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Postcolonial Directions in Education

Focus and Scope

Postcolonial Directions in Education is a peer reviewed open access journal produced twice a year. It is a scholarly journal intended to foster further understanding, advancement and reshaping of the field of postcolonial education. We welcome articles that contribute to advancing the field. As indicated in the Editorial for the inaugural issue, the purview of this journal is broad enough to encompass a variety of disciplinary approaches, including but not confined to the following: sociological, anthropological, historical and social psychological approaches. The areas embraced include anti-racist education, decolonizing education, critical multiculturalism, critical racism theory, direct colonial experiences in education and their legacies for present day educational structures and practice, educational experiences reflecting the culture and 'imagination' of empire, the impact of neoliberalism/globalisation/structural adjustment programmes on education, colonial curricula and subaltern alternatives, education and liberation movements, challenging hegemonic languages, the promotion of local literacies and linguistic diversity, neo-colonial education and identity construction, colonialism and the construction of patriarchy, canon and canonicity, Indigenous knowledges, supranational bodies and their educational frameworks, north-south and east-west relations in education, the politics of representation, unlearning colonial stereotypes, internal colonialism and education, cultural hybridity and learning in postcolonial contexts, education and the politics of dislocation, biographies / autobiographies reflecting the above themes, deconstruction of colonial narratives of civilization within educational contexts. Once again, the field cannot be exhausted.

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Title of the Special Issue:

**(IN)VISIBILITY OF ‘YOUNG’ RESEARCHERS IN EUROPE:
A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE**



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EDITORIAL

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This special issue of *Postcolonial Directions in Education* showcases an intersectional and inclusive selection of the proceedings of the conference *Voicing Young Researchers for the Future of Europe*, which took place in Malta between the 14 and 15 February 2023. This conference was one of the deliverables of the work programme of the *COST Action CA20137 Making Young Researchers' Voices Heard for Gender Equality (VOICES)*. It was convened at the University of Malta, under the auspices of Organisation of Basic Science for Sustainable Development and of the European Platform of Women Scientists, in connection with the work programme of the International Year for Basic Science and Sustainable Development 2022.

The choice of the VOICES' network to publish the proceedings of its first annual conference in this journal is informed by the

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recognition of the explained (post)colonial dynamics within HERI contexts, and the curiosity about a postcolonial reading of ‘young’⁵ researchers’ lived experiences as students, professionals, and persons that is enhanced by the nuances that the intersectionality perspective can illuminate. The postcolonial perspective enriched the select proceedings published in this special issue with a problematised approach to the intersectional epistemological and ontological backbone guiding the VOICES’ network. In this regard, the postcolonial thrust that runs across the papers’ discussions elucidated that terminology, conceptual, policy and practice manifestations of intersectionality affecting ‘young’ researchers in HERIs are underpinned by symbolic and historical legacies. Specifically affecting how under-representation, misrepresentation, dislocation, and fragmentation limit the co-construction of quality ecologies required for genuine capacity-building and professional development. Furthermore, cognizant of concurrent risks and manifestations of ‘cancel culture’ in HERI contexts that result from antagonistic and divisive trends within the scholarly/activist debates and interactions that have equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) agendas (Sullivan & Suissa, 2022; Hillman, 2022; Haidt & Lukianoff, 2018), the VOICES network identified a rationale for a dialogue between postcolonial and intersectional perspectives.

⁵ Throughout this editorial, the use of inverted commas for ‘young’ is intended to express a critical and problematised approach to the use of this term. We stand for an inclusive, equitable signifier, where the signified can include scholars who are older than 40 years of age and still in the early(ier) career stages, particularly when this is (partly) due to socio-cultural factors that can include gendered-life courses and non-mainstream career pathways.

Background: ‘Young’ researchers in Europe

Higher Education, Research, and Innovation (HERI) institutions are increasingly compelled by neoliberal economic models, and this reflects in their recruitment, remuneration and management of human resource management (Yangson & Seung Jung, 2021; Beban & Trueman, 2018; Møller Madsen & Mahlck, 2018; Ergül & Coşar, 2017; Takayama et al., 2016). It also translates into research positions that increasingly imply travelling, migration, working in multicultural settings and adjusting to transnational family and community experiences (European Commission Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2018; Vohlídalová, 2014). These trends and developments foreground manifestations of postcolonial dynamics within HERI contexts on matters such as which countries and cultures are (still?) calling the shots with respect to epistemological and ontological directions, funding matters and resource allocation, perceptions and (mis)representations of status and quality differentials between education systems, power dynamics, explicit and implicit hierarchies within HERI institutions, and gendered dimensions and trends in related mobility, doctoral and postdoctoral studies (Ergül & Coşar, 2017; Nalbantoğlu, 2017; Adriansen et al., 2016; Vohlídalová, 2014). Nonetheless and concurrently, such trends and developments also translate to opportunities to decolonise curricula, resist epistemicide, and voice intersectionality (Adefila et al., 2022).

In the above-described contexts ‘young’ researchers play a somewhat recognized role in advancing research innovation and knowledge development by bringing fresh perspectives to research (Chen et al., 2015; Cantwell, 2011; Musselin, 2004; Åkerlind, 2005). ‘Young’ researchers also contribute to the enrichment of academic life and culture, through innovative teaching, founding, and participating in associations and networks – and therefore to research excellence overall. Yet in many parts of Europe, there is only a minor share of women and other minorities among ‘young’ (and senior) researchers (European Commission, Directorate-General for Research, and Innovation, 2021). Only slightly over half of those in the academic sector are employed on permanent contracts, compared to the vast majority of those in other sectors (European Science Foundation, 2017, p. 11). Moreover, their working conditions have become increasingly unstable as they are particularly affected by the growing casualisation of the academic workforce and precariousness of the academic life (Murgia & Porgio, 2019). They face, among other things, insecure employment conditions (short-term contracts, part-time), low remunerations, long working hours, increasing requirements (mainly mobility), intense academic competition, overwhelming administrative and organisational tasks, and a lack of recognition by research organisations. Many of these work experiences are profoundly gendered, with intersectional dynamics at play (European Commission, Directorate-General for Research, and Innovation, 2021).

In parallel, and from a theoretical / ideological stance, international, and national research communities are advocating the integration of intersectionality across research fields. Intersectionality recognizes that the simultaneity of individuals' multiple social identities, such as gender, race, class, age, etc., may lead to both opportunities and oppressions that vary according to a given situation (De Silva, 2020). Notably, it has been argued that, whereas some postcolonial perspectives (e.g., postcolonial feminist studies) have not given due attention to particular forms of class, gender, race, and/or age (Bahri, 2010), intersectionality adopts a more inclusive view; because it allows us to go beyond a focus on gender that ignores class, race and other social-political structures, such as decision-making. It has been suggested that intersectionality can give a more comprehensive perspective in the analysis of the extent to which inclusive higher education is committed towards gender equality, discrimination, and genuine opportunities for 'young' researchers.

In response, summons and work plans for gender+ equality are increasingly featuring in the European political agenda, reformist, strategic and quality assurance discourses, and work programmes; and many EU-funded projects are increasingly focused on gender mainstreaming in research institutions through the implementation of Gender Equality Plans. These include LeTSGEPs (2020-2023), GEARING ROLES (2019-2022), SPEAR (2019-2022), GENDERACTION (2017-2021), EQUAL-IST (2016-2019), ACT (2018-2021). Several certification and award schemes already exist in Europe (Athena Swan Award, Label égalité, etc.);

while the CASPER project (2020-2022) examines the feasibility of establishing a European certification system for gender equality for Research Performing Organizations (RPOs).

Aims and scope of this special issue

Cognizant of the above context, this special issue hosts a dialogue between intersectional and postcolonial analyses of the matters discussed in the selected papers. This is done by recognising and further developing the discussions of earlier issues of the same journal, which include the 2018 special issue titled ‘Postcolonial Critique of Knowledge Relations in Higher Education’, edited by Lene Møller Madsen and Paula Mählck (PDE, Volume 7, No. 1), and the 2014 special issue titled ‘Knowledge and Activism’, which featured Nisha Thapliyal as guest editor (PDE, Volume 3, No. 1).

Additionally, this special issue scrutinises the nuanced, gendered, and intersectional visibility and invisibility of ‘young’ researchers going through diverse study and professional development stages: from PhD candidates to postdoctoral researchers and beyond. In this manner, the various papers of this special issue elaborate alternate or nuanced treatments of (anti)racist and (de)colonizing higher education, research and innovation contexts and experiences; or challenge canon and canonicities, hegemonies, and divisive, siloing or ‘cancel culture’ identity politics. The special issue also sought to voice a reimagination of the politics of representation and hybridity of institutional cultures and practices.

Key issues and outcomes

In this volume, voicing of at-risk or vulnerable researchers occurs through a critical discussion of research studies on discrimination, gender-based violence, misrepresentation, or underrepresentation, globalised and localised conflict, diaspora and dislocation, unsustainable work-life formulae, alienation, isolation, and precarity. Indeed, this special issues chronicles research studies that yielded nuanced (and the guest editors dare add, sometimes shocking!) datasets. Noteworthy in this regard are the papers authored by Anna Hata, Camila Lamartine, Rakibe Kulcur et al., JosAnn Cutajar and Roderick Vassallo, and Eleni Meletiadou. These papers shed light on how gender-based discrimination and harassment are (mis)hidden in plain sight (Lamartine, this volume; Cutajar & Vassallo, this volume, Meletiadou, this volume), mystified by fragmented and incongruent understandings of who the ‘young’ researcher is - which, in turn - yields invisibility (Kulcur et al., this volume). However, the studies that feature in this volume also voice complex and ambivalent critical perceptions of ‘young’ researchers and female students in Nepal (Hata, this volume), and of migrant ECRs in the United Kingdom (Meletiadou, this volume), and in Germany (Papaioannou, this volume).

At the level of practices, Cutajar’s and Vassallo’s paper draws on research with students and staff of the University of Malta that yielded mixed-data evidence on where and when sexual

harassment occurs, who are the targets, and whether these reported the incidents they were involved in, to whom, when why and with what effect. The discussion of findings draws on feminist, postcolonial, decolonial and institutional theories to analyse processes, symbolic and material systems that help reproduce differences. Cutajar and Vassallo conclude colonialism prevails when differences are naturalised, hierarchies are justified, and oppression is perceived as emanating from the inherent inferiority of certain groups of people.

The special issue's discussion also ventures out of the Mediterranean toward the European shores of the Atlantic – specifically to Portugal where Camila Lamartine unravels what it means to be “a colonised body in the coloniser's space” (Lamartine, this volume, p. 83), as informed by qualitative research with Brazilian ECRs in Portugal. The findings of this study suggest the way forward is not about eliminating Eurocentric knowledge, but rather reconstructing original epistemologies suppressed by the colonial process (Mignolo, 2003). Consequently, Lamartine (this volume) advocates for a reconfiguration of historically imposed ideologies. A related recommendation emerges from Kulcur et al.'s study with ECRs that dismantles the ‘public-private divide’ and flags the need of intersectional monitoring and evaluation for HERIs and ECRs (Kulcur et al., this volume, p. 3).

The use of under-represented or innovative research designs that feature in the various papers is also remarkable. These include qualitative content and thematic analysis of metadata of

publication indices (Saha et al, this volume), feminist institutional ethnography in Malta (Cutajar & Vassallo, this volume), cross-case primary and secondary data analysis to discern gendered sensitive curricula in Architecture Studies in Lisbon, Coimbra, and Porto (see Matos Silva, this volume), and life stories from Nepal “to grant epistemic justice to marginalised voices and foster participants’ representation” (Hata, this volume, p. 215).

In sum, this special issue complements postcolonial studies in education with voicing ‘young’ researchers’ resistance-driven excellence and excellence-driven resistance. This duality is unpacked by means of the analysis of the intersectional dimensions unravelled in the case studies discussed in the individual papers. As guest editors, we are proud to contribute to the impact dimension of the COST Action VOICES’ work programme.

We are also honoured that this special issue has enticed the attention and much precious time of ‘young’ researchers hailing from the smaller EU member states (and Mediterranean islands) Malta and Cyprus to those with roots or research in the farther and much larger countries, such as Brazil and Nepal.

Certainly, COST is much to credit in this regard, for its vision and provision of genuine opportunities; together with the persons with leadership and management roles within VOICES and who constitute the editorial board of *Postcolonial Directions in Education*, because these are persons and academics who are committed to walking the talk.

It is augured this special issue contributes to further scholarly recognition, evidence-based policymaking, and participatory and democratic development of practices that counter all injustices that are (mis)hidden in plain sight or whitewashed with pseudo-internationalisation rhetoric.

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VOICES IN ACADEMIA AND BEYOND: AN EXPLORATION OF EUROPEAN RESEARCHERS' NARRATIVES USING A DECOLONISING LENS

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Abstract

Grounded in the well-known feminist slogan coined by Carol Hanisch in 1970, “the personal is political,” and informed by the postcolonial decolonising perspective, this article underlines the significance of foregrounding authentic lived experiences, challenging purportedly ‘neutral’ and ‘objectivist’ positivist assumptions. Featuring strong representation of women researchers and individuals of minority backgrounds among our

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respondents, both within and beyond academia, the article's discussion is informed by a qualitative autobiographical comparative inquiry that deploys the intersectional perspective. The study (i) profiled 'Early Career Researchers' (ECRs) to demystify 'public-private divide' conventions, while critically questioning the ECR category's definition; and (ii) queried disparities and resistances at play with respect to (de)colonising higher education, research, and innovation (HERI) contexts. The findings include narrative insights from 36 participants of the COST Action CA20137 *Making Young Researchers' Voices Heard for Gender Equality (VOICES)* network, which includes 480 members, based across Europe. Findings resulting from the thematic analysis of semi-structured interview data critically chronicle (i) the heterogeneity in terms of researchers' institutionalised categorisations, and (ii) salient intersections such as age range, gender, nationality, country of residence, race, ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic group. The discussion critically complements existing monitoring and evaluative knowledge-bases (particularly quantitative), with a nuanced discernment of personal experiences; it thus provides valuable insights into the precarious (in)visibility(/-ies) of ECRs that connect the personal, public, and political realms. The discussion concludes with recommendations for monitoring and evaluation policies and practices to foster the mitigation of disparities, invisibilities, and under- and misrepresentations of ECRs.

Keywords: cross-country comparative research, decolonisation, early career researchers (ECRs), feminist narrative research, gender representation, intersectionality

Introduction

Feminist research aims to understand and improve women's lives. One way to conceptualise feminism is as an empowering discourse that promotes critical consciousness and resistance to prevailing social norms (Holmes & Marra, 2010). Narrative research in the

social sciences has emerged as a powerful qualitative method for understanding human experiences, as it provides a means of incorporating discursive aspects.

Grounded in the well-known feminist slogan coined by Carol Hanisch in 1970, “the personal is political,” and informed by the postcolonial decolonising perspective, this article underlines the significance of foregrounding authentic lived experiences, challenging purportedly ‘neutral’ and ‘objectivist’ positivist assumptions. Featuring a strong representation of women researchers and individuals from minority backgrounds, both within and beyond academia, the article’s discussion is informed by a qualitative autobiographical comparative inquiry that deploys the intersectional perspective. The study (i) profiled ‘Early Career Researchers’ (ECRs) to demystify ‘public-private divide’ conventions, while critically interrogating the term; and (ii) queried disparities and resistances at play with respect to (de)colonising higher education, research, and innovation (HERI) contexts. The findings give voice to 36 participants of the COST Action CA20137 *Making Young Researchers’ Voices Heard for Gender Equality (VOICES)* network, based in different European countries. Findings resulting from the thematic analysis of semi-structured interview data critically chronicle (i) the heterogeneity among researchers’ institutionalised categorisations, and (ii) salient intersections such as age range, gender, nationality, country of residence, race, ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic group. The term ‘early career researchers’ (with its suggestion of an intermediary phase)

requires critical rethinking, since the category increasingly includes people who are in that position long-term, caught up in a series of short-term insecure contracts (Menard & Shinton, 2022; Spina et al., 2022). These circumstances lead to a significant proportion of so-called early career researchers being over 40 years old, a result of casualisation and mobility challenges.

The discussion on the findings of our study (below) critically complements existing monitoring and evaluation knowledge-bases (which tend to be quantitative) with a nuanced discernment of personal experiences, providing valuable insights into the precarious (in)visibility(/-ies) of ECRs that connect the personal, public, and political realms. Based on personal trajectories of researchers, this article aims to offer insights into the diverse experiences of researchers within academia and beyond, thereby contributing towards decolonisation and intersectional analysis. As a process of transformation, decolonisation aims to confront and reduce colonial legacies that are still present in academic research, research methods, gendered practices, and institutional frameworks. The process of decolonisation should be perceived as a path toward “recovery,” rather than an effort to “reverse” the impacts of colonialism (Dixon, 2020). Deconstructing Eurocentric viewpoints and epistemologies is a key component of decolonising academia (Smith, 1999; Tuck & Yang, 2012). In order to incorporate varied voices and perspectives that have historically been ignored by colonial education systems, it is imperative to ensure the inclusion of a wide range of

perspectives and lived experiences to reveal "the unseen norms that shape universities into establishments that regard specific bodies (white, male) as the standard, turning the 'others' into 'space invaders', bodies that are out of place" (De Jong et al., 2017). While existing research has addressed the intersection of academia, precariousness, and gender (e.g. Primack et al., 2010; Zheng, 2018; O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019; Ivancheva et al., 2019; Murgia & Poggio, 2019; Bonello & Wånggren, 2023; Rowell & Morris, 2023), there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning the utilisation of a narrative approach, when it comes to researchers in Europe. With a few exceptions (e.g. Krilić et al., 2019), studies of researchers in European countries have tended to focus on one particular country (e.g. O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019; Lopes et al., 2023), rather than taking a wider comparative approach. This study seeks to bridge this gap by employing a narrative inquiry to uncover nuanced insights into women's experiences within academia and beyond across Europe, and the underlying structures that influence them. By adopting a narrative lens, our research aspires to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of academic precariousness and to inform strategies for fostering inclusivity and equity within educational institutions.

The following section provides the literature review by highlighting the significance of narratives, and emphasising the distinct contributions of feminist narrative research in uncovering intersectional dimensions and the impacts of colonisation. Afterward, there is the methodology section, followed by the analysis of data and subsequent discussions.

Literature Review

Within the domain of qualitative methodologies, feminist narrative research has gained prominence for its dynamic approach to understanding the nuanced dimensions of gendered experiences through storytelling (Smith, 2005). A narrative is a description of events occurring over time in which individuals arrange and interpret their experiences (Bruner, 1991). Narrative is a way of knowing (Kramp, 2003) because it is a valuable source of empirical knowledge (Bruce et al., 2016). Feminist narrative research is an important tool for understanding and potentially improving the lives of self-identified women (Woodiwiss et al., 2017) as it values women's voices and the stories they tell. Consequently, scholars emphasise the importance of narrative research in challenging conventional power structures, amplifying marginalised voices, and opening avenues for those who have been historically marginalised or silenced (Riessman, 2008).

Although it has been argued that initiating narrative research can be nonlinear and frequently messy (Bruce et al., 2016), there is a growing body of research on the methods and rationale behind narrative research (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Fraser & MacDougall, 2017; Andrews et al., 2013). Feminist narrative research, rooted in feminist principles, employs diverse qualitative methodologies that prioritise individual stories as transformative tools for empowerment and societal change (Chase, 2016). Narrative inquiry forms the core of feminist narrative research, offering a

systematic and interpretive framework for exploring the ways individuals construct and communicate their stories (Riessman, 2008). Narratives are not mere chronological accounts but are socially and culturally embedded, embodied and situated, allowing researchers to unpack the intricate interplay of gendered experiences, and exploring how individuals negotiate, resist, and internalise societal norms through their narrative expressions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Moreover, it is also important to embrace diverse voices and experiences to ensure inclusivity and explore intersectional analysis (Fine, 2019; Mountz et al., 2015).

The concept of intersectionality, originally introduced by Crenshaw (1991), urges us to move beyond simplistic analyses of gender and consider the intersections of various social categories, including race, class, sexuality, age, religion, nationality, parenthood and disability (Showunmi, 2020; Collins et al., 2021). This is in line with what Zheng (2018, p. 247) identifies as a key “feminist principle”: “organizing from the margins, that is, prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable and multiply disadvantaged.” Similarly, in decolonial discourse, feminist scholars promote intersectional analyses that acknowledge the relationship between colonialism, race, and gender (Hooks, 1984). Decolonising gender practices entails acknowledging suppressed voices and knowledge systems, amplifying heterogeneity, and challenging colonial constructions of femininity and masculinity. To address systemic injustices and power imbalances, decolonisation also requires structural changes within institutional frameworks (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Examining intersectionality through a decolonial lens

involves employing a theoretical framework of decolonisation, which considers various aspects such as masculinism, hegemonic beliefs, white supremacy, global hierarchies, oppression, power imbalances, democratisation, inclusion, politics of knowledge, and coloniality, among others. It is essential to recognise that most components of identity are not static or historically inherent but rather constructs of colonialism. Additionally, oppression extends beyond individual experiences to encompass communities and institutional structures (Sims, 2023).

There is a dimension of “collaborative autoethnography” (Chang et al., 2016) to this research, where a group of researchers shared their experiential accounts in an attempt to capture some of the complexity and intersections at play within the structures of the neoliberal academy. Collaborative autoethnography has the capacity to “mak[e] the familiar strange” (Rowell & Morris, 2023, p. 33), critically denaturalising the structures within which we work. Our awareness of our own dual positioning as research subjects as well as researchers was accompanied by critical and reflective distancing, as our anonymised experiences were shared, collaboratively analysed and discussed.

This article also seeks to contribute to the critical and nuanced identification of the gendered/intersectional (in)visibility of ‘Early Career Researchers (ECRs)’² across different levels. The research environment shapes the “expectations or requirements placed on

² Definitions of ‘ECR’ have tended to be inconsistent.

ECRs” according to “disciplines and national contexts” (Djerasimovic & Villani, 2020, p. 263) and institutional culture. Studies show that so-called ECRs face significant challenges such as lack of resources and funding, pressure from senior researchers, insufficient mentoring and supervision, unbalanced work-life dynamics, and the pervasive and constant pressure to publish or perish (Friesenhahn & Beaudry, 2014; Levine & Rathmell, 2020; Termini & Traver, 2020). Moreover, precarious work seems to be widespread in academia, such as in Germany, where 90% of researchers employed in academia work on temporary contracts for a term of less than one year (Dirnagl, 2022). O’Keefe & Courtois (2019) explore the feminisation of precarious academic work in Ireland through the lens of ‘non-citizenship’ and ‘non-status’. Academics who lack a permanent secure job labour (often ad hoc) under invisibility: as a group in terms of their institutional status, and individually, as lack of a coherent career trajectory results in a fragmented academic identity. The literature makes frequent reference to ‘invisibility’ (Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Bonello & Wånggren, 2023, p. 186). Mason & Megoran (2021) note that casualisation leads to dehumanisation in four ways: casualised staff are “invisible to colleagues and institutions”; they are vulnerable to exploitation; casualisation curtails their agency and academic freedom; and “it prevents them from articulating a long-term narrative of their careers that can provide meaning to their lives” (Mason & Megoran, 2021, p. 36). This latter is particularly pertinent in view of our chosen qualitative method, where we invite our respondents to tell their stories in their own words.

Our study focuses on the dynamics and challenges experienced by individuals, with a particular emphasis on the potential for decolonising higher education, research, and opening avenues for innovation and contextual reform. As decolonisation and gender dynamics collide, this reveals how colonialism repressed women's voices and upheld patriarchal systems (Mohanty, 1988). Neoliberalism and globalisation interact (Rizvi, 2007; Gyamera & Burke, 2018) in the neo-colonial context, which is itself enabled by and made up of "processes of domination" originating in European colonisation (Hickling-Hudson & Mayo, 2012, p. 2) and having "concrete effects on research practices" (Møller Madsen & Mählck, 2018, p. 8). Møller Madsen and Mählck call for more analysis of such research contexts, as the groundwork for generating strategies for decolonisation. "Decolonizing the mind" involves reimagining ways of knowing and constructing knowledge, to "disrupt the colonial gaze" and include marginalised ways of knowing (Tuitt & Stewart, 2021, pp. 106–107). Ultimately, decolonisation therefore also seeks to diversify knowledge itself, in contexts where structurally curtailed academic freedom threatens access to, production and voicing of, marginalised knowledge bases (Blell et al., 2022; Bonello & Wånggren, 2023, pp. 103, p. 273). Pereira (2017, p. 2) notes that a feminist approach has the capacity to "explore how academics demarcate the boundaries of 'proper' knowledge," with "academic practice [being] shaped by ongoing struggles over the definition of, and the power to define, what can count as 'proper' knowledge, and should therefore be accepted, funded or certified as such." In relation to these

boundaries, feminist scholarship (wherein we locate our study) may itself be a precariously positioned field of knowledge (Pereira, 2017, p. 2; Wångren, 2018).

Within a 'globalised' academic market, precariously employed academics are frequently discouraged from setting down roots, with the perceived necessity or expectation of being able to relocate (sometimes to different countries) at short notice obstructing stability in geographical, institutional, and interpersonal terms (McAlpine, 2012). Personal circumstances, such as having children, may make such expectations of "international mobility" more challenging (Krilić et al., 2019, p. 167). While globalisation may seem to be universal and "ahistorical" (Rizvi, 2007), decolonisation draws our attention towards the particular and grounded. Decolonisation may also be embedded in day-to-day practice, affecting work-life balance. For example, Mountz et al. (2015) argue for a 'decolonising' approach to scholarship that incorporates care and "slowness," with added sensitivity to the relationship between work and life.

In terms of 'European' identity, Djerasimovic & Villani (2020, pp. 260-2) note that for most of their respondents, the "distinction between European and international/global" proved to be a "fuzzy" one. They observe that their interviewees' higher education institutions "seem to have largely become reliant on ECRs to be proactive in seeking and creating" networks and communities, rather than assuming responsibility for guidance and support of their ECRs. As a result, the ECRs they interviewed "seem to have

learnt not to identify with, or expect support from, their institutions.” For some in Djerasimovic and Villani’s study, this delocalisation (or “non-belonging,” as Morris (2021) describes the everyday experiences of marginalisation in academia) led to embracing “European initiatives,” which afforded “opportunities to find their place [and academic identities] within more broadly international communities, and a globalised research landscape.” This however was not a straightforward ‘European’ academic identity: for most of their respondents, it did not translate into a sense of ‘Europeanness’ in their academic self” (Djerasimovic & Villani, 2020). A couple of the interviewees in Djerasimovic & Villani’s study saw the “issue of ‘Europeanness’ in research policy as problematic, due to its possible misuse as a facet of Eurocentrism.” The ‘European’ identity thus emerges as neither straightforward nor entirely uniform, sometimes provoking ambivalence. Decolonisation offers critical perspectives on Eurocentrism, by reminding us of what it tends to exclude.

Research Methodology

The research methodology applied to this study is based on the thematic analysis (Bamberg, 2012) of stories / experiences and biographies / backgrounds collected following the principles for surveys established by Groves et al. (2009). This qualitative approach involves the recording and documentation of stories or experiences from a target audience, with the aim of understanding both relevant events and phenomena (Lyons & Coyle, 2021).

Decolonisation of research involves recognising and giving space and voice to the heterogeneity that characterises academic researchers: there is heterogeneity and diversity between individuals (including this study's participants), as well as in terms of class, race, gender, disability, and other intersectional factors, which influence their access to opportunities and networks.

When collecting and generating the data necessary to conduct the qualitative inquiry, there are different methods that can be followed, such as interviews, workshops, or surveys, among others. In the case of this study, we decided that surveys (Groves et al., 2009) were the method that best fit our research. In this way, we could establish a structured questionnaire, which we could distribute electronically throughout our international and interdisciplinary network of researchers working in academia and beyond.

E-survey techniques make it possible to reach many people in various locations, without being limited by constraints of location or time. E-surveys, in contrast to in-person surveys, are computer-mediated communication methods with certain limitations and possibilities (Jansen & Corley, 2007). The benefits from online surveys were felt to outweigh their drawbacks for the purposes of our study, since they enabled us to address sample variation, namely by reaching out to a group of 480 members, thus including diverse voices.

To develop the survey, we first established the scope and objective of our research through the following research questions (RQs):

- **RQ1.** What are the actual situations and experiences of researchers working in academia?
- **RQ2.** What main challenges do researchers face in academia from perspectives of intersecting factors such as gender, race, age, class, nationality, and employment conditions, among others?

Once the RQs were established, we drafted the survey questionnaire. To do this, we first included a series of demographic questions, such as age range, gender, nationality, country of residence, race, ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic group, and whether the respondent has a disability. After this series of questions, we formulated a section related to the professional career, with questions such as number of years working in academia/research; field of research; current role; and type of contract (permanent, temporary, or other). Finally, we established a couple of questions in which we addressed the main objective of this study, i.e., open-text questions about the respondent's experience in relation to their search for a position in academia/research; transition in and towards academia (if relevant); the level of cooperation, competitiveness, or camaraderie perceived in academia/research; gender balance in this regard; the survey furthermore invited the respondent to share experiences that demystify the 'public-private divide'. It is crucial to emphasise that while certain inquiries within

the survey may touch upon sensitive topics, most questions were optional, and the design ensures complete anonymity of respondents and at no point were they asked to identify themselves.

After obtaining ethical approval, we distributed the final survey, consisting of a total of 22 questions (both quantitative and qualitative), through our network of researchers. We decided to leave data collection open for four months (October 2023 to February 2024) from the first call for participation. To produce a high-quality data code-set, the codes were identified using line-by-line analysis. In vivo coding was used, meaning that participant statements were taken as exact quotes, to remove language bias. Online meetings were initiated to negotiate reliability issues in qualitative analysis at every stage, ensuring harmony among the researchers in charge of data analysis. Furthermore, definitions of codes were carefully considered during coding to ensure that each code had an established meaning and to avoid “definitional drift” (Glesne, 2016, p. 198). This refers to the idea that a code should not have many meanings in different areas of the data.

Finally, to analyse the collected data, we followed an approach based on looking for patterns or themes that are repeated or highlighted within the collected data. Codes were assigned based on the research participants’ own words, identifying common trends and repetitions. This is known as thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2019), which we conducted by inputting the data in a

qualitative data in a specialised software (MAXQDA³).

Following the processing of codes and categories for each participant's responses with the help of the software, the themes were identified, which provided the basis for our detailed analysis, as shown and discussed in the following sections.

Data Analysis and Discussion

We have had a total of 36 participants, predominantly women aged between 31 and 50. 30 participants were female and 6 male. Among them, those from ITC countries⁴ are prominent. Most participants fall within the middle-class bracket with 11-15 years of experience in academia, primarily within the field of social sciences. Of those who answered the question regarding the work, 10 were working in and 6 outside of academia. Employment positions vary, with resident and temporary contracts being more or less equally represented (14 and 12 respectively).

Our findings span a wide range of topics, including: system, power and hierarchy; power structures and the global south; decolonising knowledge; public-private distortions; and agency and resistance, as will be discussed below.

³ <https://www.maxqda.com/>

⁴ ITC means Inclusiveness Target Countries which is a geographical categorisation of COST member countries. The current list of ITCs include: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Republic of North Macedonia, Republic of Serbia, Türkiye, and Ukraine (EU COST, 2024).

System, Power, and Hierarchy

The findings of this research provide insights into the complex relationships between gender, hierarchy, and power within the academic world and beyond. The dataset includes assessments of “the existing scientific system” as being “characterised by a hierarchical structure of universities and scientific institutions and a lack of transparency,” and therefore “not able to cope with intrigues,” i.e., “a way of realising insecurity and uncertainty. Intrigue manifests itself in the mixing of scientific interests with tangible personal gain” (P36). This lack of transparency is a feature of the mystification of underground and structural dynamics, which is reported in management-heavy organisations where ‘transparency’ has been seen as “tend[ing] to run in one direction only, from the bottom of the organisation to the top but not the other way round” (Deem et al., 2007, p. 95). P8 in our study also bemoans the lack of transparency, and its implications for social justice: “A lack of transparency and an undervalue of achievement is still present, in my opinion, which we all need to work on in order to make it a more just ecosystem” (P8).

Gender disparities and power imbalances are sustained by deeply ingrained patriarchal norms in academic institutions. Participants expressed concerns over the prevalence of masculine ideas and voices being favoured over those of women. Several respondents noted that the academic hierarchy was structured along patriarchal lines:

I have also noticed that there remains a tendency to value men's voices and opinions more than women's ... I personally have not experienced it yet, but from the colleagues I have been working on it is obvious how the system is still in favour of masculine ideas (P8).

Responses show situations in which young women are marginalised in academic settings because their male counterparts do not take them seriously. P13 observes that male managers in her country (an ITC country) may mistreat female employees with impunity: "Male managers in the country I live in can apply mobbing to women more easily" (P13). The same participant associates this with power relations in academia: "A male manager can easily shout at a female employee. This is how men can achieve dominance" (P13). Similarly, P8 notes that women in positions of power in academia still face more challenges than men in the same positions:

My supervisor is in her 60s and has been a vice-rector of the university for 12 years, and is the director of our research centre, and she is constantly undermined by the men in power and has to literally fight double as hard to sustain our work and positions (P8).

P31, who identifies as upper-class and who is in a high-responsibility role, nonetheless notes that her male colleagues had an easier time progressing through the ranks: "It was very difficult, raising a child and progressing in my career, but I certainly did go

(almost) to the top, with high responsibilities sometimes. My male colleagues certainly had a better career and were much more easy going!” (P31).

The patriarchal structure manifests in everyday interactions; and is nuanced with intersectionalities, such as those between gender and age cohort. In this regard, P32, who is precariously employed, testifies:

I think in academia, you need to struggle on a daily basis as a young woman researcher. The mildest one you are facing every day is not being taken seriously. ‘Adult’ male researchers treat you like “you cute little thing tell me what you have done with your research” approach. For me it is one of the most annoying parts (P32).

Another testimony, volunteered by P12, substantiates that being short-changed in terms of professional treatment intersects with patriarchal perceptions of being a woman, and with senior colleagues’ perceptions of younger colleagues:

My advisor was the dean, he really had the idea that people in the university should look “presentable.” After advising so many people... he thought that I did not get the message. One day he said, “Close the door, tomorrow you are going to be more presentable and wear a dress. While I am suggesting everyone to be presentable, you are undermining my authority.” He had the impression I was

representing him and an object of his. The other time while I was helping him to check his emails, he said, “Even though I do have the secretary, it would be challenging for me to ask her to help me. The next day her husband may show up at the door to ask about. Is it OK with you since you are so young and single?” (P12).

P32 claims to have experienced sexual harassment from a colleague with seniority:

by (the) vice dean of my faculty. Could not charge him for the assault as a woman professor told me not to do it. The reason behind this was they all think you are guilty; no one blames him because of what he had done to you” (P32).

The patriarchal structures here work to ‘legitimate’ and normalise harassment, placing the woman at a disadvantage. It is notable that P32 found a lack of support and solidarity from other women, who were integrated into the system. A major theme that exacerbates power disparities and inequalities among early career researchers (so-called ECRs) seems to be precarity. Precarity can be defined as a condition characterised by uncertainty, instability, and vulnerability in various aspects of individuals’ lives, such as employment, housing, and social welfare (Millar, 2017; Standing, 2011). Sexual harassment is an issue in higher education institutions, where intersectionally marginalised persons are most at risk (see the article by Cutajar & Vassallo (2024), in this volume, on sexual harassment at an EU university), and employment

precarity is a factor that has been found to increase the likelihood of sexual harassment at work (Wånggren, 2023) as a result of unequal power relations. Precarity in employment produced by neoliberal capitalism over the past decades around the world for financial gains causes “precarious life” (Butler, 2004; Bonello & Wånggren, 2023). For financial gain, academic neoliberal capitalism takes advantage of instability. Hence, addressing structural issues such as job insecurity is crucial for fostering safer and fairer work environments in academia.

Moreover, although some research has explored the growing sense of precariousness among academics (e.g. Lopes & Dewan, 2014; Allmer, 2018; Burton & Bowman, 2022; Bonello & Wånggren, 2023), the influence of the prevalent culture of precarious employment in academia on gender inequality warrants further exploration. P24, also in precarious employment in academia, likewise perceives that the difference in institutional status exacerbates the inequality, and adds that it creates administrative challenges:

Tenured senior professors (in an ITC country) do not have to do anything and cannot be dismissed from the faculty. Their sole responsibility is to deliver lectures as scheduled. On the other hand, we, the younger generation, must conduct lectures, handle all administrative tasks (both our own and those of senior professors), find ways and time for research, secure financial resources, and more (P24).

In this account, the lack of institutional seniority is accompanied by job insecurity, which adds to the burdens of unpaid labour and disrupts work-life balance. P24 further notes that working in academia in her (ITC) country is “very challenging,” and: “This is especially true for younger individuals, and particularly for women. Young teaching assistants often experience various forms of mistreatment from older professors” (P24). Institutional status, contractual status, age, and gender are seen as intersecting in ways that reinforce and maintain the hierarchy.

The dataset includes evidence of power structures producing precarity among many marginalised women academics as well as (so-called) ECRs, e.g., affecting postdocs in general (and, increasingly, irrespective of age and career stage, *contra* the implications of the term ‘ECR’). Data that exemplify this include: “Most postdocs are completely disposable and can be dispensed with without much disruption of the university” (P9).

Power Structures and the Global South

While precarity comes across in the data as being built into the institutional culture, it is not the whole picture. Other data illuminate intersectional dynamics at play, and provide evidence that power structures map onto prior colonial legacies and postcolonial relations of dominance-marginalisation, impacting researchers with Global South nationalities or heritage. For example, the study participant born in an ex-colony in Asia explains her career progression in a European HERI:

I did not receive tenure because I was told that I was “a bad fit” after nearly 10 years there... The 10 years that I spent as a postdoc and then Assistant Professor without any stability and a low salary were emotionally draining. It also felt very random - there was no concrete basis for deciding “tenure” or not or “fit” (P11).

As the study sample was heterogeneous, some nationalities and languages emerged as less mainstreamed than others in the data. In this context, participants with less mainstream nationalities and language competences perceived themselves as less powerful; in the words of one respondent, this was because “I am constantly reminded about my accent (including by teachers who have told me that I make up words)” (P25).

Furthermore, adding age as one more intersecting category, the data provide even more evidence of intersectional dynamics at play. For instance, being over 40 years of age and having inadequate competency in the English language, and hailing from an ex-colony in South America, one can feel that being “over 40 I feel like I am always one step behind. [maybe] because my English is not good enough” (P25). This testifies to the perceived dominance of the English language, which marginalises other voices (and with them, knowledges); as Tandon et al. (2024, p. 297) note: “The pervasiveness of the English language within academia hinders the possibility for multiple epistemologies to unfold to their full potential.”

Our data suggests that while younger researchers feel vulnerable, older persons also experience vulnerability, particularly if they are not yet established. In general, being an ECR above 40 years of age seems to create additional pressure and challenges. Recently, the term and the definition of ECR or Early Career Researcher was modified by the EU to Young Researchers and Innovators (YRI), that is “a researcher or innovator under the age of 40” (EU COST, 2023). Prior to this, the term referred to a researcher within 8 years from the date of obtaining the PhD/doctorate (full-time equivalent) (EU COST, 2019). This revised definition poses challenges and runs counter to the European Union’s lifelong learning objectives (known as EU 2020), potentially discouraging older citizens from pursuing a PhD. For example, the age barrier excludes many researchers from funding opportunities, including those who earned their PhDs after gaining industry experience and those who had career breaks because of societal requirements to fulfil traditional gender roles (usually female researchers). In addition, it also makes the transition to academia more difficult. A female researcher who has worked in the industry for several years also highlights this: “If you have worked in the industry for a long time and have a family, the transition to academia is nearly impossible...If you are young, single, and have the mobility to move to different universities and countries, you might have a successful career” (P29).

In this context, the data also suggest that women face additional vulnerabilities. For example, “When working in another country

the work life balance was less respected for me as a foreigner and being a woman” (P18) and “STEM fields are notoriously unfriendly to female, senior, social scientists from developing countries” (P2). Thus, not only being an immigrant, but also other intersecting vectors of discrimination – i.e. being of a particular age and gender with particular English language knowledge and skills – tend to make the experience of precarity likelier among ECRs.

The examples in this section illustrate how voices from the Global South are ignored or side-lined in academic discussions (a marginalisation that may be reinforced by gender and age), where certain knowledge systems are imposed on others by silencing and marginalising voices from the Global South within academic discourse (Spivak, 2004). Thus, power structures are multi-dimensional and discerning them requires a more nuanced approach, such as an intersectional perspective revealing the contexts wherein the power structures are embedded. Our data show that the primary experiential location of the power displays are social encounters and everyday conversations with one’s fellow educators, and within the workplace. Additionally, the data can inform remapping ‘the Global South’ to include nationalities not always thus identified, in line with Piedalue and Rishi’s (2017) insistence that a fixed geographic designation of the ‘South’ entrenches it (and any resulting research, policy and practice) in hierarchies of ‘civility’ or ‘modernity’ that perpetuate place-based and racialised inequalities. Consequently, a critical emancipatory engagement with the South cannot be bound to a fixed geographic designation of where the ‘South’ is.

Dislocation, Relocation, and Split Locations

Several topics related to 'location' emerge from the analysis. 'Location' in an academic setting is disclosed as losing (dislocating) or changing (relocating) location, or operating in several distant locations, such mobility having both positive and less positive connotations for our respondents. Positive experiences of dis-/re-/split-location cover opportunities for desired geographical mobility, learning, networking through travelling, and career progression. For example, as P12 noted, "It feels good to be part of an international community, which gives a powerful biofeedback to me." Moreover, the EU funding made available for researchers' mobility, with the aim of strengthening international cooperation, also leads to expansion of networks and, in general, an increase in personal capabilities. For example, as P24 noted:

COST has given me the opportunity to see the world for the first time, and to connect with other researchers. ... That physical contact, experience exchange, and networking are some of the things that benefit us the most. I cannot achieve that from my office, sitting behind a laptop.

In addition to the personal satisfaction stemming from a rewarding sense of communality, the relocation can lead to success in applying for grants and entrenchment of career prospects. For example, P11 mentioned that she did her PhD "in the [non-

European country] and then moved to [an EU country] as a postdoc,” and then she “received several large grants and then started my own group.” Furthermore, P11 adds an account of successful career development, which, notably, connects with achieving job security and stability, thus making further relocation unnecessary. In her words, “2 years ago, I got a position as full Professor and head of department at another [EU country] university, and I now work here. This to me was a huge step forward also because I finally had a permanent position with a stable income.”

In general, the location directly intersects with affiliation characteristics, which mean being based in a concrete research centre or department⁵. As P8 reported, “I have worked exclusively at research centres at the university and never in larger departments, which provided me throughout my PhD with the possibility to conduct my research freely, to be involved in European projects, and to travel.” Again, particular characteristics of the location (here: a supportive academic environment inside bigger structures) directly predetermines the possibilities open to the researcher and, supposedly, access to future projects.

However, on the other hand, working in smaller departments located inside bigger academic structures may necessitate a broader job description that includes administrative duties (particularly when based in smaller institutions), adjusting one’s

⁵ COST membership also requires affiliation, though this does not have to be in the form of a permanent post.

research interests to institutional agendas, the need to do 'ad hoc jobs' to make ends meet, or doing unpaid work. For example:

This has also involved a lot of extra work which my colleagues with doctoral positions at larger departments did not have to do, such as organising events, applying for research and travel grants to sustain the centre, administrative work and planning and organising of conferences (P8).

Also, a precariously employed study participant reported:

I have always worked in academia, with a few ad hoc jobs related to my field on the side. I have, however, aimed for a career in academia, and have built up my CV by working in several higher education institutions on fixed-term or hourly-paid contracts, and sometimes unpaid. ... I do a lot of unpaid work - I still scramble to build up my CV, though it is now so long it is unwieldy, and my research profile is all over the place (because I have had to take academic employment where I can find it, and keep doors to potential opportunity open). Yet I keep adding to the CV, just to be ready in case a permanent job I can apply for appears (P6).

Thus, the lack of a regular role, the recession from one's discipline, divergence from one's research interests or main academic focus, or a gap between research profile and job description are the less positive aspects of re-/dis-locations identified in the study. We term these disruptions 'role / discipline dislocations'.

Furthermore, split locations - for example, "I moved to a large MNC (multi-national company) (while I continued to supervise my PhD students at my academic position for free)" (P11) - pose a challenge to an ECR who strives to meet shifting requirements and survive in academia. P30 experienced movement between teaching jobs that was also geographical:

In [a particular non-ITC EU country] you also have to be willing to move for a job. I have had jobs in 4 different cities (more than 100 kilometres apart) and that has been challenging. You get the choice to move or not but leaving 300 kilometres away from where you teach is not sustainable.

P30's negatively framed experience of instability and the necessity of continuous re-location, as she strove to adapt to the split/multiple locations, persisted for eight years before she finally got a permanent job.

Decolonising Knowledges: Efforts and Barriers

This research also allowed us to collect a variety of perspectives from researchers both within academia and beyond, helping toward decolonisation and intersectional analysis. Knowledge production by groups lacking a dominant voice is seen by some as precarious. P28 experiences her workplace environment and community as exclusionary, in their failure to understand, accept, or value the interaction between different knowledge bases: “my colleagues I work with seem to ignore my studies because they think I am doing something out of the field. In my working environment only ELT [English Language Teaching] studies are encouraged or appreciated” (P28). The disciplinary aspect may therefore be accompanied and reinforced by interpersonal dynamics. The experience of P8 also testifies to the exclusion that occurs because of power play and territoriality: “I saw how academic environments can turn into personal-vendetta battlegrounds where skills, knowledge and achievements are not valued” (P8).

In the same vein, with reference to gendered dynamics, P36 argues that the neglect of women’s contributions affects the knowledge/research culture itself, and hinders structural change in the conditions of knowledge production: “Implementation of structural change initiated by women scientists in universities and scientific institutions remains a major challenge for the academic community” (P36). In P36’s account, women trying to bring about change are not heard.

A male participant who is precariously employed in academia links the devaluing of knowledge production to one's career stage and institutional status: "Precarity is built into the structure of research and the downgrading of teaching allows institutions to distance themselves from the career development of postdocs as teaching is an existential function of universities" (P9).

One respondent (P36) experienced a more localised reversal of this, feeling that her international training was dismissed and belittled within the more bounded national context. She feels she was held back because established academics in her postcolonial country of residence (an ITC country) did not trust young researchers who had trained abroad in new fields of science: "Mistrust towards young scientists (even those who have graduated from world-renowned universities) is widespread in the scientific community of national countries" (P36). She explains this in terms of competition and defensive intergenerational dynamics, which translate to hostility in response to the perceived threat of competition from outside: "It seems that in their country nobody needs their skills and knowledge of new scientific fields acquired in advanced universities and topics proposed by them. Local scientists do not need additional competition" (P36).

She further adds that:

distrust of young scientists lowers their self-confidence and reduces their motivation to work in science. It leads

to the loss of the 'frontier' knowledge they have gained in advanced universities, possible future discoveries and new technologies for the country and the prosperity of the whole society (P36).

P36 ultimately sees this therefore as a failure of international dialogue and exchange, as well as the loss of knowledge which occurs when global knowledge meets resistance in local contexts. It should be noted that this is a reversal of the more typical (colonial/neo-colonial) pattern, on the global stage, of local knowledge being overwritten, side-lined, or co-opted by globalised knowledge production (Smith, 1999). As a result, a cycle of lost opportunities is sustained when young scientists are discouraged from fully pursuing scientific endeavours and novel ideas due to a lack of trust. Thus, this response emphasises how crucial it is to create a climate of mutual respect and support among scientists so that young people feel empowered to share their special knowledge and insights, adding to knowledge production.

Public-Private Distortions

Work-life balance continues to be a critical point where researchers struggle. The results obtained show that life situations, such as having a child, pose a problem for those working in academia/research. Combining work and family responsibilities means that many academics do not find the time to create a family and those who do, face significant challenges that sometimes even lead them to withdraw from academia and

research for a time. This may add to the hurdles when it comes to resuming that professional life in the future.

The data analysis revealed how the public-private divide is undermined by the possibility of remote work and telework, the pace at which HERIs are operating, and the impact this has in terms of the demands and expectations placed on ECRs. It may seem that remote working could be a solution to this, but nothing could be further from the truth (Ivancheva & Garvey, 2022). While it is true that remote working may help to achieve a slightly better balance with family life, it has meant that having “the office” at home leads to not disconnecting from work, working more hours than one should, and even working during days off or vacation. “Spill-over from working to private lives” (Krilić et al., 2019, p. 173) is particularly intense in the “postdoctoral period” (Krilić et al., 2019, p. 169). The data below exemplifies this:

I had no office on campus, so I would work from home and come in to deliver lectures. This meant even less of a boundary between my private life and work (P6).

There is no work-life balance, only work-work-work balance. I am in a situation where I use my vacation leave to work on my own research (P6).

Personal and private spaces are here colonised by neoliberal pressures, which enlist the self (and the home) as a resource and an enterprise. A culture of overwork has been found to typify

academia across employment categories (Bonello & Wånggren, 2023, p. 101; Smith, 2024), though tending to have a higher impact on women (Acker & Armenti, 2004). Further analysis revealed that the dynamics, demands and expectations typically found in HERI contexts intersect with collateral circumstances and life events, such as bearing a child and becoming a parent. In this case the public-private divide is strategically reinterpreted by neoliberal institutions to justify precarious working conditions, dislocation, or exclusion:

I was asked to go on unemployment each time I went on maternity leave, to avoid getting a permanent contract. I was clearly told that I could never make it in academia (P11).

Balancing being a parent of small kids with being a group leader was extremely challenging (even for a man) (P9).

You still have to choose between your personal life and your professional career, because such experiments... carried out by international groups in large scientific facilities such as accelerators (prominent research institutions in Europe)... cannot be extended. If you have interrupted your studies due to personal circumstances, you should start again (choose a new topic or change the field of study). There are no conditions to reconcile them (P36).

As a mother of two kids, it is difficult to create a balance between work and life.....with the teaching load I am in, it is difficult to manage. I have been teaching 40 hours in a week for more than 600 students... And this 40 hour does not include preparing for teaching, grading, and putting numbers into the online system. I am also an advisor of two Ph.D. candidates, and a MA [Master's] student. So, there is no personal time at all. Basically, all of my time is divided by teaching, school related jobs, and home. Even though I would like to go to the gym or a social event, I do not have time (P12).

The above evidence from our study shows that the erosion of the public-private divide has been diverted from its intended feminist aims in the contexts under study, weaponised and deployed to side-line researchers with family responsibilities, in a way that reinforces patriarchal gender roles. It also distorts the boundaries between working and recreational hours and spaces to maximise researchers' and teachers' inputs and outputs.

Agency and Resistance: Conductors and Barriers

The postcolonial perspective supported the identification of dynamics and processes at play which decolonise established knowledge paradigms, production and validation, as well as the HERI systems, power structures and hierarchies described by participants. Agency is one such example. In the dataset, so-called ECRs referred to a few sources of agency, sometimes found in

solidarity with more senior colleagues, or their colleagues; and translating into attempts at centring or supporting younger, or otherwise marginalised, voices. For instance, networks and mentorship helped P15 navigate the academic structures: “I was lucky though that I did have a mentor, a professor from university, who helped me throughout the research ecosystem” (P15).

The testimony of P11 gives hope of light at the end of the tunnel, suggesting that, in the end, resilience and perseverance payoff:

When my contract...ended at that job, I had also recently become a single mother to 3 kids under 5 (and then COVID hit some time later). It was a terrible period of my life, but an important stepping stone. Now, I head a department and am a full prof in another university in the same country. Sometimes, I still have trouble believing that I “made it!” But, having freedom from financial and job security is amazing, and allows me to focus on things other than fundraising at work, and I have peace of mind at home (P11).

However, P6, who is a precariously employed academic, noted that relationships within this hierarchical structure could be compromised by the constant “awareness of inequality,” replacing the hoped-for true “collaboration” between peers:

With regard to mentorship, I have been fortunate to experience collegiality from some senior colleagues, as well

as colleagues in similar precarious positions. However, I always feel that awareness of our inequality intrudes into the relationships with senior colleagues ... One colleague on a precarious contract was a particular source of solidarity, but I have barely seen them since they got a permanent job. It is disheartening to realise that some relationships of solidarity are fragile; everyone in a precarious situation is competing... (P6).

P28 speaks of resentment from her colleagues because of the concessions made for her study:

Especially during my PhD period, I felt that English teachers around me got annoyed with me because every week I had to travel to another city to have my PhD classes and the school management had to give a day off in my schedule. For some people this is unfair because what I am studying is not directly related to language teaching (P28).

One participant exhibited a notable depth of insight and provided rich data reflecting about her experience of being singled out by colleagues as “different, not like others in the university of my country” (P36). She recalls telling one professor that she had been a researcher in a world-famous laboratory, she “was speechless when he told me, *‘That means you do not know anything about this area of physics’*” (P36). She ascribes this to interpersonal dynamics, self-interest, and “personal gain”: “I later found out that

he had tried to work in that field of physics, but he did not have the right training. He was forced to change fields” (P36).

In summary, agency and resistance in colonial contexts involve a dynamic interaction of different conductors and barriers that either support or impede colonised peoples’ capacity to assert their autonomy and self-determination. These obstacles can be dealt with by taking into consideration the systemic gaps in the academic community. To fully comprehend the intricate dynamics of colonial power relations in academia and other research settings, one must have an extensive awareness of these components.

Conclusions

Foregrounding these voices in (and through) research is a step towards decolonisation, and some of our respondents are engaging in decolonisation efforts themselves, in their own research and their everyday interactions and practice. However, to achieve meaningful decolonisation, our study makes it clear that institutions must make commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion, and act upon them, in addition to reforming policies. Additionally, they have to actively interact with knowledge holders whose voices are not as often heard, furthering the recognition, validation, and inclusion of “diverse sources of knowledge” from outside formal higher education (UNESCO, 2021, p. 126), such as communities, Indigenous cultures, and civil society organisations.

The data shows the great imbalances that exist in the public-private life of those working in academia. This is mainly due to the significant workloads, since, as some respondents indicated, not only do they have to devote many hours to teaching per week, but the preparation for it consumes more time than those hours themselves. These tasks are carried out alongside many other obligations, such as developing their research (and research profiles, if not yet securely employed), supervising theses, and administrative procedures, among other things. Increasingly, these tasks occupy the same space and time as personal activities, such as family responsibilities. Research work might require relocating one's whole life, as well as one's disciplinary knowledge and skills base. The distribution of such burdens and barriers are often gendered, and transnational mobility is not equally feasible for all; our data also indicate that, even in a European context, place and situatedness still matter. Further research is needed that takes a similarly comparative view of the European research network, with attention to resistance, directions for reform, and lived personal experience, including perceptions and feelings.

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BETWEEN KNOWLEDGES AND SILENCES: EXPLORING IDENTITIES OF EARLY-CAREER BRAZILIAN IMMIGRANTS IN PORTUGUESE ACADEMIA

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Abstract

This study explores the nuanced perceptions of early-career Brazilian immigrants in Portuguese academia, contributing to filling the gap in the literature on the experiences of researchers from the Global South in European higher education. As immigrants intersected by various matrices of oppression, they bear enduring imprints of Eurocentric coloniality that marginalises and silences them (Mignolo, 2003), a situation exacerbated when the destination country is their former coloniser. Drawing on critical frameworks of decolonial and intersectional scholarship, we delve into gender, nationality, sexuality, age, and linguistic proficiency to discern challenges to integration, knowledge production, linguistic barriers, and cultural adaptation in Portuguese academic spaces, aiming to shed light on the complex academic's power dynamics, particularly in former colonial contexts. Findings of the analysis of semi-structured interviews with ten (10) early-career Brazilian immigrant researchers in Portuguese universities articulate the enduring impact of colonial legacies on the experiences of immigrant researchers; and inform our discern and discussion of (1) integration and equity experiences; (2) the influence of identities and intersectionality on the researchers' scientific professional development; (3) dynamics of power and academic relations in promoting or limiting professional advancement; and (4) academic eurocentrism and its implications for epistemological diversity in

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academia. A more inclusive and equitable academic ecosystem is contingent on decolonization of knowledge production processes, the incorporation of Global South perspectives into academic curricula, and the re-evaluation of knowledge validation criteria to foster a more equitable and pluralistic academic environment.

Keywords: early-career Brazilian immigrants, European academia, Portugal, decolonial perspectives, southern global epistemologies.

Introduction

Many studies have investigated academic work relationships in terms of hierarchy, learnings, funding, and opportunities offered by the Global North to academics from the Global South (Choudaha et al., 2013, Silfver, 2018, Mahlak, 2018). However, there is a gap in the literature concerning the perceptions of these early career researchers (ECRs) from the Global South and their experiences and encounters in European higher education (HE) contexts.

Our intention was to investigate the subtle perceptions of early-career Brazilian immigrant researchers within the European academic ecosystem. Through exploratory research, we found relevance to the above in the responses of Brazilian students pursuing academic careers in Portugal.

There are various stereotypes concerning the Brazilian immigrant community in Portugal that interfere with their integration and ultimately reduce the likelihood of greater opportunities (Dias &

Ramos, 2019), thus illustrating our understanding of being a colonised body in the coloniser's space.

Currently, the largest foreign immigrant community living in Portugal is Brazilian, corresponding to 30.7% of all foreign residents (Oliveira, 2023). For some time, the country sought to attract more and more immigrants for internationalisation purposes, whether through HE institutions or the government itself (Amaral et al., 2006). Immigrants from the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) and Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOP), are especially drawn to Portugal for higher education opportunities (Oliveira et al., 2023, Lamartine, 2022).

Therefore, delving into intersectional dimensions encompassing gender, nationality, sexuality, age, and linguistic proficiency, our study explores the dynamics of knowledge production and power relations in Portuguese academic spaces. We aim to understand the influence on professional trajectories, integration, and the (d)evaluation of Brazilian immigrant young researchers in the Portuguese academia, under the critical framework of decolonial and intersectional studies (Akotirene, 2019, Crenshaw, 2013, Mignolo, 2003).

To achieve this, we employed a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with ten (10) early-career Brazilian immigrant researchers based in Portuguese universities, seeking locally situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988), and guided by ethical

considerations to provide a platform for voices often unheard and impacted by imperialism and colonial legacies (Ribeiro, 2020).

Our analysis was divided into four major areas according to our specific objectives in (1) observing the integration and equity experiences of young researchers Brazilian immigrants in the Portuguese academia, (2) understanding the impact of identities and intersectionality on the researcher's scientific professional development, (3) identifying dynamics of power and academic relations in limiting or promoting researchers' professional advancement, and (4) understanding academic eurocentrism and global perspectives as constraints on epistemological diversity in academia, especially considering the prevalence of a Euro-American cultural hegemony (Oyēwùmí, 2005) that directly impacts the validation of scientific knowledge.

It is also important to highlight that in this study, we pursued to bring forth authors from the Global South and their heterogeneous epistemologies to enable a more comprehensive and holistic understanding and, albeit modestly, challenge epistemic hierarchies, as suggested by Mignolo (2003).

Portuguese HE and Internationalisation

The (re)democratisation of HE in Portugal is relatively recent, inaugurated by the so-called Carnation Revolution of 1974, which marked the end of a 48-year era of Salazarism - considered Europe's longest dictatorship in the 20th century. However, remnants of this authoritarian period still reverberate in

Portuguese society, particularly concerning gender issues and educational disparities compared to other OECD countries.

Since then, significant socio-economic advancements have been in Portugal, largely catalysed by accession to the European Union in 1986 (Amaral et al., 2006). In 2005, Decree-Law 42/2005 (Ministério da Ciência, Inovação e Ensino Superior, Diário da República n.º 37, 2005), aligned with the principles of the Bologna Declaration, introduced substantial reforms in Portuguese higher education, including reorganisation, the introduction of ECTS credit units, and enhanced internationalisation efforts.

As noted by Andrade and Costa (2014), the Bologna process brought various advancements to Portuguese higher education, such as fostering partnerships, international cooperation, and promoting student mobility, because internationalisation "is considered as a fundamental vehicle for the affirmation of the vast majority of Higher Education Institutions" (p. 45) - and Portugal is no exception.

Currently, Portugal's HE system encompasses 34 public and 64 private institutions, overseen by the Portuguese Directorate-General for HE, responsible for policy conception, execution, and coordination (Cf. Regulatory Decree 20/2012, Ministério da Educação e Ciência, Diário da República n.º 27, 2012).

In recent years, Portugal has implemented several internationalisation strategies and programmes to attract foreign

students, including legal measures, such as the creation of the International Student Statute aimed at students from all non-European Union countries (Decree-Law 36/2014, Ministério da Educação e Ciência, Diário da República n.º 48, 2014) and, more recently, expanded recognition of academic degrees and diplomas from HE institutions (Decree-Law 86/2023, Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, Diário da República n.º 196, 2023).

While Portugal is still in the early stages of internationalisation and may not be as recognized and attractive as other international study destinations (Sin et al., 2019), considerable efforts have been made in the last decade to successfully increase foreign student enrolment in Portuguese HE (Oliveira, 2023).

According to Sin et al. (2019), two-thirds of international students in Portugal are from its former colonies, particularly highlighting countries in CPLP. This underscores Portugal's sensitivity to historical and cultural ties, with language being a critical factor (Iorio & Fonseca, 2018).

In fact, considering gender, women constitute most students from the CPLP in Portugal, comprising 53.1% (Oliveira, 2023). Portugal has committed towards gender equality in academia, implementing Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) as a requirement for European funding, alongside initiatives like CHANGE - "Challenging Gender (In)equality in Science and Research" and GE-HEI - Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions.

Most Portuguese universities already have GEPs, which include objectives and strategic actions to achieve gender parity. Nevertheless, their implementation is relatively recent, such as at Nova University of Lisbon, Porto University and Coimbra University. Although it has gender parity at the start of careers and stands out as one of the OECD countries with the highest female representation in STEM fields and the lowest discrepancy between scientific publications by men and women (European Commission, 2021), Portugal still has a significant under-representation of women in leadership positions and top positions in its HEIs (Jordão et al., 2022).

Among CPLP students, Brazilians make up the largest nationality, accounting for 27.5% of all foreign students enrolled in Portuguese higher education, with women representing the majority (Oliveira, 2023). In the latest DGEEC (2021) report there were 11,150 Brazilian women enrolled in Portuguese universities, against a total of 8,263 men.

This trend has relevant historical antecedents, including the colonial past that connects the two countries and the tradition existing since colonial Brazil, which continued after its independence until the 20th century, of sending the children of the economic elite to continue their studies in Portugal (França & Padilla, 2018, p. 108).

Representation of Brazilians in Portugal: stereotypes and xenophobia

In Portugal, Brazilians are often portrayed through stereotypes that attribute to them an intrinsic role of entertainment, while also being associated with traits such as submission, laziness, and sexual availability, especially when gender is considered as an analytical category (Queiroz et al., 2020, Padilla & Gomes, 2016, Piscitelli, 2008).

These stereotypes contribute to naturalising implicit differences, reinforcing subjective judgments that validate and perpetuate historical inequalities related to categories such as ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation (Lamartine & Silva, 2022). Furthermore, the colonial past and historical representations of Brazil in the Portuguese imaginary create specific niches for the actions and performance of Brazilian immigrants in Portugal.

As Gomes (2018) explains, there still prevails in Portuguese society a Luso-tropical discourse that directly acts in the omission and camouflage of various past violences under the guise of friendly and consensual miscegenation, that is, there is the notion that the Lusophone (i.e. Portuguese-speaking) space is intercultural, characterised by fragmentation and plurality (Andrade, 2021). This perspective contributes to the difficulty of identifying and formulating measures to confront xenophobia and other entrenched prejudices related to this community.

When it comes to discrimination, this plurality of perceptions is due, according to Fibbi et al. (2021), both to the behaviour of one person in relation to another, as well as one's own self-awareness, rights, and duties, in addition to the context. In this case, it should be noted that "at the same time, although it is not widely discussed, the legacy of Portuguese colonisation is alive in both Brazil and Portugal" (Śliwa et al., 2023, p 10).

Several studies have highlighted the representation of the Brazilian immigrant community in Portugal, especially regarding the media's role as disseminators and agents of status quo of this mentality, as well as attesting to the impact of these perceptions on the personal and professional quality of life of these immigrants (Śliwa et al., 2023, Lamartine, 2022, Queiroz et al., 2020, França & Padilla, 2018, Padilla & Gomes, 2016, Piscitelli, 2008).

In the academic sphere, studies have pointed to an intellectual devaluation of the Brazilian immigrant population, also related to the language issue, since in the Lusophone context, the linguistic variety of European Portuguese is considered the standard; therefore, speaking with a Brazilian accent is evaluated as inferior (Śliwa et al., 2023). Questions about scientific curricula, work performed, and professional careers, along with the frequent assignment of lower grades to their work, inhibit denunciation processes (Lamartine & Silva, 2022, Padilla & Gomes, 2016).

Additionally, Brazilian immigration to Portugal has been characterised since its inception by different temporal waves, with

the current one marked by the presence of qualified Brazilians, influenced by investors, retirees, and, especially, a massive number of university students (Góis & Marques, 2018; França & Padilla, 2018).

Lenses of the colonised body: challenging epistemic hierarchies

In the context of early career Brazilian researchers' experiences in Portugal, it is fundamental to recognize the dynamics of colonised bodies inserted into the space of the coloniser. This implies not only the presence of various marks of coloniality but also the overlapping with other forms of oppression, culminating in the intersection of diverse identities. In this sense, the concept of intersectionality emerges as a crucial tool, capable of challenging legal structures, knowledge production, and demands for social justice (Collins & Bilge, 2020, Crenshaw, 2013).

Intersectionality becomes relevant when considering the multiple aspects that comprise the identity of Brazilian immigrant researchers in Portugal, acting as layers of oppression. Thus, intersectionality presents itself as a political form of activism, opposing sources that produce differences, promoting social, material, and intellectual efforts against neoliberal hegemony to articulate identity fragmentations in the fight against colonialist oppressions (Lugones, 2008; Akotirene, 2019).

Therefore, in the heterogeneity of oppressions connected by modernity, the perspective of hierarchising suffering is ruled out, since all suffering is intercepted by structures. [...] intersectionality refers to what we do politically with the matrix of portions responsible for producing differences, then seeing them as identities (Akotirene, 2019, p. 46).

Considering the body as a category, especially a colonised body, highlights the importance of reconfiguring ideologies historically imposed by society. As emphasised by Mignolo (2003), it is not about eliminating Eurocentric knowledge, but rather reconstructing original epistemologies suppressed by the colonial process. The decolonial perspective, therefore, challenges the standardisation of epistemic power that results from the Euro-American cultural hegemony (Oyěwùmí, 2005), and Eurocentric and patriarchal society grounded in measures of racialization and universalized categorization.

The structure of the colonial matrix of power is complex and multifaceted, exerting control over various domains, including economy, authority, nature, gender, sexuality, subjectivity, and knowledge. Therefore, understanding the colonality of power is essential to comprehend how colonial relations persist even after the formal end of colonialism (Ballestrin, 2013).

In this sense, context plays a critical role as Brazilian immigrant researchers are inserted into a broader academic ecosystem

(Oliveira et al., 2023). For Mignolo (2003), geopolitical positioning in knowledge production is fundamental, highlighting the epistemic hierarchies that privilege and validate certain forms of knowledge and subjects, favouring the superiority of the global north (Madsen, 2018).

As we have seen, these hierarchies are deeply ingrained in society and in academic institutions and are perpetuated through dynamics reinforced by language, citation practices, and disciplinary boundaries, as the legacy of colonisation is reflected in the polarised and racialized social structure of Portuguese society, as manifested, for example, through the linguistic supremacy of European Portuguese (Śliwa et al., 2023).

Mignolo's (2003) proposal to challenge these hierarchies occurs when historically marginalised subjects in knowledge production detach from Eurocentric concepts. They modify the geopolitical understanding of what is valid, promoting a decolonization of dominant epistemologies, hierarchies, and epistemic practices.

Enabling knowledge from these lenses is, at the same time, seeking to make visible historically marginalised and silenced bodies, ensuring the fulfilment of the right to speak (Ribeiro, 2020), also in a form of activism, to advance the recognition of the relevance of the relationship between research, education, social movements, and activism, as suggested by Tarlau et al. (2014).

And, at the same time, decolonizing traditional and unified knowledge, paying attention to epistemologies, particularly from

the Global South, as situated and valid knowledge, deepening what Madsen (2018) proposes as an intermediary third space that inserts the researcher within the various knowledge systems.

Method

To understand the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by Brazilian immigrants in the early stages of their careers in the Portuguese academic environment, we opted for a qualitative exploratory research approach, aiming, especially, to provide a platform for these identities that are not always visible (Ribeiro, 2020).

Following preliminary research, we selected participants who were Brazilian immigrants in the early stages of their careers within the Portuguese academia. The participant selection process was conducted using the snowball sampling technique, where one participant led to another, and so on. Initially, contact was made, and participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire. Subsequently, participants were selected for individual remote interviews, each lasting an average of 45 minutes, based on the questionnaire sent.

Thus, the corpus of this research consists of ten (10) ECRs, aged between 26 and 42, from various fields of study, residing in Europe for a period ranging from 4 to 10 years. Among them, seven (7) identified as female and three (3) as male. Regarding sexuality, three (3) identified as homosexual, six (6) as heterosexual, and one

(1) participant did not feel comfortable answering this question, thus characterising a diverse and comprehensive sample when considering the qualitative methodology deployed, as outlined in the table below:

Table 1. Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	ECR's degree	Time in Europe
A	F	42	PhD Student	10 years
B	F	31	PhD Student	6 years
C	M	26	PhD Student	5 years
D	F	31	PhD Student	8 years
E	M	30	PhD Student	6 years
F	F	35	PhD Student	4 years
G	M	41	PhD Student	4 years
H	F	37	PhD Student	5 years
I	F	34	Postdoctoral	7 years
J	F	33	PhD Student	6 years

It is important to mention that, prior to the interview, all participants received comprehensive information about the research objectives and gave their informed and voluntary consent to participate, in addition to being informed of their right to

withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. Furthermore, to protect the participants' integrity, we ensured the suppression of the names of their universities and assigned a letter designation (from A to J) to further safeguard their identities. Hereinafter, they will be referred to as “participant” followed by their respective assigned letter (e.g., Participant H). This research was conducted as part of a larger research project, which received ethical clearance from FCT (2021.07485.BD), in addition to following the ethical principles of the Association of Internet Research (AoIR) from the Internet Research Ethics guide (Franzke et al, 2020).

Our data underwent qualitative analysis to identify recurring themes and relevant patterns concerning the experiences of our participants. Thus, employing an inductive approach, where the data themselves guided the interpretation of the results, we structured thematic areas according to the presented guidelines (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings and discussion

In this section of the study, we delve deeply into the experiences and perceptions of early-career Brazilian immigrant researchers. The discussion of the findings of the analysis is organised into four themes: (1) Integration and Equity Experiences, (2) Identities and Intersectionality, (3) Power and Academic Relations, and (4) Academic Eurocentrism and Global Perspectives.

Integration and equity experiences

The integration and equity experiences of early career Brazilian immigrants in Portuguese academia reveal significant challenges in terms of access to resources and career opportunities. The sense of needing additional efforts compared to national colleagues is a recurring theme, as articulated by Participant E, often attributed to cultural differences:

"(...) I constantly found myself in a position where I felt I needed to exert more effort than my local colleagues. This feeling can be partly attributed to cultural and linguistic differences, which often created barriers to my full integration into the academic environment. Additionally, I faced the challenge of feeling that my work and my research stance were sometimes subjugated or not valued in the same way as those of my local colleagues."

Linguistic prejudice is noteworthy. Although both Portugal and Brazil have Portuguese as their native language and have signed the Orthographic Agreement of the Portuguese Language in 1990 to harmonise the spelling of the Portuguese language, we perceive a downgrading of the Portuguese spoken/written in Brazil, constantly referred to as "Brasileiro" (Brazilian-specific language). For Śliwa et al. (2023, p. 10) this happens because "Portuguese still refer to Brazil as a colony, consider European Portuguese as the 'correct' Portuguese", consequently, what they call Brazilian language is considered substandard.

Thus, one of the determining factors in the choice of immigration country, beyond the approximations and recognitions of Lusophone universities and the CPLP Community (Iorio & Fonseca, 2018), ends up becoming one of the biggest obstacles when it comes to integration, as there are nuances and significant differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, and even grammatical structure that can complicate communication and understanding in an academic environment.

At the beginning of my PhD, it was agreed that I would not write anything in Portuguese to facilitate 'corrections', so I did everything in English. To this day, my supervisor does not accept the orthographic agreement (Participant I).

There was a professor who called Brazilian Portuguese 'Brazileiro', showing linguistic prejudice. This same professor once said that the quality of writing in the Portuguese media was declining due to the influence of Brazilians in communications agencies (Participant G).

The main barrier, I would say, is nationality and speaking Brazilian Portuguese rather than European Portuguese. Comments like 'you write very well, one can hardly tell you're Brazilian' might seem like compliments to some, but they also sound like xenophobia (Participant D).

It is worth noting that all participants in this study are proficient in more than one (1) language in addition to Portuguese. The main languages mentioned in decreasing order are English, Spanish, French, German, Italian, and Dutch. Participants who reported experiences in other countries, where the native language is not Portuguese, consider the linguistic factor a barrier, but not as a factor of devaluation.

Outside of Portugal, I never felt this, the diminishment related to my native language. Of course, we see a predominance of English in academia, but the ignorance regarding the orthographic agreement and the Portuguese corrections here made me rewrite my project and conduct all my research in English in a country where the native language is the same as mine (Participant A).

Regarding social integration, many participants reported difficulties in fully integrating into the research group and University Welcome Centers. It was observed that these challenges not only impacted social interactions but also had implications in terms of academic collaboration and access to resources and opportunities available in the academic environment, reinforcing our perspective of the colonised body, as this immigration is also perceived as a return to its former colonial metropolis (Gomes, 2018).

There were situations where both my Brazilian colleagues and I couldn't participate in group activities because no Portuguese colleagues were interested in doing the activities together. We even had to give up on a course unit because we realised we wouldn't be able to do the assessment in a group as recommended by the professor, who also didn't accept us doing it in a smaller group since we couldn't be included in any group with Portuguese colleagues (Participant H).

Despite my efforts to engage and contribute significantly, I often felt marginalised in group interactions and decisions (Participant E).

I believe that because I am also Portuguese (Luso-Brazilian), my experience and perception of prejudice was 'biased in relation to other colleagues (Participant J).

For us, this reflects a complex intersection of individual, cultural, and structural factors. These experiences highlight, even though some more positive ones have been reported, such as obtaining research funding through the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), the need for more effective institutional policies and practices to promote diversity, inclusion, and equity in the academic environment. As Fibbi et al. (2021) remind us, perceiving

these situations and joining efforts to minimise them is, at the same time, thinking about the well-being of society.

Identities and intersectionality

The intersection of identities emerges as a crucial aspect in the experiences of participants due to marginalisation in the academic environment, often subtle but deeply impactful. Participants reported facing invisible barriers and additional challenges related to their identity as Brazilian immigrants, especially when combined with other characteristics such as gender and sexuality.

I have already faced some forms of discrimination and marginalisation within the academic environment for being homosexual. Unfortunately, there are still ingrained prejudices in some academic institutions, which can make the journey of LGBTQIA+ students like me a bit more challenging. In some cases, I have encountered unpleasant comments or homophobic jokes, which created an unwelcoming atmosphere. Additionally, there are times when I felt that my work and my research stance were subjugated or belittled simply because of my sexual identity. This was quite disheartening and ultimately affected my confidence in the work and study environment. It would be naive to ignore the fact that someone's nationality or sexual orientation can still be seen as obstacles to professional progress, even in seemingly progressive environments (Participant E).

In Germany, I didn't feel 'unique' or different. Here in Portugal, I found the environment more conservative, and although there is an effort to appear as a neutral environment, you can perceive that there is a certain strangeness because I am a queer woman, for example [...] besides, the Luso-tropical idea serves as an 'excuse' to mask all the micro-violence we faced (Participant A).

The presence of the Luso-tropical discourse, in addition to omitting colonial violence, perpetuates a false idea of Portuguese miscegenation, establishing a foundation of non-racism that permeates society (Gomes, 2018, Padilla & Gomes, 2016). This reality reflects the persistence of structural inequalities and ingrained prejudices, challenging the principles of equality and merit that should be fundamental in the academic environment. Thus, the stereotypes associated with Brazilian women further emphasise a colonial imaginary that diminishes these women (França & Padilla, 2018), depicting them as deviant bodies, passive to sexism, machismo, and various forms of harassment (Lamartine & Silva, 2022, Piscitelli, 2008).

In a doctoral class where the classroom was full of men, with me being the only woman, I heard from the professor: “I don't understand what a woman, especially a Brazilian, is doing in this engineering class. Besides all Brazilian women being stupid and lazy” (Participant I).

I didn't suffer harassment directly, but I know a lot of women who were. It is evident the sexism and machismo with which Brazilian women are seen, is not only present in academia. Several hidden complaints are circulating, such as the case of a renowned harassing professor, but nothing happens (Participant A).

It is noteworthy that these representations often persist, even when these women do not identify as black. In this context, it is crucial to recognise that the ethnic issue is not strictly limited to race but also to remember that race, just like gender, is a powerful fiction itself (Lugones, 2008).

My perception is that it is impossible to detach these characteristics from me and be seen as just another common student. I believe that my identity makes all the difference in how relationships are established, especially as a black woman (Participant H).

I believe that being white has helped me to be included in the academic environment. The law course has a significant racial aspect; it is not so common to have black people, and most of those I come into contact with within my teaching activity are PALOP² students, not Portuguese (Participant B).

² The Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOP) consist of six African countries (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Equatorial Guinea) where Portuguese is an official language.

The variety of perspectives we observe derives, as explained by Fibbi et al. (2021), from the need to consider not only interpersonal behaviour in discrimination issues but also the individual awareness and sensitivity of everyone. This shows us, therefore, that the discrimination suffered by Brazilian immigrants in Portugal varies according to the social spaces they come to occupy in society (Góis & Marques, 2018).

Another interesting point was related to the age of the participants. The duality between "too young" and "too old" appeared in the half of the participants' responses since, as Choroszewicz and Adams (2019) affirm, age is also a system of structural inequality co-constructed with gender, gaining meaning in specific organisational and institutional contexts by shaping job opportunities and likely career progression.

Of all the characteristics, I feel that age is the most burdensome. The PhD in Law is usually done by middle-aged people. I recurrently notice the expression of amazement from people (it was even more noticeable when I started the PhD at 26 years old). I notice that age impresses people within academia - some treat it as a positive point ("you must be smart to be here so early") and others with reluctance ("it's not possible that you're already prepared at such a young age"). It is definitely noticed (Participant J).

It is important to emphasise that there is no hierarchy in oppression layers, and marginalisation based on nationality can be exacerbated by the intersection with other identities such as gender, race, sexuality, and age, as we have seen in this topic. Thus, according to Akotirene (2019), intersectionality matters because it does not essentialize these categories as if they were a single, identical, and inseparable social group but presents the multiple forms of exclusion and disadvantage.

Power and academic relations

Brazilian immigrants, intersected by various oppressive layers that directly act to diminish them, often find themselves in positions of academic disadvantage, primarily because they are immersed in historical power relations that construct and sustain hierarchies into contemporary times, including authority, sexuality, and gender (Ballestrin, 2013), as seen in Participant B's report regarding power dynamics in academia.

In my academic trajectory, it is usually white European men who hold positions of power and are at the top of the hierarchy. I believe I have not yet seen any black person [male or female] in the faculty of my university (Participant B).

When considering the coloniality of power (Mignolo, 2003), we see that it generally manifests in more subtle ways, where dependencies are related to influence networks, control over

research resources, and decisions on funding emerge as essential elements in the reproduction of post-colonial knowledge relations (Mahlck, 2018).

Here, the professors demarcate their positions much more. There is a hierarchy where they maintain a certain distance towards students. In Germany, it was the opposite. Having lunch, dinner with professors, interacting in other environments rather than just in academic ones was even part of the routine and habits from the professors. Here, the professors make this distance clear, especially if the student is Brazilian (Participant A).

There is a much greater hierarchy in Portugal than in my home country (Brazil). This hierarchy can often distance students from professors, especially in more traditional Portuguese universities (Participant D).

The participants' accounts highlight that behind the facade of collaboration and meritocracy, which can also be read as a discriminatory factor (Fibbi et al., 2021), there is a prominent conservatism present at various levels, touching upon economic, political, and especially epistemic aspects, emphasising power and knowledge hierarchies as metrics for classification and improvement of global scientific knowledge (Shahjahan, 2016).

I perceive that the hierarchies have very formal, solid structures, and the status quo is highly valued. They have been in the hands of the same people for many years, and there is generally little willingness to change (Participant H).

I notice that there is a need to emphasise my background sometimes (mainly because I come from a school with a multidisciplinary tradition). That is, this needs to 'justify' some points of view (Participant J).

Power relations can be shaped by factors such as institutional affiliation, academic reputation, and personal connections, creating an environment where certain groups or individuals may have a significant advantage over others. This dynamic can be particularly challenging for those in more vulnerable positions, like us, early-career researchers, who may feel pressured to conform to established expectations or to struggle to be heard and recognized in a field already saturated with voices (Participant E).

This vulnerability reported by the participants also reflects at the level of contestation or denunciation of unbalanced power situations. The fact of being ECRs, expecting a prosperous and relevant professional future, coupled with the fear of invalidation and academic persecution, are likely reasons why there are not as many complaints (or these appear in an insignificant manner)

about discrimination and stereotyping in Portuguese institutions and scientific productions (Lamartine & Silva, 2022, Padilla & Gomes, 2016).

Academic eurocentrism and global perspectives

The prevalence of academic Eurocentrism in Portuguese institutions is considered a significant phenomenon, as highlighted by all participants in this study. This Eurocentrism is directly related to the production, dissemination, and homogenization of knowledge, with a predominance of what is produced in the European and Northern global context:

It is frustrating because I am aware that much of what is produced elsewhere, with high added value, ends up having little visibility. Another issue is that there is a lot of content being produced, the quantity of articles, book chapters, etc., is valued, but the way this Eurocentric approach remains present, results in a distant civil society. I believe that the debate rarely yields the result it should, impacting public policies, promoting change, and fostering a more plural society (Participant H).

There is a total invisibility of epistemologies beyond the American-European core. They are not even discussed, and when they are, they are rarely taken seriously. The few people I see researching more progressive topics are

still grappling with epistemological perspectives from the Global South (Participant B).

Participants' reports attest to the premise of the coloniality of knowledge, where Eurocentrism is not only representative but also structural at the level of power, imposing epistemic hierarchies that perpetuate relations of domination and subalternity, excluding non-European voices and perspectives (Ballestrin, 2013, Mignolo, 2003).

As Mahlck (2018) points out, there is a predominance in representing the Global South as lacking or backward, constructing a dichotomy between active and passive, that is, the Global North and South. Due to the entrenched social beliefs in the social imaginary, individuals from socially stigmatised backgrounds are perceived as only suitable for subaltern positions (Oliveira et al., 2023).

Projects on law in the Southern Hemisphere, in general, tend to function more as studies of specific cases (Participant J).

The Global South is often seen as an object of study, and here it is interesting to observe the idea of “white saviours” so often mentioned in contemporary feminist studies. The openness to new epistemologies, especially critical and decolonial ones, is still in its early stages (Participant A).

The idea of Euro-American cultural hegemony, as Oyěwùmí (2005) points out, is highly present in participants' interpretations, creating significant barriers to the inclusion and recognition of other forms of knowledge and worldviews, especially in contexts where historical colonial relations are evident, in the prevalence of being a colonised body in the colonising space (Lamartine & Silva, 2022).

Historical Eurocentrism has promoted a hierarchy of knowledge that places perspectives and approaches from the West in a position of supremacy, while often marginalising or ignoring contributions from epistemologies of the Global South. However, despite various efforts by Brazilian immigrants in a European context, many academic institutions continue to privilege Eurocentric perspectives, which can result in the invisibility and devaluation of non-Western epistemologies (Participant E).

I see epistemologies that do not come from the Global North as being considered less credible. Within Research Centers, there are few researchers who value what is produced in Global South countries, and even fewer within the context of classes (Participant H).

At this point, we recognize the favouring of knowledge produced according to specific Western frameworks. For Mignolo (2003), the

way to challenge deeply entrenched epistemic hierarchies in academic institutions is through the production of historically marginalised knowledge that alters the geopolitical understanding of what can be considered epistemically valid.

Certainly, there are opportunities to incorporate more perspectives and knowledge from the Global South into European academic curricula and practices. This inclusion is not only important but also essential, as the diversity of perspectives enriches the learning process and knowledge production. Incorporating epistemologies from the Global South into curricula allows for a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the phenomena studied, providing different angles of analysis and interpretation (Participant E).

Portugal itself is a very diverse country that has been investing in immigration as a tool for economic development. The current political crisis also highlights the need to "open people's minds" to issues such as colonialism, xenophobia, and gender-based political violence. Universities need to be prepared to demystify and disseminate a more intersectional and diversified knowledge (Participant A).

The importance of incorporating more perspectives and knowledge from the global South, in my opinion, is related to the empirical visibility of the Brazilian reality,

and global South's reality in general, that these authors can provide in their studies and the increased possibility of academic exchange between researchers (Participant G).

This enriches learning, allowing students to gain a more comprehensive understanding of global issues and break stereotypes and paradigms. Many European academic curricula have historically been dominated by Eurocentric perspectives, reflecting the legacy of colonialism. Moreover, in an increasingly interconnected world, it is crucial for students to understand the issues and challenges faced by different regions of the world, breaking the idea that there is a right and wrong in epistemologies, as if only what is produced here is valid (Participant H).

In alignment with Mignolo's proposition (2003) to promote new perspectives and non-generalizing approaches, participants suggest measures for fostering environments where diverse perspectives and experiences are valued and integrated into the knowledge production process.

Enforcing the orthographic agreement would be a good starting point; increasing academic exchange and providing a broader collection of works by non-European authors would also help to expand knowledge and to study intersectionality. Indeed, it would be an important

tool for the real inclusion of students/immigrants, especially Brazilians, in Portugal (Participant A).

I hope there is a tangible commitment to equal opportunities for all researchers, regardless of their origin or migratory status. This means policies and practices that actively promote diversity and inclusion in the academic environment and eliminate barriers to entry and progression in academic careers, as well as measures that ensure a safe and respectful working environment for all. It would be opportune to ensure the representation of immigrants on committees and decision-making bodies within academic institutions, to ensure that their voices are heard, and their needs considered in institutional policies and practices (Participant E).

Providing training for faculty and staff on diversity, inclusion, cultural sensitivity, and identification of specific needs of immigrant students can reduce barriers of prejudice and Eurocentric hegemony. Conducting research and regularly collecting feedback from immigrant students to assess the effectiveness of policies, programs, and support services, and adjusting them as needed to meet their constantly evolving needs. Promoting greater visibility for immigrant students, researchers, and professors, in order to reduce

hegemony within academic spaces, diminish prejudice, and strengthen diversity (Participant H).

Therefore, the incorporation of Global South's perspectives not only challenges ingrained Eurocentrism and the predominant cultural bias in academic discourse, but also promotes a fairer and more equitable approach in academia, highlighting the importance of diverse approaches in producing a more comprehensive understanding of the world (Oliveira et al., 2023).

Conclusions

Ensuring the voice and positionality (see Ribeiro, 2020) of early-career Brazilian immigrants in Portuguese academia, a sense of needing additional efforts compared to local colleagues, linguistic barriers, and social integration difficulties emerged as obstacles affecting not only academic trajectory but also researchers' self-confidence and well-being.

Most participants highlighted nationality (Brazilian) as the main complication, emphasising the premise of being a colonised body in the coloniser's space. The link with gender was also expressed, as the colonised body is also a readily available body. Regarding sexuality, prejudices were mostly attributed to Portugal being a very conservative country, which also served, to a lesser extent, as a justification for ageism.

However, it is necessary to emphasise our caution against generalisation in this research, especially considering the limitation in terms of participants and their intersecting identities. Additionally, participants' knowledge of ontology, epistemology or critical and feminist scholarship, manifested in the responses, also implies the risk that their contributions are underpinned by motives of ideological validation.

In the logic of the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2003; Ballestrin, 2013), the invisibility of non-European epistemologies and the imposition of a hierarchy of knowledge reinforce relations of domination and subalternity, perpetuating epistemic inequalities that were reported in all participant's testimonies, highlighting the cultural and epistemic global North's hegemony, which marginalises perspectives and knowledge from the global South (Oyěwùmí, 2005).

Adding the nationality layer, we advance the critique undertaken in the articles by Lene Madsen (2018) and Rebecca Tarlau et al. (2014) who understand the vision of knowledge production as something that is superior in the global north. Therefore, in addition to the coloniality of knowledge, there is the perpetuation of the subjective coloniality of the subject itself, which is evident when we talk about the relationship between Brazilians and Portuguese, especially in academia.

The persistence of stereotypes, prejudices, and structural inequalities linked to early-career Brazilian immigrants reinforces

the need for more effective institutional policies and practices to promote diversity, inclusion, and equity in the academic environment. This implies not only expanding the representation of non-Eurocentric research and perspectives in academic institutions, including in bibliographic references, but also rethinking the criteria for evaluating and validation of knowledge, making them more sensitive to the plural and intercultural realities of the contemporary world, especially when we have cultural approaches as latent as those between Brazil and Portugal.

By challenging entrenched Eurocentrism, incorporating global South's perspectives into academic curricula, valuing different forms of knowledge, and overcoming epistemic inequalities, we are not only enriching the learning and knowledge production process but also contributing to the construction of more balanced and symmetrical power relations on a global scale.

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**‘YOU KIND OF EXPECT IT
– IT’S NOT NECESSARILY OK,
BUT AT THE SAME TIME I’VE GOTTEN USED TO IT’.
TACKLING SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN HIGHER
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

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Abstract

Higher educational institutions are considered by Reedy (2019) as misogynistic institutions created by men for men (Deveaux, 1994). With women’s increased participation in higher educational institutions, the structures, policies, and measures have been tweaked to facilitate women’s and other minority groups’ entry, retention, and progression. However, this is not enough since there is a trend to undermine the efficacy of written and codified rules which prescribe and proscribe ‘acceptable forms of behaviour’. This paper will do this by analysing sexual harassment at the University of Malta. Feminist institutional ethnography will be used to find out where sexual harassment occurs at the University of Malta, when this occurs, who the targets are, and whether incidents were reported. In this paper, the focus will be on finding out how effective staff and students perceive the university’s sexual harassment policy to be, what changes they want to see enacted for them to feel ‘safe’, and where. Feminist institutional, post-colonial and de-colonial theory together with an intersectional approach will be used as ontological tools to help deconstruct the

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taken for granted, to come up with alternatives. As educational institutions, universities must challenge, rather than produce outcomes which help reproduce broader social and political gender expectations.

Keywords: higher educational institutions, sexual harassment, feminist institutional theory, intersectional approach, decolonisation

Introduction

This paper will focus on sexual harassment at the University of Malta (UM). Despite the increased population diversity at UM, with the number of female students surpassing that of males at almost all levels, and even though the number of female academic staff has increased while the number of female support staff surpasses that of male colleagues (GESDC, 2022; Equity Office, 2023), sexual harassment at the university is still an issue. Allemendinger and Hackman (1995) who studied how the sex composition of a symphony orchestra affected behaviour, found that when women become a significant minority in an organisation (more than 10% of personnel), they witnessed a tightening of identity group boundaries which in certain workplaces led to conflict, or loss of social support across gender boundaries.

The environment at UM is still hostile for women, especially women deriving from minority groups, and men from the latter groups, although to a lesser extent (National Academies of Sciences, 2018; Reedy, 2019). Higher educational institutions were created by men

for men, what Martinovic and Verkuyten (2013) refer to as autochthony. The social group which helps create an organisation, lay down the original rules of the game. These rules become 'naturalised' and make it harder to change for newcomers, especially if these do not have a substantive presence, which thus enables the original group to retain their position of power (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2013). Rules laid down originally limit the agency of 'newcomers', who, therefore, remain 'Othered'. This transpires that those with power have more access to and control over symbols and materials, resulting in more opportunities and capabilities for stabilising and/or institutionalising particular meanings, norms, rules, and practices, in particular contexts (Sisson Runyan, 2019).

In this paper, the focus will be on sex and gender in relation to sexual harassment. As Sisson Runyan (2019) points out, when it comes to sex and gender, this can only be understood in relation to other identities and relations of inequality. In effect when we do research, we need to keep in mind that there are multiple genders and sexes, due to the intersection of these with race, ethnicity, social class, sexuality, and disability amongst others. This leads to multiple gender orderings within a given context.

Women and other subordinated minority groups, often must deal with a hostile organisational climate in higher educational institutions (National Academies of Sciences, 2018). In the case of women, feminised men, non-gender conforming individuals, people from different races, ethnicities, or those with disabilities,

these may be faced by gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and/or sexual coercion, behaviour that communicates that they do not belong or do not merit respect within a given institution.

Gender harassment is the most common type of sexual harassment women, non-binary individuals and feminized men must face in higher educational institutions (National Academies of Sciences, 2018). In this paper, we will be using the National Academies of Sciences (2018, p. 18) definition of sexual harassment for several reasons. This entity incorporates both the legal definition and research to come up with a more inclusive definition of this term. For this entity, sexual harassment is composed of three categories of behaviour:

(1) gender harassment (verbal and nonverbal behaviour that conveys hostility, objectification, exclusion, or second-class status about members of one gender), (2) unwanted sexual attention (verbal or physical unwelcome sexual advances, including assault), and (3) sexual coercion (when favourable professional or educational treatment is conditioned on sexual activity). Harassing behavior can be either direct (targeted at an individual) or ambient (a general level of sexual harassment in an environment).

The Maltese National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE, 2023, p. 2) in turn defines sexual harassment as

‘unwelcome sexual conduct’ which is deemed unlawful under the Equality for Men and Women Act (Cap 456) (Government of Malta, 2003) and under The Employment and Industrial Relations Act (Cap 452) (Government of Malta, 2002). Less attention is paid to gender harassment in Maltese legislation, which means that this type of behaviour tends to prevail. Meanwhile, Article 9 of the Equality for Men and Women Act (Cap 456) (Government of Malta, 2015, pp.4-5) states that:

(2)(a) Persons responsible for any workplace, educational establishment or entity providing vocational training or guidance or for any establishment at which goods, services or accommodation facilities are offered to the public, shall not permit other persons who have a right to be present in, or to avail themselves of any facility, goods or service provided at that place, to suffer sexual harassment at that place.

(b) It shall be a defence for persons responsible as aforesaid to prove that they took such steps as are reasonably practicable to prevent such sexual harassment.

When legislation does not regard gender-based harassment as sexual harassment, then organisations are less likely to try to prevent this from happening. Sexual harassment tends to be more rampant in environments where men hold positions of power and authority (Burczycka, 2021). The hierarchical structure of institutions, especially universities, may help promote this type of

behaviour. It is therefore more likely to prevail when students and staff (including postdoctoral fellows, residents, research support officers) depend on those with more power when it comes to their recruitment and career progression.

This paper is organised in three parts: the first section will focus on feminist institutional theory used as an ontological tool in the study. Secondly, the methodology used in the study. This is followed by a discussion of the results and how the findings inform the topic tackled in this special issue. The last section presents our conclusions and final suggestions.

Feminist institutional theory

Feminist institutional theory will be used in conjunction with intersectional, postcolonial and decolonial theories as ontological tools to analyse sexual harassment at the University of Malta. Higher educational institutions are still colonised by white, able bodied, middle class, Christian men. Women and other minority groups must make the adjustment when they enter a space originally designed by men for men (Cornwall, Gideon, & Wilson, 2008). Consequently, they are tolerated, rather than accepted and/or made to feel they 'belong' by the institution. This explains why more effort needs to be invested in decolonising universities – of sexism, racism, disablism, heterosexism, and so forth.

Ni Laoire et al. (2021) describe higher educational institutions as power-laden, meaning-making systems inscribed within a

particular context. In places such as Malta, a Southern European country which gained its independence in 1964 and became part of the European Union in 2004, EU and national equality legislation (Cassar, Cutajar & Thake, 2023) define which policies need to be implemented on an institutional basis. As meaning making systems (Ni Laoire et al., 2021), higher educational institutions, adopt and interpret policies, practices, or measures from outside the university or their nation-state, mutating them and transforming them in the process. McCann (2011) describes universities with their local, national, and trans-national connections, as dynamic and relational spaces through which policy ideas are translated and mediated. This happens because organisations have their own ethos, promoted through written and codified rules designed and implemented institutionally (O'Mullane, 2021). These tend to prescribe and proscribe 'acceptable' forms of behaviour. These 'ruling relations' can help produce outcomes which help reproduce broader social and political gender expectations if management and decision makers are not cognisant of the gendered, sexist, racist, classist, disabling, heterosexist effect of university procedures (Reedy, 2019). As Reedy (2019) points out, barriers to equality tend to be entrenched in policies, practices, and procedures, and only research can render this effect visible.

Apart from the formal norms, rules and conventions, there are also informal ones. Informal policies or norms are not always taken into consideration by theories studying gendered, sexist, racist, disabling, classist practices (Clavero & Galligan, 2020). Both

informal and formal norms, rules and conventions help to constrain or enable the behaviour of social actors working inside and outside of said institutions (Holmes, 2020). Like the formal, informal conventions, norms and practices can help determine and legitimate certain forms of behaviour. These informal rules, norms and conventions can also undermine the efficacy of formal ones. Policies can be modified, resisted and/or informed by situated actors, in particular places, and in the process undermined (Ni Laoire, 2021).

Institutional theory has been used by feminist researchers to study institutional dynamics and find whether they are gendered, sexist, classed, raced, disabling or homophobic and in what manner by taking into consideration both informal and formal rules, norms, and conventions (Kenny, 2014). The theory enables researchers to find out how gender and other norms function within institutions and how institutional strategic processes tend to maintain inequality, if these are not challenged. One of the limitations of this theory though is that it regards gender as monolithic neglecting the fact that gender constantly intersects with social class derivation, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, sex, and family status, in the process impacting on the power valency of agents. Nowadays feminist researchers adopt an intersectional approach since not all women share the same experiences because of their multiple identities deriving from their differing social locations in the contexts in which they are situated (Sisson Runyan, 2019). Gender as a power relation combined with other structural power

relations helps to normalise social, political, and economic divisions, inequalities, and injustices.

Postcolonial theory, like feminist institutional theory, is used to help challenge frameworks of colonial and postcolonial discourse, with the objective of destabilising the normalising and homogenising goals that prevail in dominant discourses and practices (Parekh, 2007). Both theories are useful frameworks to study the intersectionality of sexism, classism, homophobia, disablism regarding these as imperialist systems and operations of power which intersect with each other to subordinate and colonise different groups.

The ultimate objective of using these approaches together is to find ways of decolonising higher educational institutions which can only take place by reviewing systematic and operational power relations while exploring ways to enable social change (Hampton, 2017).

Methodology

This paper will analyse the quantitative and qualitative data which emerged from a research study that the UM Gender Equality and Sexual Diversity Committee together with the Kunsill Studenti Universitarji (Students' Council) conducted in 2021. This study involved an online survey in which 588 students and staff participated, and interviews as well as focus groups conducted with 15 student representatives deriving from diverse Senate

approved Student Societies. The survey included both close-ended and open-ended questions, and was disseminated among potential participants by the Office of the Academic Registrar and Human Resources, Management and Development directorate in April 2021. The results which emerged from this study were shared with UM stakeholders in the subsequent years.

The research team submitted the details of the research design to the UM Faculty for Social Wellbeing research ethics committee (SWB FREC), adhering to the requirements applicable at the time of the study. SWB FREC authorised commencement of the research on 15 December 2020 (reference number: V_15062020 7343).

A reflexive thematic analysis was used to identify the main recurring themes which emerged from the data collected via the survey and focus groups (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997). The identification of themes emerged via “careful reading and re-reading of the data” (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258). Reflexive thematic analysis was adopted because it enables the researcher to factor in the ways in which the broader socio-cultural context and societal structures impinge on the meaning of the content analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It enables the researcher to take into consideration both the implicit and latent content.

For the purposes of this paper, the results which emerged from the survey and the focus groups was read several times. The following themes emerged: familiarity of students and staff with the social

harassment policy; whether they knew what sexual harassment was; the format it took on campus; where it happened; who were the targets and perpetrators; whether targets and bystanders reported this behaviour; to whom did they report it; what happened when they reported; the impact sexual behaviour had on the participants; and what the participants felt needed to be done to tackle sexual harassment at UM.

One needs to underline that as any qualitative method, thematic analysis is a highly interpretive measure, and is often affected by the researcher's own views and feelings when it comes to analysing source material (Boyd, 2015). Another limitation is that it can lead to lack of coherence in the themes developed (Holloway and Todres, 2003).

Participants

Quantitative component

Table 1 below provides some socio-demographic information about the respondents who took part in the survey conducted during April 2021.

The number of respondents, 588, accounts for 3.5% of the UM population. UM data with respect to non-binary individuals was not available for academic year 2020/21, so we cannot calculate the error. Even though it may look insignificant, the count of 12 for non-binary students amounts to a low student respondent

percentage of 2.0%, we still opted at giving them a voice where relevant.

Table 1. Questionnaire: Population and Sample

Category	UM Population (staff & students)		Sample (respondents)		Margin of Error² %
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	
Total	16,612	100.0	588	100.0	3.97
Female	9,501	57.2	402	68.4	4.73
Male	7,111	42.8	174	29.6	7.26
Non-binary	n.a.	n.a.	12	2.0	n.a.
Students	13,574	81.7	426	72.4	3.61
Staff (all employees)	3,038	18.3	162	27.6	5.79
Maltese nationals	14,995	90.3	522	88.8	2.49
EU nationals	817	4.9	46	7.8	6.06
Non-EU nationals	800	4.8	20	3.4	9.26

² Calculated using an online tool at calculator.net/sample-size-calculator.html. Notably, the National Statistics Office in Malta publish findings when the margin of error does not exceed 29%. The margin of error presented for the above categories is below 10% in all cases.

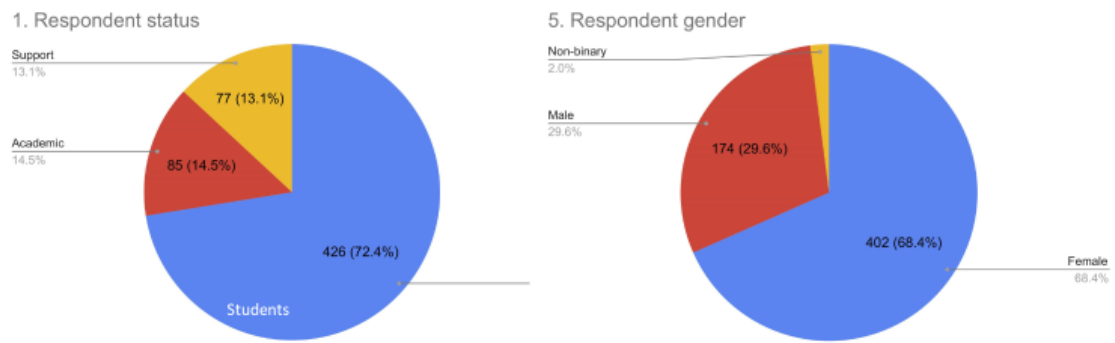


Figure 1. Survey respondent details

The majority of those who participated in the survey were students (72.4%), followed by academics (14.5%), and support staff (13.1%) (Graph 1). Among those who took part in the survey, 68.4% identified as female, 29.6% identified as male, while 2% identified as non-binary (Graph 2). Student respondents tended to be female (71.8%). Only a few of these respondents (2.8%) were non-binary.

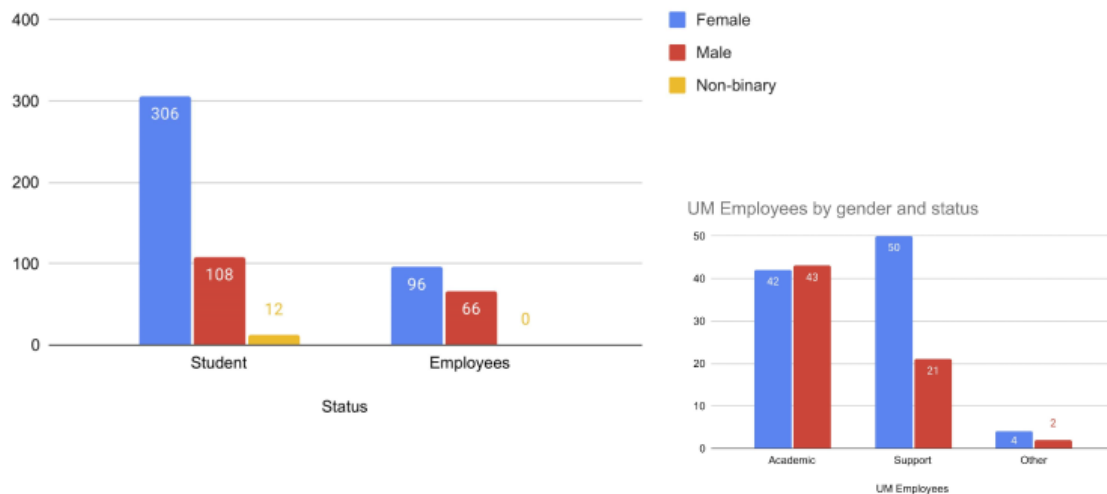


Figure 2. Survey respondents by gender and status

Academic staff (85) outnumbered the support staff (71). The category Other might have consisted of contractual workers, but

due to the nature of the survey, we could not verify this. One has however to underline that most of the respondents within this cohort were female. These, as the results demonstrate, were more likely to be on the receiving end where sexual harassment was concerned.

When it came to the focus group and interviews, most of the student representatives who took part were female (13) and only two (2) were male.

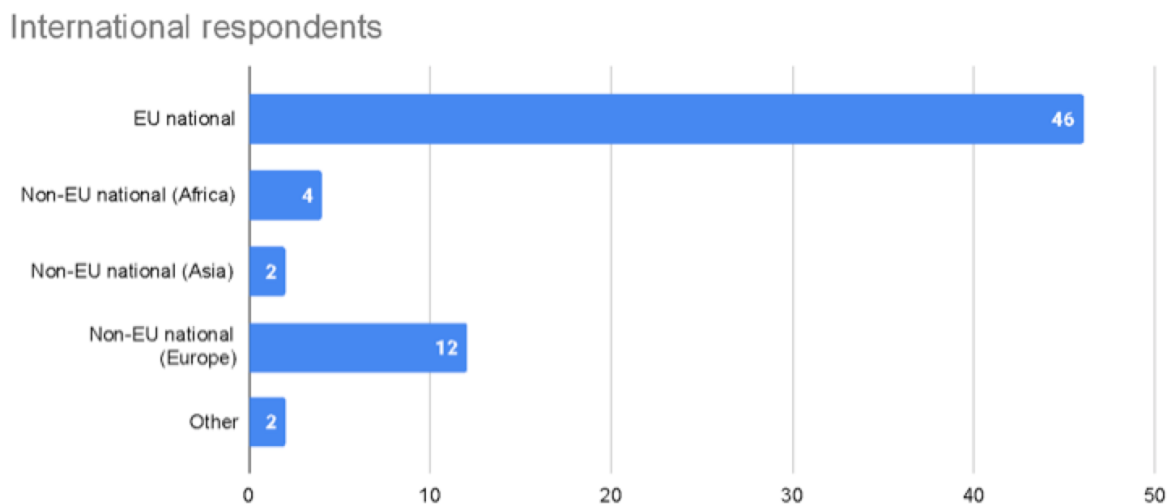


Figure 3. International survey respondents

When it came to nationality, 88.8% of the survey respondents were Maltese, 7.8% were EU nationals and only a few (3.4%) were non-EU nationals, although these tended to derive mostly from Europe (Graph 3).

The participants who took part in the qualitative part of the study were Maltese.

Results

What constitutes sexual harassment

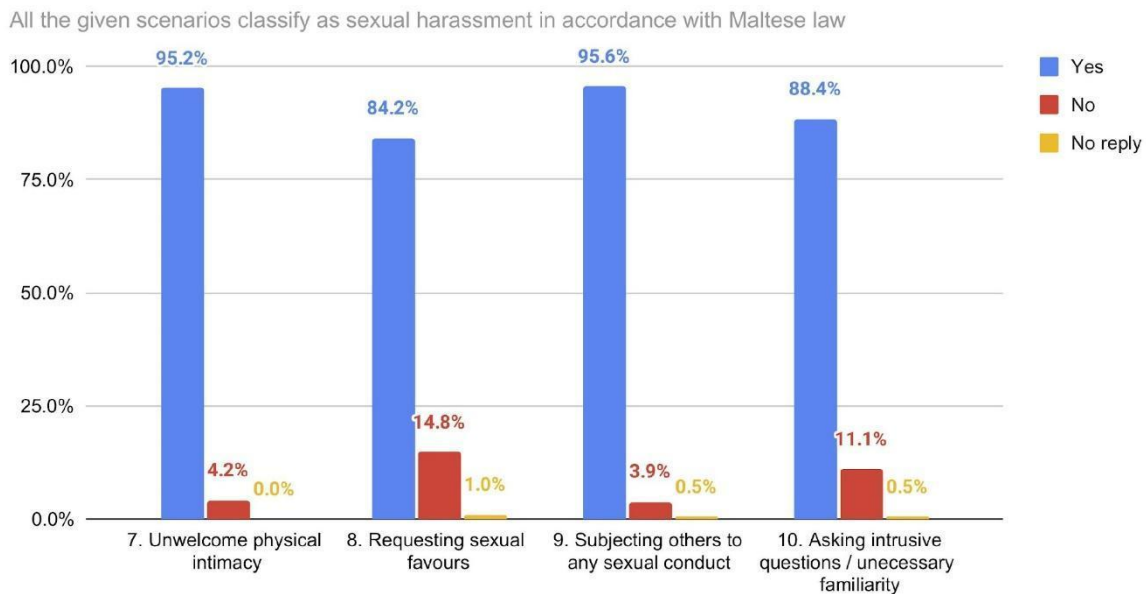


Figure 4. What constitutes sexual harassment

Survey respondents were provided with four scenarios and were asked to say which constituted sexual harassment. The scenarios were based on the UM definition of sexual harassment. They included the following phrases:

- a. An individual subjecting other people to unwelcome physical intimacy or contact such as touching, hugging, or kissing;
- b. Someone requesting sexual favours from another;
- c. A person subjecting others to any conduct with sexual connotation (that may include spoken words, gestures, suggestive jokes, and display of material) that is unwelcome, perceived offensive, humiliating or even intimidating;

- d. Someone asking intrusive questions about a person's private life or body, displaying unnecessary familiarity.

Those who took part in the qualitative part of the research were more likely to mention c; namely gender harassment. They believed that this type of behaviour is more prevalent in Maltese society, and that to 'cope' they needed to learn to shrug it off or 'suck it up'. Some of the younger participants taking part in the focus groups, stated that they felt relatively safer at the UM when compared to secondary school or other places.

When asked what type of behaviour they faced on campus, the participants, in both the qualitative and quantitative study, were more likely to mention inappropriate or offensive comments about someone's body, appearance or inappropriate behaviour. The former included wolf whistling or catcalling. They also mentioned emails, texts, tweets, phone, or instant messages that contained offensive sexual remarks, crude jokes, pictures, or videos. Both types of participants pointed out that Maltese girls and women are socially expected to tolerate this type of behaviour. A few reacted against this social expectation, and reported this type of behaviour; others felt they were obliged to develop a thick skin. Others in both the survey and the focus groups, expressed concern when other women were embarrassed by male colleagues – the female Middle Eastern students exposed to sexist jokes in mixed sex contexts, or 'boys being boys' during sporting events. From the qualitative discussions with the student representatives, some

underlined that non-Maltese women experienced culture shock when exposed to the Maltese brand of gender-based harassment.

Groping and inappropriate touching was also brought up, especially during the focus groups. 'You kind of expect it – it's not necessarily okay, but at the same time I've gotten used to it for so long – just everyday life', quipped one of the student representatives. This behaviour could not always be brushed off. One of the younger participants felt betrayed when one of her supposed 'friends' touched her inappropriately in the canteen, an incident that was still haunting her several months after. The interviewers felt that they had to encourage her to seek help since she was still troubled by the whole incident. The participant did not realise that this was sexual harassment – her participation in the study helped open her eyes to the fact.

Three types of behaviour were mentioned in the study – verbal, non-verbal and quid pro quo. When it came to verbal behaviour, racy jokes, comments about bodies (including catcalls) and clothes, unwelcome questions about relationships, sexting, pestering people repeatedly to go out with them or to have sex were mentioned in both the survey and the focus groups. Non-verbal behaviour consisted of wolf whistling, bum slapping, or groping. Two focus group participants spoke about a student who was constantly seen hanging out with a lecturer, what they believed was quid pro quo.

Where does sexual harassment occur

Gender harassment and inappropriate touching ‘technically could happen anywhere’, ‘so I wouldn’t limit that to any specific area’, most respondents in the qualitative part of the study pointed out. According to these participants, it took place in the canteen, library, quadrangle, during social events organised by student societies, male sporting events, or the workplace where academic and support staff were concerned. A few of those who took part in the survey and focus group participants mentioned that at night they did not feel safe on campus at night, or walking through the nearby skatepark and car park. This was mentioned by students who needed to be at the university at night. Staff participating in the survey mentioned that they did not feel safe in some departments, but the names of the departments in question were not always provided.

Who are the targets?

When participants were asked if they know of anybody who was exposed to sexual harassment at UM, 31.2% of questionnaire participants said they did. Over 40% of staff – both male and female – said that they knew of people who had suffered sexual harassment on campus (Graph 5). Non-binary and female students were more aware of persons who had been exposed to sexual harassment, though not to the same extent as the staff. This might ensue from the fact that staff participants had on average a longer history at the university. Data analysis revealed

that the underlying impression was that where sexual harassment was involved, the university was more likely to act when students were involved, less likely to do so when staff were. They felt that as adults the university expected them to look after themselves. Staff were more likely to speak about sexual harassment that involved staff-on-staff behaviour.

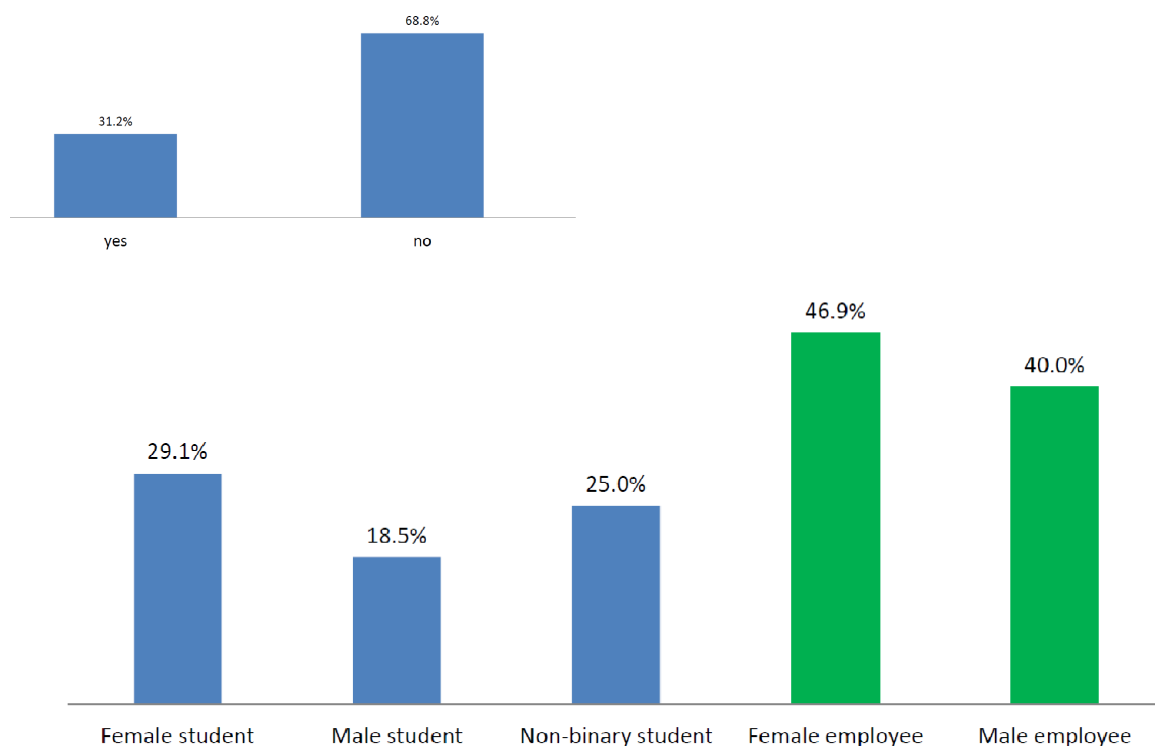


Figure 5. Do you know of anybody who has suffered sexual harassment at university: by status and sex

When peer-to-peer sexual harassment was involved, the targets were described as new students who were not aware that they could report the matter. In the qualitative part of the study. Young female lecturers were said to be targeted by male students in class. Female administrative workers who were still under probation were mentioned in the survey. Older participants who took part in

the survey underlined that anybody in a power relationship can be a target. 'When you depend on others for work, research or career progression, you are at risk', they underlined.

Who are the perpetrators?

Student representatives who took part in the qualitative part of the study said that in peer-to-peer sexual harassment, this usually involved a group of male students 'who egg each other on to try and impress their peers'. A few mentioned non-UM workers, persons with a 'lower' education working on construction sites on campus. A few spoke about a small group of lecturers repeatedly targeting students. This issue was also brought up by one survey staff respondent. Students who participated in both the survey and focus groups were less likely to mention academics because they felt 'they had more to lose' if caught. A couple of the staff respondents mentioned an 'influential' person.

Action taken

The questionnaire participants who were the target of sexual harassment or bystanders, said that in most cases, no action was taken when they saw or experienced sexual harassment (Graph 6). The reasons why they did not do anything will be explained below. Those who did something, 12% filed an official complaint, 8% confronted their harassers, 4% reported the incident to the police, and 5% sent an anonymous tip to the sexual harassment advisor.

Another 9% spoke to human resource personnel, line manager, counsellor, or lawyer.

Some of those who reported this behaviour were not happy with the way others responded to their report. Some were accused of ‘causing trouble’, or told that it was the alleged perpetrator’s way of being ‘friendly’. Others were informed that the perpetrator was ‘a good student and that a report would affect his future’. In the case of another group of targets, one was told off for being ‘too touchy’, while in another case, the target was blamed for the way she dressed.

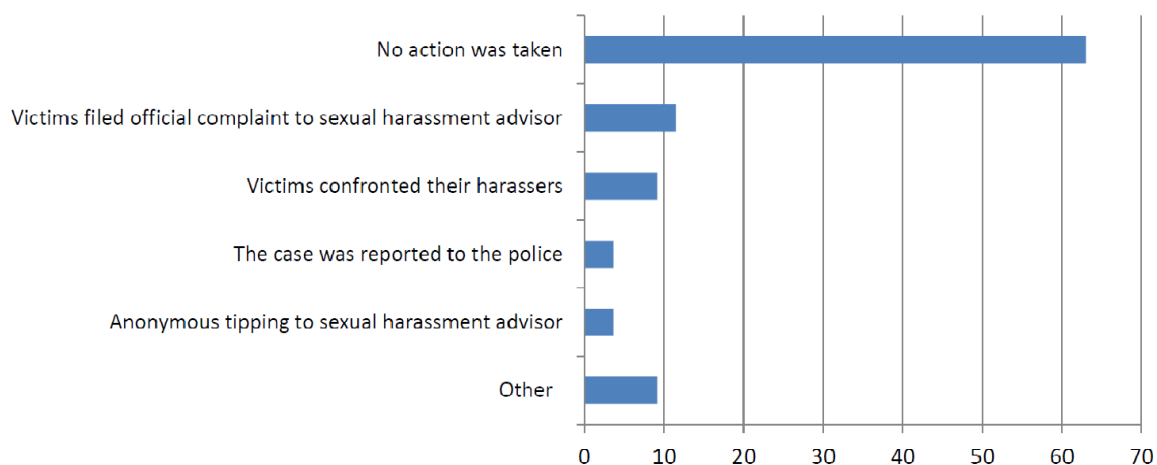


Figure 6. What action was taken when they felt that they had been sexually harassed

Some of the survey and focus group participants felt that they could not report the event since they did not know who the person in question was. A few were too traumatised to report it. Other respondents did not report the incidents (it was not clear whether they had been targeted by the same alleged perpetrator or not)

because they had been previously victimised when they had lodged a report. Other participants stated that if the alleged perpetrator 'did it again – then they would report it'. One of the participants felt that her report would not be given due diligence since the person in question 'was too influential'; another refrained from reporting the incident because the perpetrator was her friend, and she did not want to destroy his life. Some of those who did not report the misdemeanour, asked to be transferred to another department within the university or changed their job.

As one of the student representatives pointed out during the focus group, reporting, or not reporting such incidents depends on several issues:

A few things that could be marked as sexual harassment, are things that we [Maltese women] get used to, but then there's a matter of the severity, or the degree of harassment, as in some comments, eh, could be simply brushed off, you know, like a path of sand, but then some things are much more evident and leave much deeper mark.

On reading this statement and analysing the data, one realises that gender-based harassment is so rampant in Malta, that reporting all the incidents would take a toll on the person in question. The microaggression they meet daily, pushes them to learn to brush it off to cope in Maltese society.

As the National Academies of Sciences (2018) points out, the sexual harassment incidents women experience are not perceived as illegal discrimination in national legislation. Organisations tend to focus on sexualised and coercive forms of sexual harassment, rather than gender harassment, which as this paper demonstrates, is more likely to prevail in such institutions. At the same time, this type of behaviour tends to impact recipients and bystanders as negatively as the legally acknowledged ones. Gender based harassment in turn, tends to lead to worse forms of sexual harassment. A postcolonial perspective emphasises power dynamics often perpetuating systems of oppression and marginalisation. In the context of gender harassment, colonial-era hierarchies and patriarchal structures may still influence organisational cultures such as universities, reinforcing gender harassment and undermining efforts to counter it. In fact, in her study on educational opportunities in the Indian state of Karnataka, Thapliyal found that although the State of Karnataka exhibits high rates of female literacy and school completion, the statistics conceal the persistence of embedded patriarchy and sexism (Thapliyal, 2014).

Questionnaire respondents mentioned other reasons why they did not report incidents of sexual harassment. A number mentioned fear of victim shaming and blaming – they had seen what had happened to others who reported incidents, and did not want to be at the receiving end of similar treatment. Others felt that the target had been victimised by the institution. A few were afraid that nobody would believe them ('it was his word against mine'), felt

that they needed evidence, which they did not have, to substantiate their report. There were also others who did not want to relive the experience, so they remained silent. As one of the respondents underlined, she had to tell the whole story to four different people, before any action was taken. Differential power dynamics were also cited by employees as well as students, which made reporting much harder. As the National Academies of Sciences (2018) underlines, women in subordinate positions - such as early career faculty, support staff, graduate students, postdoctoral researchers - are more likely to be at risk. This entity maintains that those dependent on supervisors, advisors, or mentors, are more likely to be silenced targets. This silencing effect can be understood through a postcolonial approach as a manifestation of oppressing and marginalising colonial power dynamics. Silfver's critical reflections on supervisory practices refer to an argument developed by Mählck and Fellesson in 2016 stating that silencing is a tool leading to the exclusion of the Other (Silfver, 2018). As one of the participants pointed out:

I'm in the medical course and 99% of our lecturers work at the hospital and when we graduate, you have to work at least two years in the hospital so like that if you know you're going to keep seeing them every day for at least two years and they're going to affect how you get your warrant and stuff like that. Then, for us it's, unless it's something really severe, which can be proven, you probably wouldn't go through that process.

This finding confirms what the National Academies of Sciences (2018) had to say about women in STEM³ being more likely to be bullied or harassed out of STEM if they are not strong enough to face sexual and ambient harassment that prevails in certain programmes. This organisation also pointed out that women in medicine are more likely to experience gender harassment by faculty, other staff, patients, and their families, more than other STEM students.

One of the survey participants raised another issue when she stated that ‘the people dealing with the case may be men so the women’s situation may not be fully understood’. The fear of not being understood in a male dominated organisation proved to be a barrier to some of the targets who needed help. Men tend to be over-represented in decision making positions at UM (GESDC, 2022; Equity Office 2023). In institutions where most of the decision makers are men, especially men from similar socio-economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, sexual harassment is not taken as seriously maintain the National Academies of Sciences (2018), which means that they are less likely to respond to this type of behaviour. This silencing helps the majority retain their power unhindered since those who can challenge them are dispossessed of this capacity, an issue that constantly crops up in postcolonial studies (Silver, 2018). This leads to a climate where gender harassment is tolerated.

³ Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics study areas.

The handling of sexual harassment reports at UM

In the study, respondents were asked to comment on how the university dealt with the reports and cases of sexual harassment received (Graph 7). The majority of those who knew about a sexual harassment case – as bystanders or targets – gave a neutral answer or did not reply (around 61%). Around 16% felt that UM does not take such reports seriously, whereas a bigger percentage (23.5%) felt that the institution took these reports seriously. One of the respondents added:

I was only once involved in the process of moving forward a claim of sexual harassment. I must say that the rules and procedures worked to perfection. But maybe because the case was relatively [an] easy case: between peers (students, not anywhere as seriously as rape or [...] physical assault, and both victim and perpetrator were happy to settle the matter to the satisfaction of all. But the rules and procedures DID work very well (Participant's emphasis).

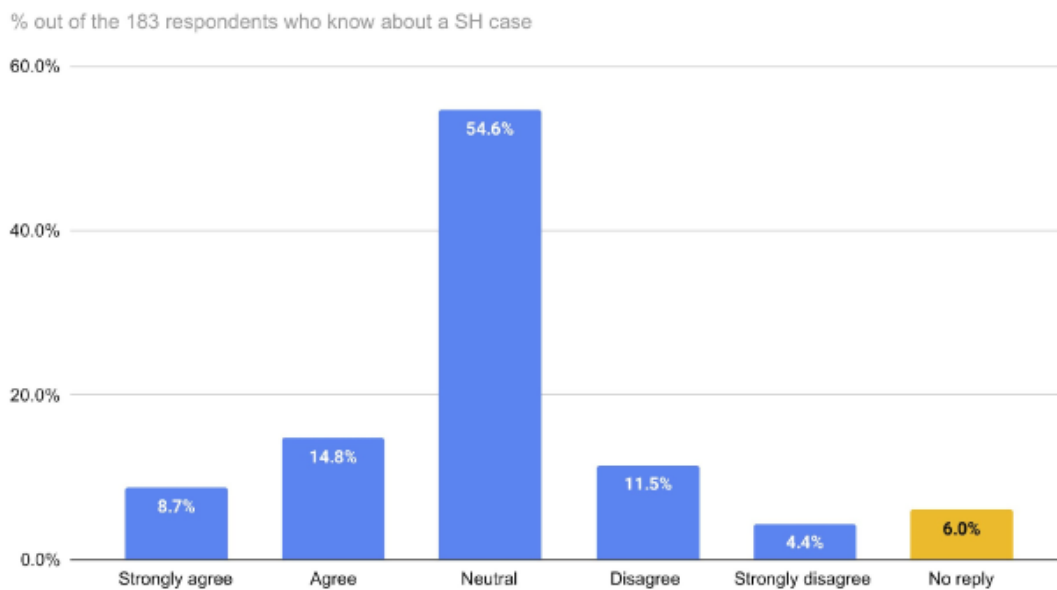


Figure 7. Does UM take reports and cases of sexual harassment seriously?

This, and other comments emphasise the fact that UM pays more attention to sexual harassment where students are involved; less so when staff were concerned, which perhaps explains why some of the staff felt disgruntled.

Effect of sexual harassment on targets

Sexual harassment influences the targets, bystanders, workgroups, colleagues, and the organisation in question maintain Bondestam & Lundqvist (2020). Targets of sexual harassment and bystanders cope with this phenomenon by ignoring it (brushing it off), trying to appease the harasser, or seek social support, but they are less likely to make a formal report, sustains the National Academies of Sciences (2018).

Gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention as well as sexual coercion help create a hostile environment pervasive or severe enough to interfere with people's educational and employment performance (Cortina & Areguin, 2021). Organisations react when sexual assault is involved because this is clearly illegal, but might not respond to other forms of sexual harassment. This symbolic compliance with the law means that little to nothing is done to deal with forms of sexual harassment which are perceived as not illegal.

In the study, staff rather than students felt disillusioned or angry with UM when incidents were reported and nothing or not enough was done. Several survey and focus group participants decried the fact that they had to suffer in silence because when they reported incidents, they were not taken seriously. All types of sexual harassment undermine targets' and bystanders' professional and educational attainment, since it has a negative impact on their mental and physical health (National Academies of Sciences, 2018). Among employees it leads to job dissatisfaction, mental or physical withdrawal from their allegiance to their workplace. Some think about quitting their job, others do so. Those who feel angry or disillusioned with the organisation might also experience a decline in performance and productivity.

Sexual harassment also impacts students. They might experience a decline in educational outcomes and motivation, which can lead to lower grades (Konlan & Dangah, 2023). They might also find it difficult to focus in class; some might change their supervisors or

tutors, transfer to another educational institution or drop out of higher education entirely.

Tackling sexual harassment in higher educational institutions

The participants in the sexual harassment study were asked to mention any changes they would like to see enacted to ensure that sexual harassment is tackled at the UM. The questionnaire respondents felt that the university needed to make system-wide changes, while demonstrating that it takes this issue seriously. As matters stood, they felt that the organisational climate at the university tolerated and up to a certain extent permitted sexual harassment when sexual assault was not taken seriously. They felt that the institution needed to demonstrate that it does not promote sexual harassment, especially when it came to gender harassment, and this could only take place when leaders took this issue seriously.

As Ni Laoire et al. (2021) underline, university's gender-based policies tend to be accepted at a symbolic level, but resisted at some levels or in certain areas, and consequently, this helps to 'weaken' their impact (Burczycka, 2021). The study's respondents felt that the policy should be given more visibility, and that there should be constant awareness raising campaigns explaining which behaviour constitutes sexual harassment, and the procedures targets and bystanders need to adopt to report an incident, and to whom this report should be made. As some underlined, women are not the only targets – men and LGBTQ+ can also be the focus of

this type of attack. The participants also felt that UM needs to design and enact different types of training, targeted at different groups – stakeholders, middle management, staff in general and students. A number also suggested bystander intervention training. They underlined that clear, accessible policies on sexual harassment as well as training were needed to explain which behaviour is acceptable. The National Academies of Sciences (2018) adds that the institution also needs to communicate the disciplinary actions that will be taken, depending on the type, frequency, and severity of the harassment.

A few participants insisted that the university should ‘create a safe and enabling environment for reporting’. Those who report do not need to be stigmatised, shamed, blamed, fear reprisals, repercussions, or backlash during their course, work, or life. They also felt that where bystander reporting was concerned, students and staff need to be told when they can report an episode shared with them by the target, and via which avenues of reporting.

Those who took part in the study insisted that the UM needs to provide different avenues for reporting, not just formal reports. These can include anonymous reports via forms, or via focal points designated in every UM entity. One participant felt that ‘anonymised examples of sexual harassment stories or reports and how UM dealt with the cases will be very helpful to victims to envision how their reporting may go and encourage them to come forward’. Some of these participants strongly felt that human resources personnel needed to investigate when there were

incidents of a 'high turnover [of staff and students] in certain departments', or when 'staff are reluctant to be placed' in certain entities. When this happens, UM 'should investigate and take action without a report'.

A number of participants felt that UM needs to demonstrate that it takes sexual harassment cases seriously - 'action speaks louder than words'. Actions, these felt, should be shared with the target to see if these agree with the decisions taken. They also insisted that the entity should be more transparent about its handling of reports. Transparency, some underlined, needs to be balanced with confidentiality. These participants felt that the university needed to improve its transparency and accountability. This could be attained, they sustained, when the university published annual reports on 'how many and what type of policy violations were reported formally and informally'. They underlined that this report needed to indicate which reports were closed, which were still under investigation, and what disciplinary action was taken. In relation to this, educational authorities in other countries, Ireland in particular, have introduced online tools which enable students and staff to report sexual assault (MacNeela et al., 2022). Climate surveys are conducted in the United States (National Academies of Sciences, 2018). The results of such surveys are publicly shared, to ensure transparency and accountability.

Another issue which was raised was the hierarchical and dependent relationships within the university. Statements such as the following are of concern: 'Care [should be] taken of newly

appointed staff - afraid to speak because they are on probation, not aware of policy'. Hierarchical and dependent relationships between students and academics, new staff and their immediate supervisors, can lead to abuse. No suggestions were made by the participants, but the National Academies of Sciences (2018) maintains that measures that can help diffuse hierarchical and dependent relationships between students and staff, management and staff can include the adoption of mentoring networks and committee based advising rather than depending on one person where promotion is concerned.

Some participants also mentioned that a male dominated institution does not take sexual harassment seriously. A solution is diversity at leadership level. Research has demonstrated that this leads to robust deliberation which helps to disrupt group think hence leading to more effective risk management (He & Kaplan, 2017). Diversity at this level also leads to a change in the policies proposed and decisions taken (Franceschet et al., 2009), while it also helps to reimagine knowledge (Silfver, 2018) which can help address the needs and issues faced by minority groups. A diverse leadership also better serves a diverse customer base – they know how to reach out to empathise with them, how to address them, and take their requests seriously (Harver Team, 2024). As articulated by Silfver, the introduction of new perspectives allows for alternative approaches to be taken (Silfver, 2018). To increase diversity in top management, higher educational institutions need to change their recruiting and promotional criteria though. Leaders also need to learn more about

what is sexual harassment, how to recognize it and deal with it. They also have to learn skills in leadership, conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation, de-escalation as well as being familiar with the policies (National Academies of Sciences, 2018, p. 7). They also need to address postcolonial systems, cultures and climate that promote an environment of generalised disrespect, instead of cooperation and collegiality. Decision makers can't rely solely on sexual harassment policies, awareness raising and training to bring about a change in behaviour. They need to combine anti-harassment efforts with fostering a positive organisational climate via civility promotion programmes (Kabat-Farr & Walsh, 2022).

Research is also important when it comes to bringing about change (Zimmerman de Moraes and Witcel, 2014). It was interesting to note that this research project helped raise awareness about sexual harassment among both participants and stakeholders. It helped conscientize different publics – those who are the target of this behaviour, bystanders, decision, and policy makers.

Conclusions

This research helps highlight that there are still factors which help ostracise women and other minorities at UM. As demonstrated, an intersectional approach needs to be adopted when studying sexual harassment. Women and gender non-conforming students and staff were at risk of being sexually harassed. Young students or new staff who were not that familiar with the university's sexual harassment policy, those on probation or in a power relationship

were more vulnerable. Gozitan, international and non-heterosexual students were more likely to be targets. Those in unequal power relations - lecturers and administrative staff, supervisor and student, line manager and staff – seemed to be more at risk of being targeted.

It was also clear from this research that the university tended to be proactive when sexual assault took place, but more reluctant to interfere when gender-based harassment was involved since this is so rampant in Malta that students said they felt safer on campus. Staff however did not feel as safe. They were also more hesitant about reporting incidents after seeing what had happened to colleagues who did.

Research is a useful tool when it comes to evaluate sexual harassment policies and the way they are implemented. Research allows us an intimate objective contact with the struggles of reality, to enter dialogue and then eventually construct a new society (Zimmerman de Moraes and Witcel, 2014); a kind of catalyst effect. When we conducted the research, it was clear that it helped raise awareness amongst the participants. More research however needs to be conducted to uncover how this behaviour impacts on different groups or individuals. For example, little to no research has been conducted on a global basis to find out whether non-traditional students are targeted, and the effect this has on their learning trajectory. Less research has focused on the sexual harassment of persons with disability in higher education (Gbagbo et al., 2023). Sexual harassment is a weapon used against

marginalised others, whatever their gender intersecting with age, class, sex, sexual orientation, ability, race, and ethnicity. These are marginalised in society, in the organisation and in specific university department microclimates (Heffernan, 2023). The objective of such behaviour helps reinforce the fact that they do not belong in these institutions.

A hierarchical organisation, lack of active leadership, precarious working conditions, normalisation of gender-based violence, toxic academic masculinity, and a culture of silence (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2022) help facilitate this type of behaviour. For effective change to take place, the problem needs to be understood fully, via research adopting an intersectional approach, training conducted with different university stakeholders and awareness raising campaigns. This behaviour can only be tackled when it is 'called out' – that is when people feel safe to report it formally and non-formally. This means that the necessary tools and services need to be in place, but moreover, there needs to be the political will from the top to tackle this type of behaviour. Higher educational institutions can also tackle this problem by changing attitudes, by promoting a culture of respect via policies and training. From this and other research it is also clear that in a culture where gender-based harassment and violence are tolerated, those in power need to take this as seriously as they do fraud or plagiarism (National Academies of Sciences, 2018).

People are embedded in and conditioned by social expectations, ideology, culture, customs, and beliefs (Grech, 2011). These have

an impact on the shape of policies, measures and procedures enacted in higher educational institutions. Higher educational institutions though, especially public ones, can help change dominant discourses which promote exploitation, oppression, and subjugation. Feminist and/or postcolonial, decolonial and institutional theories are useful when it comes to analyse processes, symbolic and material systems that help reproduce differences within a system. Colonialism prevails when differences are naturalised, hierarchies are justified, and oppression is perceived as emanating from the inherent inferiority of certain groups of people (de Sousa Santos, 2016). Their inferiority in turn, justifies their domination. Forms of domination consist of a constellation of oppressions intersecting and interacting with each other, whether these are patriarchy, ableism, racism, capitalism, classism, homophobia, and colonialism.

Decolonising higher educational institutions does not entail only challenging racism (Tamimi et al., 2023), but also the colonialist powers of patriarchy, heteronormativity, classism, and ableism while dismantling power asymmetries. Research can help demonstrate where this injustice lies, while training will help conscientize both decision makers and potential victims about it. The objective of decolonising higher educational institutions should be on building a positive organisational climate based on safety and respect of different groups and individuals. The objective is on changing behaviour by succinctly communicating behavioural expectations, while acting against those who fail to meet the expectations. The focus needs to be on bringing about

culture and climate change, where cooperation, and respectful work behaviour between all levels of the hierarchy exist.

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EXPLORING GREEK-CYPRriot FEMALE ACADEMICS' EXPERIENCES OF PRECARIty THROUGH A POSTCOLONIAL LENS: CHALLENGES, HOPES AND THE REALITY OF NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITIES IN EUROPE

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Abstract

This article brings research from the fields of 'the globalisation of international education' (Cantwell, 2011), 'postcolonial knowledge relations' (Beban & Trueman, 2018; Moller Madsen & Mahlck, 2018) and 'intersectional and trans locational gender research' (Yangson & Seung, 2021) together into a meaningful conversation to develop a postcolonial analysis of layers of precariousness in academic work in Cyprus. There is a global tendency for economic interests to gain importance over academic values in higher education, research, and postgraduate training (Olssen & Peters, 2007). The current article addresses a gap in the literature on the challenges female precarious workers in higher education and research institutions (HERIs) are facing in Europe, especially in tiny Mediterranean countries, such as Cyprus. This case study specifically intended to explore the enablers and the barriers that precarious Greek-Cypriot early-career academics had when working in universities in the UK as compared to Greek-Cypriot HERIs. Thus, it explored 22 female academics' experiences of

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precarity who first worked in various universities in Cyprus and then moved to the United Kingdom to improve employment opportunities, using lengthy semi-structured interviews and opportunity and snowball sampling. The use of a postcolonial lens unravelled enablers and the challenges for these women. The study indicated that there are still underprivileged groups of young researchers, especially women, in the academy who suffer from isolation, unsustainable work-life balance or even gender-based violence, due to the neoliberal restructuring of the HRI sector in Europe. The study aims to promote Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in HERIs, challenge the increasingly hierarchical and inequitable structures of HERIs (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020) and contribute to our understanding of how HERIs in Europe can reverse the coloniality of power, nationalism and precariousness and better support young researchers in the academy.

Keywords: intersectional gender research, postcolonialism, precarity, work-life balance, young female academics

Postcolonialism and Dimechianism in Cyprus (Greek-Cypriot part)

Postcolonialism or ‘postcolonial critical theory’ which emerged in the late 1980s – early 1990s, struggles to push back economic, social, cultural, psychological, and linguistic colonial residues. The term is generally applied “to describe any kind of resistance, particularly against class, race, and gender oppression” (Theime, 2003). It fights against unlawful and unfair power structures and relationships. This powerful movement argues for “social justice, emancipation, and democracy in order to oppose oppressive structures of racism, discrimination, and exploitation” (Nayar, 2008, p. 55), by revealing the ugly face of colonial dynamism.

Postcolonialism is concerned with social, cultural, political, economic, moral, linguistic resistance against 'eurocentrism'. Postcolonial writing aspires to resist colonialist perspectives driving towards a change in power (Boehmer, 2007).

Previous literature in postcolonial education theories indicate that ideological imperialism was a tool western Universities used to recruit top talent from their colonies, such as Cyprus, to help maintain their dominance by spreading their ways of life, social norms, and ideologies (Gregoriou, 2004; Klerides & Philipou, 2015; Peters, 2017). In a way, colonial ideologies and fundamental beliefs continued to expand in the colonies preventing decolonisation and respect for local ideas and cultural norms. Exploitation, ideological and financial, continued in the form of neo-colonialism as students from the Global South continued to turn to western Universities as they believed in their superiority, and they hoped they would help them secure a better future. However, they always went back to their countries to spread new ways of living. Particularly young female researchers aspired to live free of patriarchal Greek-Cypriot norms which dictated that they should prioritise having a family over focusing on a career. Therefore, global wealth inequality persists as our brightest minds still escape to western universities forced by unemployment, exploitation, and despair due to the policies of international financial institutions, which always support the interests of the wealthiest (formerly colonising) and most powerful countries (Bah, 2016; Shahjahan, 2016; Smith, 2016; Zucman, 2019).

Western Higher Education institutions seem to promote neoliberalism by exploiting young researchers, especially female researchers, who often must combine their family commitments with their own personal ambitions and career aspirations. The literature indicates that these are often exploited in their home countries and when they choose to migrate in their dream HERIs in Western countries (Aiston & Fo, 2021; Casad et al., 2021).

When nations colonise smaller countries, such as small islands like Cyprus, it is not always about occupying land, but also about conquering hearts, minds and influencing people's directions and choices in life (Muscat-Inglott, 2023). This conquest spreads a syndrome of inferiority among local people and fosters a submissive acceptance of new power hierarchies that never question the power of the ruler, not even several years after gaining back their freedom (Tarc, 2009; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021). This syndrome of inferiority is also combined with (Western) Eurocentrism as Greek Cypriots often get educated in Western universities as they perceive them as superior. In their societies everything that is Western is superior and promoted in so many ways in local people's everyday life (Andreotti, 2011; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021). This is also evident in the linguistic imperialism that has had a deep impact on the Cypriot language as we can see so many English words used in everyday language by native Greek-Cypriot speakers, such as 'confirm' (κονφιρμάρω); 'cancel' (κανσελάρω), and 'promote' (προμοτάρω).

Therefore, any attempt to foster social justice and foster equity in the academy is undermined as provincial inhabitants of small islands like Cyprus come in hordes to HERIs in the United Kingdom (UK), to study and become a member of these elite communities for which local cultural values and ways of life need to be abandoned (Cupples, 2019; Heleta, 2016)

Cyprus continues to serve as the European border to Muslim nations like Turkey. It is one of the Southern edges of the European continent, so close to areas of continued unrest like Lebanon, Syria, and Israel. Over a century ago, Manwel Dimech identified for the first time that the Maltese people suffered from an inferiority complex (Callus, 2013), which prevented them from “growing up” keeping them in an eternal state of childhood (Montebello, 2009). This concept also seems to apply for Greek-Cypriot people who still believe in the superiority of everything that is British and send their offspring to British universities to receive the best education in the world - as they often claim. Despite their close identification with mother-Greece and their own personal national celebrations of independence, Greek Cypriots still regard British universities superior to their own evidencing once again their own syndrome of inferiority in relation to their former conquerors. Let us not forget the continuing British sovereignty of the Akrotiri and Dhekelia Sovereign Base Areas. As McLeod (2010) claims, there is always a native bourgeoisie remaining which still replicates previous colonial behaviour, standards and norms preserving spiritual and mental dependency on their former colonial masters. As Herman and Chomsky (2002) rightfully remark, Cyprus curiously retains a

sense of nostalgia about its ‘special’ ties to Britain, Greece, and Europe.

Young female precarious academics, gender disparities in neoliberal universities and postcolonial feminism

Although significant changes in terms of gender equity in the academy have taken place in the past few decades, gender disparities persist, despite considerable efforts (Rivera, 2017). These disparities often begin while female academics are still early career researchers as their numbers have increased considerably even in traditional male-dominated fields like STEM (National Science Board, 2012). However, it is still incredibly difficult for female early career researchers to secure a tenure-track position at research universities, while you can find predominantly women in adjuncts and non-tenure-track faculty (Jacobs & Winslow 2004), especially in male-dominated fields and disciplines in which PhD students are predominantly women (Rudd et al. 2008).

Previous research focuses on what happens to female students while they study or when they graduate and once they secure a tenure-track position ignoring the reality of thousands of female early-career researchers who are struggling to survive and progress in their career. Some of the reasons why there is this discrimination against women in the academy are that they have less mentoring, publication opportunities, social and academic support, equipment, and female role models while they study (Thébaud & Taylor 2015). Supervisors often discriminate against female students as they think they are less committed to an

academic career than male students, even if female students and academics tend to be as highly organised and meticulous in their work as their male peers (Ellemers et al., 2004). They also keep in mind that women often opt to disrupt their academic careers due to family commitments, perceived difficulties in their paths, and anxiety about their work-life balance (Ecklund & Lincoln, 2016).

Moreover, women who remain in their academic career paths must face even more discrimination in terms of pay, promotion, and tenure in various disciplines (Filandri & Pasqua, 2021). Previous research indicates that women, especially in STEM, face negative experiences due to the existence of stereotypes that favour men (Van Veelen & Derks, 2022). Migrant women face additional discrimination due to their background (Morley et al., 2018), as is the case with Cypriot women in British HERIs. Moreover, Cypriot senior leadership teams in Greek-Cypriot universities often favour graduates from British universities as they perceive them as superior to graduates of local universities. Stereotypically masculine characteristics (e.g., self-confidence and willingness to take risks) are more valued in the academy than stereotypically feminine characteristics (e.g., being inclusive, supportive), and increase the possibilities for a promotion to leadership positions for male rather than female academics (Strauß & Boncori, 2020). Women also face considerable hiring discrimination and limited opportunities for advancement, leading female early career academics to leave the academy (Diekman et al., 2015).

Postcolonial feminism aspires to shed some light to the problems migrant women from former colonised countries face to improve their lives as employees in the academy. Since lives and experiences of postcolonial female academics differ from those of Western academics, for example on matters such as (i.e., housework is women's responsibility, women have to resolve any issues relevant to childcare, women have to undertake the so called "academic housework" in their universities so that men can do the research-related tasks), postcolonial feminist research wishes to make these disparities visible and acceptable across cultures and nations. If their lives and experiences are different, they should be judged taking into consideration their origin. Therefore, the current study explores intersections of colonialism and neo-colonialism with gender and nation in the different contexts of female academics' lives and experiences (Schwarz & Ray, 2005). The current study will showcase the degree to which female Greek-Cypriot early-career researchers are fighting against a distinctive colonial legacy that was itself powerfully patriarchal - institutional, economic, political, and ideological (Young, 2004).

Study design

The present study used an exploratory case study qualitative approach (Gustafsson, 2017) to examine female Greek-Cypriot early-career academics' (ECAs) experiences of precarity in HERIs in the UK, when compared to ECAs experiences in Greek-Cypriot HERIs. As a case study, this research examined a modern real-life

phenomenon within a particular context (Yin, 2013). Specifically, the study investigated:

RQ1 Which were the enablers that precarious Greek-Cypriot female early-career academics had when working in universities in the UK versus in Greek-Cypriot HERIs?

RQ2 Which were the barriers that precarious Greek-Cypriot female early-career academics faced when working in universities in the UK versus in Greek-Cypriot Higher Education Institutions?

To this end, the study utilised a qualitative interviewing data collection method, which is more suitable for exploratory studies that aspire to investigate a complicated phenomenon like female early-career academics' experiences of precarity in HERIs in the UK versus (vs) Cyprus, applying an intersectional and a postcolonial lens (Punch, 2013). Specifically, a semi-structured interview technique was utilised because it suited this exploratory study's alignment to interpretive philosophy (Saunders, 2016). The latter facilitates experimenting with various answers and permits a balance between focus and flexibility (Saunders, 2016).

The researcher designed and piloted various kinds of open-ended questions that included descriptive, structural, contrast and evaluative content to explore the interviewees' perspective and gather valid information (Elo et al., 2014). To prevent reflexivity error and response bias, the interviewer started with a detailed presentation of the study to develop intimacy as a strategy to

lessen such biases, taking into consideration that case studies have been criticised in the past as their findings cannot be easily generalised (Yin, 2013). Therefore, the present study has limitations because it was a qualitative study which used only a small number of participants from a few universities in the UK who have also lived and worked for universities in Cyprus. It is closely related to the phenomenological and hermeneutical research approach which points to an internal and deep awareness of the essence of research, not at generating generalizable outcomes.

Data collection

Utilising opportunity and snowball sampling procedures (Naderifar et al., 2017), 22 Greek-Cypriot female early-career academics (within 8 years from completing their PhD) who have worked in universities in the UK and Cyprus (see their demographic data in Table 1) were invited to participate in this study as a small (convenience) sample was sufficient for the present qualitative study, which used a lengthy qualitative survey (Vasileiou et al., 2018), and had limitations in terms of time and money (received no funding). Interviewees were located by tapping into the researcher's professional network and by relying on close friends and colleagues. All female interviewees were reassured that the information they offered would be kept strictly confidential and gave us permission to have the interviews recorded and transcribed. The interviewer asked them to offer demographic information via an online survey before the interview to ensure more time was spent on providing answers to the open-ended

questions of the study. Exploratory interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online via Microsoft Teams depending on the interviewees' availability and preferred mode of participation in the interview. Social cues, e.g., body language, were also recorded, as all interviewees were asked to have their cameras on if they had chosen to participate in an online interview. In the case of the face-to-face interviews, the researcher took notes about any social cues detected during the interviews. The researcher secured ethics clearance from London Metropolitan University as all the participants were living in the UK at the time they participated in the study. The researcher collected the data and tried to eliminate biases, which are usually commonplace in qualitative studies (Clark & Vealé, 2018).

Table 1: *Demographic data*

Age	25-35	36-45	46+
	72%	17%	11%
Years of service	0-4	5-8	
	75%	25%	
Marital status	Single	Married	
	65%	35%	
Children	0	1-2	
	70%	30%	
Disability	Yes	No	
	10%	90%	

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, based on predetermined semi-structured questions (Yin, 2013). These questions were further developed to probe deep into the interviewee's experiences. They aimed to examine their views from both a social and an organisational perspective. The semi-structured interview questions were further elaborated taking into consideration an extensive literature review of precarious early-career women in HERIs and included a list of questions and some prompts (e.g., exploratory) to allow for more discussion. Introductory, barrier and closing questions were used to enable a particular kind of progression in the interview process and included background demographic questions, experience/behaviour questions, opinion/value questions and feeling questions (Collis & Hussey, 2013). Each interview lasted approximately an hour. Female participants were also asked to bring with them photos or small items which they thought related to their experiences as early career academics in HERIs in the UK and Cyprus. These helped evoke memories and facilitated a more detailed discussion of these women's experiences in the academy.

Data analysis

Qualitative research data was collected from non-standardized interviews and analysed using a widely used approach, thematic analysis (Terry et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is adjustable and can provide an insight into prominent themes on the present topic depending on how these are perceived by the participants. The interview data were inductively analysed, according to Braun and

Clarke (2006, p. 87) six-step procedure of thematic analysis: a) familiarisation with the data, b) forming codes, c) identifying themes, d) revising the themes, e) naming the themes and f) creating a final report.

The research team (the researcher and an assistant) used a constructivist grounded theory method to analyse the interviews (Ramalho, 2015). They independently detected main themes that were later joined by the researcher into one report. The researcher named the different codes depending on the actual terms the interviewees employed ('in vivo' codes) and on terms derived from related research and theories ('a priori' codes). The research team was responsible for detecting and interpreting the themes as these emerged from the data keeping in mind the original research questions. A term should have been identified by more than half of the participants to be labelled as a theme. Each researcher separately employed the constant comparison method when coding and revising themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). As a result, they correlated the data many times through coding and re-coding to detect prominent common themes and structures (Punch, 2013). Subsequently, their outcomes were compared and synthesised. Inter-validation processes were also used.

This procedure ensured that the final report would be explicit and coherent. They both recommended and examined interview themes. Based on those themes, the research team developed an introductory codebook. Two individual coders coded every interview. Researchers individually examined interviews to identify

parts of speech relevant to the themes. Inter-rater agreement was determined to be considerably high. Using a comparative approach, the first-order themes were joined into several second-order subthemes.

As soon as the initial coding was finalised, the researcher located themes based on the level of inter-rater compliance and the researcher's willingness to adopt a balanced perspective (e.g., positive, and negative themes). Furthermore, the researcher clarified the portrayal of these areas and re-evaluated the interviews to ensure that all related parts of speech were located. Interview passages linked to these themes were individually evaluated by two researchers and subthemes were located and negotiated. An elaborate codebook was formed for every theme. Consensus between respondents was assessed using Cohen's Kappa (K)². Its value ranged from 0.19 to 0.81, which is a good Kappa score for interrater reliability. Interview instances on which coders disagreed were negotiated until a consensus was reached, although in some cases some parts were not included in the coding procedure. Quotations were selected to illustrate the points succinctly.

The study had some obvious limitations because it was a qualitative study which used only a small number of interviewees. It is closely related to the phenomenological and hermeneutical

² The kappa statistic is frequently used to test interrater reliability. The importance of respondent reliability lies in the fact that it represents the extent to which the data collected in the study are correct representations of the variables measured.

research approach which points to an internal and thorough awareness of the essence of research, not at generating generalizable outcomes. Although case studies are not credible and have low reliability, validity, and replicability (Cohen et al., 2013), this research study showed meticulousness and precision but admitting the uncommon context of this case; the research findings will probably not be generalizable. Finally, the study admits that selecting a qualitative interview approach for data collection undoubtedly carries interviewer and participant biases (Punch, 2013).

Findings and discussion

In this section, the results of the study will be presented, thoroughly described, and then discussed keeping in mind the two research questions of the present study.

Precarious Greek-Cypriot female academics' enablers in HERIs in the UK versus Cyprus

In terms of the first research question, we discovered that precarious female academics revealed that they received support in their effort to survive in the demanding world of the academy in Cyprus and the UK (see Figure 1). We identified 4 main sources of support for these women:

- (a) supportive female managers in Cyprus vs male managers in the UK,
- (b) female colleagues in Cyprus vs male colleagues in the UK,

- (c) close Greek-Cypriot friends in Cyprus vs migrant friends in the UK,
- (d) parents in Cyprus vs relatives in the UK.

The present study revealed very interesting findings about sources of support and encouragement for these migrant women, experiencing precarity to varying extents (e.g., working on zero-hour contracts, hourly paid, fixed-term contracts), who had to fight against all odds both in their home HERIs in Cyprus, but also in the respective institutions later in the UK as they had to overcome different obstacles.

The context they lived in had a direct impact on the kind of challenges they had to face and the support they received.

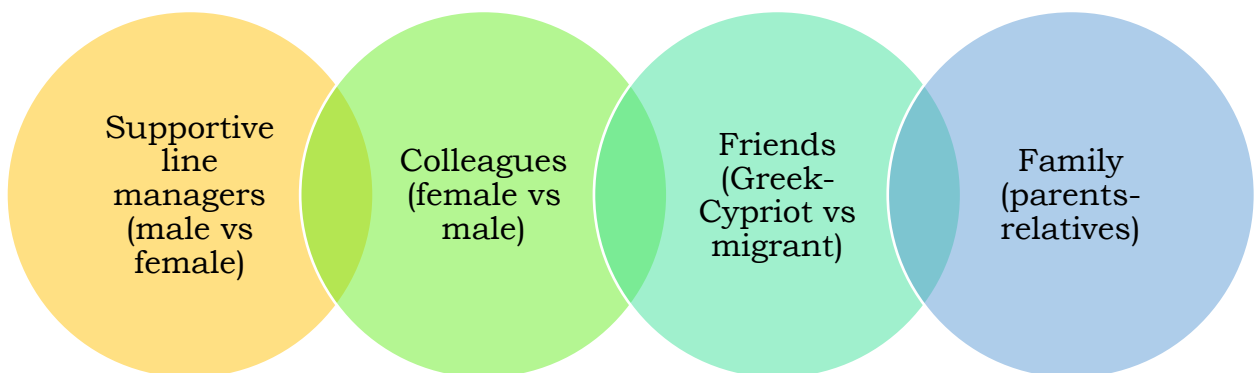


Figure 1: *Enablers*

Greek-Cypriot precarious female ECA participants of this study confessed that they were supported by mostly female managers in Cyprus, because the latter had faced similar challenges, and had fought against male patriarchal stereotypes in the past. They were

more than willing to support and promote them as much as they could, given that politics in Cypriot HERIs prevented young female academics from advancing, particularly because most senior leadership team members team were men.

Confirming previous studies both postcolonial and not (e.g., Burton & Bowman, 2022; Morley, 2013; Stavrevska et al., 2023), male managers supported these female young researchers/academics more in the UK. They were kind and showed understanding to migrant women as many of them were migrants themselves or had families as well and could understand the hurdles married women with children had to face. They tried to show some flexibility and tolerance when they had to make changes in their timetables or asked to work more days from home due to childcare. They adjusted their timetables or offered alternative solutions that matched their needs, and were also willing to support them when they had to reduce their workload. One of the interviewees, a young academic, married with one young child under the age of 10, revealed:

When I was in Cyprus, I could not negotiate when and how I would work. I just accepted orders. My female manager was trying to help me every time she saw that I was struggling, but single men were making all the decisions there and they could not understand what I was going through. It was either take it or leave it. I did not have any connections with the leadership team, and I was always at a disadvantage. In Cyprus, it is all about who you know. If

you know people, they help you. If not, they will not take your needs into consideration. In Cyprus, they also avoided women with caring responsibilities as they wanted people who could be available at an extremely short notice, that is young male colleagues with no family responsibilities. In the UK, male managers showed more empathy and understanding. Some of them were migrants and they all had kids at some point in their lives. They were willing to adjust my timetable and offered part-time positions that suited early career researchers' needs. I must admit that I managed to strike a better work-life balance in the UK (Participant 5).

Another participant was thankful to her parents who supported her, although she had to pay the price for it (full control over her personal life-patriarchy). They allowed her to stay with them, paid for her personal expenses and offered her a shoulder to cry on when she felt incredibly challenged due to the long hours she had to work to keep her part-time job in Cyprus. The same interviewee confessed that things changed when she went to the UK, as she could support herself financially, but still needed emotional support which was abundantly offered by relatives living in the UK. Her parents wanted her to come back to Cyprus, and only her aunt could understand that there was no way back to financial insecurity. Since she often felt isolated and homesick as she managed to make very few friends in the UK, her aunt was always happy to listen and provide valuable advice as she had been living in the UK for 20+ years.

I am grateful to my parents who fully supported me in Cyprus as they paid for my personal expenses and allowed me to stay at home as I could not afford renting a flat, but they also wanted a full control on my life. They prevented me from even thinking of leaving Cyprus and always encouraged me to get married, find a boring permanent job and forget about my dreams. I was patient at first but then I realised I had to leave Cyprus if I wanted to fulfil my dreams and ambitions. When I went to the UK, things improved moneywise as I am really hard-working and there are so many opportunities to find employment, unlike Cyprus which is a ghetto for young female early-career academics who should consider work as a hobby as they cannot rely on their salary to survive. My aunt offered me enormous support in the UK as she was also a rebel who left her house in Cyprus and stood on her own two feet. She offered psychological support, encouragement, and valuable advice when I felt homesick and slightly isolated as I was not able to make friends as easily as in Cyprus. I am still so grateful to her... (Participant 16).

A Greek-Cypriot early career researcher was also grateful to her male and female friends in Cyprus as they were always sympathetic to what she was going through as she had not been able to find a permanent full-time position for years. They used to comfort her and remind her of the important things in life, that is her health and her family. Later, when she went to the UK, she

also made new female friends she could rely on when she needed references and connections to find a better job. Corroborating research by Sang et al. (2013) and Thomas (2017) who also used a postcolonial lens, these female friends were usually migrants themselves who knew what it was like to be living alone without any friends or family in the UK. They were always willing to share some valuable tips and share information about possible openings which would enable her to secure a tenured position.

I remember how miserable I felt as I was exploited for years by many Higher Education Institutions in Cyprus. Thank God, I had my friends both male and female. I had lots of friends, and they were always there to comfort me and remind me of the positive sides of my life there, i.e., I was healthy, and I had a loving family. When I moved to the UK, I struggled to make friends and when I did, they were not Greek-Cypriots, but female migrants. They could understand me better and were not jealous of me. They knew what I was going through and offered valuable help and advice. I was able to find better positions because of them. They continue to support me even now and I definitely support them. I am happy with my position now after fighting alongside my migrant friends for many years. It does not come easy, but at least in the UK you can make your dreams come true. In Cyprus it is hopeless unless you know people, or you are willing to be extremely patient and put up with simply anything your- usually- male managers asked you to do (Participant 4).

In conclusion, the findings of the current study indicated that Greek-Cypriot precarious female early-career academics were able to find help and psychological support in their efforts to reach their professional goals in life, and survive due to the encouragement they received from their families, friends, line managers and colleagues both in Cyprus and in the UK with some differences in the kind of support they received. Postcolonial stereotypes were evident in the support they received in Cyprus as they were asked to conform to male stereotypes and prioritise their families over their own personal and professional ambitions adding to the existing postcolonial education literature (Mangiarotti, 2023). This clearly supports the assertion of postcolonial feminists' claims that women in former colonial countries live a different reality than Western women and should be judged taking into consideration their context as their lives are often influenced by patriarchal stereotypes (Deridder et al., 2022; Vijay, 2023). The interviewees seemed grateful and appreciative for the support they had. Voicing precarious migrant researchers who were vulnerable to discrimination and under-representation, the current study allowed the participants to present their own experiences and stress not only the challenges they encountered but also refer to the people who supported them showing perseverance, understanding and good will. Adding to Madsen and Mählck's PDE Volume 7 (2018) Special Issue on Postcolonial Critique of Knowledge Relations in Higher Education, the current paper unravelled the enablers that precarious Greek-Cypriot female academics faced adding to the existing literature on academics'

experiences from other postcolonial settings, i.e., Malta, revealing that unlike postcolonial stereotypes, male managers can also support their female precarious employees if they are open-minded and show empathy.

Precarious Greek-Cypriot female academics’ challenges in the UK versus Cyprus

In terms of the barriers that these Greek-Cypriot precarious female academics faced in Cyprus vs the UK, our interviewees highlighted: (a) career advancement, (b) sexual harassment in Cyprus only, (c) unfair pay particularly in Cyprus, and (d) limited work-life balance more in Cyprus rather than in the UK.

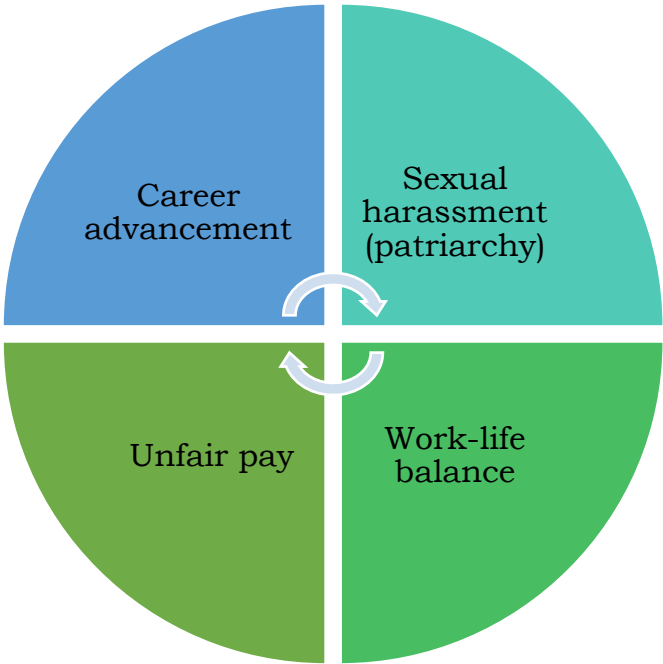


Figure 2: *Barriers*

Interviewees indicated that the barriers, in terms of career advancement, were considerably more in Cyprus rather than in the

UK; possibly due to the prevailing belief, especially in Cyprus, that the academy is particularly demanding as a place of work and requires full commitment which female academics are unable to provide due to family commitments and their own female features (i.e., being risk averse) (Blair-Loy 2003; Madera et al., 2009). In the UK, it was easier to find a tenured position as there was a wider offer of academic positions as there are more universities than in tiny Cyprus. Migrant Greek-Cypriot female academics had to overcome several barriers (i.e., due to language, their gender and ethnicity, which corroborates Strauß & Boncori (2020), but it was relatively easy to find a permanent position within a few years if they were persistent and hard-working.

... In Cyprus, you need to work countless hours nonstop and never complain to survive. This is the norm. You have to be excellent in everything just to keep your job, research, teaching, administration etc. Moreover, women are never good enough. They are considered fragile and a necessary evil only if they need someone to take care of students. Research is only for men who are considered to be smarter, more persistent, and available. Things were so different in the UK. You only had to be good at one thing and people appreciated your effort. There were so many women working in the academy and so many of them leading academic departments. Of course, there are cultural differences, and you have to improve your command of the English language, but it is easier to find yourself a decent job... (Participant 2).

Moreover, some interviewees referred to the countless hours of unpaid work and unfair pay as they could not complain, especially in Cyprus. This was just part of the things they had to tolerate for many years to get some work experience before they could even be considered not for a permanent but a better paid position. One of them highlighted that this was the most difficult period of her life. Unfortunately, previous research has also confirmed this harsh reality female early-career (postcolonial and non-postcolonial) academics had to face in other countries as well (Barbezat & Hughes, 2005; Garvis & Black, 2018). Later, when they moved to the UK, the condition was similar in the beginning, but they were able to secure better positions quite fast as there is more demand for academics.

It was so challenging...So many hours of extra work without getting decently paid and being unable to fully support yourself and pay your bills? My parents and friends told me to be patient and keep quiet, but I could not. Did I have to suffer just because I was a woman and supposedly, I was weaker? I had to quit and grab another opportunity in the UK. Things were difficult there as well but at least I could support myself and gradually secure a better position. Women always being paid less is more common in small countries like Cyprus in which men are the breadwinners and women just have a convenient part-time job to keep themselves busy outside their house and away from their family responsibilities. Their job is just a

break from their family life. We were even brought up to be thankful for this low-paid opportunity” (Participant 14).

Academics also mentioned the sexual harassment they had to suffer from male supervisors and male managers in Cyprus, comprising sexist comments and invitations to go out and have “fun”. Supervisors and managers in the UK were very careful about how they treated their female students and colleagues as they could get into trouble if the women reported them. However, no one could touch male offenders in Cyprus. No woman would report something like this formally. They would be ashamed and afraid that they would be accused of provoking it, or of a so-called “misunderstanding” - thus corroborating previous postcolonial studies by adding these Greek-Cypriot precarious academics’ experiences to findings by Bondestam & Lundqvist (2020) and Burton and Bowman (2022) on sexual harassment in the neoliberal academy. Patriarchy was still strong in postcolonial Cyprus while things were very different in the UK, where social justice is a major concern, especially nowadays because women tend to report harassment. Therefore, men tend to avoid any such instances.

I remember that line manager. He was so polite at first and then he started making these stupid sexist comments and invited me for a drink and then to go to his place to show me his ‘collection of stamps’. As soon as I realised his intentions, I left and found another job. These situations are common in Cyprus. This is not the case in the UK. Men

are afraid that they may lose their job and their reputation. Men are very careful in the UK, while men think they are almighty in Cyprus as they can get away with anything as the society tends to always find excuses for men but never for women (Participant 20).

Finally, early-career researchers complained about the lack of work-life balance while working for the academy in Cyprus. Early-career researchers were expected to be available 24 hours a day to cover for permanent employees. That is why men were preferred and more easily promoted as they did not have any family obligations. They were career-oriented and more committed to work. In the UK, female early-career researchers faced more pressure in terms of publications - thus corroborating postcolonial studies such as Rivera's (2017) on gender and relationship status discrimination in academic hiring - but were offered flexibility in terms of teaching as several of our participants revealed. Laws were protective for female employees, and they were taken into serious consideration in British Higher Education Institutions:

I cannot possibly work night and day. I have two kids. I have to be able to see them during the day. My line manager in Cyprus did not care about that. They fired me and got a man to replace me. It was easy peasy...When we moved to the UK, I realised that laws were respected there and that women were offered more flexibility to combine work with their family responsibilities. I was relieved that I could be a mother and an academic without feeling any

guilt about leaving either my kids or my career behind...”
(Participant 8).

In conclusion, our participants portrayed in detail the challenges they faced in HERIs in the UK vs Cyprus, but they also discussed the kind of support and encouragement they received from their family, friends, managers, and peers. They revealed that they felt considerably challenged to work and live as female early career researchers in Cyprus as they could see no hope, no light at the end of the tunnel. The reality as migrant early-career researchers in the UK was also harsh as they had to start from scratch, work twice as hard as their male colleagues or their British counterparts (i.e., as they faced language and cultural barriers), but were able to get what they deserved, that is a tenured position, relatively fast. They clearly indicated that patriarchal beliefs, which persist in postcolonial Cyprus, prevent young female early-career researchers to progress in their careers and survive in a highly competitive academic world which does not offer any flexibility to women if, for instance, they have increased family responsibilities.

Main findings, implications, and possibilities

The female academics of this study described their challenges and their enablers reflecting on their experiences in HERIs in Cyprus vs the UK. The findings of this study contribute to the feminist perspective, which highlights the degree to which women are still working against a colonial legacy that was itself powerfully patriarchal - institutional, economic, political, and ideological

according to Young's study (2003) on postcolonialism in Africa. This is evident in these women's narratives which belong to a long history of prejudices and inhuman remarks against females in postcolonial contexts. These women questioned their inferior status and asked for amelioration in their social position in line with Freedman's study (2002) on migrant women in Europe in their quest for equal justice and equal opportunities for females. The current study sought to answer the question why women are treated as second-class citizens, were oppressed, and enjoyed lesser opportunities than males as Filandri & Pasqua also indicate in their study on gender discrimination in the Italian academia (2021).

The precarity of the temporary conditions of service for non-permanent academic staff, especially women, increased their anxiety as they felt insecure and unable to survive without financial support in Cyprus while they felt more isolated in the UK as they missed their immediate family. The aspirations and prospects for career progression of precarious academic women were impacted detrimentally by patriarchy in Cyprus as male stereotypes prevailed making it almost impossible for young female early-career academics to secure a permanent position. This further elucidates Zucman's study (2019) which explores global wealth inequalities.

Young female academics had to manage increasing workloads without being offered any flexibility due to family commitments i.e., the care needs of children and households which significantly

affected women's advancement prospects, especially in Cyprus. This confirms Ecklund & Lincoln's study (2016) on work-family conflicts in academic science adding further evidence regarding these women's struggles to maintain their work-family balance.

These female academics, who worked as part-time members of staff and did not receive a fixed salary monthly, were paid from external grants or from departmental budgets. They were therefore particularly vulnerable and had to be willing to be practically 24 hours a day available to fill in gaps. When that external grant came to an end or that budget was reduced, these academic members of staff had to fight for their survival and became even more scared due to the uncertainty they were facing. Moreover, the main issue was not the fact that this budget could become non-existent from one day to another but that this insecurity had a profound impact on these female academics' quality of teaching and research. These women also confessed that more academic work was imposed on female rather than male academic workers as they felt even more vulnerable and afraid to refuse to do the extra work than men. Additionally, women were often given administrative tasks and teaching while men focused mostly on research which allowed them to move fast in tenured positions. Moreover, female academic members of staff on temporary contracts revealed that schools were facing issues of academic staff shortage and that women academics often had to take on extra responsibilities to support permanent members of staff when for example they fell ill. Consequently, the impossibility of getting a promotion and the rare opportunities of getting a permanent position, became even more

evident in small countries where the law of offer and demand puts young female academics at a disadvantage as they cannot often commit to a highly demanding almost exhausting academic career or long working hours which leaves them no time to fulfil family related obligations.

The current study applies a post-colonial non-western feminist view on the phenomenon of precarity in the academy which negotiates the political demands of postcolonialism alongside the social challenge of everyday patriarchy, typically supported by its institutional and legal discrimination; which translates into of i.e., sexual harassment. The paper's discussion addresses a gap in the literature on Greek-Cypriot precarious female ECAs' experiences in HERIs in the UK vs Cyprus adding an intersectional and postcolonial lens to previous studies conducted by Le Feuvre et al. (2015) on ageing and Ozkazanc-Pan (2012) on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI).

Adopting a postcolonial perspective, the current study aimed to give expression to the postcolonial experiences of Greek-Cypriot early career academics undermining discourses which supported colonisation i.e., the myths of patriarchal power and the imagery of subordination (Boehmer 2006). These women sought to take their rightful place in the world, forced to flee to HERIs in the UK to escape a dim future in postcolonial Cyprus. It seems that ideological imperialism persists as an increasing number of females 'top talent' flees to the West, i.e., British HEI, to escape poverty, compromise, and failure (Klerides & Philipou, 2015).

Implications

This study on the precarity of the work of early-career academic women is significant because it offers insights into precisely how such precarity is experienced in Western ex-colonial countries like the UK versus former postcolonial tiny countries like Cyprus. Through thick, descriptive analyses of enablers and challenges these women faced as they moved from universities in their home country when they realised they were facing a dead end to the renowned universities in the UK in search of a better future. The current research allows readers to explore the organisational structures and constraints these women face nowadays as they struggle to produce academic work of high quality while living in precarity. The present research offers various recommendations which aim to influence HEI policies and practices as regards the temporary and insecure employment status of Greek-Cypriot early-career women academics who have worked in HEI in Cyprus and the UK. There is therefore a need to:

- Moderate management expectations from the top down especially in post-colonial Cyprus where these women's voices need to be heard as their misfortune also affects the quality of education offered to students as well.
- Make imminent changes in these female precarious workers' work timetables and the internal rules which restrict their career promotions and opportunities to secure a permanent position These changes should take

into consideration these women's needs, especially those with family commitments.

- Devote time, energy, and money to collect data cross-institutionally from various HEI regarding the issue of precarity to influence senior leadership and HRM decisions about the appreciation of female precarious academic employees' academic work and their progression in the academy.
- To efficiently aid these early career researchers and academics, more investigation is needed on how HEI can assist these women catering to their needs. Further support is needed for women academics with young children or elderly family members who require additional care as they are often fragile (Meletiadou, 2023).
- Detect which academic members of staff, especially precarious women, need additional support and offer additional budgets to the schools which will ultimately offer support to these workers in need.
- Work intensively to identify and bring about transformational change in institutional norms around gender, disability, employment, and care responsibilities, i.e., avoid ignoring female precarious workers who have additional needs while fully supporting male employees. Measures to promote work-life balance across institutions should also be enforced to avoid making overwork a way of life for academic employees.

Suggestions for further research

This specific study is based on a rather small sample of precarious female academics who have worked at only a few HERIs in Cyprus and the UK. Therefore, its outcomes cannot be generalised. Nevertheless, as there is not sufficient research on Greek-Cypriot early career academics' experiences in former colonial vs postcolonial universities in Europe, this research is significant as it explores the phenomenon of female precarity in the academy in the present context. This will hopefully motivate more researchers to explore even more aspects of female precarity in the academy, applying an intersectional lens (migrant academics).

Future research needs to be planned in more HERIs, involving more stakeholders from wider HERI contexts to obtain more generalisable, reliable, and valid findings. It would be fascinating to compare the facilitators and the challenges of precarious female academics in Cyprus and the UK with other former colonial and postcolonial countries in Europe and globally. The similarities and differences from such comparative studies would advise universities on ways to empower and advance precarious early-career female academics. Such specific knowledge is significant in building gender equity internationally.

Conclusions

Taking into consideration the outcomes of the current study, the systemic and institutionalised inequalities that precarious female

academics experience in HERIs have deepened considerably especially in universities based in postcolonial contexts. This study contributes to existing research through introducing perspectives from Greek-Cypriot and British Universities and, more significantly, addresses women's perspectives of the impact of postcolonialism on their employment prospects in tiny countries like Cyprus. This study shows that the variability in employment agreements for women contributes to the uncertainty that they already experience in terms of their careers and progression within the academy. Increased workloads, unfair pay, and work-life imbalance that are impacting on the lives of early-career female academics within the academy are felt to be ignored. While career and promotion prospects are under threat, the prevalence of patriarchal beliefs in Cypriot HERIs has impacted the aspirations of Greek-Cypriot women and led to an increased resentment and their subsequent migration in the hope of a better future within the British academy.

Greek-Cypriot early-career academics on precarious contracts saw prospects of financial safety and career prosperity vanish in postcolonial Cyprus. The academy — which has been overwhelmingly dependent on the availability of academics to migrate without second thought to find employment — is turning into a place in which people with family responsibilities or aspirations to have a stable personal life and friends cannot possibly survive and/or remain. (Meletiadou, 2023). The current study wishes to remind senior leadership teams that there is still an opportunity — should they choose to seize it — to remake the

working cultures in the academy (especially in postcolonial universities) and support young early-career academics/researchers.

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THE PARTICIPATION OF EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS IN THE DECISION-MAKING BODIES OF A GERMAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

In the European higher education landscape, Early Career Researchers (ECRs) often face exclusion from participating in the university decision-making bodies (department, faculty, senate level). This paper aims to address the following research questions: to what extent is the participation of ECRs in decision-making bodies ensured, and what are the gender promotion policies within German universities, specifically focusing on a university in the German state of North-Rhine Westphalia? These inquiries are in line with the thematic scope of the special issue dedicated to examining the gendered and intersectional invisibility of researchers, evaluating participation while understanding the intersectional profile of Early Career Researchers (ECRs). The problem statement delves into thematic areas encompassing policies, legal frameworks, and practices, critically analysing their impact on ECR representation within the decision-making structures of the German Higher Education System. The paper utilises a qualitative research approach, conducting a comprehensive thematic content analysis of relevant sources such as websites, institutional documents, and governmental publications. This method aims to provide a detailed

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understanding of the context under study. Initial findings indicate a significant exclusion of PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers from decision-making bodies. However, the implementation of a Gender Equality Plan overseen by federal states has initiated a shift towards achieving more equitable representation within higher education governance structures. The necessity for rectifying under-representation is discussed using a postcolonial intersectional perspective to flag the power relations in academia (Mählck, 2018).

Keywords: gender equity plan (GEP), governance, early career researchers (ECRs), decision-making, higher education and research institutions (HERIs)

Introduction

Early career researchers (ECRs) play a crucial role in the academic landscape, contributing fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to the advancement of knowledge and scholarship (Friesenhahn & Beaudry, 2014; Taylor & Keeter, 2010), REF). As emerging scholars, ECRs navigate a complex environment characterised by diverse roles and responsibilities, including teaching, research, and professional development. Despite their widespread presence in academia (Jones, 2014) and diversified contribution (Ballenger, 2010), the extent of their underrepresented involvement in decision-making processes within academic institutions remains a topic of growing interest and concern (Xue et al., 2022).

This paper seeks to explore the participation of ECRs in decision-making bodies within the German context and more specifically the TU University in Dortmund Decision-making bodies, such as faculty councils and committees, are key forums where

institutional policies and initiatives are shaped, making participation in these bodies essential for influencing institutional governance and fostering a sense of ownership among stakeholders. However, the extent to which ECRs are actively engaged in these processes, as well as the barriers and facilitators to their participation, remain under-examined.

Building upon previous research on the challenges and opportunities facing early career researchers (Jamali et al., 2023; Laudel & Gläser, 2007)), the study discussed in this paper investigated factors influencing ECRs participation in decision-making bodies, with special attention to dynamics of institutional governance. The study aimed to identify strategies for enhancing the inclusivity and effectiveness of decision-making processes.

Using qualitative interviews with ECRs from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and institutional contexts, this study explored motivations, barriers, and facilitators shaping their engagement in decision-making bodies.

Context

ECRs in Germany

The definition of the term ‘Early Career Researcher’ in Germany is broad, encompassing various contexts of scientific qualification. Commonly used terms for early career researchers by the federal German Ministry of Education and Research and the State Ministry of Culture and Science in the federal state of North Rhine-

Westphalia (NRW) include "Nachwuchswissenschaftler" or "wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs" (MKW NRW, 2022)), which can be translated as junior researchers. According to the federal Ministry of Education and Research, junior researchers can include PhD students, scientific staff, as well as junior and tenure-track professors. Promotion of ECRs is supported directly or indirectly through policies by both federal and state governments, given the high degree of federalization in German higher education (HE) governance. Programmes supporting ECRs include tenure-track professorships, the 'Pakt für Forschung und Bildung', which supports funding of research organisations like the DFG, collaborative research centres, and graduate schools funded by the 'Exzellenzinitiative' (DFG, 2019)). However, there are no federal or state level policies or laws specifically promoting ECRs in decision-making processes at national and institutional levels, as support primarily focuses on advancing careers and acquiring academic qualifications. The representation of ECRs in university governing bodies varies, with some bodies ensuring their presence while others, such as the rectorate, may lack representation.

ECRs at TU Dortmund

The TU Dortmund employs more than 6,700 people: about 300 professors, 37 junior professors, 2,253 research assistants, 1,466 technical and administrative staff, 2,237 assistants and about 450 lecturers (Gleichstellungsbüro, 2022). The Gender Equality Plan (GEP) records in a gender-differentiated manner how many doctorates/habilitations have been completed. However, it cannot record the number of ECRs because their employment type and

contract duration vary. Some PhD students in the German universities are employed by the university as research assistants while other students are gaining scholarships and therefore are not included in the official numbers of the university as part of their staff. Moreover, it is important to underline that even after the completion of the PhD and during the Habilitation phase the official title of the ECR remains the same and therefore this person is a research assistant.

In some cases, ECRs can apply for the position of Junior Professor, which lasts for 3 years. During that time, the Junior Professors can participate in the faculty board meetings however, the opportunity to be part of the Senate is not given. After they are appointed as professors they can vote as university teachers (Gleichstellungsbüro, 2010).

In the Charter of TU Dortmund (2020), researcher assistants belong to the representatives of the academic staff. Therefore, an academic staff representative is not elected as part of the rectorate. However, five representatives are elected as part of the senate and three ECRs are part of the faculty council. There are two members of the academic staff in the standing committees, which are appointed by the Senate (Charter TU Dortmund, 2020). The representatives in the Senate and the faculty are elected by the rest of the academic staff of the TU Dortmund.

In general, it should be noted that measures to promote ECRs at the University include or focus on the promotion of female ECRs. The most important initiatives to promote female ECRs in their further careers in HE are gender parity in the appointment of junior professors (Gleichstellungsbüro TU Dortmund, 2022b, p. 16) and gender quotas for "deputy professorships" (Gleichstellungsbüro TU Dortmund, 2022b, p. 19), which are also prescribed by the Ministry of Education and Science of North Rhine-Westphalia (MKW NRW 2019). The TU Dortmund also tries to attract doctoral students, especially female doctoral students, through career development programmes and numerous qualification and networking programmes, as well as graduate colleagues, which also take the form of workshops, mentoring programmes, job fairs and career forums (Gleichstellungsbüro TU Dortmund, 2022, p. 31).

Furthermore, workshops which centre around the development of ECRs as well as work-contracts which cover the duration of a PhD and ensure a workload of 50% offer incentives for ECRs to pursue a career in science at the TU Dortmund. There is also special funding by the state of NRW which is used to promote and retain recent graduates through the provision of permanent jobs at the TU Dortmund (Gleichstellungsbüro TU Dortmund, 2022, p. 32). The faculty of bio and chemical engineering also supports female ECRs through mentoring programs and the coverage of associated costs (Gleichstellungsbüro TU Dortmund, 2022, p. 33). There are no specific policies mentioned in the GEP of the TU Dortmund which focus on the inclusion of ECRs in decision making processes and university governance.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion at TU Dortmund

According to the state equality act NRW (LGG NRW) which came into effect in 1999 every HEI in NRW must work on and publish an equality plan for the whole organisation and for the respective faculties, the administration and other units of the HEI which has more than 20 employees (SVG NRW §5 Abs. 1). In the chapter concerning gender binary and the diversity of genders, it is worth mentioning that all job advertisements at TU Dortmund University explicitly address all genders for several years (Gleichstellungsbüro TU Dortmund, 2022).

Some further efforts that have been agreed are those of The TU Dortmund also ensures the entitlement to maternity and paternity leave of its employees and aims to increase the use of open-ended contracts for academic staff to ensure predictability and professional security, of which 50% are held by women (Gleichstellungsbüro TU Dortmund, 2022, pp. 31).

Faculties like mathematics and mechanical engineering recruit young female talent through specific advertisements and involve them in committee work, for example and there is also an extra budget for trainings and conferences numerous faculties which can be requested by female junior scientists (Gleichstellungsbüro TU Dortmund, 2022, p. 31). The faculties are also obliged to agree on a women's quota with the rectorate, which is planned to be a cascade model which has a rate set depending on the rate of female employees in the career level below. The specific quotas are also discussed and to be consulted on faculty council meetings. The

quotes are then sent to the rectorate and are also controlled annually, but there are no sanctions for not meeting the quotas (Gleichstellungsbüro TU Dortmund, 2022, p. 34).

TU Dortmund University is dedicated to actively addressing and preventing discrimination and sexual violence by implementing stringent guidelines to safeguard its researchers. Additionally, it offers educational resources on discrimination and gender-specific violence and provides counselling through equal opportunities officers for those affected. All members and staff are obligated to refrain from discriminatory behaviour and foster a positive work environment, particularly individuals in managerial roles (Technische Universität Dortmund, 2022, pp. 2-4). Should boundaries be breached, TU Dortmund has established a complaints office in line with the AGG, which investigates reported incidents and, if necessary, initiates sanctions or labour law measures under the authority of the Chancellor or Rector (Technische Universität Dortmund, pp. 4-6).

In terms of decision-making involvement, the structure of the German HE system lacks clear departmental levels, with the faculty serving as the initial decision-making body. Within TU Dortmund faculties, representatives are divided into categories, with professors comprising the majority. Middle-level professional representatives, including ECRs such as PhD candidates and postdocs, along with those involved in third-party funded projects, constitute a smaller portion. These representatives may also include professionals with doctoral degrees who have worked at the university for an extended period. Additionally, there are

representatives from non-scientific personnel and bachelor and master's students. Participation in this decision-making body requires election through a procedure conducted every two years.

Theoretical framework

This study draws on Leisyte et al.'s (2013) work on stakeholder theory, and as originally conceptualized by Freeman (1984). Stakeholders are defined as "any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). A stakeholder's influence is contingent upon their power, which encompasses the ability to access coercive, utilitarian, or normative means to assert their will (Mitchell et al., 1997, p. 865). Additionally, the research will examine legitimacy, characterised as "socially accepted and expected behaviour" (Mitchell et al., 1997, p. 866), which establishes an actor's authority within the stakeholder network. Furthermore, urgency as part of the stakeholder theory, represents a dynamic component, denoting "the degree to which a stakeholder claims call for immediate attention" (Mitchell et al., 1997, p. 867).

It is important to mention that stakeholders are individuals or groups that have an interest and are affected by the decisions and actions of the organisation. In the context of academic life, the early career researchers are valid and legitimate stakeholders as their career development and professional growth are influenced by the institutional decision and practices. The elements of power, legitimacy and urgency are going to be in depth examined. That means that in the interviews we look in depth on how and if the

voice of early career researchers is heard and the power that their voice can have within their network.

In stakeholder theory, power refers to the ability of stakeholders to influence or affect the decisions, actions, and outcomes of an organisation. Power dynamics play a crucial role in shaping the relationships between organisations and their stakeholders, as well as in determining the distribution of resources, benefits, and risks (Mitchell et al., 1997). Moreover, legitimacy refers to the perceived appropriateness, acceptability, or justification of an organisation's actions, decisions, and behaviours in the eyes of its stakeholders and broader society. Legitimacy is based on the belief that organisations should operate in accordance with societal norms, values, and expectations, and that their actions should be congruent with prevailing standards of morality, legality, and social responsibility (Mitchell et al., 1997).

Additionally, urgency is a critical concept that represents the degree to which a stakeholder claims immediate attention or action from the organisation. Urgency is influenced by factors such as the timing and nature of the stakeholder's demands or concerns, as well as the potential consequences of not addressing them promptly. Stakeholders may assert urgency based on various factors, including time sensitivity, the magnitude of the issue, or the perceived importance of their interests. By framing their concerns as urgent, stakeholders may seek to compel the organisation to allocate resources, adjust priorities, or expedite decision-making processes in their favour. Thus, urgency not only reflects the timing and severity of stakeholder demands but also

serves as a strategic tool for exerting influence within the stakeholder network (Mitchell et al., 1997).

Drawing on stakeholder theory as conceptualized by Freeman (1984) and further developed by Mitchell et al. (1997), a postcolonial perspective in higher education institutions influenced this theory in several key ways. Firstly, a postcolonial perspective broadened the definition of stakeholders to ensure it includes marginalized groups such as international students and students with a migration background. This inclusive approach ensured that the voices of those affected by colonial legacies are heard and considered in institutional decisions (Adefila et al., 2022). Moreover, the postcolonial analysis critically examined how power is distributed among stakeholders. It highlighted how certain stakeholders, often from historically privileged backgrounds, have disproportionate access to the decision-making bodies, thereby perpetuating existing inequalities (Nalbantoğlu, 2017).

Secondly, the concept of legitimacy is re-evaluated within a postcolonial framework. Legitimacy is not just about conforming to "socially accepted and expected behaviour" within the existing dominant framework. It involves questioning whose norms and values are being upheld and recognizing alternative forms of legitimacy rooted in non-Western, indigenous, and marginalized cultural contexts (Åkerlind, 2005). This perspective advocates for the recognition and inclusion of diverse epistemologies and cultural practices as legitimate, potentially shifting the traditional

perceptions of authority within the stakeholder network to be more inclusive of these perspectives.

Methods

In this study, the research team carried out a one-time semi-structured interview between May 2023 to November 2023 with 10 ECRs based at TU Dortmund. The interviews aimed to gather insights into the perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of participants regarding their involvement in the decision-making bodies. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was recorded with the consent of the participants. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim and subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns within the data.

The research design of the study has been reviewed and approved by the leaders of the Work Group of the VOICES project and the Research Task Force of the Work Group. Moreover, all the interviewees signed a consent form which ensures their anonymity. The interviewees comprised ECRs with varied involvement in University decision-making bodies. Out of the 10 interviewees, eight were pursuing their PhD and the remaining two engaged in postdoc research. The researchers had a diverse background of humanities, business and economics and engineering. At the time of data collection, five of the ECRs were participating in decision-making bodies, while the other five didn't (and had never done). To enhance diversity and inclusion, the sample included both German and non-German researchers; seven participants were female and three were male.

Results

A clear definition of what constitutes an ECRs proved elusive, with varied perspectives on who qualifies for this designation. Some regarded ECRs solely as those pursuing their PhD, while others considered individuals who had recently obtained a professorship as falling within this category. This ambiguity extended to the German term used, which encompassed a broader range of researchers.

The primary challenge faced by ECRs centred on the precariousness of their employment contracts, which may offer stability for a limited duration. Support for these individuals is provided by the Graduate Centre, which facilitates opportunities for researchers with and without a PhD. As ECRs, their primary responsibilities comprised teaching, research, and involvement in third-funded projects, as delineated by their employment contracts. Both PhD students and postdocs typically grappled with substantial workloads, often without commensurate financial compensation. A significant distinction lay in whether the contract was directly affiliated with the professorship to which the PhD student was attached. In such cases, teaching obligations were typically integrated into the contract, alongside dedicated time for research activities. Similarly, postdocs had distinct responsibilities, with provisions for individualised time allocations for research pursuits.

A precise workload distribution among the researchers proved challenging to establish. It became apparent that, for some PhD

candidates, completing their dissertations was their foremost priority; however, conflicting obligations frequently complicated dissertation work. postdocs faced similar challenges in this regard. They had to work on their research papers, teach and supervise PhD students.

The motivation driving ECRs to pursue an academic career varied, with conflicting perspectives emerging. Some viewed pursuing further education as the logical progression immediately following their Master's degree, while others regarded it as the next step in their career trajectory after gaining practical work experience.

As regards, representation on decision-making bodies, gender did not emerge as a factor influencing participation in decision-making processes, as reported by the interviewees. Participation in these elections emerged as typically low, with individuals discussing among themselves who would be most suitable for representation. Whilst PhD students and postdocs stated they would be encouraged by their professors to participate in the election process to represent ECRs in committees, those in decision-making bodies emphasised their close relationship with professors, noting that they often felt unable to oppose their professors' positions due to employment connections and potential repercussions. Discussion agendas are set in advance, allowing participants to prepare accordingly. Yet, ECRs expressed feeling their voices were overshadowed by those of professors. Notwithstanding the expectation to voice their opinions on various topics, they also strived to avoid conflicts. Although professors initiate their involvement, and ECRs may have their voices heard on matters

related to their employment, final decisions rest with the professors.

Conversely, those who did not participate in decision-making bodies cited their busy schedules, which encompassed teaching, research, and project commitments. Many expressed a lack of awareness regarding the election processes for committee members. PhD students expressed that such involvement would detract from their primary research focus and opted to abstain. Postdocs faced significant workloads, including supervising PhD students, teaching, administrative duties, and proposal writing for national and European projects. Additionally, they applied for research projects aligned with their interests. While PhD students occasionally participated in application development, their involvement was sporadic, with professors making final decisions on responsibilities.

Despite closer relationships between postdocs and professors, committee work ranked low on their list of priorities due to competing obligations.

International ECRs encountered language barriers, as much of the work was conducted in German, hindering their understanding and involvement. They felt their voices were not heard within their respective professorships, diminishing the need for further engagement.

Then the last part was of the interviews examined further the topic what are the key factors that are essential for the successful career progression of the ECRs to acquire a full academic position. On this part the responses of the early career researchers were various, but the following points could be agreed. The networking opportunities were mentioned as one of the most important aspects. The ECRs thought of great importance the chance to establish collaborations and enhance their visibility in the academic field with their active participation in conferences, seminars, and other networking events as part of the national and European projects. It is important to connect not only with other professors but also with other like-minded professionals of the field. Then it was specified as important to have access to research funding opportunities in a national and European context. It was often underlined that students didn't have the experience of drafting a proposal and applying. Then mentorship and supervision were also voiced as important. The mentoring and the supervision could happen not only from the supervisor but also from the graduate centre or other facilities. Early Career Researchers often felt that they lacked support so as them to be competitive within the academic job market.

Overall, the results of the interviews with early career researchers (ECRs) revealed several key insights. Participants described their current positions and work roles within their respective universities, highlighting the division of their work in terms of working hours. Motivation for pursuing a career in academia varied among participants, with some expressing interest in research and teaching opportunities. Participants also discussed their

institutions' support for ECRs, noting both positive initiatives and key challenges faced by this demographic. In terms of representation in decision-making committees, some participants reported involvement in various committees within their institutions, detailing their roles and responsibilities. However, concerns were raised regarding the extent to which ECRs' voices are considered in faculty boards and decision-making processes. Despite this, participants identified areas where ECRs can have a significant impact, such as advocating for issues relevant to their demographic and influencing institutional decisions. Suggestions for improvement included enhancing communication and transparency in decision-making processes and providing more opportunities for ECRs to contribute and be heard. Finally, participants identified key factors essential for the successful career progression of ECRs to full permanent academic positions in their country, including access to research funding, effective supervision, and supportive institutional environments.

Discussion

The results presented on the engagement of Early Career Researchers (ECRs) in institutional decision-making processes provide a nuanced elaboration on stakeholder theory when viewed through a postcolonial lens. The findings highlight both challenges and opportunities that resonate with key principles of both frameworks, leading to several important insights.

Stakeholder theory, as conceptualized by Freeman (1984) and elaborated by Mitchell et al. (1997), emphasizes the influence and

legitimacy of stakeholders within an organization. However, the results indicate that many ECRs lack awareness of the mechanisms for participating in decision-making bodies. This lack of awareness undermines their potential influence and diminishes their legitimacy as stakeholders. The perceived exclusivity and privileging of certain individuals by professors further alienates ECRs, leading to social disengagement. This finding suggests that stakeholder theory needs to more explicitly account for the barriers that limit stakeholder participation and influence, particularly among less empowered groups.

Moreover, the significant time constraints faced by ECRs, due to their multifaceted roles in teaching, research, and administrative duties, result in a reduced prioritization of involvement in decision-making bodies. This aspect nuances stakeholder theory by highlighting the practical limitations that impede stakeholder engagement, which are not merely issues of access or awareness but also of competing responsibilities.

International ECRs facing language barriers further complicates the straightforward application of stakeholder theory. The ability to engage effectively in institutional processes is hindered when communication is conducted in a non-native language, impacting their influence and participation. This insight suggests that stakeholder theory should consider linguistic inclusivity as a critical factor in stakeholder engagement and legitimacy.

A postcolonial perspective emphasizes the need to dismantle colonial legacies and promote inclusivity. The exclusion of ECRs

from decision-making processes reflects ongoing power imbalances and systemic inequities that postcolonial theory seeks to address. The perception that involvement opportunities are reserved for privileged individuals underscores the need for more equitable and inclusive institutional practices.

The study's findings of bottom-up advocacy for more active roles for elected representatives and improved communication channels align with postcolonial objectives of empowering marginalised voices and enhancing transparency. These initiatives aim to democratise institutional governance, reflecting a postcolonial commitment to equity and justice.

The suggestion to establish separate boards tailored to the interests of PhD students and postdocs addresses the specific needs and concerns of these groups, resonating with the postcolonial emphasis on recognizing and valuing diverse experiences and knowledge systems. This approach ensures that the unique challenges faced by ECRs are acknowledged and addressed within institutional frameworks.

Combining stakeholder theory with postcolonial literature provides a richer framework for understanding and addressing the complexities of institutional governance. The barriers to ECR participation highlight the need to re-evaluate the power dynamics and structural inequalities inherent in traditional stakeholder models. By integrating postcolonial insights, institutions can move towards more inclusive and equitable governance structures that genuinely reflect the diversity of their stakeholders.

The advocacy for improved communication channels and the publication of meeting minutes is a practical step towards greater transparency and inclusivity. This aligns with both stakeholder theory's emphasis on legitimacy and postcolonial theory's call for dismantling opaque, exclusionary practices.

Conclusions and recommendations

The study was limited in size, institutional context, and the dataset dependent on ECRs perceptions, thus vulnerable to bias or inaccuracies based on individuals' perceptions or interpretations of their experiences. This limits the findings' external validity. Additionally, language barriers limited non-German speakers' access to institutional documents concerning the issues under study published in German.

Notwithstanding, the study shed light on the specifics of precarious experiences by participating ECRs, power dynamics with professors, and how these intersect with their perceptions of decision-making bodies, and their motivations to (not) be involved in such bodies. The findings underscore the need for higher education institutions to critically examine and reform their governance structures through the lenses of stakeholder theory and postcolonial literature. By addressing the barriers to ECR participation, promoting inclusive and transparent practices, and recognizing the diverse needs of their academic community, institutions can enhance their legitimacy and foster a more equitable environment. Integrating postcolonial insights into stakeholder theory provides a comprehensive framework for

understanding and addressing the complexities of stakeholder engagement and institutional governance in higher education.

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INTERSECTIONALITY OF CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY IN NEPAL

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Abstract

Inclusive education (IE) is a key international framework to ensure quality education for all. Recent studies in the Global South have critiqued a universalist perspective, particularly the assumed homogeneity of how IE should look across different contexts, drawing comparisons between ‘the North’ and ‘the South’ (Le Fanu, 2014; Singal, 2019). However, investigation into local political economy, specifically the unequal distribution of power and historical discrimination based on social identities, is lacking, which can make certain groups of students undervalued in the state’s efforts towards inclusion. This paper’s discussion examines what students’ experiences reveal about the complexity of their struggle in education, focusing on the intersections of gender, caste, and class. This article expands on existing knowledge (Madsen & Mählck, 2018), by offering nuanced perspectives on decolonizing education. It explores how intersecting hierarchies impact marginalised groups and highlights the varied meanings of decolonising discourse for different people. This paper’s discussion contributes to reimagining education by centring on the experiences of participants who are vulnerable to discrimination and misrepresentation. More specifically, this paper discusses the findings of a case study in post-conflict Nepal, in which high-caste male groups have monopolised political and social

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spheres, resulting in a decade-long conflict. The study's methodology drew on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and involved a Ph.D. student and younger students to examine generational factors. Participatory methods included life stories to grant epistemic justice to marginalised voices and foster participants' representation. The findings show critical perception is intersectional and differs partly due to the symbolic violence in school. Implications that are informed by the findings of this study include the role of higher education to develop a decolonising curriculum for both universities and school-level education.

Keywords: caste, gender, inclusive education, intersectionality

Introduction

In recent literature, there has emerged increasing attention into the role of education to provide implications to resist epistemic violence intersectionality (Adefila et al., 2022). Intersectionality is a useful tool to examine how the simultaneity of individual's multiple identities create or close opportunities (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Yuval-Davis, 2006). While intersectionality is still limited in some post-colonial perspectives, an intersectional lens can play a crucial role in shedding light on complex sociocultural and political economic structures. In the field of inclusive education, more studies investigating on local political economy, namely unequal distribution of power and historical discrimination based on social identities, are required.

The purpose of this study is to examine what students' experiences reveal about the complexity of their struggle in education, focusing on the intersections of gender, caste, and class, among other

dimensions of inequalities, using a case study in Nepal. This study argues that an intersectional lens is required to critically analyse the complexity of oppressions and critical consciousness experienced by Dalit women and girls from poor households. People from Dalit communities have historically experienced marginalisation in society and education (Pherali, 2022), compared to privileged caste groups who have continued to monopolise political, economic, and social spheres (Lawoti, 2005). This study provides implications to address the potential gap, which is, the lack of quality ecologies for critical education in the education system.

The next section integrates intersectionality and feminist post-colonialism and sheds light on the Nepalese context, followed by an outline of the study's. The findings explore the complexity of oppression and critical consciousness through a case study of a Dalit woman and Dalit girls. The discussion section emphasises the necessary conditions to create quality ecologies for critical education from basic to higher education ensuring meaningful representation.

Integrating intersectionality and feminist post-colonialism

Feminism and postcolonialism share an opposition to forms of dominance, such as patriarchy and imperialism (Ashcroft, 2007). In the postcolonial vein, some Feminist perspectives produced criticism of Western feminism for failing to address the experiences of the Third World Women (Mohanty, 1984), by highlighting the power relations between the West and the Third World. Spivak

(1988) argued that colonisation operates differently for women and men, with women experiencing double colonisation by being women as colonised subjects, and discrimination as women. This point highlights the importance of the gender dimension within the so-called Third World. However, more focus is needed to untangle the complex realities experienced by women, particularly the different social positionings among women within the same "third world" country. At the intersection of multiple power dynamics- such as class, race, and ethnicity- local imperialism has historically allowed male elite caste and ethnic groups to dominate power and resources. This adds another layer of complexity affecting local women. Acknowledging these complexities matters because decolonisation can mean different things for different people depending on their social position (Maldonado-Torres, 2011), and women in the same geographical context can have very different experiences of exclusion.

Intersectionality offers a theoretical lens to analyse these complexities. Recent studies highlighted that intersectionality and feminist postcolonialism also share nodal points including their dedicated attention to dominance, the marginalised and their resistance (Raman, 2020; Wallaschek, 2015). This includes an analysis of the Dalit women's experiences. The added value of integrating an intersectional lens is to pay attention to multiple factors, not only gender and global power relations but also multiple social categories that perpetuate inequalities and local power relations creating large disparities among local women. Intersectionality can be applied to examine how these

complex power relations affect experiences of exclusions for individuals, influenced by their social positionings, experiential perspectives of their positionalities, and normative value systems (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Thus, the use of intersectionality and feminist post-colonialism can offer an analytical approach to examine the complexities of exclusion and oppressions experienced by one of the most marginalised women in a particular context.

In the field of inclusive education, critiques of the universal model are on the increase, with emphasis on the need to pay more attention to the realities of the local contexts (Le Fanu, 2014; Singal, 2019). While these debates tend to develop a dichotomy between the Global North and Global South, more attention is needed to the local political economy, in which unequal distribution of power and resources perpetuate educational exclusions. Narayan (2019) argues the need to look at both the forest and trees, emphasising that both the global and local power relations affect the educational experiences of individuals in local contexts. Thus, this study incorporates these complexities of power relations by using intersectionality, to contribute to making inclusive education studies more contextualised.

Focusing on the role of education, this study also draws on Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970), which can be read as the core text of intersectionality in terms of aiming to reshape the education by centring the experiences of the oppressed (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). Critical consciousness is

defined in this study as critical perception that oppression can be transformed (Freire, 1970). In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues that the oppressed, whose task is 'to struggle for their liberation together with those who show true solidarity', 'must acquire a critical awareness of oppression through the praxis of this struggle' (Freire, 1970, p.51). Thus, this study examines not only how Dalit women and girls experienced intersecting oppressions but also how they perceive the oppression, and whether oppression can be transformed.

The use of intersectionality and feminist postcolonialism is very relevant to understanding the intersecting oppressions experienced by Dalit women and girls in Nepal. In Nepal, male upper-caste high-hill groups have dominated the political, economic, legal, and social spheres throughout (Lawoti, 2005), and education systems have functioned to perpetuate the hegemonic system over diverse populations (Pherali, 2022). Caste categories have long been recognised as the basis of unequal social arrangement in Nepal (Pherali, 2022). The caste system has been used to ascribe people's social status by birth especially in terms of occupational classes, deeply rooted in Hindu religion (Khanal, 2015), and to determine school entry and drop out from primary school (Stash & Hannum, 2001). The national code was formally introduced in 1854 as a legal system to regulate caste relations in Nepali society, which was used until 1963 when the New National Code abolished the caste system. However, the hill high caste groups have continued to monopolise political and social spheres (Lawoti, 2005).

From a gender perspective, education has been used to reproduce the notion of male-led country through history education that dominantly depicted male heroes, and segregating subjects in education based on gender (Tamang, 2002). Tamang (2002) argues how in Nepal, as an aid-recipient country, male upper-caste elites have created the backwardness of Nepali women as the target of international interventions. As such, intersectionality between caste, class, gender, and other dimensions of power creates different positionings of individuals even among women in Nepal. With increasing awareness to attend to these complexities of women's experiences, recent feminist studies in Nepal argued the need for an intersectional perspective to challenge the homogenous identities of "Nepali women" (Nightingale, 2011; Tamang, 2002). In addition, Tamang (2002) argues the need for critical perspective on the objectification of Nepali women to be "empowered". Therefore, intersectionality is a crucial lens to examine how these complex power dynamics influence the experiences of Dalit women and girls in Nepal.

In the education sector, Dalit girls and women face some of the most significant barriers to accessing education, from basic levels to higher education (MoEST, 2021). Previous research noted different impacts of caste by geographical locations and gender (Guinée, 2014; Khanal, 2015). Guinée (2014) examining how intimate relationships, focusing on families, influence how Dalit women interact with empowerment. However, empirical research lacks focus on how their social positionings, the experiential

perspectives of their positionalities and normative value systems influence each other to produce particular perspectives and behaviours in relation to how they deal with multiple oppressions in everyday lives.

Therefore, this study contributes to a previous study which focused on the tensions between the Global North and the Global South in postcolonial directions in education (Kapoor, 2017), by providing intersectional analysis to address local power complexities, and by focusing on the educational experiences of Dalit women and girls which requires more research.

This study

This research aims to fill in the gap by examining what students' experiences can reveal about the complexity of their struggle in education, focusing on the intersections of gender, caste, and class among other social divisions. The fieldwork and data generated are part of my doctoral studies. This study collected data in Kathmandu, Nepal in 2023, involving approximately 40 adults and 40 students in the education sector. This study conducted an in-depth interview and life story approach is used to unpack their complex experiences especially of Dalit students. This research gained ethical approval from the University College London prior to the fieldwork. During the fieldwork, the researcher actively participated in Dalit community's activities. This study analysed data using reflective thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

This article focuses on three case studies to highlight the key trends found in the analysis of participants. This article draws on data generated with a Dalit woman in higher education and Dalit girls in secondary education who are in the transition phase to choose their future trajectories. Integration of these different generations is useful to capture the commonalities and differences between the Dalit woman who strives to make structural changes for young generations in higher education and society and Dalit girls' realities.

Intersectionality of critical consciousness

The case study of Dalit woman in higher education and Dalit girls in secondary education demonstrate the complexity of their education challenges and their critical consciousness being at the intersection of multiple social divisions including caste, gender, class, disability, religion, and generational factors. Firstly, a case study Dalit woman in higher education shows how she made her personal experience of struggles with intersecting inequalities political, and how representation can mean different things from the perspective of Dalit women. Secondly, the case study Dalit girls in secondary education show ambiguous justice in their everyday educational experiences, which implies how difficult it can be for them to critically reflect and link their experience with problems of intersecting social inequalities and act.

“This is our reality. It’s my reality. It’s not personal.”

Agency to make personal political: Case study Dalit woman

Laxmi is a Dalit woman from an economically disadvantaged family in the village, currently studying in higher education pursuing her doctoral study. She is involved in politics at a national level and a local organisation focusing on women and Dalit issues. With a local organisation, she supports people from Dalit communities and poor households to ensure their access to higher education, which is often seen as a crucial step for Dalit community to challenge the social structure in Nepal.

Her lived experience of school education manifests how intersecting inequalities hamper education. She had to drop out of school and did not receive any education between the ages of 11-12, due to the poverty of her family who could not afford the school admission fees. During the period of being out of school, she had to work in a factory as a child labourer for almost ten years. Her academic performance was at the top level in school, getting a second position in her class. However, she could not continue her education due to the poverty of her family.

Nonetheless, she has questioned the rulers. Her motivation to work on issues with Dalit, women, and the intersectionality of these factors, derived from her subjective struggles, and the realisation that many social justice problems are overlapping, such as the intersection between caste and class. She reflects:

One of the motivations was, I'm also being a Dalit woman and as well as [from] a very poor community, family. My family background was very poor because here in Nepal, caste is also related to the class. ... I'm also from Dalit community and even I am also a woman, so that my experience or my reality for being poor and discriminated, discriminatory form of many many things, have pushed me to work and raise my voice against the discrimination and inequality.

Curiosity about every inequality and discrimination was an important factor to become who she is and get involved in learning, politics, and activism. She emphasised, 'From the beginning I was very curious' about 'how they, so-called upper castes, are discriminating us', differences between girls and boys, and why her family was the poorest in the community. She said:

All these factors and situation always made me to [sic] question. Question to the structure of the Nepali society. Question to the upper caste also. Question to the rulers. So, my surroundings, where I was brought up, it made me to [sic] encourage to revolt or rebel to the situation. ... Still there are so many differences between girls and boys, and Dalit and non-Dalit, and harassment also facing girls and women. So, all situations made me to involve in politics, involve in learning, involve in activism.

Her ability to transform personal experiences into political action was crucial in becoming an agent of social change. She emphasised that the personal is political because many Dalit people still experience similar oppressions.

This is our reality. It's my reality. It's not personal. Because many many Dalit women and people are facing the same, same situation. Except few can get, few can get a chance. But most of the Dalit people, Dalit women are facing my situation also. It's very similar.

She also expressed frustration at how the social reality faced by Dalit people is overlooked by non-Dalit people, and warned how the Constitution, which declares an end caste-based discrimination, can be misused by those in power to mask ongoing caste-based discrimination. She emphasised:

Some people are, because of their caste, because of their sex, they are not getting a chance, much chance. They are not getting education right, they are not getting property right, they are not getting dignity right. These all are reality, social issue.

To address Dalit, women and intersectional issues in Nepal, meaningful proportional representation for Dalit women was the most needed. While acknowledging progress in women's representation in politics in the past two decades, she stressed:

Meaningful representation is more needed or more important for women, for overall women who are excluded from many rights, economic right and social right and cultural right.

This was because even though women had 33 percent of seats in the national parliament in 2022 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2022), she perceived women's issues were not being addressed properly. She expressed her worries that women's voices can be controlled by political leaders; hence, women are not always free to raise their voice for all women, and women in the government were not necessarily representing poor and marginalised women. As a result, she said, 'So it's very difficult to mention or feel that our representatives are there', and 'we cannot hope from them'.

As such, 'Representation' can have different meanings for Dalit women in Nepal. She said:

It's very controversial, and it's a different aspect, I think. Feminist in Nepal or in South Asian context, feminists are advocating the issues of upper-caste upper-class women. They are not sincere, sincere of Dalit or marginalised women issues.

Her perception of the need for an intersectional lens in representation came from noticing the differences between Dalit and non-Dalit women in political, economic, sociocultural, and educational inequalities. She stressed key women issues:

Political rights and equal participation. Proportional representation is now the main issue for women especially in decision-making level and we are also focusing, we are also raising the voice for Dalit women, indigenous women who are more excluded from proportional representation and they are facing various dimension that make Dalit women and indigenous women poorer in the society, compared to non-Dalit women. Non-Dalit women are more powerful to access education and representation. Different dimensions are here.

Economic disparities, as reflected in her experiences, reveal that educational inequality among Dalit women is influenced by their parents' economic status. Poverty of Dalit community, however, cannot be explained merely as an individual issue. She emphasised how economic inequality has been the main challenge for Dalit communities throughout history, and how economic inequality intersects with political and social inequalities.

I think the main challenges [for Dalit people] are mainly in economic sector. They are split from economic opportunities. ... From a thousand years [ago], they were excluded from economic rights, economic access, as well as they were excluded from equal participation also, very low participation in power-relations they are exercising. Dalit people are very excluded from their structure.

She continues, arguing that sociocultural factors, including violence, untouchability, discrimination in religion and marriage still continue:

They [Dalit people] suffer from violence also. They are killed in the name of dirtying temples and dirtying wells, water. So, that is the situation facing Dalit people. So, economic, political, and social rights are the main issue for Dalit.

It's been happening [for] thousands of years, since thousands of years. Still, we are facing an untouchability issue. Some religion is [*sic*] feared, and some friends face that discrimination. ... That's the reality we are facing in urban area a little bit, but if we go or if we stay in village, it's a normal issue. Staying outside, staying outside of temples, staying outside of Brahmin family and Chhetri family [from privileged caste groups]. It is not easy to marry, inter-caste marriage. If Dalit people want to get married with non-Dalit people, it is very difficult. People are clean, we are not clean.

There are multi-dimensional ongoing inequalities Dalit women and girls must navigate, including political right, economic right, social right, and marriage. This political economy and social exclusion infer the need for critical education for Dalit women and girls. For the younger generation, she emphasised the need to make 'good

safe for our students’, and start ‘from lower class to upper university. We should make, we must make good curriculum.’

While the need for critical education to address ongoing inequalities is indispensable, possible generational differences between Dalit women and Dalit girls need to be considered. She is in the generation who experienced the conflict in Nepal between 1996 and 2006 which had caste and gender dimensions, and who have fought for Dalit rights during the formation of the 2015 Constitution in the post-conflict era. On the other hand, current school age Dalit girls are in the different generation who may not be strongly familiar with these historical struggles. The following section examines how Dalit girls experience discrimination and form their perceptions.

Ambiguous justice: Case study Dalit girls

The contributions of Dalit girls participating in this study show the complexity of their agency to make the personal political and form critical consciousness. They indicate the need for an intersectional lens to understand why students’ perceptions of solutions to social inequalities can become different and contradictory even if they share the same social categories such as ‘Dalit’ and ‘girls’.

The theme of ‘ambiguous justice’ was developed from the experiences of Dalit girls, highlighting the contradictions. They agreed on criticising caste-based discrimination, yet had varied perspectives on solutions to everyday social discrimination. The

presence of contradictions can demonstrate how students understand intersecting inequalities and form critical consciousness in ambiguous ways. The ambiguity for students persisted and reproduced by factors at school, home, and on social levels. The following sections first show the commonalities of their experiences of social inequalities and their differences in critical perception.

Conflicting critical consciousness

Dalit girls in this study all experienced caste-based discrimination directly or learned from their family members' experiences, and all had values that people should not discriminate against others based on caste.

Yes, in village. I had a friend who is from upper caste. She used to say that I was not allowed to come into the kitchen and had to stay far from it. Some houses, I was not allowed to enter at all. ... I wonder why they say these things, and everybody is equal (Rita, age 15, public school).

I also had experienced something like that back in the village. Once, I was not allowed to enter the temple. The temple was made by collecting money from everyone, and even contribute to that temple construction. Our money was pure for them to use to build a temple, but we were discriminated and not allowed to enter it. The people from

Brahmin [privileged caste] community got to enter and put 'tika' on their forehead, but my family was not allowed to. They said we should stay outside the temple. ... The god has only made two castes, male and female. But there is also third gender. Who made this caste? All humans are equal, are they not? If we cut anybody's hand, we all bleed red blood. So, why is there so much discrimination?
(Roshina, age 17, public school)

However, their interpretations on solutions to caste-based discrimination differed among Dalit girls. To address caste-based discrimination, several approaches were suggested: assimilating into upper-caste culture, attempting to explain the issue to the oppressor despite challenges, and raising awareness to shift people's perspectives.

School where 'we' become 'they': Potential void of subjectivity in caste education

As key causes of ambiguous justice among Dalit girls, school, family, and social factors are identified. School can become a perpetrator or liberator of intersecting inequalities for Dalit girls from poor families who are often deprived of economic, educational, and social capital through generations. Dalit girls' school experiences generated a sub-theme of "school where 'we' become 'they'", implying how caste issues are often objectified in school by teachers who often belong to privileged castes. To the

question of what you learned about caste in school, Dalit students answered as follows:

They [teachers] had taught us that we should separate upper and lower caste (Arisha, age 15, public school).

Teacher had said this surname is this caste and we should not discriminate. Before this caste used to experience this, but we should not treat them like that. Also, my mother talked about it in the house, so I came to know (Sapna, age 15, public school).

Caste was made by human themselves. It was divided according to their labour. That is what we learned. Before, the people who were educated were called Brahmin. And people who would sew clothes were called 'Darji'. And people who made utensils and weapons were called 'Bishwakarma'. People who made shoes were called 'Sarki' (Roshina, age 17, public school).

Dalit girls in this study tended to have learned to interpret caste as a category that separates people into upper and lower groups, potentially reproducing caste hierarchies, by learning to label specific castes and surnames as the educated groups or discriminated groups. In addition, Dalit students tended to learn about caste from the privileged caste people's perspective, such as 'we should not treat them like that'. The objectification of 'lower' castes, rather than recognising them as individuals with lived

experiences of struggle and resistance, may stem from a school environment dominated by privileged-caste teachers, with Dalit teachers being rarely represented. As indicated above, school is one of the key places in addition to home for students to learn what caste means.

In addition, all Dalit students in this study had not learned or they did not remember whether they learned about the historical conflicts in Nepal in school education. This perceived lack of attention to conflicts in Nepal may have prevented students from understanding historical resistance by Dalit people who challenge caste-based discrimination and social structure rather than of merely depicting them as the oppressed and powerless. The following section provides case study Dalit girls to demonstrate how school, home and social factors can affect their intersecting education challenges and perceptions.

“Maybe if we are mixed with their caste and become their caste”

*Assimilation as consciousness submerged by oppressive reality?
Rita’s case*

Rita is a Dalit girl with disability in a school in Kathmandu. She is 15 years old and came to Kathmandu when she was 11. She has physical impairment due to an infection she had when she was little. She expressed that her impairment makes her daily life difficult. The infection was caused by poor sanitary conditions and could have been cured with early detection and early treatment. This demonstrates how poverty and class can affect disability conditions. Rita lives with her single mother and younger brother.

Her mother self-identified as uneducated and faced financial challenges for her daughter's education, as revealed in a separate interview. Rita directly experienced caste-based discrimination in the village from privileged caste friends who did not allow her to enter their houses, indicating how young children still learn to reproduce caste-based discrimination from interpersonal level. She critiqued this untouchability, however, her idea on how to respond to social discrimination was complex.

Students' interpretation of possible solutions to social discrimination can imply their reluctance to resist, especially when the ambiguity of justice persists. Rita expressed assimilation as a solution to caste-based discrimination. To the question whether caste-based discrimination should be changed and how, she answered, 'I do not know. Maybe if we are mixed with their caste and become their caste.'

This perception of assimilation to upper-caste culture by Dalit girl can be understood as what Freire (1970) regards as one of the biggest obstacles for liberation, which is, 'oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness' (p. 51). Currently, the more privileged students are, the higher education level students often attain in Nepal (Pherali, 2022). This infers schools are often dominated by privileged caste students, teachers and their ideologies. Rita is going through multiple challenges at the intersection between caste, class, gender, and disability. Marginalisation within school may have affected her perception.

Although the school included more Dalit students compared to other schools in Kathmandu participating in this study, it did not necessarily reflect an appreciation or representation of Dalit history, culture, and identities within the school. In fact, the school had no teacher from the Dalit community at the time of data collection. Rita explained she had not learned about the history of conflict in Nepal. In addition, she mentioned about her non-Hindu friend who was punished by teachers for not practising Hindu-religious rituals in school. Rita is also Christian, but she did not express clearly whether she perceived the incident as discrimination based on privileged-caste culture or caste-related problems. This implies how commonly upper-caste culture is still normalised in school, and how Dalit and marginalised girls are disciplined to follow upper-caste practices using punishment, to the extent that some Dalit girls like Rita do not even question and find it safer to assimilate.

In addition to school factors, family factors can also affect how students develop or struggle to develop critical awareness related to social inequalities. Her mother concealed her surname and Dalit identity to secure work and rent homes in Kathmandu. Having faced caste-based discrimination herself, she viewed assimilation as a practical solution to daily exclusion based on their Dalit identity. Rita was told by her mother not to dream big due to financial constraints at home, which made her feel uncomfortable. She experienced denial of her capacity to learn by her own mother and family, and she found this psychological violence more

harmful than physical pain caused by her impairment. To the question of what will help her study, she answered:

Firstly, I worry about my leg. I do not want to worry about it, but it happens anyhow. Even at home, they say 'your studies are not good, and your leg is not good, what you will do in future'. Then it hurts more (Rita, age 15, Dalit girl with disability).

As such, class affects Dalit girls' educational experiences. For Dalit girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, class is not only about financial constraints but also intergenerational deprivation of quality education, which can negatively affect parent-child relationships, child's self-esteem, critical awareness, and hope for the future. Thus, when students do not have parents who guide them to understand what kind of discrimination and educational challenges they are going through, it may become difficult for students to develop critical perception.

Therefore, her interpretation of solutions to caste-based discrimination and awareness of everyday struggles may have become ambiguous. This is probably influenced by strong upper-caste dominant culture and immediate people (teachers, friends, parents) in school and home. The institutions such as school and home are also influenced by the historical and intergenerational power dynamics. When justice remains ambiguous, students may hesitate to resist, and this reluctance to challenge everyday discrimination only perpetuates the ambiguity.

“It is my religion and questioned it”

A glimpse of critical consciousness and symbolic violence in school: Arisha’s case

Arisha is a Dalit girl who studies in a school in Kathmandu. She struggled with the financial crisis of her family through childhood. She is 15 years old and in grade 9 and came to Kathmandu from a village at the age of 10, with her mother searching for work. Her mother also self-identified as uneducated, in a separate interview. Arisha demonstrates how a student's understanding of anti-discrimination, along with a glimpse of critical perception and willingness to act, can be easily stifled by adults who deny them the opportunity to exercise critical consciousness.

She expressed that she learned about caste in school when she was in grade 7 or 8, and at that time she did not know that she belonged to the so called “lower” caste. She felt indifferent when learning about caste in school, partly because there was no discussion about students' own identities. It wasn't until grade 8, when her mother spoke about it at home, that she became aware of her caste. Her experience highlights how caste education in schools can become disconnected from students' personal lives.

Religion can change the experiences of Dalit girls and often make non-Hindu students’ lives difficult in school due to symbolic violence. Arisha experienced symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000) based on upper-caste culture in school. Symbolic violence was experienced by the lack of recognition of Dalit

struggles and religious discrimination in school and was legitimised by the normalised use of corporal punishment. To the question of representation of her identity in school, she answered:

Yes, about the religion, the teacher was teaching us today. In the assembly today we were told to pray with the goddess's name of Hindu religion, but we are Christian, and we do not say it and are not allowed to do so. Bela is near to me during the assembly, she is also Christian, and she also did not say the prayer. A male teacher had noticed her not praying and he had asked her why she was not saying the words. She replied by saying that she is Christian. The male teacher then went to the office and had complained to the teachers. Then a female social teacher, she is our class teacher, asked Bela if she is the one who had not said the prayer during the assembly and Bela replied yes. Mam again asked why she had not said the prayer, but Bela didn't reply, so, I said that we are Christians, so we are not allowed to say Hindu prayers. But the teacher said that all religions are equal, and we should not discriminate religions. She continued saying so many things, but I felt bad about it. It is my religion and questioned it (Arisha, age 15, Kathmandu school).

Arisha questioned the school discourse of 'all religions are equal' which ironically treated Hindu and non-Hindu students differently and the latter was punished. Despite having a critical perspective

on this oppression, she struggled to articulate what was wrong to her teachers. When asked what should be done differently, she responded:

I felt in that moment why they were doing this to us. We have studied so many things in the bible. The female teacher also questioned us, 'what can your Jesus do? Why are hospitals made? Jesus cannot cure everybody'. During paush month, I had fallen sick. In Bagmati river, I had thrown stone. I do not know if it is because of that but I fell sick. I used to faint, and I used to speak without knowing. Then, we used to go to the church and pray a lot and I got cured. I believe very much in my god. But the teacher had questioned on my faith and my god. I felt really bad about it, and I felt like crying, thinking why she had to say these things. I wanted to explain so many things to the female teacher, my head was bowing down and tears fell down my cheeks (Arisha, age 15, Kathmandu school).

In her case, she was unable to express her opinion due to the presumed epistemic injustice from teachers, who were more likely to protect and justify their own perspectives rather than understanding the Dalit student' point of view. To the question of what kind of reaction, she would get if she shared her values with the teacher, she said: 'She [teacher] would probably say that I am not trying to say anything bad to you'. She also perceived that there is no space in school to talk about her religion. Her

experience of symbolic violence in school implies how Dalit students can serve as an object for teachers to question, rather than the subject experiencing inequalities to question teachers.

In contrast to Rita, Arisha clearly articulated her critical awareness, expressing her feelings and questioning the incident. In the interview, she stated her belief that it is wrong to ask students to recite Hindu prayers if they do not follow the Hindu religion. Her strong stance on questioning injustices may be linked to her curiosity about social discrimination and her belief in Christianity, which has been reinforced by intergenerational struggles with intersecting inequalities. Despite her mother's lack of education and the inadequate opportunities to learn about her Dalit identity in school, Arisha independently educated herself about caste-based discrimination by watching videos on the topic, saying, "I searched it and watched it by myself."

Caste can influence religious belief, and Arisha's intersecting challenges may have strengthened her religious convictions. Her belief in Christianity encompasses caste, class, and gender dimensions. She saw Christianity as providing a new worldview to resist the hegemonic culture that oppresses underprivileged castes. Arisha felt that Christianity guided her to "walk the right path", noting that it does not address caste issues directly. Additionally, from her Christian teachings, she learned that forming relationship at the young age is inappropriate. In this way, religion may have reshaped her understanding of caste and

influenced her sense of what is right as a Dalit girl, particularly in terms of resisting child marriage.

Class can also influence religious belief. Arisha' hampered education with sickness due to poverty and family problems strengthened her religious belief, as the only way to seek help:

Due to this [financial crisis of family and associated constant fights between parents] my studies got hampered. I cannot focus on my studies. It is still hard. Then I feel sick. My head hurts a lot after I fainted. Recently, I have not fainted but my head hurts. I overthink a lot. I think why these things happened to us. Why father left us. Mother says that because of these things, maybe I had fallen sick. I do not share with my mother because I think she might have difficult time thinking about her daughter (Arisha, age 15, Kathmandu school).

Poverty affects not only religious belief but also negatively impacts educational and parent-child relationships. Poverty can make parent-child relationships fragile, due the mother who has to work to survive, and the daughter's silence that comes from understanding her mother's struggle with caste-based discrimination, lack of education, poverty, and lack of family and social support.

Her experience highlights how intergenerational struggles with poverty, discrimination, and lack of support significantly impact Dalit girls' education and well-being. For Arisha, religion emerged as a form of resistance to intersecting challenges, offering an alternative worldview. However, her critical consciousness and desire for freedom of thought, belief, and religion were suppressed by teachers within a school system deeply rooted in Hindu culture and privileged-caste ideologies. Without proper mechanisms in place, Dalit girls may struggle to develop and exercise critical consciousness while continuing their education.

Discussion

This study examined the complexity of intersecting challenges and how critical consciousness can be developed and disrupted through educational experiences, drawing on case studies of the Dalit woman and the Dalit girls in Nepal. This study argues that education for critical consciousness is essential not only for higher education students but also for school students. Dalit girls, who may already develop an awareness of social inequalities, can have their critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) easily suppressed by adults in schools and society if adequate mechanisms are not in place.

This research adds to a previous study of Klees (2014) by highlighting the need for more attention to critical pedagogy. Klees (2014, p. 163) who argued the importance of critical pedagogy to provide students with opportunities to 'understand better how and

why people think differently' through discussions. However, this study revealed that teachers can prevent students from cultivating curiosity about inequalities and agency to challenge marginalisation in school in Nepal. The symbolic violence and the school's double standard of "all religions are equal" illustrate how teachers' roles become limited to imparting their own notions of "justice", which are disconnected from students' realities. This issue reflects Freire's critique of "banking" education, where the teacher's role is reduced to depositing knowledge into students, rather than engaging with their lived experiences.

“fill” the students with the contents of his narration - contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity (Freire, 1970, p.71)

Hence, the 'banking' concept of education can be applied to critically understand the delivery of curriculum on caste issues and the hidden curriculum of teacher-student interactions within school environments. This banking education potentially prevents students from marginalised backgrounds from exercising critical consciousness. Thus, it would be important to create a space for teachers as well as students to develop a structural understanding of caste, class, gender, religion, and other differences, instead of regarding inequality and exclusion in school as individual problems.

By highlighting the gap between Dalit women's national efforts to create opportunities in politics and higher education for future generations and the conflicting resistance and symbolic violence faced by school-age Dalit girls, this analysis underscores the necessity for higher education to foster and implement decolonised curricula and pedagogies. In addition, the government needs to ensure meaningful representation in politics including the education sector. These steps are crucial to create conditions for critical education.

The role of higher education in developing a decolonising curriculum and pedagogy should consider how to benefit both university students and school children, and how to cultivate critical consciousness through education. Giroux & Aronowitz (1993) differentiate between schooling and education. According to them, 'schooling' takes place within institutions that are related to the government through funding and certificate requirements. Institutions which function as schooling generally 'embody the legitimising ideologies of the dominant society' (Giroux & Aronowitz, 1993, p.127). On the other hand, 'education' is more broadly defined and can take place within and outside of established school institutions. Education, in their radical sense, represents 'a collectively produced set of experiences organised around issues and concerns that allow for a critical understanding of everyday oppression as well as the dynamics involved in constructing alternative political cultures' (Giroux & Aronowitz, 1993, p.127).

This broader notion of education is important in Nepal where the service delivery of the education system still faces issues with underrepresentation of students and teachers from Dalit communities, especially at higher levels of education such as secondary and higher education levels. Moreover, local organisations have crucial roles in supporting the learning of Dalit students by providing holistic support. Enhanced collaboration between the education system and local organisations at the national, local, and school levels could offer Dalit students and Dalit girls greater opportunities to learn about Dalit issues and resistance directly from Dalit communities.

Meaningful representation of Dalit people and Dalit women in the decision-making positions in the education system is also needed as a structural change. The issue of the lack of quality space for critical education for Dalit girls may not be solved without meaningful representation of Dalit people and Dalit women at decision making levels in politics including the education sector, because their political representation affects redistribution of resources and recognition of their history of resistance in school education. Epistemic justice requires not only the development of a decolonised curriculum but also the establishment of environments that foster critical education through structural change.

This study highlights the benefits of using intersectionality in analysing intersecting challenges in relation to caste, gender, and

class. Intersectional analysis allows one to conduct situated analysis (Yuval-Davis, 2015), considering not only how different social divisions intersect and influence each other, but also how these relationships can change by generations, spaces, and intersect with other social divisions and belief systems.

Conclusions

This study explored the complex interplay of gender, caste, and class challenges in education by comparing the experiences of a Dalit woman in higher education with those of Dalit girls in secondary education in Nepal. It argues that a critical perspective, one that sees oppression as transformable, is inherently intersectional. The critical perception varied between the case studies of the Dalit woman and the Dalit girls, and even among the Dalit girls within the same school in Kathmandu.

This study contributes to debates on postcolonial directions in education (Kapoor, 2017), especially the need to understand particular localities within the Global South (Madsen & Mählck, 2018), by providing intersectional analysis to examine complex layers of oppression in education. This study highlighted issues with representation in education and society, centring on the lived experiences of the Dalit woman and the Dalit girls from poor families. This paper adds to Klees (2014)'s focus on critical pedagogy by analysing barriers to critical consciousness and providing implications for conditions to enable critical education in Nepal.

Differences of critical consciousness among Dalit girls possibly occurred at the intersection between school, home, and the wider social structures, in which school and home are embedded. Ambiguous justice as a theme developed in this study, which when unpacked revealed how and why contradictions can occur between Dalit girls' consensus on critiquing caste-based discrimination (e.g. whether oppression is bad), and their differences in critical perception (e.g. whether oppression can be transformed). The case study children showed different types of perception including assimilation, confusion, and critical awareness, and demonstrated how school, home, and social factors possibly affected these differences and reproduced ambiguity for students.

Another sub-theme, in which of “school where ‘we’ become ‘they’”, showed how caste issues are often taught from the perspective of the privileged caste, and how symbolic violence was practised in school. Education can become a perpetrator and liberator of intersecting inequalities experienced by Dalit girls and women. However, the current school system may be more likely to perpetuate privileged-caste dominant ideologies through both actual and hidden curricula.

Contradictory perceptions among students highlights that some students may not be fully aware of the linkage between their culminated educational challenges and social inequalities, partly due to the lack of access to knowledge and people to share and mutually understand these challenges. In a current situation,

underprivileged children, such as Dalit girls from poor families, are often deprived of access to this critical knowledge to understand intersecting challenges, due to historical exclusion from education of their family and community, and only those who have a chance to access Dalit-focused resources may be able to develop critical knowledge. As a result, Dalit girls' agency to politicise personal struggles can become limited due to their intersecting challenges.

The findings of this study imply that meaningful representation defined by people living with intersecting inequalities, is required to decolonise curriculum. This has to occur not only in higher education, but also from lower levels of education. This occurs because the curriculum might not address caste issues in a critical, historical, and intersectional manner, nor does it create a safe environment for meaningful discussions. This gap persists partly due to a lack of substantial representation from Dalit and underprivileged communities in the curriculum design and delivery process. This study revealed that a Dalit woman perceives proportional representation of Dalit and marginalised women in decision-making as a critical issue in politics, and that Dalit girls experience symbolic violence in school. These issues with misrepresentation in education and politics can mutually influence each other and prevent the younger generations from gaining critical consciousness through education and becoming social actors for change.

Implications also include the need for quality ecologies for critical education from basic to higher education and meaningful

representations. Higher education should not only expand access for Dalit girls and marginalised groups but also focus on their experiences to produce critical insights into intersecting challenges in education and society. It is essential to develop a decolonised curriculum that addresses both higher education and school-level education. Such a curriculum should help students connect their lived experiences with broader social issues.

Intersectionality of critical consciousness infers that a one-size-fit-all approach to a decolonised curriculum may not be an effective strategy especially for students who face intersecting challenges, such as Dalit girls from poor families. Sensitivity is required, and the effectiveness of a decolonised curriculum to cultivate students' critical consciousness may depend on who develops it, who delivers it, how and where, as well as how consistent or contradictory its content is to students' home, school, and social environments. These sensitivities cannot be fully guaranteed without leveraging the knowledge and experiences of the Dalit people and the Dalit women themselves particularly. The government should provide more support to local organisations that focus on Dalit education. More importantly, meaningful representation should occur at a political level, including the education sector, to ensure representation of the Dalit people and the Dalit women at national, local, and school levels for long-term social transformation.

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WOMEN'S ABSENCE FROM THE PUBLIC SPHERE: GENDER INEQUALITY IN PORTUGUESE ARCHITECTURE SCHOOLS

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Abstract

In Portugal, public university architecture courses have originally been designed by men and for men. The female universe is left out of the curricula and women are kept away from the top positions in the academic hierarchy. Should the presence of women be regulated? Is it possible to change the course of history? The cases of Lisbon, Coimbra, and Porto inform this paper's discussion, which dwells on the analysis of official statistics on application grades for higher education (1st cycle), number of students placed in higher education (1st cycle), and number of teaching staff in higher education (all university levels). Statistics also inform the discussion of programmes of the most gendered sensitive curricular units, namely History and Theory of Architecture. The postcolonial perspective guided the discussion of findings with reference to how colonial legacies continue to influence educational systems. The headline findings show that, although academia is sensitive to gender equality, there is a gap between what is carried out in the curricula in general and the extra-curricular or occasional investigation, and research that is carried out outside universities. These findings nuance knowledge production with implications of social mobilization, and build a case for activist research that promotes gender equity and

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inclusivity. Recommendations include curricula revision, policy reform, intersectional pedagogical approaches and research practices, institutional commitment, and community engagement.

Keywords: architecture higher education studies, gender inequality, syllabuses, Portugal

Introduction

This article is about the involvement of women in Portuguese architecture schools. The text is divided into two complementary parts: the first analyses the representation of women in Portuguese academia; the second observes the integration of women authors in school curricula. Three public architecture teaching institutions – the University of Lisbon, the University of Coimbra, and the University of Porto – were used as case studies. A postcolonial perspective related to education underpinned the study which tackles the thematic areas (TA) identified in the Call for Papers by questioning “concepts and values” (TA1) like equality and representativeness; “working conditions” (TA2) as applied to women academic’s status within their professional path; “grey data areas” (TA3) as the case of the withdrawal of information derived from the difficulty of direct surveying researchers at various levels; and “misrepresentations, or under-representation” (TA4) that affects researchers since the early stages of their careers. In fact, architecture schools in Portugal are overrun with women; the profession tends to be half full. Why are they not represented in the same proportion in the public sphere? The premise that architecture remains a male-orientated discipline in

Portugal is discussed in this article. The subject is susceptible. In the past, there were very significant cases of gender bias in these schools, some of which were not publicly acknowledge. After the democratic revolution of 1974, which overthrew a conservative dictatorship and a colonial “empire”, schools underwent a curriculum adjustment and the female presence increased. The existence of documented social issues such as the “glass ceiling” (the difficulty for women to reach the top academic positions) and moral harassment (which includes the phenomenon of “intellectual extractivism”) (Laranjeiro et al., 2023) proliferated. Fifty years on, it is important to know what the current trend is. Nevertheless, in this field the most important relies on what is not yet understood, or what remains to be confirmed, proving that this issue has many nuances, and highlighting the importance of sources. This study was originally designed to be based on two types of sources: official statistics and direct surveys. Statistics were the ideal basis for supporting the findings. Thus, in the first phase of the research process, priority was given to the statistical base which, being very dispersed and uneven, required calculations and the systematisation of data in tables. It is also important to consider the complementary state of the art. In Portugal, there is little habit of making public introspective or self-assessments. The few generally have a flattering tendency (Paulino, 2014) or an agenda². In contexts like the US, which generally ‘digests’ its history with resolve, academia has already come a long way with the feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s, providing the rest of the world with a substrate for its own

² Cf. Portuguese Research Project “W@ARCH.PT - Arquitetas em Portugal: construção da visibilidade, 1942-1986”, <https://warch.iscsp.ulisboa.pt/>.

thinking. Accordingly, the premise that we live in a patriarchal society must be considered, recognising that women architects were, especially in the 20th century, 'in tow' of their husbands, that they adopted their surnames, that they were their husbands' former classmates at architecture school, that they worked in a pair, that they lived in their shadow from a very early age and until too late. Recognising all this, we also realise that the opposite – which would be to segregate women architects into a separate group solely to discuss their contributions – implies a distinction and excludes their achievements from mainstream architectural discourse. This is a current trend. Without taking either approach, this article offers data that can support a more informed analysis.

Background

Today, the presence and important influence that women have had on history of architecture is increasingly recognised. More and more women are being identified around the world who, trained in architecture or having worked in this field, have contributed to the development of the discipline's thought and practice. A role that was unjustly pushed aside by architectural handbooks in schools and which today is perhaps, and sometimes also unjustly, being overly celebrated in elite circles of academia, in a balance that is not always easy.

There is difficulty in accessing information about the female dimension in a discipline that is undeniably masculinised. But, in general, the statistics show a tendency of increase in their

representation in the profession. This is the case, for instance, of the UK, where, according to the Architects Registration Board,

[Women] representation is improving over time: in 2021, almost half the new architects joining the Register were female. More younger architects joining the Register are women³.

The absence of female authorship in curricula as well as in the profession requires a comprehensive reading of society; in this text, we acknowledge that architectural education in Portugal hasn't so far recognised and overcome the legacy of its colonial past, since it hasn't fostered, in general, an educational environment that is sufficiently inclusive and thoughtful in the eyes of a postcolonial education perspective. The absence of women substantiates a "phantom limb" in architecture disciplinary body; however, it is not reasonable to attribute the responsibility for this "invisibilization" to the male milieu. The photograph of Charlotte Perriand on her, Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret's chaise longue turning her face backwards: no one asked her to turn the head over, she had intended to do it herself (McLeod, 2005). We need to "face up" the fact that women themselves may not be feminists in the most general sense of the term.

³ Cf. "Architects today: analysis of the architects' profession 2022" in <https://arb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ARB-EDI-Report-April-2023.pdf>.



Figure. 1. The designer Charlotte Perriand in the famous *Chaise longue basculante B 306*, 1929, credited to Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret and Perriand.

As later described, in architectural education in Portugal, the following phenomenon is currently happening: around $\frac{3}{4}$ of those enrolled on the main courses are women, half of the graduates are women, just under half are professionals, and very few women make it to the top of their academic careers. This latter assertion we know empirically, in the absence of systematised statistical data⁴. It's a classic or non-inverted pyramid in terms of representation, in which the base, where the students are located, is larger than the peak. The trend of recent years is in favour of a greater presence of women in the public sphere, but this is still a long way off. In the case of architecture, it's worth focussing on History and Theory of architecture, and other alike, where traditionally there are more women teaching and researching. Although there is free and public access to official lists of course

⁴ At ISCTE-University Institute of Lisbon, a group of researchers led by Ana Vaz Milheiro and the author of this paper applied to set up a project entitled "Observatory on Architectural Education and Gender". This project was not accepted for funding as it was not considered a priority among other competitors.

syllabuses, the authorship of these lists is not in the public domain, therefore the assumption that the respective departments are the most responsible for the objectives, contents, and bibliography stands out. Thus, in practice, the interference of the male elite over $\frac{3}{4}$ of young women is potentially enormous. Both in numbers and substance. Although there is obviously no direct relationship, the likelihood of sexual and moral harassment is much higher in schools where there is a pattern of male tutors and young female students. The male hegemony in positions of power is possibly matched by a “silent majority” of women who don’t report it for fear of jeopardising their private and professional lives. And so, a vicious chain closes in on itself: the absence that generates inequality, which generates misunderstanding, that generates abuse of power, that sometimes generates reporting, which usually has no consequences.

The representation of women in Portuguese academia

Portugal is a country in the south of Europe, on the periphery of the old continent, and therefore where trends are less expressive and slower to arrive, for the better or for the worse. Portuguese society is typically western, with a Christian background and an essentially patriarchal family model. Since formally joining the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1986, the political and economic regime has been based on a generic neoliberalism which in the 1980s favoured the creation of higher education courses, particularly private ones. The nation is currently celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Portuguese revolution of 25 April 1974 which overthrew an oppressive, dictatorial political regime,

fascist-inspired, that belittled women. Among the reasons for its decline was a fierce critique of the colonial legacy and an unjustified resistance to the liberation wars in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea Bissau (1961-1974), countries that, along with other African territories, were the last of a supposed “empire” that was already in decline. The mania for grandeur of some parts of society was not matched by a trace of architectural avant-gardism: on the contrary, the state promoted the “Portuguese house”, which was supposed to stimulate the “God, country, family” ideal, of which the woman was a faithful builder. Despite the revolution, Portugal has remained a society with “gentle customs”, as it is commonly called, perhaps because it has a certain “fear of existing” (Gil, 2004) that barred the imposition of human rights. Gender inequalities in higher education have increasingly been the subject of public protests, especially by students, aimed at combating moral and sexual harassment and promoting inclusivity (e.g. Rosas, 2020). In academia, the problem of non-observance of good conduct is particularly serious since teaching staff and students live together in an educated environment with an educational vocation. Biases occur in different areas: some of these, like the humanities, have been more exposed (e.g. Cabrera, 2019; Santos, 2022; Laranjeiro et al., 2023); the major problem lies in the contexts where they occur without being denounced, investigated, and extinguished. Because, as recognisable, the problem of gender inequalities can be ongoing and silent in many contexts and relates to diverse patterns of behaviour that are often considered normal – since they are within the “norm”, which also occurs with endogamy, a

recurring practice in Portuguese higher education (DGEEC, 2023).

Findings

Table 1. Application grades (0-200) of those last placed by the general quota in public higher education architecture courses in 1998, 1st phase

Name of the establishment	Last-placed grade
Technical University of Lisbon – Faculty of Architecture	178,5
University of Coimbra – Faculty of Sciences and Technology	164,8
University of Porto – Faculty of Architecture	179,0

Source: DGES – Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, Portugal. Data collected from <https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt>

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Table 2. Application grades (0-200) of those last placed by the general quota in public higher education architecture courses between 2021 and 2023

Name of the establishment	2021		2022		2023	
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2
University of Porto – Faculty of Architecture	184,0	188,0	185,5	190,0	184,5	192,0

Source: DGES – Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, Portugal. Data collected from <https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt>

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One of the areas where inequalities in higher education would undoubtedly benefit from being studied in greater depth in Portugal is architecture. There are currently 16 courses, both public and private – which, for a country with around 10 million inhabitants, guarantees a good sample. Apart from Italy, Malta and Macedonia, Portugal is the country in the world with the most architects per inhabitant (Quirk, 2014). Looking at our case studies, we can see that they are unified by the fact that around $\frac{3}{4}$ of applicants to the programme are women (see Table 3).

Table 3. Number of female students (in %) placed in public higher education architecture courses between 2021 and 2023, phases 1 and 2

Name of the establishment	2021		2022		2023	
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 1	Phase 2
Technical University of Lisbon – Faculty of Architecture	58	93	67	63	68	100
University of Coimbra – Faculty of Sciences and Technology	64	82	59	90	74	67
University of Porto – Faculty of Architecture	72	50	70	50	73	75

Source: DGES – Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, Portugal. Data collected from <https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt>

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Since architecture is a historically and culturally male-centred discipline, how can this disparity be explained? We also know

that, according to INE (National Statistical Institute, Portugal)⁵, in 2019, 57.9% of Portugal's graduates were women, and that professional practice has become more equal in terms of gender distribution. By 2022, according to the Architects' Council of Europe, women in Portugal would account for 47% of the working population among architecture professionals (data compiled by the organisation itself)⁶. Despite this, back in 2006, Cabral warned that "the rate of feminisation of architecture has been (...) slower than that of other professions" (2006, p.31). If we consider mathematical equity, women should represent 50 per cent of the architectural working force. This decline between the first day of school and the day they leave the profession, which logically involves many dropouts along the way, is something to reflect on.

This study researched the percentage of women in the teaching staff of public and private architecture courses. It is said, read and commented that the representation of women decreases in relation to that of men as the teaching career progresses, but there are no found publicly available databases, studies or statistics that are specifically designed to verify this hypothesis, which is unfortunate, given that the three courses observed above have ambitious equality plans for non-discrimination that aim to promote greater gender inclusion (See note 12). The only alternative is to examine the overall figures, which show a trend. Table 4 looks at all higher education courses, university, and polytechnic, public and private, and observes an upward trend in

⁵ Infographic available online at https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpgid=ine_main&xpid=INE.

⁶ www.ace-cae.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/2022_Sector_Study_EN.pdf, p.94.

the total number of employees. In 2022/23, women represented around 46.6% of all teaching staff on average (18,741 in total), considering all levels.

Table 4. Total numbers of higher education teaching staff by academic year, and gender, 2020/21 to 2022/23

	Gender	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Total	WM	36 473	38 667	40 183
	W	16 705	17 869	18 741

Source: Statistics of the Human Resources of the Superior Education, DGEEC, Portugal. Data collected from <https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt>

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As for the proportion of members of the Council of Rectors of Portuguese Universities, the annual total of women is 25.0% in 2021; 31.3% in 2022; and the same 31.3% in 2023, in a positive progression, but far from the 46.6% represented by female teachers in the whole of higher education⁷. Here again, the top positions are mostly male, despite the growing representation of women.

As far as architecture is concerned, considering the globalised world we live in, it would be worth taking as a methodological benchmark the type of study carried out by the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture – ACSA (Chang, 2014). Its conclusion comes in the first sentence: “The farther up you look in the world of architecture, the fewer women you see.” These are

⁷ Cf.

https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_indicadores&indOcorrCod=0004198&contexto=bd&selTab=tab2

impressive numbers on the representation of women in the architectural academy. The webpage-report shows very explicit, well designed, and illustrative graphics which demonstrate, without any hesitation, an objective look at the under-representation of women in American institutions linked to architectural education, both the institutions themselves and those that award prizes, as well as professionals. Architecture schools and professional practice, although distinct today, have a common root. Their coexistence is inseparable; teaching is the key to reading the entire history and theory of architecture in modern times. Studying architecture culture necessarily means studying architecture school. Today, in Portugal, what mediates between the school and practice in legal terms is the Bar of Portuguese Architects. This institution is one of those responsible for the official accreditation of architecture courses and is therefore responsible for the approximately 27 000 architects practising in the country⁸, including all recent graduates from the courses recognised (7) and accredited (14) in 2005 by the Bar itself⁹. Its responsibility as a state body and representative of the sector is notable. In fulfilment of its role, the National Council ordered a study in March 2023 (António, 2023). And yet, in this study, there is no weighting of the teaching factor or differentiation between men and women. There are 71 questions and a variety of parameters, none of which are related to gender or the original training institution, let alone themes related to inclusion or

⁸ Cf. <https://arquitectos.pt/index.htm?no=101068>.

⁹

http://www.oasrn.org/pdf_upload/Lista%20de%20Cursos_Acreditados_Reconhecidos%20-%20Abr%202006.pdf.

discrimination. Is the binary separation of gender too sensitive to the current woke sensibility?

The integration of women in school curricula

Between the 1980s and the new millennium, Portugal remained an unequal and poor country, but this period was characterised by remarkable transformations and progress that brought it into line with the European Union's prosperity indexes. Contact with the outside world became broader and faster. Access to consumption (despite the arrival of the IMF in 1983) enabled the emergence of "fashions", a *media* explosion, and a generalised cultural euphoria. Architecture, particularly in the capital, was marked by the fleeting post-modernist movement, part of a broader "post-modern condition" (Lyotard, 1979). In Lisbon, things evolved enormously. With the 25th of April, the city's only architecture school definitively disconnected from its pedagogical duty and joined the political idea of mass training. Many teachers, especially those with the highest status, were not shy about acting in a machoist way, abusing the power they had under the community and society's look (Fernandes & Vilela, 2016, pp. 238-243). Pedagogically in ruins, stemming from the rottenness of the previous regime, the school never remade itself with the "window of opportunity" offered to it by the revolution (Silva, 2019). From a human, political and architectural point of view, confusion reigned between modern and post-modern values. In a context where there were more and more women students and teachers, between 1982 and 1986, the school hosted renowned male

architects and an unknown woman for four symposia about post-modernism (Silva, 2019, pp. 248-300). Lecturers included Michael Graves, Peter Eisenman, Pierluigi Nicolin, Franco Purini, Alessandro Mendini, Andreas Papadakis. Many more were invited; symptomatically, Robert Venturi and Aldo Rossi, later winners of the Pritzker Prize, declined the invitation. The woman, named Sharon Lee Ryder, was an American, a specialist in urban design, with an informative and structured speech, perhaps more conventional than the others. But stereotypically pragmatic (Boronat & Bella, 2022). These conferences were attended by young women and men students from other schools, such as the school in Porto, driven by the desire to have contact with leading figures whom they had only had contact with through periodicals.

There was a similar movement to the Soure Bienal, in the district of Coimbra. The first edition, in 1986, proposed a discussion on architecture and territorial design through initiatives such as workshops, a draft competition, and the presentation of communications (Jornal Arquitectos, 1986). In addition to the participants, architects from Lisbon, Coimbra and Porto came to Soure “just out of curiosity, to take a look at the atmosphere”¹⁰, perhaps attracted not only by the programme but also by the male figures who oversaw the event, including Alcino Soutinho, Alexandre Alves Costa, Álvaro Siza, Domingos Tavares and Sérgio Fernandez, who were rooted in the north; Gonçalo Byrne, Nuno Portas and Nuno Teotónio Pereira, originally from Lisbon; and Pierluigi Nicolin, who had also attended the Lisbon Symposia

¹⁰ José Bandeirinha to the author, 20.03.2024.

mentioned above. While there existed peer gender intermingling on a geographical level, there was no gender representativeness or “gender equity” as we envisage it today in these top figures, however it was in those terms that the architecture course at the University of Coimbra was successfully inaugurated in 1988.

The Porto school of architecture, the other school with a secular tradition besides Lisbon, evolved in a more linear way than its Lisbon counterpart, despite its internal debates. There are countless theses – academic and “informal” – that affirm a coherence of a unique pedagogical path in this period (Moniz, 2011; Fernandes, 2011; Paulino 2014), and after it was called into question, past the legacy of leading figures from the years before the revolution, and at a time when the school was digesting its first Pritzker, Álvaro Siza, awarded in 1992. Between February and April 1990, the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto presented the “Discourses on Architecture” conference cycle (which was revived in 2010 by Jorge Figueira, Carlos Machado, Eduardo Souto de Moura, João Pedro Serôdio, José Bernardo Távora, José Paulo dos Santos and Manuel Mendes) which “brought together a remarkable group of architects”, according to the Faculty itself¹¹, including Fernando Távora and Álvaro Siza; James Stirling, Giorgio Grassi and Rafael Moneo; Jacques Herzog, Peter Zumthor and David Chipperfield; Bernardo Secchi; Kenneth Frampton, in other words, ten men and no women. Three of these 10 architects would later win the Pritzker Prize: Álvaro Siza

¹¹ https://sigarra.up.pt/faup/pt/noticias_geral.ver_noticia?p_nr=739.

(1992), Jacques Herzog (2001, with Pierre de Meuron) and Peter Zumthor (2009).

It's worth focusing on the American Pritzker Prize when approaching the topic of women in architecture. The discussion of what is referred to by the public as "the Nobel of architecture" is not the aim of this second part of the text, but it is necessary to frame the critical feminist current in Portugal, which is distressed about the anachronistic framework that we can see in the teaching of History and Theory of the three schools under study. This approach is based on a wide range of Anglo-Saxon texts and ideas (Anthony & Gürel, 2006; Adams, 2012; Heynen, 2012) which argue that the Pritzker encourages the attitude of the architect-author who cultivates a public persona undermining architecture as an eminently collective practice, especially in a modernist perspective. The architects who visited Portugal before the turn of the millennium may not have been the most famous in the eyes of the *media*, but they were certainly important figures in the practice and theory of architecture. It could even be the case that the architect-person was a woman, like Zaha Hadid, who won her own Pritzker in 2004. And the most famous absentee, Denise Scott-Brown, partner, and wife of Robert Venturi (1991 laureate), who has had an important career as a teacher, frayed arguments about authorship in one of her most famous texts (Scott-Brown, 1989), in which she emphasises the authorship of architectural work, fuelling the "ideology" of the architect-as-an-author, in this case in pairs. Architect Lina Bo Bardi didn't win a Pritzker either, and she parted from the idea of belonging to an elite, but she is adored by the Brazilian academy. Giovanna Merli

did a collection on women as a research topic, noting that, “among the 9 049 architectural master’s and doctoral theses registered in the national theses database, the Portal da CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel, Brazil), 70 of these theses are dedicated to Lina Bo Bardi” (Merli, 2024) which is extraordinary for one person, let alone a woman. The type of monographic approach on women has also been the most chosen in the Portuguese context (Roxo, 2016; Carvalho, 2020) and, if we look at it in the Latin framework that includes South America, there are numerous associations that publicise women architects outside the mainstream¹². These use derivations of the word “invisible” (as a latent condition of women) that have become mandatory in the feminist lexicon to characterise and criticise a certain era (Cf. Laurino, 2018; Costa, 2023). But this activity can be limiting critical practice. For Willis (1998), a scholar on Australian women architects,

The invisibility of women architects in mainstream architectural history to date has been a product of how architectural history is determined and constructed, rather than a deliberate attempt to exclude the contribution of women architects. Specific and deliberate instances of the exclusion of women architects in architectural history have occurred but the motivation for such exclusion is unclear (p. 60).

¹² Cf. <https://www.archdaily.com/990570/pioneering-women-architects-from-latin-america-to-spain>.

Despite relevance in Willis' point, it is striking how such few women are on the syllabuses of the theoretical subjects in the case studies. According to the public programmes for History and Theory and alike subjects published online, we can see that, from the outset,

- in Lisbon, where one might think that, from what is known of its history, the teaching was more progressive and therefore featured more female authors, there are around 4 female authors in a total of 56 (spread over all years and all subjects, excluding electives), which represents 7.1%;
- in Coimbra, out of around 94 authors, 3 women were found, totalling 3.2%;
- in Porto, perhaps because the bibliography covers a greater number of authors, with a total of 130, the percentage of female authors rises to 8.5% with a total of 11 names.

The next table presents women authors (some of them practising architects), their birth and death dates, their dominant practice, and the bibliographic reference introduced in the syllabuses.

Table 5. Women authors in the bibliography of History and Theory alike curricular units in the year 2023/24

Name, (date of birthdate of death) Title of reference (Year)	Career (dominant activity)	Technical University of Lisbon - Faculty of Architecture	University of Coimbra – Faculty of Sciences and Technology	University of Porto – Faculty of Architecture
Bo Bardi, Lina (1914-1992) Stones Against Diamonds (2013)	Architect			

Colomina, Beatriz (1952-) X-Ray Architecture (2019) Privacy and Publicity. Modern Architecture as Mass Media (2000)	Architect, historian, curator, and theorist			
Jacobs, Jane (1916-2006) The death and life of the great American cities (1961)	Writer and political activist			
Jellicoe, Geoffrey Susan (1907-1986) The landscape of man (1975)	Plants woman, photographer, writer, and editor			
Latour, Alessandra Louis I. Kahn: Writings, Lectures, Interviews (Ed.) (1991)				
Milheiro, Ana Vaz (1968-) A construção do Brasil: Relações com a cultura arquitetónica portuguesa (2005)	Architect, Professor and researcher			
Molder, Maria Filomena (1950-) Rebuçados venezianos (2016)	Philosopher, Professor and researcher			
Nesbitt, Kate (1957-) Theorizing a new Agenda for Architecture - An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995 (1996)	Urbanist			
Paglia, Camille (1947-) Sex, Art and American Culture (1992)	Academic, social critic and feminist			
Schmid, Susanne W/ Dietmar Eberle & Margrit Hugentobler (eds.): A History of Collective Living (2024)				
Scott-Brown, Denise (1931-) Having Words (2009)	Architect, planner, writer and educator			
Silva, Raquel Henriques da (1952-) Lisboa Romântica. Urbanismo e arquitectura, 1777-1874 (1997) Lisboa de Frederico Ressano Garcia 1874-1909 (1989)	Historian and Professor			
Silvano, Filomena Antropologia do Espaço (2001)	Anthropologist and Professor			

Tostões, Ana (1959-) Cultura Arquitectónica e Tecnologia da Construção (2002) Os verdes anos na arquitectura portuguesa dos anos 50 (1994)	Architect, Professor and researcher			
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Source: Public syllabuses of the architecture courses. Data collected in <https://www.fa.ulisboa.pt> (University of Lisbon), <https://www.uc.pt/fctuc/darq> (University of Coimbra) and <https://sigarra.up.pt/faup/pt> (University of Porto); © Leonor Matos Silva

It is true that the disjointed data and figures are reductive. Architectural education in Portugal is based on an informal relationship with the students which often means that teachers don't update the official syllabuses, although they do provide specific bibliography as the school year progresses. The official lists are therefore not binding in terms of practice, which is of an experimental nature. The inclusion of female themes and authors also depends on the profile of the teachers, who may be more or rather less sensitive to the subject. Nevertheless, the difference between the current integrationist discourse (namely the official *plans for equality* of the three Universities¹³) and the curriculum in force is remarkable. And it contrasts with some extra-curricular events that, for some time now, have been, voluntarily or involuntarily in compensation, making up for this obvious and consequent gap. An initiative organised by the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Coimbra serves as an example. In 2010, under the coordination of Jorge Figueira, a group of students was challenged to draw up a profile of several significant

¹³ Lisbon: www.fa.ulisboa.pt/images/20232024/QUALIDADE/Plano_Igualdade_de_Género_Inclusao_e_não_Discriminacao_da_ULisboa.pdf; Coimbra: https://www.uc.pt/sustentabilidade/igualdade/PIEDUC2019_2023_web.pdf; Porto: https://www.up.pt/portal/documents/11/UP_Igualdade_-_Plano_para_a_Igualdade_de_Genero_da_Universidade_do_Porto.pdf.

women architects. This topic had not been tackled before in a pedagogical context in Portugal. Various women authors were grouped together as historical vs contemporary, practical vs theoretical and foreign vs Portuguese. These included, from oldest to youngest: Eileen Gray, Lilly Reich, Margarete Schutte-Lihotzky, Jane Drew, Ray Eames, Lina Bo Bardi, Maria José Marques da Silva, Minnette da Silva, Maria Carlota Quintanilha, Alison Smithson, Zaha Hadid, Beatriz Colomina, and Elizabeth Diller. The work resulted in the first edition of the journal *Joelho* (Figueira, 2010) on the theme of “Women in Architecture”, with texts by Jorge Figueira, Gonçalo Canto Moniz and Silvana Rubino, and a group of six students.

At around this time, Patrícia Pedrosa was writing a short but significant text for the 1st meeting of the EAHN-European Architectural History Network in Guimarães in 2010. Entitled “Being a female architect in Portugal: a short introduction to a long ride”, this essay proposed an initial summary of the history of women architects in Portugal (Pedrosa, 2010).

In the capital, some architects who had graduated from the Faculty of Architecture but were completely disconnected – especially since there is no known reference initiative promoted by the school about gender sensitive issues (Silva, 2024) – and within the framework of the Bar of Architects periodicals, developed the thematic magazine *Being a woman* (Dias & Milheiro, 2011). The publication was part of a series that proposed one theme per issue. The entire edition *Being a Woman* was designed and prepared to include women authors (while in the other issues

participation was mixed). As such, the preparation was given special attention by Ana Vaz Milheiro (Interim editor), who wrote the editorial and a research article on Maria Carlota Quintanilha. All the other themed sections – from the cartoon chronicle, usually signed by a man, to architectural projects carried out by women, as interviews, highlights, bibliographical reviews, and so on – were written by women. It was an issue made by women and dedicated to women where essays by Beatriz Colomina and Mary McLeod, “points of view” by Odete Santos and Paula Teixeira da Cruz, a statement by Inês Lobo, could be found.

These three events held between 2010 and 2011 were important milestones for their pioneering nature. Still, prior to these events is one of the most important initiatives with regard to the subject of this work: in 1993, a short film was made and presented on public television by Manuel Graça Dias entitled *Women Architects*¹⁴, in which he interviews Gabriela Tomé, Olga Quintanilha, Helena Roseta, Maria Manuel Godinho de Almeida, Luísa Pacheco Marques and Maria Soledade de Sousa – all of whom graduated from the Lisbon School of Architecture between the 70s and 90s. Graça Dias’s first statement (and perplexity) back in 1993 was precisely the disparity between the number of women enrolled in the faculties and the representation they have in the profession. This film is little referenced in the literature; but the 2010-11 initiatives above mentioned are known for the regularity with which they are referred to and taken as examples of the Portuguese state of the art since, for many years, nothing

¹⁴ The film is available in the archives of the Portuguese Radio and Television (RTP) online: <https://arquivos.rtp.pt/conteudos/arquitectura-e-decoracao/>.

of the kind was published in architecture periodicals or conference proceedings. In 2022, the main bedroom of Eileen Gray's house E.1027 would be reconstructed by architecture students at the Porto school through the engagement in workshops. The result would be exhibited in one of the school's interior spaces, a travelling exhibition that was later relocated to Lisbon¹⁵. Like Gray's house, other activities did happen in Portuguese architecture academy related to women architects between 1993 and 2024¹⁶; but they were only possible due to the pioneer events stated. What we can conclude from this long description of events is that there is a gap between what is carried out in the curriculum in general and the extra-curricular or occasional investigation, or even the research that is carried out outside universities. Can we assume that teaching is conservative or simply not up to date about women?

Conclusions

At a recent conference on modernist women architects¹⁷, a consensus was evident on two points: the difficulty of being a woman architect in a male-dominated world; and the difficulty of making women architects "visible". The two leading findings of this research are symptomatic of this tendency. Firstly, despite the high sensitivity towards gender equality within academia, there is a significant gap between theoretical commitments and

¹⁵ https://sigarra.up.pt/faup/pt/noticias_geral.ver_noticia?p_nr=67962.

¹⁶ Particularly the WomArchStruggle project, launched in 2023 (<https://www.womarchstruggle.com/>).

¹⁷ "Modernist women interior designers and artists: to deepen the reading of the different expressions of female creativity"; <https://iscidconference2024.wixsite.com/modernistwomen>.

practical implementations. This indicates that while policies and discourses may promote gender equality, actual practices and outcomes often fall short, revealing persistent “invisibilities” in the academic environment. Secondly, there is a disconnect between the representation of women in the formal curricula and the feminine investigations conducted outside the structured academic framework, whether occasional, extra-curricular, or independent research outside universities. This gap suggests that innovative, interdisciplinary, or non-traditional research on women architects might be the means to represent and support new formal academic programmes, pointing to the need for more inclusive and flexible research practices. While it would be unwise to rewrite or replace the classics, a bibliographical revision of the current curricula could be made introducing in the syllabuses texts and feminist women authors and their fundamental works, such as Gwendolyn Wright’s *Moralism and the Moral Home* (1980) or Dolores Hayden’s *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (1981). The introduction of gender studies in architecture in elective subjects would also be a complementary hypothesis: based on certain fundamentals, such as the theories and history of feminism and international law. These proposals are not so unattainable.

There are some important final considerations regarding the current state of discourse on gender equality in academia and society, particularly within the context of Portuguese society and the field of architecture. The pervasiveness of sexism across different social strata, including academic elite, often manifested in subtle forms such as gender bias in hiring, in the promotion and (under-)representation in curricula stands out. In summary,

this study enhances the literature by providing a focused examination of gender-specific challenges in architectural academia, advocating for curricular reforms that integrate postcolonial and feminist critiques which are essential to offer a comprehensive analysis of the systemic barriers faced by women in architecture. Specifically, it focuses on women in architecture, it highlights curriculum gaps, it offers empirical evidence on gender disparities, it recommends curricular reform while amplifying female voices in architecture. Finally, as a complementation of the existing literature, it intersects postcolonial and gender critiques.

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ENHANCING THE EMPLOYABILITY OF YOUNG RESEARCHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS THROUGH INTERSECTIONAL PRAXIS: A SCRUTINY OF PUBLICATION INDICES

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Abstract

In an ever-changing and uncertain world, it is challenging to tackle the multiple factors that influence the job prospects of young researchers as well as their employability enhancement opportunities. This academic research is intended to address the spill overs of gender-based gaps, and to unveil the manifestations of postcolonial dynamics within Higher Education, Research, and Innovation (HERI) institutions contexts. Specifically, by recognizing the key elements of intersectionality that assist in or hinder young researchers in (i) acquiring, keeping, and finding jobs; (ii) comprehending the intricate social encounters that are fortified by intersectional investigation to overcome distinct obstacles; and (iii) enhancing employability skills and qualities in

the educational setting intelligently and sustainably. The study is informed by ‘intersectional praxis’ for institutional transformation in HERI contexts. The paper’s discussion delves into ways how intersectionality is both a catalyst for employability enhancement and institutional excellence. Methodologically, the study comprised a qualitative scrutiny of how the concept of intersectionality featured in a selection of articles published 5-10 years earlier and scoped from established databases (WOS, SCOPUS). The findings support the discussion on the impact of postcolonial perspective(s) of young researchers on disrupting socio-political discourses, fostering further sustainable, nuanced, and comprehensive treatments of (anti) and (de)colonizing HERI contexts and experiences.

Keywords: Employability, gender equality, minorities, research and innovation.

Introduction

In this study, ‘employability’ is being understood as the capability of getting work and the ability to stay in that work (Cheng et al., 2022; Römogens et al., 2020). Postcolonial perspectives nuance the study of employability prospects of young researchers, who come European academic setting from foreign countries. The literature informs on challenges young researchers face when transitioning to becoming independent researchers in HERIs, such as obtaining financial support, publishing in prestigious academic journals, forming a team of researchers, and managing personal and professional responsibilities (Urbancikova & Umarchonov, 2024; Van Der Heijde & Van Der Heijden, 2006; Yorke, 2006). Despite the value of developing specific skills and increasing general

research experience, a key factor to employability is having access to opportunities on a level playing field with others. This means that young researchers who are in a minority group or who have circumstances that can be a detriment to their careers need to be adequately supported. From the early career stages, minority researchers are likely to face the same issues with job security and academic employment, albeit from a starting point of lower privilege (Wilton, 2014; Wilton, 2011).

To enhance the employability of young researchers, human resources is focusing on the importance of intersectionality (Saha et al., 2013). The intersectional approach proposed in this article will enhance the employability of young researchers from various aspects that are related to their lived discriminations and prejudices by others. At the same time, this approach will solve and prevent the matter in the early stages before it worsens. Enhancing the employability of a certain group of people is an early case to prevent and stop any form of discrimination and prejudice towards that group. It is a step to give them opportunities in acquiring a respectful life with a good income and the ability to compete with other groups (Mooney, 2016; McBride et al., 2016).

Additionally, this approach does not focus on eliminating the discriminations in certain communities, but it is more efficient in creating various work opportunities and a level playing field for those who face intersectional discrimination to prove their potential. This is supposed to reduce the social exclusion of certain groups and increase their living standards. Implications are very

promising with respect to creating a better life for those who were previously trapped in injustice (Grant & Zwi, 2011; Fredman, 2016; Cho et al., 2013). Even though the intersectionality approach is an effective solution to employment problems, it is not widely used in many countries that find this concept complicated and the method difficult to implement because intersectionality acknowledges the intricacies of a person's identity, rather than solely focusing on a single aspect of their minority status. Thus, it is necessary to mention that though intersectionality is a legal concept that aims to develop frameworks considering the various identities an individual holds, such as their race, gender, sexuality, age, and ability. Rather, it is more advantageous to acknowledge intersectionality within the domain of global human rights law and international humanitarian law, impacting women who belong to multiple minority groups due to their ethnicity or race (Davis, 2015). As a result, Kelly et al., (2021) also discovered this in their collaborative and multidisciplinary national health research initiative in Canada. The objective of their project was to incorporate an intersectional perspective into the area of knowledge translation. Concerning their discussions on intersectionality, the issues of unease with advocating for social justice, divisions within disciplines, and the use of token representation are highlighted. This is a challenging situation for young researchers who master this approach to prove their existence and improve their abilities in understanding and utilizing the intersectionality concept to get the work that they want (Woods et al., 2021).

Layout and research design

This article consists of four parts. The first part of the text focused on establishing the underlying theoretical proposal of how intersectionality actively empowers young researchers to participate in HERI's knowledge-based economic development strategy. Section two summarizes the impact and influence of intersectionality on the analysis of gender inequalities in HERIs. Additionally, it uncovers the existence of postcolonial interactions in these environments. Section three of this article aims to analyse the intersectionality perspectives framework through qualitative exploration and literature review. The objective is to enhance the prospects of young researchers in research institutions by focusing on employability. To achieve this, a qualitative approach was taken, and existing secondary data from WOS and SCOPUS-indexed documents were analysed thematically. As a result, the fourth section of the article delves deeper into the topic by examining the difficulties associated with how the importance of intersectionality can improve the job prospects of young researchers.

Young researchers' employability prospects

Based on the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 1996), the concept of knowledge economy (KE) or knowledge-based economy (KBE) refers to the shift

observed in developed countries towards increased dependence on knowledge, information, and skilled workforce. The presence of young researchers is vital in higher education institutions to facilitate the shift from a knowledge-based economy to a modern one. Frequently, in society especially, within HERIs, there is a demand to incorporate all individuals irrespective of caste, creed, and gender and ensure that none are disregarded, yet often lacking concrete instructions for those in positions of authority to fulfil this demand (Sue & Garth, 2019; Garcia & Zajicek, 2022; Andreas Eimer & Bohndick, 2023). Especially when it is about providing equal opportunity in a career for researchers in terms of employability, this grand idea is not exempt from repeating the same mistake of merely advocating the surface of equality without paying attention to the diverse backgrounds and conditions of the researchers that may contribute to a different ability in seizing career opportunities (Christoffersen, 2017; Christoffersen, 2018; Mügge et al., 2018). Thus, young researchers face several substantial obstacles (Aparicio & Rodríguez, 2023); more so because HERIs are experiencing increasing pressure to conform to neoliberal economic models, which is clear in the way they recruit and hire employees.

Intersectionality and postcolonial education studies

The notion of Intersectionality, which emerged from the study conducted by black feminist scholars, aims to shed light on the complexities of various overlapping forms of oppression and is

strongly linked to discrimination and disempowerment. The concept of 'intersectionality' was first introduced in 1989 by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, an American scholar specializing in critical race theory and law. However, the core concepts of intersectionality have remained resilient throughout the years. It is originally a concept in social sciences to allude to the ways that race, class, gender, and other attributes "intersect" with one another and shape individuals' experiences and social statuses (Hankivsky, 2014). It also examines the interaction of different forms or systems of oppression. Intersectionality enables us to observe social occurrences from various viewpoints. In today's social and political climate, community psychologists' understanding of 'Intersectionality' refers to the approaches, measures, and practical measures aimed at improving the opportunities for younger researchers to secure employment, as stated by several researchers. For example: Rice et al (2019) state that Intersectionality has become one of the most noteworthy contributions of feminism to social research in the past decade. It was initially formulated by African American feminist scholars and critical race theorists over thirty years ago with the aim of addressing the exclusion experienced in second-wave feminism. It considers the various factors of power and diversity that influence individuals' positions. Currently, intersectionality investigates how different social categories such as race, gender, disability, sexuality, and class are influenced and interconnected by wider historical and global factors like colonialism, neoliberalism, geopolitics, and cultural dynamics. This interaction ultimately

leads to changing power dynamics and systems of oppression (Hobbs & Rice, 2012; Hobbs & Rice, 2018). In contrast, Wright & Chan (2022) found in their research on how school counsellors can modify their methods of career counselling to suit the specific obstacles. In light of the economic decline caused by COVID-19, school counsellors can employ intersectionality theory as a guiding framework in supporting career development for marginalized populations. This demonstrates that the implementation of intersectional praxis significantly affects the employability skills of young researchers. The theory of intersectionality provides a framework for giving importance to the viewpoints and personal experiences of diverse young individuals, intending to bring about beneficial social progress through research, practical implementation, and policy development (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011).

Intersectionality is also about looking at the complex identity of the individual and seeing how it may affect their relative position of privilege or oppression. This includes indirect and visible differences across all spectrums of society. For young researchers, this can mean a gap between natural science researchers and social science researchers, or between researchers from developed countries and those from developing countries. This difference in identity and social sector will affect their relative opportunities, and failure to pinpoint this difference and create equal opportunities for all will only perpetuate the gap in status and employment opportunities between different types of researchers

(Moffitt et al., 2020). In the EU, intersectionality is already seen as an important and indispensable concept to address discrimination and increase equality across its member states and is taken into account in the Research Integrate Career Development and Mobility Scheme implemented by the European Commission (EC, 2016; EC, 2021). This approach is an umbrella for increasing employability opportunities for researchers in all fields and from all backgrounds to hopefully achieve a better career option in the research sector.

The approach of intersectionality discussed in this article aims to enhance the employable prospects of young researchers by addressing the multiple forms of discrimination and prejudice they face in their everyday lives. In this regard, La Barbera and Cruells López (2019) emphasized that the lack of knowledge among legal professionals is a significant barrier in effectively preventing multiple intersecting discriminations. Similarly, a number of researchers including Paola Uccellari (2008), have made the argument that legal reforms have the potential to facilitate the desired outcome by actively advocating for change on various fronts during the (relatively) early phases of researchers' professional journeys; thus before the situation deteriorates. Improving the employment prospects for a specific group of individuals, such as young researchers is an initial measure to prevent and halt any kind of bias and unfair treatment against that specific group (Mallett & Monteith, (2019); Moffitt et al., 2020). The prominence of doing this strategic aspect, i.e. aims to provide

them with chances to lead a dignified life, earn a decent income, and effectively compete with other communities. This method does not specifically aim to eradicate prejudices in specific groups, but instead prioritizes the creation of diverse employment prospects and an equal environment for individuals experiencing multiple forms of discrimination to demonstrate their abilities. The intention is to decrease the social isolation experienced by specific groups and improve their quality of life (Fredman, 2016; Cho et al., 2013; Dasgupta, 2022).

Enhancing the employability of young researchers has numerous positive impacts on the well-being of communities. This, in turn, promises to improve the lives of individuals who were previously victims of injustice. Although the intersectionality approach is considered a viable solution for addressing employment issues, it is not widely accepted in many countries, such as Central and Eastern European Countries, where it is viewed as a complex and challenging concept. In the past few years, there has been a focus on reviewing and improving equality laws and monitoring bodies in various European Union (EU) member states. Establish a 'sole equality entity' to oversee and regulate instances of discrimination. Although, the supranational community of the EU is highly diverse, making it a complex entity rather than a simple one. As noted by Kantola and Nousiainen (2009), in the UK, there is a robust policy against racial and ethnic discrimination, while in Spain, there is a strong policy promoting gender equality through proactive measures. The initiatives taken by member countries of

the EU had an impact on the progress of European affairs in countries outside the EU, like Norway and other Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs). Young researchers face a difficult situation when it comes to demonstrating their presence and enhancing their skills in comprehending and utilizing the concept of intersectionality to attain their desired employment. According to the 2019 publication by Duke University Press, *Intersectionality is a Critical Social Theory* that examines the importance of knowledge from young researchers because the employable competence of young researchers plays a crucial part in opposing political control (Collins, et al., 2021; Collins, 2019; Collins, 2015; Mallett & Monteith, 2019).

On the other hand, it is necessary to mention that intersectionality can be better grasped as a way of thinking or analysing a situation. The intersectional analysis involves the capability to acknowledge and comprehend the diverse overlapping identities and oppressive systems that individuals might encounter. The most crucial aspect of intersectional analysis is not just the simple employment of the term ‘intersectionality’. Instead, the emphasis is on comprehending the importance and consequences of this idea.

To deeply examine this concept of how intersectionality helps institutions to take initiative for the varying experiences of their employees and to build an inclusive workplace, it is crucial to consider the various aspects of intersectionality. As intersectionality is founded on several fundamental principles.

Such as *individual experiences and identities cannot be fully understood or explained by considering only one aspect, like gender, race, or economic standing. Also, the lives of individuals are intricate and have various aspects; whilst various factors and social dynamics working in conjunction shape the lived experiences of individuals* (Choo & Ferree, 2010). This implies analysing the usage of the term, in any form or situation, across different fields and areas of study, while placing importance on adopting an inclusive perspective that acknowledges various features of intersectionality. Consequently, it is important to note that intersectionality examines how race, gender, disability, sexuality, class, age, and other social categories are influenced and connected through factors like colonialism, neoliberalism, geopolitics, and cultural arrangements.

According to Rice and Friedman, (2019), the intersectionality approach ultimately leads to changing dynamics of power and oppression. Consequently, it is important to relate the postcolonial critique of knowledge relations, which, arguably, can be found at the root of HERIs biggest challenge when it comes to equitably fostering enhanced employability prospects. In 2011, and in 2014 researcher Hudzik highlighted that the current difficulties faced by higher educational institutions have led to a growing demand for "comprehensive internationalization". This specifically involves understanding and analyzing the various ways and reasons behind internationalization at the institutional level (Hudzik, 2011; Hudzik, 2014; Thielsch, 2020; Van den Hende et al., 2023).

Failing to acknowledge this difference will put the more privileged researchers in a better position than their disadvantaged counterparts, thus still widening the gap of opportunity between them. When it comes to employability opportunities for researchers, particularly newly graduate student researchers, they are facing diverse impetus and conditions that come from their background and overlapping identity that will eventually affect their chances in obtaining career opportunities (Cabral-Gouveia et al., 2023).

Methodology

In this study, intersectional praxis is being deployed to scrutinize to what extent intersectionality can be a facilitator of employability enhancement and institutional excellence. To this end, the research team conducted (primarily qualitative) content and thematic analysis of metadata concerning publications that deployed the intersectional perspective extracted from select databases. These included WOS, SCOPUS, EBSCO, ERIH PLUS, Index Islamicus, Index Copernicus, DOAJ, and Google Scholar. Sampling attempted scoping a vast interdisciplinary database to encompass a wide array of publications in both humanities and sciences. Additionally, the analysis factored in the areas of study of the said publications, and the respective research topics and research questions.

The sampling of papers, research topics, and research questions scoped the keywords *intersectionality and employability, intersectionality in HERIs, and intersectionality potential for young researchers' career development* and related. The search scoped the past 5-10 years of global and European trends in publication on the matters under study.

Results

Table 1 presents the main outcomes of the analysis:

Table 1: Intersectionality in indexed publications

Areas of study	Number of articles featured in the select databases¹	Research topics	Research questions
Intersectionality potential for young researchers <i>examples of publications:</i> <i>Hankivsky, 2014,</i> <i>Moller et al., 2018,</i> <i>Moffitt et al., 2020</i>	20 (approx.)	Identifying the essential factors intersectionality; Supporting young researchers with new employment	Intersectionality aligning institutional excellence and strategic gender equality (i.e., how to tackle the challenges?)
Intersectionality in HERIs <i>examples of publications:</i> <i>Sue & Garth, 2019,</i> <i>Garcia & Zajicek, 2022,</i> <i>Andreas Eimer & Bohndick, 2023</i>	26 (approx.)	Understanding the complex social experiences underpinned by intersectional exploration to overcome the unique barriers	Importance of intersectional praxis to improve young researchers' employability and institutional excellence (i.e., why is it important to assess institutional excellence for young researchers' career development?)

¹ WOS, SCOPUS, EBSCO, ERIH PLUS, Index Islamicus, Index Copernicus, and DOAJ, Google Scholar.

<p>Conceptualization of intersectionality and gender balance in HERI</p> <p><i>examples of publications:</i> <i>Choo and Ferree, 2010,</i> <i>Hankivsky, 2014,</i> <i>Petersen et al., 2023</i></p>	<p>15 (approx.)</p>	<p>Intersectionality's role in HERIs' gender balance strategies</p>	<p>Intersectionality's key principles enable perspectives, (i.e., what are the main purposes of doing this research?)</p>
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The findings presented in Table 1 shed light on how, why, and which publications are specifically deploying intersectional perspectives. It transpires that intersectionality is commonly used to explain the impact of various types of discrimination, and as a necessity to implement policy changes to address the inequalities that arise from the combination of different forms of oppression. Regarding the employability of young researchers, the findings flag the relevance given to developing specific skills and gaining general research experience - these play a crucial role in improving chances of being hired. This indicates that it is important to provide sufficient support to young researchers who belong to minority groups or face challenges that may hinder their career advancement. Hence, this study revealed important insights that highlight the urgency to tackle these concerns about the employability and job stability of young researchers.

The significance of employability lies in the young researcher's capability to participate in the workforce. The significance of intersectionality across the scoped articles is illustrated in the Figures 1 and 2, which demonstrate important elements, namely:

- Intersectionality for enhancing young researchers' employability;
- Intersectionality potential for Young Researchers;
- Intersectionality in HERIs; and
- Intersectionality & Gender Balance in HERIs

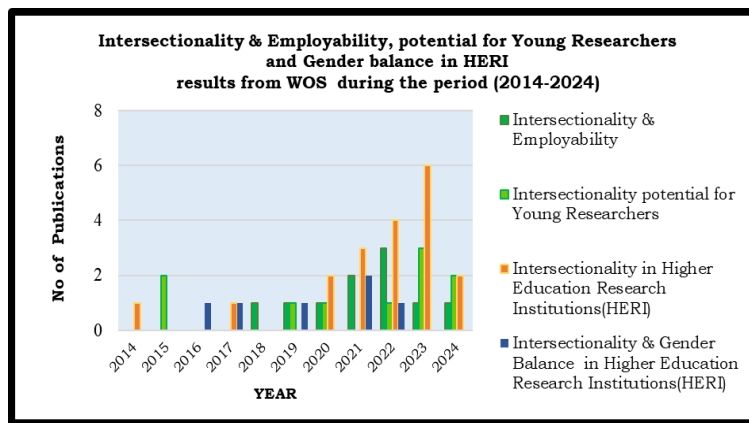


Figure 1. Citations 2014-2024, WOS

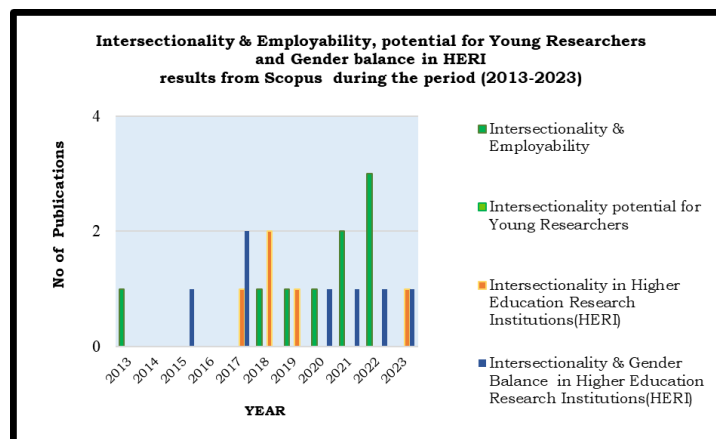


Figure 2. Citations 2013-2023, Scopus

To correlate with the consequences of young researchers' employability capability enhancement, researcher Thapa (2024) mentioned that Work-based Learning (WBL) is an education

strategy that increases participation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) because there is also support for the young researchers to enhance their employability and upgrading their skills to meet the challenges of the competitive market. Correspondingly, Humbert et al, (2024) emphasized that it is necessary to create a database of knowledge and ensure the safety of universities and research organizations. Hence, the UniSAFE initiative in 2024 recognizes the significance of intersectionality. This recognition is essential to improve employability, among other targeted outcomes, such as effectively addressing and eliminating gender-based violence (Lut et al., 2023). Employability, the potential for youthful researchers, and achieving gender equality in research institutions reflect the influence of postcolonial perspectives on the younger generation. In this regard, Madsen and Mählck (2018), emphasized that higher education institutions need to transform and adapt, potentially leading to neo-colonialism, dependence, and more intense globalization. It is also crucial to examine how existing knowledge systems and practices can be questioned, allowing for equal intellectual opportunities for young researchers.

Discussion

The findings show intersectional praxis has a strategic impact on HERIs' knowledge development, knowledge spill over, and competitiveness. These foster young researchers' employability and competitiveness through knowledge-based economic

development (Ceschi et al., 202; Saha et al., 2023). Intersectionality and employability enhancement play a crucial role due to their key enabling inspirations that enable HERIs and young researchers to meet the challenges of institutional sustainable development by ensuring gender equality as well as social benefits. Kim & Kim (2021) also share their viewpoint on the challenges faced by junior female academics (JFAs) in HERI for navigating their academic careers within a neoliberal framework and in an environment influenced by patriarchal ideals.

Furthermore, intersectional praxis fosters HERI initiatives that give voice to the diverse backgrounds of research / academic employees to build an inclusive workplace that substantiates the employable capability of the young researcher. Hence Duarte et al, (2023) remarked that intersectionality supports the alignment of institutional excellence to strategic gender equality policy that influences institutional focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and affects all parts of higher education management.

Additionally, intersectional praxis illuminates differences between equity and equality, thus informing the problematization of different forms of oppression and inequality that reinforce one another; whilst supporting the evidence-based discernment of various interacting social factors and dimensions to the benefit of human resources strategies developed and implemented to sustainably counter economic, social, and industrial turbulence (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Duarte et al., 2023).

Conclusions and recommendations

The headline finding of the study is that an alignment between intersectionality and institutional excellence, as well as strategic gender equality policies, enables organizations to better understand the distinction between equity and equality. Additionally, it enables researchers to examine how various forms of oppression and inequality intersect, reinforcing one another. By shedding light on the intricate interplay of social factors and different dimensions of human resources strategies, intersectionality equips institutions to effectively confront the challenges posed by economic, social, and industrial turbulence, and to ensure long-term sustainability. Thus, intersectionality assists institutions in proactively addressing the diverse experiences of their employees and fostering a sense of inclusivity within the workplace.

This research adds to the current knowledge by using the idea of intersectionality in higher education and research institutions (HERIs), and acknowledging the possibility of intersectional practices leading to positive changes in HERIs, especially in terms of improving the job opportunities for young researchers.

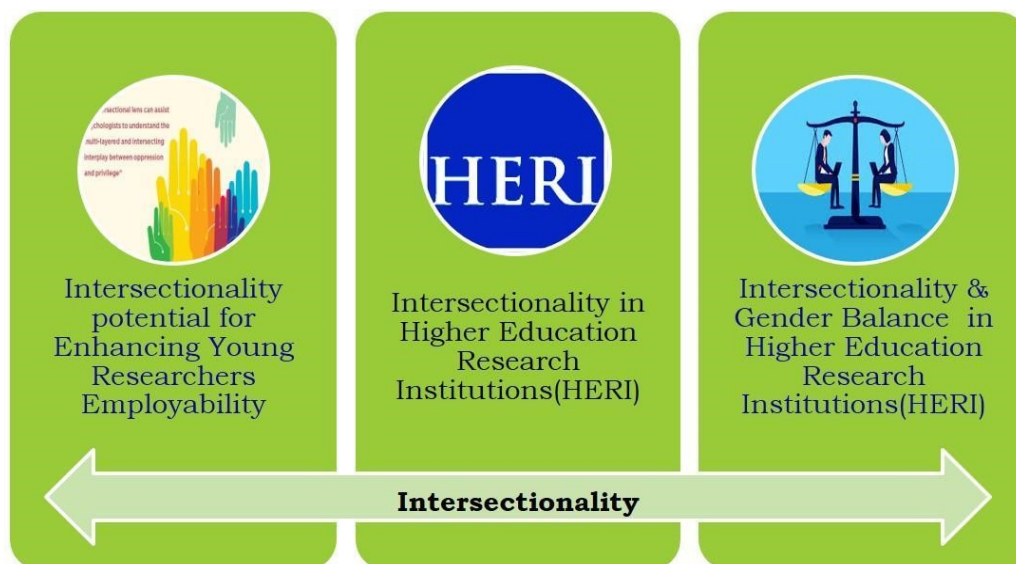
The study also provided a conceptual framework that integrates the practical knowledge and deductive reasoning acquired through

an intersectional approach to enhance the employability skills of young researchers.

In this article, the concept of intersectionality focuses on recognizing, comprehending, and addressing structural inequality within an organization with due consideration of diverse identities. However, its discussion is somewhat restricted in scope. To emphasize the significance of considering the intersectionality of practical, academic, and social perspectives, it is important to align human resources strategies to prioritize the voices and experiences of young people to bring about transformative social change. In this regard, the postcolonial perspective is useful to mention that emerged from the discussion section's insights on how the impact of the postcolonial perspective on intersectionality and young researchers' employability opens up new avenues for approaching globalization, with the promotion of new approaches and changes, which combines institutional excellence and strategic gender equality policies to promote inclusivity.

Despite limitations because the scope of this discussion is only partially focused on exploring the different approaches to intersectionality, considering the practical, academic, and social perspectives to align employability strategies of higher education institutions were limited in developing the research design. Utilizing the call for special issues led the research team to go through this current idea that education might help a country to attain a higher league in the global hierarchy and thus research

and scholars coming from the third world will be critical to the process. On the other hand, it also important that research at 'European' universities will be geared towards understanding and solving many 'third-world issues' and today's third-world researchers will be directly involved in this process. The validity of the explained research design rests on the following premises, inferred from existing literature and knowledge base, and synthesized as follows:



Recommendations include further research to explore the potential of intersectionality in understanding and shed light on the different social factors and dimensions of human resources strategies. Transformative integration of intersectional praxis for enhanced institutional excellence involves monitoring and evaluation and quality-assuring, strategic gender equality policies, which are beneficial for enabling young researchers to effectively confront economic, social, and industrial disruptions and sustainably maintain their career progress.

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