"What can a woman do?" Being women in a Nigerian university

Abiola Odejide[1]

Introduction

This article explores the perceptions and the lived experiences of female students in the University of Ibadan (UI), the oldest Nigerian university.

Until recently, there have been only a few in-depth examinations of the challenges of being female in highly gendered academic institutions (Gaidzanwa 2001; Pereira, 2003; Morley et al., 2005; Odejide et al. 2005). Contemporary social science research into gender and higher education in Africa has focused on issues of access, curriculum, the effects of neoliberal policies on the quality and management of education (Ukeje, 2002; Okeke, 2004: 480; Zeleza and Olukoshi, 2005); and also on problems of sexual harassment (African Association of Political Science, 1994; Aina and Odebiyi, 2002; Denga and Denga, 2004).

Ibadan, a big city, is located in southwest Nigeria. With a multi-ethnic student population, the institutional culture might be expected to reflect a variety of gender perspectives, since the gendering of organisations derives from concepts people have internalised about what is normal, natural and fair, stemming from their various class, ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Gaidzanwa, 2001).

Scholars have argued that women and men experience higher education differently and that social relations within the educational institutions depict inequalities in the operations of power as is evident in the statistics of access, employment, decision-making bodies, welfare and capacity to access research and professional opportunities (Bennett, 2002; Mama, 2003). Thus, this article will focus on the gender relations which characterise this university to explore how these relations could be transformed. The value of this type of research lies in its capacity to unearth a fundamental component of the participants' identity, which consists of their sense of being gendered either male or female and their perceptions of self-worth and fulfillment. This gendered aspect of

identity forms their modes of relating to people of their own or other genders (Imam, 1997); and the way such identity intersects with other factors such as ethnicity, religion and class. There is evidence that women are often perceived as unworthy, as indicated in frequent statements of some of our respondents like, "What can a woman do?"

A second issue which this article explores is the perception of women's sexuality and its pervasive impact on relationships in the institution. Reports of the widespread occurrence of transactional sex, sexual harassment, and so-called seductive dressing by females on Nigerian campuses (Morley, 2005; Adedokun, 2005) suggest that women are behaving in ways which are subverting prevailing social relations. Women's sexuality is constructed as "seductive" and perceived as threatening to men's superior status. This conflict echoes the literature on women's sexuality, especially in religious contexts. In Islam, the stereotype of "submissive Muslim women tightly controlled by men" depends on the view that "sexuality [is] an elemental and natural discourse that should be suitably channeled in society" (Imam, 1997). Otherwise, uncontrolled sexuality can cause *fitna* (disorder, chaos) in society (Mernissi, 1987; Fisher, 1994). Similarly, in Christian groups, women's sexuality is also viewed as threatening to the social order. Thus, an ascetic lifestyle was preferred for adherents; even though this viewpoint is constantly subject to social dynamics (Smith, 2004).

This article reports some recurring themes in the findings of a study on "Gender and Institutional Culture in a Nigerian University",[2] which examines the halls of residence and religious fellowships on the campus. The research focus was the dynamics of gendered power relations in the halls of residence and students' religious fellowships, and their influence on the formation of knowledge and knowledge production in spaces which are supposed to be largely managed by students, and where there should be minimal direct control by university administration. The underlying assumption is that knowledge and skills acquisition in such institutions happens in many contexts besides formal lecture situations directly under the influence of academic staff. Such other forms of learning follow from the interactions among students, what is termed in the local parlance as "the university passing through the students." The three research objectives of the larger study were to:

1. Compare gender relations among ordinary members and leaders across the two research loci (religious fellowships and halls of residence);
2. Examine how gender relations are located within age, ethnic, religious, class and cultural relations in each research locus;

3. Identify how gender and other power relations in the two research loci affect the capacity to know among male and female students in the university.

This article focuses on the second of these objectives, in particular, how gender relations develop in religious fellowships and in the institutional cultures of the halls of residence. It asks: what are the perceptions of being female on a Nigerian university campus in spaces which are not strictly regulated by the university authorities? What are the perceptions of female sexuality among the students and staff in these locations?

The national setting

Like most African universities, UI has been affected by serious transformations in political economy that have occurred at the global and local levels and have shaped the world of knowledge generation and application. National political instability, severe under-funding of education, erosion of university autonomy, the brain drain of academic staff, lack of facilities, staff and student loss of morale and violent agitations which make university governance appear more suited for males have all affected the university. It is within this context that the university is expected to fulfill its mandate of being transformative and empowering. It is expected that female students entering a mainly masculine terrain (Mama, 2003; Morley, 2005; Odejide et al., 2005), will in some way, be automatically elevated. Ideally, however institutions should not harbour conservative views on women's status (i.e. that they are innately deficient and in need of elevation), especially in view of the stated goal of higher education, "to hold out to all persons, without distinction of race, creed or sex, the opportunity of acquiring a liberal education" (University of Ibadan Act 1962, quoted in Tamuno, 1981: 3).

In addition, the Nigerian government has in the last two decades promoted the rhetoric of participatory democracy, inclusiveness and women's empowerment. However, the reality is that as in most African countries, this equality does not exist on the national political scene where decision-making processes exclude women (Kwesiga, 2002; Gaidzanwa, 1997). This exclusion also predominates within the university setting, depriving the institution of social capital. The institutions, informal networks, norms, values and beliefs, which women could bring into social and economic development, are ignored or neglected.

At present in Nigeria, women still have unequal access to higher education (Jibril, 2003) and the few studies on institutional practices show that Nigerian universities function as major sites for the production and reproduction of contemporary gender identities and gender inequalities (Pereira, 2003; Odejide, 2003: 453; Adedokun, 2004). Part of the lived experience of being female on a Nigerian university campus is being portrayed and treated as subordinate (Odejide et al., 2005) ostensibly because of "traditional culture" and social and familial factors which view women as being inherently fragile, dependent on male protection and requiring surveillance and control of their behaviour. These are notions which can become entrenched and assume the status of timeless cultural constructs regardless of any increases in female enrolment.

The university setting

Planned as a fully residential campus in the tradition of Oxford and Cambridge, the University of Ibadan was designed to maximize the impact of university education by creating not only a centre of learning but also a social institution, a community of scholars. Currently, UI has one College of Medicine and 14 faculties; 100 teaching departments and eight centres including the Institute of African Studies, which houses the Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC), probably the oldest Women's Research Centre in Nigeria.

The total student population in the 2004/2005 academic year was 18 957. Of this number, 36.9% were female, a figure which is slightly higher than the national average of 35% (Jibril, 2003). The total number of undergraduate students was 10 835, out of which 39.8% were female. Of the 8 035 postgraduate students, 31.6% were female (UI Planning Office, 2005).[3]

Table 1 shows the undergraduate student enrolment by discipline and gender. It is significant that other than in Technology, undergraduate female enrolment was higher than the national figure of 35 per cent. In Education and Arts, female enrolment was expectedly higher than that of males, but more striking is women's high representation in Pharmacy (56.6%), and Public Health (55.4%), which are not traditional female disciplines. However, the extent to which women's relative presence in the various fields actually translates to greater gender equality must be examined.

Table 1. UI student enrolment by discipline and gender 2004/2005

Faculty	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Total
Arts	656	51.7	614	48.3	1 270
Social Sciences	477	36.6	828	63.4	1 305
Law	208	38.7	329	61.3	537
Science	648	36.3	1 138	63.7	1 786
Technology	120	11.5	923	88.5	1 043
Agric and Forestry	473	42.6	637	57.4	1 110
Basic Med. Science	129	40.8	187	59.2	316
Clinical Sc.	464	41.5	655	58.5	1 119
Dentistry	59	44.0	75	56.0	134
Pharmacy	120	56.6	92	43.4	212
Vet Medicine	210	38.7	332	61.3	542
Education	682	50.8	658	49.1	1 340
Public Health	67	55.4	54	44.6	121
Total	4 313	39.8	6 522	60.2	10 835

Source: UI Planning Office, 2005

The academic staff profile shows that among academic staff, the overall percentage of female academic staff is 29%. Women make up 14% of the Professor/reader grade, 30% of the senior lecturer/research fellow grade, 35% of the lecturer grade. The highest proportion of women academics can be found at the lower grade where women make up 41% at the assistant lecturers and junior research fellow grade.[4]

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for the study derives from theories of gender identities that are informed by an African perspective. The attribution of women's inferior status to traditional culture has been contested in studies on African women and patriarchy. This debate has been succinctly captured in Bakare-Yusuf's work, which defines the argument as being between those theorists who draw attention to hierarchical differences between men and

women and those who stress their socially equivalent and complementary status (2003: 24). On the one hand, feminist scholars argue that "women, both now and in the past, play pivotal reproductive and productive roles that facilitate patriarchal economic and productive dominance" (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003: 10). On the other hand, scholars like Oyewumi (1997), Amadiume (1987), and Nzegwu (2001: 30–32) hold that gender was not an organizing principle in African societies before colonialism, even though there may have been other forms of social inequities. According to them, systematic patriarchalisation of African societies has occurred through colonialism, the introduction of Islam and Christianity and the process of state formation.

This framework is useful not only for secular relationships but also for examining gender relations within religious settings in which Imam identifies a remarkable consistency of vision, that is, "the centrality of concern with women, an asceticism about the body, a focus on (in particular) women's sexuality as a source of immorality . . . the reconstruction of patriarchal control over women and their sexuality" (1997: 3).

Research methodology

As noted, this research focused on students in religious and residential spaces on the U.I. campus. Part of the complex realities that have shaped student life at the university in the last two decades has been the rise of transnational religious movements such as Pentecostalism, and reformist (more fundamentalist) Islam. This spread has occurred at national level and has been attributed to globalization. According to Imam (2004:125), the pervasiveness of evangelical forms of Christianity and Islam could account for new forms of identity formation on campuses through which youths align themselves to persons who share similar beliefs and values with them. At UI, although students' religious fellowships have existed since the earliest days of the university (Parrinder, 1981), they were on the fringes of the larger student body until the 1980s and 1990s, which saw the emergence of strong evangelical groups of Christians and Muslims. Currently, eighteen Christian groups and one Muslim group exist on the UI campus – alongside 41 academic societies and 47 social/cultural/philanthropic organisations (UI "Registered Clubs, Associations and Societies" 2006). Their objectives are outlined in statements such as, "to make heaven and take as many as possible with us" (Redeemed Christian Church of God Records); or "to bring Muslim students under one umbrella, promoting the oneness of Allah and prophethood of Mohammed SAW" (Muslim Students' Society Records).

Approximately, 7 500 students (37% of the total student population) are registered as members of religious organisations. These highly structured fellowships have a reputation of providing students with social and academic support networks and also protection against campus violence. Their large number and visibility on campus make them a worthy object of study.

Less than half of UI students live on campus. Currently, only 44.6% of students (30% of males and 15% of female students) are accommodated in the twelve halls of residence. Eight of these are single sex while four are mixed (co-ed). There are three halls for postgraduate students, and one for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The halls form a strong part of the university culture on account of the deep ties which students forge there, ties which frequently endure beyond graduation, as can be seen in the strong Hall Alumni Association.

The method of study of students in these spaces was mainly qualitative, combining key informant interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) with documentary evidence about the groups obtained from their records. Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with the presidents and members of the executive committees of five diverse Christian fellowships (the Protestant, Anglican Communion, Baptist, African Independent and African Pentecostal churches),[5] and the Muslim Students' Society (MSS). We also conducted interviews with the female wings of these organizations: the coordinators of the "sisters' arms" of the Christian fellowships, and the *Amira*, the leaders of the female members of the MSS.

In the halls of residence, executive members and residents of Queen's Hall and Queen Idia Hall (the two all-female halls), Awolowo Hall (co-ed and undergraduate and postgraduate students) and Kuti Hall (male) were interviewed. In addition, the Dean of Students, the hall wardens of selected halls and staff advisers of the religious fellowships were interviewed. The rationale for selecting two all-female halls was to enable the female perception of university life to be heard from the perspective of those who lived in virtually exclusively separate spaces for women.

Eight focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted among a mixed group of BSF members, male MSS members, female MSS members, female Queen Idia Hall residents, female Queen's Hall residents, male Awo Hall residents, female Awo Hall residents and male Kuti Hall residents. Each focus group consisted of at least eight members randomly selected, except that members of the executive councils of the organisations were excluded. The MSS FGDs had to be

single sex because of the restriction on interaction between male and female members at their meetings.

Six postgraduate research assistants from the social sciences participated in data collection and analysis, including a Muslim female student specially selected for the MSS to facilitate access. Though my position as a senior academic and principal officer of the institution facilitated access to students and staff, and cooperation, I had to stay in the background during the data collection, given the unequal power relations between a principal officer of a university and students. However, I closely monitored the research through briefing of research staff, training, discussion of instruments and debriefing sessions after each assignment.

The respondents regarded these interviews as opportunities to express their candid opinions about deficiencies in their academic, residential and social lives, presumably with the hope that as part of management, I would be in a position to correct these. There was no reported case of refusal to participate, but we had difficulties in securing appointments, especially with the presidents of the religious fellowships whose protocol officers (fellow students) made access very difficult. This inaccessibility constitutes part of our data, as it revealed the highly hierarchical structure of the organisations.

Data collected from the eight focus group discussions and 35 interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed. The themes emerging from the interviews were tracked and recorded and the data from the two modes of data collection were triangulated with data from the documentary search to highlight the major findings.

The research assistants perceived the data collection and analysis to be empowering in building their research capacity skills, and in revealing the gender dynamics of their own institution (which they had often taken for granted).

Findings

1. Gendered hierarchy

A major finding from the interviews and the focus group discussions was the general perception of and acquiescence to a gendered hierarchy which privileged male students. Males were credited with superior skills in leadership and people, time and crisis management. This position was supported by essentialist notions of women's "natural" temperament, cultural constructs, the generally low status of women in Nigeria, and by religious doctrines. The cohort of

leaders of fellowships was predominantly male in spite of the large number of female members. Only the IVCU and the Redeemed Christian Students Fellowship had up to 30% of its leadership as females (see Table 2). Even then, female coordinators of "Sisters' Fellowship" and Amira (female heads) of the female Muslim Students' Society were still subordinate to the male leaders. Thus the Amira vigorously dismissed the possibility of female leadership by declaring, "Astagafulla (God forbids it), Islam does not encourage the female to be head of the community".

Table 2. Composition of executive committees of fellowships by gender

Organisation	Male	Percent	Female	Percent	Total	Percent
BSF	27	71	11	28.9	38	100
CCC	15	78.9	4	21.1	19	100
IVCU	24	64.9	13	35.1	37	100
MSS	13	65	7	35	20	100
RCCG	25	41.7	35	58.3	60	100

Source: Gender and Institutional Culture in a
Nigerian University research project, interviews, 2005

In the female halls of residence, females served as executives, but even in a mixed hall like Awo, which is 80 per cent female, there were no females in the executive (Awo Hall chair, 2005 interview and FGDs). Female participation in student politics as potential candidates for elective offices was low and frowned at; so was female activism. A male member of a mixed hall said:

> . . . the ones that come out . . . (for politics) are probably . . .
> those feminists. Those who believe in women's emancipation.
> But anybody who is oriented towards getting married, having a family,
> settling down, definitely the man will not want it.

The reasons given for women's apathy were astounding; for example, "women's feeble-mindedness", "fragility", "lack of courage", "inferiority complex", "keeping malice", "being more controversial" as opposed to "men's boldness", "self confidence", and "strong heart". The resignation of many women to their marginalisation in university politics is captured in the words of a female hall warden: "Some of them (female students) will always say 'What can a woman do? Let me just face my academics'." Even more worrying were reported cases of female students refusing to support female candidates in faculty elections.

This was in spite of the risks these candidates were taking, participating in often volatile student politics in the context of a supposedly hostile university management and difficult academic demands.

Occasional reference was made to an institutional culture that inhibited female participation, such as the psychological and physical violence that characterized student politics and made it threatening to female students. Generally, individual agency as opposed to social structures was perceived as important, with the female students being blamed for their "own" lack of motivation, poor time management and lack of the networking skills required for political success in student politics.

The domestication of female students was observed in both the secular and religious research spaces. Exploitative interactions were reported, mainly in the form of a number of women students providing domestic services by cooking for males in the halls, and doing decorating, sweeping and cooking work in the fellowships. Public preaching by females was limited, where permitted, to crusades, seminar, Bible class or a Bible discussion where "ladies" could preach, coordinate or evangelise (Fellowship FGD).

Ethnicity did not appear to intersect in any significant way with gender concepts in this study, probably because majority of the students in the university were from the Yoruba ethnic group. However, it was striking that some of the girls who ran for elective positions were encouraged to do so by their friends from other ethnic groups.

2. Infantilisation and control of women

Closely related to relegation of female students to the background was their complaint of being infantilised by female hall wardens, who enforced regulations on visiting periods, "morality", dress codes and "loitering" around the hall by "ladies", deploying the University's regulation that lecturers are *in loco parentis*. Less authoritarian treatment of male students by their male wardens and hall supervisors was resented and seen as sexist.

Trivialising or labeling of female students was common, for example, in the derisive references to residents of one of the female halls as "*butty*", that is, overly westernised, privileged, and not suitable as "wife material". The interviews and FGDs suggested that heterosexual relations are the norm and wifehood is an ideal sought by the female students.

In the fellowships, women's high levels of participation in religious activities were stigmatized as excessive, juvenile, evidence of being "somehow feeble

minded, more . . . easily (moved) than guys". Participation in the fellowships was viewed as advantageous to women, though, as a strategy to identify suitable partners. A male respondent in an FGD said, "There's a big rush in the husband market. In the fellowships and crusades, you will see the number of sisters who are there to get a husband." Subtle psychological pressure and close monitoring of dress codes, dating rules and general conduct on campus ensured compliance by members.

3. Female sexuality and disorder
In striking contrast to the strong emphasis placed on women's subsidiary role in the university, our researchers also heard a strong discourse that constructed women's sexuality as powerful and threatening to the social order. According to this discourse, women's sexuality was overwhelming – and impossible for women to control by themselves. One of the Sisters' coordinators presented the women students as highly subversive of social norms:

> Female students . . . go about nude, all in the name of fashion . . . the way they dress . . . may directly or indirectly have influence on the male students . . . like what they used to say, that women and money is the root of evil.

The recurring references to the existence of transactional sex and the alleged preference of some of the female students for "*aristos*", sugar daddies, echoes a dominant media focus on the alleged "immorality" of female undergraduates and the potential damage to the reputation of their residence halls and the university, according to female hall residents. The *Amira* explained the perceived reason for the need to control women: "[A] female voice is nakedness". Given this premise, management of widespread gender-based violence by the hall management was based on blaming the victims, holding the girls responsible for their own sexual harassment through their "indecent dressing."

4. Support through religious identities
Fellowships provided the students with many services: an intellectual and emotional safety net in the context of dissatisfaction with perceived inadequate academic, financial, social and emotional support by the institution. A male fellowship president said, "Some of them (students) are scared, they're afraid of university life; how do you cope with your academic and fellowship work and some other thing?" Thus, a major attraction of membership of the fellowships for students was the organisation of tutorial classes at departmental, faculty,

hall and interdisciplinary levels, even though these were gendered. Male students in general taught the groups, including the MSS, unless a female student was really outstanding, thus reinforcing notions of male's superior academic capacity. Social support was provided through hall and departmental cell groups, which effectively covered virtually all aspects of the members' campus lives.

A sense of collective identity was concretised by reference to each other with the title "Sister" and "Brother", followed by the person's first name said with a distinctive tonal inflection, an inflection which makes it different from a mere linguistic premodifier for signifying seniority. The effect of this was to blur the marker for seniority, which is a requirement for interactions in the Yoruba language.

5. Limited women's agency

The female students occasionally contested the male control of members of fellowship groups, and the double-standard of the fellowship groups in relation to sexuality. They also wanted better mentoring by female lecturers and the women's groups on campus. The female residents of Awo Hall had, in a proactive move, joined a non-governmental organisation, War against Rape and Sexual Harassment (WARSH) to fight cases of rape and sexual harassment, and had secured male residents' support.

Strategic alliances over academic work were being forged in the secular spaces, and female students sought support from senior women academic staff who could mentor them in women's groups such as the UI Women's Society, as well as in religious organisations like The Deborah Initiative, The Esther Club, and Sisters on Fire. They also questioned the more conservative agendas of groups that were preoccupied with producing "good wives and mothers to build the nation".

Discussion

The perception of a gendered hierarchy in the university's religious fellowships, and in the university student politics was pervasive. Such hierarchy runs contrary to the stated objective of the university to be an equitable space. A university setting which promotes itself as being progressive if not transformative appears to be a veritable haven for entrenched inequalities that work against women. The popular attribution of these attitudes to tradition, rather than to the "modernising" atmosphere of a university, suggests beliefs and practices

that the female and male students have internalised and are unwilling to change. These are students who have been exposed to technological innovations, philosophical, political and social theories, and yet continue to resist any attempts to shift what Mernissi refers to as "authority thresholds" (1987: 9).

In addition, for these university students, the belief in the gender hierarchy that privileges men continues to be affirmed. This calls for a re-examination of insistence on the absence of gender as a social division among Yorubas (Oyewunmi 1997, 2002). The findings suggest that there is in fact considerable reproduction of traditional Yoruba norms of masculinity and femininity within contemporary religious associations on the UI campus, thus affirming the restrictive roles ascribed to women.

The marginalisation of females in decision-making on Nigeria's contemporary political scene further legitimises the situation on the university campus. This corroborates the theories of those who point to the influence of contemporary politics on gender inequality in Nigeria (Nzegwu, 2001: 30–32; Oyewumi, 2002). The statements of many of the women students in this study denote a disturbing level of resignation to an unequal social status, and a reluctance to exert some degree of agency to empower themselves in either secular and religious contexts.

However, on the other hand we also found evidence of some contestations in the secular space, among hall chairs and female activists. Here there were remarks that indicate that women can negotiate their relationships with their male friends and colleagues in academic work. There were also calls for reviews of the curriculum to include entrepreneurial courses that could make women more employable and thus less dependent on male partners. This marks the seeds of women's awareness that they too can become "social actors, employing, reforming and changing existing social institutions for their own ends" (Mojab, 2001).

What was less explicable was the disturbing regurgitation of traditional labels of women as quarrelsome; as less academically gifted than the male students; as shallow thinkers, and as malicious. Thus, a supposedly modernizing institution was reproducing age-old stereotypes, in spite of the increasingly large numbers of female students even in the highly demanding professional traditionally male-dominated disciplines like pharmacy (56.6%), public health (55.4%) and clinical sciences (41.4%, see table 1).

How does one explain the observed clustering of females in the religious fellowships and the pervasiveness of the fellowships even in such ostensibly secular places as the halls of residence? One explanation for the ascendancy

of collective identities defined by religion points to the safety net provided by these networks, given the wider context of social instability and uncertainty in the Nigerian university system and the growing distance of the students from the location of institutional decision-making. Another influential force could be the competition for limited resources and the disillusionment of the present generation of students with the state of affairs in the nation (Federici, 2000: 49). Thus they were willing to "bear the brunt of identity politics in terms of control of their life choices so as to follow 'authentic' notions of identity and behavior and the emphasis on controlling women's sexuality and other aspects of their lives" (Imam, 2004).

This was designed to avoid what Mernissi (1987) and Fisher (1994) had described as the Islamic concept of *fitna* (chaos, disorder), premised on the view that women, as uncontrollable beings, are destructive to the social order and need to be restrained. O'Brien and Coulon note that conservative Islamic prescriptions of strict moral standards for women as a panacea for economic and social ills arise from "an institutionalised mistrust of women" (1988: 117), especially those females seen as Westernised. These fundamentalist and politically far-right groups refer to so-called traditional forms of the religion, and refuse to countenance for example, the varieties of leadership positions of Muslim women in other societies in favour of Islamic rulings about the "complementarity" and "separation" of male and female roles (Mojab, 2001).

The Christian groups similarly exclude women from top leadership positions due to the doctrinal positions of their mother churches and patriarchal family structures. Their unquestioning reiteration of such dogma differs from the findings of studies that have shown gender practices in the churches to be more diverse, deriving from intersecting ambiguities in Western and African gender practices that at once empower and disempower women (Crumbley, 2003: 584). The influence of fundamentalism in this study revealed it to be a profoundly simplified and patriarchal worldview.

Conclusion

The study has examined the ways in which gender identity for female students is constructed in a Nigerian university. Gender relations in both religious fellowships and halls of residence have been strongly influenced by religious beliefs – both evangelical Christianity and Islam, and those notions which the students and staff have imbibed about traditional norms of masculinity and femininity. Uncertainties about campus life and disillusionment about

national life have coalesced in the minds of the female students into a state of resignation and frustration expressed in the question "What can a woman do?". While the individual may feel powerless to effect a change, the institution can restructure its policies and processes to establish gender equality. This might be a painful evolution for a deeply masculine institution, since it will have to make deep "institutional, pedagogical and epistemological" changes (Mama, 2003: 105) in order to discard the restrictive social roles ascribed to females in what should be a transformative environment.

Acknowledgments

References

African Association of Political Science. 1994. "Sexual harassment and violence", *African Association of Political Science Newsletter*. New Series 16, September.

Aina, Olabisi and Odebiyi, Tanwa. 2002. *Cultism and Youth Violence in Nigerian Universities*. Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University.

Amadiume, Ifi. 1987. *African Matriarchal Foundations: The Igbo Case*, London: Karnak House.

Bakare-Yusuf, Bibi. 2003. "Determinism: The Phenomenology of African Female Existence", *Feminist Africa* 2.

Bennett, Jane. 2002. "Exploration of a 'Gap': Strategizing Gender Equity in African Universities", *Feminist Africa* 1.

Crumbley, Deirde Helen. 2003. "Patriarchies, Prophets and Procreation: Sources of Gender Practices in Three African Churches", *Africa* 73(4).

Denga, D.I. and Denga, Hannah. 2004. "Sexual Harassment: A Student's View from a Nigerian University", *The African Symposium* 4(1).

Dibua, Jeremiah J. 2004. "Students and the Struggle against Authoritarianism in University Governance in Nigeria", in Zeleza, P.T. and Olukoshi, A. eds. *African Universities in the Twenty-First Century*. Dakar: Codesria.

Federici, Silvia. 2000. "The New African Student Movement", in Mwaria, C. B., Federici, S. and McLaren, J. eds. *African Visions: Literary Images, Political Change and Social Structure in Contemporary Africa.* London: Hosfra University.

Gaidzanwa, Rudo. ed. 2001. *Speaking for Ourselves: Masculinities and Femininities amongst Students at the University of Zimbabwe.* Harare: University of Zimbabwe Affirmative Action Project, Gender Studies Association.

Centre for Higher Education Studies. 2004. *Gender Equity in Commonwealth Higher Education: Working Paper 1: Setting the Scene.* London: University of London Institute of Education. Available at www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/GenderEqComHE.

Centre for Higher Education Studies. 2004. *Gender Equity in Commonwealth Higher Education: Working Paper 5: Data Analysis II.* London: University of London Institute of Education. Available at www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/GenderEqComHE.

Imam, Ayesha M. 1997. "*Dossier 17: The Muslim Religious Right ('Fundamentalists') and Sexuality*", report for Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML). Available at www.wluml.org.

Imam, Ayesha M. 2004. "*Fighting the Political (Ab)use of Religion in Nigeria*", BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights, Allies and Others. Available at www.wluml.org.

Kwesiga, Joy. 2002. *Women's Access to Higher Education in Africa: Uganda's Experience.* Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

Mama, Amina. 2003. "Restore, Reform but do not Transform: The Gender Politics of Higher Education in Africa", *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* 1(1): 101–125.

Mernissi, Fetima. 1987. "Introduction", in *Beyond the veil: Male Female Dynamics in Muslim Society.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Mojab, Shahrzad. 2001. "*The Politics of Theorizing 'Islamic Feminism': Implications for International Feminist Movements*". Women Living Under Muslim Laws dossiers 23–24.

Morley, Louise. 1999. *Organising Feminisms: The Micropolitics of the Academy.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

National Universities Commission. 2002. *Annual Report.* Abuja: NUC.

Nzegwu, G. Olufunmilayo. 1981. "Reminiscences of an Ibadan Alumna" in Tamuno, T. ed. *Ibadan Voices: Ibadan University in Transition.* Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

O'Brien, Donal B., and Coulon, Christian. eds. 1988. *Charisma and Brotherhood in African Islam.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Odejide, Abiola. 2003. "Navigating the seas: women in higher education in Nigeria", *Journal of Education* 38(3).

Odejide, Abiola, Akanji, Bola and Odekunle, Kolade. 2005. *Gender Equity in Commonwealth Higher Education: Working Paper 1: Setting the Scene.* London: University of London Institute of Education. Available at www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/GenderEqComHE.

Okeke, Philomina. 2004. "Higher Education for Africa's Women: Partners with or cheerleaders for Men?" in Zeleza, P. T. and Olukoshi, A. eds. *African Universities in the Twenty-first Century.* Dakar: Codesria.

Oyewunmi, Oyeronke. 1999. *The Invention of Woman: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Oyewumi, Oyeronke. 2002. "Conceptualizing Gender: Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concepts and the Challenge of African Epistemologies", *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies.*

Parrinder, Geoffrey. 1981. "Religious Foundations at Ibadan" in Tamuna, T. ed. *Ibadan Voices: Ibadan University in Transition.* Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

Pereira, Charmaine. 2002. "Between knowing and imagining, what space for feminist scholarship on Africa?", *Feminist Africa* 1.

Pereira, Charmaine. nd. "Structured Inequalities: A Gender Analysis of the University System in Nigeria". Unpublished report for the collaborative research project "*Case Studies of Nigerian Universities*", sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation.

Sawyerr, Akilagpa. 2002. "Challenges facing African universities: Selected Issues". Paper presented at the 45th Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Washington DC, 5–8 December 2002. Available at www.aau.org.

Smith, Daniel J. 2004. "Youth, sin and sex in Nigeria: Christianity and HIV/AIDS-related beliefs and behaviour among rural-urban migrants", *Culture, Health and Sexuality* 6(5).

Tamuno, Tekena. ed. 1981. *Ibadan Voices: Ibadan University in Transition.* Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

Ukeje, B.O. 2002. "Financing higher education in Nigeria", *The Nigerian Social Scientist* 5(1).

University of Ibadan. 2004. Management Information Office. Unpublished Statistics.

University of Ibadan. 2005. Planning Office Statistics.

University of Ibadan. 2006. "*Registered Clubs, Associations and Societies*". Available at www.ui.edu.ng.

University of Ibadan. 2004. *The Vision for the 21st Century.* Ibadan: University of Ibadan.

Zeleza, Paul and Olukoshi, Adebayo. eds. 2005. *African Universities in the Twenty-First Century.* Dakar: Codesria.

Endnotes

1   The author is a faculty member in the Department of Communication and Language Arts at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. She was serving as deputy vice-chancellor at the time of the implementation of the study.

2   As part of the larger Gender and Institutional Culture in African Universities project carried out by the African Gender Institute.

3   Eighty-seven sub-degree students were excluded from the study.

4   Figures from 'Gender Equity in Commonwealth Higher Education', working paper 5. The Institute of Education 2003, London.

5   These were Inter Varsity Christian Union (IVCU), Redeemed Christian Church of God Fellowship (RCCGF), Celestial Church of Christ , Student Parish (CCC), Baptist Students' Fellowship (BSF).

Abiola Odejide

is a Professor in Communication Studies at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. She has served as the Director of the Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC), and recently completed a term as Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs. Her research on universities has included the Nigerian country study for the Association of Commonwealth Universities Project, completed in 2003.