more of the care work within their roles as teachers and faculty members. Within the literature, it is well established that women are significantly more likely to be engaged in pastoral care, mentoring and administrative tasks than their male colleagues (Probert, 2005; Baker, 2013). Time spent supporting students and colleagues is costly as regards their career advancement. Men are more likely to spend that time engaging in career-building activities that increase the capital they need to advance. My interviewees suggest that women are more likely to make compromises and trade-offs that are detrimental to their career aspirations and progression. It seems that women feel that men can get away with being distant and disconnected from students and their welfare, but woman cannot. Some of the interviewees suggested, in one way or another, that they were being judged on different standards to their male counterparts.

There was also a sense from their stories that men were only jugded on their academic and professional skills, whereas students and the higher education community as a whole had expectations beyond academic and professional competencies. They are expected to be giving and selfless, seen as 'caring' and 'compassionate toward the academic and welfare needs of their students and colleagues. Women were more likely than men to take responsibility for student and staff welfare, ventures which are usually demanding and time-consuming and impact their capacity to engage in other career building activities. Also, time spent supporting student and colleagues is not considered vital in the promotion process and this operates to constrain and hinder women's chances of advancing in academia.

Again, the fact that women felt pressured to engage in 'caring' work in academia and the expectations placed on them can be linked to gender bias. Traditionally, in the African culture and in Nigeria in particular, different behaviours are accepted as appropriate for men and women. Women are expected to be 'warm' 'show empathy' in line with the motherly role they perform at home. This puts a lot of pressure on academic women to labour emotionally to meet these stereotypical expectations. Maggie describes the extent to which women engage in 'care' work in academia, as well as its impact on their academic careers:

> *[W]e live in a society where as women we have to constantly prove ourselves, to our colleagues, to our families and even to the student[s] here. When I first started as a lecturer, I was so eager to show them [my colleagues] that although I am a woman, I am equally as capable as my male colleagues […] now this gets you doing a lot of work that never stops […] I got myself into so many things, committees, societies – at some point you have to learn [to] decline some of these ad hoc jobs, because they just take [up] your time. You spend hours upon hours in meetings, sleepless nights producing reports, you spend all this time on something that is not appreciated […] but I think after some time here, you begin to understand that you have to [be] wise and strategic […] the students also expect you to go out of your way to support them [...] when they have problems with the male lecturers […] they come to you to help them solve it.* (Maggie, Associate Professor, Sociology)

The narrative above is a clear indication that women are assumed to be more inclined to engage in care work regardless of their aspirations. Most of the other women spoke about engaging in other 'non-academic' care/support related work at the university. However, only two women, including Maggie, mentioned, or seemed to be aware of the ways on which 'care' work impacted their ability to progress. Many of the women who spoke about it felt it was part and parcel of the occupation: that it was something they had to do as academics. Just as most considered their primary role as caregivers in home normal and divinely ordained, it seemed as if they tried to prove themselves as capable and successful female academics by virtue of their ability to multitask and engage in different tasks at the same time. Again, this does no favours for their career, but delays their career progression. Time spent engaging in pastoral care and

administrative tasks translates into lost time that could have been spent on activities that could boost their chances of advancing through the academic ranks, such as researching and professional networking, which are much more likely to help build the necessary capital required to be promoted in academia.

7.2.3. Lack of Time: Excessive Academic and Administrative Workloads

An important factor contributing to unequal outcomes for women for women in academia is excessive academic and administrative workload. All the women interviewed spoke about life as an academic as demanding and exhausting. There was reference to the work as not a typical nine-to-five job. Some of the women remarked that 'you never stop working', even when you leave the workplace. Many of the women decried the never-ending nature of academic work, coupled with demands from students that left them with little or no time to engage in research and publishing. The women interviewed repeatedly used the adage 'you publish, or you perish'.

Most interviewees felt they had similar or equal workloads to their male colleagues but that their prospects for promotion were limited by their lack of time. The interviewees lamented their challenging workloads and especially the perceived cause – university failure to match physical and human resources to high rates of student enrolment. Several interviewees complained about large classes, heavy teaching loads and the challenges associated with administering tests and examinations as well as marking and feedback. Some also felt that they were overstretched when the time, energy and effort spent on preparation and lecture delivery were considered. Library resources and textbooks were insufficient, and students had to compete for the few books available, relying heavily on lecture notes that lecturers had to prepare and update. In order to cope, many of the women stayed up late into the night to prepare:

> *[T]here's always one thing or the other that needs doing, lecture notes, seminars, conference, teaching, marking, it is time-consuming.* (Eloho, Senior Lecturer, Acounting)

> *[I]t's the nature of the job, you work round the clock – whatever it takes to produce knowledge and stay relevant in the field.* (Alma, Associate Professor, Sociology)

> *[T]he workload gets too much and sometimes you just cannot help it, you just have to work very late into the night.* (Chika, Lecturer, Accounting)

This aligns with findings in the Global North literature. Acker and Armenti (2004) argued that the daily lives of female academics are shaped by anxiety, stress and fatigue, because of the need to work harder in response to their disadvantaged position in academia. This was the case for the Nigerian women in my interview group. They described how they had to take a lot of work home, and how they sometimes hardly slept. Ayo and Chika, who are junior academics, decried the fact that they were expected to serve diligently in the boring, arduous and time-consuming clerical and administrative roles in their departments: serving on student and staff welfare committees, continuous assessment invigilation, organising student project defences, collating and computing student's final grades and dealing with students' grade issues, amongst a host of other tasks. Consequently, they have limited time to engage in career-boosting activities:

> *[M]ost of us [female] lecturers, are always asked to do the odd jobs, the physically draining job – it was not as if they asked or we had a choice to say "no" to those jobs, it was just something that was dumped on us and at that stage you want to show that you are hardworking, that you are diligent and all of that*. (Chika, Lecturer, Accounting)

> *[D]oing the not-so-pleasant jobs was helpful because it helps you curry some favour, you're [helping] your senior colleagues […] but by the time I find the time to sit down to work on my research, to write, one is not only physically drained but mentally and psychologically drained.* (Nancy, Lecturer Accounting)

Many of the women who recalled their early experiences in academic employment echoed similar sentiments and the narratives of early career academic women in my interview group suggests that not much has changed in this regard. They are still bombarded with time-consuming administrative and clerical duties, such as sorting examination scripts, manually collating grades and invigilating tests and exams on behalf of senior male academics. Their description of the non-academic tasks they

had to perform suggests that such tasks could take hours and even days to complete. Some of the junior academics in my interview group mentioned that one of the ways they coped with the exhaustion was by making fun of their juniors and collectively gossiping about the arrogance of their senior male colleagues. They also decried the fact that universities lack basic computer technology. Their comments revealed the absence of efficient technology that could improve the efficiency of administrative and clerical tasks as well as save valuable time.

Ladi, one of the senior lecturers in my interview group, commented on her experience of serving on the examinations committee as a deputy examination officer, a committee headed by a male academic. Ladi, who had served on this committee for several years, was aware of the career progress prospects associated with that work. She was then delegated to work on the scheduling and timetabling committee. Upon scrutinising the committee allocation of tasks, she noticed that much of the physically demanding work was allocated to women, with most of the intellectual task allocated to men. When Ladi brought this to the attention of her Head of Department, he condescendingly replied that "women had been clamouring for gender equality and the need to participate and be carried along". Ladi's experience suggests that in her department and by extension her institution, women have to work harder to prove themselves. Some of the women also spoke about how lack of infrastructure at the university compounded the challenges they faced. This was especially true for the women in the public universities, who bemoaned the lack of adequate IT facilities to help simplify their jobs:

> *[W]e still collate grades manually, this is time-consuming.* (Ayo, Assistant Lecturer, Education)

> *[N]o computers are provided for staff. I think a computer is now a basic need for this job.* (Chika, Lecturer, Accounting)

> *[E]ven when I come here with my laptop, sometimes there's no power to keep the battery charged.* (Alma, Associate Professor, Sociology)

Working smart is key to growth in this job, and time is precious, but too much time is wasted on doing things manually. (Ije, Lecturer, Economics)

The interviews quoted above are telling about the challenges women academics in Nigeria must contend with if they aspire to hold a career and raise a family at the same time. An important thread running through their stories was the fact that giving up on their careers was not an option. Although the progress of their career could be slow, these women found ways to cope and continue their academic careers. In prioritising career and family, the choices made are heavily influenced by societal expectations. This is quite telling about the challenges women academics in Nigeria must contend with if they aspire to hold a career and raise a family at the same time. An important thread running through their stories was the fact that giving up on their careers was not an option. Although the progress of their career could be slow because of the challenges they confronted, these women found ways to cope and continue their academic career journeys. In the process of prioritising between career and family, the choices made are heavily influenced by societal expectations.

Nigerian women in academic employment carry a dual burden: academic pursuits, and living up to societal expectations such as childbearing, child-rearing, caring for other family members and a host of other household chores. Even when they are privileged to have domestic helps, they play a supervisory role in ensuring that domestic matters run smoothly. In patriarchal societies such as Nigeria, these roles and expectations are inevitable, deeply ingrained and accepted as normal/natural, even by women themselves. It is not surprising that a popular explanation for women's underrepresentation in academia and slow progress relates to their responsibilities in the private sphere. The findings of this study align with much of the research, which suggests that care plays a major role in generating unequal employment outcomes for women (Probert, 2005; Baker, 2012). To clarify how the responsibility for care in all its forms impact women's career advancement, I focus on care of family members, care of students and colleagues.

7.3 Chapter Summary

One of the objectives of this research was to explore the agency and power of academic women in Nigeria from a postcolonial feminist lens and make visible the complex and multifaceted differences that intersect with gender to shape academic

women's experiences within patriarchal arrangements. In Chapters 5 and 6, data related to the career histories and working lives of the academic women in this study was presented. Following on from the many experiences reported, this chapter attempted to make visible the complex ways in which academic women's career experiences are impacted by the fusion of indigenous culture and patriarchy. From the data presented in the last two chapters, it is apparent that, while there are factors that enable women's academic careers, there are more that complicate women's experiences of university employment, thus slowing their progress. This chapter focuses on the latter in explaining the unequal status and outcomes for women in academic employment.

A range of institutional and social factors were highlighted as contributing to the unequal outcomes for academic women in Nigerian universities. Institutional factors, such as the unconventional career trajectory for women and excessive workloads, were discussed. Also, social factors, such as socio-cultural attitudes and the burden of care, were highlighted as significantly shaping women's choices and career progress. Women's careers are shaped by broader social forces and institutional arrangements. These arrangements operate in such a way that women are disadvantaged and delayed from the onset. They are socialised and channelled into a narrow range of options that prepare them for traditionally feminine occupations, and thus their entrance into academic employment is significantly delayed. When they eventually enter academia, their career progress is further hindered and slowed by the burden of care for families, children, colleagues and students, leaving them with less free time to care for themselves or focus on ventures such as journal publications that can boost their career opportunities and progression.

Academic work, by its very nature, requires a good level of mental and physical health to cope with the workload and deliver the required outcomes, for both men and women. Interview findings revealed that women's careers lag because of the unplanned nature of their entry into academia. Most of the women in this study report being late entrants into academia and their careers are also constrained by heavy teaching and administrative workloads. Given the patriarchal conditions under which Nigerian universities operate, academic women must work harder to prove themselves. This puts them in a disadvantaged position because of the burden of care that they shoulder, in their private lives and at university, a burden of which their male

counterparts are almost completely free. Academic women work a never-ending shift, with many penalties for their career. Some of the consequences of the unequal burden of care are lower research output and lower chances of progression. This resonate with the experiences of academic women in the Global North, as ongoing academic conversations suggest that, despite advancement in the rights of women and their increased entry into academia, women are still unequally burdened with caring responsibilities. Borden (2017), for example, reports that, on average, academic women in American universities perform significantly more service and caring work than men. Likewise, in Britain, Crook (2020) argues that the recent pandemic exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities in caring responsibilities, which impact academic women disproportionately. While it is true that paid employment has provided some women with opportunities for independence in both the Global North and South, women continue to struggle to reconcile family life and paid work. For many of the women in this study, balancing academic work and family life means they must rely on the paid and unpaid support of other women in private spheres, thus, reinforcing the gendered division of labour and reproducing the cycle gender inequality in academic career outcomes, to the detriment of women.

CHAPTER EIGHT. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

8.0 Introduction

Why are women less visible as academics at universities in Nigeria? Why are they more likely to be saturated in specific disciplines? Why are most professors in Nigerian universities men? Why are senior women academics token women? What is it about the way women experience male-dominated academia that contributes to unequal gendered outcomes in academic employment? These questions inspired my interest in the study of women's experiences in academic employment in Nigeria. During my postgraduate studies, I developed a keen interest in pursuing an academic career. Women were more visible as lecturers and senior academic during my study in the UK. It was only then that the idea of an academic career for me as a women seemed realistic. Nonetheless, I was puzzled that it was not a common career option or choice among my female peers and colleagues, and that the title 'professor' was commonly associated with men in my experience as a female Nigerian student in a Nigerian university. I keen to enquire about how women experienced a career I was interested in, but it was also concerning to find limited resources about the experiences of Nigerian academic women. I soon discovered that my thoughts and feelings about academic work being male-dominated resonated throughout the literature. My interest was furthered spurred by calls within the existing academic conversations for more research on the experiences of women considered privileged by virtue of their employment in a male-dominated profession.

To conclude this study, this chapter highlights and summarises the findings of this study, which revealed the similarities and multiplicity of experiences for women in academic employment. The discussion and analysis of women's stories from a postcolonial feminist and patriarchy lens show how women's career chances are impacted in academia, even from the point of entry. This chapter highlights the contribution of this research to knowledge, points out the limitations, makes some policy recommendation and presents directions for future research. The chapter also offers a brief personal reflexive account of my experience of doing feminist research.

8.1 Contribution to Knowledge

This research, which aimed to understand women's experiences of academic employment and give voice to their perspectives, makes useful contributions to the knowledge of the Nigerian context. In Chapters 5, 6 and 7, this thesis presented, discussed, and analysed empirical data on the experiences of becoming and being academic women in a man's world. By examining these experiences in the light of postcolonial feminism and drawing out the impact of patriarchy, this thesis is one of the few Nigerian studies that break away from taking a detached, positivist approach to the study of women's experiences.

Two main reasons inspired the decision to study women's experiences from feminist perspectives. First, much of the literature on women's work in Nigeria merely described the problems women faced. Academic texts highlighted and identified some of the main culprits responsible for women's subordinate status and proposed sound recommendations for change. However, many of the suggestions seemed to ignore the ways in which deeply entrenched and enduring patriarchal values thwart any change at surface level. For example, the provision of childcare facilities has been repeatedly identified as a strategy for helping professional women cope with the demands of work and home life (Pereira, 2003; Fapohunda, 2014; Durodolu and Mamudu, 2020; Ahuru, 2021). While it is true that women's career progress is stalled by the demands of childcare, to borrow the words of one of the women in my study, there are deeper 'cultural wiring' issues that may water down the impact of such provisions. Feminist perspectives offered a lens for looking more deeply. Secondly, some of inner puzzles with which I struggled with as a novice researcher were validated by feminist research. It was insightful and even comforting to learn that research is indeed political (Letherby, 2003), and that not only is it acceptable for research to be influenced by my personal experience, being open and honest about it does not invalidate my research. Below, the theoretical and methodological contributions of this research are discussed while simultaneously explaining how the research narratives address the core research objectives.

8.1.1 Enriching the Literature and Theory on Women in Academic Employment

The experiences of the academic women in this study provide important and useful insights about gender relations in Nigeria and in Africa in general. They shed light on the often taken-for-granted burden that society places on women. The voices and stories in this study revealed experiences mediated by gender, age and family status, and class. While it is not possible to generalise the views and experiences of the small group of women studied, their voices tell powerful stories that contribute to a better understanding of the realities of women's participation in formal employment in Nigeria and across the African continent. The voices of the academic women in this study speak volumes about the persistent subordination of women in academia and Nigerian society in general. Their stories give voice to the issues and problems that statistics cannot reveal, providing a mental picture of what it takes for women to navigate 'a man's world'.

The first objective of this research was to assess the early experiences, events, influences and circumstances that shape academic women's career paths in Nigeria. To address this objective, Chapter Five considered interview findings on women's experiences of becoming academics. By exploring their journey into academia, this study makes an important contribution to the ongoing conversations about women's subordinate status in higher education employment. Because of the scarcity of literature on academic women in Nigeria, the literature in the Global North proved useful. While there are many studies on the experiences of women in Western countries (Burton, 1997; Luke, 2001; Acker, 2006; Bagihole, 2006; Morley, 2014; Baker, 2012; Bagues *et al*., 2017; Caretta *et al.*, 2018), only a handful studies offer insights into the experiences of academic women in the African context, in Ghana (Mama, 2005), Kenya (Turner-Johnson, 2014) or Nigeria (Ojejide, 2004; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2017). However, in much of the writing on women's experiences of academic work in Nigeria, little or no emphasis has been given to the way women enter academia and how this might impact their career experiences and progression. Also, little attention has been paid to the ways in which formal education complicates the career experiences of female academics in Nigeria. This is mainly because education is often lauded as the all-important ingredient for remedying a host of issues faced by women.

This study contributes to filling gaps in the literature in Nigeria and in the Global South in general: for example, the importance of significant men in women's career choices.

This study's contribution to literature and theory is further strengthened by the attempt to scrutinise academic women's experiences through the lens of Western feminist theory of patriarchy (Lerner, Millet & Walby, 1990; hooks, 2000), and postcolonial feminist perspectives (Mohanty, 1984; Ahmed, 1996; Spivak, 2004). This was the third research objective of the study. I argue that, despite the criticisms of the theory of patriarchy for its intersectional shortcomings and overemphasis on men's power, it offers a very useful framework with which to understand women's academic work in Nigeria. Making up for the shortcomings of patriarchy as an explanatory tool for working women's experiences, the postcolonial feminist perspective offers deeper insights by considering the impact of colonialism on women's subordination. Also, it raises our consciousness to the intersectional nature of women's oppression in the Global South, particularly in formerly colonised contexts.

In terms of the early circumstances that shape academic women's career paths in Nigeria, empirical data revealed three important factors. First is the prevalence of a non-linear career path for women academics. For all but one of the women in this study, the journey to academic employment was unplanned and fraught with many interruptions. Women tend to begin their working lives in traditional feminine professions and reroute, often at the nudging of, second, a significant other, who may shape their career choices and paths. For many of the women in my study, parental and spousal support was instrumental to their career choice and journey; many of the women referred to the influence of significant male figures such as fathers and/or husbands. Third is the empowering *and* restricting potential of education for female academics. Women's participation in education has increased dramatically since Western education was first extended to them. However, the fact that women are socialised and often encouraged to consider subjects and careers that can accommodate their primary caregiving role limits their career prospects and progress.

The question of why women choose to pursue traditional feminine careers such as primary and secondary school teaching, nursing and administration has been the subject of longstanding debate. Patriarchy shapes gender roles and expectations. Social and cultural norms are powerful tools in perpetuating and reproducing gendered

career choices, thus limiting women's participation in male-dominated fields. In fact, patriarchal values have been cited as one of the main reasons that male- or female-dominated professions exist in the first place (Witz, 2013). Also, from a postcolonial feminist perspective, I argue that limited choices available to Nigerian women are one of the enduring legacies of colonialism. Colonialism significantly constrained women's power and status. Prior to imperialist expansion, many African women held important roles in their communities, as healers, leaders and businessowners, and some societies were matrilineal, so women's status and identity were traced through female lines. For example, in precolonial times, women from the Igbo tribe of southeast Nigeria kept their name and identity after marriage. The European practice of taking a man's name after marriage emerged with Western influence. Whatever power bases Nigerian women had, were deeply eroded to achieve colonialist aims.

The second objective of this study was to explore factors that drive or depress Nigerian women's academic career progression as well as the strategies employed to navigate a male-dominated academic terrain. Household-career conflicts were a major hindrance to career progress. This resonates with ongoing academic conversations in both the Global South and Global North. The difficulty balancing domestic responsibilities with career is further exacerbated by the fact that even though dual income households are now common, women carried most of the domestic burden throughout this study. Research on gender inequality in Nigeria continues to cite patriarchal relations as the main culprit for women's subordinate status in employment relations (Morley, 2006; Okeke-Ihejirika, 2017). This study furthers our understanding of the experiences of women in academic employment in Nigeria by revealing how they get there in the first place. Also, this study highlights the enduring and self-preserving nature of patriarchy in private and public spheres and reveals how women's lives and professional pursuits are complicated by a fusion of resistant patriarchal systems with enduring legacies of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

8.1.2 Contribution to Feminist Research Practice and Reflection on the Process

I believe that the core strength of this study lies in its methodological contribution. The fourth objective of this study was to reveal important positionality issues associated with conducting research that seeks to privilege academic women's voices and experiences in a male-dominated society. In collecting empirical data for this study, I adopted a feminist qualitative approach. As a Nigerian woman, born and educated in Nigeria, my experiences inspired my interest in this area of study. As explained in the methodological chapter, much of my research methodology training at undergraduate and Masters level instilled a reluctance to acknowledge the subjective motivations for research. I found that the reflections of feminist researchers such as Bradley (2000); Letherby (2003), Okeke-Ihejirika (2006) and many others aligned with my unexpressed views about the nature of research. I found it refreshing to read feminist criticisms of the traditional requirements of scholarship and research, especially "the caution, the rigour and the measured tone in which one is supposed to present results to the world" (McRobbie, 1982: 46). This study acknowledges the importance of positionality in research on women. This methodological decision was informed by the strengths of the feminist approach, which enables the researcher to connect everyday life with the analysis of the social institutions that shape that life (Hartsock, 1975). Also, I align with the feminist assertion that reality is perceived differently by those in different parts of the society and that we must respect these differences and experiences: "we must respect people enough to believe that they are in the best possible position to make their own revolution" (Hartsock, 1975: 40).

Interviews were employed to collect relevant data. As much as possible, I took on board feminist methodological guidelines and advice and ensured that the women were active participants in knowledge production on issues that concern them. Throughout the interviews with 24 female academics, I paid attention to the language they used to express daily lived experiences as well as non-verbal language (silence, murmuring and exclamations). Data was thematically analysed with the aim of identifying and interpreting recurring ideas and patterns of meaning and making embedded information explicit (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). In presenting the findings, the voices, stories and narratives of participants were used, and findings of past

research were applied to make sense of the data. The methodological approach gave primacy to the voices of women, who have less power in gender relations in both private and public spheres. By giving priority to their narratives, this study attempted to awaken the consciousness of the women, giving them the power to influence issues that concern them. Snowball sampling was employed to recruit participants for data collection while ensuring that a spread of participants from a range of background, disciplines and experiences were included in this study (Mason, 2002), although in hindsight, I could have done more to include Muslim women from the north of Nigeria.

Before embarking on fieldwork, a pilot interview was conducted with two academic women. The pilot study gave the opportunity to refine the interview questions and enhance my interview. This was my first experience of interviewing, and I was interviewing academic women who were themselves experienced researchers. I felt overwhelmed by this fact and rarely felt I was in a more powerful position than these women. In hindsight, I could have spent more time in the field, possibly beginning with email conversations and informal telephone interviews, before face-to-face interviews. I believe this could have made a real difference to the research relationships and confidence during the interviews. Nonetheless, my insider and outsider status was significant in building rapport with the women in my study. As an insider, acknowledging and disclosing shared experiences made it easier for the women to consent to take part in my study. My outsider status as a researcher studying overseas meant that trust was not an issue. They were confident that they could disclose private information without fear and I believe that this was significant in minimising bias. Also the fact that I was in some way in a less powerful position in the research relationship eliminated any possibility of exploitation in my research women. Age emerged as an important factor, intersecting with gender to influence workplace relations. My own age was significant to some of the women, especially the older women who made positive reference to the fact that I had embarked on my research journey at a young age. The fluidity of my insider and outsider status influenced the dynamics of the research relationship and was crucial in reassuring the women who may not have been keen to reveal details of their lives of the confidentiality of the data.

Finally, I was careful to avoid any form of judgemental behaviour, both verbally and non-verbally, as it was important for the women to share and make sense of their experiences. Although there were several ways in which I felt less powerful, I

acknowledge my privilege as a researcher and how this helped me understand the experiences of the women in this study. My career experiences, personal history and the literature on the subject were all critical tools that enhanced my understanding of the stories and issues under study. Adopting a feminist research methodology made me conscious of the need to maintain a critical distance from the data, even when I observed commonalities in the stories of the women and my own experiences. Using a feminist qualitive research methodology and scrutinising women's stories from patriarchy and postcolonial feminist perspectives enabled me to gain and critically analyse rich information about living and working in a man's world. My experience of the embodied and emotional experience of doing research on a marginalised group provides valuable information for research training as it can enhance researchers' preparedness. It also adds to the voices of researchers who suffer hostility and danger during fieldwork, experiences not often acknowledged in research writings.

8.2 Implications for Policy-Makers, Academics and Universities

This study is significant in many ways. As stated in Chapter 4 and earlier in this chapter, this study was inspired by the low visibility of women in academic employment, a reflection of persistent gender inequality in employment in Nigeria. In Chapters 5 and 6, it was noted that male support was a crucial ingredient for the academic career progress of the women in this study. This finding contradicts the fact that gender relations in both the public and private sphere are patriarchal.

When scrutinised through the lens of Walby's theory of public and private patriarchy (1990), this apparent contradiction of male support (fathers, spouses, male colleagues) for the careers of the women in this study in a patriarchal society can be attributed to the complexities of social dynamics and individual perspectives. First societies are not static and, as cultural norms evolve over time, there can be shifts in values and expectations. As awareness grows about gender equality and the benefits of women's empowerment, some men may genuinely support women's careers, recognising the potential benefit of equal opportunities for society. Secondly, as the Nigerian society becomes more industrialised and competitive, there is a growing recognition of the importance of utilising the talents and skills of all individuals, regardless of gender and support for women's careers may be seen as a means to enhance overall economic productivity and prosperity. However, it may also be a potential indicator of the breakdown of private patriarchy, as discussed in Chapter 6.

Furthermore, male support for women's careers as revealed in this study may be limited to the public sphere, where they recognise the importance of equal opportunities for women in order to maintain a positive public image or to align with prevailing social expectations. However, in the private sphere or within interpersonal relationships, these same men might still uphold traditional gender roles and expectations. This phenomenon, as described by Walby (1990), highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of patriarchal societies. Men may exhibit a range of attitudes and behaviours that can be seen as supportive on the surface but that fail to address the underlying power structures that perpetuate gender inequality. For example, some men might engage in what is sometimes termed "benevolent sexism," where they express positive attitudes toward women but still hold patronizing or controlling beliefs. This can result in behaviours such as 'protecting' women in ways that limit their agency or assuming that women are 'fragile' and need special treatment.

It is, however, important to note that, while there may be instances of male support for women's careers in a patriarchal society, this does not necessarily imply widespread gender equality or the absence of systemic barriers. Such support may be limited to specific contexts or individuals and may not reflect the overall societal norms and structures. Achieving gender equality requires addressing structural inequalities, challenging gender roles, and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

8.2.1 Critical Mass

Many countries have legislated to get more women into predominantly male professions; in the Global North, for example, the UK's Equality Act 2010, and legal gender quotas in Norway. In the Global South, gender quotas have been adopted in countries such as Malaysia, South Africa, Niger, Egypt. In fact nearly half the countries in the world today use some type of quota to increase female participation in politics, education, and employment. Quota systems have been employed to rectify the under-representation of women in many aspects of public life. Although Nigeria operates an ethnicity-based quota system to encourage and increase the participation of minority ethnic groups in education and employment, gender quotas have not been adopted.

According to Walby (1990), while some advances have been made in challenging gender inequalities in private or personal spheres, gender hierarchies persist in the public sphere. As is evident in this research, women often struggle to

access leadership positions, decision-making roles, and economic opportunities. These inequalities are perpetuated by various factors, including cultural norms and institutional biases. In the context of public patriarchy, where power and decision-making are concentrated in the hands of men, achieving critical mass can challenge and disrupt traditional gender norms and biases. By increasing the representation of women in influential roles, it becomes more difficult for gender-based discrimination and biases to persist unchallenged. Having a critical mass of women in positions of power can bring diverse perspectives, lived experiences, and insights into decision-making processes. It can lead to more inclusive policies, practices, and cultures within organizations, which in turn can benefit both women and men by creating a more equitable environment. This can also have a ripple effect in interpersonal spheres because of the complex interplay between public and private patriarchy, although changes in the public sphere may take time to translate into shifts in private spaces due to the persistence of deep-rooted cultural norms and structural inequalities.

The process of breaking down public patriarchy and increasing women's participation in academia and the workforce in general can lead to complex outcomes that intersect with other aspects of gender dynamics, include domestic labour and the reinforcement of gender norms. For example, as highlighted in Chapter 5, increased female participation in the workforce can lead to economic empowerment, improved financial independence, and the challenge of traditional gender norms that restrict women's role to the domestic sphere. As women become more engaged in the workforce, there is tje potential for a double burden where women continue to shoulder a significant portion of domestic and care work responsibilities. Despite professional commitments, women might still face societal expectations to fulfil traditional roles as caregivers and homemakers, as highlighted and documented in Chapters 6 and 7. Should women have the means to hire domestic help, most likely women and other marginalised groups, this can indeed reinforce patriarchal norms in certain situations.

Despite these dilemmas and complexities, there are many advantages to the quota system, even though it is criticised as being against the principle of equal opportunities for all, by giving preference to women over men. Women's subordinate position in academic employment has its root in patriarchy, a self-preserving system. It is imperative that Nigerian policymakers take quotas seriously when considering

promoting the full participation of women in employment. While it is true that a legislated quota system will not eliminate the masculine culture of universities and workplaces, I argue that if women remain tokens in these institutions, their full and equal participation remains a utopian dream. Women are not likely to have a major impact until a critical mass is achieved (Childs and Krook, 2008; Childs, 2009; Broome *et al.*, 2011). As their numbers increase, women will be able to organise and collaborate effectively to promote women-friendly policies and influence their male colleagues to accept policies promoting and addressing women's issues. Moreover, the introduction of a legislated quota system will be useful in creating a sense of urgency (Kotter, 1995). Such a move will signal to HE institutions that change is imminent, necessitating the recruitment of powerful change-leaders (women).

Also, throughout the literature on women's work and employment, the impact of mentoring for women's career progression is well established. Mentors are often cited as crucial for promotional opportunities (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2014) as they offer 'reflected power' to mentees (Kanter, 1977). Mentoring relationships enhance career development at all stages (Kram, 1985). Morley (2006) argues that women in higher education are more likely to look for female role models and mentors. While no formal mentoring scheme exists for the women in this study, some of the women cite the positive impact of informal mentors as a crucial career enabler. In supporting women's careers in academia, Nigerian universities will benefit from formal mentoring schemes for aspiring female academics at all different stages in their career, especially at early and senior lecturer levels where women often get stuck. With access to formal mentors who have advanced knowledge and experience within the field, women can benefit from opportunities to engage in occupational planning, develop work-related skills and gain professional confidence (Baker, 2012). Formal mentoring will also give academic women a safe place within which to reflect and seek advice on difficult decisions and problems from a person who has walked a similar path (Durbin, 2015).

However, it is important to note that critical mass alone is not sufficient. It should be complemented by broader efforts such as changing societal norms, addressing systemic barriers, promoting gender equality in education and career opportunities, and creating supportive policies and laws. Moreover, it is crucial to ensure that women in positions of power have the agency and support to enact meaningful change and that their presence is not tokenistic.

8.2.2 Cultural Change

I consider the women in this study powerful agents for change; given the range of social weapons they must contend with, they not only find ways to keep going but also find the courage to share their stories, strengths and vulnerabilities. To formulate effective gender policies in Nigerian higher education, it is imperative that women's experiences are prioritised and their voices heard. It is important that the challenges, obstacles, and career experiences of academic women are expressed in their words. The findings of this research, which gives primacy to women's voices and experiences in academia, could be relevant for female faculty and administrators as a justification for policy formulation and implementation in Nigerian universities. On this basis, policymakers within the university must take care to be inclusive of family needs. Campus childcare would allow women with young children to manage their research and publication responsibilities after regular time at work (Armenti, 2004a). But this is not enough, because women are culturally wired to prioritise childcare over their career in a way that creates the illusion of 'choice'. Insofar as women and men continue to feel, think, and accept that childcaring and domestic responsibilities are women's concern, merely providing primary interventions such as on campus childcare facilities will do very little to uproot the patriarchal system. It is clear from the voices in this study that women's full participation in academia as students and academics goes beyond simply expanding structures and facilities to accommodate numbers. While increasing representation is important, without the necessary support, the performance and career progression of female academics would remain very slow, rendering strategies aimed at improving representation at best superficial. Without transformation in the structure, processes and institutional culture of universities, academia will remain less attractive to women, resulting in fewer role models and mentors for early and aspiring female academics. An important starting point for any attempt at increasing women's participation is the breaking of barriers that limit their options and progress.

8.3 Closing Remarks: Implications of the Study

This final section addresses the fifth research objective, which is to examine the implications of women's under-representation in the academic workforce for the universities and their constituent communities, and for Nigerian society. From ongoing

conversations and debates on the status of women in education and paid employment, several theories have evolved that have been useful in shaping our thought processes and ways of understanding these issues. Feminist and postcolonial feminist perspectives offer a lens with which to make sense of the experiences of women in higher education in Nigeria. A central idea within feminist perspectives, regardless of 'stance', is the need to illuminate women's experiences by giving voice to the silent other (Letherby, 2003). Post-colonial feminism aims to give voice to the unheard and unacknowledged 'other' recovering from decades of colonial rule and oppression. In line with feminist research ethos, the testaments shared by the women in this study were presented with intent of retaining the richness and originality of their experiences.

This study has offered a basis for understanding how women experience a male-dominated world within a male-controlled society, which is the goal of feminist research. This study gave women a voice, which is a powerful tool for empowerment. Their experiences reveal how women continue to deal with the impact of colonialism on their status, power, and privileges. Formal education was introduced in Nigeria by the colonialists with the express aim of educating and training boys and men to serve an imperialist agenda. To ensure men focused on their education, training and employment, women were assigned the important task of caring for their private and domestic needs, a pattern that endures decades after colonialism. Formal education was only extended to women to prevent them from organising and clamouring for access, a move that the colonialists anticipated would disrupt their agenda. Robertson (1985) revealed that the kind of education given to women was aimed at preparing them for a life of domesticity as perfect wives and mothers (Mianda, 2002).

While many texts blame women's subordinate status in employment on the choices, decisions and priorities of women, adopting a postcolonial feminist lens ensured that I explored how women's choices are impacted by strong and enduring structures of male domination. The struggle for social change cannot yield immediate returns, but women academics and researchers are better placed to negotiate a fairer deal in future. It is important that as many stories as possible are told of the experiences of various groups of women in Nigeria and across the continent. This study contributes to the small but growing database on African women's experiences, which is important in informing social policy. Because of the thinness of the database, findings of this study render the analysis and conclusion drawn tentative at best. More

research on the voices and experiences of women in various groups is needed, as this study is only a small contribution to the development of an impressive database, of which all African scholars who have joined the quest for transformation can be proud.

Even with increasing numbers of female graduates in Nigerian universities, female academics remain few, particular in senior academic and administrative positions. Women in academic employment, even where they exist in large numbers, tend to be concentrated at the lower rungs of the academic career hierarchy. As mentioned in the Chapter 1, only 24% of academic workforce are women and only 15% of the professoriate (Statista, 2021). These statistics suggest that, not only are women numerically under-represented in academic employment, but their progress across the academic ranks is also slow. This thesis explored how the gender gap in university based academic work is perpetuated and why this should matter to academics, universities, and society in general. The experiences of women in academic employment in selected public and private universities in Nigeria were explored to reveal the specific barriers that limit women's participation and their career progression in male-dominated academia. A deeper understanding of persisting gender disparities is crucial for devising and implementing effective policies to promote gender equality in academia and society at large. Prominent studies by Mama (2003), Ojejide (2004), Ojejide *et al*. (2006) and Morley (2003) emphasise the need to move away from issues of statistical representation to a thorough examination of the ways in which gender relations structure differential academic career outcomes for men and women. Mama (2003) suggests that for too long women have been blamed for their poor representation as students, academics, and administrators in African universities, with little or no focus on how the structure, processes and workings of academic institutions combine to keep women out of academia. Ojejide (2004) asserts that Nigerian women's assumed primary role as mothers and caregivers cannot be separated from their role in academia, because in many ways, the unequal gender relations in universities and the home retain the imprint of a male breadwinner society. These realities continue to make academia 'a man's world' and addressing these, and other related concerns, is of paramount importance if the gender inequality in academic employment, the labour market and society in general is to be addressed.

Finally, this research on academic women has impacted me in so many ways, as a researcher, an academic and as a woman. Mills sums it up:

> *Learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work: continually to examine it and interpret it. In this sense craftsmanship [sic] is the centre of yourself and you are personally involved in every intellectual product upon which you […] work. (Mills, 1959: 216)*

As a researcher, I am more aware of the complex relationships between participants and myself. Over the years of undertaking this research, I have developed a strong conviction of the need to acknowledge my role and the part I play throughout the research process. As an academic, I have learnt lessons from the stories of the women in this study. This research has challenged me to be cautious of the language I use in my classroom and with my colleagues. I am more aware of micro expressions and micro actions and how this this could reinforce stereotypes about girls and women in education and in the workplace. As a woman, I consider myself a very important agent of change. The home and family are important sites of oppression and subordination for women. As stated earlier, patriarchy is self-preserving, so I do not believe that 'working harder' is an effective strategy for women, and I have learnt to demand fair sharing of domestic responsibilities rather than try to juggle or balance it all. I end with the hope that my son will be culturally wired to value and engage in domestic work and that my daughter will learn that the burden of domestic life is everyone's responsibility, and not just a woman's.

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APPENDIX A

University of the West of England
BRISTOL

CESR
Centre for Employment Studies Research

Info Sheet & Consent Form

In A Man's World? The Experiences of Women in Academic Employment in Nigeria

I am a doctoral student at the Centre for Employment Studies Research (CESR) at the University of the West of England, Bristol, in the UK. I am researching women's employment in Nigeria's higher education sector, the factors restricting their access to academic positions (overall women are just 18% per cent of university academic staff) and aiding or constraining career progression. I am interested to learn how women who have employment in universities (as teachers, researchers and/or in academic management) interpret these issues and their own situation. In particular I am keen to understand how academic women in Nigerian universities define and describe their professional roles and perceive key influences on their career.

I am hoping to conduct interviews (each around an hour in length) with academic women at different stages of career at a sample of universities and in these interviews explore with participants issues including:

- The factors, people and events they identify as having shaped their academic career to date.
- Views on the value of having academic mentors and role models
- Individuals' experiences of recruitment process, institutional practices and progression opportunities.
- Views on work responsibilities, workload, career satisfaction and relationship with other colleagues
- Family circumstances, attitudes toward societal beliefs, culture and expectations for women and how this impacts women's working lives.
- Views on the capacity to attain a functional work-life-balance
- Views on university structures, rules and regulations and the extent to which these influences academic career.
- Attitudes to university and government effort to advance women's issues and promote their increased representation in higher education employment

The information and views shared will be treated with the strictest confidence. Research participants' anonymity will be maintained at all stages of the study. All interview materials will be kept securely and destroyed on completion of the study.

Attached here also is a brief demographic survey for you to complete before the interview.

Thank you for participating in the study.

Joy Umekwe

Joy2.umekwe@live.uwe.ac.uk

+447918414850

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Dear (Name)

My name is Joy Umekwe and I am a doctoral researcher at the centre for employment Studies Research at the University of the west of England, Bristol. I am exploring and investigating the barriers and challenges that affect women's career progression. This research attempts to understand how these women define and describe their professional roles, their perception of who has the power to control their careers, whether they consider their careers to be atypical as well as the factors beyond their control which influence their career. I would like you to take part.

I would like to ask you to share your valuable first-hand experiences of academic employment. The interview can take up to 60 minutes and is very informal. I am simply trying to capture your experiences as an academic staff in a Nigeria university. Interviews will be audio-recorded to facilitate data analysis. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential.

The information you give me will be solely used for the purpose of my research and will be treated in strict confidence. The tapes from these interviews will be transcribed and your identity will be protected by use of pseudonyms throughout the process. Your name will not be given to any other person in connection with the interview material- If I quote any information obtained from you in my thesis or in any papers or publication resulting from my study, I will do so in such a way that you cannot be identified.

I believe this study is very important as a means of enabling academic women identify problems they encounter on account of being women both at home and in the work place. The findings of this study will help in highlighting these problems and might influence change in favour of women. Your participation in this study is nevertheless, voluntary and you can refuse to respond to any question or ask for the tape recorder not to be used or withdraw from the study at any particular time. I would however, greatly appreciate your participation. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. This PhD research project of Joy Umekwe (joy2.umekwe@live.uwe.ac.uk) is under the ethical approval of University of the West of England. Research Project Supervisors: Prof Stephanie Tailby (Stephanie.tailby@uwe.ac.uk) and Prof. Harriet Bradley (harriet.bradley@uwe.ac.uk)

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign the consent form provided.

I, ... have accepted to participate in Joy Uzochi Umekwe's study as described to me. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I can withdraw at any time. I also understand that my identity will always remain anonymous.

Signed: .....

Name: .....

Date: .....

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Institution:

Position:

No. of years in service:

Educational Qualification:

1. **How did you get here**

   Tell me about yourself, journey, influences

   Can you tell me about your experience growing up as a woman?

   What motivated you to become an academic

2. Can you please tell me about your professional career/current position

   What has been your experience with working in this university?

   What support system does the university have in advancing gender issues?

   Challenges? Opportunities? How many years have you worked at the university?
   Do you have any publications (journals, books, book chapters, conference papers?
   Do you belong to any committees at your institution?
   Promotion requirements, equality, level playing field?

3. What are your plans for Promotions/Long term or Short Career Aspirations?

   To what extent does the university support your plans.

4. What impact has being a women had on your career

   How has the traditional culture/societal expectations of women's roles in your society impacted on/affected your career?

   How do you manage to keep a balance between career expectations and family responsibilities?

   What strategies have you used to reach/maintain your current academic and professional rank?

What kind of support do you get for career advancement? Mentors/role models/research/from your institution

5. **Are there any important issues that I have not talked to you about that you think are important for me to know?**