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Surviving carelessness and disposability in British higher education: the gendered and racialised emotional labours of academic migration

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I examine emotional labour mechanisms for navigating and surviving the policing and disciplining of migrant subjectivities in the internationalised context of British Higher Education. I draw on my pedagogical practices, relationships with staff and students, research and leadership in my trajectory to Professorship in the UK and turn to the affective to expose gendered and racialised othering of migrant academics engaging in transformational and authentic practices of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), involving change agency and responsibility praxis against institutional and social injustices. Such practices include the emotional labour of managing the white classroom and doing social justice; speaking out, doing caring leadership and feminist anti-racial solidarity and dealing with exhaustion; and the emotional labour of "excellence" for managing policing of the migrant body. The narratives outlined in this paper illustrate the entanglement of power, emotions and irresponsibility and a complete absence of an ethic of care towards underprivileged groups and trespassing bodies, rendering them disposable in educational institutions where racism is prevalent alongside a non-performative EDI rhetoric. Although practicing a political ethic of care has the potential to challenge neo-liberalised HE and disrupt normative whiteness it can also inadvertently perpetuate the instrumentalisation of feminised and racialised labours of migrant academics for signifying EDI. Moreover, navigating biopower and resisting illegitimisation in Higher Education (HE), might sometimes require alignment with careless gendered labours, including over-commitment, presenteeism and complaining.

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Introduction

This reflexive and conceptual paper outlines three narratives of emotional labour aiming to unravel the gendered and racialised care and carelessness underpinning the

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disposability of migrant life in UK higher education (HE) institutions. I draw on relational and political conceptualizations of care (Tronto, 2013) and a translocational lens to intersectional difference and power (Anthias, 2021) to interrogate the policing and disciplining of foreign bodies (Foucault, 1975–76/2003; Foucault, 1977–78/2007) in higher education spaces across gendered and racial/ethnic, nationality categories. This affective and intersectional approach to academic migration can enrich our understanding of gendered exclusions and racism in the internationalised context of higher education and contribute to knowledge about the entanglements of power/privilege, emotions and irresponsibility in the neo-liberalised university. I use the terms "migrant" and "foreigner" interchangeably in this paper to refer to academics born outside the UK. I use "minoritised" academics to refer to all racialised, classed and gendered academics experiencing higher education as an outsider from within (Hill-Collins, 1986), thus acknowledging the lack of homogeneity and universalism in these experiences.

Emotions and emotional labour in neo-liberalised higher education

The commercialisation and massification of HE have transformed research, teaching and academic subjectivities through the operation of corporate culture and market values focusing on student/customer satisfaction, measures of control of surveillance for academics and the exploitation of temporary, precarious, and often gendered and racialised labour (Adalberto & Rubén, 2021; Bartos & Ives, 2019; Constanti & Gibbs, 2004). Neo-liberalising processes have pervaded every aspect of academic life, corroding its character through individualism, stiff competition, dehumanisation, disembodiment and exacerbation of gender and other inequalities (Sümer & Eslen-Ziya, 2023; Tsouroufli, 2012, 2023).

Within neo-liberalised HE, it is often women who engage in caring for students, while men are more supported with research and publishing (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Guarino & Borden, 2017). Women are usually caught up in "academic housework" (Heijstra et al., 2017), and their emotional labour in sustaining the therapeutic culture of HE, doing gendered service work and community building remains unrecognised (Burford et al., 2020; Steinberg & Figart, 1999). Whilst emotional labour is not necessarily gender specific, the overwhelming majority of studies show that women not only provide more emotional labour but they are subject to expectations that they will do so (Hochschild, 1983; Leathwood & Read, 2008; Meier et al., 2006).

Although there is some interesting work around the emotional labour of female, minoritised staff teaching gender and race in higher education (Cardona, 2020; Koster, 2011; Tunguz, 2016), academics remain a relatively under-researched group in terms of emotional labour. Moreover, an affective approach is largely absent from explorations of migrant academic identities and international students (Tsouroufli, 2015) and investigations across academic groups of different grades and employment statuses within British HE. Pultz and Dupret (2024) found substantial differences in the emotional labour invested by staff in precarious positions and academics with tenure.

There is an increasing interest in decolonial and intersectional approaches to academic migration, but the turn to the affective (Hey & Leathwood, 2009), and a subjective understanding of the challenging conditions of international employment remains slow. Moving from discourses of brain drain and gain, to a focus on the body (Metcalfe, 2017) and the role of emotional labour in navigating racist violence and the modern

global/colonial imaginary (Stein & Andreotti, 2017) in HE is essential in engaging with more nuanced theorisations of intersecting identities of transnational subjects and producing sophisticated understandings of the gendered and racialised implications of their movements across interconnected worlds with non-fixed boundaries (Braidotti, 2011).

Postcolonial and critical scholars have argued in favour of perspectives that address the power asymmetries between Global South and North, histories of imperialism (Motsa, 2017), epistemic injustices (Walker, 2018) and the colonial baggage of transnational mobility and migration (Burford et al., 2021) in an attempt to de-romanticise internationalisation and explore its disturbances and inequities. Stein and Andreotti (2017) draw on Castoriadis' concept of social imaginary (1987) to explore histories of violence in US HE and the impossibility of internationalisation to instil an authentic culture and practice of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in neo-liberal HE. Treated as a colonial, racist and heteropatriarchal gender matrix of power and exploitation, the modern global/colonial imaginary materially and symbolically orders social meanings and relations that position the West and Western/European reason as the centre and the capitalist market and individualism as the best modes of social, economic, and political organisation (Chakravartty & Silva, 2012; Mignolo, 2011). Tsouroufli (2023) has critiqued unproblematic notions of the West and Europe as homogenous and has drawn attention to economic and intellectual forms of intra-European imperialism and neo-colonialism, which have generated new forms of racism (neo-racisms) and sparked constructions of the other (e.g. Mediterranean, Central or Eastern European) as honorary or second-class European subjects/citizens (Brah, 1996) and migrant academics in the UK.

Focusing on the emotional labour of migrant women and the overburdening labour that they are required to do in order to perform as legitimate academic actors is essential in exposing the operation of white-British hetero-patriarchy and the processes through which migrant women's bodies are disciplined and forced to learn their "place" in the academy. Interrogating the emotionality and intersectionality of migrant labours can provide nuanced understandings of higher education inequalities and issues of belonging and othering that unfortunately are addressed in a disembodied way through HE EDI training and policies, and with little if any attention to privileged irresponsibility underpinning the operationalisation of neo-liberalised equality and the commodification of migrant and minoritised labour to signify EDI in HE spaces. In this reflexive paper, I outline three narratives of emotional labour in navigating gendered racism in my career in HE. I focus on the gendered and racialised labour I invested in managing my negative emotions generated by student and staff performances of whiteness; managing the negative emotions of students and colleagues generated by my critical/feminist/anti-racist teaching and leadership praxis; dealing with exhaustion from supporting other migrant and minoritised staff and students through solidarity networks; and performing excellence to counteract illegitimisation and disposability of my migrant academic/change agent subjectivities, practicing a political ethic of care and disrupting normative HE diversity discourses (Ahmed & Swan, 2006).

In this paper, I draw on Hochschild's idea of emotional labour *as* "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7) by service workers. Academic institutions can be conceptualised as service providers, where teaching staff are expected to perform increased emotional labour within the intensified environment of HE in order to adhere to the neo-liberalised agenda and achieve

customer/student satisfaction and profit for management (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004). I also draw on Ahmed's work on the sociality and political nature of emotions to investigate how emotions are not simply things that happen to people but are in motion and circulated from both the inside out and the outside in and infiltrated with power (Ahmed, 2015). I unravel the emotional work on the migrant self, on others and on the migrant self by others in HE, within a framework that treats emotions as discourses implicated in the generation and (re)-configuration of identities (Tsouroufli, 2012, 2015) and as affective currencies (Ahmed, 2004, 2014a, 2015) that dictate the legitimacy of certain academic subjectivities and confer privilege upon them while disadvantaging those lacking currency and value from neo-liberal institutions. Such an approach can illuminate the complexity of the emotionality of teaching, researching and leading in HE institutions, where the imposition of feeling rules and sanctions of certain emotions by management and students/clients might impact on academics and academic careers differently. For many migrant and minoritised academics whose marginalised identities and caring practices are entangled with the politics of teaching, research and academic citizenship in the neo-liberalised University, gendered and racialised emotional labours might lead to estrangement and alienation and seriously damage their personal and professional lives.

To interrogate the intersections among power, emotion, and critical praxis in HE and challenge EDI practices that do not actually challenge inequalities, I engage with the concept of privileged irresponsibility (Tronto, 1990), a term coined by Tronto in her address entitled "Chilly Racists" to the American Political Science Association, to refer to the ways in which the majority group fails to acknowledge the exercise of power, thus maintaining their taken-for-granted positions of privilege. Located within Tronto's political ethics of care framework (Tronto, 1993) my concern with emotions and emotional labours of academic migration, aims to expose how power and emotion operate through irresponsibility and how critical, feminist and anti-racist pedagogy and action can address hate, aggression and careless practices against "others and othered" academics often concealed and legitimised in academic life (Zembylas, 2007, 2017; Zembylas et al., 2014). Care is treated here as relational but also political (Tronto, 2013) and involves intellectual, emotional work and action aspiring to democratic life and repairing the world, thus a responsibility for all, rather than the terrain of women only (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984, 2013).

Theoretical framework, epistemological stance and methodology

The theoretical informed analysis presented in this paper is inspired by Foucauldian conceptualisations of biopower (Foucault, 1977–1978/2007). Initially observed in relation to European colonisation of the continents at the start of modernity, biopower acted as a state apparatus of security (Foucault, 1975–1976/2003, p. 257) and protection/purification of the white race. I set out to explore how biopower operates within internationalised British HE to regulate and control migrant bodies that are seen to be corroding – alongside other minoritised bodies – whiteness and threatening their normative and privileged status, thus making everyday racism, violence and disposability of migrant life, credible.

I focus on whiteness as a mode of being (Ahmed, 2007) and its operation as a technology of power through gendered and racialised norms about who is a legitimate teacher

and scholar in British higher education. I am interested in forms of domination that are not necessarily tied to white and/or feminine/masculine student bodies but the privileges, social locations and emotions implicated in the marginalisation of migrant academics. These emotions I contend may be weaponised to do whiteness or associate with whiteness in the neo-colonial, internationalised context of British higher education, aiming to reassert power and reclaim space occupied by migrant academics now. Such intersectional privileges are reiterated though hegemonic performances of student and staff voices, which encapsulate a shared repertoire about credibility and superiority inherent in a British imperial past, colonial legacy and neo-liberal present.

I outline three narratives of emotional labour to illustrate the cycle of fighting back and recovering from racism:

(1) The emotional labour of managing the white classroom and doing social justice
(2) The emotional labour of speaking out, doing caring leadership and feminist anti-racial solidarity: Dealing with exhaustion
(3) The emotional labour of "excellence": Managing policing and the disposability of the migrant body

Narratives can "open valuable windows into the emotional land, the symbolic lives of organization" (Gabriel, 1998, p. 135). Burke and Jackson (2007, p. 3) argue that: "all academic work and research tells a story". In this way the narrative becomes an epistemological category through which we can know and make sense of the world, of organisational life (Frost et al., 2000). However, narratives are not always fully reliable in point of fact – the interests of the narrator and the social context shape them, and we make sense of the past in the light of subsequent events (Portelli, 2001). Therefore, in what follows I share some reflections on the positionality of the narrator and the social context in which she has attempted to make sense of the past.

The narratives outlined in this paper are written from a special standpoint on life, academic identity and society: the standpoint of the transnational, international and foreign, Southern European female academic. These three categories/identities are characterised by an intersectional impact of disadvantage and privilege (Tatli & Ozbilgin, 2012), belonging and othering processes and experiences (Tsouroufli, 2012, 2015) and configurations of gender, race/ethnicity and care (Tsouroufli, 2023) shaped by socio-political and spatio-temporal particularities, movements and the interdependency of local, institutional and transnational lives. Thus my gendered and ethnicised/racialised labour of care in the family and the institution are treated as interconnected places in the inequality-making process and othering experiences of migration in British HE.

Various types of violence have marked my trajectory as a transnational/international and foreign woman since I came to the UK in 1996 and my mobility has been enmeshed with possibilities and challenges. White in skin colour but not white enough; non-native speaker of English, and of a cultural heritage and nationality seen as second-class European and inferior to "Western" identities (Andrikopoulos, 2023; Tsouroufli, 2023). I have always been seen to suffer from baggage of deficit rather than having multiple skills (e.g. speaking foreign languages and understanding different cultures) that have allowed me to build sustained international partnerships and research capital. The pathologisation of foreigners as the subtext of internationalisation discourses alongside

capitalist, neo-liberal and neo-colonial exploitation of migrant labour constituted recognition of my migrant academic identity as challenging and despite certain privileges (free movement) I enjoyed as a European before Brexit, I never felt welcome or included as equal. Like many other Europeans, being racialised as white upon arrival to the UK led to misrecognitions and alienations (Andrikopoulos, 2023), often trivialised or invisibilised in a context where colonialism and imperialism are usually understood only in relation to British domination, and white privilege is often decontextualised and treated as innate to anyone with white skin.

Occupying multiple epistemic worlds and socio-political worlds has not always meant unlimited or unrestricted movement between physical spaces but rather occupying interconnected locations-worlds, which alongside race/ethnicity and gender shifted over time as a result of local, national and global changes and crises. For example, Brexit exacerbated my foreignness although I had already obtained British citizenship at the time, and the lockdowns during the COVID-19 epidemic restricted international travel and thus my ability to perform gendered care and my role as a "good" daughter in my country of origin. At the institutional level my ethic and practice of care in combination with my careless practice of complaining, exacerbated my illegitimisation, precarity and exhaustion as a female migrant academic.

Last but not least, having been raised and educated abroad, in a socio-cultural and political context where education was seen as a public good and a space to develop ethical and critical citizenship for social justice, I have maintained this stance as a feminist critical, decolonial scholar in the UK and have always struggled to manage the white classroom and the expectations of the neo-liberal university as I illustrate in detail in the first narrative below.

Narratives of emotional labour: the cycle of fighting back and recovering

1. The emotional labour of managing the white classroom and doing social justice

I discuss the emotional labour in teaching social justice and managing student hostility, disrespect, violence and academic discrediting as well as my own emotions of dislike, anger and fear. I also discuss the emotional labour dedicated to fighting back and recovering from gendered racism. As a migrant and minoritised academic, I am certainly not alone in engaging in female emotional labour of teaching gender and grappling with gender-race dialogues in higher education (Cardona, 2020). I am also not alone in resisting gendered expectations of student care exacerbated by the MacDonalisation of higher education and the governmentality of therapeutic cultures (Bartram, 2018). Student aversion to criticality for democratic citizenship and social justice and a strong stance in anti-intellectualism in the neo-liberalised university (Giroux, 2002, 2008) has always presented challenges to my pedagogical commitments and credibility as a feminist/critical scholar. However, since I – a migrant woman – started to progress in my career, I was confronted with more intense and everyday gendered racism in teaching spaces, demonstrated as Karenism (Nash & Pinto, 2021), a form of vigilantism and exhibiting white privilege by hegemonic femininities (Grajeda, 2022) in order to re-centre whiteness. In my experience, in an attempt to discipline the foreign teacher, white British middle-class women often

deployed emotions of uneasiness and vulnerability to reject the operation of whiteness in research and higher education pedagogies, while in fact reiterating it.

Katina (pseudonym) for example, a white-English female postgraduate student from a middle-class background expressed her disappointment and discomfort with the classroom discussions around white male privilege and made the following statement:

> "Too many assumptions in this classroom about white men".

She used the example of a man in her own family to contend that he had not benefitted from white privilege and in most sessions she would remind us that although she understands EDI issues they were not relevant to her research. I explained that the focus of the discussion was not on individuals but the operation of white hetero-patriarchy in institutions and professions.

As I became more senior and older, I developed more confidence in not engaging in comforting the discomfort (Applebaum, 2017) generated at the intersection of power, emotions and critical praxis in the classroom when white privilege is challenged. However, maintaining a professional self in a hostile place and debating from the intersectional position of the foreign academic woman – who might be subjected to further accusatory and punitive acts – due to non-normative ways of being and speaking (e.g. voice tone and demeanour) – requires substantial emotional labour in terms of hiding and managing emotions of anger, distress and fear of complaint as well as managing the negative emotions of students. As noted by Ahmed (2021) race and gender scholars are more likely to receive complaints, although they are not seen as legitimate complainers themselves, and may not be able to afford to complain due to the additional labour required and the isolation and marginalisation they might suffer (Tsouroufli, 2012). Furthermore, complaints as well as EDI discourses and policies, can be easily mobilised by white, hetero-patriarchal institutions to leverage power and silence migrant and minoritised staff.

Gendered racism though discretisation and denigration was also performed by non-white British student bodies and ranged from unreasonable, condescending and disrespectful demands to disengagement, unfriendliness and requests to be taught or supervised by white British male or female colleagues whose credentials and accolades certainly do not exceed mine. Interestingly, such requests only came from weak and under-performing students but they are not innocuous and they indicate discomfort, mistrust or even perhaps disgust towards foreign bodies and a strategic approach to performing whiteness by proxy, through associating and making alliances with those at the centre, rather than those at the margins of white British hetero-patriarchal institutions (Tsouroufli, 2023).

Days after such incidents occurred, I would try to make sense of the experience and recover from the trauma by reaching out to friends or speaking to colleagues who have suffered similar experiences. Adhering to my political ethic of care I supported students in dealing with some of the emotions generated in the classroom and explained in informal meetings the importance of taking responsibility for the harm caused as an act of genuine engagement with social justice (Zembylas, 2021), that goes beyond embracing the popular non-performative EDI discourse (Ahmed, 2014a, 2015). Such gendered labour required further emotional investment and negatively impinged my time for writing and my health and well being. None of the universities I have worked for

though has ever provided any guidance or support for migrant and minoritised staff in dealing with such issues and seemed more concerned with student/customer satisfaction. Upon reflecting on managing the white classroom I came to realise that although throughout my life in the UK, I was placed in the category of white that signified privilege, even though I had a different trajectory to academia, experiences and resources compared to my white colleagues, the intersection with other identities – gender, nationality, migration status and responsibility praxis – undermined my academic status and credibility.

Nevertheless, despite the price I have paid in terms of my health and career for my performances of teaching as activist (hooks, 1994), I am proud I have remained authentic to my EDI commitments and acted as a change agent, from the privileged space in which I speak as an academic and the less privileged location I occupy as a migrant/foreign woman. I am also proud that some white students have admitted how hard it was for them to see the relevance of my teaching to them and ended up praising me for having learned a lot through challenge and discomfort. In what follows, I discuss the exhaustion resulting from building alliances with other migrant and minoritised staff and students and doing leadership and solidarity from a stance of political care and responsibility for social justice and democratic society (Tronto, 1990, 1993, 2013).

2. The emotional labour of speaking out, doing caring leadership and feminist anti-racial solidarity: Dealing with exhaustion

How can disseminating market values in higher education institutions and operating "Big Brother" managerial and audit mechanisms not compromise democratic education and an ethic of care? What spaces for communal care, democratic action and resistance can be carved out when neo-liberal logic permeates every aspect of academic life and corrodes bodies and souls? How can outsiders within (Hill-Collins, 1986) not be injured, when their politicised, marginalised identities become embodied emotional currencies invested in the power struggles they investigate from their particular suffering positions and epistemological standpoints?

Working within the neo-liberal university where traditional values of academic freedom and knowledge have been challenged globally (Adalberto & Rubén, 2021; Danling & Yongyan, 2022); individualism is celebrated as a common good; and social justices claims have been repelled (Brown, 2019); care practices for democracy (Tronto, 2013) can lead to serious damage to staff careers and well-being. Although British academia from its inception has not been a caring place (Lynch, 2010) – in both political and affective terms – the current deficit of care, neo-liberal political apathy and populist regimes across the Western world engender higher risks and sanctions for those taking responsibility for communal and political care (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005). Wounded by care in my experience resulted from recognising and exposing inequities, responding to particular incidents of injustice, speaking out and taking action inside the classroom and in staff meetings, management boards, conferences, EDI fora, mentorship, academic/research leadership and my own scholarship. Sometimes, challenging power and domination meant responding to stereotypical assumptions and racially inflammatory comments, such as "All lives matter Maria!" when speaking about Black Lives Matter in an

event, as well as refusing to stay neutral and indifferent to the suffering of other migrant and minoritised staff (Filippakou, 2023).

Challenging inequality regimes (Acker, 2006) also involved resistance through alliances and carving spaces for feminist anti-racist solidarity and alternative action (Tsouroufli, 2023). A critical mass of academics and students relating to each other, discussing gender and racial bias and responding to each other's injuries is essential in counteracting subalternity, invisibility and achieving emotional and professional sustenance. However, building these political alliances and promoting democratic practices within higher education institutions has involved substantial emotional labour that led to my exhaustion (Emejulu & Bassel, 2020). Managing my heart (Hochschild, 1983) meant constantly trying to control the pain, anger, grief, exhaustion from gendered and racialised abuse suffered by me in my informal responsibility as the EDI change agent/complainer. The conflict I have experienced between these negative emotions and emotions I sometimes felt compelled to express to "conform to display rules" (Abraham, 1998, p. 441) – although not always successful – resulted in emotional dissonance and burn out (Mountz et al., 2015). Moreover, "ganging up" with minoritised staff stigmatised me as "risky" for educational institutions and exacerbated my white-other status and the precarity of my honorary citizenship in British HE.

Promoting democratic practices involved supporting other minoritised members of staff, making their work and talent visible in the institution and beyond, speaking out when they suffer racial abuse and demonstrating an ethic of care and responsibility as resistance to violence, carelessness and disposability. For example, an incident in a promotion panel involved stopping a colleague from defaming a female migrant applicant by claiming that "there were issues with her publications submitted to the last REF". I pointed out to the panel that if such information had indeed been discussed in a REF panel, it should remain confidential and not be brought up in promotion panels. The Chair of the panel agreed that such information should not be shared as per University guidance. However, there was no apology from my colleague. Again I was very distressed for days and I kept wondering what might have happened if I had not cared and complained about yet another injustice. I was also concerned that my ethic of care was not welcomed but rather seen as a threat to the good image of some colleagues and the white University.

Being the enlightened witness in Hook's terms (1994) and the ethical academic citizen (Tsouroufli, 2018, 2023) has always meant trouble and exacerbated illegitimisation and marginalisation of my gendered migrant academic identities. Surviving within contemporary organisations where masculine practices and discourses are dominant, requires no contestation of the masculine culture and its privileged practices of individualism and careerism (Collinson & Collinson, 1997; Collinson & Hearn, 2004). Surviving and succeeding within academia also requires taking up a safe position by avoiding disrupting racism and normative white subjectivities, which as Amy Brandzel (2016) observes:

> *stripped of their normative status, white subjectivities fight back to restore it by appealing to the idyllic past that they believe has been lost to them. "Hence,".., the narrative of sorrow and injury justifies the need for a "cultural defense" in which the violence against immigrants, Natives, queers, people of color, and gender-variant others is legitimated in the name of protection* (Brandzel, 2016, p. 3).

I argue that the emotional labour of solidarity and caring leadership operates as both resistance to gender and race inequality regimes in HE (Acker, 2006) and inadvertently compliance, through reproducing gendered and racialised divisions of informal EDI labour and change agency and exacerbating the othering of "others" through exhaustion and marginalisation. In what follows, I focus on the emotionality imbued with maintaining excellence and navigating the disposability of academic migrant life.

3. The emotional labour of "excellence": Managing policing and the disposability of the migrant body

In this section, I explore how biopower is mobilised to control migrant academic lives (Foucault, 1975–1976/2003) and protect whiteness in Global North higher education institutions shaped by their colonial past, hetero-patriarchal regimes, neo-liberal and internationalisation present (Foucault, 1975–1976/2003). I am interested in interrogating the rationale for separating academics into those whose lives are worth being protected and those whose lives are disposable and should be repudiated making racism justifiable and credible (Showumni & Tomlin, 2020). Racism is "the precondition that makes killing acceptable" (Foucault, 1975–1976/2003, p. 256) in Foucauldian terms and in Achille Mbembe's (2003) term of necropolitics – as a kind of biopolitics directed at the extermination of groups of people through killing or creating intolerable conditions of existence that lead to their disease and death – might seem extreme or irrelevant to the context of higher education. However, I draw on Mbembe's (2003), "death-worlds", as a metaphor to illustrate how employing careless practices and creating intolerable working conditions, require substantial emotional labour in order to manage the policing and disposability of the migrant body, not only damage professional and personal lives but also reiterate the status of migrant academics as peripheral, honorary citizens and that of white British subjects as superior (Apata, 2020). In what follows, I share examples of everyday racism (Showumni & Tomlin, 2020), practices that control the movement of migrant academics in the space of higher education and configure the professional and personal lives allowed.

Such practices of everyday racism include various careless and damaging projects such as de-professionalising/de-skilling migrant academics; controlling resources and spaces for migrant academics in higher education; presenteeism culture (Hadjisolomou et al., 2022) and expectations of over-commitment from migrant staff; favouritism and cushioned lives for white British academics and those associating with whiteness; and dehumanising migrants. For example, in some of the institutions I worked in I was requested to provide a summary (verbal or written) of the work I would undertake when working from home and evidence of the work achieved, as well as detailed accounts of the work I had prioritised (e.g. finalising and submitting a report to funders) instead of attending a departmental meeting. However, the same grilling was never demanded from white English men or women of all grades, who sometimes did not even bother to give apologies for non-attending, attended meetings online or prioritised non-work commitments such as attending shows at their children's school. These practices indicate that my bestowed white academic identity was far from privileged within the internationalised and neo-colonial spaces of British HE and that the configuration of my particular migrant identity as second-class European woman and informal EDI change agent was

unfavourable for my career and belonging. Some examples reflecting staff stereotypical assumptions and xenophobic anxieties include the following, although the list is not exhaustive:

> White English Professor chatting with me in the staff room: "In Europe … well, after Germany, France … well that's it, further ahead there is nothing, nothing worth talking about … "

> White Female mid-career academic: "Maria, you so fit the stereotype, dark hair, Spanish and you have an accent". "Interesting" I responded "My hair is ginger and I am not Spanish".

White British Professor in response to a suggestion made by a member of a staff in a meeting: "So Byzantine!" I responded almost instantaneously: "Well, if it were Byzantine it would be good". Another member of staff endorsed the view that such measures would be anachronistic but was careful to use the word "archaic" rather than Byzantine. Although I also felt that that new plan put forward was not conducive to progress and growth I resisted the misrecognition of Hellenic culture and the assumed superiority of the "Western" world. White British Professor while I was chatting to two female Greek colleagues in the common room: "We have been invaded by the Greeks"

Since my first academic job in 2000, the emotional labour of navigating surveillance of my migrant body and the everyday racism was substantial and invisible. I have spent considerable time and emotional stamina negotiating, declining menial tasks and fighting for roles that I was entitled to due to experience and relevant credentials. Being conscious of my embodied precarity (Hari et al., 2025), and the different expectations from migrant and minoritised academics I was always worried about the consequences of my assertiveness which has been heavily penalised. Not only did I dedicate substantial time and emotional labour in conversations about racism with racists but also in managing my anger for having been treated less than human on many occasions. I have coped with fear and anxiety about my future by compensating with over-commitment, being and being seen 24X7 physically or virtually present and available and demonstrating research and academic excellence at all times. The emotional labour of appearing indestructible and superwoman was simultaneously exhausting, reassuring and paradoxically a "perverse pleasure" (Hey, 2004). Excellence became the technology of myself in dealing with the bio-power of everyday racism.

Being aware of how migrant and minorised staff are instrumentalised by higher education institutions to signify inclusivity while marking the limits of the worlds they can occupy (Kidman, 2020), I intentionally and strategically built my symbolic capital as a research player and succeeded in a predominantly white academic discipline (Education) where women are the majority in the lower echelons of the profession. However, such success must be de-romanticised, as it came much later in life in comparison to the progression of white British women, after many losses, injustices and injuries, and it still feels bittersweet. It has not changed my status as honorary academic citizen and my sense of belonging but it increased responsibility and care for justice and education for democratic citizenship. It also triggered a journey of reflection and catharsis that was completed with the publication of this paper, my third and last reflective piece of work.

Why did I keep knocking at a door that was always closed for me? Why did it matter to succeed in the academic world? Was it worth living in a "death-world" (Mbembe, 2023)? Does my life here matter to anyone? These questions haunted me during the first

lockdown and I knew the time had come for my awakening and exodus! It hit me suddenly that after losing the love of my life in 2013 and soon after becoming a carer for my terminally ill mother, I had only taken 4 days of sick leave and had intentionally avoided discussing my circumstances at work. My resistance to taking leave was not only a way of coping with bereavement but also a way to manage the precarity and disposability of the migrant body, which is not expected to be sick, in need of care and not expected to have transnational or any caring responsibilities.

I remember vividly when my mother was diagnosed with cancer I only had my leave approved after involving HR and did not get a word of sympathy from the Head of Department or any of my white British colleagues. However, later both leave and sympathy were generously and empathetically offered to a white English, female colleague who lost her father-in-law. To make matters worse days after my mother's diagnosis, the lead of our group warned us at the start of a meeting that she was upset because she was expecting a phone call in regard to the test results of a stray dog she had recently taken to the vet and she might have to leave the meeting. Following these incidents, I battled with many negative emotions and felt compelled to investigate the institutional reasoning for surveillance of migrant and minoritised staff and the treatment of their emotions and lives as disposable. Since then, I strategically refrained from discussions about transnational care of my family or the care of myself, having realised that the care of very distant relatives or even pets owned by white British colleagues was indeed a more legitimate reason for leave. Over the years it became crystal clear to me that the presence of the migrant body as well as its death or the death of its loved ones is invisible. The invisibility of death and the embodied precarity of migration have been discussed extensively by Kiereri (2023) in Burlyuk's and Rahbari's book: *Migrant Academics' Narratives of Precarity and Resilience in Europe* (2023). The emotional labour of legitimising the migrant body, resisting its policing and dehumanisation in British higher education has received less attention as well as the implications for health, well-being, career progression and belonging.

I will close this narrative with a snapshot from a conversation/informal complaint I raised in one of the HE institutions I worked for in order to turn attention to the emotional labour of complaining from the non-privileged position of a female migrant academic in an attempt to urge the institution to take responsibility for injustices. The following extract illustrates how complaints can constitute both a political act of caring for EDI as well as a careless practice for migrant academics exposing them to further abuse and illegitimisation in HE institutions.

> "Are you saying you are not able to do your job Maria?"

The question above was the response of the white-English male senior leader to whom I complained about the intolerable conditions that migrant and minorised staff had suffered in my institution, including disproportionate expectations of excellence, excessive workload, limited if any opportunities for progression and even difficulties in taking leave. Other migrant and minoritised members of staff had also complained to senior management and Human Resources but to my knowledge no action had ever been taken. I was disgusted with such an incriminating, insensitive and patronising question and responded almost instantaneously as follows:

> "No, I am saying that many of my colleagues are not actually doing their job and do racism. Also I do not appreciate being pathologised and bullied for raising a complaint."

I got an apology, which unsurprisingly did not lead to any responsibility or action taken about the injustices committed in the institution. To labour this point, I think the perpetrator looked more surprised with the audacity of a foreign woman to challenge him rather than the careless practices I complained about. Apologies are not always genuine or innocent and can be easily mobilised by white British men to perform privileged irresponsibility and re-centre whiteness and hierarchical masculinities, in similar ways that white British women use Karenism (Nash & Pinto, 2021).

In the concluding section I share some thoughts about the importance of future research on the emotionality and intersectionality of academic migration within a political framework of care and democracy (Tronto, 1993, 2013) for complicating the glorification of academic migration and combating institutional carelessness and equality illiteracy underpinning diversification and internationalisation practices (Tsouroufli & Ferri, in press).

Concluding reflections: higher education a careless institution for migrant academics?

In this paper, through three narratives of emotional labours I have illustrated my gendered and racialised experiences of navigating British HE as a migrant academic. It has been argued that reflexive, autobiographical and narrative work can operate not only as cathartic forces but also tools for disrupting normative whiteness (Arday, 2019). However, the process of catharsis through such personal, politicised and reflexive writing is never disembodied or neutral, and involves substantial emotional labour in managing unpleasant memories and exposing of one's self, thus potentially leading to further exclusions and esstrangement. Nevertheless, a focus on emotions and emotional labours of migrants complicates romanticised discourses of internationalisation, belonging and equality in HE.

First, the analysis presented in this paper calls attention to the conditionality and contextuality of academic migrant subjectivities and the entanglement of their legitimacy with affective performances that are not only seen as safeguarding the power structures of white British heteropatriarchy of HE institutions, but also sustaining their neo-liberal, capitalist and colonial ethos. I contend that although in all service sectors identity work is enmeshed with emotions and emotional labours, the commercialisation and marketisation of the British HE sector, has led to sanctioning the generation and circulation of "risky", unsettling or displeasing emotions for normative staff and student subjectivities and consequently reducing or eliminating spaces and opportunities for creative and transformational discomfort and care for social justice and democracy. Thus policing and disciplining migrant identities and career trajectories that might be implicated in politicisation of lived marginalities, is paramount in ensuring that the interests and productivity of HE institutions are protected. Navigating HE successfully and securing belonging rests on performing the right, non-threatening migrant, whose configured foreignness is not perceived as damaging to the image of HE institutions and neither challenges its EDI rhetoric nor exposes the operation of privileged irresponsibility.

Second, the emotional labour narratives outlined in this paper indicate that embracing a political ethic of care has potential to challenge and resist the individualistic, neo-liberal

ethos of British HE. However, resistances usually come with ethnic and gender penalties (Tsouroufli, 2024) and surviving HE might entail taking hybrid or perhaps contradictory gender and care performances (e.g. caring for others alongside performing heroic, careless, "macho" femininities), to counteract the disposability of academic migration. Not only can such performances lead to serious health and wellbeing issues but also taking individual responsibility for EDI could perpetuate the commodification of migrant and minoritised staff for signifying equality, while sustaining institutional indifference for social justice and non-performative HE EDI policy discourses (Ahmed, 2007, 2015).

Third, attention to the fluidity and contingency of affective and embodied gendered, ethnic/racial migrant identities and their intersections with care/carelessness in the interconnected worlds of academia and families across and within nations and borders, allows for a more nuanced interrogation of power, disadvantage and unbelonging (Roohi, 2023), and de-romanticisation of mobility and internationalisation of HE. For example, transgressing gender norms by assertively complaining at work, while aligning with gendered care expectations in the family abroad can generate the circulation of negative emotions at the personal and institutional level and further illegitimise and alienate migrant bodies. Researching differences relationally and interdependently (Anthias, 2021) can unfold the complexity of intersectional inequality making and illuminate local, institutional and global developments in gendered racism and racialisation processes that are invisibilised and individualised in EDI and internationalisation practices informed by decontextualised fixities of migrant, ethnic groups, cultures and privileges.

Affective and intersectional interrogations of academic migration can expose the entanglement and operation of biopower, emotions and racism within institutions allegedly committed to promoting EDI while maintaining white supremacy. The generation and circulation of emotions of hostility, violence, anxiety, fear and disgust against foreigners do not indicate individual pathologies but rather the legacy of colonialism and imperialism and the predicament of conviviality and multiculturalism (Gilroy, 2005), which HE EDI rhetoric and internationalisation discourses attempt to make irrelevant and redundant. Post-imperial grief and aversion to trespassing bodies (Mizra, 2013) can easily masquerade as disposable empathy, tolerance and inclusion in HE EDI and internationalisation policy discourses and educational practices but in the absence of privileged responsibility, care, and love they can never lead to reparation, SYNXORESI, and hope for a better future. The Greek word for forgiveness (SYNXORESI) has been intentionally used here as its literal meaning is making room in our hearts and lives for others . . . . I will close by arguing that the big question for researchers, educators, students, and policy makers operating within neo-liberal regimes and populist times, is not how, but why would capitalist HE institutions replace market values and invest in a political ethic of care and democracy that might displease their privileged staff and student population?

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