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## Gender in the neoliberalised global academy: the affective economy of women and leadership in South Asia

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As higher education (HE) institutions globally become increasingly performative, competitive and corporatised in response to neoliberal rationalities, the exigencies of HE leadership are being realigned to accommodate its value system. This article draws on recent British Council-funded research, including 30 semi-structured interviews, to explore women's engagement with leadership in HE in South Asia. A potent affective economy was discovered. Leadership was associated with affects such as competitiveness, aggression, impropriety, stress and anxiety, in ways that were intensified by highly patriarchal and corporatised HE cultures. Indeed, its difficulties and toxicities meant that leadership was rejected or resisted as an object of desire by many women. We illuminate how different forms of competition contribute to the affective economy of HE leadership. The research also raises wider questions about the possibilities of disrupting dominant neoliberal constructions of HE if those who question such values are excluded (or self-exclude) from leadership positions.

**Keywords:** neoliberalism; higher education; women in leadership; affective economy; South Asia

### Introduction: gendered leadership in the neoliberal global academy

There is a potent psychic and affective economy of leadership. How it is perceived, enacted, felt and narrated can determine who is deemed intelligible, or who makes themselves intelligible as leaders in the global academy. Our recent research in South Asia (Morley and Crossouard 2015) and exploration of the global literature (Morley 2013) suggest that this involves a two-way gaze. Firstly, women are generally not being recognised, developed, selected and promoted into senior leadership posts in most developing and developed countries (Ibarra, Carter, and Silva 2010; Manfredi, Grisoni, and Handley 2014; Singh 2008; Van Den Brink, Benschop, and Jansen 2010). Secondly, leadership is proving to be a site of ambivalence with

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many women refusing, rejecting or reluctant to occupy these posts in the highly performative, patriarchal, competitive and corporatised higher education (HE) sector. Leadership for many women and men is not associated with the good life. Rather, it is frequently conceptualised in terms of loss, sacrifice (Guillaume and Pochic 2009) and cognitive dissonance between one's values and passionate attachments to subject disciplines and scholarship on the one hand, and the imperatives of neoliberal corporate cultures on the other. Leadership is often perceived as involving an affective and material load that necessitates the living of unliveable lives (Butler 2004a). For many, leadership is not an object of desire, nor does it represent a happiness formula (Ahmed 2010). Drawing on Ahmed's (2004, 2010) theories of affect, and critical sociology of HE (for example, Amsler and Bolsmann 2012; Ball 2014; Coate and Howson 2014; Leathwood and Read 2013; Morley 1999, 2003), this article engages with recent research into women's leadership in HE in South Asia to explore the grammar of women's affective engagement with leadership in the neoliberalised, competitive global academy. It explores how different forms of competition intersect with entrenched structures of inequality to produce diverse affective economies.

HE has been both the agent of neoliberal reform and also its object. While HE plays a central role in the reproduction of elite power in contemporary capitalism, it has also been heavily neoliberalised itself (Cribb and Gewirtz 2013). Neoliberalism is characterised by four central processes of change in the political economy of capitalism: privatisation, deregulation, financialisation and globalisation (Morley *forthcoming*; Radice 2013). These four processes privilege market relations, which assume and promote a logic of competition as intrinsic to the knowledge economy, with its emphasis on cognitive capitalism (Moulier-Boutang 2012). Competition assumes multiple forms including global league tables, international research coalitions and marketing to attract students. Globalisation extends the market, increases visibility and converges aspirational frameworks for institutions and nations. It transmits dominant values from the Global North to the Global South – involving new forms of imperialism (Naidoo 2011). While the history of HE in South Asia varies greatly from country to country, dominant regional concerns resonate with the wider restructuring of the neoliberal global academy – see Altbach (2013) and Agarwal (2013) on massification, quality assurance and expansion of private HE. Hence there is a convergence of competitive structures and processes. Competition is being relayed through the audit culture (Morley 2003), the prestige economy (Coate and Howson 2014), knowledge mobilisation and the recently introduced research impact agenda (Colley 2013), financialisation of research targets and students, marketisation and privatisation. These are presented as reforms designed to 'modernise' the sector, and reassure taxpayers that their investments are generating healthy returns.

However, for many people working in the sector globally, neoliberal reforms are experienced not as modernisation, but as intolerable amounts of surveillance and performance management creating increasingly toxic and unhealthy workplace cultures (Brown 2014; Morley *forthcoming*; Parr 2014). Competition between academics is actively encouraged while paradoxically resources are allocated within collegially-based structures such as peer review. The competitive academy is giving rise to a powerful affective economy in which academic identities are based on the ability to meet dominant key performance indicators. The competitive ethos underpinning this mercantile paradigm is producing a binary of winners and losers, with associated pride, shame and anxiety. As explained in the following, both winners and losers are entangled in an affective economy, within which leaders are central in the relay of rewards and punishments associated with winner/loser positions, thereby ensuring that discursive and material realities of competition are installed and accepted.

Neoliberal policies favour the owners of capital; that is, dominant groups. However, neoliberalism also takes the individual as the basic unit of analysis (Cahill 2014). Competitive individualism and profit rather than collective social responsibility are encouraged, with each individual responsabilised and required to behave in particular ways; that is, as economic, rational actors (Lemke 2001). The work on the self which this requires is not devoid of affect, however – on the contrary, it relies on emotional components as diverse as love, anger and desire, competitiveness itself, associated with pride for winners, shame and humiliation for losers, and anxieties from pressures to compete. As already suggested, such affects are integral to the ways compliance with competitive neoliberal value systems is internalised and secured (D'Aoust 2014), both by leaders and the led. Along with misrecognitions, cognitive capitalism generates arbitrary and unsustainable inequalities, and the neoliberal project in the global academy is producing a range of exclusions and differences. A central difference, or binary, is between leaders and the led.

The individuation of human agency and sociality inherent in neoliberalism and the significance of the affective both re-emerge when one considers the concept of leadership. As defined by Northouse (2007, 3), leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Formal leadership positions can empower incumbents to control resources and influence innovation and change. Potent cultural templates, or scripts, circulate for how leaders should be – often based on larger cultural and historical formations (Alvesson, Lee Ashcraft, and Thomas 2008). It is assumed that individual agency, unimpeachable characteristics and structural positions will result in some organisational members being authorised to exert and display managerial power. Leaders are expected to demonstrate authority and to possess excellent interpersonal and communication skills; that is, to be skilled in the affective management of themselves

and others. Relationships, however, can be problematic given that HE leadership is often rotational and fixed term, involving multiple and conflicting affiliations, resignifications and unstable engagements with hierarchy and power (Cross and Goldenberg 2009). Instability can be reinforced for women who also have to negotiate intersections with other simultaneously held and contingent identities (Billing 2011). This can lead to some dissonance, as cultural scripts for leaders coalesce or collide with normative gender performances. It can result in women having a legitimacy or credibility problem in patriarchal organisational cultures (Burt 1998).

A key question is whether neoliberal organisational regimes are reinforcing patriarchy and particular forms of masculinities; for example, the *homo economicus* (Morley forthcoming). Increasingly, leaders are seen as the agents who mediate, comply with and promote the neoliberal agenda via a range of managerial technologies (Alvesson, Lee Ashcraft, and Thomas 2008; Haake 2009). Leadership in the neoliberal university is seen by many as a relationship of entanglement. The academic profession is complicit in promoting hierarchical indexes and indicators that regulate the profession and install competitive cultures in which individuals are pitted against each other (Amsler and Bolsmann 2012; Gill 2010; Leathwood and Read 2013). This takes the form of truth-telling (Ball 2014), via peer review, appraisal, impact case studies, auditors, search agents and the construction of academic identities via metrics and management by numbers (Ozga 2008). The empty signifier of excellence is invoked, yet the value indicators are unstable, transitory, contingent and contextualised. Hierarchical power and market forces combine in complex ways, transferring power away from professionals and towards executive control, as Radice observes:

The traditional model of autonomous professional partnerships in these fields is giving way to a corporate private enterprise model in which only a small minority (predominantly white and male) retain control, while the rest become salaried workers managed from above. (2013, 415)

The emerging construct of leaderism suggests that transformative leadership is all about gender-neutral dispositions and skills. Certain subjectivities, behaviours and characteristics can strategically overcome institutional inertia, outflank resistance and recalcitrance, and provide direction for new university futures. However, these dispositions are frequently associated with dominant masculinities (O'Reilly and Reed 2010, 2011). The focus on the charismatic leader, or indeed the rhetoric of 'distributed leadership' (Gosling, Bolden, and Petrov 2009; Lumby 2013), can disguise the gendering, corporatisation and massive values shift taking place in the global academy. Yet our research indicates that many academics, especially women, see through the disguise. They are uncomfortable about entering leadership positions that require their compliance with neoliberalism's competitive log-

ics, which demand a focus on an auditable surface of signifiers and indicators and their demonstration of aggressive, competitive dispositions and skills in the globalised, commercialised and commodified knowledge economy (Hoggett 2010).

In relation to the particular surfaces of these indicators, although the competitive hierarchies of neoliberalism are underpinned by metrics and diverse performance indicators, gender equality in academic leadership seems to have completely escaped its organisational logic in most national locations. Gender equality is not an indicator in any of the global league tables (Grove 2013). Success in these tables does not appear to require attention to gender. If gender would therefore seem to be a disqualified discourse, leadership in the competitive, corporatised global academy is nevertheless heavily gendered. As discussed more fully in Morley and Crossouard (2015), male dominance of senior leadership positions is visible in countries with diverse cultures, policies and legislation for gender equality. For example, *She Figures* (European Commission 2012) reports that women comprise 20% of full professors and 15.5% of heads of institutions in the European Union HE sector. India, which is soon to be the largest HE sector globally, but with no HE institution currently in the Top 200, has 3% female Vice-Chancellors (Economist Intelligence Unit 2013). The prestige economy appears to construct leadership priorities and identities in the global academy with a lack of discursive or quantitative connection between quality and equality. Given the power of such league tables to install a logic of competition and to work as mechanisms of social exclusion (Amsler and Bolsmann 2012), how these relations of power become integral to the production of our material realities is paramount.

We now provide an elaboration of our theoretical framework, before turning to the research project from which the data derived. Our analysis will show that competition exists in various forms and that these articulate with other factors to produce a particular type of affective economy of gendered HE leadership.

### **Neoliberalism and its affective economies**

While different social theorists have illuminated the new forms of governmentality engendered by neoliberalism in HE (for example, Lemke 2001; Olssen and Peters 2005), feminist theorists in particular have been concerned to attend to the materialities of such worlds. In so doing, neoliberalism is explored as a verb as well as a noun (Morley *forthcoming*). It is important to theorise how neoliberalism becomes internalised as a set of regulatory mechanisms, so that the academic profession obligingly conforms to the requirements of its audit and performance cultures (Gill 2010; Morley, Marginson, and Blackmore 2014). We therefore turn to Ahmed (2004), who draws on Butler (1993) to argue that it is through ‘the repetition of

norms that worlds materialise' (2004, 12). She extends this to a social and relational understanding of emotions, making the affective integral to the production of norms and the materialisation of our worlds. Affects impress themselves upon subjects and upon objects, and through circulation and reiteration over time create 'the effect of boundary, fixity and surface' through which our worlds materialise (2004, 12).

Ahmed's (2004) theorisation of the affective therefore resists the construction of emotions as individual, largely psychological 'dispositions'. Rather than residing in subjects or objects, or as something we 'have', emotions are 'effects of circulation' (2004, 8), within 'affective economies', in which different emotions 'stick to' and delineate different subjects and objects, individuals and collectives. Any affective economy involves hierarchies between different affects, with some (but not others) accumulating value over time – here what seems particularly relevant is the value traditionally attached to 'rationality', whether within western thought, academia or indeed within tenets of neoliberalism itself. We therefore argue that the concept of an affective economy is particularly appropriate for a discussion of the competitive value system of the neoliberal academy. We would clarify here that for Ahmed (2004), rationality is considered as an 'affect', rather than an absence of affect. When reviewing different theorists of emotions, she rejects dichotomous understandings which see them either as attributable to sensation and bodily change or as involving appraisals and evaluations of the world, arguing instead that emotions and sensations cannot be easily separated, and that they involve processes of attribution and thought. Thus emotion brings together 'thought and evaluation, at the same time that it is "felt" by the body' (2004, 6), as part of our apprehension of and orientation to the world. She also stresses how emotions are shaped by cultural histories and memories, rather than being 'in the moment'. She recognises how long-standing cultural legacies embedded within modern thought have privileged particular affective economies, notably that associated with rationality, and also how this is gendered:

Emotions are positioned 'beneath' the faculties of thought and reason. To be emotional is to have one's judgement affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous [...]. Emotions are associated with women, who are represented as 'closer' to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement. (Ahmed 2004, 3)

We suggest that the privileging of 'rationality' in modernity lends credibility to the neopositivisms and technical rationalities of measurement which have been identified as characteristic of neoliberal times (Torres 2013), and through which HE institutions and their workers are ranked and classified (Ozga 2008). It can lend uncritical credibility to the metrics and selection criteria (where they exist) used to make academic appointments, in ways

that foster competition, but misrecognise the biases inherent in professional judgements, the differential constraints on women and men's workplace opportunities, and more widely 'how social relations are turned into calculabilities and exchanges' (Morley 2014, 457). If in a formal domain this technocratic affective economy might superficially seem to prevail, a subliminal affective economy is also in play, however, which works in complex ways to secure our compliance and to reproduce inequalities. Crucially, as already pointed out, the privileging of the rational must also be considered to be gendered – it is clear from our research data that particular affects 'stick' more readily to men than to women in association with the concept of leadership. Contemporary neoliberal cultures have been seen as producing gender re-traditionalisation, and indeed a 're-instatement of gender hierarchies through new subtle forms of resurgent patriarchal power' (McRobbie 2009, 47). As shown in the following, the masculinities of neoliberalism seem particularly powerful in contexts where deeply patriarchal relations have prevailed. In such contexts, women can be reluctant to engage in ways that seem 'unwomanly'; or if they do so, risk critique for acting in gender inappropriate ways. Attention to resistances and challenges to dominant understandings and practices of leadership are therefore significant in the analysis of the affective economy presented.

### **The Asian Century: women rejecting, resisting and revisioning leadership**

The British Council commissioned our research on women in HE leadership in response to concerns about the under-representation of women in senior leadership positions in South Asian HE (Morley and Crossouard 2015). The research builds on British Council investments in this topic more globally, including workshops in Hong Kong, Kuwait, Japan and Dubai on the topic of *Absent Talent: Women in Research and Academic Leadership*, and panel presentations at the *Going Global Conferences* in 2012, 2013 and 2014 (Morley 2014; Morley and Crossouard 2015). The South Asian region in this study includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, countries which together account for 25% of the world's population (Economist Intelligence Unit 2013).

The term 'Asian Century' is frequently used to characterise the shifting post-colonial/imperialist power relations between the Global South and the Global North. It is also used to describe the globalisation of the neoliberal project, with Asian economies embracing market ideologies (Naidoo 2011; Ong 2006). The region is characterised by its growth and expansion of HE systems – often described as under-resourced – and by privatisation (Altbach 2013). At the time of writing, no South Asian universities were in the Top 200 in international rankings/league tables, and the policy priority is to raise quality and standards (Times Higher Education World University

Rankings 2015). Women's participation as undergraduates is flourishing, with an estimated 31 million undergraduates in tertiary-level education in the region – a participation rate of 43%, of which 13 million are women (Economist Intelligence Unit 2014). The expansion is largely attributed to the rise of the middle classes in the region, with increasing aspirations for HE and professional lifestyles. Other enablers include the development of women-only provisions, including the Asian University for Women in Bangladesh and the Fatimah Jinnah Women's University in Pakistan.

Our research utilised three main methods of data collection: critical review of literature and policies (which revealed the limited research evidence on women in HE leadership in this region even if some national contexts have seen elite women as heads of state); statistical analysis of available datasets on women's representation in HE; and 30 semi-structured interviews (19 women and 11 men) from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Our sample included five vice-chancellors (two female, three male), one president (male), two deputy or pro vice-chancellors (both female), four deans (all female), two associate or vice-deans (one female, one male), five directors (three female, two male), four professors (two female, two male), three assistant professors (one female, two male), one associate professor (female), two senior lecturers (both female) and one lecturer (female). The interviews explored participants' views on women's under-representation in leadership, what makes leadership attractive/unattractive to women, what enables/supports women to enter leadership positions and personal experiences of being enabled/impeded from entering leadership.

Our interview data are full of narratives of ambiguity. A notable finding was that participants – especially the women – had more to say about the disattractions rather than the attractions of leadership. While some identified power, recognition, influence, making a difference and financial rewards as attractions, the majority of female participants associated leadership with an unhealthy heavy workload, vulnerability to accusations of bribery and corruption, and the affective burden of having to deal with conflict and negativity from colleagues in highly competitive professional cultures. Those women who had become vice-chancellors or pro vice-chancellors described how they had done so with no formal leadership development or preparation for the task. While the concept of neoliberalism was not named as such, the values, practices and functionalities associated with it – including increased global competitiveness, financialisation, the reinforcement of particular types of masculinities and performance management of colleagues and of the institution – were frequently cited as disattractions. The narratives demonstrated the institutional embeddedness of neoliberalism as well as the power of policy transfer and globalisation of values. Neoliberal strategies of governing are re-engineering academic workplaces, notably through the circulation and resultant intensification of affects such as competitiveness, fear,

shame and desire, intersecting in important ways with gender regimes, as shown in the following analysis of the interview data.

### **The affective economy of higher education leadership in South Asia**

The intensification and bureaucratisation of HE were seen as major barriers for many women. Their happiness formula (Ahmed 2010) to maximise their potential was often to focus on research and scholarship, rather than on ever-increasing administrative responsibilities. Leadership represented a competing priority, in oppositional relationship to research and scholarship, as a female assistant professor from India explains:

A leadership position – the reason I never thought of that as a goal is I don't want to compromise on my research, that is one thing for sure.

Although it could be argued that research and scholarship have also been neoliberalised (Morley *forthcoming*), passionate attachments to research also deterred a female dean in India from seeking senior leadership positions:

I have been advised that I should forget about my disciplinary advances, which I'm not ready to, as yet, let go, so. I think for the next five years I will still trade off or balance these two roles. If I had the choice of moving to another place as a director and leave my lab behind, I don't think I'm ready for that.

Respondents' affective orientations embraced their disciplinary fields, but in a context of intensification of academic work also suggested the impossibility of combining these competing values with their vision of a 'good life' as an academic (Ahmed 2010). Devine, Grummell, and Lynch (2011) used the metaphor of the 'elastic self' to describe how leadership was perceived by women in their Irish study. This implies the necessity of infinite capacity and availability that is ultimately unsustainable. In our study, leadership was frequently perceived as onerous, unhealthy and injurious to women; that is, as an imagined future of unhappiness (Ahmed 2010). There was an anticipation of hurt, injury and danger, as a female director in India describes:

So there was one Senior Professor I was talking to, a very dynamic lady, very good researcher and internationally known and I said: 'Why are you not taking Headship of the Department?' and she says: 'It is too much of headache, too much of politics to manage and this will hamper my research. This will hamper my work/life balance', and she says: 'Anyway I'm not inclined' okay?

Many constructed the intersecting demands of the neoliberal academy and those of their patriarchal societies as major impediments for women's access and success in public life. HE institutions were identified as reflecting and

reinforcing macro-level patriarchal practices and priorities. A male head of department in Pakistan observes how the gendered division of labour in 24/7 working cultures impedes women:

I need to spend about 8 hours a day just on administration, on really quite useless things. And of course I also have my research – however in my situation, as a man I can manage both, and spend time on those other aspects when I get home. However, when a woman gets home, she is involved with the family – so women will avoid those kinds of admin posts – they are doing very well as associate professors, as assistant professors, as students, as doctoral students, but their inclination is to the family, and not to put themselves forward for these kinds of posts where there is a lot of administration.

The conjuncture of patriarchy and neoliberal competition also meant that authority, power and leadership were constructed together with a particular type of masculinity that is aggressive and ruthless, as a female assistant professor in India explains:

This stereotype definition of leadership, probably that is what matters. ... But the way society understands is probably for certain roles a person has to be really aggressive or something, which the woman could have handled in a different way, not showing that kind of aggression per se. But then you are not selected for the role in the interview if you don't look like you can kill something.

Such a stereotype was very far from the ways in which women respondents reported they wanted to lead, which overwhelmingly reflected a concern for more participatory and consultative approaches to leadership. Competitive hierarchical relations, however, prevailed. A potent symbolic order also exists in which women must never overtake or lead men, as a female dean in Nepal outlines:

The men – they also do not like the female to be a leader, that I have also faced the problem ... They want to see the male as the leader, not the female.

Competition was experienced in terms of the arms race in the global league tables, but also in terms of women and men. Power and leadership were interpreted as zero sum, suggesting that if women's collective power increases then this automatically and competitively reduces male power. There was also evidence of an unequal relationship to entitlement, with more privileged subjects drawing upon narratives of injury (Ahmed 2004). The male academy is seen as the host, with women as risky guests. In this sense, there are some border anxiety and fears of proximity as women are allowed entry into highly hierarchicalised and male-dominated spaces. Affective responses to women in leadership positions resemble a type of 'stranger danger' (Ahmed 2010), and determine who could and should lead.

Women can still be perceived as ‘risky’ appointments to senior positions (Ibarra, Carter, and Silva 2010). The power of leadership discourses produce effects through reiteration and endless repetitions (Butler 1993). The repetition of norms is also a key device ensuring the reinforcement of gendered hegemonies. One such repetition is that male leaders were believed to appoint in their own image, or to clone themselves in order to protect long-term patriarchal interests (Gronn and Lacey 2006), as a female dean in Sri Lanka notes:

Some of the senior male academics who always want to have it go, even for an acting position, to another male ... I think it is something to do with this gender power relationship ... A lot of males in Sri Lanka believe that for women administration is not right.

The cloning is based on fear and risk aversion, as a female professor in India believes:

They are used to seeing men as leading, right? So they are uncertain how will it be if it is a woman? Because they have not seen many. So I think it's a fear of uncertainty. And the society is not ready to take that risk so a known evil is better than unknown.

These fears of ‘stranger danger’ can be rearticulated with the male academy positioned as a victim of women’s intrusion and invasion. A female senior lecturer in Pakistan describes how some men re-cast themselves as the injured parties whenever women appear to be succeeding:

It hurts their male chauvinism concept that women are growing. Will I be the subordinate of this women? It hurts their ego.

As these participants indicate, patriarchy, conjoined with the values of the neoliberal academy, produces and sustains a range of socio-cultural practices and belief systems about what is considered gender-appropriate behaviour and lifestyles. In this potent symbolic order, women are not expected to lead men, or seek authority outside the domestic domain. If they do, this represents a major challenge to the *status quo* and can surface considerable hostility to women who transgress socially prescribed boundaries.

Globalisation, as discourse, provides both restrictive and creative possibilities. It was believed by some that the power of the international could help re-position and broaden women’s experiences. Stranger danger can be recast as stranger value. Women’s capital can often be misrecognised and restricted in their own patriarchal communities, but highly valued and nurtured in international contexts – especially in global feminist networks. A female vice dean in Afghanistan suggests that international mobility and its opportunities for women to enhance their academic capital were essential enablers in the competition (between women and between men) for aca-

demographic positions, even if the number of women with PhDs was ‘very, very low’. However, she highlights how international mobility is also gendered:

There is not a closed culture for the men. They are free to go outside but the women cannot because it’s prohibited in some places of my country, for the women to go alone abroad without their husband.

The power of international experience was therefore noteworthy in developing women’s academic capital, helping to overcome their sense of alienation from the affective community of leadership. However, while such academic capital had public recognition, a further powerful source of alienation was that leadership was associated with bribery and corruption – in the sense of cultural beliefs that power corrupts and that leaders had gained power through nepotism and networks rather than merit. Additionally, there were beliefs that anyone occupying a leadership position was open to bribery and corruption. A female vice dean in Afghanistan comments:

Mostly the high-ranking positions are polluted with the bribery.

A female dean in Sri Lanka suggests that leaders are blamed and suspected of corruption if ever there are irregularities:

Also in Sri Lanka this Administration is somehow a dirty game ... Rightly or wrongly, many of them are blamed for financial irregularities and things like that so I think women are more sensitive. We might be thinking okay, why go into that mess? ... Corruption leading to all kinds of remarks and all kinds of things like that.

A male assistant professor in Bangladesh believes that corrupt practices and lack of good governance deter women from seeking highly visible senior positions:

I think that good governance should be there ... the governing body. Some of the members are from the government officials, so there is also chance of the corruption there ... So these kinds of policies ... personal interest, government affiliations, political affiliations, also the politics, these are the factors, you know, that discourage the women to come to the higher leadership positions.

Another factor contributing to leadership’s unattractiveness was the complex interpersonal relations within institutional hierarchies. Butler (2004b) noted how vulnerability is differentially distributed. Women, it seemed, are often vulnerable to interpersonal conflicts in leadership roles. Leadership positions can be rotational and fixed term, requiring resignifications and changing identities. Peers can be transformed into subordinates, as a female pro vice-chancellor in Bangladesh identifies:

And then again you know what makes it unattractive is ... the thing is when I became the Pro VC then I see all my colleagues in a different light. Before you just saw them as your colleagues. Now you see them in various shades. So that is nice, at times it is not.

A female professor in Sri Lanka feels that the interpersonal dependencies in leadership are unattractive:

I'm not that much of a people person, so I would much prefer not having to deal with people administratively. And in leadership, obviously, you deal with people and you wait for responses, and you can't get on with it, because you don't have very much autonomy in terms of getting things done, so I guess that is not very attractive.

Women often felt that they carried the additional burden of being different, or 'other'. This meant that they were more visible and had the additional workload of having to demonstrate their value, as a female director in India comments:

You have to keep proving every time yourself okay? Whereas somebody sits in that position of power, he need not prove, but a lady has to prove every time.

In addition to the stress of the long hours' culture, a registrar in Pakistan mentions affective issues including isolation:

I think it's the burden and the stress of working in a senior leadership position, which makes it unattractive. Most of the people and most of the women realise that it's a very lonely job up there.

The isolation is also reported by a female dean in India:

I'm alone, even today I'm the only university-wide woman dean, I'm the only woman in the series of directors, deputy directors, university-wide deans and associate deans ... then in these evenings when there's a networking dinner, you are completely left out.

From these observations, it appears that leadership narratives are frequently heard and understood as negative by the majority of women and many men in this study, demanding sacrifice, isolation and extensive self-protection in toxic, competitive cultures.

Universities, like many other large organisations, were represented as intensely political sites of struggle, with complex and competitive micropolitical relations (Morley 1999). Ahmed (2010) argues that some bodies become understood as the rightful occupants of certain spaces. In our study, the rightful occupants of senior leadership posts were seen as men, with women viewed as imposters or strangers. This gave rise to women experi-

encing a sense of not belonging. Women were precarious leaders, vulnerable to silencing practices, misrecognition and undermining. Resistance to women in leadership was relayed and produced through everyday social relations and transactions, as a female dean in Sri Lanka reports:

I know colleagues in other universities have said that they feel sometimes put down by men in forums.

Hostility and lack of confidence in female leaders was expressed in speech acts which pointed to the habitualities and historicities that are ingrained within an affective economy, as a female professor in Nepal reports:

I could sense it, there is a sixth sense also, sometimes you can sense it that they don't want to help you out, and if you just request for help they never say no, it's fine, but the things are not being done rightly or on time, so you know that by the time you'll come to know that they are reluctant to help you out.

This observation suggests that feelings do not merely reside in subjects or objects, but that the very constitution of legitimate subjects is itself an effect of the circulation of affect (Ahmed 2004). The Nepalese professor was made to feel like an imposter by what was not said or done, exemplifying how micropolitical interference is relayed through quixotic and unstable social and cultural practices (Morley 1999).

As mentioned earlier, Burt (1998) suggested that women have a legitimacy or credibility problem in male-dominated and patriarchal organisations. Authority does not 'stick' readily to women in the affective economy associated with leadership of the competitive, neoliberal academy (Ahmed 2004). Lack of confidence in women's leadership authority is reported by a female pro vice-chancellor in Bangladesh:

It's not even been a month where in one of the public universities we have got one lady Vice-Chancellor, she's the first one ... and already there are murmurs that she won't be able to do it [...] it's from her colleagues – mostly male.

A female assistant professor in India outlines the negativity she received from a male colleague who felt uncomfortable with women in authority:

I don't know whether that is typical of India or not, men don't like to work as much under women as they would like under men ...

While a female senior lecturer in Pakistan describes the envy and jealousy that she receives from colleagues in response to her evolving international career:

I have presented three papers abroad ... People get jealous instead of feeling pride that's she growing ... I realised that people are so jealous of people who, especially women, who were growing and getting out of the institution.

An extreme manifestation of hostility to women was acid throwing and gender-based violence, as a male vice-chancellor in Bangladesh reports:

In many of the families, wives are beaten and acid-throwing and all these things are going on. ... [On campus] sexual abuse is there. In my tenure for the first time, two males, one official and another teacher was sacked on the basis of these charges.

Sexual harassment is not just confined to male academics pressuring female students. A female senior lecturer in Pakistan reported how she was stalked and sexually harassed by a male student, who insisted on marrying her, persistently calling her on her telephone and coming 'barging' into her office again and again.

As these narratives suggest, toxic relations were a source of stress and anxiety for many of the female participants in the study. The violence that this affective economy materialised was both real and symbolic. The affective economy associated with leadership consistently denied women recognition as potential leaders, construing them instead in subordinate and often sexualised positions. The toxicity of these affective burdens is intensified through repeated, multiple iterations. Although in many cases provoking anger and resistance to dominant constructions, these clearly also have the potential to produce feelings of self-doubt which may work to confirm hegemonic patriarchal relations, particularly when these are compounded by the competitive pressures of the neoliberal academy.

Recruitment and selection processes are notorious for discriminating against women. Manfredi, Grisoni, and Handley (2014) found that the use of executive search agencies or head-hunters in the United Kingdom meant that this process was being outsourced to private organisations who paid little attention to anti-discrimination legislation and who moved within male-dominated networks. Van Den Brink, Benschop, and Jansen's (2010) study of 13 universities in the Netherlands also revealed a range of casual discriminatory practices in the appointment of professors that eluded formal protocols and objective criteria. The local logic of the institution and the organisational *status quo* are often informally invoked to determine who might be a comfortable fit (Grummell, Devine, and Lynch 2009; Pullen and Simpson 2009). In our study, a common complaint related to the political allegiance involved in recruitment and also how the process was invariably male-dominated. A female dean in India was one of many who described how universities' selection procedures were exclusionary and discriminated against women:

First and foremost, most of the selection committees have only men on them. Very, very few have any women.

Selection as a political process featured widely in the data, as a female lecturer in Nepal observes:

I mean to say, Director, Rector, VC, there is a huge political pressure is there ... I am away from politics, I mean it just goes above my head. That is why I am a little bit reluctant to face the leadership as a female leader in future.

A female professor in India also highlights how political connections outweigh merit:

Selection is not by competence, it's not by efficiency, it's by political allegiance.

The challenges described outline how institutional processes and practices are designed and executed in relation to male norms – something that gender-mainstreaming policies attempt to address (Morley 2010). These norms provide powerful exclusionary messages to women and can seriously deplete their aspirations and opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

It appears that many women in this study were reflexively scanning leadership and then dismissing it as a career option (Morley 2013). They decided not to aspire to an object that statistically they are unlikely to acquire. In contexts where patriarchy intersected with the competitive values of neoliberalism, leadership was strongly associated with undesirable affects which were incommensurate with their priorities and preferred ways of working in the academy. Additionally, formal leadership was not always equated with vertical career success, but as incarceration in an identity cage that restricts rather than generates capacity and creativity (Alvesson, Lee Ashcraft, and Thomas 2008; Haake 2009). As Ahmed (2010) suggests, a sense of misalignment with an affective community produces a range of potential responses, including self-doubt, shame and humiliation, but also anger and resistance. At worst, misaligned or 'alien bodies' risk simply 'disappearing' from view. This was not the case for this group of respondents, who were active in resisting, contesting and challenging the affective economy associated with leadership. Challenge was through the ways that they sought to lead, but also by rejecting leadership itself as undesirable.

Neoliberalism is not just about injury (Gill 2010); it can also be about reward and recognition – material and symbolic. Those willing to enter leadership in the global academy gain financially and symbolically. Exclusions of particular social groups from leadership can represent a democratic

deficit, but can also be a form of distributive injustice. As McRobbie (2009) suggests, the individuated agency that is privileged in neoliberal times fundamentally undermines the logic of collective political struggle against structures of inequality, and cedes instead to the re-installment of gender hierarchies and patriarchal power. A key question is how the neoliberal agenda and its consequential individualising competitiveness can ever be interrupted and disrupted if the majority of leaders in the global academy are those who sign up to its value system?

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