Becoming, Doing, Being and Belonging into Academics: Career Trajectories of Early-Career Academics at the University of Dar es Salaam

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Abstract

Using a qualitative phenomenological case study, this paper analyses the dynamics and complex experiences of early career academics (ECAs) within the increasingly neoliberal university, the University of Dar es Salaam. It employed focus group discussion and in-depth individual interview methods for data collection from 21 participants. Davey's framework was used to access and analyse the participants' narrative accounts. The findings demonstrate that neoliberal- driven reforms have affected and continue to affect the lives of the ECAs. Their lives have been dominated by constant struggles to develop professionally within the neoliberal context. The study recommends the university to make concerted efforts to assist ECAs' professional development through establishing mentoring programmes and ensuring a balance between teaching load and other core activities.

Keywords: *higher education, neoliberalism, phenomenology, professional experiences, reflexivity*

Introduction

Neoliberalism has emerged as a new common sense (Torres, 2011) shaping people's lives in the past three to four decades. It is a socio-political and economic ideology organized around the imagination of the rule of the market, cutting government expenditure for social services, deregulation, and privatization. These ideologies have not just economic effects, but profound social effects as well. The ideologies have, in various forms, manifested in higher education (HE), thereby affecting the functioning of the institutions. The neoliberal influence on HE has been widely studied from different lenses such as economic, social, cultural and political (Ball, 2012; Gandin, 2006; Kellner, 2002; Klees, 2008; Saunders, 2010),

some documenting how the neoliberal ideologies have shaped the functioning of universities in areas such as governance, curriculum, teaching and financing (Samoff & Bidemi, 2004; Torres, 2011). Much of these studies are done in developed countries leaving the developing countries' situations invisible and misrepresented in both local and global bodies of knowledge about the sociology of HE.

While almost three decades have passed since the government of Tanzania and HE institutions in the country first embraced neoliberal ideologies, literature documenting the sociology of HE and the experiences of academics are scarce in the country. Although professional experiences (PEs) of early career academics (ECAs) in developed world have been well documented by experts in HE (Boyd & Harris, 2010; Misiaszek, 2015; Smith-Slabaugh, 2006), studies on how the neoliberal HE ideologies have affected or influenced the PEs of the ECAs in Tanzania are hardly found. Literature search found only one study by Magosho (2015) that analyses the preparation of ECAs albeit not linking the study to neoliberalism but providing a useful analysis of how universities in Tanzania nurture and prepare ECAs. This study is, therefore, an attempt to document the experiential lives of the ECAs within the neoliberalized spaces of HE at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) and thereby filling the gap in the emerging discipline in the country. The study aims to capture ECAs' experiences by analysing how PEs of ECAs intersect with neo-liberal HE ideologies in Tanzania with particular reference to the UDSM. To understand such intersectionalities, I analysed ECAs' career trajectories focusing on their journeys in becoming academics and the experiences they have in the profession.

The paper begins by analysing the dominance of neoliberalism in Tanzania and its naturalisation in HE. Next is the analysis of the early career trajectory literature relevance in shedding light on and understanding of the ECAs experiences. I then proceed by presenting theoretical and analytical frameworks as well as a methodology that guided the study. The methodology section is followed by the presentation and discussion of the core aspects of ECAs' experiences at the UDSM. In light of the analysis of ECAs' narrative accounts, I offer conclusions and study implications for ECAs and UDSM as well as recommend further research in the area.

Neoliberalism in higher education: A new common sense in Tanzania

Neoliberal educational policies and practices have been operational in the country when the *Ujamaa* socio-economic and political system changed to (neo) liberal socio-economic and political system in the late 1980s, which has continued to the

present day. Their operations are rationalized by the global capitalist discourse of *what works* is what counts and that *best practices* are to be emulated worldwide. In the past three decades, we have witnessed how different actors, at institutional (local), national, and global levels, have supported the globalization of neoliberal policies and practices both financially and propagandistically. The neoliberal imageries, ideas and practices have been progressively infused in many countries (Ball, 2012), and unfortunately, the developing countries have been the recipients of *what works* and *best practices* from the developed countries as far as power relation imbalance is concerned.

Tanzania, like many other developing countries, has been the victim of the neoliberal policy reforms advocated by developed countries through various forms of powers and relations. Such relations include both material and social relations that involve a complex interplay of material forces, relations and interests and a set of practices, relationships and forms of organizations that are discursively constituted as economic (Ball, 2012). In education, the neoliberal policy reforms of the late1980s and 1990s emphasised basic education at the expenses of HE (Ndibalema, 1998; Samoff & Bidemi, 2004). Using poorly supported evidences and analyses from the neoliberal projects of *Human Capital Theory* and the *rate of return analysis* in education (Klees, 2008; Samoff & Bidemi, 2004), Tanzania like many other developing countries was urged to direct her scarce resources to basic education and not HE that was erroneously conceptualized as elitist and luxury. Instead of striking a balance in terms of resource allocations between and within different levels of education, the country embraced such a clause in its development outlook and priority. Such neoliberal ideologies increasingly took hold since the 1990s, leading to stagnation and deterioration of the HE sub-sector. In particular, the policies and practices severely affected (and continues to affect) the academia in the country (Ndibalema, 1998; Samoff & Bidemi, 2004). As reported by Ndibalema (1998) in the 1990s, academia suffered departing distinguished academics and the inability to hire and train new academics proportionately with students' increase. Distinguished academics opted for more lucrative positions either abroad or inside the country (particularly politics). Moreover, the academics that had not been lost to the brain drain suffered underpayment and work overload (Ndibalema, 1998).

Although the neoliberal HE ideologies and practices in Tanzania seem to be normalized and therefore, less challenged (Torres, 2011), I argue that their impacts on the ECAs' PEs are pervasive and evident. In the mid-2000s, when the government decided to expand the HE sector, many young academics were employed in all public universities including the UDSM. The massive expansion came immediately

after almost a quarter-century of neglected HE in the country. The negligence embodied, among other things: frozen employment, limited operational budget allocation, limited funds for research and staff development, and constricted salary and remuneration increase for the university staff. The negligence, particularly the frozen employment policy resulted in succession planning effects in which by the time new employment opened, there emerged a gap between the recruits and the existing senior academics.

Besides, limited funding for staff development meant the university was unable to train students and their staff at the graduate level, particularly at the Ph.D. level. As such, when universities wanted recruits, the only available was mainly for the rank of Tutorial Assistants. Doctorate employment candidates were nowhere to be seen as universities, the government and even donors were rarely providing scholarships beyond the undergraduate level. The non-provision of scholarships for the graduate level by the government and development partners was rooted in the assumption that HE is a luxurious benefit for the affluent classes and has low social return because the benefits are accrued more to an individual than the society (Klees, 2008). Therefore, the non-optional recruitment of junior academics resulted in a wide socio-economic, age and academic gap between the ECAs and *the about to retire* and *the retired contracted* professors. By 2010, junior academic staff (below the rank of Lecturer) constituted 60 to 70 percent of the total staff members at the UDSM and other universities in the country (Abeli, 2010). Revealing the impacts of neoliberal ideologies to the academia, Abeli, argued:

> Due to the freezing of employment in all public sectors between the late 1980s and early 2000s, most of the universities are now experiencing a big gap between the newly recruited young staff and the ageing senior staff. Most of the senior staff (over 80%) are above 50 years and in some institutions like UDSM, over 70% of their full Professors are on contracts after retirement (p.18).

Abeli's argument is similar to the observation made by Mkude, Cooksey and Levey (2003) who noticed the effect of frozen employment policy on succession planning and continuity in teaching and research at the UDSM. The policy fostered the development of two dissociated blocks of *seniors* and *juniors* that rarely interact professionally. This dissociation has adversely affected the mentoring practices and the overall professional development of the ECAs. By lacking mentorship support, ECAs are systemically prevented from becoming fully professionals. I consider this as systemic oppression brought by the neoliberal ideologies. Freire

(2010, p.57) argued, "An act is oppressive only when it prevents people from being more fully human." It is plausible to argue that neoliberalism so far has not contributed entirely to the *good* of the society but fulfilling the benefits of only a few. These milieus have created a unique social and career development context, without exception to ECAs at the UDSM. Unfortunately, what has been happening has always been taken for granted and treated as mundane. The poorly supported career experiences of this group of academics have become the accepted way of life.

Career trajectory of the early career academics

Analysing career trajectories is one of the ways to understand the PEs of ECAs. Career trajectory analysis is important because occupations structure a large part of people's everyday reality and serve as a major source of personal identity and self-evaluation (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001). Vázquez-Cupeiro and Elston (2006) used personal trajectories to analyse the processes that gave rise to gendered career pathways in Spanish academia, tracing how individuals might move from academic *passion* to academic *consecration* in a setting in which both visible and disguised discrimination persist. Moreover, the occupational roles that people perform determine whether their work-life is lastingly challenging and fulfilling, repetitively boring or burdensome and stressful (Bandura et al., 2001).

Career trajectories of ECAs are interwoven with complex issues such as gender, age, academic rankings, social and professional status, (mis)recognition, inclusivity (and exclusivity), (non) visibility and precariousness (Misiaszek, 2015). Visibility or non-visibility of ECAs within their working environment contributes to the development of fluid trajectory. The way ECAs experience their early-careerness contributes to their (mis) recognition as subjects in HE. In particular, precariousness is becoming a defining characteristic of the ECAs at the UDSM especially the Tutorial Assistants (TAs) and Assistants Lecturers (ALs) who are not sure about their career development and further education.

Personal trajectories and perceptions of self are important aspects of the ECAs. Their perceptions of their experiences as ECAs are highly influenced by their personal life trajectories and the kind of support and guidance, as well as struggles they experienced as they strived to become academicians. The perception of personal experiences is important in professional identity formation and allows voices on categorization or labelling, identification and comparison to be heard. Identity building in the workplace may be viewed as a *becoming* and there is a profound connection between identity and practice (Boyd & Harris, 2010). The ECAs in

this study defined who they are through negotiation and reconciliation along multiple trajectories of identity related to their varying positions of membership in the academia. The perception of self is important for personal continuity and professional commitment and, therefore, identifies the support needed for fully professional socialization and advancement.

Theoretical and analytical frameworks

The theoretical framework of this study was based on critical pedagogy (particularly the work of Paulo Freire) aiming to transform existing power and privilege in the service of greater social justice and human freedom. The theoretical framework guided my attempt to understand ECAs' stories, empower their ideas and restore their humanity and subjectivity as well as unveiling the reality of their experiential lives (Freire, 1998, 2010). Through narrative accounts, the ECAs had the opportunity to unveil their experiences within the HE system, which has, in turn, affected their understanding of their subjectivities.

Davey's analytical framework for investigating professional identity used to access the participants' professional identity (Davey, 2013). The framework consisting of different lenses-*becoming, doing, being and belonging*- of PEs helped to highlight and unpack the specific but intertwined areas of their experiences. According to Davey, the *becoming* lens focuses on the intentions and aspirations, motivations and the initial experiences concerning joining a profession. The *doing* lens focuses on daily experiences of work and the professional tasks involved. The *being* lens focuses on self-image and affective aspects which include the socio-professional personae and emotional positioning. Lastly, the *belonging* lens focuses on the perception of fitting into the wider professional culture.

Methodology

The objectives of the study suggested the use of phenomenological research design. Phenomenological case study was appropriate in order to understand the phenomenon deeply (Hatch, 2002; O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). The study used the multi-method framework (Millward, 2012) by employing two methods in data collection: focus group discussion (FGD) and in-depth individual interviews. The participants were purposively selected because of their potential backgrounds and experiences in informing the research (Bryman, 2016). Besides, the types of research design and topic necessitated the researcher to decide on the participants who would be most likely to provide appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth (Jupp, 2006). Therefore, The recruitment involved 21 participants

for this study from the ECAs category as presented by pseudonyms in Table 1. The participants were fully tenured staff from the UDSM School of Education (SoED) and Dar es Salaam University College of Education (DUCE). Out of 21) participants, 15 participated in FGDs and six were involved in one-to one in-depth interviews. The participants were all between 23 and 46 years of age at the time of data collection.

Table 1: *Participants' Information and Data Collection Method*

Focus group discussion

	Participant's Pseudonym	*Gender*	*Academic Rank*	*Date conducted*
FGD 1	Sun	Male	AL	
	Moon	Male	AL	November 6, 2018
	Light	Male	TA	
	Cloud	Male	AL	
FGD 2	Ben	Male	AL	
	John	Male	AL	
	Richard	Male	L	November 15, 2018
	Rose	Female	L	
	Peter	Male	AL	
FGD 3	Mercury	Male	L	
	Venus	Male	L	December 3, 2018
	Mars	Male	L	
	Jupiter	Male	AL	
FGD 4	Mary	Female	TA	December 19, 2018
	Patricia	Female	AL	

One-to-one in-depth interview

	Rahel	Female	AL	January 10, 2019
	Jane	Female	L	January 22, 2019
	Dickson	Male	TA	January 24, 2019
	Friday	Male	TA	February 5, 2019
	Agnes	Female	AL	February 11, 2019
	David	Male	AL	February 28, 2019

Source: Fieldwork data

The study adopted concurrent data generation and analysis, or an iterative process (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011) until saturation of data was achieved (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Data collection started with FGDs to generate themes for further exploration in the in-depth interviews (Hatch, 2002). After four FGDs with 15 participants, themes that were further explored in the interviews were developed. Having conducted six interviews, it reached a point of data saturation where no new information and themes were observed. Therefore, FGDs and in-depth interviews provided adequate data to develop a robust understanding of the ECAs experiences at the case university.

The narratives gathered from FGDs and interviews were analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this method of analysis, data were put through the process of categorization, description and synthesis in which they were reduced into identifiable patterns and themes (McNabb, 2008; Wiersma & Jurs, 2004). MAXQDA (2018 Version) helped to support this process.

Findings and Discussion

Becoming an academic: negotiating the career path

Identity building in the workplace may be viewed as a *becoming* (Boyd & Harris, 2010). To become academics, the ECAs had to go through social negotiation and reconciliation along multiple trajectories. ECAs professional identity is a function of educational trajectories, previous experiences and roles, motivations, aspirations and goals. On becoming academics, the respondents had mixed experiences, some were dreaming to become academics and teachers in their early years of schooling while others seemed to have found themselves in the profession coincidentally. We discussed their previous educational and professional histories, their career decision to become teachers and or academics and their initial experiences of the job. Their actions to (not) become teachers were featured by reflexivity (Archer, 2007a, 2010; Holmes, 2010). Early career academics (ECAs) had to respond to their situations in terms of self-development and the choices available about the future course of their lives.

The combination of several factors such as a passion for the profession and the qualifications made possible for the ECAs to join the profession. Rahel demonstrated the excitement she had to become an academic. Besides, her family members who are mostly teachers supported her inspirations and dreams to become an academic. Family and peers' support seemed to be part of the factors that made her decide to become an academic: "I got support from my father, who is a teacher as well.

My Aunt who is also a primary school teacher backed me a lot. The whole family supported me in one way or another." (Rahel, Interview, January 10, 2019). Rahel's story reveals the presence of communicative and autonomous reflexivity (Archer, 2007a). Her internal conversation about to become a teacher was influenced by immediate others. Therefore, her internal conversations were nourished by advice from significant others.

Becoming a university academic in Tanzania has been an ambition for many university students. David as well had a dream to become an academic, and hence, he had to speculate early on his first year of an undergraduate degree to find out what it takes someone to become an academic:

> One day we were discussing about studies and our future. It seemed that both of us were interested in working in higher learning institutions from the very beginning. We tried to speculate on what takes someone to become a university lecturer or join these institutions as academicians. We were interested in the criteria, what to do and the like. By looking at our lecturers, their lifestyle, the way they teach us, it was very wonderful. All these influenced us and gave us motivations. (David, Interview, February 28, 2019).

Again, David experiences display reflexivity mainly supported and confirmed by significant others. His social mobility was guided by the autonomous reflexivity he embarked on (Archer, 2007a). He and his colleagues had ambitions to become academics, and to fulfil those ambitions, they had to consult others and search for information. That means their internal conversations aided by the significant others led them to achieve their desired social mobility. Many participants admitted that they were what they are because of family, teachers and peer support in terms of career guidance and advice.

I found that (not) becoming a teacher was a dilemma some of the participants went through. They had to overcome their internal conflict of career choice and interests as well as family and peer pressures. This affirms Boyd and Harris's (2010) assertion that individuals have to negotiate and reconcile to become who they want to be professionally. ECAs' varying positions of membership of multiple communities played around their desires, aspirations and preliminary requirement preparation to become teachers and later academics. Jane gave her story on how she became a teacher and later an academic by successfully managing conflicting forces on career choices:

> After high school, I was selected to go for the Diploma in teaching. I refused to go. I had to stay at home for a year. My father was an Educational Officer and he was encouraging me for a teaching career. My siblings did not like the teaching profession. They were bankers, engineers, etc. I was following what they were saying. After the encouragement from my parents, the next year I went for my Diploma course in teaching. (Jane, Interview, January 22, 2019)

Agnes also had a similar experience with Jane in terms of overcoming career choices. She joined the teaching profession although she was not interested in it.

> Before joining the degree programme, I earned a diploma in education. So when I went there, it was not my interest to become a teacher. When I was in progress with that diploma course, there was an advertisement for the course in which I was interested in another university. I went to see the Dean of Students of that college; he discouraged me totally to go for that programme. I was so much discouraged, I felt very bad, and I lost hope. So I had to continue with the Diploma course. (Agnes, Interview, February 11, 2019)

Dickson, the TA who also had to manage peer pressure and his desires to become an educator, revealed an almost similar experience:

> I had friends around whom after knowing my results [high school performance], advised me to pursue a Bachelor degree in Laws. So, they managed to influence me and I applied for that course. By that time, I did not have enough knowledge about careers. So, I was admitted to pursue a Bachelor of Laws here at the UDSM. It was not something that I did love that much but rather a mere influence of peers. But deep inside my heart, Laws was not part of my interests. I used even to tell my high school friends that I don't like to judge people, so I won't study Laws at all. I decided to change my degree programme from Laws to Educational Psychology and the process just took like a month. (Dickson, Interview, January 24, 2019).

Jane, Agnes and Dickson's narratives clearly illustrate reflexivity that they went through in a course of negotiating their career interests and plans. Reflexivity is realized through an internal conversation where people continuously think over their situation and redefine their interests and plans (Archer, 2007a, 2007b). In the pursuit to become who they are, ECAs' active participation and agential role guided their decisions.

Besides, becoming academics, participants had to work hard in terms of nourishing their academic performances because being employed as an academic at the UDSM is competitive and requires higher performance at the undergraduate level. They had to work hard to achieve their dreams of becoming academics. Reiterating his story, Dickson asserted that:

> For me to be the best I had to struggle, I had to work hard. I told my friends that I am going to compete because I had a dream that one day I want to be a lecturer in one of the best higher learning institutions. The courses were tough. Sometimes, group members were not giving their best inputs because they don't really care about excelling; they just wanted to pass exams. They didn't have big dreams, so for them to score at an average or C grade was pleasing, but for me, it was not the aim. (Dickson, Interview, January 24, 2019)

The struggle and active agential role-taking recurred to many participants. In contextualizing his experience and active participation in shaping his career, Dickson used "the hard way, the right way" (Interview, January 24, 2019) metaphor meaning that it was through hard work that he managed to become an academic. Taking an active role in the pursuit of your dreams is highly emphasized by critical pedagogies. It is argued that an active role is a human attribute that is required for change (Freire, 1998).

Doing academics: the academic triad

Doing lens focuses on the daily experience of the work academics and the professional tasks involved. It involves the knowledge bases they have or need to perform their duties as well as pedagogical dispositions that enable them to *do* their work. The ECAs identity cannot be only conceptualized in terms of their motivations to join the academy, but also the experience they go through doing the academic work. The participants felt proud working at the UDSM despite many challenges they encounter in their professional life. They described themselves as public figures and identified themselves as teachers responsible for teaching, research and consultancy.

Congruent with Davey 's (2013) findings, this study found that love for teaching career was also seen as a factor for keeping ECAs in the profession. In particular, the good reputation of the university in the country and region was a motivating factor for the ECAs to continue working at the university. The UDSM has the power of structural and cultural properties to influence ECAs' internal conversations (Archer, 2003) and thereby enticing them to continue working despite the numerous

challenges they face. UDSM being the oldest and major state university, many academics feel proud of working at the university. The opportunities it offers to the academics in terms of teaching, research and community services as compared to other universities in the country, attracts many to become part of a well-recognized academic community.

> It is a pleasure to be an academic staff at the UDSM. This is a national university which admits the best candidates in the country. So, as academic staff, I feel good. Being a lecturer here, you must be capable academically… you must be capable of doing research and influencing people. Being an academic here, you are likely to have an opportunity to be a consultant for various organizations. You are also consulted by various media houses for analysis on various issues. (Dickson, Interview, January 24, 2019)

Although the ECAs job description is centred on tasking them with teaching, research and community services, the findings indicated that they are mainly engaged with teaching. Research and community services seem to have been dwindled by several factors, including limited project funds and a large number of students in which the ECAs spend a significant amount of time teaching, marking and handling large classes. A larger number of students has been a challenge for the ECAs who otherwise would have had a very positive experience with the academics.

> In a class, one is teaching more than one thousand and six hundred students. This is a very big number. It is not an online programme, it is a face-to-face session. Then you need to mark the tests. Based on the university regulations, at least they need to have a minimum of three assignments for the coursework before the university final exams. (Jane, Interview, January 22, 2019)

Similar to the findings of this study, Magosho (2015) found that ECAs at the UDSM and other universities in Tanzania experienced tension, confusion, depressions and anxiety due to weighty workloads, lack of support and poor access to resources and information. Work overload in terms of teaching large classes has been affecting ECAs to such an extent that they cannot be able to conduct research and produce publishable papers. Paradoxically, publications are the mainly considered criteria for promotion at the university. Therefore, ECAs are put into a dilemma on whether to focus on teaching as they have been doing or write papers:

> Sometimes you find a dilemma because we have ambitions for

promotions. You know what we should do is writing papers. But if you are teaching 1800 students, giving them assignments, marking and doing other administrative activities. It is kind of hectic. (FGD 2, November 15, 2018)

Besides, there has been a challenge on how ECAs get research funds or get involved in research projects commissioned to senior academics. Although research funding is scarcely available, when they are available, ECAs are rarely involved. It depends on the social network and connections an individual has with the senior academics who normally win those projects. As a result, the ECAs are mainly involved in teaching. ECAs tell their experience through FGD:

> We are expected to do teaching, research and consultancies. But when it comes to practice, the challenge is how the young scholar is incorporated into that system. From my employment to date, maybe I have done one or two researches which I struggled to get access to those funding. So, you can experience challenging things such as 'who knows who.' You cannot win research funding when you are not close to those senior members of the academic. In teaching, you can be involved because it is one of the responsibilities those senior members of staff will not want to do much. So, you will be given thousands of scripts to mark but when it comes to research it is difficult to access the funding. (FGD 3, December 3, 2018)

The analysis in the *doing* aspect of academics focused on the experiences of ECAs as they experience their daily professional lives. As they execute their professional activities, ECAs identified critical challenges such as work overload, limited research projects, and uncertain academic advancements. The participants argued that it is not easy to be involved in research for young academics as it usually depends on who knows who. As a result, this affects ECAs professional development. The participants voiced that they are not given opportunities to work together with senior academics especially in co-publishing. This signals that academic practices particularly research have moved from being a collaborative endeavour to competitive undertaking as asserted by Santiago and Carvalho (2012) that:

> We live in a context where career advancement has become increasingly difficult. The advancement in this career depends more and more on publications and this turns academics into individualists. They have individual strategies to occupy scarce

positions at the top. (p.526).

Working in the competitive context which typifies the survival of the fittest, ECAs are obviously in the disadvantaged side. Their early-careerness may have implications in terms of developing fundable projects and producing quality and acceptable papers in top quality peer-reviewed journals accredited by the university.

Being and belonging into the academics: the respectful profession

In this subsection, I analyze two aspects related to ECAs identity and experiences: *being* in the academics- how a sense of personal intersects with professional self-image; and *belonging*- the aspects of collectivity and consciousness of (not) belonging to. Therefore, the analysis focuses on how ECAs identify themselves and how their self-identity intersects with the wider academic community as they experience their professional lives. In the due course, I concurrently analyze ECAs' perceived rewards availed to them by being in the academics and their future commitments to the academics.

The findings indicate that although the ECAs did not want to be teachers, particularly for lower levels, they are happy being academics at the university. The ECAs have demonstrated a positive self-identity with the profession. They described themselves as being in a *respectful profession* due to its social recognition and opportunities available to them for being in the profession and being at the UDSM in particular. That feeling has turned them into happy individuals despite having numerous challenges working as academics. Besides, ECAs' *being* and *belonging* to the academic profession is associated with multiple factors such as flexibility, professional development opportunities, economic rewards, exposure and expanded social network. These factors correspond with what Berry (2012) found to be pulling factors behind graduate students' wish to join academics in the UK. The perceived benefits of being in the profession are vital in keeping and motivating the ECAs. One participant noted:

> I am happy; I am comfortable with what I am doing. I think the profession is good. It creates a network for academic staff and students. They can create a friendship that can be socially beneficial. It creates a good social relationship. For staff, because we meet regularly, we become like a family. (Rahel, Interview, January 10, 2019).

Agnes, who identified herself as a teacher, also concurred with Rahel's assertion that being in the academics, she belongs to a profession that helps her create social relations with both students and fellow academic staff. She calls herself a teacher because of the nature of the work she is doing as depicted in the following conversation:

> I use to call myself a teacher. The nature of my career makes me consider myself a teacher. I am an AL, but major duties are on teaching, instructing, leading seminars, leading students on how to go about in their studies. Therefore, I find myself that the major purpose of me being here is teaching. Generally, I am a teacher. I am not a lecturer per se. (Agnes, Interview, February 11, 2019).

Apart from the teaching work that ECAs are doing to identify them as teachers, the professional code of conduct and specialization in specific subjects make them identify themselves as teachers. A participant in the interview pointed this out:

> As teachers or lecturers, we are professionals and therefore we are supposed to behave professionally or we should abide by the professional code of ethics or conduct. One of the key issues I can use to define my profession is expertise or area of specialization. Professionalism must involve or should involve a specific area of specialization. (David, Interview, February 28, 2019).

Therefore, the ECAs sense of professionalism has helped them in creating a positive image and value of what they are doing. This is vital in terms of developing a sense of belonging to the profession. However, apart from self-image created in the ECAs professional lives, numerous rewards help in enhancing their sense of being and belonging as they expect returns and fulfilments being in the profession. The conversations with ECAs revealed several perspectives in terms of viewing those rewards. For example, Dickson shared his experiences as to why he is in the academics and particularly at the UDSM:

> I have the privilege of going for further education and even being sponsored by the university. It is also good to be here as there are many resources. To be here I also meet the intellectuals, I share with them my experiences and they share theirs. Besides, many events are taking place here at the UDSM, both national and international. Being here becomes easy to get opportunity to participate in those events. Generally being here is rewarding. (Dickson, Interview, January 24, 2019)

Dickson's idea about the opportunity to develop professionally was also seen in the interview with Friday who admittedly declared:

> There are opportunities for professional development. I know from here I can easily go for Masters and later Ph.D. If I was not here, it could not be easy. For example, now I was supposed to be waiting for government posts for secondary school teaching. In secondary education, it could be not easy for me to develop professionally. (Friday, Interview, February 5, 2019)

The academics, particularly the ECAs, by nature of their work, have to undergo further training to Ph.D. levels. Apart from furthering their education, they have to do some research that will eventually produce publications for their promotions. Therefore, being at the university, the ECAs are exposed to such opportunities. However, they noted that to succeed in all that requires passion and hard work in studying and updating oneself as noted by Friday: "I may say that this is a very interesting profession especially when you are passionate about it. It requires passion because you have to study hard, undergo further studies. If you dislike studying, you can't be an academician." (Friday, Interview, February 5, 2019).

A sense of being and belonging into a profession can be expressed by an individual's commitments to the profession and plans for the future. The majority indicated a genuine commitment to the profession and was eager to invest their resources for their professional development. While demonstrating commitments to the profession, they showed interest in furthering their education abroad. They seem to prefer doing their further studies abroad to broaden their experiences and learn from other cultures apart from the UDSM from where almost all the participants did their Bachelor's degrees. For instance, when asked about their career plans, David responded: "I am planning to enrol for Ph.D. this year. I prefer at least to change the environment by studying abroad. I did my bachelor's and master's degree at the UDSM. But if things go wrong I will study here." (David, Interview, February 28, 2019).

The plans for further education were identified by all ECAs in the ranks of TA and AL. Since these are the training posts, it is necessary. Those who were already having their Ph.Ds indicated commitments in doing various researches in their areas of specializations and developing some joint projects with other academic staff and other educational stakeholders. Some were thinking of doing Post-doctoral studies to sharpen their experiences. Mostly they had not thought of leaving the

academic profession despite some challenges they face as noted by Jane:

> Initially, I didn't like the profession. However, since I have engaged in the profession, I need to work hard to meet the requirements of the profession. Working hard in publications may be doing research, consultancy so that I can meet the requirements of the profession. I have no alternative. (Jane, Interview, January 22, 2019).

I had an interesting conversation in the FGD 4 about their plans in which Patricia admitted the desire to find greener pastures outside the academia after her Ph.D. She further reiterated that she is not in the profession because she loves it rather because of what the profession gives her. One FGD had reached a consensus that:

> If you want us to be very frank with you, very frank, some of us are in academics not because we like it. We don't like the teaching profession. We are here because of what the teaching profession gives us, the returns that we get from the teaching profession. Some of us plan to go for Ph.D. studies but no plan to continue being academics for the rest of our life. After earning Ph.Ds we may seek greener pastures elsewhere. (FGD 4, December 19, 2018).

Freire (2010) posited that speaking the truth is among the dilemma that faces the oppressed. He argued that the oppressed suffer from the duality between speaking out and being silent, which has established itself in their innermost being. Some ECAs' attempt to speak the truth about their career plans and the likes and dislikes for teaching career is important for the power to transform their world. However, the majority of the participants indicated a high degree of commitment to the profession by having plans for furthering their professional knowledge. They have all indicated that after their Ph.D.s, they are going to commit their time in doing research and community works.

Conclusion and Implications

The dominance of neoliberal reforms from the 1980s hitherto at the UDSM has resulted in the unique ECAs identity. Their identities, which are constantly formed and re-formed as they navigate through the challenging context of the UDSM, have shaped their plans for their professional trajectories. The process of becoming, doing, being and belonging into academics involves not only academics' background knowledge and pursuit of academic career but also their mediation of multiple identities. These identities are shaped and reshaped by a range of factors,

including institutional policies, disciplinary conventions, personal life histories, and professional aspirations. These multiple identities can contradict or harmonise with one another, or be fragmented, during the academic journey. ECAs' common held identity of a 'teacher' particularly at the UDSM played a significant role in shaping their desires to become academics. Their attachments are partly associated with working at the UDSM being a 'respectful post' and university teaching being a 'respectful profession' both socially and academically. These identities have in turn influenced their professional practices, commitments - the struggle for professional advancements- and continued affiliations with both the academics and the university in particular. Their identity is the result of their positionalities within academic terrain, their location within shifting networks of relationships.

For ECAs, their professional lives have been altered by the neoliberal regimes of the past three decades. Their lives have been dominated by constant struggles to develop professionally. Considering the context they are working, it is only through collective struggles that their true and full development can be achieved. For the university, the findings demonstrate how neoliberal-driven reforms have affected and continue to affect the lives of the ECAs. To that end, the university must make concerted efforts to assist ECAs given the contexts they are going through. They need to establish a mentoring policy in which senior academics will be obliged to assist ECAs as a requirement for their performance review. Along with that, the university should set special development funds for ECAs' professional development particularly in research and publication. Therefore, through the support of the senior academics, ECAs can utilize those funds to undertake research and produce publishable articles as required for their promotion at the university. It has been observed in the present study that ECAs are overloaded with teaching large classes thereby spending much of their time handling those classes. As a result, they have been failing to do other professional activities such as conducting research and writing papers. To deal with the situation, the university should ensure the balance of teaching load and other core activities. This can be achieved by admitting students while considering the available human resource base.

The purpose of the present study was to explore the lived PEs of the ECAs within the neoliberal contexts. Like most qualitative studies, this inquiry leaves more questions than provides answers, and as such yields several different areas for future research. The results discussed herein are not an exhaustive and complete representation of the experiences of ECAs within the neoliberal contexts. Therefore, there is a need for further research in the area to complement the results of the present study.

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