Through a Woman's Eyes: A Version of Events

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Introduction

{slides 1 and 2}

This lecture represents a reflection on my career in academia. It is personal and therefore subjective, but as we know today, thanks to a variety of more recent approaches in the social sciences such as critical theory, postmodernism and feminist critiques of social science, science is not seen as being as objective as the paradigms derived from the Enlightenment philosophies would have us think. And so, in deriving my standpoint from those approaches, I stand on firm ground.

In this lecture, I examine a number of themes; some of which have occupied me throughout my career and others which have begun to occupy spaces in my mind more recently. They are all derived from reflection on my experiences in the academy and my research. After I explain the theoretical underpinnings of the lecture title, I position myself within the gendered university and then weave a narration of my version of some of the events of my life in academia with research findings. I finally share some thoughts on a way forward.

Lecture title and theoretical implications

Feminist Epistemology {**Slide 3**}

Now I explain the title of the lecture and its theoretical implications. The title draws inspiration from two seemingly disparate issues, which on close reflection, emanate from one source and say similar things. The first part of the title was inspired by the slogan of the NGO Forum on Women held in Huairou near Beijng in 1995.

"Look at the World through Women's Eyes" [**slide 4**] was a phrase that appeared everywhere at that Forum, displayed right under its logo. I do not think that I fully understood the significance of those words at that time, but I think I do now, and my take on its importance forms a part of the theoretical underpinnings of this lecture.

Notions relating to women's gaze at reality, as expressed in the Huairou NGO Forum slogan, came about with the emergence of feminist epistemology in the second half of the twentieth century. Between the 1960's and 1980's, human and social sciences were transformed as a result of changes in the world situation, social movements and new currents in philosophical thought and the nature of knowledge (Casimiro and Andrade 2006). This coincided with the resurgence of the feminist movement in the 1960's (see also Mitchell 1971 for a detailed account of the social movements of the period). All this happened within a period of ideological upheaval, when the need to rethink and change the dominant paradigms underlying knowledge creation and the analysis of the social world was greatly felt (Casimiro and Andrade 2006). On this point, Casimiro and Andrade (ibid.) write,

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Women, who felt a need to know, understand and make visible their lives, forced social and human sciences to review their conceptualisations, which were often based on implicit androcentricity (the ' malestream'). Fields of knowledge such as history, anthropology, psychology, psychoanalysis, philosophy and linguistics underwent great epistemological change, finally satisfying at least some of the feminist concerns. By conceptualising the themes of society, culture and the individual in new ways, these disciplines came to address relationships and differences, male and female, power and hierarchy and uncertainty (Pérotin-Dumon 2000 in Casimiro and Andrade 2006).

As we know, the epistemological tradition that derives from Descartes (17th Century, now manifesting as neo positivism) sees knowledge construction as an individual project in which rules are drawn up that allow individuals to carry out that project successfully. Knowledge was therefore constructed in a neutral and value free manner, not reflecting group interests or private emotions. Feminist thinkers (Sandra Harding, Dorothy Smith, Susan Bordo) all questioned this position in the second half of the 20th century, bringing about the birth of feminist epistemology. In Africa the malestream or androcentric science has been critiqued (Charmaine Pereira, Amina Mama, Jane Bennett, Desiree Lewis)

Feminist epistemologies interrogate the traditional, Cartesian knowledge construction processes and pose questions about whose knowledge is valid and what constitutes knowledge. Feminist epistemologies claim that knowledge is neither neutral nor value free, and that emotions and the experiences of the researcher matter in knowledge creation. They make the case that women's experiences and voices were previously (I mean traditionally) not included in knowledge construction and validates women as knowers, creators of knowledge. By looking at the world through women's eyes women are recognised as knowers and research based on women's experiences is made valid. The adoption of the concept of the women's gaze as the slogan for a major women's international conference put the logic of feminist epistemology centre stage. 'Look at the world through women's eyes'' implies that the gaze of women is different from the gaze of men. Now I will leave this discussion and move on to the next half of my title, and then sum up and state my position.

Postmodernisms and postcolonial thought

"A Version of events" is derived from postmodernist and postcolonial thought, which to me in many ways symbolize a part of the globalised *Zeitgeist* of the 21st Century which we in sub-Saharan Africa may not explicitly experience in our daily lives because we are absorbed in our own ideologies, and struggles in our orbits which consume us fully and do not allow us to look beyond our borders and feel that we are in fact part of a wider world. So it is that our print media does not concern itself with matters like the geo-politics of our situation as a 'developing' society or the implications of our incorporation into the world economic order. And yet we are fully in it, the world has globalised, but we do not really engage with those issues.

Postmodernist thought defies a coherent definition. Jean François Lyotard (The Postmodern Condition, 1979), one of its proponents, has called it a 'mood'. There are many strands to it,

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and there are many contestations in its discourse. Postmodernism is also a function of globalisation I would say. Any deeper discussion will be beyond the scope of this lecture, but we can say that postmodernism engages with the changes that have transformed patterns of our everyday life through new technologies and restructured our work, leisure, education, politics, and personal identities (Best and Kellner 1997). Another strand of postmodernism which links up with postcolonial thought focuses on otherness, difference, and heterogeneity and is in part a function of decolonization and the immigration of people of colour all over the earth(ibid). Postcolonial thought on the other hand, for me deals with the social, psychological, political , economic and cultural debris created by colonialism. It interrogates conflicts of cultural and personal identity, and engages with the paradoxes created through decolonisation and its aftermath. Like women, in postcolonial thought all peoples who were classified as 'different' or 'other' are seen to have valid voices.

One dimension of our societal experience through which boundaries are crossed, paradigms of our times absorbed, and passed to us subliminally is the Arts - culture, popular culture and music, dance, art, poetry, theatre and youth culture, and the phrase I chose for my title comes from popular music. The second part of the title of my lecture references a 2012 hit album by Emeli Sandé titled ***"Our Version of Events."*** [**slide 5**] and the song that inspired the album title is labelled "Read All About It (Pt. III) [**slide 6**]. The song encourages someone/some people to speak up and speak out, and let the media hear the message, because it is time we got some airplay of our version of events. The reference to "our version of events" for me implies that there are other versions of the events that have been heard. It is encouraging minorities to regain their voices, it is ok to be different, ok to be out of the mainstream. It is a postmodern, postcolonial anthem that touched the core of my being. To illustrate my argument, I shall now read out sections of the lyrics.

Read All About It (Pt. III)"

You've got the words to change a nation
But you're biting your tongue
You've spent a life time stuck in silence
Afraid you'll say something wrong
If no one ever hears it how we gonna learn your song?

So come on, come on
Come on, come on
you've got a heart as loud as lions
so why let your voice be tamed?
Maybe we're a little different
There's no need to be ashamed
You've got the light to fight the shadows
So stop hiding it away
Come on, come on

I wanna sing, I wanna shout
I wanna scream 'til the words dry out
So put it in all of the papers,

I'm not afraid
They can read all about it
Read all about it, oh

At night we're waking up the neighbours
While we sing away the blues
Making sure that we're remembered, yeah
Cause we all matter too
If the truth has been forbidden
Then we're breaking all the rules

So come on, come on
Come on, come on,
Let's get the TV and the radio
To play our tune again
It's 'bout time we got some airplay of our version of events
There's no need to be afraid
I will sing with you my friend
Come on, come on

I wanna sing, I wanna shout
I wanna scream 'til the words dry out
So put it in all of the papers,
I'm not afraid
They can read all about it
Read all about it, oh
Oh-oh-oh

Yeah, we're all wonderful, wonderful people
So when did we all get so fearful?
Now we're finally finding our voices
So take a chance, come help me sing this
Yeah, we're all wonderful, wonderful people
So when did we all get so fearful?
And now we're finally finding our voices
Just take a chance, come help me sing this

I wanna sing, I wanna shout
I wanna scream 'til the words dry out
So put it in all of the papers,
I'm not afraid
They can read all about it
Read all about it, oh
Oh-oh-oh
I wanna sing, I wanna shout
I wanna scream 'til the words dry out
So put it in all of the papers,
I'm not afraid

They can read all about it
Read all about it, oh

So to close this introductory section, my lecture is all about giving voice to myself (and all others who identify with the subject matter and may have gone through some of the experiences to be described), based on a feminist, postmodernist and postcolonial approach. **{Slide 7}**

Certain sections of this lecture have appeared in some of my publications, particularly in a paper published in the journal "Ghana Studies" 5 (2002) titled *Gender Issues in Ghanaian Tertiary Institutions: Women Academics and Administrators at Cape Coast University* and another article I wrote with Prof. Nancy Lundgren, titled "*Disappearing Dodos: Reflections on Women and Academic Freedom based on Experiences from Ghana and the US*,   which was published by the Nordiska Afrika Institutet in 2009 in a book edited by Akosua Adomako Ampofo and Signe Arnfred titled "African Feminist Politics of Knowledge, Tensions, Challenges, Possibilities."

Positioning myself within the gendered university

Nancy Naples (2003: 123-140) has argued that the positionality of the researcher (in this case the speaker) in terms of race, class, and gender for example, reflect the entire research process, from its question framing to the analytical approach as one's social location influences the full scale of the research choices. As I speak, I am fully aware of the complex nature of writing about one's experiences in an analytical manner. As Acker (1994:16) rightly points out,

> The gendering of academic practice is a difficult terrain for women academics to write about, not only because of the danger of being thought to be 'obsessed' or showing pique or disappointment. To write about gender and academic life, they also need to see the forest and the trees, the patriarchal structures and everyday forms of maintenance and control…because gender influenced interaction is so routine, it is also ambiguous. It is just as difficult for a feminist academic to know to what extent the reception accorded her work or the response to her teaching is related to her politics, her gender, or some other feature of her background, demeanour or ability, or whether it resides in the politics and practices of the institution, or even the culture and political economy of the society.

I speak this afternoon, fully aware of this. To what extent could the issues I speak of affect male colleagues? To what extent do the issues have to do with my own personal characteristics? We come to our various workplaces with our educational credentials, but we also come with our personal characteristics derived through socialization and our life experiences. I have tried to see both the forest and the trees, and besides, we women as minorities, need to tell our stories, we need to begin somewhere.

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Before I begin to talk about my personal experiences at UCC, I wish to state that I will refer to all my superiors as 'Dominants', and not by the positions they held.

I joined the teaching staff of this university in May 1985.having interviewed for the position in Germany. I was 30 years old, fresh from graduate school in Frankfurt, with my Ph.D degree in my pocket. I had left Ghana for Germany at the age of 17, and had lived a sheltered life prior to leaving. I experienced the final phases of the student disturbances of the late Sixties in Germany, even though I went there in 1972. I experienced political teach-ins, demonstrations and all types of political viewpoints, from anarchism, feminism to socialism. I learned that it is OK to question authority. Even today I have no problem with anyone who questions authority or with any ideas that do that. I also learned that Germans generally respect people who speak up.

But I had no experience of life in Ghana as an adult woman. No idea about the university system here, no idea about the workplace in the Ghanaian landscape. No idea about the politics of the university. I came back to Ghana with a strong sense of identity as an African woman, not even necessarily a feminist. At the same time I understood that I was a citizen of the world, since I had literally grown up with people from all over the world whom I had met as a student, and had become quite at ease with life in Europe. Already the postcolonial issues come up. Could one marry the two positions? Was that perhaps part of what caused my later unease?
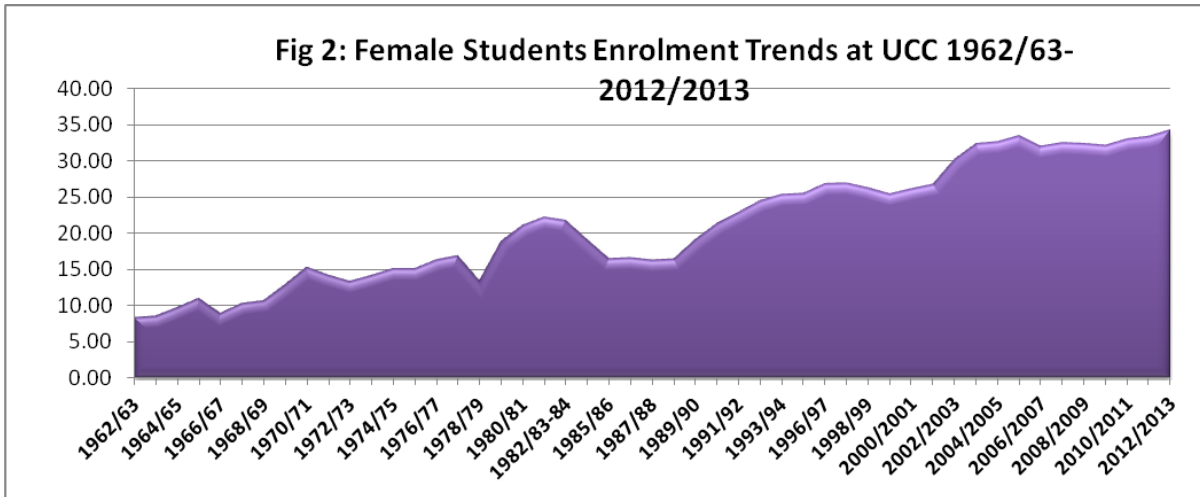
   I adopt a feminist perspective in this lecture. In my own life and career this perspective evolved slowly. Based on my experiences, I began to examine the position of women in tertiary institutions here. I position myself in today's lecture as a woman in a gendered system. ***In fact, I stand before you this afternoon, as the 2nd woman to hold an inaugural lecture in the University's 50 year history***. The university community should not be proud of this. At this juncture, I will take time to show some statistics and then return to my narrative. (Slides on statistics) **{Slide 8}**
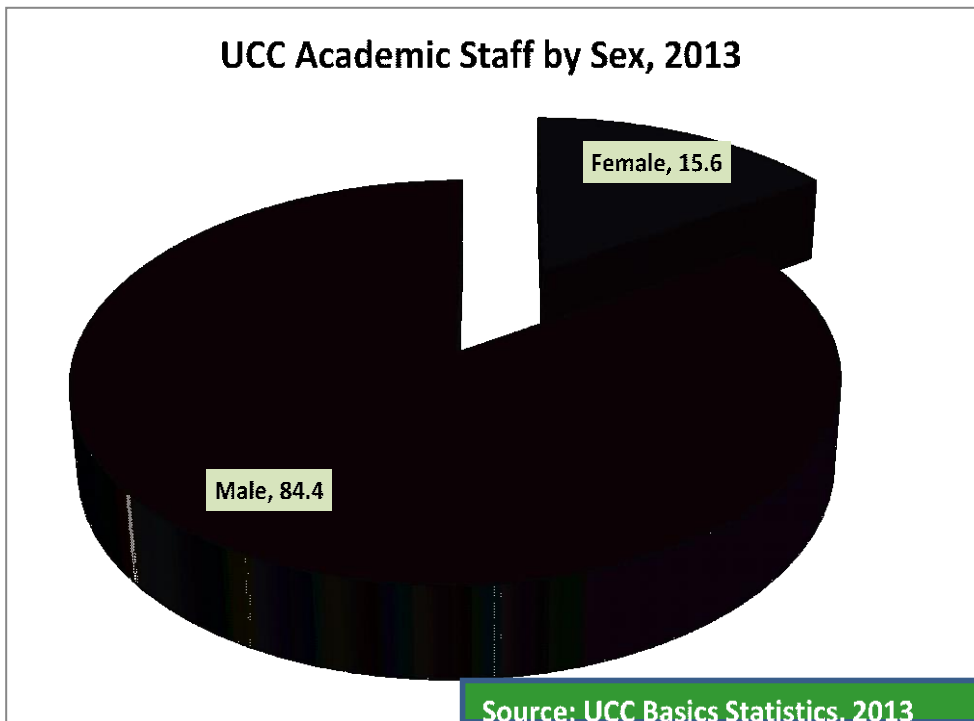
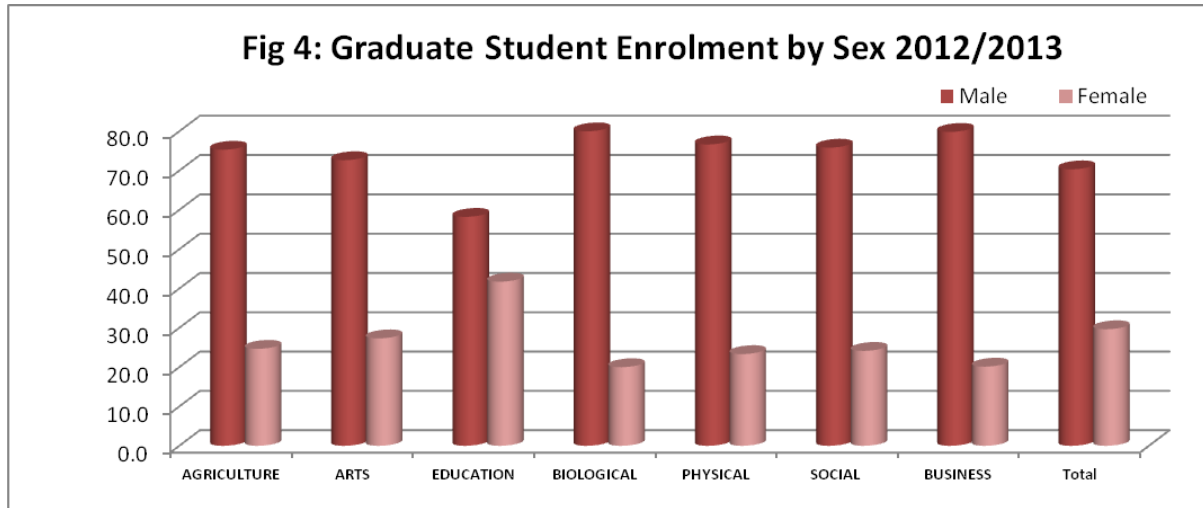Fig 1: Student Enrolment (1962/63-2012/2013)
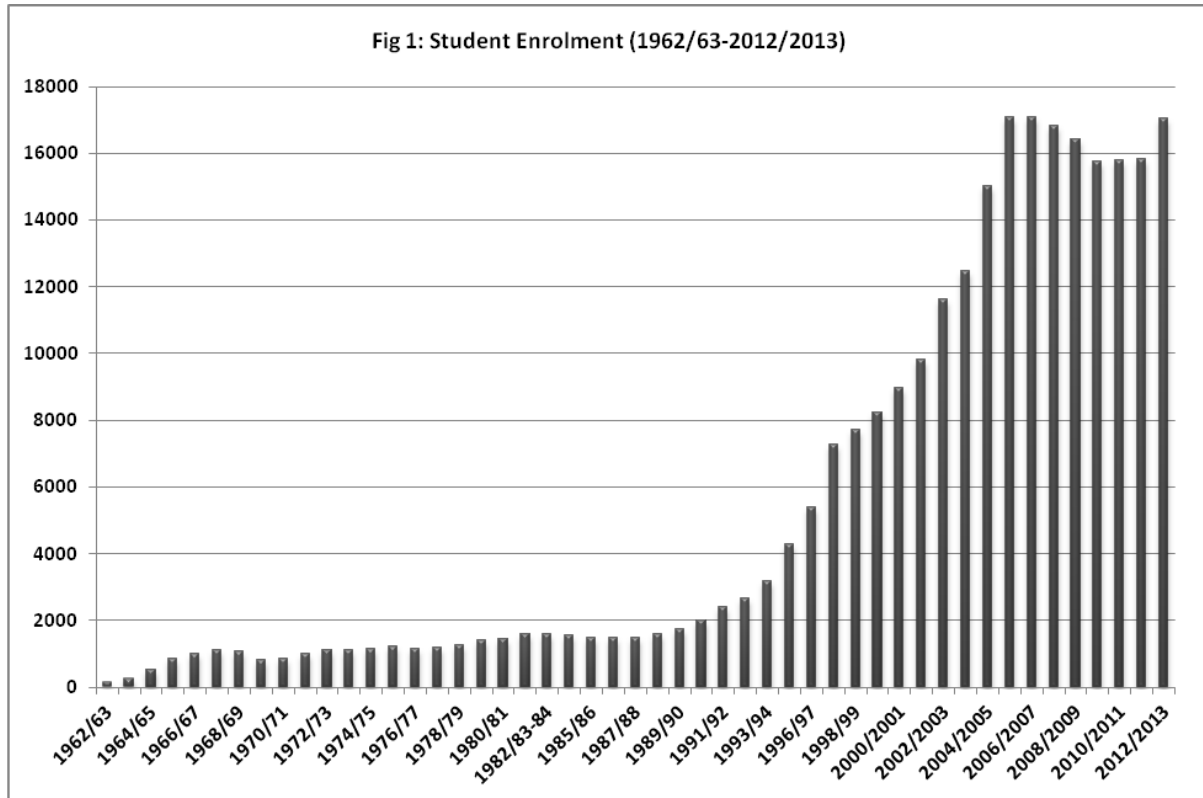
Source: Britwum et. al. 2013

 Fig. 1 shows that the 2012/2013 student enrolment stands at 17,034. The female proportion has been increasing but not as rapidly.

Female enrolment reached 30% in 2002/2003 academic year, but took 10 years to pass the critical threshold of 33.3% (Fig 2). Is the affirmative action regulation working? **{Slide 9} {Slide 10 - Piechart}**
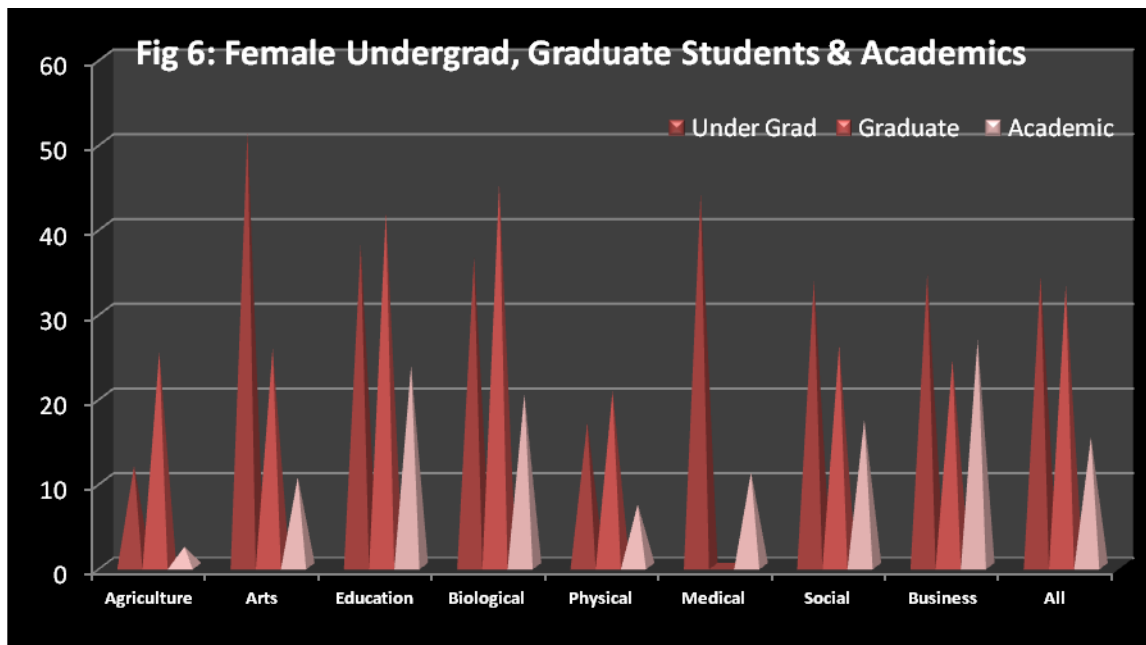
Fig 2: Female Students Enrolment Trends at UCC 1962/63-2012/2013

UCC statistics Fig. 3

UCC Academic Staff by Sex, 2013

Female, 15.6

Male, 84.4

Source: UCC Basics Statistics, 2013

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Fig 4: Graduate Student Enrolment by Sex 2012/2013

Source: Britwum et.al. 2013 **{Slide 11 fig. 5}**

Fig 6: Female Undergrad, Graduate Students & Academics

Source: Britwum et.al. 2013 **{Slide 12**}

The UCC is a gendered institution. As Britwum et.al.2013 show, decision making is in the hands of men, mainly. Britwum (2013) writes:

> Decision making at UCC is gendered with men as usual dominating in all decision making spaces. As noted in an earlier report (Britwum A. O., 2002) the university system is governed through committees and boards and their membership set in the statutes of the university. Out of a total of 68 committees and boards through which the university is administered only 3 have female proportions beyond the critical 33.3% mark. The highest 57% is the sexual harassment committee, the second has 44% and the third 33%. Ten committees have no females at all and 17 have a proportion that falls below 10%. All the current principal officers, the Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, the Registrar are men (Britwum et.al 2013).

This situation may seem not significant, and people in the audience may argue that it does not matter who sits on committees. But it does matter. Let me explain.

A few years ago a woman, an administrator, came to see my husband and I at home. She talked about the fact that she had been relocated to a division of the university that would be extremely demanding in terms of time. She was not sure of what to do. I immediately said, "what about your children? They are still quite young; do you really think you want that position?" My husband, on the other hand, said. "Take it. Go for it. It will be good for your career progression." The young lady took my husband's advice and it appears she has not looked back since then. I was struck by the differences in our reactions to the lady's predicament. My husband and I both made equally valid points, but our answers show that men and women have different interests and view the world differently.

In the 1980s Caroline Moser and Caren Levy (1986) developed a framework for analysing gender that has subsequently become very influential in the area of gender and development, often referred to as the Moser Framework. One of the central ideas in her framework is that men and women play different roles in society, and therefore have different needs and interests. She identified the triple roles of women: productive, reproductive and community management. The triple roles framework is now part of a mapping tool used to analyse the gender division of labour, seeking to find out who does what? Who takes decisions on what?

Why have I made this digression? To show that men and women generally do view things differently and this also brings us back to looking at the world through women's eyes. The talk about 'gender balance' that we have heard so often, is not only about numbers, but it also is a recognition of the need to have the views of women heard in decision-making, so that decision making is more balanced and rounded. So, in organisations such as our university, where males dominate and decision making is essentially a male affair, we can say the university is gendered. Having a token woman appearing in decision making does not solve the problem. As I indicated in a 2002 study,

> Low statistical visibility in the university has political implications; it indicates that those who are not seen have few power resources. Groups with high statistical visibility may perceive those with low statistical visibility as weak, unimportant and lacking in status. This may affect the balance of power. Certainly those considered to be insignificant are not likely to be considered for influential and high-ranking positions, neither are they likely to be consulted in matters considered to be important unless it is absolutely necessary, as for instance in situations where there is a need to woo all groups in order to build a strong consensus.

> Low statistical visibility of a group may also affect self-esteem and confidence levels of its members. For instance members of such a group might not be motivated to become high achievers because there are very few of them. This applies to students as well as academics. An eg. Could be young women who qualify to pursue courses in physics but choose other subjects because they realize there are few women who study that subject. Or, another eg, women not feeling confident to speak up at

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academic board meetings on issues that concern women because there are very few other women to support them. *Cite eg. From the last academic bd. Meeting.[i] "We are wonderful wonderful people, so when did we all get so fearful?"(Emile Sande 2012)*

Low statistical visibility of women students has a direct link with the rate at which women academics are created. Women in academia are drawn from the group of females who go into tertiary institutions. So it follows that a small group of potential candidates will result in a smaller group. This creates a vicious circle; women students may not feel encouraged to embark on academic careers simply because they never came into contact with enough women academics when they were in university, and so the cycle continues (Prah 2002:101).

Managing colleague relations from a weak position

Having established that statistical minorities are not in a strong position at the university, I refer to research on how women manage relations with their colleagues and then return to the narrative about my experience here. In the 2002 study in which I interviewed academics and administrators, one of the respondents, said,

Senior male colleagues tend to demand traditional codes of respect and think that as a woman, one should show more 'respect'.

Augustina Adusah- Karikari's (2008) research on experiences of women in higher education corroborates this point, so do my own experiences (which I shall narrate shortly).

 Before I do that, I will introduce more ideas that should throw some more light on relationships with colleagues.

The theory of the many and the few in the organization

Sandra Acker, studying women in British universities develops a theory that addresses the situation of "the many and the few in the organization."   This theory speaks to both those who dominate in numbers in the organization, and those who form minorities. A distinction is drawn between uniform, skewed, tilted and balanced groups. She writes, citing Kanter (1977)

All people in uniform social groups are of the same social category. In skewed groups, "dominants" and "tokens" appear, in ratios from 99:1 to about 85:15. The few, the tokens (who may be solos, if only one is present) are often treated as representatives of their category, as symbols rather than individuals. In tilted groups, dominants become 'majorities' and tokens "minorities".

Minorities are more powerful than tokens, as they can form coalitions, influence group culture and be seen as individuals as well as representatives of a social type. Finally, when the ratios change from about 60:40 to 50:50, the group is balanced. Using Kanter's terminology, women university teachers in the UK comprising 12 percent of the profession,

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are typically 'tokens' in skewed, male-dominated colleague groups. (*I think we can work out the maths for our situation bearing in mind the statistics we saw earlier*). According to Acker, being the only woman in a university department makes one paradoxically both invisible and extra-visible. Invisibility may be a consequence of a tendency for dominants to express solidarity in reaction against the presence of an outsider. At one extreme, women may be overtly excluded from the informal networks. Invisibility is what one feels in a large committee meeting with many men and few women, perhaps a secretary and oneself. She says this is hardly the most comfortable position, for speaking out, not to mention speaking out to advance the cause of women. It takes a certain aggressive style even to enter the discussion. How does one do it? It is necessary to begin speaking at precisely the moment a previous speaker finishes and before another begins, while a number of others are trying to accomplish the same feat (Acker 1994:128). In my UCC study, half of the respondents agreed with this point.

The token does not have to work hard to have her presence noted, but she has to work hard to have her achievements noted. Kanter has suggested that what is often thought of as a reluctance to seek promotion or positions of influence may not be due to personality traits or family responsibilities, but to the dynamics and dilemmas of token status, as filtered through self-perceptions and opportunity structures.

It is important to note that not all women in the academy might agree that there is a problem of gender domination and inequality. The pressure on tokens is not borne by all women. We are all different, of course. Just as some women students seek consensual relationships with lecturers to get ahead, some women in academia may seek to accommodate the hostile climate and strive to move ahead in the organization by resorting to "brotherization," client-patron relationships, and sometimes even enter into sexual relationships with dominants (see Njoki Kamau's study on women in higher education in Kenya universities 2004).

On my return home I was faced with an adjustment double whammy. I had to find my feet in an environment that was not new but was new and also had to adjust to my job. I adjusted, settled in an on-campus bungalow and did not have any serious problems with my teaching. The problem was, I felt I was not being fully occupied in the department. I had lots of ideas but felt trapped. I started feeling restless, and I was bored. I went straight to a Dominant and told him my problem. My reasoning at that time was, "well, he is one of those who employed me so if I have any problems I should let him know". He responded by asking me to represent the university on a board that was servicing one of the ministries. In retrospect, I think I ought to have informed a different dominant about my frustrations. I am not sure when I started having issues at work. I think the problems began around the time I committed that faux pas. These things happened simply because I did not have a very clear idea about the university's conventions, its channels of communication and hierarchy, and its politics.

At the end of my probation period I was summoned for an interview. This was the normal procedure at the time, and I met a panel of men, who were all senior colleagues (dominants).

At the interview I was asked to comment on my experience so far at the university. I told them that it would be useful if management could find a way of making better use of younger colleagues like me. I said this without malice, I was just being honest and open. I noticed that my comment had not gone down well with some of the dominants who took me on. I calmly answered all their questions and my appointment was confirmed. But those dominants who had not been happy with my comments stopped greeting me, I later noticed. Looking back, I realise that I probably had unwittingly taken a position that was politically dangerous, little did I know that tensions were rising around one of the dominants and that some colleagues would eventually vote against him. I was in my own little world, adjusting to my new life and frustrated with my job. I began looking elsewhere for greener pastures. I had **wanderlust**. *I was unmarried, with no family responsibilities. I took a leave of absence and took up a position at the National University of Lesotho, and later went to the US on a Fulbright grant. In Lesotho, I was assigned several courses, and I gained a lot more experience than I had done while in Ghana.*

Multiple roles of women and 'greedy'institutions

All the research I have seen on women's career trajectories in higher education reference the problem of multiple roles and the role strain that accompanies it (Tsikata 2007, Adusah-Karikari 2008, Oloka-Onyango and Tamale 1997, Acker 1994, Kamau 2004, Sabelis and Schilling 2013). There is no doubt that timing counts. The timing of family and career cycles has an impact on a woman's career. Citing Acker (2006) Sabelis and Schilling (2013) argue:

> Women around the age of thirty are sometimes seen as jugglers trying to meet contradictory expectations: striving to be/come committed and dedicated professionals, caring mothers and daughters, supportive spouses, cooperative neighbours and so on. By this time, women often experience career 'failures' or so called 'dips' which they tend to attribute to their own personality or assumed incapacity to meet the general standards of working full-time and doing care work (Sabelis and Schilling 2013:128)

It happened to me; my 2002 research shows that it happens to other women, too. In that study, one respondent stated,

> My role as mother has certainly cost me a lot, when it comes to the job (Prah 2002:107)

Many women have to juggle their jobs and their reproductive roles.

I returned to Ghana and to UCC after having spent 2 years in Lesotho and 1 year in the US. This time I was married and expecting my 2ⁿᵈ child. I began to have more problems from then on, but linked them with gender issues only later on. What were the problems? It is a long time ago and I do not remember everything. I do clearly recall an argument I had with a dominant. I told him I was a free spirit who would not offer him support blindly. Shortly afterwards, there was one semester in which no student registered for any of my courses. (I taught only elective courses at the time). A dominant summoned me and asked why I did not

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have students. I told him I did not know why. I wasn't particularly bothered by this because I thought I would have more time to take care of my baby who was about 4 months old at the time. Of course I did not mention that. I naively assumed that the students had not registered because they did not know me. After all, I had been away for three years. I had taught for one semester before my confinement. I did not attach any significance to it and happily stayed at home that semester. Little did I know that trouble was brewing. My lack of students was used against me. I will come to that part of the story soon.

 In her study of British women academics, Sandra Acker employs a few concepts that are useful for analyzing or understanding the constraints on women in workplaces such as universities. She adapts Lewis Coser's (1974) concept of "total institutions" to the university situation. Lewis Coser used the term 'total institutions" to describe organisations and groups that demand undivided loyalty, such as the church for priests, or the family for some housewives. "Greedy institutions" differ from "total institutions" in that they do not necessarily impose physical boundaries. Acker argues that coordinating, over time, the demands of two 'greedy'institutions, such as the work setting and the family, is problematic for women and *some men*, particularly those men who either equally share domestic responsibilities with their partners, or take them on almost fully. However, the main issue here for women lies in *the timing of career and family cycles* (Acker 1994:128). She rightly argues that even if a woman postpones having children until her higher education is complete (I did that) the arrival of young children will still coincide with the age and career stage when she is expected to make an impact on the field. Caring for young children is a demanding task that draws upon one's time, energy and emotions. Beginning a family at the same time as one begins a career could create interminable stress and conflict of interest. Acker concludes that it is sometimes easier to concentrate on one type of cycle and leave the other until later.

I remember that when my children were little, I used to lock myself up in the study in order that I could concentrate on my writing and marking. They used to ask me whenever I returned from the office," will you go out again?" If I said "yes" they looked downcast; if I said 'no 'they looked happy and relaxed. I realised they felt happy enough even if I locked up myself in the study. As long as I was home they were happy.

So much for 'greedy institutions".

Time passed. When I came up for renewal of my contract, I had a rude shock. It turned out that I had been earmarked for dismissal. A friendly dominant later told me about how my case had been thoroughly discussed at an Appointments and Promotions Board Meeting. The assessment of my performance as a university lecturer was very negative. A short letter from management to me summarised the assessment. My research was of poor quality, my relations with students and colleagues not cordial, and I was not effective as a teacher. I had applied for a six year contract; I was given a two year contract instead and asked to improve within those two years. It is important to note that I did not get to see that assessment (written in 1993) until the year 2000, when I had access to my file only because I became the head of the department. Mr. Chairman, I stand to be corrected, but I have seen that UTAG is still struggling with this issue. Academic staff do not get to see what their superiors write about

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them. It is about time this practice was changed. *Here are some excerpts from the assessment:*

> *Her teaching style and efficiency need to be improved, for students continue to complain about her performance; some would even avoid her course rather than encounter her intolerance and displeasure…*

I had no idea that students had felt threatened by my teaching. No one had ever drawn my attention to any problem. I must say though, that because I teach gender – related courses, class discussions were sometimes contentious. But I had never had reason to think that my students felt intimidated in my classes. I shall skip the remarks on my research, on my relations with colleagues it read:

> *Her relations with faculty members can at best be described as dual. She appears friendly to some when she is in a good mood and hostile to others. Her contribution to the work of the Department is not very impressive. She tends to give excuses to avoid extra commitments in the Department. She has therefore made very little impact on the development of the Department. There is a story about those last two sentences which I will skip.*

No one had discussed these issues with me. These specific comments about the quality of my teaching and research must have somehow circulated because, many years later, someone told me that I had been the subject of a conversation he had heard in Accra. The people involved had mentioned that they had heard that I was up to no good and that a person like me should not even have been employed as a lecturer in the first place. In retrospect, I now think that the fact that no one had registered for my courses at some point was significant. Unfortunately I had no idea about what had transpired and still do not know.

My relations with some of the dominants become frosty. One of them told me at a meeting of the department that I was too junior to supervise graduate theses. No one offered that I could be a co-supervisor. It is important to note that I have never had a mentor in this workplace.

Meanwhile other departments had been using me as a graduate thesis supervisor. Since I finally was learning fast about how to get by in the university system, I simply accepted that I was 'too junior'' and decided not to tell them that I was already doing what they said I should not do. I continued to give of my best to my students. My personal relationship with the dominants deteriorated so much that we hardly spoke to each other. I had become a pariah. I hardly stayed in my office. Immediately after lectures I would go home. I never lingered in the office. Eventually I decided to tell another dominant about my situation. We were summoned to the other dominant's office. The main complaints made by the dominant I had issues with were that I was haughty and disrespectful. I remember him saying that I tended to snap at him. Nothing was said about the quality of my work. I wore dark glasses throughout the meeting because I was fighting tears the whole time. All the dominant mediator could say at the end was that we should treat each other as a big brother and his little sister. I was very disappointed at the outcome of the meeting. As soon as the dominant I had issues with left, I burst into tears. My tears kept running down and I could not stop, I was

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hysterical. The mediator dominant was visibly upset. He phoned my husband and asked him to pick me up. I just sat and cried. That whole chain of events affected me so powerfully that I wept intermittently for about two weeks.

After this incident, my family stepped in with advice. One of my sisters told me. "Don't let them marginalise you, marginalise them. Set yourself some concrete targets in your career and work towards them". I decided to work at research and publishing more papers and aim at moving up the ladder. I was never engaged in the projects of the department; neither did I bother to demand to be included in anything. I must say that I submitted almost twice as many papers as required for my promotion to the rank of senior lecturer because I was afraid that the application would be rejected. For the next four years, until I was promoted to the rank of associate professor, I would apply for two-year contracts each time. I could no longer bear any unpleasantness or rejections, and my self-confidence was at its lowest. I used to see younger colleagues walking around the Department with confidence. I would walk around quietly, with my head down. I became more subdued, the carefree confidence and spontaneity of my younger self had dissipated. I was to spend a long, long, long winter of cold and frost in my department.

It took me 12 years to become a senior lecturer, 17 (6) years to become an associate professor, and 28 (11) years to become full professor. The events I have so far described occurred during my first decade here. It is important to note that career progression corresponds to my life path as well. As my children grew older, I had more time to research and publish and learned to survive in the system. Survival for me has mainly been to keep a low profile and cultivate very few friendships. I was depressed for almost two years and did not know it. Workplace harassment which I believe I experienced can result in the victim being silenced, (which was so in my case), feelings of self-doubt and low self-esteem, depression, and in extreme cases it may result in suicide. Note that our private lives have an effect on our work lives and vice versa.

In her research on women in 3 Ghanaian tertiary institutions, Adusah-Karikari (2008) observes that the experiences of women are set within the social context in which they live. Women in Ghana's academy are heavily constrained by cultural and identity constructions and expectations. She writes:

> The research findings in this study revealed that the woman faculty or administrator is automatically perceived as a mother and her authority is sometimes undermined. In general, women are victims of patriarchal mentality and the custom of appreciating men and underestimating women. A conflict arises when a woman's subservient role is exchanged for a role or position of authority. The culture is passively hostile to women and there exists a subtle aura of sexism… the general expectation of our society is that women can make their best contributions in positions subordinate to men.

Citing Graham (1974), Adusah-Karikari argues that men are expected to be independent and assertive but when women display those characteristics they are thought of as 'tough and bitchy'.

With reference to my narrative so far, it is important to note that, at the end of the day, the dominant had not complained to the mediator dominant about my work. What irritated him was the young female colleague who was disrespectful and haughty, and who should be put in her place and even fired if possible.

There is one more vignette I wish to share with you, which will close my reflections on those first 10 to twelve years here. They are connected to my identity and how it was constructed in those early years of my career. I have often wondered how people see me on this campus. A younger male colleague once came to my house and found me busy in the kitchen. He expressed surprise that I cook. Feminists do not cook I suppose. But that is not the story I want to tell you. The social psychologist C.H.Cooley (1902) presented the world with the concept of the **Looking Glass Self**. Cooley argued that we form our identities based on how we think other people view us.

Sometime in the eighties, the university organised a symposium. It was a public event. I had not been here for long, but I volunteered to participate because the theme had to do with education in Ghana and my Ph.D thesis overlapped with the theme of the symposium. (Of course I did not mention that to the organisers). The organising committee accepted my proposal to participate. Soon I was summoned to the office of a dominant who was part of management. He wanted to know exactly what I would be speaking about and asked me several questions: whether I had researched the topic, whether I had the relevant data, and he wanted to see my abstract and the paper when it was complete. I readily complied with his requests and presented my paper at the Science Auditorium. It was well received.

Why would a dominant go through all that if he had confidence in me? I did not even ask myself such a question at that time, but later, when I fell into the depths of despair like a figure in a novel by Franz Kafka, I thought, 'these people must think I am just a silly little girl''. You will recall that I had been told I was too junior to handle graduate student dissertations, and my assessment stated that I was haughty and disrespectful. Maybe in those days I came across as a young and foolish girl. Who knows? I ask myself.

But what if I had been a young man? I earned my Ph.D at the age of 29. I would have been perceived as a promising young man. I did not even realise until fairly recently that most colleagues did not start their careers, Ph.D in hand. Many of them went abroad to get their Ph.D's after their probationary period. I came here with a clear advantage and never knew it. So the silly little girl just drifted along.

 So what happened next? After senior lectureship? I became a Senior Lecturer in 1997. For the first time in my herstory at UCC, I was asked to act as head of department in the year 2000, 15 years after I joined the University. Prior to that, I had never acted as HOD even for a day. I think I became HOD by default, there is a story about that but due to time constraints I will skip it. I promptly developed hypertension when I took up that position. But even

though I knew I was not loved, there were some successes during that period, and I regained a measure of self confidence. Those were happier times for me. Between 2003 and 2006 I was Vice Dean, and got to know more about administrative matters and the university machinery.

From 2006 to 2009 I was Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, and the troubles continued, but in a very subtle manner. There were a group of dominants who used to meet and strategise before every meeting I convened. I knew they were dead set against me and told myself I would never lose my temper with them. There was often open hostility towards me at meetings, but I held my own. After that one term as Dean, I knew that I could not continue. I quit. I was miserable, stressed and felt that I had no life. A colleague, who later became Dean, had discussed with me the pressure from hostile dominants in the Faculty. He said that he feared that he would experience the same kind of pressure from them, should he become Dean. I told him that those dominants wouldn't dare trouble him because he was male. I was proved right.

From 2009 to 2011 I was back in the department, teaching. I was an associate professor at the time, (I had been promoted in 2002). During this period I became invisible. I was never nominated to serve on any committee, never offered a position of responsibility. For the second time in my career, I had been silenced. I began to feel that old wanderlust and restlessness (this coincided with a time when my children were leaving home). I took a year's sabbatical leave, and vanished from the University of Cape Coast. I returned from my leave in August 2012, but kept a very low profile. By this time I felt drained and unable to deal with the politics of the institution. I had not had any other responsibilities apart from teaching and research since August 2009 when I ended my term as Dean, and I had become quite comfortable with this situation. I decided to reapply for promotion in August 2012. I had put in my application before I took my leave in 2011. When I returned from my leave I found a letter for me had been in my pigeon hole in the mail room for 6 months. I had not checked my mail for the greater part of my leave, and the letter regarding my application more or less told me to cross my t's and dot my I's, nothing much more. I was very upset and withdrew the application. I put in a fresh application then. The rest is herstory.

A few weeks ago I met a colleague in the administration building. She was very surprised to see me. Is this a ghost? She asked. Yes, I said. I was dead but have returned. I needed to disappear from here, I told her. Oh yes, she said. Everyone knows that a certain dominant disliked you. Wow! I thought. So everyone knew, and no one did anything about it? It is only during the tenure period of one administration that a dominant attempted to resolve the workplace harassment I have experienced here. I have already narrated that experience. So my personal issues were known but ????

Of course, it appears to have been my personal problem but was it? I cannot attribute my more recent problems to gender alone; I think they have more to do with workplace psychological harassment and the politics of the workplace. Not all the dominants who played a role in the events that led to my self- imposed exile were men. But I think gender still played a role in my later problems. This is because the university is such a male dominated place with male cultures and leadership styles, that women who become dominants (as I did

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too) do not have models of alternative leadership styles they can follow. Things then tend to be done as they have always been done. It is important for women who become dominants to think carefully about their leadership styles and about what norms and values they represent as leaders. When I became a dominant, I knew that I definitely should not behave like my male predecessors. I recall that during the first meeting I chaired as dean of the faculty of social sciences, I told my colleagues. "I am your humble servant". Today I laugh when I look back at their reactions. They were embarrassed; many of them just looked down at the table. But I meant it. Perhaps I was not successful in my attempt to be an anti-authoritarian leader. A 'soft' leadership style is not often considered effective in a male world.

Of Frayed Careers and the life course

Now I turn to the concept of 'frayed careers'. I came across the concept of the frayed career earlier this year when I was browsing through some academic journals online. I was excited about the concept, for even without having read how it was conceptualized, intuitively I knew it would correspond to my career pathway.

What is a frayed career? It is a career characterized by non-linear rhythms in career progression and personal lives, particularly for women, marked by a consistent struggle between commitment and responsibility to professional and personal domains. This then informs choices made, multi-tasking methods, time-management and mobility (Sang, Al-Dajani and Özbilgin 2013). Another term that reflects this type of career is "the patchwork" career.

The frayed career discourse clearly points out that the prevalent logic of career making is still male oriented, linear and cumulative, based on the model of work at the beginning of industrialization in a male dominated working world which assumed a male breadwinner and a woman homemaker, with full dedication to the tasks. Following this model, a career tacitly assumes a linear process of reaching an optimal position in terms of the hierarchical order of positions and jobs. The rational step by step approach towards the fulfilment of one's development in work basically entails masculine norms affecting both men and women, and keeping them from reflecting over the rhythms of life and work and the opportunities of age stages for work and organisation (Sabelis and Schilling 2013). Frayed careers have also been conceptualised as landscapes or careerscapes, (landscapes do not depict a uniformity of colour or texture) linked to rhythms of life. The frayed career concept presents an alternative means of analysing careers.

The graph depicting my career trajectory is a linear one.**{slide 14}** From 1985 to 2013 the graph moves up. Taking my narrative into consideration, I have added irregular lines moving up and down underneath the straight lines. They represent the ups and downs of challenges that affected my career trajectory.

Knights and Richards 2003, (quoted in Sang et.al 2013) in their analysis of UK universities, describe masculinity within academia which they say is aggressive and competitive. Sang et.al (citing Doherty and Manfredi 2006) have argued that women who conform to the masculine career models within academia may not exhibit 'frayed careers'. This is certainly true. We women have learned to adapt and survive in this gendered male dominated, dog eat dog institution. At UCC we have not tried to subvert the status quo. We cannot do that, there are not enough of us. Some of us are able to survive by following the dictates of the male institutional culture going about things as the culture demands. Others survive and progress by using 'brotherization' tactics, joining the social networks, and 'drinking with the boys' and through political patronage. Others, like me, consciously took the decision to distance myself from the institutional culture as far as possible, both physically and mentally, out of self-defense, and the knowledge that I cannot seek recourse or assistance to overcome some of the hurdles. But I have also survived. We women in the academy, "outsiders within", (to quote Kamau) adjust and adapt depending on our socialisation, our experiences, stages in our life courses and our morals and values.

Towards a Conclusion

I trust that I have demonstrated that career trajectories are not always as linear and cumulative as we think. Career trajectories, especially for women (but also for men) tend to meander and are rhythmic due to the repetition of similarities within a career over time, which can be detected through patterns of behaviour, stories, experiences and observations (Sabelis and Schilling 2013:131). Generally I have not been able to fit into the space for women created in this institutional culture, and have had to struggle to be accepted. As Tsikata states in her study of gender and career trajectories at the University of Ghana,

> Gender inequality was a foundational characteristic of the university, manifesting in various ways and affecting different elements of the cultures of the university. From gender inequalities in student and faculty numbers, to the male-centered approaches in the residential arrangements and in the governance structures, the university has been an inequitably gendered space in which women have had to work hard to establish themselves (Tsikata 2008: 39).

As Marx wrote in his famous German Ideology, "philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways: the point, however, is to change it".

Let us change in this wonderful, exciting 21st Century that offers us so much. Only when we have done so can we proudly say we are Ghana's university of choice.

Mr. Chairman, there are gaps in my presentation. I have not looked at the historical context which framed my life at UCC. Tsikata (2008) has stressed the importance of taking that approach. After all, careers are always careers in context (Maher 2013). I know that during those years the University was" finding its feet". I might have done well to compare my careerscape with a male one. I did not do that. I did not talk about the role of power, status and personal insecurities in our institutional culture.

Mr. Chairman, I have a few recommendations. Management has done well to recognize that the university is not a gender neutral institution. Surely that must have been part of the thinking behind the establishment of the new Centre for Gender, Research and Advocacy. Bravo. But that Centre will need to have the full support of management.

It would also be useful if the University established mechanisms for resolving cases involving workplace or psychological harassment. We need to find very effective methods to stop the abuse of power by men or women who make life difficult for women, (and men) other minorities, the vulnerable and the inexperienced in our growing University community. We will need to have a space where workplace harassment issues can be resolved.

We have taken care of the very specific form of sexual harassment (even though it appears that our effort is not particularly effective, judging from the horrific stories coming out of the rumour machinery). So we may want to review the sexual harassment policy and put in place a new committee.

There is a need for more women to be employed in our universities. And when we employ them, we may want to recognize their strengths, help them to reduce the challenges they may have, and support them so that they can realize their full potential.

Mr. Chairman, my vision for a future UCC is a workplace of men and women working side by side in a gender balanced community where everyone enjoys equality, freedom of speech and maintains his or her dignity. Thank you. *Millicent and Dorothy, please play the music.*

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[i] At an Academic Board Meeting held in October 2013, there was a discussion about a committee that was said to have minimal female representation. This was strongly contested by a colleague, a Dominant, who insisted that there was a woman on that committee. The woman was seated next to him and said nothing. I know that she must have had her own thoughts on the matter but she kept quiet. I was seated behind them and could have said many things but also could not pluck up courage to speak up. Of course tokenism is not enough. I could not articulate my thoughts on the issue.