

Multiple African Academic Identities

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Becoming and being an academic has recently gained focus in educational research (McAlpine and Åkerlind 2010, Åkerlind 2011). Often, these issues have been investigated in a Western academic setting (mainly in the US, the UK and New Zealand) leading to insights into the vast variation of how academic practice is perceived and conceived at an individual level (McAlpine and Åkerlind, 2010). However, little is known about becoming an academic in other higher education systems. As Sirat (2011) coming from Malaysia puts it: *'While the discussions are primarily centered on the experiences and frustrations of early career academics in the English-speaking world, these frustrations and reservations however, are not uncommon or unfamiliar to the majority of aspiring early career academics and their mentors in the developing higher education systems'*. Although some authors focus on differences, others have pointed out that many of the issues found in the western setting seem to apply elsewhere (Madsen and Møller-Jensen 2013, Adriansen and Madsen 2013).

This paper does not contest the idea that issues of importance found in a Western academic setting are important in other settings. However, it tries to explore the multitude of diversity within the field. Therefore, it brings forward a study of academic identity processes in an African university context. Based on interviews with eight academics at two universities in Ghana, the processes of identity transitions are explored. Using the artefact of lifeline interviews (Adriansen 2012), it is possible to describe the academic journey through the creation of multiple academic identities.

In the presentation, I focus on one educational history. This case is a story of hardship and willpower but also of compassion and responsibility. Studying abroad in a Western context and now working as an academic in an African context is exemplary for all the interviewed academics, which highlights a necessity for addressing negotiations and transition in understanding their academic practices.

To understand this, the paper draws on the geographies of scientific knowledge by Livingstone (2003), which has shown how knowledge is produced and reproduced in specific spatial settings and that these settings have significance for the knowledge production. Within the field of geography, Simandan (2002) describes wonderfully how he was trained as an undergraduate in a Romanian university system where fieldwork was highly valued due to the border with Russia, whereas when he went to England for his postgraduate studies, fieldwork was neglected but discussion and debate were valued.

The geography of scientific knowledge gives us a framework for understanding how legitimate knowledge within a research field is shaped by place and how this interacts with being an academic. Through training and education in a Western scientific culture, the interviewed academics bring certain values and legitimate ways of thinking to the foreground. However, in their academic practices at African Universities these values do not always apply and thus this study shows how the academics use multiple academic identities to deal with academic practices such as supervision and teaching.

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