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Series II, Africa, Volume 16

The Idea of a Nigerian University:

A Revisit

Nigerian Philosophical Studies, III

Edited by

Olatunji Oyeshile

Joseph Kenny



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CHAPTER XIII

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND THE VIOLATION OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

CHINYERE UKPOKOLO

In July 2010, the global community was hit by news and pictorial reports on the Internet of a case of sexual harassment involving a male professor in Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria and a female student from the institution. The initial reaction of the state government was to request for a probe of the incident.

In August, 2011, a similar incident, and now more horrendous, was perpetrated in Abia State University involving five male students, and the victim, a female student. The perpetrators were reported to have conducted a video coverage of the incident and circulated the same round the university campus. It later found its way to the Internet. The initial reaction of the school authorities was to deny the existence of such students in the institution, but later insisted that the reported violence and 'brutal violation' took place outside the school campus.

This paper is neither an attempt to initiate investigations into those stories nor to declare the degree of culpability of any of the parties – the perpetrators or the victims. However, one thing is clear, to borrow the terminology of Noam Chomsky in his work, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965), these are 'surface structures' of 'deep structur[al]' understanding. In other words, those incidents are reflections of a bigger picture of the workings of the human mind.

What those incidents represent is a climax of the nature of the interactions that exist in many institutions of higher learning in the country, though often surreptitiously. In any case, these two incidents share certain commonalities: erosion of the values of the university. But there exists a difference. While in the Ambrose Alli university incident the victor became a co-victim and begged to 'live', and was in fact ready to pay for that 'life', in the Abia State's case the victim was driven to the point of rejecting life, begging to be killed. Undoubtedly, what happened in these two institutions are cases of gross sexual harassment and sexual violence, which distorts the university culture. Whatever the nature sexual harassment takes in higher education institutions (HEIs), it distorts the learning process, and violates the academic freedom of the victim.

This paper explores how sexual harassment in HEIs constricts the spaces of knowledge production and acquisition in the university, and consequently violates the academic freedom of the victim. Although various scholars have paid attention to the issue of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Africa (see Adedokun, 2005; Denga and Denga 2004;

Ogunmaberu, 2006; Idowu and Yahaya 1993), not much scholarly space seem to have been given to the interconnectedness between sexual harassment and academic freedom in the Nigerian university system, and this has created a gap in our understanding of the challenge sexual harassment poses to the essence of the university. The basic questions this paper sets to answer are:

- what do we mean by SH, and who are the victims?
- Which aspects of the tenets of academic freedom are violated by sexual harassment?
- How does sexual harassment hinder knowledge production and/or obstruct access to knowledge?

These questions are explored for the intersections of sexual harassment and academic freedom. Empirical data collected in 2010 and 2011 was utilized for this study. The research design is case study typology. This study was carried out at a public university in Nigeria here referred to as 'Rose Mill University' (pseudonym).

Research Context and Methodology

Rose Mill University (pseudonym) is one of the many public universities in Nigeria. Located in the southern part of the country, the institution is one of the top ten universities in the country. Academic staff strength is high, reaching a little over 1,000 with female academics less than 40% of the figure. Undergraduate students' enrolment by 2009/2010 session is about 13,000, with higher male students' enrolment though the number of female students in recent years is increasing progressively. As the subject matter of this research is a sensitive one, I have concealed the names of the informants and the institution, without undermining the accuracy of the facts being presented. The employment of fictionalization as a strategy in ethnographic research is not a novel development (see for instance, Wallot 2009; Ukpokolo, 2010).

Both primary¹ and secondary sources of data were employed for this study. The primary data were collected using semi-structured interview questions. A total of 46 informants participated in this study comprising of 17 female students, 17 male students, 5 men academics and 5 women academic staff, the institution's Counsellor and a social worker. The interview questions generally focused on capturing the perception, prevalence and experience of sexual harassment in the institution studied, and how sexual harassment violates the academic freedom of the victims.

¹ Data for this paper was generated from field report carried out in 2011 augmented with earlier situation analysis report on sexual harassment in a public university in Nigeria carried out by the writer and a team of academic staff from a Nigerian university.

Students and lecturers interviewed were randomly selected while purposive sampling was adopted in the selection of the social worker and the university counsellor. Male students were interviewed separately from the female students. Also, five focus group discussions were carried out. The interviews were taped recorded and later transcribed. Journals, books, and the Internet were also consulted for documentary evidence. Collected data were subjected to critical analysis utilizing context analysis, descriptive and interpretive techniques. Direct quotations of informants' voices have been included in the analysis to allow the readers gain insight into the thoughts of the informants and further generate their own meanings. Academic staff and undergraduate students of Rose Mill University constitute the research population.

The major methodological challenge encountered in this study is the unwillingness of the informants to recount their personal experiences of sexual harassment. Rather, they all claimed that their friends or someone they know were victims of sexual harassment. This 'culture of silence' is a major challenge in dealing with the issue of sexual harassment in HEIs. Findings from this study cover heterosexual relations, and are not an attempt to deny the existence of other form of sexuality that may also exist in the institution, and where sexual harassment cannot be ruled out. This study does not cover post graduate students, and sexual harassment among staff. The terms 'teachers' and 'lecturers' have been used in this study interchangeably.

CONCEPTUALIZING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is a global phenomenon not only at the HEIs but also at the workplace. Sexual harassment can be classified into three categories: (i) verbal, (ii) visual and audio, and (iii) physical. Some of the acts that constitute sexual harassment are presented under these sub-heading and discussed below:

(i) Verbal:

- Sexist remarks directed at an individual
- Use of force/intimidation/threat to get someone into having sexual affairs with a person
- Demanding sexual favours in exchange for employment, promotion, admission or any other benefits or entitlements
- Offering sexual favours in exchange for higher grades

(ii) Visual

- Taking and sending unwholesome pictures, making recordings for the purpose of blackmail.
- Indecent dressing and seductive postures

(iii) Physical conduct

- Unwelcome fondling or caressing of a person
- Brushing against someone with the purpose of deriving sexual favours
- Touching or pinching someone to elicit sexual feelings.
- Rape

Although the list above is by no means exhaustive, there is a general agreement that sexual harassment is ‘unwelcome sexual overtures’. Sexual harassment can be categorized under what Stephen P. Heyneman termed “education corruption” which, according to him is “the abuse of authority for both personal as well as material gain” (Heyneman 2009: 1). He identified four ways in which education can be said to be corrupt (i) through its functions (ii) through the supply of goods and services (iii) through professional misconduct, and (iv) in the treatment of taxation and property. In the light of the above, one that applied to the discussion in this paper is ‘through professional misconduct’, which he again identified, among other things, as:

- Accepting material gifts or rewards in exchange for positive grades, assessments or selection to specialized programmes.
- Bias in grading or assessment because of family or other private requests
- Assigning of grades or assessment biased by a student’s race, culture, social class, ethnicity, or other ascriptive attributes
- *Sexually or otherwise exploiting, harassing or discriminating against particular students* (emphasis mine)
- Adopting an inadequate textbooks or educational product because of a manufacturer’s gifts or incentives
- Forcing students to purchase materials where profits accrue to the instructor (Heyneman, 2009: 3).

On her part, Pereira (2002) describes sexual harassment as “sexual corruption”, and concludes that the higher education institutions in Nigeria are characterized by “sexual corruption” (Pereira, 2002: 29). In the same vein, Mama (2003) observed that in Africa, “sexual pervasions are a pervasive feature of academic life” (Mama, 2003: 118). The prevalence of sexual corruption in HEIs distorts the processes of assessment in the educational sector, and further destroys the trust on the lecturers that those students with excellent performances sincerely represent what their certificates reflect. Bennett *et al* (2007) identified certain concerns that have been consistent in studies on sexual harassment and sexual violence on campuses in southern African universities and her neighbouring countries as follows:

- multiple zones of power and seniority which according to the authors reflects hierarchical nature of the university and patriarchal cultures of leadership which expose the 'juniors' to vulnerability to harassment by the 'stronger'.
- The existence of transactional sex in HEIs in the continent which could include provision of higher grades (higher CGP) from men academics to women students. In this case women students offer themselves willingly to men academics in exchange for higher scores or even for access to financial gains.
- Women's overt or covert harassment of men lecturers through provocative dressing, and
- The inability of victims of sexual harassment to divulge their experiences of the incident due to the fear of stigmatization and/or victimization (Bennett *et al* (2007: 56).

The above observation not only indicates the pervasive nature of sexual harassment on our campuses but also opens up space for us to begin to imagine the possible consequences of sexual harassment in Nigerian higher education, particularly in a country where the instruments and mechanisms for addressing sexual harassment in HEIs are lacking. Bennett *et al* (2007) affirm that:

What campus-based research on sexual harassment and sexual violence has offered is one window into the cultures of heterosexuality within higher education. While it is critical to note that such cultures may offer people access to important life-enhancing pleasurable relationships, a focus on sexual harassment and sexual violence allows certain tensions of gendered dynamics to be brought to the surface, possibly named as 'abusive' and identified as core zones for intervention, both for the sake of those likely to become abused and for the sake of higher education itself (Bennett *et al*. 2007, 87).

Implied in the above is that sexual harassment is a gender issue and as such gender and academic freedom in HEIs in Africa is not only about leadership issue, access to higher education but encompasses what Barnes (2007) termed "the bodily expressions of inequitable power relations" (Barnes, 2007: 18) which is, in the words of Hallam (2001), "antithetical to the ideals of the university as a collegial community of aspiring and credentialed scholars" (Hallam 2001 as cited in Barnes, 2007: 18). The prevalence of sexual harassment in HEIs in any country raises a fundamental question, which borders on the quality of certificates emerging such country. Besides, sexual harassment distorts the culture of the university and fundamentally violates the rights of the victim to engage in

knowledge production, the individual student's right to the pursuit of knowledge.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND THE ENTERPRISE OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The concept of 'academic freedom' which has gained currency in discourse on the university today dates back to the period "spanning the last decades of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century" (Pak, 2007: 83). Although the issue that thrust up the question of academic freedom, as Pak (2007) noted, was the case of a faculty in a British University who was being persecuted for his position in a dispute between the administration and the academic staff, the major foundation-laying epoch that instituted academic freedom as a pillar in the discourse of university autonomy, took place at the International Conference convened by UNESCO in 1950, in Nice, where and when the universities in the global community stipulated three categorical principles for which every university should stand. These, according to UNESCO policy Statement, are:

- The right to pursue knowledge for its own sake and to follow wherever the search for truth may lead;
- The tolerance of divergent opinions and freedom from political interference;
- The obligation as social institutions to promote, through teaching and research, the principles of freedom and justice, of human dignity and solidarity, and to develop mutually material and moral aid on an international level (extract from UNESCO Policy Statement).

In Africa, academic freedom became a buzz word in the discourse on HEIs in the 1990s following the policy Statements that have come to be referred to as *Dar as Salam Declaration* and *The Kampala Declaration* (1990). The interest since then has been on how the neoliberal policies of the government interfere with (i) knowledge production within the university space, including curricula development and the issue of harmonization and standardization; (ii) administration of the university (iii) autonomy of knowledge production and finally, though not directly implied in neoliberalism, and often treated by some scholars as unserious, (iv) gender issues.

Although gender is conspicuously missing in the English version of *The Kampala Declaration* on academic freedom, an unexplainable oversight, in the French version, the reverse is the case. Despite this omission gender issues have continued to be a problematic that cannot be avoided in the discourse on academic freedom (see Sall, 2000). The issues articulated in *The Kampala Declaration* and the way each interferes with

the processes of knowledge production continues to generate reactions and counter reactions from different groups ranging from academic staff union, civil society, to the students. Often times, most reactions come from the academic staff's rejection of interference, which they perceive to be counter-productive to the goals of the university or opposed to the processes of qualitative education.

Despite some achievement recorded since the formulation of *The Kampala Declaration* (1990), diverse challenges, some of them new, have continued to undermine the value and quality of the university as the 'ivory tower' (see for instance Sawyerr, 2004a; 2004b; Teferra & Altbach, 2004; Nwagwu, 2010). In recognition of this reality, The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), in collaboration with *Centre de Recherche en Anthropologie Sociale et Culturelle*, Algeria (CASCA), in 2010 organized an international conference in Oran, Algeria, termed 'Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility of Academics and Researchers in Africa: What are the New Challenges?' The goal of the conference was to review the journey so far with regard to academic freedom in the continent, and articulate other challenges that have emerged since the formulation of *The Kampala Declaration*. The consensus at the end of the conference was the conclusion, through both empirically and theoretical based scholarly works presented by seasoned African scholars² at the conference, that the violation of academic freedom in HEIs in Africa has moved significantly away from government interferences which the teachers often agitate against.

In recent times, the majority of the participants noted, threats to academic freedom emerge from within the university. For instance, Ogachi (2010) explored the corporate cultures that are threatening academic freedom in many public universities in Eastern Africa. Professors, rather than engaging in teaching and research, are co-opted to function as directors of various units and centres (some of which are duplicated) aimed at generating money for the universities (Ogachi, 2010).

Other issues threatening academic freedom from within include ethnicisation of the university (Munara & Wako, 2010), the complexities of intra-group interaction which often obstruct access to formal and informal spaces in the university as a result of gendered practices (Ukpokolo, 2010) *et cetera*.

What these studies suggest is that the violation of academic freedom from within calls for a closer look at how spaces of knowledge

² Some of these scholars include Thandika Mkandawire (London School of Economics), Mustafa Raufu (Oxford), Jimi Adesina and Fred Hendricks (Rhodes University South Africa), Amina Mama (California), Hocine Khelifaoui (Canada) and other stake holders such as Scholars At Risk (SAR, New York), Academic Staff Union of Nigeria University (ASUU) represented by the president of the association, Ukachukwu Awuzie. This list is by no means exhaustive of the scholars that took part in the conference.

production are being constricted through practices within the university, practices which include sexual harassment.

As defined in *The Kampala Declaration* (1990), 'academic freedom' is "the freedom of members of the academic community, individually or collectively, in the pursuit, development and transmission of knowledge, through research, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation, teaching, lecturing and writing" (*The Kampala Declaration* 1990, emphasis mine). The university, as an 'ivory tower' typically represents a free space where teachers can produce knowledge, carry out research, interrogate ideas through writing, and be able to disseminate their findings through seminar presentations, discussions, teaching and lecturing. The students on their part are expected, without restriction, to access and harness this knowledge which lecturers possess. Accessing knowledge also implies freedom of movement within the university community for the purpose of study, research and utilization of academic facilities such as libraries, Internet facilities, laboratories *et cetera* at all times wherever they are located in the university environment. Constriction of intellectual spaces, therefore, includes practices that interfere with and challenge the achievement of any of these goals.

Although much debate on academic freedom tends to focus on the area of knowledge production, which definitely is one of the core issues, the often neglected area of the declaration is the part which challenges African academics not only to freely engage in knowledge production, but to act responsibly in their bid to produce knowledge, disseminate or teach. For instance, Chapter III, Article 21 of the *Kampala Declaration* states categorically that: "No one group of the intellectual community shall indulge in *harassment, discrimination, or oppressive behaviour* towards another group" (emphasis mine). Students are not excluded from the intellectual community; as such, acts that restrain the production and/or pursuit of knowledge in the university violate the principle of academic freedom whether from the teachers or the students. Students' unethical conduct can hinder their teachers from performing their statutory duty or make the university environment un conducive to any meaningful learning processes for their colleagues through vices ranging from cultism, unwelcome sexual overtures to sexual violence such as rape.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT ROSE MILL UNIVERSITY

To a casual observer, sexual harassment is not prevalent in RMU. However, that does not seem to be the case. Findings from this study demonstrate that there is a general belief among members of the university community that sexual harassment is prevalent in the institution. The informants were quick to point out that although generally women tend to be victims, men are not exempted. According to a male undergraduate student:

Guys also fall victims of sexual harassment from female students, especially some girls in secret societies. These girls [in secret societies] go to a guy and say "it's you I want to date, you like it or not". "It's either you drop out of school or you date me". Through all that, the guy is already undergoing sexual harassment. But his ego won't allow him to tell his classmate that, "that girl is harassing me" (Fieldwork, 2010).

Apart from their colleagues, students also harass their teachers as one of my informants observed: "Some girls also go to the lecturers' offices and harass them sexually through their dressing and appearance or even verbally" by openly saying, "You give me that mark and sleep with me" (Fieldwork, 2010). Many male informants are of the opinion that provocative dressing and seductive postures by female students constitutes sexual harassment of male teachers and students. A male Senior Lecturer argued that some female students deliberately dress in such a manner as to seduce their lecturers, visiting them at late hours in the office with frivolous discussions with the intention of endearing themselves to their lecturers and in the process seduce them. Besides, female students can harass their teachers through video recording of conversation with sexual connotations with the intention of blackmailing such teachers. Female students that initiate sexual harassment do so with the intention of using "sexual favours to gain academic favour" (Heyneman 2009: 12), a case of 'transactional sex'. The belief that female students are hapless victims of male teachers seems to wane against actions such as these.

The poor economic condition of many students was suggested as a contributory factor to incidents of sexual harassment. While poor girls stand vulnerable to sexual harassment from more comfortable male students, 'rich' girls can harass poor male students. Though informants are unanimous that power has strong influence on sexual harassment, they seem to disagree on the nature of this power. Sexual violence such as rape is a clear evidence of power where the stronger, physically, takes advantage of the victim's weaker stature as exemplified in the incident in Abia State University narrated earlier. According to an informant, "Using rape as typical example, within RMU, it's all about power... maybe because the perpetrator is physically stronger than the victim" (Fieldwork, 2010). But power need not always be physical. According to Bakari & Leach (2009) "Men in position of power may not need to use physical violence to maintain their control over subordinate groups" (Bakari & Leach, 2009: 13 citing Hearn, 1998). Power asymmetry existing between the teachers and the students naturally underscores students' subordinate positionality. For instance, an informant observed:

This [sexual harassment/rape] happens mostly to people who are at disadvantage. Probably they are below people who have power. I think it has to do more about power or status or authority that the person feels he can exercise on somebody else making the person to be disadvantaged.

That is how it mostly goes. It's just about power (Fieldwork, 2011).

Basically, power is one's (or a group's) ability to cause others to do what the individual (or group) wishes the other to do. Shively (1997), for instance, observed that power can be exercised in various ways, such as through coercion when we force a person to do something he or she did not want to do, as persuasion when we convince someone that a particular action is what he or she really wishes to do, or as the construction of incentives when we make the alternative so unattractive that only one reasonable option remains (Shively, 1997: 6). Viewed from this perspective, power becomes complex, elusive and can, indeed, take varied forms. For instance, an informant concluded that "in cases of lecturers harassing students, it has to do with the power that the lecturers can use on students... So, I think it's all about power (Fieldwork, 2011). The indication is that some students perceive themselves as helpless as the statement below indicates:

If a lecturer tells me "if you don't sleep with me, I will not pass you" and he does it this year, I have a carry over, and the next year, the same is about to happen, I will succumb! (Fieldwork, 2010).

A male undergraduate student in Faculty of Science has this to say:

Most times, the object would have no choice but to succumb, because the subject has power to do anything to you. From the onset, he uses this as a weapon against you. Most times, they put it in a way that the object feels all she or he has to do is just to do it once and get over with it, but over time, the person comes back because the subject has power over you and keeps using the power to have his way every time and gradually, the object loses his or her self esteem (Fieldwork, 2010).

Men and women exercise power over the other either covertly or overtly. Chinweizu in his widely celebrated book, *Anatomy of Female Power* (1990), puts it this way:

Whereas male power tends to be crude, confrontational and direct, female power tends to be subtle, manipulative and indirect. Whereas aggressiveness is the hallmark of male power, manoeuvre is the hallmark of female power. From a male-centred point of view of what power is, it is easy to be misled into thinking that a female form of power does not exist at all; and even when female power is recognized, it is

easy to dismiss it as power of inferior type, just because it is not hard, aggressive or boastful like the highly visible male form (Chinweizu, 1990: 12).

By implication, a female student that harasses her lecturer does so manipulatively, making her lecturer to do her biddings or what an informant describes as turning the lecturer into her 'boy'. Her sexuality is here employed as instrument of exploitation. An instance was given of a lecturer that went to the extent of changing a female student's scores even in the course he never taught. Of course, when the matter came into the open and was investigated, he was found culpable and he eventually lost his job.

With regard to lecturer student relationship, findings suggest that academically weak students tend to be more prone to sexual harassment or even harassing their lecturers in a bid to upgrade their performances. This view is supported by a Senior Lecturer in College of Humanities who argued that:

Because such students need to improve on their Cumulative Grade Points (CGP), such lecturers catch in on that by threatening her that her poor performance could lead to her withdrawal from the institution. So the effect is more on the very weak students. In fact, that is the major weapon the lecturer has on a student, marks (Fieldwork, 2010).

Although participants generally acknowledged that unwelcome sexual overtures when carried through is a trauma that the victim may live with for life, some students succumb because "I need to graduate". However, instances abound where a few students have dared to challenge the seemingly hegemonic power the teachers have over their marks by reporting to the constituted authority, but the processes are daunting. For instance, a student who is convinced that his/her performance has been compromised may request for a remark of his/her script. But this takes a long process and is often viewed as an indictment on the integrity of the lecturers.

THRIVING IN SECRECY, SUSTAINING CONTINUITY

The indication is that sexual harassment thrives in an environment where victims do not 'speak out'. An informant notes:

The victims [of rape] are usually afraid to speak out especially rape victims. If the news has not broken out, they won't be able to say anything but if they find the courage to talk, they are ashamed, most of the time. They feel it was something they did that caused some of the things that happened. Then, apart from that, sometimes the remaining

students pity the victims; sometimes some students say the victims caused it (Fieldwork, 2010).

When the researcher sought to know the reason for this ‘culture of silence’, an informant resorted:

Aaaa, even if I am being sexually harassed by a lecturer I will not say it. I won’t even tell my friend. Because people will label me... “This is the girl that lecturer is harassing”...aaa *Olorun ma je* [God forbid].

Although in RMU, there is institutional mechanism for general disciplinary issues, the social worker in the institution is of the opinion that the students themselves have a strong role to play in availing themselves of the opportunity offered by this redress mechanism. He notes:

Before it [a case] gets to the disciplinary body, the ladies themselves are the ones that can determine what will happen. If they want to stop sexual harassment, a lot has to do with the victim. For example, it is the lady that would say, “I have not done anything to this lecturer to sexually harass me and I want the authority to do something about it to rescue me from this injustice”. So, it is the lady that would make herself available. First, she has to make a formal report and you know the committee has to work with data and facts. A lecturer can even say that “This lady wants to spoil my career”... But it is the case that is reported to them [the committee] that they can investigate (Fieldwork, 2010).

A male lecturer, however, reasoned that most victims of sexual violence, that is rape, do not report because they too are culpable. In his words, “they are not completely innocent” (Fieldwork, 2011). Obviously, the inability of the victims of sexual harassment and sexual violence to make formal report to institution’s authorities due to stigmatization and/or their culpability constitutes further hindrance to any attempt to curtail the prevalence of the phenomena. This position was supported by the university social worker who on occasions encouraged victims to make a formal report. According to him:

Because of the societal stigma, they don’t want to be stigmatized that this is the person that was raped because they would ask questions such as “Where was it? What was she wearing? Was she the only one that has been raped?” You know, all these things put a setback. And when the

perpetrator did it and goes away, he has the tendency to do it to another person (Fieldwork, 2011).

Every individual is interconnected in a web of social relationships, which has effect on one's choices. For the victim of rape, the protection of her identity and her right to privacy surpasses her right to seek justices against the harasser. The Social Worker further hinted:

Some of them even say they don't want their fiancé to know and we respect the right and confidentiality of our patient. If we say, do you know in Rose Mill University we can assist you to get justice, they may say 'I don't want any of my mates to know'. Some of them would tell you when they are in the hospital, and their mates come to visit them, they would say they are in the hospital for another sickness, instead of that one (Fieldwork, 2010).

Insisting on the right to privacy on the part of the victims renders efforts at giving assistance ineffective. As the Social Worker further observed, the social work unit is most interested in the patient's recovery, therefore, would not do anything that would harm her or make her experience another shock or trauma.

THE INTERSECTIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

The UNESCO Policy Statement on the university states:

Neither Academic Freedom which encompasses the freedom to enquire and to teach as well as the freedom of students to learn, nor University Autonomy are privileges but that they are the basic and inalienable conditions which enable the University as an institution of scholarship and learning, as to its individual members to meet, fully to assume and optimally to fulfil the responsibilities Society confides to both (UNESCO Policy Statement (IUA)).

Education generally functions to "certify the acquisition of knowledge and skills and to identify those who may deserve more specialized training" (Heyneman 2009: 5). When the processes of acquiring knowledge, Heyneman added, are prejudiced as a result of ascriptive considerations such as gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation *et cetera*, the very purpose for which educational institution is established is jeopardised (Heyneman 2009: 5).

Gender here has to do with how gendered socio-cultural dynamics intersect access to knowledge and knowledge production. For the female

students, the most prevalent form of insecurity they experience in RMU campus is sexual harassment, which at times manifests as rape. Informants observed that the fear of falling victim of rape restrict their movement particularly during examination when they need to study late in the library and classrooms. A study of students' utilization of ICT centres on the university campus reveals that the space is populated by male students late in the evenings, making access to technology a gendered issue. With this apparent constriction of such spaces of knowledge acquisition, female students become disadvantaged, as they retire to their halls of residence earlier than usual as a result of the fear of sexual violence. Commenting on this reality a 400L female student observed:

When we are in our rooms, hardly do we read because of the distractions we face with our roommates, and activities going on in the hall. So, what we do is, at night, we find it easy to read and assimilate. Some would go to any lecture theatre that is close to the hall to read. *But, as of last semester, I discovered that people didn't go out to read the way they ought to, because they are scared of being sexually harassed* (Fieldwork, 2010, emphasis mine).

In their paper, "*I Invited her to my Office*"; *Normalising Sexual Violence in a Nigeria College of Education*, Bakari & Leach (2009) observed that female students in their research noted that the greatest threat to their studies was sexual harassment (Bakari & Leach 2009: 31). Findings from the current study give further credence to that conclusion.

Reactions to the experience of sexual harassment varies, depending on (i) the form of sexual harassment the individual experienced, e.g. verbal, physical such as rape, (ii) the psychological disposition of the victim of sexual harassment and, (iii) the programme the victim is pursuing in the university. An informant observed:

Someone who is a victim of rape will find it so difficult to adjust. If she is not open to some good guidance or counselling and allows her emotions to control her, she might have a problem with continuing her education... I've seen a lot of people that psychologically, have been affected by this kind of a situation. I have a friend that has to withdraw from school because she has been sexually harassed by some guys around her. She couldn't cope with the situation so she has to change school to continue her studies (Fieldwork 2010).

An institution where there exists healthy interaction among students, on the one hand, and between students and teachers on the other, engenders positive intellectual culture. According to a female Senior Lecturer,

“students can go to the library without fear. They can approach their lecturers without fear. Accessibility to lecturers will be a given” (Fieldwork, 2011). She further noted:

Sexual Harassment weakens knowledge production itself. The knowledge production is distorted. The student will not pay attention. ... It lowers the integrity of the lecturer. On the part of the student, the knowledge he/she will be acquiring will not be complete (Fieldwork, 2011).

Informants also noted that some of the survival strategies victims adopt include avoidance of classes or courses of the harasser, particularly when such courses are optional. Concerning such a lecturer a 300 Level female student observed:

I may not be free in his class. He has my Matric number and it can affect my performance. I won't be free with him at all. If the course is a borrowed course I will delete the course (Fieldwork, 2011).

A Lecturer in Faculty of Science corroborated this position when he noted:

It's clear that students normally don't go for courses of lecturers who are known to be harassing students. If the course is optional, students will avoid the course... as a way of avoiding contact with the lecturer-in-charge... and this will affect their career-building (Fieldwork, 2011).

Where such courses are compulsory, the students may choose to be self effacing in class, avoid asking questions when the need for clarification arises, and this reduces student's classroom participation. Another male lecturer observed:

Students may not have the full meaning of what they have read or taught and they may have reasons to once in a while come back to their lecturer for clarification and interpretation. But where sexual harassment exists, the student will be discouraged to go or ask for further clarifications or the lecturer's position on an issue (Fieldwork, 2011).

The above narratives reveal how sexual harassment can constrict spaces of knowledge acquisition, and subsequently violate the academic freedom of victims. Chapter I Section A of the *Kampala Declaration* on academic freedom states “Every person has the right to education and participation in intellectual activity”. Such rights are violated as the

dynamics of sexual harassment threatens the victim's right to actively participate in "intellectual activity". In essence, sexual harassment affects the quality of knowledge impacted on the victim as a result of constriction of intellectual spaces.

REDRESS MECHANISMS IN RMU?

Presently, HEIs in Nigeria are yet to formulate sexual harassment policies although disciplinary committees exist in all schools. This absence constitutes a challenge to dealing with the issue of sexual harassment in HEIs in the country. The existing general disciplinary committees such as Students Disciplinary Committee and, Senior/Junior Staff Disciplinary Committees also handle cases of sexual harassment in most institutions. The implication is that procedures and processes required for handling a delicate matter like sexual harassment is absent. This further restrains victims who wish to seek redress.

In RMU, the existing procedure for reporting a case of sexual harassment is through the Head of Department (HOD) who will investigate and establish the fact that there was a case of sexual harassment, to the Dean of the Faculty who will also do the same, then to the Registrar and finally to the Vice Chancellor Academics, if it is a case involving an academic staff. The institution then sets up a panel excluding members of the Department of the harasser to establish the *prima facie* of the case. According to an academic staff, "though the process is complex, this complexity allows for thoroughness and eliminates biases and the tendency for someone to hijack the process". Another academic staff who was a member of the RMU Disciplinary Committee maintained: "My sister the procedure is long but that is why RMU disciplinary resolution has integrity" (Fieldwork, 2011). A case of sexual harassment involving students, depending on where it took place, goes to the Dean of Students from where it is sent to the Students' Disciplinary Committee for final investigation and verdict.

Beside the disciplinary committees, other redress mechanisms available to victims include the Counselling Unit in the Students' Affairs Department, the Social Work Unit, and the Law Clinic where victims can seek justice and redress. Interestingly, victims of sexual harassment hardly seek redress at these places, except a few cases that get to the general disciplinary committee through a panel's recommendations. Fear of stigmatization and victimization keep many victims away from reporting their experiences, which may indicate the students' lack of confidence or limited trust for the available procedures. An informant asked a rhetorical question: "Will they act on my letter or I will end up putting myself in trouble" (Personal Communication, 2011). For some informants, the university authority is biased in handling sexual harassment issues. A male undergraduate student observed:

Sometimes the authorities are partial with their judgement... If the perpetrator is their relative, sometimes the judgement is not actually what we like. But we believe that the school authority should actually put in some strict punishment on the perpetrators (Fieldwork, 2010).

This allegation is contradicted by instances where lecturers have been indicted or out-rightly dismissed as a result of their involvement in sexual harassment. According to a male Lecturer who had sat on a case of sexual harassment by a male lecturer:

There are cases of lecturers who have lost their jobs in this university because of sexual harassment. For instance, one happened in Faculty of Education recently. So it is not true that the university does not do anything. The issue is that the students are afraid to make formal report (Fieldwork, 2011).

It, therefore, may not be correct to assert that the institution is relaxed in dealing with the issue of sexual harassment. The facts seem to suggest that while the university is willing and ready to deal with the issue of sexual harassment in the institution, the 'culture of silence' that characterise sexual harassment is a challenge. The absence of a gender unit with a counselling gender clinic in the institution is a missing link in overcoming this challenge. A 400 student hinted:

If there is a centre where complaints can be made and... those ones will take it up, may be that will help those that are shy and ashamed to come out. Let fresh students be aware of it. Give them advice. Innocent girls that are admitted are ignorant, coming from their parents' watch where they don't know anything about tertiary institution (Fieldwork, 2011).

In recent sessions, the school authority has been inviting gender scholars during orientation of new students to speak to the in-coming students on gender issues, including sexual harassment, with the intention of inculcating in the students the right value – freedom and the respect for human dignity. This is a welcome development. Presently, RMU is working on the formulation of gender policy and sexual harassment policy which are intended to impact on the values in the institution. However, the security situation on campus needs to be improved upon. Installation of Close Circuit Television (CCTV) at various 'danger spots' on campus can enhance security on campus and puts a check on those students and visitors to the campus that may attempt to engage in anti-social behaviour such as

rape. This, the management has started doing. But, there is still need for improvement.

CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS

This paper attempted an exploration of the relations between sexual harassment and academic freedom. It argued that sexual harassment constricts intellectual spaces and, thus, violates the academic freedom of the victim. Discussions in the paper demonstrate that sexual harassment is a question of power which males and females exercise in diverse ways. For female students who engage in harassing their lecturers sexually, the act is usually subtle, indirect and manipulative, making their victims psychologically terrorized or oppressed and disposed to sexual exploitation. Conversely, male lecturers and male students exercise their powers in aggressive, direct, and confrontational manner, and are often easily identified as cases of sexual harassment underrating the former. Obviously, the prevalence of incidents of sexual harassment in universities in Nigeria signals to the stakeholders in the educational sector the erosion of the values and culture of the university.

In any case, findings from this study provide opportunity for the management in HEIs to look deeper into the mode of interaction in the university space in order to begin to redesign processes and structures that could engender a more positive mode of interaction, between staff and students, on the one hand, and among students themselves on the other. Institutional mechanisms specifically designed to deal with gender issues, including sexual harassment, need to be put in place in all tertiary institutions in the country. Findings from this study further demonstrate that school authorities need to make the matter of sexual harassment a public issue for the staff and students, including institutional provisions for tackling sexual harassment. This can function as a preventive mechanism. It is obvious that the existing disciplinary committees both for students and staff cannot adequately deal with the issue of sexual harassment and, therefore, engender the 'culture of silence'. Gender unit can, indeed, fill this gap. The university education is meant to enhance the development of the individual and any action that works contrary to this vision constricts the intellectual spaces and, is a violation of the much needed academic freedom in any learning process.

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