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Original Article

Editorial

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The Spectre of Violence in Graduate Feminist Research

The line that separates students from independent researchers is blurred during graduate studies. Not yet undertaking fully developed research programmes, as happens during a PhD or when acting as a professional researcher, but moving beyond the descriptive engagement with others' research that characterises much of undergraduate education, graduate researchers are the ghosts of research yet to come. Their passions and interests now, will become the catalyst of research into the future. Recognising the importance of this location in the research field, this journal emerged out of the MA Gender, Globalisation and Rights programme at the University of Galway, as a space to give voice to graduate work. The MA course itself is broad in its scope and draws students from diverse backgrounds, all of whom share a commitment to equality. Building on the core principles of the MA programme, this journal is explicitly feminist, intersectional and international in its scope and interests. Authors in the current volume, many of whom are MA Gender, Globalisation and Rights alumni, engage with a range of topics, connected via a passion to confront inequality and build a more equal world, providing a snapshot of the interests, methods and debates among graduate researchers that will shape the feminist research agenda for years to come.

A common thread that runs through the articles in this fourth edition of Dearcadh is violence, and these articles invite us to reflect on violence as it presents itself to contemporary graduate researchers. Developing expertise on gender-based violence against women and girls is one of the major contributions that feminist research has made to wider social studies, moving from a position of marginality in the twentieth century to now being a significant field of study with its own journals, research institutions and advanced degrees. As the field has expanded, it has inevitably generated differences and sub-fields. It is worthwhile returning to the foundational questions and considering how these are important for contemporary research. Graduate research provides a useful insight into the most pressing issues.

The Istanbul Convention defines "gender-based violence against women" as: 'violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately' (Council of Europe, 2011). This definition recognises violence against women as a subset of gender-based violence rather than the things being synonymous, and at the same time acknowledges that a crucial unifying factor in different types of violence committed against women is an inequitable gender system that privileges men over women (Boyle, 2019).

Although violence can seem to be self-defining or easily understood from a common sense perspective (Scriver et al., 2015), it can be difficult to agree on a definition that is sufficiently both broad and precise. By focusing narrowly on individual actions causing injury or death, it is easy to overlook non-physical violence – such as economic, psychological or sexual violence; or violence which is not associated with direct individual victims or perpetrators (Scriver et al., 2015). Galtung's (1969) introduction of the concept of structural violence has proven essential to the field, highlighting both that individual acts of interpersonal violence are often structurally embedded, as is the case for most intimate partner abuse (Boyle, 2019), and that in contexts of structural inequality, the denial of life-chances to certain socially-stratified individuals and groups in itself constitutes a form of violence.

A challenge of studying and understanding this complex topic lies in appreciating the broad range of types of violence and their impacts without equivalising or flattening their differences. While it is true that harassment and femicide are both types of gender-based violence against women, they are significantly different in severity and seriousness. Kelly (1988) introduced the influential concept of the continuum of violence, to note the way in which, under conditions of structural inequality, different life experiences of violence shade into one another in the understanding of individual victim-survivors. Furthermore, violence operates as a continuum across the life course, affecting women in different but cumulatively constituting ways at different life stages (Boyle, 2019).

Notwithstanding considerable research and theorising on violence prevention, protection and response, the crisis of violence against women persists, morphing and reasserting itself in new forms as legislation and cultural representations change. In the twenty-first century, the introduction of the crime of coercive control allows a more nuanced criminal justice response to intimate partner abuse (Stark, 2012) but can equally be seen as evidence of the limitations of preceding responses. Meanwhile, technology-facilitated forms of violence including image-based sexual violence, cyber sexual violence, and new forms of economic abuse demonstrate how pre-existing forms of patriarchal power and control move easily into emerging spaces and tools. Debates persist among feminists about how to tackle structural issues in a way that centres the rights and desires of victim-survivors, with a growing movement away from criminal justice "carceral" responses (Davis, 2013), emerging efforts to identify possibility within transitional justice (Westmarland et al., 2018), and a risk of polarisation between carceral and abolitionist perspectives (McGlynn, 2022). Although there is widespread – though not universal – agreement that gender-based violence is embedded in structural gender inequality, the question of where to place the emphasis in tackling these distinct phenomena continues to provoke debate.

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The graduate researchers published in this volume bring a range of insights to problems of gender-based violence and wider structural inequality. Researchers highlight ongoing violence in women's lives, from the direct violence experienced by women in intimate partnerships (Gannon) and more broadly in society (Minah), to new means of enacting this same violence (Hayman). Further, authors draw attention to the ways in which structural violence is embedded in social relations and organisations that continue to oppress women and sexual minorities, even as much changes in the social world (Le Goff, Ruggi, Whelehan). While both structural and direct forms of violence are omnipresent in the works in this volume, authors are not content to simply describe its presence and impact. Gannon and Hayman investigate emerging approaches, both programmatic and legislative, to addressing forms of violence against women and their application to the Irish context. They provide clear guidance on where gaps in research on violence against women remain and the opportunities for further research.

How change happens is a further consideration; the role of feminist activism is identified as a key factor in challenging violence and inequality, as explored in the articles by Ruggi and Minah. Nevertheless, a warning remains: in Le Goff's article we are reminded that violence appears in many guises, and may pose an impossible-to-achieve aspiration. Post-feminism, as presented by Le Goff, is a stark warning that feminism itself may be co-opted and used as part of a patriarchal structure that is conducive to on-going violence. Finally, Whelehan's article takes us that step further by providing a snapshot of what a more inclusive organisation might look like when issues of embedded structural violence and inequality are addressed.

These articles, as described in more detail below, thus make important contributions to both our understandings of violence in the present context and the roads being travelled by graduate researchers as they find their way through a complex and changing landscape.

As we have outlined, articles in this volume range from a focus on specific ways to address gender-based violence, to broader structural violence and the activism that continues to push for transformative and substantive change. Gannon's article is one which focuses on the specific. In her paper, Gannon investigates the usefulness of the Campbell Risk Assessment questionnaire in the Irish context, a risk assessment tool which is used by the Aoibhneas Domestic Abuse Support for Women and Children. In addition, the author examines what the level of risk was of outreach and refuge clients in comparison to the existing literature on domestic abuse and domestic homicide. Despite the increased attention being paid to gender-based violence as a global human rights issue, Gannon's research highlights that in the case of Ireland, there has been a lack of attention paid to domestic homicide and methods for its prevention. This is not for the lack of prevalence of Irish domestic femicide, with 252 deaths reported between 1996-2019. Using the responses to 20 of the Campbell Risk Assessment questionnaires, Gannon analyses how the questionnaire, a tool developed in the U.S., serves (or fails to serve) national and non-national women experiencing violence in an Irish context. The paper concludes with the recommendation that although helpful, Campbell's Risk Assessment requires tailoring to the Irish context, with special attention paid to developing risk assessments for non-nationals living in Ireland. Gannon's contribution is a helpful reminder that, while gender-based violence is a global issue, no universal programmes exist which can successfully address the cultural and intersectional nuances of gender-based violence.

While Gannon focuses on what might be considered more 'traditional' manifestations of gender-based violence (such as domestic homicide and domestic violence), Hayman's work highlights that with newly emerging technologies come new avenues for perpetuating violence, and that Cyber Sexual Violence (CSV), although virtual and non-physical, must be understood as a serious a form of sexual violence under Irish law. Hayman examines the recent advances in CSV legislation in Ireland, a topic which, as the author highlights, has yet to be a subject of any empirical studies in Ireland. The article comes at an important time, as Ireland takes a step forward in addressing CSV, with the new legislation Online Safety and Media Regulation Act (2022) and the Harassment, Harmful Communication and Related Offences Act (2020). Hayman examines Ireland's legislation regarding CSV reporting tools such as Hotline.ie, and awareness raising campaigns, and assesses these contemporary approaches and their limitations. In her findings, the author highlights legislative progress made, but also the limitations that arise with its implementation, and shortcomings of the reporting tools that are currently available for adults who have experienced CSV in Ireland. In terms of legal limitations, the issue of a two-year time limit on reporting is a notable weakness, as is the fact that CSV is not directly linked to sexual violence under Irish law. Hayman highlights that Hotline.ie as a reporting tool for adults is a grey area, as Hotline.ie was set up for children, and this continues to be outlined on their website, possibly deterring adults from reporting via the tool. Finally, she notes that awareness-raising campaigns, such as the government-backed 'No Excuses' campaign, have been effective in raising public awareness of CSV; however, there remain few support services for adult victim-survivors of CSV. Both Gannon and Hayman engage with different approaches to tackling manifestations of gender-based violence in Ireland, in doing so both authors highlight gaps in research and existing data, and the current limitations of tools and legislation that require examination.

When considering an issue such as gender-based violence, it is important to highlight the role of activism and social movements in challenging structural violence. Kaata Minah's study of the Ni Una Menos movement, a feminist movement born on Twitter in response to high rates of femicide in Argentina, focuses on how feminist social movements are mobilised and sustained in the Latin American context. Minah uses document textual analysis of existing literature of social movements and the Ni Una Menos website and manifesto to interrogate the formation and mobilisation of resources of Ni Una Menos using Resource Mobilisation Theory and New Social Movement Theory. The author argues that Ni Una Menos has been successful due to the movement's capitalisation of available socio-organisational resources, such as social media, human resources and moral resources. Combining these resources, Ni Una Menos successfully mobilised a feminist movement in Argentina which then spread to other Latin American countries, all with the aim of changing structural manifestations of violence experienced by women and girls. This article contributes to the growing body of research which focuses on the role that social media can play in feminist activism and mobilisation (see Jackson et al., 2020; De Benedictis and Mendes, 2023). The author challenges the assumption that feminist social media organising is always 'slacktivism', by highlighting the substantive advances that Ni Una Menos facilitated for both gender-based violence and reproductive rights in Argentina and beyond.

Continuing to focus on the importance of collective feminist activism in challenging issues of structural violence, Ruggi addresses the history of systemic gender discrimination in the University of Galway. In the article, Ruggi links the feminist organising surrounding the cases of discrimination faced by Mary Dempsey and Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington to the memories of struggle for women's inclusion in Irish higher education. The author uses a decolonial feminist ethnographic methodology to connect feminist achievements from the '70s and '80s to the issues of gender discrimination raised by women lecturers at the University of Galway in 2014 by examining legal documents relating to both cases. Ruggi argues that three conditions for equality were evident in both historical and contemporary cases examined: these were collective, continuous and combative feminist work. Both Ruggi and Minah underline the importance of what Minah describes as 'human resources' in sustaining feminist work in the face of structural inequalities, with Ruggi underlining that while certain cases can act as a catalyst for protest and calls for change, substantive feminist activism requires communal and often anonymous efforts.

The transformative potential of activism in the face of structural violence is vital to centre in the current moment, in order to counter the rise of popular (and apolitical) feminisms. Le Goff's article examines the interplay between postfeminism and elements of feminist thought that have been co—opted by neoliberalism, with the author arguing that their interaction has evolved into a new phenomenon: the neoliberal feminist. Le Goff's paper explores the commodification of confidence, framed as 'confidence cult(ure)', and stresses that this is a prime example of how the core values of the postfeminist sensibility, such as self-improvement, self-surveillance and discipline, and the psychic effect of neoliberalism, in which the individual is both the problem and the solution, interact. The emergence of neoliberal feminism is explored through two case studies: Girl Power and Successful Girls. The methodology used is theoretical in nature, and employs Gill's (2017) theory of 'postfeminist sensibility' to examine how certain media representations discursively delimit the potentialities of women's lives, while cleverly selling these limitations back to us as a hollowed-out form of 'feminism'. Although dealing with the topic of violence less explicitly than other authors, Le Goff's article acts as a warning to the potential for feminism to be hollowed out and filled with a neoliberal, and patriarchal, agenda, resulting in a widespread, but apolitical, feminism that leaves structural violence unchecked.

In contrast to Le Goff's warning regarding the potential of the increasingly popular neoliberal feminism to undermine structural transformation, Whelehan looks at the potential for countering a different type of structural gender-based violence: systemic discrimination against individuals on the basis of their sexuality. The article focuses on what policies and strategies the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) can implement which would foster a more LGBTQ+ inclusive atmosphere. This paper is interesting as it addresses a somewhat taboo subject in Irish society; LGBTQ+ Gaelic Games players. Through five semi-structured interviews conducted by Whelehan with key informants, three main themes were identified as essential for fostering more LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Gaelic games. These were community, dressing room culture, and generational differences. The interviews also highlight means of confronting and addressing this exclusion in order to eliminate the structural violence which the GAA has

carried from Ireland's 20th century history. Positively, the paper reported high levels of allyship among teammates, and therefore is optimistic in its tone for the future of inclusion in what was historically the foundation of an Irish, post-colonial, and strictly heterosexual masculinity.

Conclusion

As a whole, the articles presented in this volume give a strong sense of the myriad ways in which gender-based violence continues to haunt research on gender, globalisation and rights. Far from receding, violence emerges in new ways and spaces in the current period. Violence even, as identified by LeGoff, hides in the guise of new forms of 'feminism', where post-feminism ultimately reinforces the inequalities that underpin and enable violence, in essence, doing patriarchy's job for it. Research tasked with identifying and addressing inequality, simply cannot avoid the spectre of violence. The authors in this volume, our ghosts of research yet to come, draw out violence and shine a light on it, helping us to find the ways forward. These nascent researchers remind us that violence remains a critical concern of feminist research and a fundamental barrier to true equality.

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