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Postfeminism and Middle Eastern Female Academics in UK Universities: A Discursive Analysis

University of Kent

6/7/2017

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You can achieve anything you want in life. Chase your dreams, no matter how big or how small. I believe in you and thank God every day for you in my life.

Faleh Albouss

Abstract

This thesis explores how Middle Eastern Female Academics appropriate postfeminist discourses emphasising choice, agency and individual decision-making to account for their work experiences in British universities. In looking at their accounts of their academic work experiences, the thesis highlights how they downplay inequality – a contrast to much of the existing literature on gender and the academy which suggests that all women and in particular women of colour, face multiple levels of exclusion in university workplaces characterised by a masculine norm. Approaching postfeminism as a discursive formation and using it as a critical concept to interpret the data, the analysis identifies four interpretive repertoires drawn on by 20 female academics of Middle Eastern origin within the context of in-depth interviews. These include (1) individualism, choice and empowerment, (2) ‘natural’ sexual difference, (3) retreatism – western tradition of working mothers, (4) retreatism – Middle Eastern tradition of extended family of origin. Through use of these interpretive repertoires the respondents firstly deny experiences of inequality and secondly constitute an academic “feminine” identity derived from the co-existence of masculine and feminine behaviours as follows: (1) the independent academic woman, (2) the academic mother – western tradition, and (3) the traditional Middle Eastern academic. As the thesis takes a discursive approach, these identities are not treated as fixed and stable rather they are understood as being constructed through postfeminist discourses and constantly negotiated with work colleagues and others. Thus, the identified academic femininities are understood in processual terms as something MEFA ‘do’ or ‘perform’ as opposed to being a static attribute they ‘have’ (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Identification of these interpretive repertoires and the three academic femininities demonstrates the following: first, that similar to their white, western colleagues, Middle Eastern Female Academics

draw on the discursive formation of postfeminism and that their use of postfeminist discourses shapes how they configure and speak about their academic work experiences. Second, Middle Eastern Female Academics constitute academic identities within postfeminism. Third, our understanding of tradition as an element of the postfeminist discursive formation needs to be expanded to include domestic responsibilities attached to family of origin as well as domestic responsibilities connected to motherhood.

Keywords: *Postfeminism, Middle Eastern Female Academic, Academic Femininities, Postfeminist Discursive Analysis*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Exclusion of Women in the Academy

The aim of this thesis is to present a discursive analysis of the Middle Eastern Female Academics (hereafter MEFAs) who provide accounts of their work experiences when teaching and researching within British Universities. As will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, a review of the literature indicated that the career trajectories of women in academia remain in the spotlight of gender studies, because despite years of social movements and governmental interventions, the career paths of female and male academics remain distinctly different, with female academics experiencing continued inequality (Blackaby, Booth & Frank, 2005; Bagilhole & White, 2013). For instance, despite a relatively high enrolment rate among female graduate students (Kjeldal et al., 2005; Ellemers & Haslam, 2011), female professors and researchers are drastically underrepresented in senior level positions and administrative roles (Reitsamer, 2009; Monroe et al., 2014). Women who choose to pursue an academic career come across other hurdles such as limited opportunities for promotions (Van der Brink & Benschop, 2014), differentiated income and professional treatment (Bett, 1999; Trower, 2001), organizational culture and traditions favouring male leadership and management style (Sonnert & Holton, 1995; Ellemers & Haslam, 2011; Monroe et al., 2014). These pronounced differences, and particularly the barriers encountered by female professors and researchers, are a manifestation of the gender inequality that still exists within the walls of many universities and in society in general. Bagilhole and White (2013) conclude that despite decades-long struggle to achieve equality within the academy, women are very far from reaching parity with their male counterparts. To date women are significantly underrepresented among higher rank academic positions (Kjeldal et al., 2005; Ellemers & Haslam, 2011), experience a pay gap (Trower, 2001;

Monroe et al., 2014), and fail to fit the white-male professor stereotype prevalent in the university sector (Coontz, 2006) – a range of factors which contribute to feelings of marginalization (Śliwa & Johansson, 2013). Extensive research has demonstrated two crucial problems preventing equal representation of men and women in academia: the recruitment process and the existing environment (Van der Brink & Benschop, 2014; Husu, 2015). First of all, a significant proportion of women are unable to secure a senior academic position due to the existing gendered environment and the dominance of professional academics, who in making decisions about the recruitment of new members, draw on a masculine ethic and masculine expectations regarding the performance of academic work. On the other hand, women who get hired often choose to leave academia for good at certain points of their career or choose temporary contracts instead of tenured positions. These phenomena are observed due to the fact that female professionals encounter a high number of institutional and organisational barriers that significantly affect their professional development and decrease their chances to succeed (Monroe et al., 2008; Bagilhole & White, 2013; Monroe et al., 2014).

Academic women are therefore faced with a hypothetical choice - pursue an uninterrupted career and achieve success in a highly competitive environment OR for part of their career, retreat to their home and a focus on family life and child rearing, thereby missing a number of important career years (Coontz, 2006). Women feel stressed having to combine full-time work responsibilities with taking care of their family and household chores. Research indicates that the reality of working in a contemporary university environment means that women are often dissatisfied with their own work performance which can have a negative impact on their motivation and job satisfaction. In addition, academic women often experience a sense of feeling “scientifically phony” (Trotman & Greene, 2013) which means that academic women

themselves and at times their colleagues, view them as not being able to comply with high professional standards. The latter undermines the performance of the entire organization, as a major proportion of its employees (women) are prevented from full participation due to having to overcome serious obstacles which prevent them from working at their full potential (Trotman & Greene, 2013; Zikic & Richardson, 2015).

While gender research has documented the inequalities experienced by women in general, research which also takes into account the ethnic origins of academic women and their professional trajectories reveals that their experiences differ quite significantly from other women (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995; Turner, 2002; Wyer et al., 2013). Trotman and Greene (2013) argue that despite years of progressive thought ethnic minority women are often still not welcome in the ivory tower of academia. The researchers note that higher education institutions, their system of rules, hierarchy and expectations of work performance, are still tailored to fit the profile of a heterosexual white male who does not have to interrupt his career due to the birth of children and does not have to consider any other commitments (such as family responsibilities or household chores) except his professional ones (Hult, Callister & Sullivan, 2005; Trotman & Greene, 2013). Turner (2002) adds that minority women experience the phenomenon of the so-called “double marginalization” within the walls of academia: they feel excluded and discriminated against not only because they are women, but also because they are part of an ethnic minority.

The hostility and discrimination surrounding ethnic minority women results in a number of significant issues: (1) their professional career trajectories are negatively affected; (2) ethnic minority women are underpaid, (3) ethnic minority women suffer from a number of negative psychological experiences (Trotman & Greene, 2013). The latter manifests itself in a number of ways, as the minority women are reported to feel

significantly more stressed and dissatisfied with their job due to the atmosphere they are surrounded with at work. Trotman and Greene (2013) further report that ethnic minority women in academia often become victims of the impostor syndrome. They basically feel that people working in the same institution as them have constructed a profile of what a successful academic should look like and it's not them. Women often feel the pressure of not being able to fit the ideal image of the academic which is usually masculine and white and this has a negative impact on their self-efficacy and motivation. These women perceive themselves as scientifically phony and occupying a position they are not worthy of (Zikic & Richardson, 2015).

Analysis of the experience of women of colour in America has demonstrated that in addition to common issues facing ethnic minority women in different universities around the world, the country of employment seems to add a certain specific burden (Turner, 2002; Kim, 2009). Ledwith & Manfredi (2000) and Turner (2002) have argued that in addition to such negative experiences as race-related devaluation of work, pressure to abandon ethnic ties, being forced to comply with the white-male professor example, black women employed by American universities had to face an additional set of issues. These issues included: an increased range of activities which are not beneficial for career development, such as responsibility to perform a mentoring role for students of colour associated with low numbers of diverse faculty employees. Overall, the work experiences of ethnic minority women from certain regions and residing in particular counties remains relatively neglected and poorly understood (Sang et al, 2013). While there is existent considerable research dedicated to the situation of black women pursuing academic careers within American universities (Carty, 1992; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001), little or nothing is known about the experiences of certain minority groups within UK universities. For instance, we still know very little about the

career trajectories of Middle Eastern women and how they are shaped by their encounters with gender discrimination in general and in UK universities in particular.

The general studies that do exist suggest that Middle Eastern women experience traumatic psychological events when leaving their home countries and starting their lives from scratch elsewhere (Nahas, Hillege & Amasheh, 1999). Nahas et al. (1999) describe experiences of postpartum depression after the birth of children and difficulties associated with integration into a new community, an experience which is common for migrant women.

Nevertheless, despite this ongoing disadvantage the numbers of women in general and ethnic minority women in particular entering into the academy is increasing. According to the report Equality Challenge in Higher Education (Brill, 2010), before 2010, 66% of the non-UK professor staff were white males, however this number has been continually decreasing since then and is now closer to 51% (Monroe et al., 2014). What is also interesting is that academic women as a group – including ethnic minority women - don't solely interpret their work experiences in terms of disadvantage (Sang et al, 2013). As is normal practice, the initial stages of this PhD research included a consideration of the existing literature (outlined in chapter 2 below) which presented an overall picture of disadvantage and exclusion within the Academy for women in general and ethnic minority women in particular. Though this PhD research did not begin with an absolute presumption of hearing “tales of discrimination” during the planned series of interviews, on the basis of the existing literature there was some sense that such an outcome was quite likely. Surprisingly, a sense of disadvantage and exclusion on the basis of gender or ethnicity was not the predominant emphasis in the responses of the interviewees. Instead, the interviewees strongly drew on the notion of choice and their own individual decision-making when accounting for their work

experiences in British universities. These responses align with the work of Sang et al (2013) who found that their academic respondents did not view their careers in terms of disadvantage and inequality. Rather, contrary to Sang et al's (2013: 160) expectations, their female academic respondents '...display(ed) greater levels of agency, connectedness and entrepreneurial flair to mobilize their varied resources in order to achieve career success'. Thus, the data gathered for this PhD research, along with reading the work of authors such as Sang et al (2013), led to a shift in emphasis in the PhD research away from a sole focus on exclusion and discrimination towards a consideration of how MEFAs understand their access to and inclusion in British universities.

1.2. Inclusion of Women in the Academy

When considering how women in general and ethnic minority women in particular are included in organizations such as universities, it is important to differentiate between the policies and practices of inclusivity put in place by institutions and the understandings women have of their inclusion and the tactics and strategies adopted by individual women to secure inclusion. With regard to the former, a range of policies and practices have been implemented to address gender inequality across Western Europe. For instance, Iceland (like many other European countries) in response to concerns about the risks and unfairness associated with gender inequality passed an Act of Gender Equality in the 1970s. The aim of the Act was to eliminate gender discrimination and promote equality between men and women such that both could contribute to the work and life of Icelandic society while also being able to undertake family responsibilities (Drummond, 2015). The Nordic nations (Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden) are recognized as having one of the most progressive approaches to the issue of gender equality. Pearson (2014) argues that this can be

explained by the fact that the Nordic countries make the pursuit of gender equality central to their way of life socially, politically and economically. Within this context, particular attention, according to Husu (2015), has been given to the promotion of gender equality within the academic environment. Researchers utilize a number of measures as an indicator of national gender equality in science and academia, for instance, the number of women holding a professorial position, or the proportion of Universities led by women (Husu, 2015). Interestingly, these two indicators do not always correlate and therefore to assess the country's performance as far as the promotion of gender equality is concerned, one has to assess the full range of conditions, national policies and social environment (Husu, 2015).

The focus of this thesis is the second approach to inclusion outlined above, that of the understanding women themselves have of their presence in universities – which as we shall see is not always one of discrimination - and the accounts they may provide to interpret this access. Previous research indicates that one approach taken by women to explain their access to different social or work arenas is to construct hybrid identities such as those that contain elements of the culture they now live in and the culture they left behind if they are migrants (e.g. Essers & Benschop, 2007) or elements of masculinity and femininity (e.g. Lewis, 2014) or elements of career and motherhood (e.g. Anaya, 2011; Lewis & Simpson 2017). Anaya (2011) analyses the accounts of successful academic women, who place an emphasis on free choice and the choice they make to spend most of their free time on academic work thereby foregoing a family. Anaya (2011) also discusses the accounts of professional women who, instead of choosing between career and family, decide to combine both becoming a type of “supermom”, though such a demanding identity comes at a cost. Other research which explores women's position in male-dominated work environments suggests that some women reject the masculine characteristic of such work places and instead place an

emphasis on more feminine behaviours and work identities. For example Lewis (2013) demonstrates how some female entrepreneurs reject the masculine norm inherent to entrepreneurship and instead take-up entrepreneurial identities with a feminine element to secure a sense of authenticity when running a business. Dosekun's (2015) exploration of young women in Lagos, Nigeria demonstrates that instead of enacting masculine practices as a means of blending-in, they choose to expose and highlight their femininity through a consumer-focused lifestyle with a strong emphasis on girly fashion. She argues that this is their way to demonstrate to the world that they are successful, and therefore empowered and entitled to their luxurious lifestyle (Dosekun, 2015). What these studies indicate (as does the data in this research) is that first, women do not always interpret their work experiences in terms of exclusion and discrimination and second, women do not always seek to conceal their femininity in order to "fit in" to a contemporary workplace.

This valuing of feminine attributes and behaviours can be linked to a broader societal appreciation of femininity which can be associated with the emergence of a postfeminist gender regime (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). Lewis (2014) has argued that understanding women's experience of work should not be approached solely from the perspective of exclusion connected to a dominant masculine norm. Rather, she proposes that efforts should also be made to understand how women and a reconfigured femininity are now being included in today's work places. To facilitate exploration of the way in which women are now included in organizations, she recommends that use should be made of the concept of postfeminism as this can be critically deployed to interpret women's own understanding and accounts of their organizational experiences. In addition critical attention can also be directed at '...the kinds of organizational subjects women (and men) are being asked to become, such as the new ideal manager characterized by a feminine ethos...' as such feminine organizational subjectivities form

the basis of their inclusion in today's organizations (Lewis, 2014: 1846). Postfeminism as a lens through which to explore women's work experiences, has also been taken up within the gender and academy literature with authors such as Webber (2005) exploring the way in which Canadian undergraduates dismiss and disavow feminist knowledge, a repudiation which has been identified as central to a postfeminist gender regime (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Scharff, 2012). Morrison et al (2005) explore the experiences and perceptions of undergraduate students in a British university and identify a marked reluctance to acknowledge gender discrimination despite the study collecting data which highlights the persistence of inequalities within the academy. These inequalities include ongoing discriminatory behaviour in the form of inappropriate jokes by academic staff, discomfort felt by female students in male dominated classrooms leading to a reticence to speak and young women not being taken seriously as students with academic potential. Nevertheless, the research states '...that undergraduates themselves, particularly women, have difficulties in recognising or communicating these gender inequality problems' which the authors suggest may be '...a symptom of a post-feminist academic environment where gender equality is supposed to be a thing of the past' (Morrison et al, 2005: 161). Thus, within the gender and academy literature postfeminism is being taken up to explore and analyse the accounts provided by students and female academic staff of their work experiences.

This study uses postfeminism as a critical concept to interpret MEFA accounts of their work experiences because as we will see below, there is also a refusal to acknowledge the presence of discrimination in the academic work place. To date there are few concepts which help us understand why individuals who are subject to discriminatory practices and behaviours deny this experience of prejudice.

Postfeminism is one such critical concept and as a contemporary theoretical resource has been taken up by a number of authors studying gender and work (e.g. Gill et al,

2017; Kelan, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, Scharff, 2015; Swan, 2017) to address and make visible this contradiction. It is drawn upon in this thesis to explore how Middle Eastern Female Academics account for their work experiences in British universities as dependent on them as individuals and their individual choices, denying the impact of contextual factors that negatively affect them. Thus, in their accounts of their academic working life they place responsibility for “good” or “bad” experiences with the individual rather than at the organizational or societal level. As we will see below that through this individualist focus they present accounts which deny experience of discriminatory practices, a position which upholds rather than challenges the gender inequity documented in much of the literature on work and the academy (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016).

Postfeminism (discussed in chapter three below) is a contested concept with a variety of interpretations and definitions. However, the account of postfeminism developed by Gill (2007) and McRobbie (2009) tends to be the interpretation most drawn on by researchers when exploring the contemporary experiences of women and girls and this interpretation is used in this PhD research. Through their notions of a postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2007) and a postfeminist gender regime (McRobbie, 2009), they argue that postfeminism should be understood as ‘... a cultural discursive formation that moulds our thinking, attitudes and behavior towards feminism and women’s changing position in contemporary society’ in general and organizations in particular (Lewis & Simpson, 2017). Interpreted in this way, postfeminism can be understood as shaping and reshaping feminine norms and as such can be used by researchers to explore women’s accounts of their professional experiences in modern organizations. The strength of this approach, according to Lewis (2014: 1846), is in the ability of the notion of postfeminism to critically assess how “women and a reconfigured femininity are now being included in the contemporary workplace”.

However, as part of this identification and interpretation of postfeminism, it has been argued that the discursive formation of postfeminism can only be drawn on by white women living in a western culture and as such is exclusionary of women of colour. More recent research questions this assumption with authors such as Dosekun (2015), through empirical work in Nigeria, suggesting that postfeminist practices are also taken up by women of colour and that postfeminism should therefore be understood as a transnational cultural phenomenon and not just an aspect of western culture for western white women. Following Dosekun (2015) and other authors such as Lazar (2006), Thornham and Pengpeng (2010) and Chowdhury (2010) who have all drawn on the concept of postfeminism to investigate the contemporary lives and experiences of non-western, non-white women, this research will explore how MEFA draw on postfeminist discourses to refute the identity of victim and convincingly account for their academic experiences as positive and based on their own personal choices.

1.3. Research Questions

The current study will explore the accounts of the work experiences of a relatively neglected ethnic group, Middle Eastern women pursuing an academic career in the UK context. Ethnic minority women as whole and Middle Eastern women in particular, remain an understudied group in relation to experiences of being included in or excluded through discriminatory practices from professional work places and organizations such as universities (Renzulli, Grant & Kathuria, 2006). Little is known about the origins of these women - have they come recently or are they already integrated within UK society; do they experience the phenomenon of double marginalization?; do they choose an individual coping model when encountering the incidents of gender discrimination at their place of work (Turner, 2002)? The topic of the academic work experiences of ethnic minority women within the UK becomes more

and more acute each day due to the recent migrant crisis in Europe (Shabi, 2015). A number of charity organizations, for instance the Council for At Risk Academics, assists researchers and academics from around the globe who were forced to leave their home countries and migrate to the United Kingdom. Shabi (2015) reports that since the Syrian crisis began, more and more scholars and students, among them women, come to the UK in search of a safer environment. Some of these Middle Eastern women are PhD students others are Professors who had to quit their jobs back home. They all try to integrate into the new environment, and understanding how they perceive and account for their experience of working in the UK academy might help improve the current situation concerning gender inequality and increase institutional productivity (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995; Sonnert & Holton, 1995; Zhang & Hannum, 2013).

Nevertheless, as said above, the responses of the respondents in this study did not derive from a sense of exclusion, disadvantage or discrimination – though there was recognition that the latter can occur. As with the experience of Sang et al (2013) in their study of migrant female academics, the respondents in accounting for their work experiences avoid an emphasis on discrimination instead they highlight their own agency, viewing their careers as dependent on their own initiative and choices. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to explore how Middle Eastern Female Academics avoid being understood as “victims” of discriminatory practices or a masculine norm through mobilization of postfeminism as a critical concept (Gill et al 2016; Lewis, 2014). This critical deployment is guided by the following research questions:

1. In what way are postfeminist discourses appropriated and used by Middle Eastern Female Academics when speaking about and accounting for their career and work experiences in British universities?

2. What postfeminist identities (referred to as academic femininities) do Middle Eastern Female Academics create and enact when they draw on postfeminist discourses?
3. What elaboration of the concept of postfeminism emerges when Middle Eastern Female Academics draw on postfeminist discourses to account for their academic work experiences?

These research questions explore MEFA's apparent refusal '...to accept a self-conscious understanding of themselves as gendered actors, believing that the 'problem' of gender disadvantage has been 'solved' and therefore gender is no longer an issue' (Lewis, 2006: 453). Instead the focus is on their claim of inclusion and their denial of disadvantage in contrast to the majority of the existing research on female and ethnic minority academics which highlights experiences of exclusion both from and within the academy. By mobilizing postfeminism as a critical concept, the research will demonstrate how respondents understand themselves as being included in the professional work environment of the university through their own agency and choices. The three research questions will be examined through a discursive analysis of the data collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews with twenty Middle Eastern Female Academics. In addressing these three questions the thesis will make its contribution first, to our understanding of gender in the academy by moving away from a focus on women being excluded to one of how they see themselves included. Second, understanding of the MEFA claim of inclusion will emerge through identification of the notion of academic femininities. The data analysis outlines the academic femininities that are taken up by respondents through their appropriation of postfeminist discourses. Finally, the research through its critical use of postfeminism will elaborate our understanding of this concept.

Overall and building on Dosekun's (2015) and others call to treat postfeminism as a transnational concept, this research will explore the take-up of postfeminist discourses by MEFA working and living in the UK. Unlike much of the research which draws on the notion of postfeminism, claiming that it is a discursive formation mainly open to white women - that as a cultural phenomenon it is unavailable to women of colour and therefore is rarely approached from their perspective - this research will argue that postfeminist discourses filter through to MEFA living within the postfeminist gender regime of the UK, providing the discursive background within which they develop a (postfeminist) academic identity.

1.4. Research Design

The current thesis uses social constructionism as a theory of knowledge in order to process and extract meaning out of the collected information. The research utilises an inductive approach to answer the research questions and is qualitative in nature. In-depth open-ended interviews were chosen as the data collection tool to explore the academic experiences of twenty Middle Eastern Female Academics. Through a discursive analysis which looks at the experiences of Middle Eastern women employed by UK universities we seek to identify how they draw on postfeminist discourses in accounting for their work experiences and in constructing an academic identity. The study is cross-sectional in its nature as it mostly focuses on the current experiences of Middle Eastern women within UK academia.

1.5. Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured in the following way: Chapter two provides an overview of the literature that specifies the institutional and organizational barriers encountered by women who chose to pursue academic careers. The chapter critically analyses

various practices and issues associated with the exclusion of women within the academy and considers the experiences of ethnic minority women in relation to manifestations of the gender inequality they encounter while working in organizations such as universities. The chapter critically evaluates interventions developed by universities to address various barriers for female researchers and assesses their effectiveness. The chapter further discusses particular characteristics of ethnic minority women who choose to pursue careers within academia and their experiences. The chapter is concluded by exploration of the work identities of professional women and its relation to the experiences of ethnic minority women.

Chapter three outlines the feminist perspectives drawn on in the Gender and Organization Studies field and the positioning of the concept of postfeminism in relation to these. In outlining the feminist perspectives which inform investigations of gender in contemporary organizations, the chapter presents the different approaches used to understand the impact and positioning of gender within organizations. Following this, the chapter will present an outline of the concept of postfeminism, highlighting the diverse versions in the literature of this cultural phenomenon and specifying the interpretation drawn on in this thesis. The chapter will also explore the concept of postfeminism as a transnational cultural discursive formation with the focus on the experience of a particular ethnic group. The fourth chapter provides an overview of the methodological approach adopted within the thesis. A consideration of the discourse analytic perspective employed, to explore how postfeminism as a discursive formation is drawn on by the MEFA respondents, is provided. Here, the notion of interpretive repertoires is used as the organizing principle of the analysis. As Lazar (2006: 340-341) states 'repertoires is a concept that allows (the researcher) to go beyond individual expressions to identify patterns across texts (here interviews), and to connect

these to wider social formations' such as postfeminism. In addition, the limitations and ethical concerns encountered in the process of research are outlined.

The fifth and sixth chapters present the actual results of the qualitative study. The experiences of twenty interviewed Middle Eastern academic women are analysed using the concept of postfeminism (Gill, 2007; 2009). In chapter five the focus of the analysis is on identification of the interpretive repertoires the respondents draw on when appropriating postfeminism as a means to account for their academic work experiences. Chapter six outlines the academic femininities which emerge from this appropriation. Three academic femininities are presented – the Independent Academic, the Academic Mother and the Middle Eastern Academic – all of which are constituted through the integration and embodiment of modern, individualised, choosing behaviours alongside traditional family oriented aspirations and behaviours. Finally, chapter seven presents the discussion of the findings and directly addresses and answers the three research questions outlined above. The conclusions chapter will reflect upon limitations of the current study, encountered issues as well as suggest opportunities for future research.

1.6. Conclusions

This introduction has presented an overview of the selected topic of gender inequality within academia explored through critical use of the concept of postfeminism, illustrated by the example and experiences of Middle Eastern Female Academics who chose to pursue their careers within British universities. The current thesis will address an identified research gap – Middle Eastern Female Academics account for and interpret their professional experiences British universities by applying the concept of postfeminism with an added component of transnationality. The in-depth open ended interviews conducted with twenty Middle Eastern women employed in

British universities aim to answer the established research questions and identify salient issues and problems these women experience in the UK academic environment.

Chapter 2. Experiences of Women in the Academy

2.1. Study background and chapter overview

The issue of gender inequality in the workplace remains a burning topic throughout the globe (Monroe et al., 2014). Individuals continue to experience oppression and discrimination based on their gender, skin color, sexual orientation, social class, religious views, etc. (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Lawler, 2002). Given the concerns of this research, attention will largely focus on gender inequalities present in the academic environment which manifest in a number of ways: from women being significantly under-represented among higher rank positions, to female students and professors being sexually harassed at their workplace (Hoffmann, 1986; Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1993; Roosmalen & McDaniel, 1999). Unfortunately, gender inequality is not a notion of the past or a problem of economically less developed countries. Empirical evidence demonstrates that Western society has till this day failed to provide equal working opportunities to all women though as we will discuss later the perception is often that we have successfully dealt with systematic inequalities around forms of difference such as gender. Apart from the obstacles, academic women come across at work, they also experience significant stress at home, where they try to combine their family and work-related responsibilities, thus increasing the overall workload. The situation becomes more complex and critical when the notion of ethnic minority comes into play. Minority women experience the so-called “double marginalization”, and their situation of being disadvantaged due to the fact that they are women in traditionally male environment, is further aggravated by the fact that they are also trying to fit into an ethnic majority group (Karam & Afiouni, 2014; Zikic & Richardson, 2015).

The chapter provides an overview of the gender inequality problem present in Western academia as articulated in the existing research. The chapter covers three key areas as follows: the exclusion of women in Western academia, the inclusion of women

in Western academia and female professional identities. The exclusion section of the present chapter will focus on the dominant norm of masculinity circulating in the academy while the inclusion section will provide an overview of various the strategies adopted by professional women to facilitate their inclusion within the academic work environment as well as considering institutional strategies adopted to promote inclusion. The coping mechanisms women employees use to deal with gender discrimination are also critically discussed and analyzed. Special focus is directed at the experiences of minority women who chose to pursue academic careers. The chapter also contains analysis of case studies and interventions by academic institutions developed to address and eventually eliminate practices which discriminate against female employees.

2.2. Exclusion of women in academia

2.2.1. Gender inequality in academia: the norm of masculinity

Benschop and Brouns in their cornerstone work *Crumbling Ivory Towers: Academic Organizing and its Gender Effects* (2003) discuss the problem of gender within modern educational institutions. The researchers argue that the perception of success in academia revolves around practices and norms that are based on the everyday experiences of men, and masculinity is considered a necessary prerequisite of a successful academic career. Benschop and Brouns (2003: 202) argue that: "...solutions are sought in special treatment for women. That the position of men serves as a norm, in other words, that femininity is hierarchically ordered to a masculine norm, and that (the fact that) power processes are at stake, is silenced".

A number of researchers have discussed the existence and consequences of the established masculine norm within the context of any professional environment in general, and academia in particular (Van der Brink & Benschop, 2012; Van der Brink & Benschop, 2012a; Simpson et al., 2010; Knights & Richards, 2003; Currie et al., 2002;

Deem, 2003). The existence and the extent of persistence of this norm is manifested in a number of ways, from the specific expectations the university holds for the candidates occupying managerial and leadership positions, to how students perceive and interact with their professors (Van der Brink & Benschop, 2012; Simpson et al., 2010). For instance, within the context of the US academy, Krefting (2003) discusses the experiences of female faculty staff, who are often addressed by their personal titles (e.g., Mrs) instead of professional (Doctor or Professor), or even experience some male and female students leaving their class due to the fact that the instructor is a woman and not a man. The societal perception and expectation of a successful and professional academic is based on a specific established norm – it has to be a white male, and any deviation from this norm can be viewed with negativity (Krefting, 2003). This well-established, but detrimental norm is well recognised, and according to Krefting (2003: 265): “Women completing PhDs are sometimes advised, even now in the 21st century, to use only initials as a feminine first name reduce the odds of acceptance for research manuscripts or attendance at presentations”.

According to Van der Brink and Benschop (2012), modern academia is characterised by an overall striving towards excellence through the emerging notion of managerialism. New managerialism has pushed modern universities to switch towards a greater on focus on performance indicators and quality control, e.g. citation indexes, members of peer-reviewed journals` editorial boards, participation in the recognised conferences, etc. (Van der Brink & Benschop, 2012; Falkenberg, 2003). Knights and Richards (2003) argue that this focus on merit-based system within educational and research environment inevitably produces a number of inequalities, including those which are race- and gender-based. Van der Brink & Benschop (2012) point out that the paradigm of managerialism determines the recruiting process when hiring the new staff, particularly professors. As a result, when trying to outperform other universities and

research groups, the institutions end up hiring more male professors (Van der Brink & Benschop, 2012). This inevitably leads to underrepresentation of female professors among staff (Van der Brink & Benschop, 2012a; Knights & Richards, 2003) and reduces the number of available female role models which could inspire and empower more female students and young researchers (Van der Brink & Benschop, 2012). When researching the role of excellence and managerialism-based approaches to hiring new candidates in Dutch universities, Van den Brink and Benschop (2012) have discovered that while emphasising that the number of publications was the only eligible criteria to be accepted or rejected for the position, hiring committee members openly highlighted the perceived expectations of female candidates:

“We have only one criterion: the list of publications. If women want to work part-time, that`s fine. But when you apply for a position here and you have half of the number of publications you should have had, the committee will never invite you for an interview” (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012: 514)

Interestingly, as pointed out by Van den Brink and Benschop (2012), Dutch universities hold one of the last positions among other EU educational institutions as far as equal representation of men and women professors, with women accounting for only 12% of the full professorship positions. Therefore, in an attempt to hire the most successful top-performers, hiring committees divide all candidates based on their gender: Female candidates are expected at least the specific stage of their career to switch to part-time work, while male candidates may be perceived as a safer bet in terms of performance and their ability to work full-time and produce more high rank publications (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; Van der Brink et al., 2010; Silwa & Johansson, 2013). Van den Brink and Benschop (2012) discuss the issue of male norm not only within how the identities and roles of men and women are perceived within the

academic workplace, but also as a part of the selection process. Van den Brink et al. (2010), for instance highlight the presence of a masculine norm in the recruiting committees, where most of the staff selecting the new candidates are often males themselves. The researchers, however, point out that artificially including more women into such commissions provides little benefit. Van den Brink et al. (2010) refer to such gender-balanced commissions as “paper tigresses” (p. 1477). Although creating a vision or notion of equality and equal opportunity practices, such commissions should emerge organically due to overall equal representation of men and women within the specific establishment (Van den Brink et al., 2010).

The study by Wenneras and Wold (2001) has evaluated a peer-review system of the Swedish biomedical academic environment. The researchers concluded that independent reviewers were incapable of evaluating the quality of the candidate independently from his or her gender. According to the Medical Research Council (MRC), each candidate pursuing a faculty position ought to provide a CV, along with application letter and research project. The members of the committee evaluate each component of the application and give scores that are in the end multiplied by one another to form a product score (Wenneras & Wold, 2001). An important fact to consider is that the scores of the MRC and other European evaluation committees are never made available to public, and therefore the committee members have considerable freedom to give scores to the candidate without the fear of being held responsible for the biased judgement. The study has demonstrated a clear bias of the committee members towards giving male applicants a higher product score, which eventually resulted in more positions being given to male candidates (Wenneras & Wold, 2001).

Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) discuss another component of the problem of gender relations within the academic context – networks benefiting male candidates.

The researchers argue that male researchers often engage into self-promotion activities, directed at building more ties and connections, and eventually increasing their chances of landing a job. These male-centred networks often include Female candidates as well, however Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) point out that women usually restrain themselves from active promotion, and instead focus on their actual achievements. The scholars further note that the women that do engage into self-promotion are often criticised by their colleagues, for behaviour that is not feminine, or too masculine (Van der Brink & Benschop, 2014). The researchers discuss the notion of social sanctions applied to women who engage in the types of behaviour that are widely perceived as normal, and even beneficial for male candidates (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014).

This situation, a complex combination of meritocracy, managerialism and the masculine norm within the candidate selection process (Van den Brink et al., 2010) also inevitably contributes to supporting and promoting the existing culture of patriarchal and elitist dominance within the modern academy (Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000). The academic environment has often been perceived as patriarchal and elitist, dominated by male professors and researchers (Poole, Bornholt & Summers, 1997). This patriarchal tradition is inherited within an institution and often manifests itself through work environment, values, culture and structure (Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000; Knights & Richards, 2003; Karam & Afiouni, 2014). A number of researchers have pointed out that male lives, experiences and behaviour patterns are often perceived as normal, while women`s experiences are treated as a deviation from this norm (Currie et al., 2002). This notion has firmly found its way in the everyday life, experiences in school, university, in communication style or relationship patterns. This trend is particularly prominent when it comes to display of emotions. Currie et al. (2002) note that women`s sexuality and behaviours are “ruled out” as different and separate from normal working life (having a period, breastfeeding, pregnancy and giving birth) being perceived as

disruptive of the professional norms expected in organizations . In fact, it is often observed, that patterns of behaviour, communication or management characteristic of males, are considered normal or effective (Currie et al., 2002; Harley, 2003; Ceci & Williams, 2011). At the same time, patterns of women behaviour different from this norm are viewed as counterproductive and weak. This issue, commonly observed in business organizations and governmental institutions is also quiet typical in the conventional academic environment (Ceci et al., 2014). Bureaucratic organisations rule these “abnormal” issues out of the everyday work considerations, and thus significantly disrupt the working process for women, putting them in an underprivileged position.

It is therefore argued that the organizational notion of presenting the concept of job as something which is gender neutral is incorrect and does not fully reflect the reality (Currie et al., 2002). Hult et al. (2005) discuss the historical and deep rooted separation of work spheres into professional work (or paid work) assumed to be a privilege of men, and unpaid and unskilled household work perceived as the feminine sphere and domain. These assumptions, perceptions and stereotypes are deeply ingrained inside many organizations, including educational institutions. These stereotypes based on tradition and gender have the power to negatively affect organization`s performance, efficiency, work culture as well as communication and collaboration inside the establishment. These perceptions are likely to worsen woman`s quality of life through dissatisfaction with their job and complicated work-related interactions. Hult et al. (2005: 52) notes: “in today`s politically correct work environment blatant discrimination is not common, but gendered assumptions and stereotypes are often buried below the surface”. These assumptions affect decisions made regarding appointment and compensation of male and female staff. For instance, a male head of the department can unconsciously increase or give a raise to a male

colleague instead of a female one, simply because the male is viewed as a sole provider to his family (Hult et al., 2005).

The notion of job and labour division are gendered, and women can be viewed as disadvantaged individuals simply because they are unable to comply with “normal” standards established by men. This disadvantaged position is further worsened by the fact that women experience themselves being constantly compared against an established standard – male type of behaviour and work. This established routine is rarely questioned, and it is very common that women, who achieve a considerable success within their professional field are those, who have adapted to the male-dominated work culture and often mimicked male behaviour and working style (Currie et al., 2002).

In addition, the claim that a male-oriented work culture creates a number of disadvantages for women, also points out that males, on the other hand, are not put in an advantageous position, but simply into a normal one. The so-called power of the male norm is often found in its invisibility, as researchers or employees do not notice advantages it offers men. Instead they only see disadvantages brought to women (Currie et al., 2002; Acker, 1990; Lewis & Simpson, 2010; Kelan, 2009). As Currie et al. (2002:64) note in relation to the academy: “we want to demonstrate these elements of the male norm: the positioning of men`s lived experience as normal, the invisibility of that norm in everyday discourse ..., and the obfuscation of male advantage in the articulation of women`s disadvantage”. A number of authors discuss the notion of a logic of success – a career trajectory and level of dedication that is perceived as one deserving of a reward (promotion to a senior position, etc.) (Currie et al., 2002; Sonnett & Holton, 1995; Ceci et al., 2014). Most of the respondents interviewed by Currie et al. (2002) described a successful researcher as a person who dedicated 100% of his/ her

effort to a single goal of professional success. Alternative scenarios (focusing on other commitments and responsibilities) are viewed as less worthy and not deserving of a high rank position. This logic of thought already places Female academics, who have to juggle multiple commitments and responsibilities, in a disadvantaged position compared to their male counterparts. This logic naturalises the advantaged position of men and their overall predisposition to professional success.

Women`s candidacy for a senior level position is often viewed or considered through a prism of certain demands and characteristics the female candidate is expected to comply with. These expectations are shaped and formed on the basis of observation of male candidates and are often inherited in the organizations where one male leader succeeds another (Kloot, 2004). The demands often include major sacrifices and a high level of commitment that makes taking care of other responsibilities (such as family and children) virtually impossible (Currie et al., 2002). These demands and expectations are mostly never questioned within the professional environment and are taken for granted, as a sort of norm it is obligatory to comply with if one chooses to pursue professional growth. However, it is often left unnoticed that the radically high expectations are based on the life experiences of men, men who dedicate 100% of their time to career growth, while their dedicated wives take upon a burden of household responsibilities and family commitments. Women who are not able to make these sorts of commitment are perceived as unwilling, despite the fact that they are simply unable to decrease their burden of family commitments and sacrifice them for the sake of an academic career.

Academic institutions till this day view this choice of Female employees not to pursue certain key positions as their unwillingness to commit and make a sacrifice in the name of education or science (Van der Brink et al., 2010). This male-biased perception manifests judgemental and biased view of Female choices and reflects male-

dominated and normalised academic culture common worldwide. These deeply inherited expectations of women to perform a child bearing role and take upon major share of household responsibilities, is never viewed as a significant factor that places male employees into an advantaged position. Instead, it often appears to be unnoticed and unaccounted for (Currie et al., 2002).

Critical gender research has shed light on the existence of a masculine norm and made visible its impact on women's experience of work and organizations. Much of this research has drawn on the seminal work of Joan Acker (1990) whose theory of gendered organization argues that the entire concepts of job and hierarchy are gendered and based on the masculinity norm in our society. Acker (1990) argues that hierarchies existing in the modern workplace and determining the actual wage system are based on the assumption that individuals, who are fully committed to paid employment are automatically considered to be in advantageous position when considered for a job. On the other hand, Acker (1990) elaborates, those individuals (e.g., female professionals with children), who have to divide their attention and effort between multiple commitments can only compete for lower rank positions. Acker (1990) and Bailyn (2003) argue that these processes contribute to the differentiated pay women and men receive for doing the similar type of job, an issue that will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Kloot (2004) points out that the issue of the male norm within leadership positions is particularly relevant to understanding women's experience of academic life. The so-called invisibility effect, which refers to the reality that no major differences actually exist between the managerial approaches of women and men; however, they are perceived as different with men being automatically associated with management (Sinclair, 1998). "Masculinity is an implicit construct in the perception of leadership,

and what women do is rarely defined as leadership. Societal norms define the expected roles of behaviours of men and women, and managerial characteristics are often assigned to men.” (Kloot, 2004: 473). Furthermore, the same behaviour exhibited by men and women is perceived and even evaluated differently. For instance, more bold and aggressive behaviour is often justified when observed in male managers, however can be criticised as inappropriate when displayed by women (Kloot, 2004). At the same time, some researchers argue that perception and societal norms, although being important determinants of the male and Female career evaluation, are not the sole contributors to the situation (Sinclair, 1998; Kloot, 2004). Sinclair (1998) argues that the dominance of the male norm within the academy or any workplace environment is further promoted by differences in the up-bringing and motivation men and women are subjected to since childhood. For instance, boys are encouraged to challenge the existing order and have ambitions, while girls often experience their parents and teachers telling them to comply with the rules and norms, and not be selfish. Interestingly, as a result, male leaders often are more motivated by achieving their personal goals and recognition (Kloot, 2004), while female managers are driven by the benefit of an entire community or even society as a whole. Benschop and Brouns (2003) suggest that the behaviour and motivation of males is recognised by their colleagues and management as appropriate for a leader, while the efforts of female managers to ensure benefit to a given group as a whole is often perceived as weakness, lack of ambition and inappropriate for a true leader. Kloot (2004) notes that the issue of gender in balance is concerned with the dominance of the male norm, as well as how the entire concept of leadership is experienced and conceptualized within modern society. In line with the argument of Benschop and Brouns (2003) and Sinclair (1998), the problem is further aggravated by the fact that boys and girls are brought up with differential goals and perception of success.

“Men are more concerned with competitive success, and women are more focused on doing a job well. Men are less concerned with human relations and are more aggressive. Women are more caring. Men are more tolerant of ethical misbehaviour and women are less tolerant of such misbehaviour” (Kloot, 2004: 473)

In general many gender researchers believe that the existence and reliance on a specific norm (i.e. male) often with acknowledging this, decreases overall diversity within the workplace and negatively affects the performance of a given team or an entire organisation (Kloot, 2004). Others go further, and argue that the male leadership norm as perceived within the modern workplace, is according to its many features, detrimental to the effective functioning of the academy (Hames, 1994). Hames (1994) believes that the so-called male thinking often relies on overuse of control and adherence to conformity, is often associated with strict authority or hierarchical structures, and involves strict and often impersonal procedures and processes everybody is expected to agree and comply with. Although Hames (1994) may be painting an unpleasant picture, the male behavioural norm is indeed often associated with rough competition, control, authority, rules and hierarchy (Van den Brink et al., 2010; Falkenberg, 2003; Kloot, 2004). Sinclair (1998) further argues that the male norm is often associated with such negative phenomena as clubbiness, traditional authoritarianism and reliance on rituals.

The discussed situation often leads to women leaders trying to adapt to the existing masculine order by behaving in accordance with the dominant masculine norm. To counter this some commentators have argued that women should instead rely on the ‘natural’ traits associated with their female gender. While critical gender theorists have criticised the essentialism inherent in this argument, the “men are from mars, women

are from venus” emphasis on gender difference is part of the contemporary postfeminist discursive formation to be discussed in chapter 3. Interestingly, research has long recognised e.g. Meehan (1999) that this type of behaviour i.e. relying on so-called ‘natural’ feminine behaviours cannot be beneficial to the women and leads to their further exclusion. In addition, women who adopt a masculine norm are often criticised by other women, and not excepted by male leaders due to being either overly feminine, not feminine enough or not masculine enough. According to the observations by Barker and Monks (1998), women demonstrating a masculine mode of behaviour are still undervalued in their managerial function and therefore have to further push themselves to prove to everybody they are even more male-like than males themselves. While more recent work e.g. Katila & Eriksson (2013) illustrates that it is now more acceptable for women to enact male behaviours when managing, the perception of women “doing” masculinity is still negative. While women may not be criticised for being masculine, their enactment of masculine behaviours is often associated with traditional bureaucratic organization and bureaucratic practices and as such women are perceived as “old fashioned” in their management behaviours. In addition, when women can now “do” masculinity this must be performed alongside feminine behaviours – the former without the latter can still be perceived negatively (Lewis & Simpson, 2017).

Simpson et al. (2010) engage in an even a more complex discussion concerning the actual experiences of women within male dominant professional environment. The researchers argue that modern women experience a highly contradicting situation (Simpson et al., 2010). From one point of view, the modern university is dominated by the best person for the job approach, which is supposed to be based on the principles of equality and sameness among the staff regardless of race, social status and gender. The women are expected to be evaluated on the same set of criteria as men, and perform in

exactly the same way as the male candidates. At the same time, Simpson et al. (2010: 199) argue: "... women also encounter and express a strong rhetoric of special contribution and difference as women are portrayed (and often perceive themselves) to have superior relational skills for leadership in the contemporary organization". This contradicting experience is also mixed with the existence of male norms (Krefting, 2003), and eventually lead to professional women having to sort out through whether they are equal and the same as men, or indeed 'naturally' different, and how this reflects upon their position in the university where male norm of behaviour is well-established and persists through generations, .

Bailyn (2003) initiates a discussion regarding what the dominance of the masculine norm and male-centred experiences mean specifically for the academic environment, as opposed to corporate environment. The researcher, in an empirical study, has interviewed academic staff of one of the US key educational facilities, and some respondents, including male ones, acknowledged the existence of such norms. Bailyn (2003: 143) notes: "What this means is that the academy is anchored in assumptions about competence and success that have led to practice and norms constructed around the life experiences of men and around a vision of masculinity as the normal, universal requirement of university life". Harvard physicist Howard Georgi, shares his opinion, that scientists are expected to be highly competitive and assertive (Georgi, 2000). However, the researcher himself raises an important question, are these qualities really beneficial to a successful scholar? Does the fact that these traits are perceived as beneficial within the corporate environment automatically make them suitable within a university environment? Georgi (2000) believes that in order to do "good science", the researcher has to be persistent, while his/ her work is driven by curiosity. Even more so, assertiveness as a trait may not always be beneficial when an ability to critically evaluate and question your own work is crucial (Baily, 2003). Georgi

(2000) notes that considering assertiveness as a necessary prerequisite for being a successful academic may put women in a disadvantaged position, as the latter may be perceived or expected not to possess this quality, or indeed be less assertive due to their upbringing or societal pressures (Sinclair, 1998).

In line with the arguments and concerns voiced by Bailyn (2003) and Georgi (2000), Benschop and Brouns (2003) argue that widespread dominance of a masculine norm derived from behavioural repertoires of male researchers has some negative consequences for the institutions as well as science as a whole. The researchers even propose the Olympus model to characterise and explain the educational hierarchical system and broad-spectrum outcomes of the masculine norm. The core of the model, or rather a top of the scientific Olympus – is a young man, a symbolic representation of a successful researcher (Benschop & Brouns, 2003). He is distanced from everyday practices, and focused on a single goal – succeeding in his scientific career through delivering a maximum number of publications. The function of science, according to this model, is to deliver universal knowledge; and the university itself is well secured and isolated from other aspects of life (e.g., social), as they can only create barriers to seeking and delivering objective truth (Benschop & Brouns, 2003). Although somewhat exaggerating a real situation, the model by Benschop and Brouns (2003) makes an important point, in demonstrating how the masculine norm affects not only the relationships inside academia, but also outside, as it presents the students with a skewed vision of science and successful career. Finch (2003) continues the argument by stressing that within the UK, at least one third of school students enter academia, and therefore any gender inequality practices, imbalances or established norms serve as an example and model of the society to them. This way the inequalities and gender practices are further distributed throughout their adulthood (Finch, 2003).

Knights and Richards (2003) make an argument that our contemporary understanding of various problems concerned with gender, race, social status or any other inequality, should be evaluated in relation to established masculine reasoning and dominating concept of meritocracy. Furthermore, it is argued that masculine discourses and norms have a detrimental ability to legitimize the process of intense competition and control over any procedure involved in seeking knowledge (Knights & Richards, 2003; Kloot, 2004; Deem, 2003; Van den Brink et al., 2010). Knights and Richards (2003: 231) rightfully concludes: "... meritocratic systems of inequality reflect and reproduce the discursive practices of masculinity that present disadvantages to a majority of women and some men".

Holmes et al. (2007) discuss the issue of established norms and masculinity in relation to women of colour, in particular – Black women in academia. The researchers argue that the male norm is not the only one dominating modern universities (Holmes et al., 2007). While numbers of white women holding higher rank positions are slowly but steadily rising throughout educational sector, women of colour and ethnic minority women have to face marginalisation due to the fact that (a) they do not comply with masculine norm, and (b) they do not comply with "white male or Female" stereotype" (Holmes et al., 2007). The researchers have conducted an investigation, of whether it is important for university students to have mentors of the same gender/ ethnicity. The results indicate that it may be highly beneficial for the students to have access to mentors who have a lot in common with them, also due to the fact that these mentor figures are viewed by students as role models, further inspiring and positively influencing their career (Holmes et al., 2007).

Overall, research indicates that the existence and persistence of the masculine norm within the Academy has profound consequences for the women who take up an

academic career. This norm contributes to ongoing difficulties for female academics including the maintenance of barriers which impede progress through the academy and being subjected to negative gendered behaviour. In the next sections, we will consider research which explores the existence and persistence of a negative context which acts to exclude women in general and women of colour in particular from university work environments, particularly at more senior levels.

2.2.2. Structural barriers preventing gender equality in academia

Despite the considerable attention directed at the topic of gender inequality within the work place environment the specific problem of discrimination against women within academia has only recently been brought into the spotlight. Researchers have relatively recently started to conduct empirical studies regarding roles and opportunities of Female scholars and academic professionals around the world (Monroe et al., 2008; Husu, 2015). Women who dedicated their career to academia and science are often faced with a number of hurdles that significantly affect their professional growth and development. Professional women often find themselves in a male-dominated culture, where male-leader stereotypes are perceived as the only effective way to perform academic tasks, as discussed in the previous section (Braidotti, 2013). Women face implicit and explicit bias and oppression, and often find themselves excluded from professional networks and collaborations (Rhoton, 2011), not taken seriously (Trower, 2001) or sexually harassed (Roosmalen & McDaniel, 1999). Women deciding to pursue a career in academia are faced with a number of structural challenges that include but are not limited to: necessity to combine work and family responsibilities, existing wage gap between female and male professionals, gender inequality and discrimination, sexual harassment, underrepresentation of Female

employees among higher management ranks (Monroe et al., 2008; Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra, 2013; Husu, 2015).

Interestingly, despite seemingly identical sources of job satisfaction, research conducted by Lawler (2002) demonstrated that women and men differed in their opinion regarding the most significant career obstacles. Both sexes have identified similar key sources of dissatisfaction: access to campus resources, teaching practice, administration and salary. At the same time, female employees were significantly more likely to report negative interactions with their colleagues, negative and dissatisfying experiences concerning promotion, necessity to balance multiple commitments (work and family life), significant workload (Lawler, 2002). Another psychological source of dissatisfaction for women came from their perception and experience regarding their chances for promotion and tenure. Female employees were reportedly engaged in a higher number of committee activities and had to advise more students through supervision and mentoring duties. Hult et al. (2005) notes that interviewed female employees of MIT perceived these factors as capable of negatively affecting their professional trajectory and chances for promotion. Interestingly, a number of empirical studies (Lawler, 2002; Hult et al., 2005) reported tenured women in the SET fields in Princeton University and MIT to be less satisfied with their positions and discouraged.

2.2.3. Balancing home and professional life: women in academia

Gender discrimination at places of work manifested in a number of ways, particularly through the lack of measures adopted by the academic institutions to adjust to the unequal distribution of family commitments between male and Female employees (Monroe et al., 2008; Monroe and Chiu, 2010; Sonnert & Holton, 1995). Women have to balance work and family responsibilities and often find themselves physically and

emotionally exhausted. Monroe et al. (2008) discusses emotional suffering that women who choose a career in the Academy experience on a daily basis.

“Many other respondents told of the incredible pain felt as they were torn between children and their job. The emotional exhaustion and the sense of desperation, as they had to choose between what felt like irreconcilable conflicts, left women drained emotionally and unsatisfied with whatever solutions were crafted” (p. 225).

Moreover, female researchers and professors believe that the conflict between professional responsibilities and family life is the reality for female professionals in any sphere of work, not only Academia (Monroe et al., 2008). Because of the imbalanced distribution of work and family-related responsibilities discussed before, women end up having to deal with an increased work load. Trower (2001) notes that feeling stressed and overwhelmed is much more common among female faculty members than male ones. Women often end up feeling frustrated and guilty of not giving their families enough time, at the same time feeling like they are not giving 100% of effort to their work as a researcher. High and unrealistic expectations often lead to high levels of stress among women who chose to pursue academic career (Hewlett & Luce, 2005).

A number of factors negatively affect women productivity and wellbeing and are directly connected to the issue of gender inequality. Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra (2013) discuss the matter of time, time structure and time consciousness in relation to “the widespread gender division in work and family life” (p. 283). A number of empirical studies have demonstrated that men and women spend their free and work time differently (Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra, 2013; Sonnert & Holton, 1995). This differential freedom to spend work- or family-related time between men and women has been

shown to significantly affect individual health, productivity, wellbeing and the level of stress. For instance, women often have to devote more time to family responsibilities when compared to men, and this time squeeze is known to cause decreased social role, autonomy and leads to partial or complete elimination of social life (Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra, 2013).

The phenomena of marriage and motherhood have a considerable and differentiated effect on men and women, as well as their professional trajectories. Researchers (Trower, 2001) group these effects into separate categories based on the effect they have upon certain career stages: (1) graduate school effects, (2) postdoctoral fellowships, (3) faculty positions. The research has demonstrated that having a child increases a time gap between obtaining bachelor's and doctorate degrees for both men and women. However, in the case of men the total gap was only extended by 0.9 years, while in the case of women it resulted in 3.1 year extension, which as discussed above, significantly affected the life-long earnings. Interestingly, married researchers demonstrated a significantly more productive performance during graduate years, while their colleagues who had children showed decreased productivity. Trower (2001) reports a positive effect on marriage occurring during postdoctoral fellowship period on professional productivity (number of publications) for both genders. Similarly, to the graduate school period, postdoctoral period suffered in terms of productivity when male and Female researchers had children. It has been noted that having family commitments affected and shaped women's professional characteristics, when male counterparts were significantly more resistant to these changes. When unmarried and married Female postdoctoral fellows were compared in regards of their commitment to their research projects, only 6% of the unmarried researchers reported not being able to dedicate 100% of their attention to their study topic. At the same time the total of 16.5% of the married women-postdocs could not give their full attention to the research. Interestingly, family

commitments and marriage did not show any significant effect on male postdoctoral fellows (Sonnert & Holton, 1995).

Trower (2001) reported that the female postdoctoral fellows with children were three times less likely to dedicate their full attention to the research. Once again, parenting did not seem to make much significant difference for the male researchers. An important fact observed among male and Female postdoctoral fellows was that having a child shifted family priorities towards the husband`s career. The presence of children made families focus more on the man`s career priorities and therefore wives were automatically assigned housekeeping and child raising responsibilities (Trower, 2001; Sonnert & Holton, 1995). Researchers report difficulties when identifying and studying relationships between marriage, parenthood and faculty positions. According to Trower (2001, n.p.), “Interactions between family and an academic career do exist but they are too complex and idiosyncratic to be captured by global variables such as marital and parental status”. Interestingly, a considerable proportion of male employees (27.3%) and Female ones (34.6%) reported that career demands have negatively impacted their decision to marry. Another important aspect – decision to have children – was more influenced by career demands among women (77.8%) than among married men (46.2%) (Sonnert & Holton, 1995).

Sonnert and Holton (1995) conclude that despite family and parenthood-related obstacles and barriers are encountered by both, male and Female researchers, the latter seem to be significantly more vulnerable to the associated challenges: “disadvantages for women`s career are straightforward and intuitively plausible – restricted mobility for dual career couples, or the large amounts of time and effort required by child rearing” (p. 160). Interestingly, women scientists who choose not to marry or have children encounter a set of completely different challenges. According to Sonnert and Holton

(1995), they often feel uncomfortable due to a high number of unwanted advances from male colleagues and feel pressure from everybody concerning their marital status and dating other people. Thus, these single women are unable to escape the prejudices targeting other women – married or unmarried, which negatively affects their career path (Trower, 2001; Sonnert & Holton, 1995).

Pressure and work load seem to only increase as women move up the career ladder within academia. Over 70% of women holding tenure or tenure-track position within the faculty report that prospect of leaving their job for an extended period of time because of giving birth is very risky for them (Trower, 2001). They consider such maternity leave to seriously jeopardise their position within the university as well as career prospects. The reports also show that an average faculty member has a workload of 55 hours per week, while working mothers often have over 80 hours of work due to their imbalanced life. Most of the household responsibilities and care for children falls on their shoulders (Wyer et al., 2013; Zhang & Hannum, 2013).

2.2.4. Gender inequality: women underrepresentation among higher academic ranks

Underrepresentation of women in higher education is a global trend, however different countries demonstrated varied degrees of improvements associated with movement toward gender equality. According to Pearson (2014), Western countries definitely lead the way, while Sub-Saharan Africa is a distinct outsider, with only less than 10% of women enrolled in colleges and universities. Recent decades have witnessed a significant growth in the proportion of women among Asian, Latin America and Caribbean students (Figure 1). Eastern Europe and Middle Eastern countries also demonstrate a positive progress as far as educating young women. However, empirical data shows that high representation of women among university students does not

guarantee gender equality and lack of oppression and discrimination (Sonnert & Holton, 1995; Wenneras & Wold, 2001; Monroe et al., 2008).

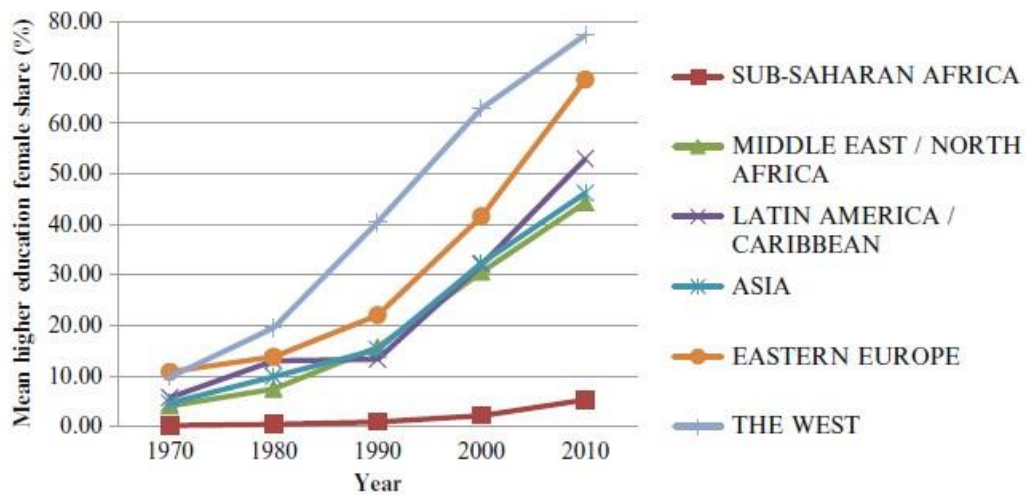


Figure 1. The global trend of woman participation in higher education during the period of 1970-2010). The data was calculated by dividing the number of enrolled women by the total number of the population of the appropriate age (Source: Pearson, 2014).

Monroe et al. (2008) argue that underrepresentation of female researchers and professors in Academia is merely a reflection of inequality that still exists in the rest of the professional spheres and our society as a whole. A number of studies have conducted empirical research to study women's under-representation in the academic sphere as well as the underlying causes (Monroe et al., 2008; Sonnert & Holton, 1995; Husu, 2015). Monroe et al. (2008) have collected empirical data regarding female representation in US academic environment and studied problems that women face at their workplace. Monroe et al. (2008) argue that academic and professional worlds hire Female specialists at the same rate, and even though it is believed that occupation type should create a gender gap, jobs requiring higher qualification are expected to decrease it. However, this is now what the researchers have observed in the reality. As much as

58% of the students enrolled in Graduate Degree programs were women, however only 15% of the “top 50” faculty positions (p. 216) were held by women (Figure 2).

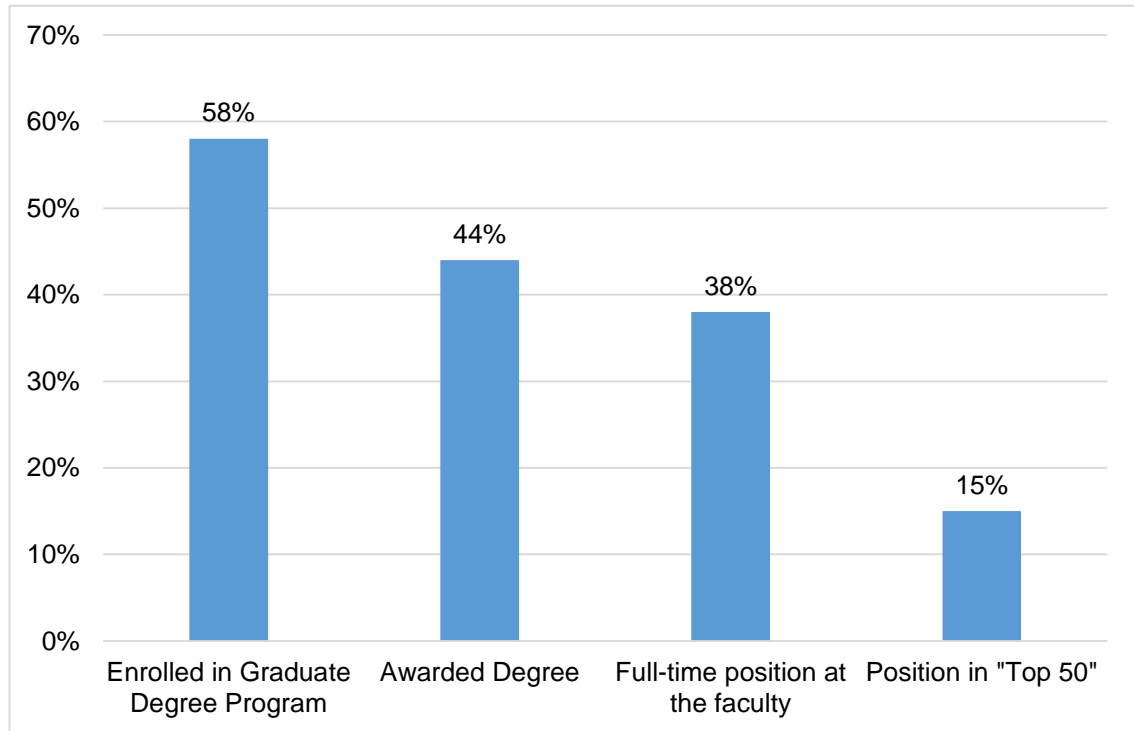


Figure 2. Percentage of women employed by academic institution by professional status in the US for 2001 (source: Monroe et al., 2008)

Figure 3 below demonstrates a clear and typical scissor pattern, reflecting the promotion distribution between men and within the academic environment (European Commission, 2012). The scissor pattern reflects the dynamics of gender gap change throughout different stages of professional development of men and women within academic institutions (Macha, 2011). The compared time periods (years 2002 and 2010) demonstrated that the alarming pattern of significant underrepresentation of female professors and researchers has not improved within the time frame of eight years. The data obtained for European academic institutions largely echoes patterns observed within the US academia (Bellas, 1994; Budig & England, 2001; Monroe et al., 2014). The most balanced representation of men and women is observed within the graduate

students groups (60% of male students versus 36% of Female students), while the most skewed pattern is observed at the most senior level of professorship (Grade A: 90% of male professors against 10% of Female ones).

Husu (2015) discusses the case of Norway, which when looking at the overall number of Female professors cannot be considered a gender equality leader among other European countries and instead displays average results: 21% of Female professors (data for 2013). Despite this, Norway as well as other Nordic states, greatly excels in gender equality when it comes to high rank academic and scientific leadership: 25% of Norwegian and 43% of Swedish universities are led by women. At the same time 90% of European universities are led by male professors. The same pattern is observed in Nordic academic scientific boards and committees (Husu, 2015).

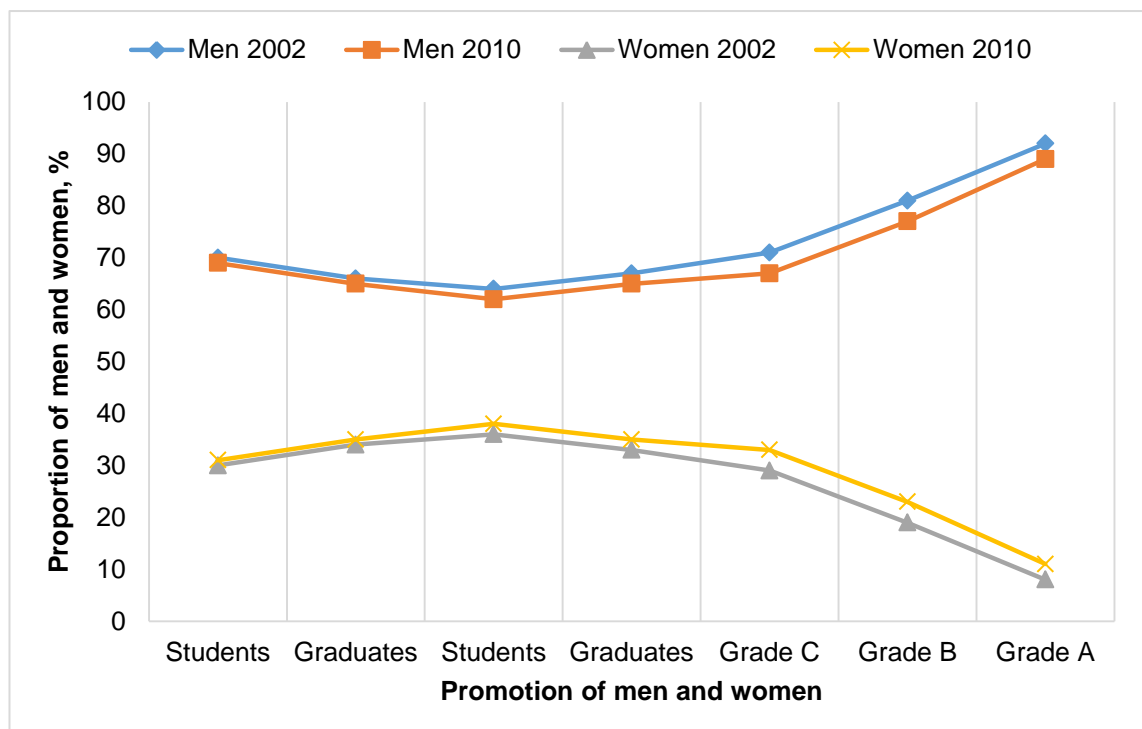


Figure 3. Promotion of men and women within academic environment (science and engineering) during the period of 2002-2010 within the EU states (source: European Commission, 2012).

Underrepresentation of female professionals among higher ranks varies among countries, specific institutions and discipline fields. STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) demonstrate the lowest representation of Female specialists (Monroe et al., 2014). For instance, among the elite US science and engineering institutions, the percentage of women employed as full professors has been close to 10% for the last 50 years (Monroe et al., 2014). Apart from the negative gender discrimination phenomenon, this fact indicates lack of change and progress: literally – a stagnant situation. The problem is further aggravated by the burden of racial inequality. When it comes to the representation of women of color, the number decreases to 1.6% of the full professors employed by engineering faculties (Ward, 2001; Wyer, 2013).

The negative dynamics cannot be explained by the low desire of women to pursue career in STEM sciences: up to 44% of all PhD students are Females, however after graduation they massively abandon their aspiration to become scientists or professors. Certain fields, such as Life Sciences, observe significant improvement as far as increased representation of women among academic staff. However other fields, such as Chemistry and Physics, remain dominated by males (Monroe et al., 2014). The so-called, pipeline problem, also fails to explain the negative dynamics: “Inequality cannot be explained by reference to the pipeline or pathways problem, which argues that after we get enough women in graduate school they will advance naturally through the pipeline and into the top administrative positions” (Monroe et al., 2014, p. 418).

Table 1. Percentage of Female professionals in “top 50 disciplines” (source: Reitsamer, 2009).

Subject	1	2	3	4		
	PhD`s, %	Female Assistant Profs, %	Female Associate Profs, %	Full Profs, %	Gap between 1 and 2	Gap between 1 and 4
Mechanical Engineering	10.4	15.7	8.9	3.2	-5.3	7.2
Physics	13.3	11.2	9.4	5.2	2.1	8.1
Astronomy	20.6	20.2	15.7	9.8	0.4	10.8
Computer Science	20.5	10.8	14.4	8.3	9.7	12.2
Economics	29.3	19	16.3	7.2	10.3	22.1
Math	27.2	19.6	13.2	4.6	7.6	22.6
Political Science	36.6	36.5	28.6	13.9	0.1	22.7
Chemistry	31.3	21.5	20.5	7.6	9.8	23.7
Biology	44.7	30.4	24.7	14.7	14.3	30
Sociology	58.9	52.3	42.7	24.3	6.6	34.6
Psychology	66.1	45.4	40.1	26.7	20.7	39.4

Some researchers went as far as suggesting that the genetic predisposition might affect the ratio of male to female representation (Sonnert & Holton, 1995). If this argument was valid, Monroe et al. (2014) point out that Female PhD students would be observed underperforming compared to their male counterparts, when in reality an opposite pattern is observed.

The Table above illustrates a typical pattern of underrepresentation of women within STEM faculties when compared to the social sciences (e.g. Sociology). Reitsamer (2009) presents data that emphasizes these serious differences. According to the researcher women represented only 20% of the PhD students studying Computer science in 2008 in the US. At the same time, such faculties as Sociology and Psychology hired over 50% of Female PhD students. Interestingly, Biology PhD students consisted of women by almost 45%. Despite the data regarding PhD students, all of the analyzed faculties demonstrated significant underrepresentation of women professionals within a higher rank positions. Faculties of Sociology and Psychology employed only around 30% of female professionals, while the faculties of Astronomy and Computer Science only employed around 10%. The table, in line with empirical studies, shows that significant drop in women representation occurred at the stage of full time professorship. While women seen to occupy a significant portion of Assistant Professor positions, not many make it to a tenure job. This interesting and disturbing phenomenon will be discussed in greater detail later within this chapter.

Various theories and concepts have been developed to explain differentiated career trajectories of men and women in academia (Wyche & Graves, 1992; Kjeldal, Rindfleish & Sheridan, 2005; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Zhang, Y., & Hannum, 2013). Kjeldal et al. (2005) discuss two major variables affecting women`s career prospects and maintaining a “glass ceiling” within academia walls: productivity and

professional experience. The latter variable, professional experience, is thought to be negatively affected by existing structural factors such as highly competitive environment, where Female professionals are only starting to conquer their ground (Sonnert & Holton, 1995). Female specialists are often offered certain work arrangements (part time, adjunct, etc.) which significantly decrease their chances to compete with their male counterparts, who are able to dedicate their full time and effort to climbing the academe career ladder (Zhang & Hannum, 2013). Academic productivity is also closely connected to the professional arrangements available to Female researchers and professors. These “marginal positions” (Kjeldal et al., 2005: 433) lead to increased teaching load and associated significantly fewer opportunities for conducting research and performing group leadership responsibilities (supervising PhD and post-doctoral students, etc.). This in turn, negatively affects women`s satisfaction with their own results, self-efficacy and motivation to conduct the research. Decreased motivation and limited time free of teaching sessions in turn decreases chances to obtain research grants, or even apply for them (Bain & Cummings, 2000). Female researchers are also reported to attend fewer professional events when compared to their male counterparts: women attend fewer conferences and meetings (Kjeldal et al., 2005).

According to the Kjeldal et al (2005), opportunities available to male and female researchers in the academy are quite different. Male leaders tend to favor and appoint male staff, a phenomenon referred to as “homosocial reproduction or “like promoting like” (Kjeldal et al., 2005: 441). This behavior can be explained from the standpoint of social identity theory (Ellemers & Haslam, 2011). The males tend to view other males as their “in-group”, while Female leaders are considered “out-group”. Even though existing behavioral patterns and group dynamics seem to be much more complex than this, the theory has been supported by a number of empirical studies from academia and

other fields (Kjeldal et al., 2005; Sonnert & Holton, 1995; Wyer et al., 2013; Lawler, 2002; Lewis, 2014).

Overall, much of the research concludes that women are often faced with difficult dilemmas that make them choose to stop their academic career. One of the choices Female employees make is not to join the tenured scientists ranks. This is why recent decades are witnessing an increased representation of non-tenure-track Female employees working full time within the faculties. Some researchers believe that this decision to join non-tenure-track or part-time employment opportunities is largely caused by increased stress connected to the necessity to combine work and family-related responsibilities. This creates a conflict between career and family, and women often find themselves choosing for non-tenure employment options, simply because they offer more flexibility (Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000; Macha, 2011; Zhang & Hannum, 2013).

At a certain point of their career trajectory, young women experience pressure from their families and friends who often view marriage along with motherhood more important than a successful scientific career. Women often feel judged, instead of being supported and perceive marriage and family life incompatible with their professional growth (Budig & England, 2001). Empirical evidence suggests that women from STEM faculties who are recent PhD graduates and who are offered two career opportunities (a part-time contract or a tenure opportunity) would often choose the temporary contract, usually a three year one. PhD`s in mathematics, physics, geology and chemistry were much more likely to go for a temporary offer in order to adjust it to possible family plans. The researchers also studied the impact of other variables (university prestige, location, ranking, salary, etc.) and its effect on the choice made by women, however the

contract length seemed to be one of the strongest predictors of a woman's future career trajectory (Trower, 2001; Pearson, 2014).

2.2.5. Differential pay: men and women in academia

The pattern of differential pay between men and women is consistent throughout private and business institutions. Trower (2001) reports women on average making \$10,300-\$12,895 less when compared to their male counterparts occupying equivalent positions. Researchers point out that underrepresentation of women in academia often goes along with substantial underpayment of their services. Monroe et al. (2014) present data that demonstrate Female faculty members earning 80-85% of what their male counterparts are paid. The tendency seems to be consistent throughout academic ranks and institutions. It is further argued that discipline field determines the level of inequality. For instance, STEM disciplines are considered the worst for Female professionals concerning the level of underpayment.

A number of studies have looked into differential pay for men and women and have proposed a number of explanations for the observed negative phenomenon (Budig & England, 2001; Zhang & Hannum, 2013; Morley, 2014). Budig and England (2001) discuss the role of motherhood in decreased wages for women. Wage penalty, particularly the one associated with motherhood is a very important problem to discuss when exploring the issue of gender inequality. The consistent finding of mothers earning less than fathers suggests that women who make a choice of having a child pay price for this decision. This decision, to have children, often puts women in disadvantaged position compared to men, thus further contributing to gender inequality. The research reveals that absence of earnings or the lower wage of women during the time they stay at home and care for children is only a minor aspect of the problem (Zhang & Hannum, 2013; Sonnert & Holton, 1995). Years, even two or three, spent to

raise a child often cost women job opportunities, chances of promotion and basically significantly decrease their overall life time earnings (Budig & England, 2001). Pay inequality is suggested to affect and trigger other gender inequalities. Budig and England (2001) consider the importance of motherhood - a parent who chooses to stay at home and dedicate his/ her time and effort to raise and educate a child also benefits a larger community. Children who receive attention and care in early childhood are less likely to commit a crime or engage in other illegal activity, it is claimed. However, despite the social emphasis that is placed on the value of motherhood, mothers who usually take up the responsibility are never compensated for it (Budig & England, 2001).

Recent studies indicate that mothers are increasingly trying to combine caring for children and work responsibilities, however even those who do not leave their employment place lose a certain amount of time to child-related activities (Budig & England, 2001). The empirical evidence suggests that becoming a parent does not have a significant negative effect on fathers, on the contrary, a minor positive effect has been demonstrated (Zhang & Hannum, 2013).

Wage penalty for motherhood can be partially explained by the fact that because of losing some years of experience and staying at home, women are able to advance less in their careers when compared to men (Budig & England, 2001). According to the human capital theory, employees during the early stages of their career receive lower wages but gain valuable practical experience. This gained experience along with seniority later results in more efficient and productive performance, and is compensated by an appropriate wage during later career stage. It is difficult to link lifetime earnings of Female academic professionals with their experience and describe the effect of motherhood on the variables. However, indirect evidence suggests that women choosing

to become mothers lose sufficient time and experience associated with it, which later negatively affects their pay levels (Budig & England, 2001; Zhang & Hannum, 2013).

Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra (2013) illustrate the Nordic welfare model by discussing the particular case of Iceland. The country attempts to equalize rights and possibilities of men and women by securing a total of 9 months of parental leave, and reserving 3 months of the leave exclusively for fathers. Another important step the government of Iceland has taken was to provide parents with access to relatively cheap day care facilities. This measure takes some pressure off the parents and allows some more flexibility regarding work choices and work load. This comprehensive set of social benefits makes Iceland one of the global leaders as far as fighting for gender equality (Drummond, 2015), and has even been recognized as such by the World Economic Forum and its Global Gender Gap Index rating (Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013).

Monroe et al. (2014) emphasize the importance of the development and application of the so-called salary equity programs. The University of California is a famous example of the successful adoption of such a program. The University has developed an advancement system that is based on open and regular reviews of staff performance. These reviews determine raises and promotional events for the employees of all ranks across the institution. Monroe et al. (2014) notes that the system inevitably involves and promotes heavy use of bureaucratic procedures. However in the end the intervention enhances transparency and accountability. To prevent gender-biased salary gaps, the University of California regularly posts information regarding available salaries and recent promotions. In this way women who are in doubt regarding their status and think they might be underpaid compared to their male colleagues can simply compare their earnings to those of other staff. Women academics who are unsatisfied

with their current salaries and think they are being discriminated against can appeal for the review of their performance which is conducted by a special commission (Monroe et al., 2014)

2.2.6. Research productivity and output

A number of researchers have focused on the issue of research productivity among women who choose to pursue an academic career and its link to their career trajectory, tenure rate and wage (Trower, 2001; Zhang & Hannum, 2013). Trower (2001) points at two obstacles when researching the problem of research productivity: methodological approach (which parameter to use as a reliable and unbiased measure) and unusual data patterns. An empirical study by Wenneras and Wold (2001) examined productivity and promotion patterns of women in Swedish universities. The research has shown that candidate reviewing process was prone to a number of biases. For instance, women were reported to be awarded 44% of PhDs in biomedical studies, however only one quarter of postdoc researchers within the same field were women. Wenneras and Wold (2001) have further reported that only 7% of women were awarded professorial positions. This alarming statistics was coupled by the fact that Female candidates had to demonstrate 2.5 times stronger and productive performance in order to be viewed equal to their male counterparts.

There are contradicting results regarding productivity of male and female researchers as far as number of scientific articles and their scholarly value. Some researchers report male professionals to be more productive compared to their Female colleagues, however note that women often publish papers that end up having a significantly higher citation rating. The question of a single criteria adopted to evaluate productivity within academic environment is a major issue, as both – number of

publications and citation rating can be rather important and self-excluding parameters (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Trower, 2001).

2.2.7. Sexual harassment: women in academia

Sexual harassment at work place remains a significant factor decreasing work efficiency and traumatizing women all over the world (Fitzgerald et al., 1988). Fitzgerald et al. (1988) argue that the problem of sexual harassment against women in academia was brought into public and scientific spotlight and even though its negative effects on women workers and students are recognized the issue still persists (Roosmalen & McDaniel, 1999). A number of incidents of sexual harassment has been reported against women in academia (Hoffmann, 1986; Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1993; Fitzgerald et al., 1988). Sexual harassment is widely recognized as a significant barrier to professional career development of women, however, the issue is rather difficult to investigate due to vague terminology and definitions, lack of standardized methodology adopted across fields and institutions and relatively low report rates by victims of abuse (Fitzgerald et al., 1988). Indeed, a recent case of systemic sexual harassment in a British university was reported in *The Guardian*, (27 August 2016). It was stated that the prevalence of inappropriate sexual behavior is suppressed due to the use of non-disclosure agreements and confidentiality clauses once a legal case is taken. This applies particularly to situations where the alleged harassment is taking place between a staff member and a student. Sexual harassment is still very much a live issue in many British universities, particularly in the context of “lad culture” –here the focus is on student behavior and not staff behavior. However staff-student relationships and the occurrence of harassment in these relationships is increasingly an issue for universities. It was further reported that a senior professor resigned because of university failure to address the issue of sexual harassment which has now become “a normalized and

generalized part of the academic culture” (The Guardian, 27 August 2016, pp. 6) affecting staff as well as students.

Once the problem became a topic of public discussion and recognition within academia walls, a number of universities and colleges undertook surveys to ascertain the extent of the problem (Roosmalen & McDaniel, 1999). The goal of these investigations was to obtain a clear picture: how serious and widespread was the problem, and what are the consequences the university has to deal with. In early research, the numbers presented varied greatly from institution to institution, all because of the fact that different definitions of sexual harassment were used along with highly diverse methodological tools to screen for it. It became clear that a unified method should be developed to screen and assess for incidents of sexual harassment. From this research five different types of sexual harassment – outlined in Table 2 below – were identified.

The phenomenon of sexual harassment appears to be widespread within the business and academic environment (Roosmalen & McDaniel, 1999; Valla & Ceci, 2014; Robbins et al., 2013). However the question remains how does this malicious practice affect careers of women and their professional development. Fitzgerald et al. (1988) view sexual harassment as a significant obstacle to woman`s career development in universities and the recent Guardian report (2016) discussed above still bears this out. Negative effects include physical trauma, emotional difficulties and poor work performance.

Table 2. Five areas of sexual harassment used while interviewing potential victims

(source: Fitzgerald et al., 1988)

Area	Manifestation
Gender harassment	Sexist remarks and generalized sexist behaviour.
Seductive behaviour	Inappropriate sexual advances, with no further threats or sanctions.
Sexual bribery	Promise of reward coupled with requests of sexual activities.
Sexual coercion	Coercion of sexual activity, coupled with a threat of punishment.
Sexual assault	Major sexual imposition and/ or assault.

Despite obvious negative effects of sexual harassment in the academic environment and policies directed at controlling it, why is the phenomenon still so widespread? The study by Fitzgerald et al. (1988) – though somewhat dated - sheds light on this matter. Fitzgerald et al. (1988) reported that only 3% of all the female students who experience any form of sexual harassment go as far as reporting it to the authorities. Most of the women never do it because of a number of reasons: (1) they feel that nobody will believe them (2) they do not want to be viewed as troublemakers, (3) they have solved the issue themselves or believed it as not serious enough to report.

Fitzgerald et al. (1988: 174) noted that: “the central concept of sexual harassment is the misuse of power, whether organizationally or institutionally, in a manner that constructs a barrier to women`s educational and occupational pursuits”. As demonstrated by review of the earlier studies, sexual harassment has been a major problem women professionals had to face for a long period of time. However, according to Monroe et al. (2014) the situation has improved as incidents of sexual harassment at workplace appear to have become rare but as was reported in The Guardian this may be due more to non-disclosure agreements than to a reduction in this negative behavior. Monroe et al. (2014) argue that the issue of sexual harassment has been around long enough to develop effective preventive measures. In fact, the researchers suggest, such measures exist and are successfully implemented in a number of institutions. Monroe et al. (2014) note that sexual harassment prevention training is a crucial tool to eliminate harmful practice from the world of academia and science. Researchers argue that one of the major problems when dealing with incidents or existence of sexual harassment is the fact that many of the victims simply do not recognize harassing behavior as such and therefore end up never reporting the incident (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Gutek, 2008; Monroe et al., 2014).

2.2.8. Ethnic minority women: double challenge

It is argued that ethnic minority women experience more discriminative barriers compared to women from the dominant ethnic group (Sang, Al-Dajani & Özbilgin, 2013). Researchers argue that ethnic minority women experience the so-called “double marginalization” (Turner, 2002: 74). Over two decades ago Wyche and Graves (1992) have identified a research gap existing within the topic of women experiences within academia. The gap concerned psychological aspects of these experiences among minority-status female employees (African, Asian, Native American and Hispanic).

Unfortunately, at the moment the gap still exists and little is known about specific experiences, tendencies and sacrifices ethnic minority women experience if they choose to pursue a career path in the academic environment (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001).

An interviewed Female scientist of Afro-American origin noted (Wyer et al., 2013: 16):

“It was in the spring of that year, that I really came to terms with what it was going to mean to be a female and be a serious scientist, because at that time we had a speaker who was Shirley Jackson, who had just gotten her Ph.D. in physics from MIT and was the first Black woman to do so. She came and spoke, and it created quite a furor in our department and a whole conversation engendered about whether or not women could be women and scientists at the same time.”

Trotman and Greene (2013) state that the academic environment in the United States is suited to and tailored for white heterosexual males, where it is hard for employees to view women of color as equals in terms of professional capabilities. At the same time, the authors argue, this creates an effect of minority women starting to doubt themselves and their own talents. Ethnic women start perceiving themselves as cheaters or impostors, occupying somebody else`s place (Trotman & Greene, 2013). It is important to challenges this established status quo of heterosexual male supremacy within academic walls.

Trotman and Greene (2013) discuss the development of psychological research in the US that used IQ test score results to demonstrated differences between various social, ethnic and gender groups. The authors highlight that this notion of dominance was carved inside academic walls, and many stereotypes remain and persist there till this day. It is considered that women of colour experience particularly negative and difficult events during their academic career due to the fact that they are doubly

victimized on grounds of race and gender. Instead of focusing on their professional growth, these women often find themselves trying to prove their competence and worthiness when compared to white males and even white women (Renzulli, Grant & Kathuria, 2006; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001).

It is argued that the ivory tower of the academic environment is not welcoming women of color and they meet various obstacles and barriers on their way to success (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). The researchers agree that women of colour are significantly more stressed when compared to their male and white female counterparts. Ethnic minority women also experience less satisfaction from their job and perceive themselves as disadvantaged. Trotman and Greene (2013: 294) describe their professional experience as undergoing “personal and psychological minefields”. The authors also argue that ethnic minority women regularly become victims of the ethnocentrism by representatives of the dominant culture. This leads to major psychological traumas and distress. A number of US universities are making an effort to diversify their faculty by including minority women. Even when these recruiting efforts turn out to be successful, the issue of adaptation and comfortable work environment still exists. However, the increasing percentage of minority women among faculty staff does not solve the problem of gender equality or discrimination of women (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). Trotman and Greene (2013) further note that due to their unique minority status, women of colour are often expected to perform additional status-related responsibilities, while at the same time continuing to conduct professional duties.

A number of interventions and strategies have been proposed to deal with the situation (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Trotman and Greene, 2013). An important tool to improve professional experiences of ethnic minority women is encouraging them to share and talk about their life and career and describe challenges and barriers they face.

It is crucial to make them talk about sexism and racism. First of all, discussing burning issues makes the entire faculty aware of the problems. Secondly, people openly discussing their challenges and problems experience psychological relief. Ethnic minority women should be encouraged to talk to other women who share the same challenges and experiences. It is particularly crucial to introduce new minority employees to successful women of colour who were effective in their careers and are ready to share their experience. However, even talking to new employees that have not achieved great success yet, has also proven to be useful as it allows ethnic minority women to see that they are not alone, they are not on their own and there are colleagues that share similar experiences and women they can talk to. The university must support and facilitate creation of special networks that serve to offer support and validation to women of color. Trotman and Greene (2013) view these networks as survival tools that can play a crucial role in letting a new minority woman adapt and succeed in a new seemingly hostile environment.

One major issue that can significantly worsen the experience of an ethnic minority woman is her isolation from other women, and particularly other minority women (Trotman & Greene, 2013). Isolated women tend to further isolate themselves from friends and family and do not discuss their problems with anybody. They do not reach out for help and do not realize that encountering practices of sexism and racism are not normal and should be reported to university administration and fought against. The management of inappropriate sexual behaviour varies between institutions with some being more accepting of victims than others. More conservative institutions are less likely to have active management policies in this area. The variability across institutions often means that in some universities women in both majority and minority groups have to adapt or devise their own strategies for dealing with unwanted sexual attention (Trotman & Greene, 2013).

Imposter phenomenon, discussed by many researchers (Trotman & Greene, 2013; Monroe et al., 2014) is rather commonly observed among ethnic minority women who chose to pursue an academic career. Women of color are highly vulnerable to perceiving themselves as intellectually phony compared to white female and male colleagues (Sang et al., 2013). This phenomenon is observed due to the fact that minority women compare themselves against expectations established within a given institution. An academic environment dominated by white men and a masculine norm creates an atmosphere where professionals are expected to act and behave in a particular manner. Ethnic minority women cannot always easily fit this “ideal” profile, and therefore they frame themselves as losers and not worthy of an academic position (Monroe et al, 2014; Sang et al, 2013). In addition to the notion of imposter syndrome, there is little empirical research on how macro factors such as migration flows impact on academic identity (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Zikic & Richardson, 2015). Migration is named as a major factor influencing how professionals from different countries perceive themselves as employees and experience their work environment (Zikic & Richardson, 2015). Zikic and Richardson (2015: 2) refer to the processing occurring during this identity formation as “a macro role transition” and argue that migrant professionals “may face complete discontinuity from socially scripted or highly institutionalized trajectories, and as a result engage in non-linear career experiences”

2.3. Including women in the Academy

2.3.1. Recruitment practices in academia: equalizing gender imbalance

In this part of the chapter attention will be directed at institutional approaches and strategies for increasing the number of women working in the academy at all levels. However, according to Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) despite a number of efforts, a shift towards a more balanced ratio has not been achieved. A number of researchers

point towards recruitment tools as the most plausible solution for the existing problem (Monroe et al., 2014). Others argue that without challenging the existing order within academic walls no transparent recruitment process will yield positive results, as even if more women join academia, they will still be often forced to leave due to established institutional and organisational barriers (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Lawler, 2002). Despite an existing argument and controversy, recruitment process is one of the important issues to address in order to shift the established status quo and more towards gender equality.

Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) describe the academic system as an opaque environment, where a well-established elite (an inner circle) decides upon new members. Decisions made within this environment are often made in an informal atmosphere, and the decision-making process can be described as closed. The researchers argue that more transparent procedures and accountable decision-making processes will increase the chances of women to get hired and enhance their career trajectory. Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) conducted a study to explore the issue of transparency and accountability of recruitment process within Dutch universities. The authors have conducted in-depth interviews with 24 women and 40 men who held various positions within recruiting committees, and analysed over 950 reports of appointments conducted by the committees. The researchers discuss the importance of transparency and accountability when enhancing gender equality in business and academic institutions (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). It is argued that the new approach towards managerialism in academia is actively promoting a demand for transparency for all existing policies and practices. Modern demands pressure universities to be more open and accountable in front of their internal and external stakeholders. At the same time, empirical evidence concludes that transparency and

accountability of recruitment process alone cannot serve as a solution to the existing problem of gender inequality.

The supposed value of recruitment process transparency is in its ability to enhance more fair selection process of the worthy candidates (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). Empirical studies of gender mechanisms taking place within the organisations demonstrated that chances of gender-related bias are significantly decreased by open and transparent decision-making process (Shaw & Stanton, 2012; Monroe et al., 2014). A practice of keeping evaluation criteria and assessment process confidential are likely to increase the chances of gender bias and decrease chances of the female candidates being promoted. The problem exists, that despite mutual agreement that transparency and accountability are of paramount importance in fighting gender inequality, there are little comprehensible guidelines on what actually constitutes these notions within the academic recruitment process.

Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) have developed specific criteria of assessing transparency and accountability of the existing recruiting systems within universities. The researchers argue for the presence of four distinct compounds that enhance transparent, accountable and gender-bias free: (1) open recruitment process, (2) clear criteria of candidate assessment, (3) presence of the HRM professional during the selection process, (4) submitting the appointment report to the university board for approval of the selected candidate. Van den Brink and Benschop argue that an open recruitment process, achieved through public advertising via university and job board channels, ensures that all interested and qualified candidates may apply for the position, instead of offering an employment opportunity to a selected and privileged pool of candidates. They further emphasize that committee boards which are in need of alternative permission (advertising the professorship within a narrow circle) must first

obtain a special permission from the university administration. The selection criteria used during the interviewing process to design the questions and assess qualification of the candidates must be properly developed and made known to all stakeholders of the process. These clear and specific criteria should serve as a basis of shortlisting the qualified candidates. An HRM advisor can play a significant role in professionalizing the entire recruitment process, and may help in designing the selection process or developing new channels to seek for the qualified candidates. Each appointment, made by the committee, should be properly documented and handed over to the university board for confirmation. In case any doubt or contradiction arises, the report should serve as a documented proof that the selection process complied with the university criteria and specify the decision rationale behind hiring a particular candidate (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014; Monroe et al., 2014).

Some protocols developed to enhance gender equality via increasing transparency and accountability of the recruitment process, suggest that extra effort should be dedicated to searching for women candidates (Reitsamer, 2009). A number of protocols strongly advise to have at least one woman member on the selection board to ensure unbiased decision. Some universities have developed gender-neutral procedures – special protocols that stimulate the committee members to clarify their selection criteria and use a checklist procedure to ensure the decision has not been affected by gender of the applicants (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). Filling such checklists is mandatory for all the committee members, and the completed protocols are delivered to the university board for examination (Reitsamer, 2009).

Formal practices, developed by the universities, often comply with the three different concepts of gender equality. Some practices, particularly those advising for equal representation and access to promotional opportunities for women and men is

clearly based on the “equal opportunities” framework. This framework predicts the existence of multiple barriers in the way of women professionals (Monroe et al., 2014). The so-called intentional gender equality approach emphasizes the particular contribution of women to the work process and advises for their representation within the recruiting committee. A post-equity perspective, on the other hand, targets gender-neutral practices that are developed to effectively disrupt gender inequality practices. Protocols developed based on this framework advocate for gender-neutral selection process of the candidates (for instance the use of unified application forms where no indication of gender or name can be found) (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014).

Some researchers argue that ensuring the presence of women among committee members does not guarantee unbiased decisions and equality of male and female candidates. It is argued that women members are not expected to support other women during the recruitment process. Empirical studies have shown examples where women committee members demonstrated hostility towards women candidates being interviewed (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). This observation is supported by other ones, all of them suggesting that women are just as prone to making gender-biased decisions as their men-colleagues. Therefore, women being a part of the recruitment committee do not guarantee a gender-neutral selection process and are not more likely to give women candidates equal or increased chances to succeed during the recruitment process (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). Despite this, some studies suggest that presence of women committee members improves the overall work atmosphere during the process and overall increases the chances of women applicants. Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) conclude that diversifying the committee composition, enhances transparency and efficiency of the selection process and thus decreases a chance of gender-biased decisions favouring white men professionals.

2.3.2. Gender inequalities: coping strategies

In this section attention will be directed at how women “cope” with gender disparities and unfair treatment. A number of empirical studies have investigated the psychology of academic women and how they cope with the existing situation of gender inequality (Carty, 1992; Monroe et al., 2008; Hult, Callister & Sullivan, 2005; Barry, Berg & Chandler, 2006). The researchers agree that overall “women reject legal and administrative mechanisms in favour of the subtler collective action proposals” (Monroe et al., 2008, p. 224). Evidence exists that there are significant differences in male and female professional experiences, motivation factors, job satisfaction and ways to deal with existing work-related situations (Hult et al., 2005).

Hult et al. (2005) stresses the importance of monitoring levels of job satisfaction when evaluating overall work climate and gender inequality within an academic institution. Most of the researchers focus solely on work performance and efficiency, ignoring factors such as satisfaction and motivation, which are known to directly and indirectly affect both (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). A detailed survey carried out within the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) explored levels of job satisfaction and motivation among female employees of the institution. The female members of MIT SET colleges (specialised in Agriculture, Engineering, Natural Resources, Science) were interviewed to study their job experiences. SET colleges were chosen, because according to the authors (Hult et al., 2005), the progress towards gender equality was the least profound and obvious there. The study has found that both male and female employees share the same sources of job satisfaction and professional success: college interactions, access to campus resources, administration and teaching. Males and Females found positive communication and interaction with their colleagues, teaching practice, access to scientific and recreational resources as well as administrative support key to their satisfaction.

A number of interventions have been suggested and implemented to increase levels of satisfaction among women employees (Karam & Afiouni, 2014; Monroe et al., 2014). Hult et al. (2005) note that different universities and faculties still identify highly similar causes of dissatisfaction among their female employees. The problem appears to be really widespread and pervasive across institutions, particularly among science and engineering faculties. The National Science Foundation has implemented an intervention called the NSF-ADVANCE program, which attempts to enhance participation of Female professionals in science-related projects and increase their representations among the scientific and engineering staff. A number of the US universities have followed the initiative by developing local programs to help women employees have an equal access to higher rank academic positions and leadership roles. For instance, the Utah State University was one of the first to receive the NSF-Advance award for its plan. The initiative started by conducting interviews and surveys with local women employees to identify the sources of dissatisfaction. Interestingly, the research has demonstrated that women employed by a large university in the rural West have problems similar to those experienced by their colleagues from Princeton and MIT (Hult et al., 2005).

Individual responsibility model

The study conducted by Monroe et al. (2008) at the University of California at Irvin (UCI) demonstrated that female employees of the faculties were demonstrating behaviour that can be explained by individual responsibility model. The Female employees seemed to fully recognize the UCI authority and shifted responsibility over the situation of gender inequality to themselves. The women employed as academic professionals felt like it was solely their responsibility to deal with the situation where they had to put more psychological and physical effort to keep up with their male

counterparts. Monroe et al. (2008), in accordance with other researchers (Kelan, 2009; Monroe et al., 2014), discovered that the majority of interviewed women felt like they had to do more compared to male employees if they wanted to succeed in academic environment. The common reflection upon the existing situation was lament; anger was rarely observed. Therefore, Monroe et al. (2008), concludes, women have (1) recognized and acknowledged the existing situation of gender inequality in academic environment; (2) recognized authority of the UCI board over taking the administrative decision; (3) adopted an individual responsibility model concerning the situation; (4) expected themselves to work harder to achieve results similar to those demonstrated by their male counterparts. This dangerous logic has put women in a situation where they rely on their own strength and hard work to adapt to the ongoing discrimination, and do not actively demand or expect the higher level authority (University or State) to tackle the issue. This dangerous observations suggests that Female employees compare their own performance to high standards influenced by exaggerated gender-biased expectations. Inability to comply with these requirements results in women seeing it as their personal shortcomings and low self-efficacy (Monroe et al., 2008).

Adaptation of male model of behaviour in academic environment

A number of researchers report an interesting observation of female reaction to gender inequality in Academia: they try to fit into the male world (Monroe et al., 2008; Knights & Richards, 2003; Leslie et al., 2015). A number of empirical studies have concluded that women unconsciously and consciously adapt to a male mode of behaviour (Monroe et al., 2008). Women adopt a habit to imitate or echo male behaviour: not wear pink or overly feminine clothes, avoid keeping photos of children and family at their work place. This finding has been proven by empirical findings, when interviewed women reported being extra careful regarding their dressing style and

the manner of behaviour. This adaptation to male model of behaviour seems to be a common behavioural pattern among women within academe (Ward, 2001). Among a number of ways women in academia choose to react to discrimination and inequality, resistance has been described as a rather common one (Zikic, & Richardson, 2015). Śliwa and Johansson (2013) in their empirical investigation of the effect of meritocratic systems on minority women within the UK business schools have described resistance as an individual reaction to oppression within the work environment. Some interviewed minority women revealed that the process of self-identification within the reality of deeply rooted inequality makes the resistant to expectations imposed on them by others. A number of authors argue that there are certain types of reactions and behaviour practices expected from women in general and minority women in particular within a male-dominated domain such as academia (Roosmalen & McDaniel, 1999; Zikic & Richardson, 2015). Women interviewed by Śliwa and Johansson (2013) refused to adhere to these expectations as a form of individual protest. Another crucial detail, revealed by the study, was an attempt of the minority Female researcher to focus her work on topics important for her region of origin: “this is the subject I’m interested in, and this is the community of researchers I want to connect with” (Śliwa & Johansson, 2013:17). However, this particular respondent has expressed a strong belief that her research choice and thrive to connect with native fellow researchers will have a negative impact on her chances of promotion within the UK institution.

The issue of meritocracy-dominated system within the UK higher education institutions receives a special meaning in the context of professional experiences of ethnic minority women. Śliwa and Johansson (2013) argue that being a discrimination promoting system in itself, meritocracy further oppresses individuals who are already disadvantaged because of their ethnical status. The researchers examined experiences of women of non-UK origin pursuing career within the UK business schools. The choice

of the target group was caused by an increasing role of it publicly discussing disadvantages of meritocratic policies and problematizing them in a new context. Research of professional experiences of minority groups and how they are affected by malfunctioning institutional and organizational systems are highly important as they promote public awareness of how individuals lose their opportunities due to rigidity in modern day life of the UK universities.

The current emphasis on merit in the UK universities, according to Śliwa and Johansson (2013), is caused by compliance with market-framed and stimulated research competition. The Research Excellence Framework has been designed to assess and develop these criteria. The framework estimates the merit degree of various academic outputs. The researchers argue that merit of academics is established through evaluating their teaching, leadership qualities and roles (for example, being a head of the department or a research group), generating income, and managerial role within the institution. Śliwa and Johansson (2013) argue that meritocracy assumes that complex social structures can be developed without considering gender, race, sexual orientation, religious, class or other differences between the individuals. The researchers argue that meritocracy can be viewed as a move towards ideals of social justice, equal opportunities, free competition, individual achievement, etc. Despite the noble goal, the discourse is lacking any trace of recognition of context-dependent variables that play a role in shaping social structures. Basically, the critiques of the UK system point out, the discourse of meritocracy chooses to ignore existing multiple bases for discrimination and inequality (such as the ones based on gender, class, race, etc.).

Therefore, the existing system prevents problem recognition and therefore – solution. Śliwa and Johansson (2013) suggest that foreign women constitute a group of employees within the UK academia who are the main targets and victims of most of the

existing organizational barriers and inequalities. Without a doubt, meritocratic system plays a role in maintaining the masculine status quo and, according to Śliwa and Johansson (2013: 7) what we need is to “possibly offer foreign women academics a way of making sense of their professional experiences and open up an avenue for challenging the underlying meritocratic principles and practices operating with the organizations they work for”.

Various interventions have been suggested to improve the current state ethnic minority women find themselves in. Monroe et al. (2014) argue for the effectiveness and use of mentoring programs that provide consulting services on campus. At least two types of programs can be distinguished: (1) professional/ department-based, and (2) personal/ university-wide. The first type of mentoring program provides advice for both, men and women, on professional issues related to the work of the department. Advice can relate to grant-writing or publishing papers to dealing with workload, etc. Younger employees are paired with more experienced staff who provide mentorship and advice on a number of topics. Sometimes, Monroe et al. (2014) argues, it makes more sense to provide mentorship help of the second type – so that an individual, particularly the one that is a subject of discrimination, can discuss problems in no physical proximity to his/ her colleagues. In the case of ethnic minority women, a woman counselor/ mentor is highly recommended, particularly the one of minority status herself. Most of the time, employees simply need a sympathetic listener, however sometimes mentors can give a useful professional advice.

2.3.3. Inclusion of migrant women in professional environment

As noticed by Lewis (2014) modern gender studies tend to focus on the exclusion of women within their respective professional environments, while there is less attention given to the experiences of migrant women and their attempt to become

included into their respective fields. It is argued that migrant professional women such as academics have to overcome the double marginalisation (Nahas, 1999), adaptation to the new country (Essers & Benschop, 2007). Essers and Benschop (2007) have conducted an empirical study of the experiences of migrant (Turkish and Moroccan) women who decided to start their own businesses in the Netherlands. The researchers demonstrate various strategies and tactics adopted by the female entrepreneurs. Many of these approaches are centered around combining local approaches towards doing business together with their native customs and cultural habits (Essers & Benschop, 2007). The researchers also note that both Turkish and Moroccan business women drew on different sources of support when planning their business activities, i.e., while they apply for loans and small business support programs to local banks, they also gladly accept help from their parents as well as their extended family. In this way migrant women find it important to combine some new and local trends with their traditional role of family and community (Essers & Benschop, 2007).

Researchers argue that migrant workforce continues to have a significant effect on the Western job market, including academic environment (Luke, 2001). Studies suggest that the UK academic labour market is largely affected by female migrants from various geographical areas (Sang, Al-Dajani & Özbilgin, 2013). And even though the total number of ethnic minority women pursuing an academic career in the UK institution is gradually increasing, the same pattern cannot be observed for the group's representation among higher ranks of influential positions. Sang et al. (2013) suggests: "Intuitively, at the intersection of these two disadvantaged groups, migrant women academics in full professorial posts should suffer from frayed careers" (p. 158). Despite the logic of the above mentioned assumption, the empirical research by Sang et al. (2013) has demonstrated that the double outsider status of female academics has more explanatory power regarding their position within the UK institutions than their status

of double disadvantage subjects. Being a double outsider meant that the migrant female academics had access to ‘wider repertoires for performing gender and ethnicity in academic and often freed them from the prison of a narrow set of traditionally female roles that their British-born female counterparts find themselves locked into’ (Sang et al, 2013: 169). Thus, this study shows how some academic women can secure inclusion within the academy and frame their career experiences in the university in terms of success as opposed to disadvantage.

2.4. Understanding Identity

2.4.1. Perspectives of Identity in Organization Studies

Identity as a construct has become increasingly important in the field of organization studies over the past two decades (Alvesson et al, 2008). The development of this interest in organization studies mirrors the importance attached to identity in the popular realm where it has infiltrated our everyday common sense through talk shows and reference to the idea that your identity – who you are – can be stolen and used for criminal purposes (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Within organization studies, understandings of identity have been developed at the organizational and individual level with the former generally referring to the collective understanding of organizational members regarding the features which function to distinguish one organisation from another organization’ (Gioia et al, 2000: 64). In considering identity, the focus here is on individual identity and the broad issue of who and what an individual is in relation to others, addressing questions such as: who am I?, how should I act?, where do I belong?, who will I be in the future and what makes me different from other people? (Alvesson et al, 2008). Different perspectives on identity can be delineated including an approach which understands identity in terms of an internal, active “project of the self”, (Being); an alternative which understands identity as

something social and collective (Belonging) and thirdly a perspective - with a strong presence in the organization studies field - which treats identity as constituted in discourse (Becoming) (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). See table 3 for a brief summary of these positions, Being, belonging, and becoming, which are discussed below.

Table 3. Three understandings of identity in organization studies

Being	Belonging	Becoming
Fixed	Intersubjective	Fluid
True self	Socially positioned	Fragmentary
Within	Culturally constructed	Contingent
Unfolding	Collective	Constituted in discourse
Unique	Associated with group	Context-sensitive

Beginning with the first perspective (Being), identity is depicted as unified and located inside the person, understood in terms of traits and characteristics of an individual which emerge and unfold over time. This approach is characterised as essentialist because it treats identity as an artefact of the mind and/or socialisation processes. Further, it understands identity as something which is largely independent of external influence – socialisation processes may play a role but only to draw out the “real” person as s/he “works on him/herself” as part of an instrumental “project of the self”. Attached to this understanding of identity is the sense of being “true to self” and an assumption that a person is “knowable” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006).

The second perspective on identity (Belonging) referred to as “the social self” argues that an individual’s identity cannot be developed unilaterally. Here, identity is intersubjective and a product of external influence understood in terms of membership or identification with a particular group or groups. Individual identity is thus a manifestation of group(s) identity whereby the qualities of an individual align with the qualities of a collective group (Lewis, 2013). Examples of “group” include class, gender, race, adolescent or religion (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Taking religion as an

example of group identity, Fukuyama (2007: 26) asserts that there is a major difference between identities in Western societies and Muslim societies, as in ‘... a traditional Muslim society, an individual’s identity is given by that person’s parents and social environment; everything – from one’s tribe and kin to the local imam to the political structure of the state – anchors one’s identity in a particular branch of Islamic faith’. Therefore, according to such dualism-based view, identity is not a matter of choice as instead it is constructed by the social rules which are formed and determined externally. Identity from this perspective is perceived as being unified, essential and permanent with individuals being heavily committed to the categories that apply to them which are now said to intersect in myriad ways. One major example of the group approach to identity is social identity theory which ‘...is defined by individual identification with a group: a process constituted firstly by reflexive knowledge of group membership, and secondly by an emotional attachment or specific disposition to this belonging’ (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006: 25). This type of group approach has been subject to challenge due to its essentialism and its presentation of identity as something permanent and unified.

An alternative perspective to the group (belonging) and “true self” (being) approaches understands identity as constructed in and through discourse (becoming) and subject to constant negotiation between individuals (PAD Research Group, 2016). Here, identities are understood as unfinished, always in a state of becoming and the product of dominant discourses and it is this perspective on identity which informs this thesis. Identity is thus understood in terms of a discursive production of the subject within particular cultural, historical, political and physical circumstances. The latter means that at certain points in time within particular contexts there are dominant discourses which hold sway and identities are the (unfinished) product of these discourses (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Lewis, 2013). Discourse is defined by Watson (2001: 113) as ‘a connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which

constitutes a way of talking or writing about a particular issue, thus framing the way people understand and act with respect to that issue'. Discourse asserts a preferred version of the world at particular points in time and that this preferred version disqualifies competing versions. Thus an identity is constructed and constituted through discourse and as such appears to be "...deterministically imposed from outside by social forces..." (Warhurst, 2011: 263). In the organization studies literature this is referred to as identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) indicating that individual identity does not emerge from within a person but rather derives from discursive, linguistic, structural forces over which they have little control (Cunliffe, 2009).

Nevertheless, we should not understand identity constituted through discourse in determinant terms only. In addition to the notion of identity regulation, the organization studies literature has developed the concept of identity work, a construct which helps us understand how discourses become part of the lives of individuals and operates simultaneously with identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Andersson, 2010; Hay, 2014; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008). What identity work signals is that an individual does not passively absorb discourse rather they adapt, transform or reject them. Despite recognition of the agency individuals display around discourse and identity it is important to highlight that people do not have an absolute free choice as they are often constrained by social location (gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion etc.), institutional policies and the wider socio-economic environment. What this means is that identity formation can be easier or more difficult for different types of individuals (Lewis, 2013). Gill and Scharff (2011), in emphasising the fluid and multiple nature of identity consider how migration is a key contributor to identity formation among both first- and second-generation immigrants. They argue that for immigrant women the longing to return to one's roots serves as an important factor shaping identity. The researchers use the examples of South Asian people who move to the UK to illustrate

this point. According to Gill and Scharff (2011), such migrants recruit their memory as the only available tool to connect with their origin, which in turn affects their hybrid identity. Furthermore, Becham (2002, as cited in Gill and Scharff, 2011) argues that immigrant identity is often shaped under the perception of their inevitable assimilation into the dominant culture and the discourses that characterise this. The identity of an individual therefore, according to Hall (1990), is equally a matter of his/ her past and present, as it is of their future. In line with these considerations, Hall (1990) points out that identity as a concept is not fixed in time, and it cannot be viewed independent or outside of neither history, nor culture – an expression of the third perspective discussed above. Hall (1990), when discussing identities and their origin, argues against the adoption of dualism-based approaches to identity construction (e.g. Western versus Middle Eastern). As an example the researcher refers to the post-colonial residents of the Caribbean, who seek to return to their roots. For example, the Martinique view and perceive themselves as French and not French at the same time. When developing their identities individuals often encounter contradicting forces – one of a desire to find their roots (non-French), and another – influenced by their present and practical considerations, such as language spoken, etc. (French) (Hall, 1990). The fragile and insecure nature of identity is well illustrated through these migrant examples. Thus, applying this third approach (becoming) to the research outlined in this thesis it is suggested that MEFA draw on (dominant) postfeminist discourses connected to the contemporary (UK) social context when constituting their academic identities (femininities). Thus, identity here is not located within the person but rather is anti-essentialist, produced through (postfeminist) discourse and has no existential coherence and stability. Such an identity is therefore fragile and in a permanent state of “becoming”.

2.4.2. Female professional identities: challenges and goals

A number of studies have been focusing on roles, positions and experiences of women within academic environment (Meyers, 2013; Monroe et al., 2008; Morley, 2014). Saunderson (2002) however suggests that the majority of these valuable studies are focusing on reasons underlying female academic careers, statistical characteristics (i.e., numerical representation of women among academic staff in general or senior positions in particular, etc.). Some studies, such as the one by Bush et al. (2001), have focused on how women respond and react towards the circumstances surrounding their professional experiences, however, as noted by Saunderson (2002) there has been historically less attention given to exploring identities of academic women. At the same time, Bush et al. (2001) argue that some studies although focusing on the identity of a woman, often fail to study it within the context and its environment. Saunderson (2002, p. 382) argues that: "... by using identity as a powerful sensitising concept, interesting and valuable findings have been produced about academic women`s perceptions, feelings, positions and responses to their working lives in the university sector".

Despite being a commonly used term and topic of numerous scientific discussions, academic identity is a complex notion which is often wrongly perceived and misunderstood (Quigley, 2011). He argues that complexity of the concept prevents scholars from constructing a clear and comprehensive definition. Overall, the concept can be characterised as an attempt to describe and re-construct academic ontology (how do academics evolve and come to be). This major goal helps develop understanding of how academics come to understanding of their role and position (academics epistemologies). Therefore, academic identity is a deeply individualised concept that differs from each individual researcher and depend on personal characteristics, time point of career, university of employment, etc. (Quigley, 2011).

This individualised approach is in many ways in line with postfeminism concept and qualitative research that attempts to re-construct multiple narratives in order to understand the studied phenomena (Saunders et al., 2011). Despite the individuality factor, while characterising one`s academic identity, the researcher can afford to retreat to a number of commonalities, such as, for instance, professionalism. Quigley (2011) broadly defines professionalism as an occupation in which an individual can control his/her own work. Acker (1999) argues that scholars have always experienced difficulties while trying to define professions that are mostly characteristic to women (nursing, teaching, social worker, etc.). These difficulties have led to creation of the term semi-profession, aimed to define above mentioned occupations which struggled to be recognised as proper professions. Quigley (2011) discusses the notion of semi-profession as an ill-defined category that does more harm than provides solutions.

A number of researchers have explored how modern academic identity is formed (Archer, 2008; Quigley, 2011). By conducting a comprehensive empirical research, Archer (2008) has established that each individual researcher is guided by his/ her own set of notions. For instance, younger academics were mostly affected by their perception of success and authenticity. Archer (2008) notes that perception of self by young academics is majorly exacerbated by: “(a) the current dominant performative ethos, (b) their age, (c) race, class, gender, and (d) status – in particular, contract researchers” (Quigley, 2011: 22).

2.4.3. Successful academic woman identity

Raddon (2002) discusses a number of identities of modern professional women. One of them, the successful academic is constructed from the narratives of women who share a number of similarities, including a significant dedication of their time and efforts to academia (Raddon, 2002). In fact, as Raddon (2002, p. 390) suggests, “The

successful academics devotes all her time and energy to the university”. According to Bagilhole (1993) the academic type of female builds her reputation through conducting research, and among other terms used to describe the successful academics type, the researchers use “career-oriented”, “hard-working”, etc. (Crompton & Harris, 1998; Raddon, 2002). Interestingly, Raddon (2002) adds that a successful and respected academic woman publishes in right academic journals. It is easy to notice that the various narratives discussing and describing successful academics identity are often intercrossed by the notion of meritocracy, as a reputable academic is expected to follow a certain career path (i.e., gaining a major proportion of her professional experience not simply within an academic environment, but by a prestigious group or faculty (Raddon, 2002; Edwards, 2000). Moreover, successful academics differs from simply a researcher by focusing most of its time conducting actual research work, as opposed to administrative role, tutoring and teaching which are usually inevitable components of everyday life of any researchers (Raddon, 2002; Goode, 2000; Edwards, 2000).

Raddon (2002) further develops her idea that successful researcher is a distinct category which can demonstrate a high research output (i.e., number of publications within prestigious peer-reviewed journals), even during her early days of career. Raddon (2002, p. p. 391) notes: “While it is not explicit that the “successful academic” should be a man, or indeed a child-free woman, a number of aspects would seem to stand in the way of mothers being able to succeed in this field and to fit into these values”. The values, according to Raddon (2002) include the following: (1) the practical importance of Female`s contribution into caring for children, family and contributing to the family budget, (2) the practical need for taking time off of their work in order to have a child or children, (3) the fact that the majority of low paid or temporary based positions are dominated by women within the modern academia.

2.4.4. Academic mother identity

Another identity type key to the female academic is that of a mother (Walkington, 2005; Raddon, 2002). For example, Raddon (2002) discusses the identity of a so-called good mother, a complex phenomenon composed of at least two key discourses provided by academic mothers: one of the dedicated and selfless mother, and the mother combining the best of both words. The researchers discuss the two different pathways an academic woman may choose when deciding to have a child, and both involve certain challenges. For instance, the selfless mother, who dedicates 100% of her efforts to her children and family as opposed to continuing with her work, traditionally is praised by the society, while another alternative, a woman who attempts to combine both types of responsibilities, family- and work-related, is often viewed through the prism of judgement and negativity (Raddon, 2002). The traditional view holds that any amount of time and effort this type of mother dedicates to her work is in fact stolen from the precious time that could have been dedicated to her child or children (Walkington, 2005). Women who attempt to combine the two types of responsibilities, are often described by the researchers as jugglers (Raddon, 2002; Walkington, 2005).

They juggle the responsibilities, as Raddon (2002) argues, in order to gain a certain degree of independence and sole focus on home and family. Interestingly, Raddon (2002) raises a point of dominant discourse typical to the narrative of the selfless mother. According to this dominating discourse, the dedicated mother who chooses to place her child-caring role before her other commitments, interests and responsibilities in life, is giving her family her 100% effective attention. Therefore, according to this logic, a full-time mother is always more effective, dedicated and productive than a juggler one. Another important implication of this discourse is the fact that it is often assumed that this 100% full mother's attention is always priority more beneficial to a child than part-time mothering of a juggler mother (Crosby, 1993).

Pateman (2000) argues that this discourse has a long history-based background, and therefore has been dominating social opinion for decades. In the case of the UK, the researcher refers to the so-called Beveridge family – a typical family model characterised by a working father (career focus) and woman, who`s main responsibility is to care for the family (dependent on male) (Pateman, 2000). Raddon (2002) also notes that this family model based on Female dependency has been typical for the post war UK for a number of decades, and has therefore left a deep imprint in modern life of the society. However, although still being a typical discourse within narratives of modern women, the traditional male breadwinner/ Female care taker model has been gradually displaced by its modern alternative – male breadwinner/ part-time working mom model (Crosby, 1993). According to this model, man still retain their dominant or primary role as a breadwinner, however women often use an opportunity to work part-time, while still remaining a key figure in taking care of children and household related responsibilities. This model has been described as particularly challenging for women, as they still remain dependent on the main income provider (husband), have to take selfless care of children, and find time (usually around school hours, etc.) to contribute to the family income by taking upon various (usually) low paid jobs, that do not have any bright professional prospects (Raddon, 2002).

2.4.5. Conflicting and vulnerable identities

When exploring identities and the process of identity construction within academic environment, the researchers highlight the importance of traditionally feminine and masculine roles within the professional environment (Priola, 2007; Mouffe, 1995). Priola (2007) has conducted an interesting empirical study of female experiences when occupying educational leadership positions within the academia. The researcher has demonstrated that Female manager identities are constructed on the basis

of the existing expectations and views over leadership and managerial styles, which are based on white male dominant professional world (Priola, 2007). Interestingly, Priola (2007) notes that these newly constructed professional identities came into conflict with roles of women outside of their work, i.e. when trying to adopt to the existing norm and expectations, Female educational managers adopt a more masculine behaviour. This adopted style may therefore interfere with woman`s natural behaviour, both at work, and especially at home or when she is with friends and family (Gherardi, 1996). As Gherardi (1996, p. 190) notes: “The experience of being a stranger and entering a “non-natural” culture entails the suspension of normal through patterns”. Priola (2007) attributes the experienced and reported feeling of being an outsider inside to this complex phenomenon.

The process of identity construction within educational managerial positions had often involved discourses related to the role of femininity and masculinity, and their relative roles within professional development process (Priola, 2007). For instance, Female managers have often drawn on some feminine qualities (such as more focus on communication, democratisation of management process, personal attention to staff, etc.), and how these characteristics not only contributed to their professional growth and achievement of the established work related goals, but also helped academic women preserve their feminine identities (Priola, 2007; Goode & Bagilhole, 1998).

Interestingly, when conducting interviews with Female managers within academic settings, Priola (2007) has discovered that a number of the participants denied their feminine characteristics (i.e., emotional side of the personality or being more soft when compared to male counterparts). While possibly, these response reflected adequate qualities of a certain proportion of Female leaders, Priola (2007) hypothesises that conscious or subconscious denial is a mechanism that allows Female professionals to better fit into a given organisation (i.e., by adapting and fitting in to comply with the

existent male-dominant norms). Therefore, as demonstrated by Priola (2007) and Gherardi (1996) male educational managers professional identities are complex and based on a number of contrasting processes and behaviours. As Priola (2007, p. 36) notes: “It appears that to position themselves as managers, these women enact more masculine behaviours, mainly aimed at rationally controlling their work environment and repressing their emotions”. At the same time, these same women recognise importance of emotional side of the relationships, both at work and at home, however due to the dominant expectations often fail to express their femininity as they fear that this open expression would lead to them losing their reputation and authority within the workplace (Priola, 2007). Prichard and Deem (1999) argue that this construction of a professional identity, based on contradiction and suppression, may have unexpected and unpredictable behavioural outcomes, as anxieties and repression are built inside Female educational managers.

What Priola (2007) and Gherardi (1996) discuss is a situation of contradiction or conflict between the two identities of a professional woman – her role as an employee, and her role as a member of society. Priola (2007, p. 36) suggests: “Focusing on the tensions between their “institutional” identities as managers and their personal identities as partners, and in some cases, as mothers, these women academic managers seem to address the conflict they experience by attempting to separate their professional and personal roles (e.g., “I am either at work or mum at home”)”. It is suggested that for those professional women who do not have children yet, or have made a decision not to have them at all, the conflict is less tense as they can effectively distribute their weekly time between career- and family-related responsibilities. These managers, for instance, as demonstrated by Priola (2007) can choose to dedicate their workdays entirely to their professional ambitions, while separate their weekend time for partner-related activities. Thomas and Davies (2002), however, suggest that even this seemingly effective time

and role distribution does not help to resolve the conflict, but instead only helps to mask and hide it, while the tension between the two identities, work and home one, persist. Priola (2007) and Whitehead (2001) make some interesting predictions regarding how the described conflict will eventually be resolved within the working environment. The researchers rightfully point out that the underlying reason of the existing tension and conflicting identities of Female managers, regardless of the specific industry, is caused by the dominance of male-type of expected behaviours. These expectations will continue to dominate until the position of manager, or leader will stop being viewed as exclusive to men employees. Therefore, as Priola (2007) points, out, when Female managers will be just as a common phenomenon as male ones, we can expect to witness a shift from expected behaviours, dominant norms, and this situation will eventually eradicate identity conflicts many professional women experience inside and outside of academia.

Saunderson (2002) discusses the various conflicting factors which affect construction of female academic identity, as well as their negative role on identity process. Interestingly, according to Saunderson, the conflicting situation had a negative impact on a specific aspect of the respondents` identities: their academic self-context. Saunderson (2002) has explored the perception of academic and female self of the interview participants before and after they started their academic career. According to the obtained responses, the participants` highest evaluation of themselves usually was related to their live before and outside of the university, which as Saunderson (2002) suggests, indicates a major problem concerning their academic identities. Saunderson (2002) has further explored the role models women see within their academic environment, and divided them into two groups: those belonging to Research Assessment Exercise, and those – excluded from research work. According to the respondents` reports, they tended to view women within the Research Assessment

Exercise as positive role models, while the remaining women – as negative ones. The respondents, who themselves have been assigned to the non-research group, have further noted that this has negatively affected their academic experience and created a conflict within their self identification within academic environment (Saunderson, 2002). According to one respondent, her exclusion from the research-oriented group did not make her feel inferior, however instead made her feel empathetic towards other members of the unit. Sanderson (2002) concludes that despite respondent`s denial, exclusion from the Research Assessment Exercise did create an inner conflict of identity.

2.4.6. Femininity and managerial identities

While some researchers point at disadvantaged position of women leaders within academic or business environment (Saunderson, 2002), others argue that although a number of myths and stereotypical expectations exist, they are not always in way of Female career ambitions (Priola, 2007). Empirical data collected by Priola (2004) suggests that feminine discourses of women occupying managerial positions are centered around some qualities and characteristics that positively affect their professional performance: an ability to multitask, the tendency to focus on human aspect of relationships important for HR function, reliance to team-based approach and democratic values as opposed to sole decision making process, and, finally, profound communication and people skills. According to Priola (2004), Female managers prefer to identify themselves with a group of Female colleagues that show patterns of differentiation of their male colleagues.

Priola (2007) demonstrates that Female professionals construct their identities by drawing upon the points of differentiation, such as, for example, an ability to simultaneously manage a number of job related tasks. As one of Priole`s (2007, p. 424)

interviewees note: “I think the difference between me and male colleagues is that I accept the admin and do all the different things that has to be done. I am not afraid of “getting my hands dirty”, of picking up little bits in between. I think women are better at multi-tasking, but also at speaking up, even if they may become unpopular. Men here look at the organisation`s values and play their game”. The expressed opinion of a Female manager suggests an overall negative perception of masculine managing style, as the respondent implies that males are worse at both multitasking, as well as facilitating an open dialogue and discussion.

Professional identity and migration

The problem of professional identity is particularly acute for migrant women of color who choose to pursue an academic career. In order to develop their identity they have to adapt and navigate through an unfamiliar, male-dominated environment (Zikic & Richardson, 2015). These women have to comprehend and accept local professional ethics, rules of conduct and other institutional scripts in order to partially or fully integrate and become an accepted and productive member of the faculty. Often this complex process of adaptation to the new work environment goes along with having to integrate into a new country and society which creates additional pressures and stress (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Sang et al., 2013). Zikic and Richardson (2015) argue that most of the empirical research on professional identity is focusing on employees who are already well familiar with institutional scripts, while the area of migrant professionals having to adapt to the new working environment remains a blind spot (Ahmad, 2001).

Zikic and Richardson (2015) refer to immigrant professionals as “outsiders” when discussing the process of their integration into the new labour market and argues that they find themselves “at the institutional periphery” (2). It is argued that outsiders

of a particular culture or work environment lack knowledge of the so-called scripts that facilitate adaptation and development process. An empirical study conducted by Śliwa and Johansson (2013) fully supports this statement. One of the interviewed foreign employees of a UK business school reflected upon her experience:

“Being a foreign woman, it’s a double jeopardy, that one... I do feel a double outsider to some extent because in the end, the fact is not going to change that it’s a male-dominated environment so as a woman that positions me right at the end of the power... But being a foreign person also puts me in a disadvantage even within the spectrum of women... So there is the case of me being not only part of a group that is organisationally oppressed but also being part of an oppressed group that within that is also disadvantaged” (Śliwa & Johansson, 2013: 17).

Minority migrant women entering academia find themselves unaware of local rules and scripts which strongly impacts on the development of their professional identity. Lack of this knowledge makes it more difficult for them, when compared to non-minority women and men colleagues, to understand what is expected from them in social and professional terms by the employing institution, and therefore makes it rather difficult to adjust their behavior and find their place in a new life (Wyche & Graves, 1992).

2.5. Conclusions

The current chapter has explored various manifestations of the range and types of gender inequality which are typically found in the academy. The main types of obstacles encountered by women who choose to pursue an academic career have been discussed. The overall picture is one of exclusion whereby the majority of the literature on women in the academy paints a rather bleak picture. The continued existence of the

masculine norm, inappropriate behaviour such as sexual harassment, an ongoing gender salary gap and problems related to work-life balance focus on discrimination, disadvantage and failure (Sang et al, 2013). Nevertheless, within this overall negative picture some studies e.g. Sang et al (2013: 160) present a different picture – one which presents ‘...women academics display(ing) greater levels of agency, connectedness, and entrepreneurial flair to mobilize their varied resources in order to achieve career success’. While certainly a minority position, it is an interesting one as similar sentiments were expressed in this study as outlined in the introduction. In the next chapter, the concept of postfeminism is outlined and justification is presented for its use in this thesis as a means of interpreting the views of Middle Eastern Female Academics which appear, to be at odds with the dominant negative picture presented in this current chapter.

Chapter 3: Feminist Perspectives, Postfeminism and the Field of Gender and Organization Studies

3.1. Chapter Overview

The present study mobilizes the concept of postfeminism to critically explore the work and life experiences of academic women of Middle Eastern origin. Gill et al (2016) and Lewis (2014) argue that utilisation of postfeminism as a critical concept when studying contemporary organizational experiences can reveal and expose the terms upon which women are included (as opposed to excluded) within organizations such as universities. It can also highlight ongoing sources and incidents of gender discrimination and how women deal with such occurrences. While much of the critical literature on the notion of postfeminism places an emphasis on the “whiteness” of this cultural phenomenon i.e. it is argued that it largely applies to white women, privileging their experience, this study demonstrates the appropriation of postfeminist discourses by Middle Eastern Female Academics working in the UK context, when reflecting on their work experiences. Drawing on the work of writers such as Butler (2013), Dosekun (2015), Lazar (2006), Thornham & Pengpeng (2010) and Chowdhury (2010), the thesis will approach postfeminism as a transnational cultural phenomenon which is drawn on by women of colour from the Middle Eastern region to account for their work experiences within British universities. In addition, working with the concept of postfeminism and showing the disciplinary power of this cultural phenomenon, we can explore the different modes of being constructed by Middle Eastern Female Academics in British universities and how through drawing on postfeminist discourses, the respondents in this study – contrary to much of the existing research - present a positive account of their academic work experiences.

The chapter develops around a consideration of the position of postfeminism as a critical concept within the Gender and Organization Studies field which includes an examination of this multifaceted concept. It begins with a delineation of the feminist perspectives which inform the study of gender issues in organisations. This is important to do for two reasons: first, the study of gender in organisations – explored either as a variable with attention directed at women’s access to organizations; or as a system with emphasis placed on gendered organizational practices and processes; or a “doing” with a focus on the instability of categories such as ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ - is usually approached from the vantage point of one or other feminist perspectives (Calas & Smircich, 2006). Their importance is that they allow us to see how feminism is manifest within the Gender and Organization Studies field. Second, in drawing on postfeminism as a critical concept to explore the organizational experiences of Middle Eastern Female Academics, the thesis will not be treating postfeminism as a theoretical perspective (to be discussed further below). As such, in writing this thesis the researcher does not claim that he is a postfeminist scholar working out of a postfeminist perspective. Rather, he is approaching postfeminism as a diffused and shifting cultural phenomenon which according to Gill (2016: 621) ‘...is an analytical category designed to capture empirical regularities in the world’. Using postfeminism as a critical concept and not a perspective allows us to make visible the cultural roots of the positive accounts of academic work experiences provided by MEFA while also highlighting the “darker” side of this positivity.

Another way of understanding the differentiation made here between perspective and analytical category is that the former relates to feminist theories which when applied to organizational contexts present ‘...alternative accounts for gender inequality, frame the ‘problem’ differently and propose different courses of action as ‘solutions’ (Calas & Smircich, 2006: 219), often with a focus on understanding women’s

organizational experiences in terms of exclusion. In contrast, approaching postfeminism as an analytic category which provides insight into the impact of the empirical regularities (e.g. reconfigured femininity) of the world on work experience, allows us to move to a focus on the nature of women's contemporary inclusion in organizations such as universities. Using postfeminism as an analytical category allows us to investigate why the respondents in this study view their university employment experience positively, either denying completely or diminishing the impact of any experience of discrimination, thereby diverging from the existing research on women in the academy.

3.2. Feminism in Organization Studies

Feminism as a social movement has played an important role in shaping (Western) society and the organizations that operate within it. Feminism is an extremely complex and diverse umbrella for a number of distinct feminist perspectives and movements that during different periods of times, particularly across the twentieth century, sought to establish gender equality. Some historians discuss the notion of profeminist, referring to earlier movements and ideologies. Most scholars agree that the history of Western feminism can be split into three major events, or waves: first, second and third (Lawler, 2002). This "wave" metaphor has been extensively criticized (Coleman, 2009) but despite this is still referred to with references made to second wave, third wave and now even fourth wave feminism. The first-wave feminism aimed to combat legal inequalities that put women into a disadvantaged position. The period took place during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The following second-wave feminism significantly broadened the goals and objectives of the movement by considering issues such as cultural inequalities, the role of women in general and work-related inequalities (Genz & Brabon, 2009) and can be dated from the 1960s/1970s

onwards. Third-wave feminism includes a wide range of feminist activities and is often perceived as a continuation of the second wave (Freedman, 2007; LeGates, 2012).

Calas and Smircich (1992) point out that gender studies include a wide range of theoretical approaches and reviewing various feminist theories helps understand how the concept of gender has been evolving, particularly in the study of organizations. Calas and Smircich (1992) consider that this analysis renders an interesting finding: there is a common underlying tendency within organizational studies and it concerns whether or not the “gender”-basis of knowledge is accepted. The researchers therefore pose an interesting question: “How is organization theorizing (male) gendered, and with what consequences?” (p. 230). Various authors provide a review of the feminist perspectives that have been used when researching gender in organizational contexts with the different perspectives taking divergent positions regarding the neutrality or gender bias of organizations and organizational knowledge. These include Alvesson & Due Billing (1997); Bewis & Linstead (1999); Benschop & Verloo (2016); Calas and Smircich (2006), Gherardi (2003), Witz and Savage (1992). All discuss a number of feminist perspectives with most of these reviews including the three leading types of feminist analysis in organization studies: gender as a variable (e.g. liberal feminism); feminist standpoint (e.g. radical feminism) and poststructuralist feminism (Alvesson & Due Billing, 1997). The diversity and evolution of the existing perspectives reflect the three key trends shaping gender studies: re-vising, re-flecting and re-writing (Calas & Smircich, 2006). However, it should be noted that the perspectives are not linear in the sense that each perspective is located in a particular time period with one perspective “following after” another. Rather, as Alvesson & Due Billing (1997) state all the perspectives exist at the same time with some (e.g. liberal feminism) being more dominant than others in organization studies, with certain topics (e.g. women leaders) being more strongly associated with one particular perspective and not others, and with

elements of different perspectives being combined with each other (e.g. liberal feminism and radical feminism through the focus on feminine difference in leadership) (Alvesson & Due Billing, 1997; Simpson & Lewis, 2005). In what follows the various feminist perspectives will be outlined by drawing on the authors listed above.

Witz and Savage (1992) argue that modern organizations are gendered, and therefore it is impossible to understand the existing gender relations without properly considering organizational processes, affecting or underlying them. A focus on gender in organization studies, according to Witz and Savage (1992), originated due to the fact that the previous attempts to study the relationship between organizational bureaucracy and gender have not resulted in any systematic and solid framework. Gender and organizational studies try to consider "... the reasons why organization theory and feminist theory have begun to engage in dialogue in recent years, and how new currents in social theory have placed the issue of the relationship between gender and bureaucracy firmly on the agenda" (Witz & Savage, 1992, p. 3). The development of both, organizational studies and feminist theory has resulted in constructive dialogue, which according to Gherardi (2003) has occurred from the 1970s onwards, and has enriched both groups. Alvesson and Due Billing (1997) argue that modern gender studies are heavily influenced, if not, dominated by feminist theory. Gender studies, based on feminist theory, therefore often aim to evaluate the subordinate position of women within organisations, and suggest effective approaches to change this. Alvesson and Due Billing (1997) point out an important distinction between gender studies and feminist studies, and argue that the former is more relevant and appropriate. The argument is based on the assumption that gender relations within the working environment should be studied and evaluated from various unbiased perspectives, as opposed to solely feminist ones (Alvesson & Due Billing, 1997). This means including other organizational actors besides women e.g. men and also not treating women as a

homogenous group. Despite this valuable point, gender studies are often being addressed through the feminist perspective and feminism remains the dominant concept applied to understand gender relationships, particularly within organizational studies (Lewis, 2014; Alvesson & Due Billing, 1997; Dosekun, 2015).

Gherardi (2003) points out that the concept of gender contributes two different but important notions in organizational theory: the concept of power and sexual differences. Gender studies often attempt to see to what degree sexual differences originate from natural biological differences that exist between men and women and to what extent these differences are artificially constructed through social and structural organization (Gherardi, 2003), with more emphasis on the latter as opposed to the former. Gherardi (2003) distinguishes between the three key sources of gender differences relevant to organizational studies: body, language and society. The first source of perceived differences, a human body, is distinctly different in men and women. The key feature of a female organism that stands out is its ability to bear children. It is important, however, to emphasize the cultural component of the gender differences (Gherardi, 2003). Basically, each person's nature is constructed socially, which is also conducted within a given organization. There is a nature/ culture debate (highly similar to that of nature/ nurture in biology) which discusses which of the two key sources of gender differences is the most influential (Gherardi, 2003). Gherardi (2003) also points out that within the modern Western society, individuals and their nature are shaped by the linguistic discourse they grow up with.

The three main feminist perspectives most commonly utilised in gender and organization studies will be discussed further below. Other less common feminist perspectives in gender and organization studies include Marxist feminism, Social feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, and postcolonial feminism.

3.2.1. Main Feminist Perspectives in Gender and Organization Studies

There are a range of feminist perspectives drawn upon in the study of gender in organizations and these will be summarized below. We will begin with what are considered to be central perspectives within the Gender and Organization Studies field i.e. Liberal, Radical and Poststructuralist Feminisms, with the liberal approach being the most dominant one (Alvesson & Due Billing, 1997).

Liberal Feminist Perspective: Alvesson and Due Billing (1997) argue that one of the most common ways to classify the variety of feminist theories is through dissecting them based on their political standpoints. Based on these observations, the three key types of feminist frameworks are liberal, radical and socialist theories, which differ in what they consider as desirable changes when it comes to gender issues. Liberal feminism, Alvesson and Due Billing (1997) point out, aims to secure gender equality for women so that women can seek access to the resources that society in general and organizations in particular may have to offer. Starting from a position of emphasizing the similarities between men and women (though a later version does emphasize gender difference) it argues for a “level playing field” between men and women such that women can compete on equal terms with their male colleagues. Policies based on the tenets of liberal feminism – which focuses on the individual and understands organizational structures, policies and practices as gender neutral – tend to concentrate on the removal of barriers to gender equality. While liberal feminism has had the most influence on actual organizational policies, commentators such as Alvesson & Due Billing (1997) have noted that the de facto reality of this approach is that it has benefitted middle-class women most, narrowing the gap between them and their corresponding middle-class male colleagues (Alvesson and Due Billing, 1997; Benschop & Verloo, 2016).

Brewis and Linstead (1999) argue that the emergence of liberal feminism may be traced all the way back to the eighteenth century. The early scholars argued that women are in fact just as capable as their male counterparts at their workplace. One famous manifestation of liberal feminism is acknowledgement of the existence of the glass ceiling in modern organisations. This ceiling, serves as an invisible but challenging barrier, which puts women into a disadvantaged position, through for example preventing them from reaching higher rank managerial positions within a given organization (Brewis & Linstead, 1999). “Such work argues that the historically influential definition of women as somehow irrevocably feminine, congenitally subordinate, emotional and irrational, and therefore ill-equipped for work at the top of the “organizational tree”, results in vertical segregation – the situation in organizations where men dominate the senior positions” (Brewis & Linstead, 1999, p. 52). Calas and Smircich (1999) note that the liberal feminist perspective played a key role in developing understanding of women’s experience in the contemporary workplace. At the same time the movement has been heavily criticised by a number of activists, particularly Black women in the US, who argued that ironically, although there had been an attempt to change the status quo of the male dominant workplace, liberal feminist in turn tried to replace it with establishing the domination of white heterosexual women from the middle and upper classes of society (Hooks, 1981 as cited in Calas & Smircich, 1999). While suffering from a number of limitations, the liberal feminist perspective helped to initiate dialogue and understanding of gender-based discriminatory practices, particularly concerning women occupying managerial functions, which have always been viewed as belonging to male employees (Benschop & Verloo, 2015).

Radical Feminist Perspective: Calas and Smircich (2006) discuss another important feminist approach that has tremendously contributed towards understanding

experiences of working women i.e. radical feminist theory. Interestingly, the movement originated from the growing dissatisfaction of women with sexism characteristic of the liberal movement of leftist politicians, protesters against Vietnam War, and the social movement for human rights (Jaggar, 1983 as cited in Calas & Smircich, 2006). The basis of the movement can be formulated as follows: "... gender is a system of male domination, a fundamental organizing principle of patriarchal society, which is at the root of all other systems of oppression" (Calas & Smircich, 2006, p. 222). The key distinction between the liberal feminist perspective and the radical feminist perspective, is the fact that while liberalists chose to view manifestations of gender-based discrimination and discriminatory practices (e.g. sexual harassment, underpayment, difficulties obtaining promotion, low representation of women among higher rank positions, etc.) as manifestations of individual experiences and personal problems, radical feminists chose to connect these negative experiences to systematic processes within the society that continue to put men into a privileged position, and define masculinity as a norm to follow and adhere to if one wants to succeed within the professional environment (Jaggar, 1983; Benschop & Verloo, 2015). Brewis and Linstead (1999) assert that radical feminists not only believe in natural differences existing between the genders but also stress the importance of highlighting and using these differences within professional settings. For example, some argue that women should be deliberately accepted among higher rank managerial positions so that they can compensate for the excessive rationality of the male senior management (Brewis & Linstead, 1999).

Alvesson and Due Billing (1997) argue that the goal of radical feminism is to first of all free women from the existing patriarchal order of things. Once women are free from male-dominant oppression they should address the existing issues, such as class-based inequalities. Alvesson and Due Billing (1997) further note that: "Radicalism

is based on the assumption that women have different experiences and interests than men and/or that women have radically different orientations than those characterizing traditional and contemporary patriarchal society. Radical feminism does not aim at competing with men on equal terms or to share the benefits – top jobs, higher wages, access to formal power – on a 50/ 50 basis, but wants to change the basic structure of society and its organizations and make competition a less central notion” (p. 22). The radical movement, therefore, concentrates on proving the need to transform some major structures such as the patriarchal order within politics, society and family, the role of church, academia, etc. (Calas & Smircich, 2006). The movement is referred to as radical due to the fact that its focus is solely on the experience of women and it is regarded as woman-centred. Radical feminist research often focuses on the crossing of two major powers – power relations and gender roles (Calas & Smircich, 2006). According to Eisenstein (1983 cited in Calas & Smircich, 2006), in line with the radical feminism premises, women should be encouraged to get in touch with their authentic feminine side through cultural feminism. Interestingly, Moraga (1983 cited in Calas & Smircich, 2006) highlights the importance of discussing specific experiences of ethnic minorities – women of colour. According to the researchers, radical feminism should also focus on the experiences of women who are not white heterosexual professionals (Moraga, 1983 cited in Calas & Smircich, 2006).

Radical feminism theory and practice has had a major effect on organizational studies, as “starting in the late 1960`s, radical feminists discovered and put into practice organizational forms that were reflective of feminist values, such as equality, community, participation, and an integration of form and content” (Calas & Smircich, 2006: 221). The movement itself was focusing on promoting changes within such systems as leadership and power structures within the organisations (Brown, 1992). The radical feminist movement, according to Calas and Smircich (2006), was reactive in

nature and aimed to challenge the established masculine norms. The goal of the movement was to create a so-called woman-space – an environment where various organisations help women gain skills and capabilities they were lacking. Some examples included letting women make decisions regarding medical care, teaching women technical skills such as carpentry and auto-mechanics (Calas & Smircich, 2006). The researchers also put a lot of emphasis on the creation of cultural centres and organisations where women could exchange feminist ideas, and educate themselves on feminist art, literature, gender studies, etc. (Brown, 1992).

Radical feminist leaders formed a number of groups and organisations which aimed to educate members and create a social and political momentum. Many of the groups focused on a democratic, equality-focus structure emphasizing the equal role of each of the group members (Calas & Smircich, 2006). The main focus of such groups was to prevent a single individual taking control and monopolizing leadership or group discussion. While being effective in educating group members regarding the existence of glass ceiling and inequality, these types of organisation failed to develop any form of political activity or momentum. According to Calas and Smircich (2006) later organisations have focused on adapting some sort of structure and leadership-based approach, along with role distribution. The contribution of this particular movement within feminism towards organisational studies was deeper understanding of the role of organisational structures and hierarchies in supporting gender-based discrimination within professional organizations. According to Calas and Smircich (2006: 222), radical feminist research has identified “...five organizational elements reflective of feminist values in organizing: a participatory decision-making system, a system of rotating leadership, flexible and interactive job designs, an equitable distribution of income, and interpersonal and political accountability”.

Poststructuralist Feminist Perspective: Alvesson and Due Billing (1997: 32) define poststructuralist or postmodern feminism as a theory that ‘...questions the gender categories that were taken for granted by the two perspectives previously described. Notions like men and women, the male and the female, are no longer viewed as fundamental, valid points of departure but considered to be unstable, ambiguous and attributing a false unity’. This orientation derives from the core ideas of poststructuralism and postmodernism which include ‘...the impossibility of a universal truth, the dominance of oppositional dichotomies in our thinking and deconstruction as a method to unveil ambivalences, fluidities and absences...’ (Benschop & Verloo, 2016: 106). Alvesson & Due Billing (1997: 37) explain why poststructuralist feminism questions the established status quo as follows: ‘One might rightly ask what is the common significance of “woman” when applied to a 70-year-old retired Brazilian schoolteacher as well as a 14-year-old girl from the New Delhi slum, a Norwegian female prime minister, a black single mother of several children in South Africa, a young MBA career woman on Wall Street and a lesbian upper-class middle-aged artist in Victorian England’. Based on these considerations a number of scholars suggest that the widespread use of such identities as “woman”, “female”, “feminine gender identity” are misleading, as they only provide a false unity which reflects little to no common shared features among the discussed subjects (Alvesson & Due Billing, 1997; Calas & Smircich, 2006). Basically the point here is that there is no universal meaning of ‘woman’, rather the meaning of ‘woman’ varies depending on the languages contexts i.e. discourses which are in use at any particular point in time and any particular place (Alvesson & Due Billing, 1997).

Following on from the above, the focus of organizational research which is informed by poststructuralist feminism is the discursive practices of gender (Benschop & Verloo, 2016). A clear move away from the notion that gender is part of an essential

essence towards the conceptualization of gender as a “doing” is a key hallmark of the poststructuralist feminist perspective. The emergence and take-up of a poststructuralist feminist perspective by gender researchers signalled a ‘...move towards an ontology of gender as a largely performative situated social practice’ (Tyler & Cohen, 2010: 177). As such research which relies on the principles of poststructuralist feminism is not concerned with individual subjects per se but rather attention is directed at the discourses within which men and women are constituted (Alvesson & Due Billing, 1997). Following on from this, masculinity and femininity are not perceived as solid entities within a solid gender order. Poststructuralist feminism places an emphasis on subjectivity arising out of cultural representations connected to prevalent gender (and other) discourses, with a significant amount of research from this perspective exploring how people take-up the subject positions made available to them from the multiple discourses circulating within distinctive spatial-temporal settings (Benschop & Verloo, 2016).

Of particular importance to note is the power that is connected to the notion of discourse. Power here refers to the way in which discourses constitute the world such that it is difficult, sometimes impossible, to think or act outside of them. Here, men and women within an organizational context are placed in subject and object positions according to discourses such as the postfeminist discourse of ‘natural’ sexual difference. Thus men and women ‘...are ‘made subject’ through...discourses while at the same time they are also subjected i.e. constructed as objects of power. Thus who an individual is ‘is not an unchanging essence but rather a shifting product of power’ (Miller 2008 cited in Lewis & Simpson, 2012: 145). Recognition of the power of discourse does not completely render resistance impossible – in other words the less powerful are not completely powerless. Individuals may be subject to dominant discourses but are also active within them and drawing on particular discourses may provide individuals with

opportunities to secure power and resources. What this means is that power is mobile and the impact of changing circumstances and connections enables power to shift from one group to another. Therefore at different points in time different categories of people may have greater influence over and control of how power is played out with the instability of identity providing opportunities for shifts in power (Lewis & Simpson, 2012).

In relation to the notion of gender discourses and the power that attaches to them, one key concept used to capture what is meant by “doing” gender and the relation of this “doing” to discourse is that of performativity. Performativity refers to how something such as identity comes into being from drawing on discourses. It is the materialization of norms, a process that is inherently unstable and full of the possibility of resistance (Cunliffe 2009). According to McKinlay (2010: 235) using performativity as the way to understand what drawing on discourse means, highlights ‘both the fragility and the stubborn consistency’ of something like identity. From this, an individual cannot “choose” an identity in the way they might “choose” an outfit or how they take their coffee but neither is s/he condemned to act out a structurally determined identity without some kind of individual input. In performatively constructing an identity by drawing on discourses, there is a degree of repetition and ritual. Drawing on a discourse to “do” an identity is never a one-off event but rather is a continuous repetition of prior acts and utterances, that is, it is the recitation of cultural norms over time. It is through the repetition and recitation of discourse that the effects (e.g. identity) the discourse names are produced (Cunliffe, 2009). As this performative “doing” of gender is not done within a vacuum i.e. it is located in a context, an individual’s performance is judged and evaluated against a culturally based norm to assess whether a person is a ‘proper’ member of a social order. Individuals who cannot achieve the standard are directed towards the means to improve or subject to exclusion

(Lewis & Simpson, 2012). The effort put into the performativity of gender is propelled by a plea for recognition as a viable, culturally intelligible subject that is recognised and valorised by others (Tyler & Cohen, 2010).

3.2.2. Neoliberal Feminist Perspective

All of the above feminist perspectives, drawn upon by researchers in the Gender and Organization Studies field, have been acknowledged and written up by a number of writers (e.g. Alvesson & Due Billing, 1997; Brewis & Linstead, 1999; Calas & Smircich, 2006; Gherardi, 2003, Witz & Savage, 1992). However, a newly emerging feminist approach – neoliberal feminism – is only now been identified as significant within the Gender and Organization Studies field (e.g. Benschop & Verloo, 2016). The appearance of neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg, 2014) is associated with the instrumentalization of feminist principles such as equality within mainstream public discourse in general and in mainstream organizational discourse in particular (Lewis & Simpson, 2017). Neoliberal feminism is categorised as a moderate form of feminism along with other named feminisms such as choice feminism (Kirkpatrick, 2010), popular feminism (McRobbie, 2009) and market feminism (Kantola & Squires, 2012). This has particular significance for the present study as its emphasis on the individual woman not only is a re-statement of the individualist principle of liberal feminism but also links forward to the notion of postfeminism. According to Gill and Scharff (2011: 7) ‘...the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism (in general) bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism’.

Rottenberg (2014) discusses the important role of Sheryl Sandberg’s feminist manifesto *Lean In*, which she argues can be seen as a signal that a transition in feminist thinking is occurring with the shift from liberal feminism to neoliberal feminism.

Rottenberg (2014) argues that mainstream liberal feminism is transitioning into a general cultural pattern with a neoliberal twist and presents a distinction between neoliberal and liberal feminism. The key difference, according to Rottenberg (2014) comes from the fact that liberal feminism was based on a sharp critique of the gender exclusion which occurred within liberal democratic structures, and manifested through law, institutional structures, etc. In contrast, neoliberal feminism is seemingly evolving in complete harmony with the neoliberal order and "... offers no critique – immanent or otherwise – of neoliberalism" (Rottenberg, 2013, p. 420). Neoliberalism moreover creates a new feminist subject: "Individuated in the extreme, this subject is feminist in the sense that she is distinctly aware of current inequalities between men and women. This same subject, however simultaneously neoliberal, not only because she disavows the social, cultural and economic forces producing this inequality, but also because she accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care, which is increasingly predicated on crafting a felicitous work – family balance based on a cost-benefit calculus" (Rottenberg, 2014, p. 420). Prugl (2015) argues that early predictions concerning the future evolution of liberal feminism have not come to pass. It was anticipated that the liberal feminist movement would radicalise, as women became a core element of the work force and would confront gender discrimination and inequalities, and forcefully push towards more radical and structural changes. However, the course of history has proven this point of view wrong, as a couple of decades later feminists and neoliberal feminists have seem to have adopted a different approach to gender issues, namely individual solutions and coping strategies to confront gender problems at their workplace (Prugl, 2015). Rottenberg (2014) emphasizes her argument by describing how liberal feminism has gone "to bed" with capitalism. Instead of challenging neoliberal capitalism, the contemporary "... neoliberal feminist subject is

thus mobilized to convert continued gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair” (p. 421).

Rottenberg (2014: 420) further discusses the underlying reasons for the emergence of neoliberalism feminism and suggests that it “... simultaneously serves a particular cultural purpose: it hollows out the potential of mainstream liberal feminism to underscore the constitutive contradictions of liberal democracy, and in this way further entrenches neoliberal rationality and an imperialistic logic. Each woman`s success becomes a feminist success, which is then attributed to the USA`s enlightened political order, as well as to its moral and political superiority”.

While Rottenberg explores the emergence of neoliberal feminism generally, Prugl (2015) adds to our understanding of this moderate feminism by explaining the emergence of neoliberalism, as well as increased interest towards gender studies and feminist issues on the corporate level. The researcher argues that while many multinational corporations (MNCs) have focused on such issues as ethnicity-based diversity of their staff or environmental affairs to build relationships with the key stakeholders and demonstrated their commitment to the principles of social responsibility, other have chosen women empowerment as a tool to prove and demonstrate their focus on sustainability and public relations. Prugl (2015) uses such examples as 10.000 Women initiative by Goldman Sachs (focused on partnering business schools with the corporate world to provide female entrepreneurs with the necessary training), the programmes by the World Economic Forum, etc. All of these initiatives aim at reducing the gender gap in various spheres of professional activities: business, politics, economy. One of the best examples is The Girl Effect programme by Nike, which suggests that communities can be affected from within through empowering and educating girls, which can change the life of their families (Prugle,

2015). Prugl (2015: 616) further points out: “Companies, including Yves Saint Laurent, Avon, Kraft, and Coca Cola all have invested in projects targeting women and girls and deploying the feminist idea of women’s empowerment”. Prugl (2015) treats such cases as examples of the encounters between neoliberalism and feminism currently taking place, which it is claimed result in women’s empowerment in contemporary organizations.

Rottenberg (2014, p. 422), while also discussing the origins of neoliberal feminist, gives more attention to the potential consequences of the movement, particularly the emergence of a new type of feminist subject: “Using key liberal terms, such as equality, opportunity, and free choice, while displacing and replacing the content, this recuperates feminism, forges a feminist subject who is not only individualised but entrepreneurial in the sense that she is oriented towards optimizing her resources through incessant calculation, personal initiative and innovation. Indeed, creative individual solutions are presented as feminist and progressive, while calibrating a felicitous work-family balance becomes her main task”. Rottenberg (2013) and Prugl (2015) argue that the process of convergence between feminism and neoliberalism leads towards the creation of a moderate form of feminism. This moderate neoliberal feminism becomes invisible, as said above, through the emphasis placed on individual action and choice and promotion of the principle that as long as a woman has chosen a particular course of action, then irrespective of outcomes, there is no requirement to problematize her circumstances (Lewis & Simpson, 2017).

This section of the chapter has mapped out the various feminist perspectives prevalent in the field of Gender and Organization Studies. We now turn to consider in more detail the critical concept of postfeminism which we are mobilizing to explore accounts of the work experiences of Middle Eastern Female Academics. As said above,

we are not approaching postfeminism as a type of feminist perspective rather we are treating it as an analytical category. However, following the delineation of the concept of postfeminism we will summarise its positioning in relation to the feminist perspectives within the context of this thesis.

3.3. Postfeminism as a social, cultural and political phenomenon

Most reviews of the notion of postfeminism begin by citing the complexity of this cultural phenomenon and the lack of agreement regarding how we should interpret it. As a starting point, postfeminism is often contrasted to a generalised feminism with the latter presenting women as victims of a male-dominated world while postfeminism rejects the idea of victimhood, instead preferring to interpret the experiences of women in terms of their individual agency and individual choices made. Thus, the notions of empowerment, free choice and liberation have become central to any understanding of this cultural phenomenon (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Meyers, 2013; Butler, 2013). It is important to understand, however, that the issue of choice is often “forced” upon modern women, as society perceives them as agentic individuals. Choice is forced onto women, and may further be complicated by various other social constructs, such as class, ethnicity, etc. It is important to take these other constructs into considerations as not all of the various social classes have equal access to making choices (Braun, 2009).

It is argued that postfeminism can be used to explore women`s professional experiences (Lewis, 2014). Lewis (2014) argues that this critical concept provides a necessary alternative to traditional studies of women`s work experiences as many of these are underpinned by an assumption of exclusion associated with a dominant masculine norm. In contrast, considering women`s accounts of work experiences through the lens of postfeminism helps us to develop an understanding of how women professionals and femininity are integrated in the modern work environment (Lawler,

2002; Genz & Brabon, 2009). Lewis (2014) discusses a number of different professional identities (or femininities) among women who choose to become an entrepreneur in the male-dominated business environment identifying four as follows: individualized, maternal, relational and excessive. Lewis argues they are all different except for sharing “one key characteristic being the way in which they are all constituted through the doing of both masculinity and femininity via the integration and embodiment of conventional feminine and masculine aspirations and behaviours” (Lewis, 2014: 1845).

3.3.1. Defining the concept of postfeminism

Postfeminism emerged in the early 1980s long before the death of feminism (Butler, 2013). The term was commonly used to define behaviours of young women in the US. There is an ongoing debate about the concept of postfeminism and its current position within feminist cultural analysis (Gill, 2007; Lewis, 2014). Therefore, there exists a necessity to clearly define postfeminism and characterize the features constituting it. Gill (2007) argues that there is still little agreement regarding what postfeminism actually is and notes that there is much variety in the explanations and interpretations attached to the term. McRobbie (2009) warns against seeing such a complex phenomenon as postfeminism as mere backlash and rejection of the older generation’s feminist ideas. Instead, she argues that postfeminism must be taken very seriously as a cultural phenomenon which has had a significant impact on women today and given this must be approached as something more just a protest and challenge to the existing order. She suggests that postfeminism has been integrated not only into political or social protest and structure, but also into popular culture and media, and while it is often interpreted as a symbol of progress and achievements by women, a critical investigation of such “claims of progress” is required (McRobbie, 2009). For

example, the emphasis placed on notions of empowerment and free choice are often perceived by younger women as an alternative to traditional radical political movements and interventions with the consequence that dealing with ongoing discrimination is understood as an individual as opposed to a collective responsibility. (McRobbie, 2009; Butler, 2013).

In considering the various interpretations of postfeminism, four versions can be identified (Gill, 2007; Gill et al, 2016): a version which understands postfeminism as backlash; a version which understands postfeminism as a historical shift within feminism; a version which understands postfeminism as a theoretical perspective; and finally a version which understands postfeminism as a discursive formation referred to as a postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2007) or postfeminist gender regime (McRobbie, 2009). Starting with postfeminism as backlash, in this account postfeminism is understood as a “kickback” against the achievements of feminism often in a contradictory fashion. At times backlash postfeminism presents feminism as the root of modern women’s unhappiness with a strong emphasis on “enough-is-enough”. Alternatively, postfeminism as backlash praises the achievements of feminism for women emphasising that inequality is now a thing of the past and therefore feminism is now obsolete and again “enough-is-enough”. This positive sense of backlash contributes to the instrumentalization of feminist principles where they become part of our common sense so appear “normal” and therefore no longer needed to be fought for by feminists. However, once incorporated the key elements are transformed into much more individualistic “goals” as opposed to collective aims. McRobbie (2009, p. 3) argues: “These new and seemingly “modern” ideas about women and especially young women are then disseminated more aggressively, so as to ensure that a new women`s movement will not re-emerge. “Feminism” is instrumentalised, it is brought forward and claimed by Western governments, as a signal to the rest of the world that this is a key part of

what freedom now means". Gill et al (2016) suggest that the value of this backlash version lies in the way it directs attention to the strong anti-feminist sentiments expressed through social media which manifest in torrents of abuse directed at any woman who expresses publicly, views about women's presence (or absence) from public life. The second version of postfeminism which emphasises the occurrence of an historical shift within feminism places an emphasis on a time after second wave feminism. Here, postfeminism is understood in terms of "what comes after" second wave feminism, what ongoing transformation of feminism is occurring and contains an opposition between 'older' and 'younger' feminists with the latter perceived as less disciplinarian, lighter in outlook and open to men. It represents itself in terms of a shift in feminist activity, a particular moment, but not a time after feminism as the backlash perspective does (Gill et al, 2016).

Within the context of Gender and Organization Studies, the versions of postfeminism which fit with the shape and concerns of the field are postfeminism as a theoretical perspective and postfeminism as a cultural, discursive strategy (Lewis, 2014). Starting with postfeminism as a theoretical perspective – it is stated at the beginning of this chapter that the author of this present thesis does not see himself as a postfeminist working out of a postfeminist perspective. What this means is that in the thesis postfeminism is not used as a theoretical approach akin to how the other feminist perspectives outlined above are used in gender research. Nevertheless, one of the ways in which postfeminism has been understood, particularly in earlier considerations of this phenomenon, is as a theoretical perspective which represents an epistemological break within feminism with postfeminism being understood as feminism within poststructuralist theory (Gill, 2007; Gill et al, 2016; Lewis, 2014). 'Thus, as a theoretical stance it signals that the breadth of feminist issues is more extensive than in previous times and as such is not against feminism but about a feminism which

reconsiders and makes a clear shift in its categories and questions' (Lewis, 2014: 1849). As part of this 'epistemological break', postfeminism understood in these terms signalled a shift away from a focus on equality towards consideration of the complexity of difference and the pursuit of a non-hegemonic feminism capable of giving voice to all women, not just western white middle class women (Gill et al, 2016). However, a perusal of the research which draws on the notion of postfeminism, demonstrates that few researchers have adopted this theoretical version when trying to understand postfeminism or to interpret empirical situations (Lewis, 2014). This rejection can be understood in terms of the view expressed by Genz & Brabon (2009 cited in Lewis, 2014: 1850) that '...a purely theoretical conception of postfeminism is insufficient and inadequate...(and risks)...repressing its importance...in the public debate on feminism and the modern woman' While this theoretical version of postfeminism has not been taken-up in this thesis either, at the end of the chapter we will briefly consider its relationship with the fourth version of postfeminism to which we now turn.

Postfeminism as a discursive formation: The fourth version of postfeminism derives from the significant academic attention directed at this cultural phenomenon by authors such as Rosalind Gill and Angela McRobbie. Both of these writers approach postfeminism as a discursive formation connected to a set of discourses around gender, feminism and femininity. At this point in time, this is the dominant understanding of postfeminism mobilised by most researchers when exploring the postfeminist life and accounts of work experiences of women and girls (Lewis & Simpson, 2017) and it is the version of postfeminism used in this thesis. In her work *Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a sensibility*, Rosalind Gill (2007) offers a new understanding of postfeminism as a sensibility (or discursive formation or cultural dispositive), which can be applied to characterise various cultural phenomena (e.g., books, movies, shows, advertisements). In addition, it can be used to interpret various aspects of women's

lives, as example their accounts of work experiences in organizations such as universities, making visible how postfeminist cultural norms are embedded in them or drawn upon by women to interpret their situation. McRobbie (2009) refers to the same understanding of postfeminism as a postfeminist gender regime. Although both, Gill (2007) and McRobbie (2009) highlight, the underlying anti-feminist sentiment behind the emergence of postfeminism, they both also acknowledge that certain important elements of feminism (e.g. choice, empowerment) have been “successfully” incorporated into organisational, cultural and political life. The current study will utilize the concept of postfeminism developed through the foundational work of authors such as Gill (2007), McRobbie (2009), Negra, (2009) and Tasker and Negra (2009) (Lewis & Simpson, 2017) which suggests that the phenomenon can be best interpreted as a “distinctive sensibility“ relating to a number of interrelated elements. These include a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; an emphasis on the notion of ‘natural’ sexual difference; a focus on subjectification as opposed to objectification; self-discipline and self-surveillance; femininity as a bodily property; the ascendancy of a make-over paradigm; and retreat to home as a matter of choice not obligation (Negra, 2009). It is further noted that the patterned articulation and discussion of these elements constitutes the phenomenon of a postfeminism sensibility (Gill, 2007).

The present thesis utilizes the understanding of postfeminism as a sensibility, developed by authors such as Gill (2007), McRobbie (2009) and Negra (2009) for a number of reasons. The version of postfeminism as a discursive formation enables a wider understanding and interpretation of postfeminism as a cultural phenomenon and avoids seeing it as merely a historical step in a feminist evolution. In addition, Gill (2007) warns against using the notion of a postfeminist sensibility solely within the context of modern media. Instead, she argues (as does Lewis 2014) that it should be used as a more broad and general analytical concept, which would help research into

entities such as organizations, providing the impetus to understand a multitude of topics and issues. For example, drawing on the notion of postfeminism we can explore how women reconfigure their femininity to ensure their inclusion in the modern organisation. From the collection of elements which co-exist as part of a postfeminist sensibility, three of these have particular significance for this study i.e. individualism, choice and empowerment, the emphasis on ‘natural’ sexual difference and retreat to the home as a matter of choice not obligation (Lewis, 2014).

3.3.2. Individualism, choice and empowerment

The concepts of individualism, choice and empowerment – “being oneself” and “pleasing oneself” - are central to the postfeminist philosophy (Gill, 2007; Meyers, 2013). Gill (2007) argues that these notions and the one of taking control and being in charge of one’s own decisions became central to contemporary culture and are regularly manifest in popular shows, advertising, etc., thereby infiltrating everyday common sense. As Gill (2007: 156) states: “This is seen not only in the relentless personalising tendencies of news, talk shows and reality TV, but also in the ways in which every aspect of life is refracted through the idea of personal choice and self-determination”). A number of authors point towards a one-sided interpretation of individual’s motives and actions within modern society. For instance, a tendency among young women to undergo a breast augmentation procedure is viewed as an overall trend among women to “please themselves” through enhancing their looks and beauty. Much less attention is given to the underlying motivation to please oneself through this kind of surgery by focusing on the societal pressures that encourage women to undergo such a procedure. Gill (2007) suggests that there must be a very strong social pressure involved to influence these kind of decisions. Gill (2007) argues that postfeminism suggests that modern women may freely choose any action or make any life decision, as they are

independent agents of their own will, and are no longer limited by any kinds of constraints. It is suggested that modern women are motivated by their own professional and personal aspirations as well as by their willingness to “feel good about themselves” (the latter message being strongly communicated through popular media) (Meyers, 2013).

Empowerment and free will, as major cornerstones of a postfeminist gender regime manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Women are not only making free choices themselves, they also turn to themselves as a main source of motivation for these changes to occur. Gill (2007) argues that not so recently women chose to dress in a particular manner in order to satisfy men`s taste and attract them. Modern Western women often consider this behaviour unworthy, as it portrays an image of a desperate heterosexual woman that only cares for male approval of her looks and behaviour (Genz & Brabon, 2009; Meyers, 2013). Postfeminism as a critical concept help understand that while more women are turning to the idea of pleasing themselves and appear to be escaping the old dependence on men, this notional freedom must be investigated. Postfeminism conveys the sense that modern women are totally free agents of their own will. Quite surprisingly, these “free agents” while assuming that they make individual choices based on different motivations, end up in the same position i.e. similar, if not identical looks, well-groomed appearances, hairless bodies, manicured nails, thin waist. Gill (2007) raises an interesting question of “the relationship between representation and subjectivity, the difficult but crucial questions about how socially constructed, mass mediated ideals of beauty are internalised and made our own” (p. 13).

However this cornerstone notion of empowerment and endless freedom has often been a target of critique within the postfeminist concept (Genz & Brabon, 2009). Some researchers themselves, but mostly the popular press provide this explicit image of a postfeminist utopia where women are capable of achieving any goal if they have a

desire for it. This overly optimistic view, unfortunately, is far from reality and can also be a psychological burden carried by generations of young women who are taught to perceive themselves as powerful but in fact are not. A special term “choiceoisie” (Genz & Barbon, 2009: 37) has been coined to depict all major life and career choices as individual decisions, rather than culturally influenced ones. Some researchers go as far as regarding this vision as a postfeminist American dream (with an obvious focus on individual versus collective) (Rail, 1998; Genz & Brabon, 2009). This postfeminist celebration of individual choice and individualism is also dangerous, as it removes the common base uniting women in struggle against gender inequalities and oppression. It is argued that these celebrations of individual victories and choices are quite dangerous because they are often misinterpreted for something greater (Genz & Brabon, 2009) and require of individual women and girls that they develop individual “strategies” and “solutions” to deal with what are systemic, societal issues.

It is important to mention that such notions as individualism and free choice have been explored outside media studies, and within working environments (Lewis, 2014). Lewis (2014: 1853) in considering the experience of women business owners, argues that notions of individualism, choice and empowerment are central such that “Success in entrepreneurship is understood as the effective performance of fundamentally gender-neutral methods, routines and rituals, allied to the strong belief that individuals (male or female) have an equal chance to succeed if they are ambitious and hardworking” Further, Lewis (2014) emphasises the particular importance of free choice, as female entrepreneurs are viewed as autonomous subjects who can perform actions that are not governed by any external bodies. Lewis (2014) implies that within the postfeminism concept, professional women are no longer seen as oppressed, but instead possessing a free will and choice to succeed in their profession.

3.3.3. 'Natural' Sexual Difference

One key characteristic of the postfeminist gender regime is the resurgence of the notion of 'natural' sexual difference between men and women. One populist influence here is the book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* by John Gray which sets up a 'natural' dichotomy between men and women, presenting them as "alien" but complementary to each other because of enduring differences. Such dualist thinking has had a significant impact on how we understand gender issues and manifests in a common research design which compares male and female experience with less attention directed at differences among men or among women. Most mainstream accounts of 'natural' sexual difference tend to present the dichotomy in terms of complementarity – men and women may be different from each other but they are complementary. The suggestion here is that there is no hierarchy and both are equally valued.

However, from the position of feminist perspectives such as radical feminism or poststructuralist feminism, the co-existence between masculinity and femininity is not one of complementarity. Rather, there is a binary divide between the masculine and the feminine with an ongoing privileging of masculinity. 'These feminist perspectives connect women's subordination to their difference from the masculine norm and the hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity, with the former being prioritized over the latter which is constituted within binary logic as nothing' (Lewis, 2014: 114). Despite ongoing research which makes visible the persistent "pecking order" between masculinity and femininity, this hierarchy is not recognized within postfeminism. The stress placed on peaceful, non-hierarchical co-existence has contributed to the emergence in the business world of the figures of the feminine leader, the feminine manager and the female entrepreneur who are seen as necessary complements to traditional masculine leadership, management and entrepreneurship.

Postfeminist discourse of difference places an emphasis on the ‘...special contribution that women’s so-called uniquely feminine viewpoint can bring to management and organizations, emphasizing its dissimilarity from the conventional masculine character of managing and organizing’ (Lewis, 2014: 1856). From this position of complementarity, ongoing differences between male and female experience of organizations (e.g. the gender wage gap) are interpreted through the prism of choice. Variations in choices between men and women are thought to arise out of ‘natural’ sexual difference and these ‘choices’ are the reasons for ongoing disparities in terms of position and salary, not a masculine-feminine hierarchy or ongoing discrimination.

3.3.4. Retreat to home: a matter of choice but not obligation

A lot of women in various societies choose never to pursue or quit their careers in order to fulfil their obligations as mothers and wives (Trower, 2001; Zhang & Hannum, 2013). However, we do not really know how often this choice is purely conscious and manifested by the free will of women making it. It is often hard to draw a clear line between obligations and choices. Stone (2007) reports that the media picked up an interesting trend that started in early 1980’s: the journalists “noticed” more and more high-achiever type women quitting their jobs and returning home to take care of their families. The most famous case was that of Brenda Barnes, the CEO of PepsiCo North America, who in 1998 decided to spend more time with her family (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). The story of Barnes was just one out of many similar ones: they all told stories about different women, working in different professional areas, companies and countries. The only similarity they had was the fact that all of these women were highly successful and satisfied with their jobs, and made necessary adjustments to ensure they receive proper help and support with taking care of household responsibilities. Their only reason for quitting their successful careers, according to media coverage, was the

fact that they realised that no job is more worthy and rewarding than that of a mother (Stone, 2007). Stone (2007: 3) notes: “As a mother myself I did not doubt the bit about motherhood and children (...); but as a scholar of women`s careers, I did have some questions about what women in these articles were saying about their jobs”.

Giving up a job – particularly a professional position – to stay home with children is one of the key social practices of postfeminism. Such retreatism is always interpreted through the prism of choice and difference, where women, due to their ‘natural’ affinity to children choose to return home. From this perspective, work including professional work is constructed as unrewarding and staying home is presented as an escape from all the pressures of the contemporary work place (Negra, 2009). No reference is made to the pleasures or benefits of working – work for women is understood as an impediment to their ‘natural’ need to mother their children. This is a significant move away from the tenets of liberal feminism which fought for women’s right to leave home so that they could self-actualise in the workplace. Children would be cared for in well-run (state funded) nurseries while women would no longer have to curb their professional ambitions. Within a postfeminist gender regime, the shift to retreatism with its emphasis on active parenting and being constantly available for children, is an explicit denunciation of the liberal feminist valuing of public achievement based on the rejection of domesticity and childcare (Lewis, 2014). Looking at the contemporary situation, the postfeminist revaluing of home and children may not have contributed to the wholesale exodus of women from the workforce but has impacted on how work is positioned in relation to family. While more and more educated women choose to combine motherhood with career, it is argued that ‘...a psychological distancing from work is established, contributing to the downgrading of the significance of employment...’ (Lewis, 2014: 116). According to McRobbie (2009) the ability to combine home and work is dependent on social compromise and adjusted

ambition leading her to coin the term ‘female individualization’ to signal that while women are now invited to self-actualise through work in the same way as their male colleagues, such self-actualisation has to be achieved while maintaining “one foot” within the domestic realm.

3.4. Postfeminism and migrant women

A number of views exist on the role of postfeminism in the modern professional environment. Meyers (2013) argues that modern ideologies developed on the basis of neoliberalism and postfeminism create an atmosphere of denial within the society as a whole, and academic world in particular. The researcher suggests that postfeminism creates the foundation for legitimizing ongoing systematic gender inequality and sexism in higher education and goes as far as advocating for returning terms such as sexism, patriarchy and misogyny into the modern gender equality debate to highlight dominating sexism (Meyers, 2013).

Gill and Scharff (2011) discuss the influence of migrant women on cultural stereotypes. Particularly, the question of Muslim migrants (as a self-chosen identity) is becoming more and more acute to the European Union and Western world as a whole (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Muslim women often find themselves being seen as a threat and a symbol of Otherness and they feel pressured “to position themselves vis-à-vis shared values in order to prove they can be legitimate members of the society they live in” (Gill & Scharff, 2011: 230). It is further suggested that European governments are stressing the importance of shared values for the process of integration and citizenship acquisition. In this way, Gill and Scharff (2011) argue, European society finds itself split into two – first, “native” (non-migrant) citizens already in possession of the shared values and second, migrants who are expected and required to demonstrate that they share these values as well. Non-migrant citizens therefore find themselves in a position

not only to judge whether migrants are displaying the same commitment to common values, but also to evaluate and create hurdles on the road to migrant`s integration (Gill & Scharff, 2011).

Researchers describe an interesting phenomenon concerned with stereotyping and migrant Muslim women (Ahmed, 2001; Gill & Scharff, 2011). Women migrating to Europe from Middle Eastern countries are often perceived as individuals trying to escape gender inequality and oppression while looking for the safe haven of the Western world. However, it turns out that once they arrive and start a long integration journey, migrant Muslim women find themselves being discriminated against on the basis of culture, religion and gender (Gill & Scharff, 2011). These women find themselves in the situation of inequality once again. “While for many of them the migration project was motivated by the wish to escape particular forms of gendered control and enable a wider choice of gendered lifestyles, it would be wrong to assume that after migration they experienced a paradise of gender equality” (Gill & Scharff, 2011: 231). Therefore modern European society witnesses the shift of a paradigm from the pluralist orientation developed by the aim of moving towards multiculturalism, returning to a renewed emphasis on shared values and citizenship (Gill & Scharff, 2011).

3.5. Postfeminism as a transnational/ transcultural concept

Dosekun (2015) argues that the majority of the postfeminist research has been focusing on the Western world alone, and therefore postfeminism is often perceived as a phenomenon developed and belonging to Western culture and values. As a result of this, Dosekun (2015) continues, both theoretical and empirical research has neglected understanding and studying postfeminism within its non-Western context. The researchers note that this tendency to westernise postfeminism is rooted within its

historical origin, as the notion evolved as a result of various liberal movements and second-wave feminism activities (Tasker & Negra, 2007). As already discussed within the present study, feminism has been criticised for promoting the rights and interests of middle class white heterosexual women (Spigel & McRobbie, 2007), and according to Dosekun (2015) postfeminism as a concept has been criticised for only looking at experiences of Western women, while ignoring the situation and exclusion of women around the globe.

Butler (2013) has developed a comprehensive critique of the postfeminist concept, implying that its premises apply only to young, thin, attractive white girls. Based on this argument, both Butler (2013) and Dosekun (2015) argue that modern postfeminism excludes women of colour from its considerations. Dosekun (2015) argues that modern researchers should adopt a transnational approach towards postfeminism to account for differences in culture and social structure that exist between nations, and how these differences impact the experiences of women as well as discriminatory practices around the globe. Therefore, Dosekun (2015) suggests to view postfeminism as a transnational cultural phenomenon that may reach and affect women within different countries.

In order to fill this existing research gap, Dosekun (2015) conducted an empirical study of female experiences in Nigeria, which demonstrated that the interviewed individuals also viewed themselves as subjects of postfeminism. Dosekun (2015) along with other researchers (Hedge, 2011; Kaplan & Grewal, 1994) suggests that postfeminism should be viewed as a transnational notion. Dosekun (2015, p. 6) defines transnational as follows: "... to designate the multiple and uneven cultures, practices, subjectivities, and so on that exceed and cross but do not thereby negate boundaries of nation-state and region". According to Grewal (2005 as cited in Dosekun, 2015), transnationalism is a complex phenomenon constructed through various

heterogeneous connections that may involve meanings, practices, commodities, people or capital. The connections and connectivity discussed by Grewal (2005 cited in Dosekun, 2015) may include commodity circuits, movements (e.g., migrations), activism, relations between states, media networks, etc. In the opinion of Dosekun (2015, p. 6) to think transnationally means "... to link ... the lines and clusters of power that do not respect local, national or regional borders, but traverse them and thereby come to constitute other kinds of boundaries and belongings". Within the context of the postfeminist concept, transnational thinking is therefore concerned with "... how, as an entanglement of meanings, representations, sensibilities, practices, and commodities, post-feminism may discursively and materially cross borders, including those within our feminist scholarly imaginaries" (Dosekun, 2015, p. 7).

Researchers such as Dosekun (2015) doubting whether postfeminism is a universal concept, or a product of Western society designed for "white girls only", often discuss the importance of the mechanism enabling such complex concepts to travel across borders. Indeed, understanding of the specific mechanism by which postfeminism can travel through world would enable the development of a certain answer regarding whether the concept is applicable outside the Western world. According to Dosekun (2015), such mechanisms as contemporary media channels and social media in general facilitate the diffusion of Western ideas and discourses to other countries. For instance, postfeminism is daily transnationalised via commodity exchange, various media outlets as well as consumer connectivities (Dosekun, 2015). Feminist scholars have identified and described the significant role of various media outlets and consumer discourses and practices that facilitate the spreading of postfeminism within the context of the Western world (Elias, 2013). Dosekun (2015) emphasises that the same mechanisms are valid, and in fact, actively used to transfer

Western postfeminist ideas to the remainder of the world. This can be viewed as an inevitable consequence of the globalization process (Elias, 2013).

Bradfield (2013) examines various media outlets and neoliberal, postfeminist and hybrid discourses within South African TV shows. The researcher uses *Society*, a popular miniseries aired by the South African Broadcasting Corporation on local public TV, as an illustration of how Western discourses cross borders and affect women elsewhere. The researcher discusses an episode where:

“... Inno, a young thin, and beautiful black woman who supplements her limited salary as a “television weather girl” with gifts from wealthy suitors, is pictured in her messy apartment surrounded by 67 pairs of designer shoes. Inno tries to take comfort from her possessions even as she eludes her landlord, unable to pay her rent” (Bradfield, 2013, p. 25).

The described piece utterly reminds us of the iconic series *Sex and the City* (aired between 1998 and 2004). The series *Society* is presenting the African dream, which highly resembles the American one, particularly due to the overemphasized focus on sexual representation, consumption-based lifestyle, etc. At the same time, as noted by Bradfield (2013), the show solely portrays black African women, takes place in Johannesburg (although also presents a rather glamorous setting), and makes numerous references to the complex context of the South African Republic, living in post-apartheid era. In many ways, *Society* and its portrayal of young professional South African women closely resembles Western postfeminist discourses: the main character, Inno is free to make her life choices, and as a result finds herself dedicating her life to her career. She is also empowered and feels herself entitled to live a particular distinctive lifestyle, which can at least partially be described as luxurious. On the other hand, the show discusses a number of issues that have a major impact on the female

characters and their choices, however also portrays realities typical to South Africa, and not common in the Western world. Even though being a successful professional, Inno struggles to make ends meet, which indirectly demonstrates that South Africa at the moment is lacking a middle class (Bradfield, 2013).

Thayer (2009) has conducted a study of the influence of neoliberalisation and feminist movements within the context of Brazil. According to the researcher, without a doubt, the country has been affected by Western movements and tendencies as far as culture, social and, most importantly, gender relations are concerned. However, Thayer (2009) warns against two possible scenarios of the spreading of phenomena such as feminism and postfeminism within a given cultural context. According to the first scenario, the new ideas and discourses may only be spread among a certain “elite” that has an increased access to the original sources of the new ideas – the Western world itself. The researcher argues, that even though most of the country’s citizens have access to media outlets, that are without a doubt affected by the spread of new ideas, they are still less likely to absorb these ideas and have them affect their lifestyle, when compared to the “geographically mobile elites” (Thayer, 2009, p. 367) which have open access to Western education as well as native carriers of the new frameworks and ideologies. This idea somewhat corresponds to the study conducted by Dosekun (2015), according to which most of the Lagos women constructing their entrepreneurial identities through postfeminist did indeed have access to foreign (although, important to note – not always Western) education. Similarly, the Middle Eastern Female Academic respondents who are the subject of this thesis will have had access to Western education and met with Western women, so are likely to have been influenced by postfeminist discourses.

Nevertheless, Thayer (2009) notes that this scenario that access to western discourses is only available to elite groups, may not always be the most likely one when discussing the diffusion of feminism, neoliberalism and postfeminism. While Thayer (2009) calls this elite-wide globalization a “rapist script” (p. 367) noting that business and political elites are indeed more likely to gain access to the newest discourses through their closer interaction with the Western world, globalization slowly but surely penetrates the most remote communities, bringing a number of concepts, including neoliberalism, feminism and postfeminism to different groups.

Hedges (2011) and Mankekar (2008) argue that media outlets and technological developments along with information channels all together create a global network, that allows even the most geographically distant subjects to construct their identities based on the non-local knowledge and information they absorb. Therefore, individuals around the world obtain an opportunity to consume new ideas, including those of postfeminism, and many women prefer to view and perceive themselves as cosmopolitan (Hedges, 2011).

According to the results of the empirical study conducted by Dosekun (2015) the women of Lagos chose to view themselves as postfeminist subjects. The researcher describes a few examples to illustrate it. For instance, the interviewed women adopt a particular dressing style which is very spectacular, yet not very comfortable. According to the results of the semi-structured interviews, these clothing ensembles are claimed by the female respondents to be a result of their own free choice. Dosekun states that (2015, p. 13): “They insist that they dress for and to please themselves, certainly not men, and subject their appearance to intense self-scrutiny positing and experiencing beauty as power”. Interestingly, the interviewed women also highlighted that as an integral part of their personal development into career women they were investing in the

outfits and beauty procedures which according to Dosekun`s (2015) observations were rather expensive. Therefore, Lagos women perceive and position themselves as successful career women, free to make their own choices and entitled to the distinguished looks they can afford as professionals. Butler (2013) notes that a major boost for the transnationalisation of Western values is achieved through the popularisation of various iconic figures – such as Beyonce, Kim Kardashian, etc. In line with this argument, Dosekun (2015) mentions that all of the interviewed Lagos women kept themselves up-to-date with the latest trends and postfeminist female icons. Interestingly, these women characterised their clothing style as “girly” and also referred to themselves as “girl girls”. However, they found it important to draw a distinction between the traditional position of the female at home (i.e., cooking, cleaning, taking care of children), and their new status of stylish freedom (Dosekun, 2015).

Dosekun (2015) further draws attention to the fact that the interviewed Lagos women position themselves as empowered. However, it is important to note that the group of women interviewed by the researcher are no ordinary or average Nigerian women, in contrast these are relatively successful ambitious women who strive to achieve their business goals, and often have pursued higher education abroad (Dosekun, 2015). The researcher notes herself that these women, their position and perception of themselves is quite different from those of most of the local women. Therefore, although Dosekun (2015) makes a valid point regarding postfeminism being able to cross borders and influence women around the globe, its impact within the context of the UK versus Nigeria is hard to compare. The researcher also notes that she has discovered some significant qualifications within the narrative of independent consumerism-catered lifestyle of Lagos women. Dosekun (2015) suggests that they are largely driven not only by empowerment and the notion of free choice, but also by the local hyper-moralized attitude towards gender. Therefore, behaviours and perceptions

that may resemble manifestations of postfeminism, may not always be postfeminist in their nature with respondents making a differentiation between their earned and purchased glamour from work and that of women who create glamorous identities funded by male partners. As an example, Dosekun (2015) uses the story of Lagos women who spend considerable amounts of money on their luxurious looks, therefore resembling the empowered consumeristic attitude of their Western counterparts. However, young local women who live the same lifestyle but instead of using their own earned money, spend money given to them by their “sponsors” are condemned and criticised. According to Dosekun (2015) this negative attitude towards such young women by the interviewed Lagos women is caused by their pursuit of sexual respectability, as well as postfeminist notions of free choice or empowerment. Therefore, as argued by Saunders et al. (2011) complex social phenomena should be understood and studied only within their social context. Thus, when approaching postfeminism as a transnational culture which “travels”, attention must be directed at how it interacts with the local context.

In line with the argument, presented by Dosekun (2015), Bradfield (2013) suggests that the histories and trajectories of postfeminism around the world, for example, within the context of the South African Republic, do not identically match those of the UK, or the US. At the same time, according to Bradfield (2013), the South African media demonstrates a tendency towards a highly similar postfeminist sensibility in regard to women characters and lifestyle. Odhiambo (2008) demonstrates how local highly popular magazines such as *True Love* and *Drum*, consider femininity as an important property of the female body, and draw attention to such processes as the subjectification of women, using as an illustration beauty queens and beauty pageant contestants who agree to exchange their fame, body and beauty for money, by promoting various consumable products. According to Bradfield (2013, p. 29), “The

globalizing forces of neoliberalism and postfeminism predict a global orientation toward the homogenized objectives of the autonomous individual consumer sovereignty, and the pursuit of corporate profitability by any means”. However, various factors, such as local demands, traditions, moral requirements, have a power to significantly alter and transform how a cultural phenomenon such as postfeminism is taken up, in order to be able to speak to the needs and wants of a viewer from a given region or ethnicity (Bradfield, 2013; Dosekun, 2015). In this regard, both Bradfield (2013) and Kraidy (1991) discuss the notion of glocalisation – the engagement of local and global, which results in the production of hybrid (postfeminist) identities.

According to Giulianotti and Robertson (2006, p. 173) glocalization is “... the agency of quotidian social actors in critically engaging with and transforming global cultural phenomena in accordance with perceived local cultural needs as well as values and beliefs”. The proposed definition points towards the importance of interactions between the process of globalisations as well as various artefacts, such as demands of local audiences, and characteristics of the local industries (Bradfield, 2013). The above-mentioned TV series, *Society*, presents a typical postfeminist discourse of a female hero, Beth, who is a professional young woman, pursuing a consumerism-oriented lifestyle. The show emphasizes her independence, free choice and empowerment, typical premises of postfeminism, however gives it a local, national spin – one which frowns on her gay identity leaving her traumatised after losing her job and position. Bradfield (2013) points out that although postfeminism as a discursive formation can have a major impact in non-Western contexts, local preferences, traditions and routines seem to have an equal, or at times even greater effect. Beth can only achieve happiness through putting communal above individual interests, and by going back to traditional ways (e.g., church and religion, being in touch with community and family). Therefore, it can be concluded that although postfeminism appears to be a transnational notion,

local tendencies, traditions, people`s expectations and culture seem to have a major effect on how the Western message is transformed to adopt to the local demands.

Postfeminism as a transnational concept has also been discussed by Thornham and Pengpeng (2010) within the context of Chinese culture and media. The researchers point out that although local media outlets, such as magazines, seem to include some postfeminist ideas, they are not quite embracing the concept. Although Thornham and Pengpeng (2010) demonstrate the transnational nature of postfeminism, they also stress that local manifestations and applications of it are much more complex to study and understand due to local specifics. For instance, the idea of feminism in China differs from that in the Western world. Thornham and Pengpeng (2010) note that the entire category “woman” which originated in China only after historical revolutionary events. After 1919 the word “funu” became widely accepted and used, and it stood for describing a woman as a political and social category (Thornham & Pengpeng, 2010). Calas and Smircich (2006) have pointed out at the importance of linguistic concepts for various feminism movements and theories, and the example of China discussed by Thornham and Pengpeng (2010) illustrates it. Thornham and Pengpeng (2010) further argue that within the Chinese cultural context gender liberation or equality was more associated with gender neutrality, proclaimed by the established regime. It is therefore logical to assume that Western media which finds its way into China is perceived by Chinese women differently from how the Westerners see it. Partially this is because of the emphasis put on the concept of gender and gender roles, and various types of female identities emphasized by the Western media (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009).

The present study will also recruit the postfeminism sensibility, and particularly its transnationality, when exploring the MEFA`s identity work. The study therefore assumes that professional MEFA women employed by UK academic institutions have

access to Western media, and postfeminist ideas, not only while they are living and working in the UK but also within their original home environment through media and communication channels. At the same time, the present study also assumes that, similarly to the case study of China discussed by Thornham and Pengpeng (2010), Middle Eastern cultural values which respondents are exposed to through family and visits to Middle Eastern countries will have an important effect on how professional women see themselves and interpret their professional and personal experiences within the UK academy. As such this PhD research will consider the relationship between postfeminism and transnationality within the accounts of the academic respondents living and working within the UK.

3.6. Using postfeminism as a critical concept

The present thesis adopts postfeminism as a critical lens to better understand professional and personal experiences of MEFAs who may face discriminatory practices, but similarly to other females employed within academe (Morrison et al., 2005), deny their existence. A number of researchers have successfully recruited postfeminism as a concept to conducted gender research within the higher educational institutions (Webber, 2005; Morrison et al., 2005). Although empirical evidence suggests otherwise (Baggilhole, 1993), there exists rhetoric among the UK undergraduate students (Webber, 2005) as well as female scientists (Morrison et al., 2005), according to which, gender inequality are a matter of the past, and discriminatory practices in relation to women do not exist or are extremely rare, and therefore do not need to be addressed. Webber (2005) suggests to view such practices as a coping mechanism which helps professional females, whether they are undergraduate students or full-time Professors, exist and develop within the environment which still creates a number of serious threats and obstacles for female professionals. This coping

mechanism was also described as characteristic to the postfeminist milieu (Webber, 2005). In line with these considerations, postfeminist framework has been adopted as the most appropriate to document and understand complex narratives of MEFA`s which may contradict reality concerning their professional position and gender.

Researchers such as Lewis (2014) and Gill et al (2016) advise to use postfeminism to critically study women`s professional experiences. Lewis (2014) argues that the notion of femininity has been relatively neglected (compared to masculinity) in the Gender and Organization Studies field. Understanding femininity in the work-related context and the view of women as a diverse and heterogeneous group improves current understanding of challenges they encounter at work. Studies of women`s professional experiences are crucial as using postfeminism as a critical concept can help explain a number of interesting phenomena taking place in different professional environments. Kelan (2009) has explored the ICT sector and how women employees experience discrimination within it. Despite the fact that modern professional organisations are often perceived and presented as gender neutral, empirical evidence suggests that women are often experiencing various incidents of oppression and discrimination. Despite that, Kelan (2009) reports, women reported the incidents as rare and not something that has to be combated on the organisational level. Instead, interviewed women perceived incidents of discrimination as their individual problems they had to solve themselves. Kelan (2009) and Lewis (2014) argue that these experiences are characteristic of a postfeminist work climate where women choose to view themselves as equal to male colleagues and prefer to ignore existing sources and cases of gender inequality. Accepting and discussing the issues of gender inequality, they think, will put them into a disadvantaged position compared to men.

However, Lewis (2014) suggests, the power of postfeminism concept is not only in revealing incidents of organisational gender inequalities. It can also “direct critical

attention to the kinds of organisational subjects women (and men) are being asked to become, such as the new ideal manager characterized by a feminine ethos manifest in a range of managerial attributes associated with femininity” (Lewis, 2014: 1846). The concept can also largely contribute to understandings of femininity, particularly a reconfigured femininity, in the context of the modern professional environment.

Approaching postfeminism as a transnational concept as discussed above, can provide extra dimensions to the analysis of persistent gender inequalities and emerging feminine identities. In arguing for the use of postfeminism as a critical concept within the Gender and Organization Studies field, Lewis (2014) developed the notion of entrepreneurial femininity and depicted four different entrepreneurial femininities: individualized, relational, maternal and excessive. This diversity is useful as it allows for diversity among a group of women, exploring how postfeminist discourses can be taken up differently by different women, giving rise to the notion of femininities – for Lewis (2014) entrepreneurial femininities, within this study academic femininities.

Lewis (2014) views individualized entrepreneurship femininity as the dominating one, that is potentially open to challenge from the maternal femininity within a postfeminist gender regime. Lewis (2014: 1859) notes: “access to any particular entrepreneurial femininity is influenced by the structural position of individual women in terms of class, ethnicity, race, age, sexuality and other forms of social difference”.

The academic environment is currently a tabula rasa in regards to existing forms of professional femininity adopted by professional women. The academy differs significantly from the business environment and therefore provides an interesting research site to further explore the notion of postfeminist femininities within a work environment. Finally, in drawing on postfeminism to read the work experiences accounts of Middle Eastern Female Academics, we have emphasized above that we are not treating the notion of postfeminism as a theoretical perspective. As such we have

rejected the version of postfeminism which interprets this cultural phenomenon as feminism within poststructuralist theory. Nevertheless, while postfeminism is not being treated as part of poststructuralist feminism, it is important to note that in drawing on the version of postfeminism as a discursive formation to explore the work experiences accounts of Middle Eastern Female Academics, our use of it will be underpinned by poststructuralist principles. What this means is that the focus of the data analysis is on how respondents draw on postfeminist discourses and what identities (academic femininities) they construct out of the postfeminist discourses they bring into play in their everyday working lives.

3.7. Conclusions

The current chapter has provided an overview of some of the terminology and the version of postfeminism that is being used in the thesis. The chapter began with a review of the feminist perspectives prevalent within the Gender and Organization Studies field and how the dominant perspective approach relates to postfeminism understood as a discursive formation. As part of this an explanation has been provided as to why the theoretical interpretation of postfeminism, where it is treated as a perspective, is not being used in this thesis. Following this, a detailed discussion of the phenomenon of postfeminism is provided outlining the various interpretations of this phenomenon, the interpretation adopted in this research and the dimensions of postfeminism (individualism, choice and empowerment, ‘natural’ sexual difference and retreatism) which are relevant for our analysis of how MEFAs account for their academic work experiences. The concept has been further adjusted by adding a notion of transnationality, particularly the focus on ethnic background and its interplay with another key status – gender. The chapter concludes that postfeminism is a powerful transnational concept that can be used to analyse the modern day experiences of

professional women, their encounters with discrimination and their perception of these events.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Philosophical Considerations

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents an outline of the research methodology and philosophical orientation underpinning this study. As a starting point to this, it is helpful to remind the readers of this present study that the research is exploring the interaction between individual Middle Eastern Female Academics and the wider cultural (gender) environment – understood here as the discursive formation of postfeminism. As discussed in chapter 3, the analysis will focus on how respondents draw on the discourses of postfeminism when talking about their academic careers. This focus is adopted as a means of understanding the positive accounts presented by the respondents of their work experiences in British universities despite the extensively recorded gender disparities prevalent in these organizations. Taking this into account the philosophical orientation of this study is social constructionist as it is concerned with the interrelationship between the individual acts of female academics (e.g. responses to issues of gender in the academy) and the socio-culture environment connected to gender (postfeminism) through which their responses are recursively reproduced. In other words, how the female academics in this study talk about their work experiences and the gender issues attached to these is an expression of the relationship they have to the postfeminist gender culture they are located in. As Middle Eastern female academics situated in the discursive formation of postfeminism in the UK, their talk about their work experiences in the academy is influenced by this gender context (Fletcher, 2007).

The researcher has chosen to use a qualitative interview study to explore the social relationships with the cultural context surrounding the issue of ethnic minority women's experience within the UK academia. As well as discussing the social constructionist research philosophy underpinning the research, the chapter will outline

elements of the research design including the construction of the sample and design of the interview guide – details of how the participants were approached and interviewed are provided. The researcher reveals considerations concerning insider/ outsider experiences when approaching Middle Eastern Female Academics, as well as some of the encountered difficulties. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the research limitations and ethical issues encountered during the course of the study.

4.2. Research Philosophy

Research philosophy, according to Holden and Lynch (2004), is a very broad term that concerns the process of knowledge development and interpretation. The adopted research philosophy assumes a certain way the researcher views the world. These assumptions have a significant impact on choice of appropriate methodology and overall research strategy and data interpretation. Holden and Lynch (2004) argue that it is important for researchers to be able to defend their choice of philosophical paradigm and toolkit, after critically considering alternatives to their chosen approach (Johnson & Clark, 2006).

4.2.1. Social Constructionism

The term the ‘social construction of reality’ coined by Berger and Luckmann (1966) places an emphasis on ‘...the shared processes and negotiated understandings in which people constantly engage to create meaning...’ (Fletcher, 2007: 163). As an approach to research, it is at this point in time, well established within organization studies research particularly for those researchers utilizing qualitative methods. Fletcher (2006: 426) points out that sometimes the label ‘social constructionist’ is used indiscriminately by qualitative researchers to refer to work which is concerned with ‘the subjective experiences and perceptions of respondents...’ as well as research which is concerned with the way ‘...meanings are negotiated/shared through social processes

contributing to the social construction of reality'. Qualitative research which is underpinned by social constructionism should aim to be interpretively and relationally aware when analysing the accounts – here gender accounts – of the respondents. This means that for this present research, attention should be directed at the interrelationship between the individual accounts of academic work experiences provided by the respondents and the socio-cultural gender environment – understood here as postfeminism - that they are located in (Fletcher, 2007).

In considering this particular philosophical position Fletcher (2006, 2007) states that it is often the case that the terms constructivism and constructionism are used interchangeably and argues that a differentiation should be made between them. While social constructivism is concerned with how individuals mentally construct their world by drawing on cultural norms and practices and privileging individual, subject knowing; social constructionism directs attention at how individuals know the world and construct themselves in interaction via relationships, exchange of information, dialogue and collaboration. 'Like constructivism, social constructionist ideas emphasize individuals as social beings but attention is given to the relational (emphasis in original) rather than the cognitive (emphasis in original) aspects of social becoming (Fletcher,2007: 167). Fletcher (2007) further argues that in researching a particular set of social activities, analysis should go further than claiming that these activities are socially constructed or located, attention should also be directed at questions of how, why and in what ways are particular actions socially constructed. Social constructionism emphasises that all aspects of social life are relational and connected to particular expressions of relationships. As such social life is always emerging and becoming. While this position does not deny an 'external' reality, it does ask questions about the way that reality is constructed such as how did this construction emerge, what are the consequences of this construction, and who benefits from this construction?

Thorpe (2008) argues that the social constructionist approach is highly diverse and complex, and can take a number of flexible forms. Most importantly, the experiences of the 20 participants were not viewed outside of what is already known about the position of professional women within the UK academia (e.g., presence of structural and institutional barriers). It is also important to mention that the researcher has also accounted for their ethnic background (e.g., importance and presence of extended family). This consideration is in line with that voiced by Thorpe (2008), who argues that collected data should not be viewed separately from what we already know about the surrounding world, as some sort of objective entity.

It is also critical to mention that such issues as generalisation of the obtained data and overall high objectivity were not central to the present research. As pointed out by Thorpe, social constructionism as a paradigm, unlike that of positivism, does not aim for a high level of generalisability of the obtained data. Instead, the goal of the researcher was to gain deep insight into the professional and personal experiences of MEFAs in UK universities, and how they draw on the discourses of postfeminism to interpret and account for them.

4.2.2 Qualitative research

Creswell (2009: 99) defines qualitative research as: “An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting”. Qualitative research often requires the researcher to be open and interested in the participant’s perspective on the discussed issue. The present study has adopted the qualitative approach in line with the chosen paradigm, social constructionism. According to Soklaridis (2009: 719), “qualitative research is...concerned with how the

social world is interpreted, understood, experienced and produced”. Qualitative research highlights the importance of understanding people`s perception and construction of their lives in a meaningful way through social interactions, and interpreting these processes and experiences in the chosen context of the social world.

4.3 Sample Construction

4.3.1 Group Selection: Why Middle Eastern, Why Academics?

There were a number of reasons underlying the choice of selected population. When choosing to focus on MEFAs, the researcher was guided by academic and personal reasons. First of all, Middle Eastern professional women in the West in general and employees of academia in particular, remain understudied and poorly understood. The literature regarding gender discrimination in academia often focuses on ethnic minorities, however much of the research is done on African-American female academics (Tofler et al., 1987; Gilmore, 1996). Studying Middle Eastern women offers a number of unique opportunities for the study of gender issues in the academy. For instance, many of them have migrated from countries that are less tolerant of gender equality rights, particularly in the academic environment. Women finding their academic career path in the UK, possibly, expect equal opportunities and rights with their male counterparts. As it is known, in reality gender discrimination still exists in the West, and therefore this drastic difference and contrast between past and present, expectations and reality creates an interesting social context, that has not been investigated (Dosekun, 2015). Focusing on a specific ethnic minority, Middle Eastern women, adds originality and novelty to the research. The present study is also important from a political and social perspective. The current crisis in the Middle East has caused a major wave of immigration, and it is safe to assume that ethnic minorities in the UK will become more common. It is important to understand the experiences of migrant

employees in order to help resolve existing problems caused by gender or ethnic inequalities and develop understanding that will be supportive of further integration of ethnic minority representatives and their effective collaboration with the ethnic majority (Gilmore, 1996). The researcher of the present study is of Middle Eastern origin himself, and investigating ethnicities close to his own were expected to provide additional benefit as far as understanding cultural differences and obtaining easy access to participants. In what follows, the researcher will outline the sampling process and the limitations attached to the adopted sampling procedures considering their impact on the research.

4.3.2 Sampling Technique, Access and Data Collection

The present study has adopted the technique of purposive sampling in order to select the population for the study. Devers and Frankell (2000) discuss the approach as a type of non-probability sampling which relies on using the critical case sampling. This type of sampling is usually used when the target population, just like in the case of the present research, is very small (Devers & Frankell, 2000). As pointed out by Mason (2010), within the context of qualitative studies resorting to a small sample size is quite common. According to Mason (2010) adopting a small purposive sample within qualitative research has useful research benefits because occurrence of a specific data piece or pattern, or theme is all that is necessary for researchers to make sense of collected data, while frequencies of a specific response are rarely valuable. This can be explained by the fact that qualitative research in general is not concerned with making statements that can be extrapolated on to a larger sample, unlike positivist-based quantitative studies. On the contrary, qualitative research aims to understand reasons and underlying forces behind complex phenomena (Mason, 2010). Finally, as discussed by Mason (2010) and Easterby-Smith et al. (2012), qualitative research, particularly studies which are like the current one based on in-depth interviews, is very labour

intensive, and therefore dedicating time to collection and analysis of large sample-based data is often simply not feasible or practical (Mason, 2010). Based on these considerations and the overall rarity of the studied population (MEFAs employed within the UK universities), the researcher has adopted a purposive sampling approach and in what follows the researcher will outline how this approach was implemented.

The first task was to identify the population of MEFAs. When the researcher tried to identify an appropriate population of MEFAs employed by UK universities from which to draw a sample of respondents, 107 individuals were identified suggesting a relatively low abundance of Middle Eastern academic women in the UK. It is important to point out that the researcher used a subjective approach when trying to identify the potential study participants i.e. due to lack of alternatives, he searched for respondents by their first and last names. This approach is prone to flaws, as the MEFAs that might have changed their names due to marriage or other circumstances were missed. The researcher conducted an exhaustive search of the websites of all Universities in the UK with the aim of identifying female academics with Middle Eastern names. The researcher also contacted administrators of the universities regarding the availability of demographic data regarding ethnicity. The demographic data was willingly shared with the researcher however it lacked information regarding ethnicity of the staff. When filling in forms, the employees are asked to identify their ethnicity, however the request is optional and most of the employees choose not to reveal this information. Using the search strategy of reviewing websites for the most part proved successful and in total 107 potential research participants were identified. Once the female academics were identified as Middle Eastern, they were contacted through publicly displayed email addresses and requested to participate in the study using the email template (see Appendix 1). The researcher obtained four types of responses after sending emails to the 107 potential respondents as follows:

- (1) “I am not Middle Eastern” (typically from an individual of a different ethnic origin but who has a Middle Eastern name) – 6 responses;
- (2) “sorry, I am busy. Good luck with your research” - 27 responses;
- (3) “Yes, let’s meet” - 20 interviews (see Table 4);
- (4) No Response – 54 individuals

Overall the sample construction approach outlined above based on first and last name identification provided 20 respondents who came from the following countries: Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, and Turkey. The majority of this group contained respondents who moved to the UK at an early age with a small number being more recent immigrants. The sample therefore contained female academics who were either born in the UK, moved to the UK as children with their parents or moved to the UK at college age and made a decision to stay. Most of the interviewed women were UK citizens, while a minority were not. Excluding the six respondents who said they are not Middle Eastern, this sampling procedure yielded a response rate of 20%.

As pointed out by Creswell (2009) sample population and sampling techniques have an important effect on data validity and reliability, therefore it is necessary to discuss the consequences of the chosen sampling approach and the obtained sample size for the outcomes of the present thesis. Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) discuss two types of access related issues the researcher has to consider when planning an empirical study. These types refer to formal access (obtaining permit from management to collect primary data) and informal access (an opportunity to get in touch with prospective study participants) (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). In line with arguments by Easterby-Smith et al. (2002), the researcher has encountered significant difficulties when trying to gain informal access to MEFAs employed within the UK academy as the result of which

only 20 out of 101 contacted female academics who saw themselves as Middle Eastern were recruited to participate in the in-depth interviews. The following may be the reasons for the low response rate. As pointed out by Creswell (2009) and Easterby-Smith et al. (2002), when a researcher tries to access prospective participants via cold calling (as it has been conducted within the present study), the latter makes two key decisions: (1) is the issue worth his/ her attention; (2) if the study takes place during work hours would participation in it be viewed positively by the prospective respondent's management. The following factors often have a strong influence on the individual's decision to participate or not participate in the study:

- How much time is required to participate in the study?;
- Is the topic of the research acceptable or not (e.g. sensitive topics)?;
- Does an individual/ institution initiating the contact have a good reputation? (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

When establishing an initial contact the researcher has provided the prospective participants with the information concerning (a) the purpose of study; (b) time/ resources required to spend if the participant agrees to take part in the study; (c) possible contribution to the existing body of knowledge. For instance, the researcher has mentioned that participation in an in-depth interview will require 30 – 60 minutes from the prospective participant. The researcher believes that the rather low response rate (20%) can be explained by the sensitivity of the chosen topic and the outsider effect – an interviewer being a male of Middle Eastern origin. Although cold calling, as argued by Creswell (2009), is often a rather ineffective approach to recruit participants of in-depth studies, no other approach was available to the researcher at the moment when the collection of data took place. For example, networking and contacting professional associations, were not available options as the researcher, his supervisors and colleagues had no established connections with MEFAs and no professional associations

representing this group of academics existed in the UK at the moment when the study took place. Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) discuss the issue of reciprocity as an important factor which fuels primary data driven research. According to this principle, prospective study participants are more inclined to dedicate their time to contribute to the study if they expect something in return (e.g. political support, promotion, new business ties, etc.) (Creswell, 2009; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). The researcher as a PhD student did not have anything to offer to prospective participants, and the interviews were largely of more benefit to him than to the respondents themselves. The discussed factors may have created significant obstacles that resulted in a rather low MEFA participation rate.

Following implementation of the adopted sampling procedure, 20% of the approached academics who self-identified as Middle Eastern agreed to participate in the study and be interviewed. The response rate can therefore be characterised as being on the low side. Given that the total number of Middle Eastern Female academics working in the UK universities is overall quite low, and the number of participants who agreed to be interviewed is also low, consideration has to be given to the consequences of the small sample size for the research as the low number of respondents could be seen as a limitation on research. The researcher did wonder whether his gender and ethnicity i.e. a Middle Eastern man acted as a deterrent to participation in the research. Even among those who did agree to participate there was at times a reluctance to address certain issues. The respondents might have viewed the interviewer with a certain degree of hostility caused by the fact that he originates from the same region, where the matter of female rights is a very sensitive topic. These considerations might explain the low response rate. Groves and Peitcheva (2008) point out that most of the empirical research that is carried out involving responses from a sample population relies on the assumption that 100% of the contacted individuals have granted agreement to participate in the study. Although this is especially true for quantitative survey- based

studies, it is also relevant to qualitative research. Seeking high response rate is associated with high costs (time, money, etc.) and is sometimes not feasible due to other considerations e.g. a small population of potential respondents as is the case in this study. Therefore a researcher may conduct a study based on a limited sample size connected to a high non-response rate (de Leeuw & de Heer, 2002). Groves and Peitcheva (2008) argue that a high non-response rate may lead to a high level of bias within the obtained results. For instance, in the context of the present study such bias could potentially result in unequal representations of some groups of MEFAs. Hypothetically, such groups could be MEFAs having successful careers, MEFAs not encountering institutional barriers on their career path, MEFAs occupying high-rank positions versus MEFAs struggling with their careers, MEFAs encountering incidents of institutional racism or gender discriminatory practices, MEFAs occupying relatively low-rank positions within the UK academe. While it can be assumed that the first three groups would participate more willingly, the remaining three may have been more reluctant to agree to be interviewed on such a sensitive topic. As a result of such potential bias, the researcher may have mostly obtained answers from MEFAs who are relatively more successful in their current occupation, or MEFAs who encounter relatively low number of gender discriminatory practices, or do not encounter them at all within the context of the UK academe. This would also explain why, when the researcher has expected to encounter narratives of MEFAs depicting well-known gender issues existing within the UK academe, mostly non such narratives were identified, and instead the researcher has encountered MEFAs depicting their stories of success, independence, girl power and professional and personal success. On the other hand the researcher argues that such identified contradiction is a result of presence of postfeminist discourse which modern professional women actively draw on when discussing their professional and personal experiences (Lewis, 2014). Groves and

Peitcheva (2008, p. 185) point out: “Furthermore, when (...) survey items influence the decision to participate, our theory predicts larger nonresponse rate biases on those items”. The researcher argues that the topic of the interview which was communicated to the identified potential interview participants may have been the factor which has contributed to a high non-response rate encountered within the scope of the present work.

Table 4. The demographic data concerning the 20 interviewed MEFAs

	Alias	Origin	Position	Area of Study	Marital Status	Children
1	Aida	Iran	Professor	Social Science	Divorced	Yes
2	Basma	Lebanon	Lecturer	Social Science	Single	No
3	Durra	Egypt	lecturer	Social Science	Single	No
4	Elham	Egypt	lecturer	Social Science	Married	No
5	Fadia	Lebanon	Senior Lecturer	Social Science	Single	No
6	Ghada	Iran	Lecturer	Science	Married	No
7	Hadeel	Egypt	Lecturer	Social Science	Single	No
8	Ibtisam	Morocco	Senior Lecturer	Humanities	Married	Yes
9	Jamila	Iran	Senior Lecturer	Art	Married	Yes
10	Latifa	Iran	Senior Lecturer	Social Science	Divorced	No
11	Magda	Iraq	Professor	Humanities	Married	Yes
12	Najat	Egypt	Lecturer	Art	Divorced	No
13	Qamar	Algeria	Professor	Humanities	Married	Yes
14	Razan	Lebanon	Lecturer	Social Science	Married	Yes
15	Suraya	Iran	Lecturer	Science	Single	No
16	Tara	Turkey	Senior Lecturer	Social Science	w/Partner	No
17	Urooj	Egypt	Lecturer	Social Science	Married	No
18	Widad	Sudan	Lecturer	Art	Married	Yes
19	Yumna	Lebanon	Senior Lecturer	Science	Married	Yes
20	Zainab	Iraq	Lecturer	Humanities	Married	Yes

In order to exclude a possibility that current research has been negatively impacted by low response ratio, analysis of demographic data of MEFAs who agreed and refused to participate in the study has been conducted. First of all, all of the individuals who were contacted during the course of the research were divided into three

groups: respondents who agreed to participate (20 individuals), respondents who refused to participate (27 individuals) and non-respondents (54 individuals who have not replied to the initial email) (Table 5). The discussed three groups showed considerable similarity as far as their age (all mostly between 30 and 60 years of age), religious beliefs (mostly Muslims), and country of origin (mostly from Egypt, Iran and Iraq) (Table 5). There were also significant similarities as far as educational level of respondents and non-respondents (all – Postgraduate Academics holding PhDs). Interview participants were mostly representatives with Social Sciences Arts and Humanitarians backgrounds (85%), while only 15% of them had a background in Science. Individuals who refused to participate were also mostly from Social Sciences Arts and Humanitarians backgrounds (67%). Similar pattern was observed among non-respondents (69 versus 31%) (Table 5). Finally, concerning location of the universities, where MEFAs were employed, 60% of all of the interviewees were London-based. Individuals who refused to participate or did not respond to the email were also predominantly employed by one of the London-based universities: 67% and 65% respectively (Table 5).

Table 5: Comparison of study participants and individuals who did not respond or refused to participate in the study

Category	Study Participants		Non-Participants			
			Refused to Participate		Non-Respondents	
Number	20		27		54	
Age	Mostly 30-60 years old		Mostly 30-60 years old		Mostly 30-60 years old	
Religion	Mostly Muslims (Not definite)		Mostly Muslims (Not definite)		Mostly Muslims (Not definite)	
Country of Origin	Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon	Other ME Countries	Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon	Other ME Countries	Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon	Other ME Countries
	16 (80%)	4 (20%)	19 (70%)	8 (30%)	39 (72%)	15 (28%)
Education Level	Postgraduate Academics (PhDs)		Postgraduate Academics (PhDs)		Postgraduate Academics (PhDs)	
Field of Study	S.S., Arts, & Humanities	Science	S.S., Arts, & Humanities	Science	S.S., Arts, & Humanities	Science
	17 (85%)	3 (15%)	18 (67%)	9 (33%)	37 (69%)	17 (31%)
Location	London-Based	Outside London	London-Based	Outside London	London-Based	Outside London
	12 (60%)	8 (40%)	18 (67%)	9 (33%)	35 (65%)	19 (35%)

The conducted analysis of the sampling procedure demonstrates that the three sub-populations of MEFAs (study participants and those who did not respond or refused to participate) are highly similar in regard to their demographic characteristics. The researcher therefore makes an assumption that the findings from the sample of 20 respondents does signal significant findings in relation to how MEFAs speak about their work experiences and is not simply due to small sample size. Given the similarities between the respondents and non-respondents it is likely that a larger sample while providing further detail on how MEFAs speak about working in the academy, would not necessarily give rise to radically different insights concerning the accounts of the professional and personal experiences of MEFAs within the UK educational context.

Another important issue relevant to the scope of the present study concerns reaching saturation point when conducting qualitative research (Mason, 2010). Although the researcher has interviewed a total of 20 MEFAs employed within different UK universities and originating from different Middle Eastern countries, after having interviewed 10 to 12 academic females, the researcher has started encountering similar narratives and themes. Moreover, Mason (2010) and Nelson (2016) argue that among various criteria determining the point of saturation (a moment within a given study when recruiting new participants does not render new insights on the research topic), heterogeneity of the total population and research goals of the study are key drivers determining how quickly or slowly the point of saturation will be achieved. Within the scope of the present study the researcher has interviewed a relatively homogenous group of MEFAs, and has established only three research questions, all concerned with experiences of MEFAs within the UK academic context. Therefore, in line with these criteria and researcher`s observations, the saturation point has been achieved around the time when the Respondent # 12 has been interviewed. In line with this argument, it can

be suggested that the sample size utilized within the present study is sufficient and appropriate to provide a valuable insight into the topic of research.

4.4 Interviews, Interviewing and Interviewer Effect

4.4.1 Interviews and shift in interviewing strategy

As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, this research began with the assumption that interviews with MEFA respondents would provide various “tales of discrimination” regarding their experiences of working in the British Academy, derived from the author’s reading of the existing literature. Given this, the first three to four interviews (in semi-structured format) were approached in the more conventional qualitative way of treating the interviews as a site of “excavation” whereby through good interview technique the researcher would “unearth” information and evidence of ongoing discrimination within the British university sector. These first interviews were understood by the researcher as a verbal exchange of information with the interviewer aiming to elicit information from the MEFA respondents by asking predetermined questions. While the questions were developed prior to the interview (see Appendix 2), the intention was to build rapport with the respondents such that they would have the opportunity to elaborate and explore issues that they perceived as most important in regard to their work experiences (Cooper, 2010). Understanding the interviews in these terms meant that a key challenge for the researcher would be to ensure that the academic respondents adhered to the main topic of the research but at the same time felt free to interrupt the course of discussion with their personal experiences and impressions (Brinkmann, 2014).

In understanding the interviews in these terms, the researcher adopted the following approach when interviewing the first four academic respondents: at first the participants were asked the most simple questions (for example, those regarding

demographic data), that were easy to answer. This ensured that the interviewer had established a verbal and emotional contact with the respondents. Once the respondents have provided answers to the “easy” questions, a set of more complicated ones was offered. These included topics such as why they pursued graduate degrees and questions related to constraints based on gender, ethnicity, children and family life. The researcher has utilized the approach adopted by Soklaridis (2009) that advised to ask questions that concern sensitive or personal topics at the end of the discussion. Some respondents took time to open up or build a connection with the researcher, and therefore were more likely to provide comprehensive answers to sensitive questions at the end of the interview. From the researcher’s perspective, sensitive topics included the role of their ethnicity and gender in their career opportunities within UK universities, the ability to integrate into the workplace and their perception as women in the workplace. As expected from the knowledge obtained from reviewing the existing literature many women found it difficult to answer the question regarding combining family and work responsibilities. This appeared to be one of the sensitive topics due to a commonly experienced feeling of guilt that is caused by the challenges they experienced when trying to combine the multiple obligations that academic women experience on a daily basis. Some of the respondents had their own vision of the problems of gender inequality within the workplace, and instead of answering the prepared interview questions they often started explaining their understanding of the problem in general as well as its implications for them. When situations like this occurred, the researcher attempted to gently guide the participant towards personal experience and specific answers to the interview questions.

However, the data gleaned from these first four interviews signalled that these respondents “read” their situation in a quite a different way from the research literature. Rather than hearing “tales of discrimination”, these respondents spoke vocally about the

range of choices open to them and strongly emphasised how their work experiences were influenced by their own decision-making and life choices. This contradiction with the existing literature on gender and the academy surprised (and initially worried) the researcher. This change from what was expected led him to not only reconsider the theoretical framing of the thesis but also led him to rethink how he should engage with the respondents when interviewing them. As a Middle Eastern man coming from a traditional, conservative background, the researcher originally assumed that within a discriminatory context (according to the literature) he would orientate to the respondents in a traditionally protective manner, sympathising with the respondents' difficulties. However, this was not the case. It was clear from these first four interviews that the female respondents did not see themselves as victims, did not need his sympathy and in contrast saw themselves as strong, choosing individuals in charge of their own destiny. The MEFA's responses and stance in the interviews led the researcher to direct attention at his own identity work (Cassells, 2005) while interviewing.

4.4.2 Interviewer Identity Work and Effect

The interviews were conducted between February and November 2015. The majority of the interviews with MEFAs were conducted in their academic offices located at their universities (17 participants) with three interviews being conducted in public areas such as libraries (1 participant) and study rooms (2 participants). Twelve of the interviews were conducted in London-based universities and the remaining eight took place outside London. The interviews lasted approximately one hour, and were organized around a number of questions and themes related to career choice. The shortest interview lasted nearly 40 minutes while the longest one lasted over an hour

and a half. Eighteen interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and for two interviews extensive notes were taken.

During the course of all of the interviews and particularly following the first four interviews, the researcher continuously reflected on his identity as interviewer of these academic respondents. These reflections were at first informed by the notion of insider/outsider status of which there is an ongoing debate within the qualitative research literature regarding whether being an insider or outsider in relation to the chosen population is beneficial for the researcher and study in general (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Acker, 2000). One side of the argument is that the insider researcher can access information more easily as their chosen population is more accepting and open due to their similar status. At the same time, the insider researcher is well aware of aspects of the topic (e.g. sensitivity of gender issues) which can be highly beneficial as it can help uncover hidden elements of the problem that are not obvious to outsider scholars. In this ongoing debate each side seems to possess an equal number of arguments. For instance, as noted by Dwyer and Buckle (2009), the insider status allows researchers to gain information quickly and be accepted by the population. Once the researcher is accepted by the sample, his/ her chances to obtain comprehensive data and in-depth information become significantly higher.

The experience of the author of this thesis is somewhat similar to that discussed by Dwyer and Buckle (2009), whereby the researcher is part of the studied culture (Middle Eastern) but he is not a part of the group in study (Middle Eastern Women). Dwyer and Buckle (2009: 55) discuss three membership roles that qualitative researchers may engage into: "... (a) peripheral member researchers, who do not participate in the core activities of sample studied (b) active member researchers, who become involved with the central activities of the sample without fully committing themselves to the members` values and goals; and (c) complete member researchers,

who are already members of the group or who become fully affiliated during the course of the research". The present research resembles the first method of researcher engagement: (a) peripheral member researchers, in that the author of this present study is not a woman but, being Middle Eastern himself, does have in-depth knowledge of Middle Eastern culture.

As well as thinking about insider/outsider status, Mangione et al. (1992) argue that wording, probing and other types of behaviour during the interview may significantly affect the content of respondents' responses during the interview. Within the context of the present research, the interviewer has faced a number of challenges associated with engaging the respondents during the course of the interview and avoiding any behavioural signs that might have altered the provided information. For example, as pointed out by Fowler and Magnione (1990), an interviewer has to demonstrate interest in the respondent's answers and his/her emotions in order to keep the respondent engaged from the beginning till the end of the conversation. At the same time, any type of behaviour or emotion (nodding, smiling, showing surprise) may be interpreted by the interviewee as a direct reaction to his/ her position regarding the question in focus (Dykema et al., 1997). However, the impact of the interviewer goes much further than this. As a Middle Eastern man, the researcher assumed that his shared ethnic origin with the respondents including similar cultural characteristics, social background and norms of behaviour and etiquette would facilitate the interview discussion. However, the researcher found that these shared characteristics did not always benefit the research. The fact that he is male proved in some interviews to be a significant difference with the respondents requiring him to do significant amounts of interviewer identity work (Cassells, 2005) in relation to the power relations in the context of the interview and the wider power difference between Middle Eastern men and Middle Eastern women.

With regard to power relations in the interview there was a clear power difference between the respondent and the interviewer in that the MEFAs were in a more senior academic position to the researcher who was completing the research as a PhD student. As academics, these respondents were well-versed in academic practices around PhD research, PhD supervision and PhD data collection and were able to make judgements about whether the researcher was a “good” or “bad” interviewer. The researcher was very conscious of this fact and sought to perform the role of “competent researcher” on an ongoing basis. He knew that he had to account for himself in research terms to these academic respondents and that they were in a position to “turn-the-tables” on him if his performance of “competent researcher” did not always work (Cassells, 2005; Learmonth, 2006). On the other hand the power relations between the respondents and researcher varied when their gender was taken into account. As a Middle Eastern man it is likely that the gender of the researcher impacted on the power relations of the interviews. Oakley (2016) points out that interviewing female respondents has gradually become an important part of feminist and organisational studies, as it helps to better understand their experiences and perception. Interviewing women has also allowed researchers to challenge the existing dominance of the male perspective and masculine norms within scholarly literature (Oakley, 2016). Oakley points out that she personally had to challenge a number of well-established dogmas, such as a necessity to establish a “rapport” with the interviewee (Oakley, 2016, p. 197). She argues that her interviewees were always eager and enthusiastic when sharing their opinions and having a conversation with her. In contrast, during the course of the present study, the researcher has experienced a number of situations when MEFAs were not eager to discuss their knowledge and establishing rapport or connection was difficult. When interviewing the MEFAs a number of situations occurred in which the interviewees would ask the researcher a question or seek his feedback concerning one of

the topics of the conversations that took place. Some of the examples of such questions are: “Do you have children?”, “Where are you originally from?” One of the interviewees also wanted to know what was the researcher’s personal experience when combining professional responsibilities with his family commitments. According to the existing scholarly literature (Saunders et al., 2009; Easterby-Smith et al., 2014), the researcher should have avoided answering such questions, particularly the last ones. This is due to the fact that answering the question related to the topic of conversation could result in sharing a personal opinion, which in turn may create an interviewer effect and influence the answers of the respondent. However, Oakley (2016) and Alvesson (2003) point out that qualitative interviewing and interviewing females as a part of feminist research does not obey the standard rules and procedures. In line with their argument, the researcher had decided to consistently provide honest but short answers to the interviewees’ questions, not fearing that this would compromise results of the conversations or bias data. The decision was made due to the fact, that answering the questions helped the researcher develop a more close relationship with the interviewees.

Nevertheless, the researcher was conscious that at times his gender and the fact that he is a Middle Eastern man did become an issue when interviewing. For example, during one of the interviews the researcher was asked by the interviewee if he was willing to allow his own daughters to make individualised choices regarding what they study, who they marry, where they live and if he would “allow them” to move out of the family home as young adults. The researcher answered a genuine “yes” to all of these question though he admitted that he wouldn’t be completely happy about the leaving home issue as a single young adult. It was these type of questions which alerted the researcher to the power relations surrounding the interview and the need for him to perform an identity which aligned with and demonstrated understanding of their life

experiences and the context within which they made their choices. It also made him aware that the interviewees were addressing him as much as he was addressing them and that both of them were equally constructing identities within the context of the interview. As Learmonth (2006: 88) suggests: ‘...it is possible to argue that for any given section of an interview (regardless of who might be doing the “physical” speaking at the time), the “source” of the text becomes undecidable – both participants are intimately implicated in its production. Conventional boundaries that are taken for granted – even those apparently fundamental ones..... “one person, the interviewer” and “another person or persons being interviewed are deconstructed – they may not be as firm as they might first appear”

4.4.3 Performative Effect

Another potential consideration of the present study which has to be critically accessed concerns the performative effect of the interview. Cassell (2015) points out that the performative effect on conducting an interview is particularly important when conducting identity work process. As discussed within the scope of the previous chapters, identity work is an analytical process aiming to develop a sense of one’s identity (Alvesson, 2008). Due to the fact that identity should not be perceived as a static concept, but instead a dynamic and ongoing process (see Chapter 2), the question arises regarding how “interviews entail identity work by both the interviewer and the interviewee” (Cassell, 2015, p. 111). For instance, within the context of the present study, this has a following implication. When asked whether they have ever encountered any gender or ethnicity related issues within the UK academe, or know of any, many of the interviewed MEFAs answered that they have never encountered such incidents, or do not know of such happening to other female academics. Cassell (2015) argues that there are moments when during an empirical research, the interviewer has a

feeling or knows that when responding to the questions, the interviewees are not telling the 'truth'. Similarly to the argument by Cassell (2015), within the incidents discussed above the researcher knew that the interviewees were not telling the 'truth'. However, Cassell (2015) develops her argument further, "... just because someone may not be telling the truth, this does not mean that what they say is not interesting for our research" (p. 111). Rapley (2001, as cited in Cassell, 2015) argues, that instead of trying to understand whether an interviewee is telling truth at any given moment of the interview, it would be necessary to understand how both interviewee and interviewer interact to conduct identity work process.

The topic of interview performative effect is closely intertwined with the issue of reflexivity (Cassell, 2015). Haynes (2012, p. 72) defines reflexivity as "... an awareness of the researcher's role in the practice of research and the way this is influenced by the object of the research, enabling the researcher to acknowledge the way in which he or she affects both the research process and outcomes". In line with the definition provided by Haynes (2012), the researcher argues that it is important to acknowledge the possible mutual effect the researcher and the interviewed MEFAs have had on each other. Cassell (2015) makes a point that within the scope of organisational studies a number of factors have been discussed from a reflexivity position standpoint. For example, it has been acknowledged that gender has a strong impact on identity work and results of the interview. In addition to that, Cassell (2015) notes that it is well-known that when the researcher interviews another researcher, this also has a strong impact on how both an interviewee and an interviewer make sense of the purpose, scope of the interview and its questions. In order to conduct the research from the standpoint of reflexive practice, the researcher has maintained a research diary. Within this diary a number of issues related to reflexivity were recorded. For instance, the researcher argues, as discussed above, that his gender had a strong impact on the outcomes of the

interview. In addition to that, as pointed out by Cassell (2015), the fact that the MEFAs were interviewed by the researcher has probably also affected the obtained narratives.

Feminist research, according to Dallimore (2000), has been heavily criticised for being weak regarding its validity. Dallimore (2000: 1) notes: “Feminist researchers can effectively respond to these criticisms by reconceptualising issues of validity as they relate to feminist goals and research methodologies. Various issues of validity can be addressed through reconceptualization in terms of “trustworthiness” and by demonstrating the “applicability” of research findings”. By performing this reconceptualization, feminist researchers should demonstrate the rigor of their studies and utilize an action oriented approach that will allow to achieve ultimate goal: social change for women and emancipation (Dallimore, 2000).

4.4.4. Sensitivity of a chosen topic

The key limitation identified within the present study concerned the reluctance of some of the respondents to openly engage into the dialogue concerning a number of sensitive topics. Despite some of the interview approaches discussed above (e.g., starting a conversation with relatively general topics such as career plans or goals), some of the interviewed MEFAs viewed the topics related to gender and ethnicity within the context of their specific workplace inappropriate to openly discuss. Some of the interviewees have openly voiced their concern that they can be easily identified by their colleagues through the information provided regarding their research interests and ethnic origin. This concern has probably at least partially caused the low response rate when the potential participants were initially contacted via email.

Lee (1993) argues that exploring sensitive topics is highly beneficial for society as a whole, as it allows to research the darkest corners of social issues and policies. At the same time addressing sensitive topics within the research context imposes a number

of limitations on the study itself: difficulties associated with obtaining data, participants being unwilling to openly share their opinion, etc. (Lee, 1993). Interestingly, Lee (1993, p. 2): “Where research is threatening, the relationship between the researcher and the researched is likely to become hedged about with mistrust, concealment and dissimulation”.

Lee (1993) further elaborates that research is perceived as threatening by the interviewee if it deals with areas of personal life, which can be stressful or private. The present study collected data through semi-structured interviews, which included questions related both to highly private and stressful aspects of the participants` private and professional lives. For instance, some of the participants have considered questions related to their identity or future family plans too sensitive and therefore their initial reaction can be characterised as defensive. In most of the cases, the researcher could overcome such reactions by changing the subject or double checking whether an interviewee was comfortable to answer the specific question. Most of the interviewees at least at one point of discussion became worried and openly voiced the concern that they can be easily identified based on shared stories, due to the overall uniqueness of their professional life (i.e., place of origin, topic of research, scientific interests, family status). Many were seemingly reluctant to give any examples of incidents of gender or race-related discrimination at their workplace, possibly because they were afraid of being easily identified.

Therefore, it was highly challenging for the researcher to establish, when the interviewees declined to acknowledge existence of gender and ethnic discriminatory practices due to their personal perception (i.e., focus on inclusion, reluctance to be perceived as a victim in a white male dominated academia), fear of being identified by

the current or potential employer, or simply due to the fact that they have not experienced such during their professional life in the UK.

4.4.5. Middle Eastern Male Interviewing Females

A number of researchers have demonstrated importance of considering the researcher's gender during the process of conducting in-depth interviews (Oakley, 1981; Miller & Glassner, 1997; Williams & Heikes, 1993). Williams and Heikes (1993) point out that despite lack of systematic empirical research into how gender roles and perceptions affect in-depth interviews, there is some evidence suggesting that major differences in outcomes may arise when males interview females, or vice versa. For instance, according to Miller and Glassner (1997), male respondents are often more comfortable with female interviewers asking them questions concerning personal and sensitive topics. Rubin (1976, as cited in Williams and Heikes, 1993) expresses an opinion, that the observed phenomenon can be explained by the fact that certain cultures, such as the American one for example, actively promote the notion that males are not expected to openly express their feelings and communicate on personal topics. More specifically, different cultures may condemn conducting intimate discussion between men, but not – between men and women (Williams & Heikes, 1993). The researchers conclude that males interviewing females may encounter certain difficulties when trying to re-construct personal experiences of the latter (Williams & Heikes, 1993).

While interviewing the Middle Eastern academic women regarding their professional and personal experiences in the UK, the researcher of the present thesis has encountered a certain degree of resistance and unwillingness to cooperate and provide needed information. While in the case of most interviews, this obstacle has been successfully overcome by using some of the techniques and approaches discussed by

Oakley (1981) and other researchers, a few of the interviewees, although formally answering the questions, were clearly reluctant to share their true (or more personal) opinions and experiences.

Oakley (1981) argues that “proper” interviewing has been associated with masculine norm and male, more objective and rational approach. Traditionally, women are viewed as inferior, prone to emotions and subjective inconsistent judgements (Oakley, 1981). Miller and Glassner (1997) suggest that social sciences view male psychology and approach as dominant, and Female as subordinate. This situation can potentially create a conflict between a male researcher and Female interviewee. In the case of the present research, the potential friction was further aggravated by the fact that the interviewer belonged to the Middle Eastern culture himself, which according to Abu-Lughod’s (2002) argument is often perceived as oppressive for women.

In order to avoid issues discussed by Oakley (1981) and Abu-Lughod (2002) the researcher tried to establish an atmosphere of trust and anonymity, as well as non-hierarchical type of relationship to ensure their engagement. In order to achieve the abovementioned goal the researcher tried not to openly direct the conversation, and instead follow the natural flow of it while sometimes asking questions to channel the discussion towards the desired topics. Before asking personal or family-related questions, the researcher made sure to obtain the interviewees’ verbal agreement, to ensure that they were comfortable with the question and did not mind it. Interestingly, while some of the interviewed academic women were visibly tense at the notion of such questions, others were very open in sharing their thoughts and experiences.

4.5. Data, Methodological Approach, and Ethical Considerations

4.5.1. Nature of the data

It is important to point out that the present research is based on perceptions of the study participants, and not always on the actual experiences. Postfeminist discursive approach has been used throughout the study to collect and analyse perceptions of personal experiences and the ways in which the interviewed MEFAs presented themselves in relation to their organisational context. Therefore, the obtained data does not directly reflect 'reality', but instead – respondents' perceptions. This perception-based approach has manifested itself throughout the interview, when MEFAs consistently refused to refer to themselves as being discriminated against or even consider or discuss incidents of ethnicity- or gender-based discrimination. Similar observations have been made by Kelan (2009) and Lewis (2014), who reported modern females discussing their advantageous position, providing narratives of empowerment and success, and restraining from discussions of discriminatory practices, gender inequality and male dominance. For instance, Kelan (2009) points out that within modern professional world, females often present their workplace as gender neutral, although studies demonstrate that various gender inequality practices persist throughout industries, countries and time. Due to this perception-based data, it is important to keep in mind that the provided narratives do not reflect actual gender-related practices and work environment but instead reflect complex constructs used by MEFAs to communicate their position, while focusing on discourses of inclusion, empowerment and individualism.

4.5.2. Discursive approach

The present study utilized a discursive approach to gain understanding of the professional and personal experiences of MEFAs within the context of the UK

academy. Wetherell et al. (2001) argue that the notion of discursive analysis is becoming increasingly more complex, turning into an umbrella term for a number of research approaches. In line with the argument by Wetherell et al. (2001), the present study tried to capture the relationship between the discourses of the interviewed MEFAs and their backgrounds, recognising, that participants have to be viewed as producers and products of their stories at the same time. The relationships captured within the present thesis were often paradoxical when, for instance, some of the interviewed female researchers have described the cases of clear gender discrimination directed at them or their colleagues, however refused to acknowledge and use the term of gender discrimination within the context of their universities. Therefore, it was crucial for the researcher to be able to draw on their background and approach, and understand how they drew on postfeminism within their discourses.

Kiesling (2001) have adopted the discursive approach when investigating such concepts as masculinity. Wetherell et al. (2001) point out that the researchers have been using the discursive analysis as a strategy to study men and masculinity, however used the term in many different ways. The present study adopts the definition discussed by Wetherell et al. (2001), which defines the discourse as a rather broad term, concerning the cultural, behavioural and other patterns an individual may exhibit. Kiesling (2001) and Wetherell et al. (2001) discuss the so-called normative practices, which allow the researcher to distinguish and characterise various discourses, including masculine and feminine ones. For example, the present thesis has discussed both discourses – feminine and masculine, and to differentiate them, the common cultural practices were used. For instance, some of the interviewed MEFAs repeatedly mentioned that they have adopted an alternative model of professional behaviour – one that is more aggressive, relies on asking questions, and not agreeing with the authority if they do not feel that this authority is making a rational decision. The present thesis accounted for such

experiences as being a part of a masculinity norm. In line with the tradition of discursive approaches (Wetherell et al., 2001) the present study refused to recognise gender as something purely biological in nature, instead the behaviours and experiences of female academics were analysed from a perspective of “doing” gender connected to the cultural context (postfeminism) in which they are living and working. “Doing” here means approaching gender as ‘...neither something into which we are born nor something that we eventually become’ (Edley, 2001: 192). As such the focus is on how gender is accomplished during social interaction with a particular cultural context and/or individuals. The masculinity and femininity associated with a profession such as that of academic is therefore not permanent or fixed but something which is ‘...constantly remade on a moment-to-moment basis (providing) not just a radical destabilizing of the assumption that gender is something that is natural (or) inevitable but also a much more positive sense of how change may be effected. Transforming the status quo becomes understood as a matter of challenging and changing discourses, encouraging people to tell different stories about themselves and others’ (Edley, 2001: 193).

In the course of the conducted 20 interviews, the researcher has accumulated a significant body of data in the form of verbal recordings, which was translated into the form of transcripts and later analysed in the form of texts. The strategy of the researcher was to identify and collect a complexity of terms and concepts previously described within the postfeminism discourses, and use them to construct female identities among the 20 interviewed MEFAs. The notion of identity is a key part of the current research, as during the interviews the participants would often engage in discussion concerning their gender identity, particularly in relation to their academic work. As pointed out by Wetherell et al. (2001), there are a number of approaches to view gender identity, and understand such concepts as manhood, masculinity and femininity. The present

research, in line with the argument by Gillmore (1996) and others discussed above, has chosen a view that is alternative to one perceiving gender identity as innate. Instead, the researcher has acknowledged the important role of society, cultural context and professional experiences in influencing the doing of gender, the doing of masculinity and femininity.

In line with the discussion by Wetherell et al. (2001) of discursive approaches, the present study searched for patterns and regularities in MEFAs behaviour, particularly in terms of language use, once they were discussing their personal and professional experiences within the UK academy. The researcher chose to evoke a number of sensitive topics (when it felt appropriate, and after obtaining verbal consent from the interviewee), and while some of the interviewed female academics openly engaged in the discussion, others were rather cautious and reluctant to share their opinion and experience. Wetherell et al. (2001) point out that such reluctant behaviour is also a source of information for the discourse analysis, as it provides insight regarding which issues are considered sensitive and “out of question” for the interview participants.

Another source of information, focused on during the data analysis, were the contradictory statements. For example, a respondent would clearly and in great detail describe the situation where gender discriminatory actions took place, however when asked to elaborate on the topic of sexism within the UK academy, would deny the existence of any structural or institutional barriers. Interestingly, the same attitude has been mentioned by Dick (2001), who has conducted a study of workplace gender-related policies and sexual harassment and has collected interview accounts which clearly denied the existence of malfunctioning practices, or presented them in a way which would clear the employing organisation or individual managers of any

responsibility. Dick (2001) has even come up with the term to describe such behaviour, “interpretive privilege” (p. 649) and mentions that “The issue (...) of how to explain those accounts of events or experiences that participants implicitly or explicitly refuse to name or interpret as sexism is a relevant to discursive as it is to more mainstream studies”. The researcher has furthermore, suggested a toolkit that allows for framing the devices used by the interviewees, for example – that of “trivialization” (when an interviewee chooses to interpret the events as jokes). Wetherell et al. (2001) point out that identification of such forms of presentation, and their critical analysis are essential to the discourse analysis. Similarly, the author of the present thesis when identifying such contradicting statements, did not bluntly try to confront the respondent, but rather attempted to carefully clarify the position of the interviewee by asking follow-up questions, and noted such incidents.

4.5.3 Interpretive Repertoires & Postfeminism

During the process of data collection, more specifically once the researcher has conducted the first four interviews of MEFAs, it has become obvious that the obtained narratives of experiences of academic women did not correspond to what was known from the scholarly literature. While the researchers discussed underprivileged position of female academics in the UK in general (Trower, 2001), and of minorities women in particular (Turner, 2002), the first four interviewed MEFAs provided no information regarding any of those problems. Instead they positioned and presented themselves as successful women, empowered and not being discriminated against when compared to, for instance, white males. The researcher has therefore adopted a research approach based on iterative process (Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986). Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs (1986) characterise an iterative process as an approach commonly adopted within social sciences, during which the researcher repeats a specific sequence of actions until a

desired result is achieved. In the context of the present study, the researcher, based on the answers obtained from the first four respondents, have revisited scholarly literature. According to the conducted analysis none of the alternative frameworks (such as feminism) did not help understand the narratives of MEFAs, who instead of talking about their disadvantaged position and exclusion instead focused on empowerment and inclusion within the UK academe. Therefore, as the researcher accumulated more data from the remaining interviewees, a decision was made to recruit Postfeminism as a lens to understand experiences of the MEFAs in the UK universities due to the fact that it provided a more appropriate insight into the discourses of inclusion and empowerment of ethnic minority women within the UK academe.

The analysis of the data concentrates on how a postfeminist sensibility is expressed in the interview data by depicting the way in which respondents draw on postfeminist discourses when providing accounts of their academic work experiences. This approach is based on the tenets of discourse analysis including first, the principle that language is itself a form of practice thereby rejecting the traditional differentiation made between words and deeds (Edley, 2001). Second, discourse does not act as a proxy to tell us something beyond the text i.e. should not be understood only in descriptive terms. Third, discourse is constructive of and constructed by the social context within which we are located. Fourth, discourse is action orientated, functional, occasioned and rhetorically organized (Gill et al, 2016).

The discursive analysis of the interview data collected for this research uses the analytical tool of interpretive repertoires to look at the way in which the respondents talk about their work experiences in British universities and to consider what this talk “does”. This approach is adopted because the large majority of studies which research the cultural phenomenon of postfeminism and how individuals in a variety of contexts draw upon postfeminist discourses use this analytical tool. Interpretive repertoires are

defined in Gill et al (2016: 7) as a “...recognisable routine of arguments, descriptions and evaluations distinguished by familiar clichés, common places, tropes and characterisations of actors and situations”. Interpretive repertoires provide a consistent and coherent way of talking about something like gender and work experiences at a particular point in time. They contribute to the common sense – things that we know are ‘true’ – prevalent in a particular social context, providing a basis for shared understanding. Thus, this approach suggests that how individuals talk and express opinions about certain issues such as the prevalence (or not) of gender discrimination, ‘...they invariably do so in terms already provided for them by history’ (Edley, 2001: 198).

Identifying and delineating interpretive repertoires is central to a discursive analysis that makes use of them. There is no set rules or “recipe” of how to achieve this but familiarity with the interview data and knowledge and understanding of postfeminist discourses played a central part in the completion of the discursive analysis of the current research. Finally, it is worth pointing out that the terms ‘discourse’ and ‘interpretive repertoire’ are approached in this study as being closely linked. Both discourse and interpretive repertoire can be understood as ‘repositories of meaning’ which provide distinctive ways of talking about the social world (Edley, 2001: 202). As will be shown in chapters 5 and 6, the interpretive repertoires used by the respondents provided them with a distinctive way of talking about the academic world enabling them to construct a positive account of their academic work experiences. This is done by denying discriminatory behaviour or inequality in the academy while at the same time outlining how they deal with unequal circumstances when faced with them, how they make their own choices and how they construct an academic identity.

4.5.4 Ethical Considerations

As discussed by Saunders et al. (2011) research based on collection of data is often concerned with a number of ethical issues. The present research has to address a number of limitations and ethical considerations that emerged during the process of research design and data collection. For instance, during the course of interviews, it became evident that respondents were reluctant to give out their demographic information. Their concern had to deal with the fact that there is a rather low number of Middle Eastern Female academics working in the UK universities, and therefore unique and rare demographic background would make it easy to identify each female participants. This concern is a common challenge within qualitative research (Matthews, 2012; McGraw, Zvonkovic & Walker, 2012), and issues of confidentiality and anonymity became evident during the data analysis and reporting stages of the research (Ortlipp, 2008). The researchers have to ensure that reported data cannot contain clues that will allow interested parties to identify the respondents who provided information on the organisation of their workplace. If this precaution is not followed the published report may result in work-related problems and embarrassment for participants who agreed to be interviewed by the researcher (Golombisky, 2006). The researchers are therefore advised to ensure great caution and care in maintaining anonymity of their respondents. If the researcher needs to publish real names of respondents or an organisation they work for, he or she has to obtain a special permission to do so from the involved stakeholders.

Great caution has been exercised by the author of the current thesis to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents. The researcher felt a moral obligation to ensure that reported information cannot be used by interested parties to harm or embarrass participants who agreed to answer the interview questions. During the course of the present research all the demographic information (name, age, university of

employment, etc.) were removed, and aliases were used instead of actual names. These precautions were communicated to the respondents and will ensure that participant confidentiality will be maintained.

Despite a short debriefing that took place prior to each of the interviews, some of the interviewees showed reluctance towards providing their opinion or sharing their experiences. The debriefing session aimed at reassuring the issue of confidentiality, as well as providing the participants with the general purpose behind the study. Sensitivity of some topics, as mentioned above, was the main limitation of the present study, as a number of interviewees directly or indirectly refused to discuss their relationships with their colleagues despite reassurances concerning confidentiality. The interview participants have also found it important to discuss the identity of the researcher; while some required the researcher to produce his student ID, another one of the contacted MEFAs agreed to participate in the study only after having a conversation with the researcher's supervisor.

During the briefing session mentioned above, the respondents were also informed about the right to withdraw from the research at any time before the data has been processed. None of the interviewees took advantage of this right however two of the MEFAs have requested that the researcher did not use a recording device during the interviews. The interviewer did not use the recording device but took notes instead. In order to establish a relationship based on trust, the researcher has offered all of the interview participants to examine the transcripts of their interviews for approval before using it in the analysis. Surprisingly, only three of the respondents requested to take a look at the interview transcript prior to data analysis.

4.6. Conclusion

The present chapter has outlined the research methodology, study limitations and ethical considerations encountered by the thesis. It can be concluded that the current study adopts a social constructionist worldview on knowledge generation and interpretation, is qualitative in nature and relies on data collected through interviews. The study is cross sectional in nature, as it focuses on a given period of time as opposed to a process, and the sample population consists of 20 Middle Eastern female academics employed by UK universities. The researcher has approached the academics who agreed to participate in a semi-structured interview and provide detailed answers to open-ended questions regarding their professional, personal and family-related experience as female researchers. The author of this present study has encountered a number of ethical challenges: maintaining the respondent's anonymity and confidentiality of personal data, ensuring data integrity and complying with high ethical standards, avoiding implicit bias when selecting and reporting obtained information and results. The research has also been limited by a number of factors: limited time-frame, extensive time and effort needed to obtain sufficient sample size and in-depth interviews, sensitivity of the topic and unwillingness of some of the respondents to share their opinions with the male interviewer.

Chapter 5. Data Analysis – Postfeminism, Interpretive Repertoires and Middle Eastern Female Academics

5.1. Introduction

Mobilising the concept of postfeminism understood as a discursive formation, this chapter explores the individual accounts of Middle Eastern Female Academics focusing on how they draw on postfeminist discourses to account for their work experiences within British universities. Four recurring postfeminist interpretive repertoires and associated subsidiary interpretive repertoires (Gill et al, 2016) have been identified through the analysis of the data, summarised in the Table below. It should be noted that the processes of data collection and analysis were affected by the personal and professional experiences of both the participants (Middle Eastern Female Academics working in the UK) and the author of this present thesis (Johansson & Sliwa, 2013).

In completing the analysis, an effort was made to include a variety of viewpoints as a means of reflecting the various accounts provided by the respondents. Although, the researcher of this present study and interview participants often did not share similar opinions over the topic, an overall sense of understanding was achieved, which has positively contributed to the dialogue process and enabled the researcher to capture the complexity of viewpoints and experiences of the Middle Eastern Female Academic respondents. In what follows, chapter 5 will provide an overview of the postfeminist interpretive repertoires identified within the narratives of the 20 interviewees. In the following chapter 6, attention will be directed at the construction of MEFA identities, referred to here as academic femininities, showing how variation in the way respondents draw on postfeminist discourses leads to differences in MEFA identities. Thus, the focus will be on making visible the different modes of being an academic with Middle Eastern roots in the UK.

Table 6. The four postfeminist interpretive repertoires and their subsidiaries

Postfeminist Interpretive repertoires	Subsidiary Postfeminist Interpretive Repertoires
INDIVIDUALISM, CHOICE & EMPOWERMENT	Choice I'm not a victim My gender has nothing to do with my work I deal with sexism myself Gender equality is sorted
'NATURAL' SEXUAL DIFFERENCE	Female academics don't say no to academic tasks Career choice & disadvantaged position Lack of respect for 'natural' female behaviours
RETREATISM: WESTERN TRADITION OF WORKING MOTHERS	Parental involvement – western tradition Balancing home & slowing down for children My family comes first Children need their mother
RETREATISM: MIDDLE EASTERN TRADITION OF EXTENDED FAMILY (OF ORIGIN) OBLIGATIONS	Extended family obligations & expectations Parental approval of work & life choices Parental involvement-middle eastern tradition

The first three interpretive repertoires – Individualism, Choice and Empowerment, 'Natural' Sexual Difference, Retreatism: Western Tradition - discussed within the present thesis derive from the features and empirical regularities of postfeminism, identified by Gill (2007) and Negra (2009) and used by gender and organization researchers such Kelan (2009) and Lewis (2014) . In drawing on the first interpretive repertoire – individualism, choice and empowerment – the respondents (similar to other studies, Gill et al, 2016; Lewis, 2014) deny the existence of discriminatory practices on the basis of gender. In addition, the MEFA also consistently tried to distance themselves from any suggestion of ethnic discrimination. Instead, most of the interviewed women emphasized the role of choice, and their unique individualism as the two key drivers of success within their chosen academic field. As we will see

below, there was little discussion of incidents of exclusion with a stronger emphasis placed on being included in their academic work environment. Emphasis is placed on the British academic context being a gender and ethnicity neutral work environment where individual effort, talent and merit are the determinants of how far a person can proceed up the career ladder. With the second interpretive repertoire of 'natural' sexual difference, the respondents draw on notions of difference to account for any kind of varied experiences or contrast between themselves and other colleagues. The third interpretive repertoire of Retreatism: Western tradition is drawn on by those respondents who want to combine a professional academic career with being an active parent.

The fourth interpretive repertoire – Retreatism: Middle Eastern Tradition – is an extension of the third one, and is heavily influenced by the original cultural origins of the respondents and is unique to this study. Despite some similarities between the two retreatism interpretive repertoires, there are also some important differences, which will be discussed and illustrated with examples within this chapter. The Middle Eastern tradition emphasises the role of the extended family – parents, aunts, uncles etc. – with an expectation that regular contact will be maintained and support provided when required. In addition the opinion of the extended family is often taken into account when decisions and choices have to be made. Similar patterns have been identified by Essers and Benschop (2007), who observed the professional experiences of Turkish women in the Netherlands, highlighting the important role of the extended family in how the female respondents made their choices, and understood themselves (e.g., importance of parental approval, family support, etc.). Through the identification of these recurring interpretive repertoires in the respondents' talk about their academic work experiences, the analysis will show how the 20 respondents construct their work experiences within British universities as ones of inclusion as opposed to exclusion

(Lewis, 2014). Before turning to outline in more detail these four interpretive repertoires, the chapter will begin by considering how the respondents understand their national identity i.e. as British, Middle Eastern or a combination of both. This section demonstrates that the respondents don't solely identify as Western but in drawing on postfeminist discourses (discussed in later sections) demonstrate that postfeminism should be understood as a transnational (and not just Western) cultural phenomenon.

5.2. Global Women – Middle Eastern & British

According to the obtained results, the interviewed women perceived themselves as Middle Eastern, British, or a combination of both ethnicities. The present thesis argues that postfeminism is a transnational cultural phenomenon, and is widely drawn on by not only Western women, but instead – women from all over the world. The interviewed MEFAs spent varying amount of time in the UK, Europe or other foreign countries, however, most of them still felt a strong connection to their countries of origin. Although some of the respondents did not associate closely with a Middle Eastern identity, this was often used as a sort of a disclaimer to demonstrate that the women refuse to perceive their foreignness as a disadvantage in their professional life.

According to Aida, her ethnic origin has never created any professional barriers for her and instead has provided her with some key opportunities due to the chosen area of specialisation and research:

“and in fact actually that is what identity's more about than anything else, I'm sure that they do but I think it has benefitted me rather than handicapped me...”

(Aida)

Others, unlike Aida, readily identified themselves as being of Middle Eastern or Arab origin, and shared that this is how they perceive themselves and present themselves at their work place and in class:

“Yes, I do a lot of, actually in many cases I do that, it depends on the context that I’m actually in, so it might come across as I’m Middle Eastern, it might come across as that I’m an Arab, I’m from the Arab world and it might come across as I’m Lebanese, I’m from Lebanon, so it’s the three identities that come across when I’m actually, it depends on the context that I’m in.” (Faida)

Foreignness and Middle Eastern identity can provide more obvious benefits for migrant female researchers. The ethnic origin also motivated some of the respondents to learn more about their background, and this initial curiosity has inspired a life-long research journey for Elham:

“Because I felt that I’d spent my whole education learning about my American half because I grew up in the States and I wanted to learn more about my Egyptian half and background and heritage, and I love politics so Middle East studies. And Arabic was part of the programme and I wanted to learn Arabic.” (Elham)

Intellectual curiosity and interest in one’s identity was a re-occurring topic during the interviews, and while for some of the respondents it has inspired a few short term projects, for others (like Latifa) it has triggered a life-long quest. One of the respondents, Elham shared during the interview that her willingness to learn more about her ethnic origin and identity was partially caused by seeking approval from her family, and especially father:

“I think, obviously it pleased, it did please my father very much, he was happy that I was interested in his history and culture and his, you know, background but no, it was driven by me. I think if I wanted to be pre-med or, you know, pre-law or something like that he would have been equally happy, yeah.” (Elham)

Analysis of the interviews has demonstrated that reaction to the question regarding participants` identity has caused the biggest variation among their responses, than any other question. For instance, Hadeel argues that identifying somebody as Middle Eastern is too broad and uninformative: Middle East is a large region, characterised by diverse culture, languages and habits. Therefore, in order to define one`s identity it makes more sense to refer to a specific country of origin, rather than the entire region:

“We've come to accept that we are Middle Eastern, and the media and everything else. So we've come to accept we are Middle Eastern, which is something I accept, but Middle Eastern for me, or Arabs for me, used to, I used it to refer mainly to people from around the Gulf area, rather than Egyptians, so rather than ourselves. But I now accept it because it is the norm.” (Hadeel)

In relation to identity, a number of respondents have shared their experience and understanding of being perceived as a foreigner while living and working in the UK.

The theme of ethnic origin was an important part of the respondents` narratives. While some of the respondents (i.e., Aida), in line with the postfeminist perspective insisted that their origin did not have any negative effect on their professional career and work-related interactions, and if anything has positively contributed to their opportunities, others made it clear that they experienced being treated differently throughout their life. This differential treatment, according to some, had little to do with their gender, but instead was due to their ethnic background:

“... people would ask “where are you from?” and I`d say Britain and they`d say “yeah but where are you really from?” you know, there`s all that, always that assumption that actually you don`t have a genuine claim to being British

because of how you look or where we would assume that you're from..."

(Durra)

The respondent Durra has shared an experience from her teaching career. Once she started teaching practice in one of the UK universities, she was assigned a number of courses by the department, one of which was Islamic Law. Durra reports that she had no knowledge of Islamic Law, and the department allocation was based on the assumption that due to her Middle Eastern origin she must be familiar with it. Interestingly, the person allocating an unfamiliar subject to Durra was of ethnic minority background as well - a fact Durra describes and perceives as "internalised racism":

"... structural racism and discrimination is so embedded in society that there's a lot of internalised racism and people who are not white can also internalise that racism and subject it onto other people..." (Durra)

Cohen (2004) emphasizes that the perceived similarity and differences between the foreigner and representative of the dominant group will be constructed through the phenomena of ethnicity, social class, religion, culture, language and bodily presentation. Fadia, unlike Durra, experiences herself being foreign as having no negative consequences for her career, however presents her foreignness as a sort of a constant value that will not change throughout time:

"... in many cases I felt that the institutions that I worked in have actually protected me and encouraged me to stay in this country, and one thing that I learned coming in and living in Britain is, and I haven't experienced living in other countries apart from my own country, but you are a foreigner, you arrive in this country as a foreigner and you're always a foreigner..." (Fadia)

When discussing one`s identity, the concept of labelling has also come up and most of the respondents had a pronounced negative attitude towards being labelled as Middle Eastern. Ibtisam elaborated and explained that while she is proud of her Arab identity, she is opposed to labelling somebody as it often puts people in a specific “box” in accordance of common stereotypes:

“I really don’t mind because I am an Arab woman from North Africa, from Morocco, I speak Arabic, I am Muslim, I don’t have a problem. If it’s a labelling that is negative, that is trying to stigmatise me of course I reject that...”

(Ibtisam)

Ibtisam immediately draws a connection between being labelled (as a Muslim) and stigmatisation. McDowell (2008) argues that gender is often being immediately connected with cultural stereotypes, resulting in various assumptions, i.e. oppressed Muslim women, etc. Sliwa and Johansson (2013) argue that the UK academic environment has been greatly internationalised within the last decades, which positively contributed to the overall levels of acceptance and integration of foreign professionals. At the same time, the UK academia remains an environment dominated by white males and gender-based discrimination is often followed by an automatic perception of Arab women as “victim of oppression”:

“... if you’re trying to label me within a particular category of Arab women who are the victim of oppression or who are oppressed and who need to be saved like the kind of discourse we hear sometimes about Arab women then of course I wouldn’t accept that, I’m not a victim of oppression, I have my own agency, if you see what I mean so I think, yeah, I can recognise how I’m called but I don’t mind if someone calls me, you are an Arab woman, I am very proud of my roots and who I am. I don’t pretend to be someone else because I’m not, that’s who I

am, I'm very comfortable with my roots as an Arab woman but I'm also comfortable to live in this country, I mean I don't feel like I'm... I don't feel that there is a discrepancy between the two." (Ibtisam)

Sliwa and Johansson (2013) argue that foreignness is a quality that can have positive and negative attributes depending on the circumstances, as well as the norm it is compared to and determined against. In the case of the present research studies, most of the female participants discussed their foreignness in relation to "Britishness". While analysing the interviews, a complex picture of "Britishness" emerges. Some of the components that constitute it, according to the researchers' narratives are: language, culture, food, focus on internal politics, and often – conflict with some of the Middle Eastern countries, including Turkey, Iran and Iraq. Cohen (2004) argues that one's perception of him/ herself as foreign often originates from the political and cultural relationships between the two countries – the country of origin, and the country of residence.

The participant Latifa has shared her experience of feeling "different" and "foreign" throughout most of her life in the UK. Among other things contributing to her perceiving herself as foreign were the worsening relationship between her country of origin and the UK. Similarly to Cohen's (2004) observations, cultural relationships between the two countries, and particularly the negative events in their common history has led to her feeling alienated and experiencing an identity crisis throughout most of her life.

Magda has mentioned that being a minority and a female within her faculty made her work extra hard to build her reputation and respect from both colleagues and students:

“I was the only female prominent member of staff, okay, so seven years, there were some other women but they’re doing, you know, like part-time Arabic teaching and I was the only full-time first lecturer and senior lecturer, all the other, my colleagues are men, okay, and there I did feel that I had to sort of... I mean they were nice, you know, I didn’t feel they were sort of discriminating at me outwardly, but I did feel that I had to work a little bit harder to sort of establish my authority and I felt that also with students and actually particularly with male students from the Gulf, my first two years, you know, I was teaching, we had lots of... the Institute of Urban Islamic Studies, there are lots of students from, I mean Qatar, from Emirates, from Kuwait, from Saudi Arabia, and I think the combination of my Arab name, Iraqi connection, being a woman, I felt that had to be really strict for them to actually respect me, it took a couple of years and then it was fine and then they’re all scared of me [laughs]. No, and it’s also, I mean it was very clear that they had, naturally they felt a much greater sense of authority towards the wide or the male, than the younger Female, I mean that was clear, you know, everyone here, so yeah I mean I was able to deal with it... “ (Magda)

Overall, these narratives demonstrate that most of the interviewed female academics even after years of work and integration into the UK society perceived themselves as Middle Eastern. Therefore, the present work provides support for thesis argued by Dosekun (2015), concerning the need to view postfeminism as a transcultural and transnational concept, as opposed to being a prerogative of white professional women. At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that while all of the 20 interviewed female academics were of Middle Eastern origin, most of them have spent a significant amount of time abroad, particularly in the UK, therefore being influenced by local culture. Thus, the present study and interpretive repertoires discussed in greater detail

below, should be seen as a product of interaction between at least two cultures – the UK one, and the Middle Eastern one.

Despite this important disclaimer, the present work provides clear evidence that postfeminism is not solely a white professional female discourse, and instead should be viewed as something taken up by a variety of women from non-Western as well as Western backgrounds.. According to Dosekun (2015), Western world often views itself as a source of innovation and progress, which brings this modernity to the rest of the world, particularly – to those “other women” of the Third world. McRobie (2007), in regard to consumer cultural, argues that postfeminism exists in the third world, however in a different, slightly more “tamed version”. This version is beneficial from a marketing point of view, as non-Western women try to replicate fashion, style and behaviour of their Western counterparts (McRobbie, 2009). The present study, after analysis of the interviews with MEFAs concludes that such statements should be viewed with caution. As we will see below, the subjects of the interviews freely drew on postfeminist discourses to describe and reflect upon their professional experiences and personal life, suggesting that postfeminism is relevant not only to “Western girls”, and exists among the Middle Eastern women as well, and perhaps not in its tamed form as discussed by McRobbie (2009). Furthermore, the present study agrees with the argument by Lazar (2006), who suggests that postfeminism has become a global notion, despite the fact that it has originated in Western culture and media. Dosekun (2015) advises to think transnationally about postfeminism, which in her interpretation refers to considering “... how as an entanglement of meanings, representations, sensibilities, practices, and commodities, post-feminism may discursively and materially cross borders, including those within our feminist scholarly imaginaries. Methodologically, this mode of thinking entails tracing the connectivities through which post-feminist culture may travel, wherever this may lead” (p. 6). The further sections will illustrate

transnational nature of postfeminism and present interpretative repertoires Middle Eastern female academics constantly draw upon when reflecting on their professional and personal experiences within the UK academe.

5.3. Postfeminist Interpretive Repertoire: Individualism, choice and empowerment

The first interpretive repertoire which the respondents repeatedly drew on is individualism, choice and empowerment. In addition the subsidiary interpretive repertoires include the denial of existing gender discrimination practices (I'm not a victim and I don't get treated unequally), as well as adopting individual strategies to address certain gender inequality practices. Gill et al. (2016) discuss a number of various approaches professional women utilize to distance themselves from such problems as sexism and gender inequality. While the detailed accounts of such approaches, observed among the 20 interviewed MEFAs will be discussed within the subsections below, it should be noted that the most common ones were individualisation, "... experiencing inequality as a matter of choice", and putting gender discrimination into historical context, thereby treating it as a matter of the past. Individualisation, discussed by Gill et al. (2016), is a way to present one's experience as unique; as an exception from the rule rather than a common pattern. When the professional musicians draw on postfeminism discourse of individualism, as argued by Gill et al. (2016), they present gender discrimination as a rare practice, which is encountered by the individual women, however does not affect the general population. Another interesting discursive approach, commonly observed by the present study concerned placing the problem of gender inequality into the past, and therefore treating gender discrimination as a notion separated from the present by a layer of historical period. For instance, this is how Yuma approached the topic:

“I don’t think I am being treated differently because I am a female, or originally not from the UK... Yes, I mean, there are occasional stories about male professionals given preference when compared to their female colleagues, however I have not personally encountered such situations. I think, these things... gender discrimination, being a woman in guys’ world, and so on, and so forth... it is not relevant anymore. If you work hard, you can succeed whoever you are – a boy, a girl. This is what I believe in, and this is what I tell my female students...” (Yumna)

Within the presented passage, Yumna summons a number of tools to distance herself from the issue of gender discrimination: using “I don’t know”, “...occasional stories”, “I have not personally encountered” formulas. Each one of these discourses can be dissected to reveal that Yumna in fact does not want to be perceived as a passive object of external environment, and instead draws on the discourse of empowerment and freedom of choice when analysing her own professional experience and success. Gill et al. (2016) argue that the professional women often adopt the formula of “I don’t know”, “I am not sure” when approached, or rather confronted by the topic of gender inequality. The vagueness of the answer thereby demonstrates their attempt to distance themselves from the mere existence of sexism at working place. As mentioned above, the formula “... occasional stories” does make the incidents of gender discrimination sound like there are rare and exceptional and therefore should not be viewed as a general rule. Moreover, Yumna suggests that gender inequality related issues have become a matter of the past, and therefore there is no incentive to discuss them within the context of the present day UK academe. Gill et al. (2016, p. 10) note: “In an era characterized by a postfeminist sensibility, gender inequalities are frequently presented as something that happened in the past and that no longer characterize the contemporary world”.

There is another time-related discourse identified within the course of the present study. The MEFAs sometimes mention that they have indeed experienced some minor problems in the beginning of their career. For example, Durra has noted that it took her some effort to win respect from the rest of her research group. Zainab, on the other hand, noted that she has experienced some sort of disrespect and doubt from her students, and therefore felt like she has to work harder to establish her reputation and position of a female researcher. This is how Zainab addresses the issue of her being a female researcher in the UK:

“I don` t experience any discrimination at my work. I like it and have great relationships with my colleagues. I am not sure such issues are relevant anymore. When I started career in the X University, yes, maybe then, it was a bit difficult at first... Maybe because I was the only non-white female staff... Well, I felt like I have to work harder to prove that, you know, I am not hired only as a poster figure to show the university cares about ethnic diversity... Not that they would do that... But I did chose to work a bit harder, and stay at work a little longer to prove that I am worth this place...” (Zainab)

Although Zainab indirectly acknowledges that some incidents related to gender or possibly ethnicity did take place, however she chooses to distance such events by stressing that this has occurred in the beginning of her career, and is not relevant within the present time. This appears to be a common discourse as Gill et al. (2016) have identified a similar pattern when analysing the interviews by professional female musicians. Moreover, in addition to stressing the notion of time and relevance, Zainab emphasizes her active role – “I did chose to work a bit harder”, implying that this is a free and voluntary choice each woman can make. Therefore, within one statement, the

interviewee recruits a number of discourses to distance her experiences from the context of gender or ethnic inequality.

The first interpretive repertoire, that of individualism, choice and empowerment, concerns a professional woman being in charge/ responsible for her decisions and dealing with the circumstances. This repertoire can be better characterised as “Individualism, choice and empowerment”. The repertoire clearly emerges from the story of Aida, who according to her own words, was always responsible for her choices and decisions (choice), while making sure she does what she wants as opposed to expectations imposed by society and culture (individualism). The discursive repertoire of Aida can be characterised as hierarchical in its nature as it is encouraging other female researchers to follow her path to achieve social progress, an eventual goal of the latter being “living a very moral and ethical life”. Her successful studies and career are the greatest source of happiness and empowerment for her.

Ibtisam has realised the role of personal choice and individualism early in her youth, when her family insisted that she tries to live independently in another country while pursuing university education:

“... something happened in my own psychology that I discovered, being independent, like being away from my family, having to pay my own bills, you know, being on my own, learning how to be responsible and to be part of a hall, like inside, it was something there that happened in terms of discovering who I am and then it was very hard for me to go back and belong again...” (Ibtisam)

At the same time the gained sense of independence and empowerment also partially alienated Ibtisam from her own community, as she felt her aspirations and goals have changed and differed from the goals of local women. At the same time, Aida

admits that she believes because of her choice to focus on her career, her marriage ended with a divorce:

“I’m very committed to my work and one could argue that it’s one of the factors that led to my divorce, so...” (Aida)

Interestingly, the interview analysis suggests that, the interviewed academic woman perceives the situation where one has to choose between career and family as normal and almost natural. A number of interviewees characterise academic career as being so difficult and challenging, that it almost makes it impossible for a woman with an “average” load of family-related responsibilities to pursue and succeed in it.

According to Aida’s narrative, empowered women make “very strategic choices” that help them advance in “male-dominant” environment, however the same notion of empowerment and choice brings some, according to the interviewee’s perception, almost unavoidable consequences, such as, for example, divorce:

“I think when something had to go I’m afraid the marriage went, it was a mutual thing so the kids are great, they’re very happy kids and my job is great, there’s no longer a marriage.” (Aida)

The repertoires of Aida and Durra revolve around various strategies adopted by professional women that aim to be included into the male-dominant work environment (Lewis, 2014). Interestingly, according to the narrative of Aida, this inclusion for an academic woman is practically impossible if the woman sticks to her natural feminine characteristics and has full family-related responsibilities (i.e., taking care of children, living with a husband, etc.). Throughout her interview, Aida points a couple of times that she owes her professional success to her strategic choices and comfortable family arrangements (divorce, living alone and her ex-husband taking care of children half of the time). Aida also considers her model of behaviour very male-like, and acknowledges

that women characterised by more feminine approach end up being less successful as they doubt themselves more and fail to say no to administrative tasks.

The identified interpretive repertoire is based on the following sub-interpretive repertoires: “I make my own choice”, “I’m not a victim”, “My gender has nothing to do with my work” and “I deal with sexism myself”, which will each be illustrated by some examples from the interviews in the following subsections.

5.3.1. I make my own choice

The sub-interpretive repertoire “I make my own choice” was a re-occurring one among the interviews. The sub-interpretive repertoire was most commonly discussed within the context of making education or career-related plans, as well as the respondent’s decision to move to and live in another country. For instance, the researcher Ibtisam shared her story of career success: she wanted to be a researcher since early age, and throughout her life she stayed focused and motivated by that goal:

“Yeah, I always wanted to be an academic, since I was doing my baccalaureate at my high school, I always wanted to be a teacher and I always wanted to be a teacher of a higher level” (Ibtisam)

Interestingly, one of the respondents, Aida, has compared her own choices with not going “with the flow” and implied that her making decisions often involved overcoming obstacles:

“... I’ve had a whole series of strategies, I haven’t gone with the flow, so the decision to go to Columbia was one of them for example, I wanted to be in New York but I wanted to go to an Ivy League school, I took on a huge amount of debt in order to do that...” (Aida)

The respondent Durra shared her experience of deciding to become an academic instead of commercial law practitioner. According to her story, her choice was influenced by the strong detesting of commercial law firms representing corporations that conduct unethical activities and focus only on profit. Therefore despite having all necessary capabilities (a Master`s Diploma from a top university) as well as peer pressure Durra has probably experienced (as many of the graduates chose to go for the commercial law due to high expected income), the young graduate has chosen to pursue a different path. For some respondents it was important to stress that their own choices were different from those made by majority (of other women?), and these decisions were responsible for them becoming what they are now:

“I didn’t do a mainstream political science PhD, I did the kind of PhD I wanted to do, so some of the decisions were very strategic, compromising with whatever social norms there were, and others were I did them exactly the way I wanted to do them...” (Aida)

Aida similarly to some other respondents in her narrative often draws on individualist aspect of academic career. Her career success (obtaining full Professorship early in her professional life) is attributed to her obtaining good education in [top university] as well as making individual choices (different from those of others) that eventually result in a rather successful academic career and steady professional growth.

When asked what had the biggest impact on their career or life path, many of the respondents, similarly to Aida, have brought up the notions of individualism and choice. Interestingly, Elham has brought up two other phenomena, that had a weaker but still significant impact on her career: having a child and her ethnicity. The interviewee has openly admitted that her ethnicity has indeed impacted both, her life and career trajectories:

“I think my personal choices have totally developed, shaped my career and I think they continue, they will continue to. Although that said like we were saying a minute ago I think obviously having a baby I’ll be thinking of more than just myself but I think it is all choice. If you’re asking me kind of choice versus ethnicity for example...” (Elham)

Elham admitted that having a family significantly impacted her mobility, ability to work long hours or travel around to visit conferences or participate in the international conferences. However, personal choice was something impacting and shaping her career trajectory throughout the life.

Lewis (2014) discusses the emphasis placed upon the notion of individual choice within postfeminist discourse. The researcher argues that the notion of choice is stressed as well as a certain “neutrality” in terms of performing a specific professional activity. These two notions are connected to the professional femininity of a Female, which portrays an image of an independent entity, who performs her work as a sort of neutral activity, not affected by exterior factors (i.e., gender or ethnic discrimination), and therefore appears not to be controlled or ruled by any other force, except for the individual choice (Lewis, 2014; Gill, 2007). As we can see from the narratives of Aida, Elham and other Female researchers, they experience and perceive themselves being fully in charge of their actions and choices.

5.3.2. I’m not a victim and I am not treated unequally

Most of the interviewed women described their workplace as being “gender neutral” (Fatima). A number of the interviewed Female academics refused to consider themselves victims of discrimination at the workplace. These women stressed their equal position among other colleagues, including male ones. The empirical studies by Kelan (2009, 2010) investigated experiences of gender discrimination of women in the

ICT or MBA programs, and according to the obtained results, the interviewees tended to depict their place of employment or education as a place with equal gender opportunities. Even when discussing the incidents of gender discrimination concerning them personally, the respondents still tried to stress that these situations and gender discrimination as a phenomenon are not characteristic of their organization (Kelan, 2009).

Gill et al. (2016) makes the same observation, when describing how the interviewed female students draw upon postfeminist discourses to distance themselves from such issue as gender inequality within the academe. Gill et al. (2016) and Kelan (2009) describe a number of discursive strategies their study subjects utilize to distance themselves from sexism and gender inequalities. Similarly to the empirical works mentioned above, the present study has also utilized a number of re-occurring tools and practices the MEFA interviewees actively recruited when drawing on postfeminist discourse. One of the most common approaches was to turn their unique position as a female, and an individual from Middle East, into special and privileged. Another approach was to use individual or unique examples from the lives of other colleagues (usually white locals) to demonstrate that their, MEFA`s experience, is no worse, or even better, and therefore such issues as race or gender inequality are not relevant to the context of the UK academe.

When asked about possible existing gender inequality practices that might have negatively impacted her career, Fadia shared a story of her colleague, a white academic, who unlike Fadia herself, has an ongoing struggle within finding a permanent position in the UK academia:

“Found a job, yes, I’ll tell you why, because I have a friend of mine who graduated with me, she’s white British blonde excellent researcher, and she’s

still, but her field of research is, has to do with beaten women, yeah, abused woman and crime against woman in Britain, she's still on part-time job, she graduated eight years ago, because, actually not eight, say five years ago, it's because there isn't many jobs out there." (Fadia)

Fadia considers herself as being "lucky", as opposed to being a victim and suffering from gender oppression within academia. Instead of perceiving herself as being discriminated against, Fadia notes that her being from Middle East has actually opened a number of professional doors before her and has facilitated her employment in the UK institutions:

"I was, in a way I call myself lucky because there are few people who have my expertise, so being Middle Eastern here became an advantage in finding a job because you're talking about an area and in relation to my field, huh, you're talking about an area that is completely in the news now, so anyone who are related to that in a way or another, that could kind of benefit, yeah, through research or through journalism or through any form of information is an asset."(Fadia)

Gill et al. (2016) note that such discursive approaches are typical to women who try to minimize the possible impact of gender practices within an organisation. The researchers argue that such wide and varied toolkit of discourses is used to disavow the complexity of gender discrimination which till date exists within the UK academe (Gill et al., 2016). Interestingly, the researcher also stresses the wide use of such approach as "individualisation", which implies that the specific experience of a given female is isolated or decoupled from the majority of other female experiences (Gill et al., 2016). This offers a wide opportunity to use a number of disclaimers, for example, if the discriminatory event has indeed taken place, an individual may say that although it has

happened it has nothing to do with the reality, and should instead be viewed as an exception, and not a general rule. This approach of individualisation was commonly adopted throughout multiple narratives of the interviewed MEFA`s, and although particularly popular within the interpretative repertoire of “I`m not a victim”, has also occurred throughout other repertoires.

This notion of denial of gender discriminatory practices and refusal to view oneself as a victim of oppression is widely discussed within postfeminism studies (Kelan, 2009; Lewis, 2014). Johansson and Sliwa (2013) argue that mixed organizational setting constructs an environment or context, where gender and ethnicity should not result in an inferior position. At the same time, it is widely accepted that the UK academic environment is represented by a white male norm, and therefore, “nonwhiteness” or “nonmaleness” become key aspects through which the notion of otherness is constructed (Kelan, 2009).

Razan, similarly to other respondents, refused to admit instances of institutional racism or sexism in her place of employment. She has argued that she has been always accepted and treated just like other employees:

“Um, no, I don`t... No, I wouldn`t say I was treated differently. No. No. I would have remembered if it was relevant, no, I don`t think so.” (Razan)

Razan has also made it clear that in her opinion she was not given more or different responsibilities or withheld from professional opportunities due to her gender or minority status:

“I wouldn`t say they are given more opportunities or they are given more responsibilities, we`re not institutionally held back by the university, as a woman I don`t feel that the university is holding me back or not giving me

opportunities to achieve whatever I want to achieve, at least I don't feel it..."

(Razan)

Razan here, similarly to many other participants uses a disclaimer, discussed above. In this case the disclaimer is "... at least I don't feel it...". Gill et al. (2016) also note the common use of such small disclaimers within the discourses of the interviewed professional women: "but", "in my situation", etc. In the case of Razan the use of the disclaimer "... at least I don't feel it" implies as if women have a free choice to experience gender- or race-related discrimination or not. Although, it contradicts common sense, as the existence of gender discriminatory practices is well-documented throughout the world, and also in the UK academe context (Deem, 2003), this verbal construction is widely used by the interviewees to distance their perceptions and experiences from the ones of women, who "chose" to experience gender inequality, and thereby – chose to be victims. This identified discourse is one of the most vivid way in which the interviewed MEFAs draw on postfeminism to discuss and construct their personal and professional experiences, and it revolves around the sometimes mythical notion of "choice", discussed within the previous section of the present thesis. Razan, just like some other interviewees (Jamila, Latifa), included a small disclaimer into their response, suggesting that even if the researcher finds some contradicting evidence from other female researchers, the latter should be treated as outliers or a matter of personal choice.

Another important disclaimer commonly adopted by the interviewed MEFAs concerned their ethnicity. Interestingly, while most of them acknowledged their Middle Eastern origin, and its profound effect on their academic identity, others stressed that they view themselves as ethnicity neutral, due to intermix of cultures, experience of working within different professional environments, etc. The present study argues that

this approach is highly similar to that used within the most common postfeminist discourses drawn by professional women who deny any incidence of gender discrimination at their workplace. These women eliminate the slightest notion of possibility that these practices take place. Similarly, the interviewed Middle Eastern Academics, were often avoiding drawing attention to their origin in order not to be perceived as different or disadvantaged within their professional field. On the other hand, the described reaction may be much more complex in nature, due to the differential perception of foreign and native employees by their management, as reported by some of the respondents, including Tara.

Sliwa and Johansson (2013) argue that identity can be used as a leverage during important negotiations or personal or professional situations, when a foreign employee tries to tailor her/ his behaviour to the expectations and perceptions dominating the present work environment. The respondent Tara has noted that she often perceived her bosses and other key academic staff viewing foreign employees, particularly women, as no threat in career sense. Tara argued that she often had a feeling that other employees tend to see migrant women researchers as less of a competition, and their general expectation was that the latter will be cooperative and less ambitious in a career sense. The academic hierarchical structures can be characterised by intense rivalry and therefore, it can be hypothesised that playing along the lines of these perceptions and expectations, can put migrant employees in a “safe” position, when compared to staff that is expected to be more ambitious and competitive (i.e., white males) (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

When given an example of an obstacle mainly experienced by professional women on the career path – maternity leave and family obligations, Razan has started discussing the role and consequences of personal choice in relation to one`s career.

Sliwa and Johansson (2013) argue that a typical component of meritocracy discourse focuses on the hierarchical progression of an individual up the career ladder. This progression, as assumed, occurs irrespective of gender, age, social status or ethnicity of an individual. Therefore, professionals are viewed as disembodied subjects, all possessing equal opportunities (Kohen, 2004). Their respective achievements are compared against a so-called merit (Sliwa & Johansson, 2013). Similarly to the meritocratic system portrayed by Sliwa and Johansson (2013), Razan`s argument suggests that each individual, a man or a woman, has equal chances, and maternity is a choice any woman can make, however it is only fair that she will have to face the consequences of it:

“... however, because, you know, taking time off for maternity but this is a choice that I`ve made so it`s certainly influenced my career and part, you know, I decide not to take longer maternity leave because I didn`t want to delay, you know, I didn`t want to lose any human capital, I didn`t want to stay away from work for a long time but apart from that I don`t, you know, apart from the maternity stuff I don`t see, at least for the moment, a difference between the career chances of my male colleagues and myself. ” (Razan)

Acker (1990) emphasizes that most of the meritocratic systems are constructed around the assumption that a model individual pursuing a specific career is a single white male, whose only (or at least main focus) revolves around his career and professional development. An alternative scenario would be a male, who`s personal needs are taken care of by his wife/ partner (Sliwa & Johansson, 2013). Allen (2011) points out that within the UK academic context, the notion of individualism becomes very important when discussing the meritocracy system. It is not the performance or needs of a group that are compared to a merit, but rather a single individual (Allen,

2011). Therefore, it can be hypothesised that Razan`s perception of maternity being a choice some women have to make, somewhat echoes the common meritocratic discourse, according to which, each individual carries sole responsibility for his/ her achievements and professional success.

While most of the interviewed women, regardless of their experience of encountering gender- or race-based discrimination or lack of it, Razan refuses to see maternity leave and family responsibilities as an obstacle on the career path of the successful Female researcher. According to Razan, the academic system “accounts” for these choices and leaves, therefore ensuring that both, male and female researchers have equal opportunities and can enjoy the same career growth:

“But not because, I mean but in a sense that, yeah, for six months I`m not doing any research, I`m not publishing any papers so obviously this will not... But it is taken into account by the fact when you are asked to make an end of year review of your, each person here has to make their end of year review and what they have achieved in this year, the fact that the person has been away for let`s say maternity leave or sick leave or whatever, it`s taken into account so I`m not being punished, I will not be, you know, no-one will say to me, oh but this year you`ve done nothing because you were on maternity leave, this is accepted and it`s considered, taken into account but obviously in terms of output, in terms of research, this influences my output.” (Razan)

Knights and Richards (2003), as well as other researchers, argue that present administrative academic system fails to account for women taking maternity leaves and compensate for the time they spent away from teaching and research. According to them, during the period of maternity leave, Female academics loose important professional opportunities, get outcompeted by other research teams, miss networking

events, etc. The cumulative effect of all these negative events results in underrepresentation of women among higher-paid academic positions, as well as the observed distinct pay gap existing within modern UK academia (Moorley, 2014; Droomund, 2015)

5.3.3. My gender and ethnicity have nothing to do with my work

The present study tries to understand complex interplay between different components (gender and ethnicity) in shaping experiences of academic women in the UK. However, this particular chosen layer, ethnicity, was often difficult to research and analyse, as many of the respondents denied negative or positive interplay between their ethnicity and gender at their workplace. Two hypotheses can be constructed based on these reports: (1) ethnic and gender discrimination does not exist within the UK academia; (2) modern professional women do not want to be perceived as victims and therefore deny their underprivileged position. The present study utilizes postfeminist analysis to present an account of how the Middle Eastern women interpreted their situation, and according to the conducted analysis they do not interpret their situation as discriminatory, as they draw on the concept of postfeminism as a discursive formation.

A number of interviewed academics have either directly or indirectly demonstrated that their gender (or ethnicity, or both) have nothing to do with their work. For instance, Aida and Fadia shared that their ethnicity if anything has only contributed to their career and overall success due to the fact that they were able to fill in a unique niche and offer expertise that was much needed within a given faculty:

“I was living in [x city]; I was encouraged all the time, not on the basis of being someone from the Middle East, on the basis of being, you know, a good student anyway. But, you know, coming from the Middle East was a privilege because I

was able to contribute to the department with something that they didn't have expertise in, so I suddenly became the expert in that field, and I was offered teaching on that basis because I have that kind of expertise in, you know, background and the practice based expertise." (Fadia)

As discussed above, most of the interviewed MEFAs refuse to view their experiences at the UK academe as having anything to do with gender, and on the contrary, prefer to view their "otherness" as a source of competitive advantage. Gill et al. (2016) note that such issue as gender is often "unspoken of", and the professional women rather prefer to discuss such issues as age or qualification in relation to their own career trajectory. The researchers argue that this disavows the whole notion of sexism and gender discrimination, which makes it very difficult to discuss the diverse experiences and issues encountered by the interviewed MEFAs, as it undermines the existence of the problem of gender discrimination (Gill et al., 2016). Interestingly, the interviewed MEFAs adopt the above mentioned postfeminist discourses not only to distance themselves from the issue of gender, but also from their ethnic background, as most of them clearly deny their otherness being an obstacle in their career, and instead, just like Fadia does, present and contextualize it as a key advantage when compared to other non-Middle Eastern academics.

The experiences of Fadia and Aida, as well as some other interview participants allow to better understand how Middle Eastern women choose and follow the path of integrating into the UK academic environment. One of the paths available to them is possession of rare expertise (knowledge of culture and political background) or skill (knowledge of Farsi or Arabic). Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that all sorts of existing differences (gender-based or determined by social class) tend to undergo the process of naturalization within a given society. Naturalization occurs through attaching biological

explanation to a given difference: i.e., older people are wise because they lived long and accumulated more knowledge and experience (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Naturalization occurs independently in different societies and can lead to different results. In the case of Middle Eastern women, it is logical to assume that potential employers or collaborators may assume that they have expertise and skills needed for a specific project (as the perceptions and judgements are formed only by looking at someone's name). Therefore, it can be suggested that employers often give specific job opportunities to Middle Eastern candidates, and latter can be pigeonholed into "Middle Eastern" direction of research, maybe even against their will. This assumption will be later supported by a few narratives of the researchers.

Fadia has also shared a similar experience of her origin and expertise (knowledge of Arabic and understanding of political situation in the Middle East) opening some doors for her in the UK BBC. At the same time when directly asked whether she thinks her origin or gender affect her professional experiences, Fadia replied that she does not think so. Interestingly, though, Fadia has also shared her experience of the university staff members making jokes regarding her being from Middle East, as well as her reaction to these jokes:

"... it's just that the first shock when someone start, you know, you are talking and someone says, "Sorry, what do you mean, I don't understand," you know, these kind of attitudes, if they don't understand your accent, which for me is like, what, you know. And it just seemed to be that they're just being funny, you know, literally being funny, they don't mean any offence saying that and it's their way of engaging with you but in a very dry English humour [laughs]. So I got used to it and then I started hitting back, so if someone, you know, shoot a kind of, you know, reference to my origin I just will shoot back on them, you

know, like compare it to something stupid that, you know, wherever they come from do.” (Fadia)

Although Fadia admits these jokes and remarks being perceived by her as unpleasant and offensive in the beginning of her career, she quickly adapts to perceive them as neutral: “No, because many times I just let it go and I didn’t feel, I used to feel, I’m telling you at the beginning I felt offended, and that’s why...” (Fadia). Fadia further stressed that these experiences, even though re-occurring on the regular basis were not meant to be as offensive and therefore cannot be considered an example of gender- or ethnic discrimination against her: “It might be but I never thought of being, you know, honestly, I’ve never been in a position where I felt that I’ve been discriminated on the basis of my gender.” (Fadia)

The story and behaviours of Fadia are rather interesting, but not unique among the Middle Eastern female academics who found themselves trying to integrate into the UK work environment. On one hand, Fadia completely denies role of gender or ethnicity in her professional achievements and decisions. She tries to treat the issues of gender, and particularly ethnicity as neutral as possible, and therefore ends up ignoring or not acknowledging the fact that her foreignness might have played a positive role in her career as well (i.e., invitation to work for BBC). It appears that the strategy adopted by Fadia, neutralizing gender and ethnicity helps her integrate into the UK academia, just like ignoring or laughing along with jokes of her male colleagues helps her to find her social place within a new work team.

Interestingly, while recognising the existence of gender stereotyping and structural barriers within academic environment and other spheres of life, the respondent Ghada refused to admit that there may be any sort of gender inequalities involved within her current employment place. When asked whether she considers

herself having equal promotional opportunities when compared to her male colleagues she said that they all had the same likelihood of advancing up the career ladder:

“Becoming head of department for example than any other of my colleagues? Yeah, I think I have the same chance...” (Ghada). At the same time Ghada firmly believed that academic career is highly challenging particularly for women, as they are deprived of their opportunities to become mothers:

“Okay. I think it comes from different things like in academia being a Female is very difficult from a different perspective, it’s a career which is shaped based on working hard, working hard means you cannot provision to become mother.”

(Ghada)

Ghada highlights that any woman can make a choice of having a child and maternity leave, however, within the context of the UK academia these choices are associated with a number of challenges, particularly – the issue of workload distribution among colleagues from the same department. Although, according to Ghada, teaching load can be re-distributed among the employees who continue working, this practice is not considered appropriate as it puts Female`s colleagues under pressure:

“And that is something important for the majority of women, as soon as you decide to have children if you are in any other career, you know, you get a normal maternity leave and then put your kid in a, I don’t know, perhaps a nursery and go back to work. If you are at a university there are a couple of problems in that, first you don’t get a normal maternity leave the same way that you could get outside because there is sort of a fair share of work between everybody and if somebody leave, it’s not like a company that that load would be allocated to, you know, a new person would be hired for that period etc. If you leave your load would be distributed among your colleagues, because no

one like that firstly, and your colleague would dislike you for leaving for maternity leave.” (Ghada)

Ghada further develops her argument by comparing work and maternity experiences of women in academia and private sector, highlighting the issue of pay differences and associated difficulties when trying to pay for nursery for children:

“Secondly, academia jobs are not really well paid jobs so you cannot afford to put your kid in any nursery, you know, you have to wait for, I don’t know, public nursery or something like that. So many of the Female academics when they have kids they kind of have a hard break on their academy journey just because they’ve had kids. And I think that’s one of the really main things that put Female back compared to men. So if you look on the successful academic Females many of them are single and many of them don’t have children, that’s one thing which is sad.” (Ghada)

Therefore, while the problem of career delay associated with maternity leave is acute for both, academic and private sector, Female researchers suffer most as they proportionately earn less when compared to their counterparts employed by business organizations, and therefore experience more financial problems and dependence on their partner and family (Pearson, 2014).

Hadeel, when discussing the issue of the role of her gender and ethnicity in her career progression and experience, has touched the topic of representation of men and women among higher rank jobs within the University department where she is employed:

“Mmm, I don’t know actually. If you go around you find that most people are Female. Okay, the Vice-Chancellor of the University is a male, the Deputy Vice-

Chancellor is a Female. The Head of the Business School is a Female. The Programme Convenor, here, I'm a Female. We've got four Programme Convenors, three are Female and one male. We've got loads of Female. We actually complained that we are underrepresented in terms of male in our department. So when students come in, they think it's a Female job. And X University originally was an education training college for teachers, and the teaching profession has always been associated with Females." (Hadeel)

Some of the respondents reported an opposite situation of the majority of department staff being represented by Female employees. In line with previous findings (Probert, 2005), the academic male to Female ratio depends on the research focus of the department, with more technical or STEM faculties still being dominated by male employees (Valla & Ceci, 2014).

Ibtisam voiced another common opinion about the interviewed women: yes, the differences in attitudes towards her do exist among her colleagues, and they are indeed related to them perceiving her as a foreigner. However, Ibtisam argues, these comment or perceptions merely affect her personal relationships, let alone professional career and interactions at work:

"I mean like there are some colleagues who would say, who make comments about something but it's not like that affects my career, do you see what is the difference I'm trying to make there so it's not like the Dean is trying to put me down because I'm a Middle Eastern woman, I've never experienced that, I've always been respected by my colleagues but of course there are little comments there about the Arab woman here and there that is a bit strange that you look at people and you think, what do you mean and then they realise that you are actually from there and then... But it doesn't affect me, I don't think I have

suffered from... I don't think I've felt like I was the victim of something.”

(Ibtisam)

The general message delivered by a number of respondents is that even though Middle Eastern Female academics are perceived as foreigners and do have to integrate into the male-dominanted academic environment, they do not view themselves as victims or being in an underprivileged position: “I've never felt that I'm being given more as a Female member of staff, we all are overloaded, everyone, male and Female, yeah” (Jamila).

5.3.4. I deal with sexism/ racism myself

The sub-interpretive repertoire of sexism and racism regularly re-occurred during the interview process. The responses and perceptions of Female academics regarding existence of such phenomena within the UK academia, as well as their reaction varied greatly: from full acknowledgement to complete denial. Alemdaroğlu (2015) suggests to view gender as a key determinant of one's social position and role. The respondent Durra, however, have stressed it multiple times that even though she recognises difficult position of women in academia, herself being a Female researcher has not interfered with her career:

“But I do think that being a woman in academia or in fact any workplace due to structural sexism in society is a really difficult and significant thing. I think that's definitely something that, yeah, woman have to kind of take on as a challenge actually in the workplace.” (Durra)

A relatively small proportion of the interviewed women adopted an active position regarding gender discrimination in their respective universities. One of them, Elham, was discussing a situation which emerged within the department where she is employed. Among 50 of the academic staff, there is only one Female professor. In line

with Sliwa and Johansson`s (2013) argument, Elham engaged into an activist group within the university trying to take steps and address the existing issue:

“I’m involved in a group of women who’s been talking to the administration actually about kind of trying to look more closely at this but, you know, women tend to be given higher teaching loads, higher administration loads, they’re promoted less so you find many more women lecturers and fewer women leaders and professors, and it seems to be something that’s quite endemic within the politics and political science, international relations field in particular. So that’s been something I didn’t know that I’ve learned having kind of been in this career so it’s quite challenging. There’s, you know, a set of challenges for early career researchers to do with kind of workload and unrealistic expectations by the institution about what’s possible on the one hand, and then I think there’s further challenges for career minded women and what’s going on in this discipline.” (Elham)

The key questions, which according to Elham are crucial to address are: underrepresentation of women among top ranked positions, limiting workload and overcoming structural barriers, such as unrealistic expectations. Interestingly, Sliwa and Johansson (2013) actively discuss the harmful effects of unrealistic expectations in relation to academic staff, and particularly – towards Female employees. Sliwa and Johansson (2013) further argue that the principles of meritocracy have been internalised within the modern academic institutions, and an individual experiences pressure of meeting the expectations of a particular merit. Within the situation described by Elham, women that work in departments largely represented by males experience double pressure, as they often feel as if they have to set an example and perceive themselves as representatives of their gender as a whole (Knights & Richards, 2003). Therefore,

challenges mentioned by Elham may be of psychological nature, as this situation of internalised meritocracy combined with biased ratio of male versus Female professors creates pressure which is often difficult to handle (Śliwa & Johansson, 2013).

During the analysis of the interviews it became obvious that perceptions of sexism and racism differ among the female respondents. Some of the female academics were much less likely to recognise racism and confront it as such, when compared to others. For instance, Fadia shared that once she has moved to a new work place, she has noticed her colleagues mentioning her origin and making jokes about it all the time:

“... it’s just that the first shock when someone start, you know, you are talking and someone says, “Sorry, what do you mean, I don’t understand,” you know, these kind of attitudes, if they don’t understand your accent, which for me is like, what, you know. And it just seemed to be that they’re just being funny, you know, literally being funny, they don’t mean any offence saying that and it’s their way of engaging with you but in a very dry English humour [laughs]. So I got used to it and then I started hitting back, so if someone, you know, shoot a kind of, you know, reference to my origin I just will shoot back on them, you know, like compare it to something stupid that, you know, wherever they come from do.” (Fadia)

Fadia was one of the interviewees who, even though barely acknowledging and admitting the existence of racist practices, chose to confront them on an individual basis. Similarly to the respondents interviewed by Kelan (2009), she has highlighted that the incidents were rare and were not meant as hateful or discriminatory neither against her gender, nor ethnicity. Lewis (2014) argues that this situation is very typical for professional environment, where Female employees tend to underestimate frequency and impact of gender discriminatory practices, and believe that the only way to

overcome them is adopting an individual strategy: “This orientation is part of a postfeminist climate where women`s belief that they are equal means that ongoing sources of inequality are ignored, rendered invisible and have become increasingly difficult to name” (Lewis, 2014, p. 2).

5.3.5. Masculinity and Integration: Gender equality is sorted

The issues of masculinity and dominant male norm have been widely discussed within the topic of integration of the female academics into the UK university environment. While most of the women presented the UK academe as ethnically and gender neutral environment, they still used disclaimers to highlight certain existing differences between the attitudes towards male and female colleagues. Other MEFAs, for example Aida, openly addressed existing discrepancies, such as perception of women as less ambitious and likely to question the existing order at work. The present section will discuss the masculine norm, and various approaches the interviewed MEFAs shared regarding their integration into the male-dominant environment. Masculinity and its perception in business and academic environment has been a focus of both theoretical and empirical research for a long time (Knights & Richards, 2003). Knights and Richards (2003) argue that masculinity has long been attempting to claim an entire domain of technology, as well as science to itself. It is further suggested that according to the contemporary discourse, masculinity has been linked to logic, rationality, as well as alienated from emotions and body (Corneau & Shouldice, 1991). Knights and Richards (2003) argue that this perception of masculinity has largely affected the social construction of technology and science. Both of these knowledge domains were characterised using masculine practices, while science has been traditionally associated with cold and calculated actions, aiming at conquering and mastering nature. It is argued that these perceptions and stereotypes continue to

dominate modern science, reinforcing gender stereotyping and male dominance (Knights & Richards, 2003). The present study has also encountered the discourse of masculinity and its role in science and forming female identities and behaviours.

Interestingly, in her narrative, Aida refers to masculinity and adoption of masculine trait by professional women as a way to overcome and deal with typical stereotypes surrounding Female researchers at their workplace:

“I think because as somebody advised me as, when I was starting my career, they said, “women academics never say no and they never ask questions”, so I ask questions and I always say no when I don’t want to do something, so I think I have a very masculine attitude towards my job, and because, that said there’s another interesting thing here, when I was, when I had finished my second book I wasn’t going to apply for a Professorship because I just didn’t think I was ready yet (...) so there’s an interesting way in which women also, even successful women, even women who have masculine strategies like I do, don’t consider themselves ready enough.” (Aida)

In Aida’s narrative, a common belief is that “women academics never say no and they never ask questions”, and therefore modifying woman’s behaviour and adopting masculine attitude (which according to Aida refers to asking questions and being able to tell people no), can help her achieve success at work. The respondent also implies that professional women who adopt masculine behaviour are less likely to doubt themselves as far as professional capabilities, and therefore have higher chances to advance in their career.

Similarly to Aida, a number of researchers discuss the phenomenon of masculine stereotyping and its harmful effects for women (Knights & Richards, 2003; Śliwa & Johansson, 2013). Śliwa and Johansson (2013) argue that masculine

stereotyping puts women into negative position when compared to their male counterparts, as male behaviour is often what is expected from ambitious women who want to succeed. Male behaviours include adoption of male leadership style (focus on subordination, meritocracy, etc.), and in order to fit into the modern professional world a number of women attempts to modify their own leadership style and behaviour to fit the existing stereotype. In line with Lewis` (2014) argument, understanding adaptation of conventional masculine behaviours allows to understand how modern Female professionals integrate themselves into the male dominated world. In the case of Aida, the Female researcher fights stereotypes by arming herself with a stereotypes: women generally fail to refuse unnecessary duties, therefore in order to succeed she has to learn to say “no”.

“I think it’s a quiet culture it’s again a close kind of a gender related, gender cultural things that women don’t ask for what they want the way that men ask, they won’t ask for a promotion, they don’t ask for a raise. In a company they are, in industry normally there are systems, although also asking is important but there are also systems so if you never ask you end up getting promotion and raises, etc., etc., but in academia, there is no system for that so you always have to ask for a promotion and ask for a raise, if you never ask and you are somewhere for 50 years nobody ever knock at your door and say “Do you want a promotion?” And asking for promotion is something that is really, really, really, women are less probable to ask for a promotion or raise than men.”

(Ghada)

Both Ghada and Aida consider asking questions a more masculine type of behaviour, which if adopted can bring female professional certain benefits. Their argument supports findings of Knights and Richards (2003) who also note that in

science and technology (as well as in business world), more initiative and aggressive behavioural patterns are considered masculine. The entire concept of science is attributed a number of masculine characteristics: logic-driven, aggressive, emotionless (Knights & Richards, 2003). Therefore, women who chose not to adopt and adjust to a masculine type of behaviour, put themselves into unprivileged position. Interestingly, while Aida chooses to “ask questions” and “say no” (hereby adopting a masculine position), Ghada seems to voluntarily put herself into an unprivileged position, as she also refuses to ask for promotion or behave aggressively with her colleagues to prove her point and worth. Therefore, it can be seen that the discourse of individual choice re-occurs here as well, differentially determining career projections of the two female academics.

5.4. Postfeminist Interpretive Repertoire – ‘Natural’ sexual differences

The repertoire of ‘natural’ sexual differences often dominated the discussion. A number of researchers discuss ‘natural’ sexual differences as main professional features and approaches men and women can differentially contribute to a given organization (Druskat, 1994; Buttner, 2001). ‘Natural’ sexual differences is an important repertoire that can be traced down in a number of the collected narratives and involved the interviewees interpreting differences between staff as connected to gender. For instance, Ghada shared her perception of the ‘natural’ sexual differences using an example from her corporate work past back home:

“I think that expressing your anger is something that male and female have quite different approach to it like I cry if somebody, anybody upset you and most of my male friends or colleagues shout and I think this cry and shout have the same value, if shouting, if crying is bad, shouting is equally bad, it’s the same, but it’s not on the same level of acceptance in the setting, in the, like in the society so

when you are in a meeting if you cry everybody will pity you, if you shout everybody just you know, give you respect. So it's something that I may shout these days, but it's just kind of a habit that I adopted over years of being in these male dominant, you know, environment that if I want my work to go through I know I should, and I'm upset, I want, "Why didn't you do this? You should have done this because, you know, we discussed about it, you should have done this, this way not the other way", now I know I should shout but I'm not happy with it, I prefer to stick with my nature which was like and people don't think if I cry they should be the enemy, like it's a sign of my anger, you know what I mean?" (Ghada)

Interestingly, Ghada makes an individualistic choice and "sticks to her nature" as far as demonstrating her emotions and building a professional argument at workplace. At the same time, according to the narrative, Ghada fully acknowledges the price of her choice (exclusion rather than inclusion), and expecting less attention and respect from her colleagues when compared to more aggressive masculine approach to communication and debate.

5.4.1. Female academics don't say no to academic tasks

A number of studies have demonstrated bias in workload distribution among male and female academic employees (Hult et al., 2005). Hult et al. (2005) argue that Female academics often report negative professional experience due to the fact that the faculty assigns them more administrative tasks as well as teaching hours. In line with these results, the respondent Elham reported presence of similar practices in her institution of employment:

"And, you know, the answer is that it shouldn't be that way, there should be equality etc., and sometimes the response you get is that well women take on too

much and they'll take on more on themselves or they lend, they're better at a certain type of skill set so as a result they get more administrative responsibilities within the department.” (Elham)

Hult et al. (2005) argues that situations of misbalanced workload similar to this have a number of negative consequences for the Female employees. Female academics feel overloaded with administrative and teaching tasks, and have much less time to pursue their research goals. Within the academic environment, the key path to success and moving up the career ladder is publishing one`s research. Therefore, once Female academics are deprived of their time to conduct research and write manuscripts, they are automatically robbed of their chances to succeed within the chosen career path. Apart from financial consequences of the situation described by Elham, overloading of Female academics with teaching and administrative tasks has another negative effect – psychological (Wyche & Gravis, 1992).

Researchers who fail to keep up with their peers as far as publishing and validating their competence, feel less motivated and satisfied with their job, as well as with their own professional capabilities. One of the outcomes of this widely discussed in literature is the feeling of being a charlatan – taking up spot that belongs to a more qualified candidate (Wyche & Gravis, 1992). Despite being a widely discussed notion within theoretical literature (Wyche & Gravis, 1992), none of the interview participants, except for Zainab have brought up the issue. Zainab shared: “I don`t think I was discriminated by my colleagues... Maybe it is just about me, but every time I got a contract I felt that I have to work harder than everybody else to prove that my supervisor did not make a mistake when hiring me...”. In the case of Zainab the accumulated stress has finally led to her decision of cutting on her work hours, and considering being stay-at-home mother.

According to Aida, the stereotype of women not being able of saying no to an administrative tasks originates in the ‘natural’ sexual differences. Aida argues that women and men significantly differ in their reactions and responses, as well as attitude towards authority: “... when I was starting my career, they said, “women academics never say no and they never ask questions...” (Aida).

Durra`s narrative suggests that throughout her professional career, she has been pigeonholed into researching topics that she was not particularly interested in simply because she was of Middle Eastern origin, and presumably had qualifications and skills needed to succeed within the chosen research direction. Durra has also highlighted that this practice has also something to do with her being woman, as she was presumed to be less likely to confront her supervisor and demand him/ her to change the topic:

“I think being a woman meant, made me be pigeonholed to do the sort of research I do actually, so I do stuff on refugee and migration law and I`m not saying that I`m not interested in it, of course I was, but there was a definite attitude from the people who were advising me about what research to do that I would be interested in this. And, you know, for instance white professors would say to me “why don`t you do asylum law? Why don`t you do refugee law?” and I`m sure that the reason they particularly advised me to do that is because I`m a woman of an ethnic minority so I got pigeonholed in that way and I think that`s generally sort of continued.” (Durra)

Although, Sliwa and Johansson (2013) argue that traditionally women are burdened with extra administrative responsibilities, the encountered issue might be much broader. The present study hypothesises that due to the perception of ‘natural’ sexual differences, Female academic employees are often manipulated or pigeonholed into conducting extra work or researcher they would otherwise not be interested in

doing. The present research suggests that in the case of Middle Eastern women, they are often pigeonholed into pursuing research related to their region of origin, often without them being too enthusiastic about it.

Najat has shared her experience of receiving responsibilities that are below her qualification and capacity – she was not given a module to lead when the new semester started. Najat considered herself qualified and experienced enough to lead a module, therefore, the news have upset her:

“I’m not leading a module but when the distribution of teaching happened I’ve noticed that I wasn’t given a module to lead this year, I thought that it might happen, I assumed this would happen automatically as it was my second year, but then I’ve noticed that I’m teaching but I’m not actually leading module, I’m given the responsibility of being an admissions officer which is more like an administrative role rather than a teaching role, so I did ask the programme leader...” (Najat)

Despite widespread perception of women finding it difficult to disagree with administrative decisions, Najat has initiated a process of discussion trying to obtain teaching privileges similar to those of other employees. Najat refused to express her open judgement and critical analysis of the situation, and therefore it is not clear whether the refusal to give her own model had any discriminatory roots or had only to do with the fact that she is a relatively new employee within the department. Overall, it appeared that the Female researcher perceives the entire situation as highly upsetting and unfair and attempts to initiate a dialogue with the administration to change it. She was also deliberately avoiding any mentioning of ethnic or gender discriminatory practices, similarly to some other interviewees. It seems, that although all of the respondents were told that the study will maintain the highest degree of data privacy

and anonymity, some were still afraid to openly express their opinion in an attempt to avoid their identity being disclosed and facing circumstances at their current workplace.

5.4.2. 'Natural' differences, career choice and disadvantaged position

Suraya has shared her experience of being one of a few women within the Department of Mathematics. According to her interpretation, being a woman does not reduce one's chances to become a permanent employee within the department, as Suraya personally never felt discriminated against while being interviewed for a position. At the same time any career break, including a maternity leave, puts individuals into an unprivileged position. Suraya admitted that people within the academia choosing to have a family and children are faced with a need to sacrifice some part of their potential career success. This observation is in line with an overall theoretical and empirical data concerning structural barriers within the modern academic environment (Sliwa & Johansson, 2013).

Not all of the respondents interviewed for the present study named gender and ethnicity as some of the constraints they had experienced within the UK academic environment. The respondent Aida chose to stress multiple times that the only obstacles she has encountered were of financial nature:

“Yeah, I, the obstacle of course was money, always was money when I was getting my graduate Degrees, but I took out student loans as I said, and it took something like fifteen years to pay all of it off, but I have, I did manage to do that a couple of years back, so that really was the biggest obstacle.” (Aida)

At the same time Aida on multiple occasions recognised that family, taking care of children or divorce process can be a major obstacle and time-consuming responsibility for other female academics:

“... and I don’t have to be a full-time mother so I don’t have the pressures on me that a lot of colleagues who are full-time parenting, whether as single parents or in families do...” (Aida)

5.4.3. Lack of respect for ‘natural’ female behaviours

The current study critically analysed narratives of female academics of highly diverse personal and professional backgrounds, i.e. explore their experiences within the UK and Middle Eastern context. Ghada, however recognised that the existing differences are widespread not only in her country of origin, but in the Western society as well supporting the argument by Alemdaroğlu (2015).

“... that’s the generic thing which I think but I mean maybe that, basically I think that’s sort of a frontier of pressure in this, in the current era that like we think that everything is equal, equal, in the face everything is equal, equal but in reality there are many things I think in the culture that are shaped from the male dominant culture and in the system value that are shaped by the male dominant culture and then when women enter those cultures they have to kind of adopt the culture and it feels like, I feel it’s been really, it’s still male dominant so the level of acceptance towards female behaviour, female natural behaviour is also less and less, you know”. (Ghada)

Ghada stressed that in her experience, there is less acceptance and respect for natural female behaviours (crying in the situation of high stress, relationship-focus leadership and management style, etc.). Interestingly, it takes Ghada some struggle to admit that even within her current UK workplace she may experience similar kind of attitudes and problems concerning her inclusion into academic environment because she is refusing to adopt more masculine behaviour:

“Yeah, that’s the only thing, other than that, I don’t know, I don’t see any other thing that would affect me. Again something else for example is, yeah I don’t have particularly that, maybe I have to some level but I don’t have that particular problems myself but for example confidence is different in the way that you express your confidence is quite different in male I think.” (Ghada)

Apart from discussing different examples of situations where ‘natural’ sexual differences become more pronounced, Ghada also shares her perception of roots of the existing behavioural differences:

“I think it’s in the makeup, the way that women don’t propose to men, men propose to women for wedding, it’s because of the fear of rejection, I think it’s quite psychological, like women don’t want to hear rejection don’t ask men and it’s more difficult for them. So it’s the same reason that they don’t ask for raise or for promotion.” (Ghada)

Therefore, according to Ghada’s narrative, female reluctance to take an active position within the workplace environment, and, for instance, request promotion or refuse extra teaching hours and administrative tasks can be excused by the traditional upbringing of girls within both, Western and Middle Eastern worlds.

Unlike, Ghada, a number of respondents (i.e., Aida) while also recognising existence of the ‘natural’ sexual differences, chose to adopt more aggressive masculine approach within their given workplace environments. Lewis (2014) discusses this phenomenon as a widespread characteristic of entrepreneurship women who find their way towards inclusion into the male-dominated world of business.

“There is no inequality problem but there is gender inequality. So in that sense maybe gender and equality in Turkey is, uh, I mean it’s really very crude in

Turkey and it's very explicit, here it's more hidden. So I think people stop realising that it's still an issue and because they don't realise it anymore they don't, there is no political awareness about it, actually being a feminist is almost taught as kind of an insult, you know, and people say "oh" but "oh okay that, but I'm not a feminist, don't get me wrong, I'm not a feminist", as if being a feminist is something bad. So it was very surprising for me when I came here how apolitical and depoliticised people are, yeah." (Tara)

Tara's narrative focuses on perceptions of female professionals by academic staff, and also – of ethnic minority women. She argues that as a migrant she is expected to comply with a certain type of stereotype that has been constructed on the basis of her foreignness and otherness:

"I think it's a combination of that because I think there is, I think there are different, for example when you think about your relationship with your line manager and so on there are different expectations in that person's mind about how different people should be behaving and I think this is gendered and it is ethicised, so for example as an ethnic minority woman you need to be behaving in a certain way." (Tara)

Interestingly, according to Tara, as a migrant she is not being perceived as a threat within a highly competitive white male dominated academic environment:

"Such as not questioning, you know, more submissive, ready to help all the time, always cooperative and so on. So you shouldn't really be raising your voice much, you are migrant, you know, you are a woman and so on, and I think it's not only being an ethnic minority or being a woman because I can see that white woman for example can't take, they can't have a different subject position or ethnic minority man. So I think it's more the mixture that it raises certain

expectations and I think certain kind of behaviours succeed more so if you are, if you fit to the more, for example I know people, it's like if you're an ethnic minority it doesn't mean that you can't succeed but I think you shouldn't be perceived as a threat in a way. I mean authority never likes I mean a threat to itself anyway or questioning and so on, this is something we know, so they want people who would be cooperating with them. So if you for example are a woman, you know, with a child and so on, you know, if you are fitting to that kind of what is expected of a woman to be or an ethnic minority woman to be then you can I think overcome some of the barriers easily.” (Tara)

Alemdaroğlu (2015) argues that while the dominated Western perspective views Islam and Muslim culture in general as a source of oppressive practices against women, the Middle Eastern researchers as well as scholars from other regions have demonstrated that gender discrimination is a more widespread phenomenon that cannot be attributed to a particular religion or culture. In line with the results of the previous studies (Sliwa & Johansson, 2013) gender discrimination was a re-occurring narrative during the interviews. Multiple respondents have mentioned the underprivileged role female academics are assigned within the modern UK universities.

The interviewee Elham clearly acknowledged existence of gender discrimination in her own university, as well as provided one of the reasons that are commonly believed to justify the existing gender gap:

“In practice there's a clear gap in what's possible for male colleagues and what's possible for female colleagues it would seem based on the numbers (...) Some would argue that the male colleagues are more qualified. I find that really hard to believe (...) They're getting promoted because they're better basically is the argument.” (Elham)

At the same time, the interviewee acknowledged that she finds it difficult to believe that such dramatic underrepresentation of female is due to chance:

“I don’t believe that in a department of say random number, fifty people, where ten of them are professors that only one woman is qualified to be a professor. No, I don’t believe that that’s...” (Elham)

According to one of the interviewees, Elham, academic career is challenges as it is, however women face much more challenges when compared to males:

“I think it’s challenging for everyone. I think there are particular challenges for women, you know, for example there is a very large department, not the department I’m in at the moment, although we have the same actually, we have the same in my department, in this department and another department both have staffs of between thirty-five and fifty people, one woman professor.” (Elham)

The underrepresentation of women, particularly in STEM departments has been a widely discussed problem that persists in a number of the UK, as well as other universities. A number of researchers have discussed different ways in which female academics try to cope with the situation: some, as discussed above, adapt to the expected male pattern of behaviour (being less feminine in clothing and leadership style, etc.) and try to integrate into the existing situation without challenging current status quo.

5.5. Postfeminist Interpretive Repertoire – Retreatism: Western tradition of working mothers

Another important interpretative repertoire identified within the present study concerned the role of family and combining family and work responsibilities by the MEFAAs employed within the UK academe. The repertoire is closely intertwined with

other repertoires and sub-repertoires discussed above, such as for instance, choice and not positioning oneself as a victim despite an overwhelming amount of work and family related obligations. The interviewed female academics have actively drawn on postfeminist discourse to describe and reflect on their experiences within the UK academe.

Some of the most interesting sub-repertoires included the one concerning coping with difficulties, such as choosing to have a family while maintaining active professional life; and integrating into a male-based work environment. The interviewed women have often highlighted the differences between the female and male work-related behaviour, and while some made it clear it was their choice to continue more “soft” female-like behaviour, others, like for instance Aida, have openly stated that they had to adopt a more aggressive masculine model (similar to the discussion by Wetherell et al., 2001). Aida has further shared her perception of “women academics never say no and they never ask questions” theory (discussed in a greater detail within the section below), and expressed that her success in life, and the fact that she can effectively combine family and work-related commitments is partially due to her position of a feminist. In Aida’s interpretation herself being open about her life views allowed her to immediately get back to work after giving birth, without feeling guilty; the same position, according to Aida, has also allowed her to recognise the existing situation of inequality (necessity to take care of children combined with high expectations at work), and therefore seek for professional help of a child caretaker.

Such openness and directness was rather scarce within the analysed discourses, as most of the interviewed MEFAs refused to admit any existence of structural barriers, particularly in relation to ethnicity. Interestingly, although a number of women distanced themselves from any notion of gender discrimination at work place related to maternity leave or continuation of their career afterwards (which is in line with the

findings by Gill et al., 2016), a relatively large proportions of MEFAs acknowledge existence of invisible barriers, which made choices like having a family much more difficult for female academics when compared to their male counterparts. At the same time, it is important to mention, that majority of the interviewees denied any existence of obstacles associated with their ethnic background or position of foreigners within the UK. At the same time, on multiple occasions, the interviewees chose to share that they were missing their own (as opposed to husbands` or partners`) families, and support they might have provided. At the same time, this has not been openly recognised as a disadvantaged position (when compared to the local UK colleagues) by any of the interviewed MEFAs, since it has been their free choice to move to the UK. This example illustrates how the UK academe MEFAs draw on the postfeminist discourse to reflect on their family- and work-related experiences.

5.5.1. Parental involvement in western tradition

Another important sur-repertoire that has emerged during the process of data analysis is that of the role of father, as far as helping with chores and participating in taking care of children. Some of the respondents therefore tended to stress that their husbands/ fathers were particularly supportive which had a significant positive effect on their career: "... and I was helped by the fact that my ex-husband was, was and is a fabulous father, and so he was very involved in that, so that really helped..." (Aida).

The respondent Aida has mentioned during the interview that due to the help she has received from her ex-husband and professional child-minders, she was able to take very short career breaks when having her two children. When asked how she felt about going back to work so soon after having children, the researcher replied that practical circumstances (help from the ex-husband and child-minders) as well as ideological

reasons made it easy and necessary for her to get working as soon as possible. Being a feminist, Aida noted, made her decision to continue her career much easier:

“Great, partly for two reasons, one practical, one ideological, the ideological reason is I’m a feminist and I’m, I was very happy to just take a very brief break and go back to work (...)I have had an amazing child-minder who has raised both of my kids since they were four months old and she’s a, she and her husband are both child-minders and they’ve been child-minders since they, for fifteen years, so they have far more experience of raising kids than I ever did, and they were wonderful and they lived across the street, so in a way I never felt that it was that I was abandoning my kids to a worse fate, I was sure that they were getting enormous amounts of love and good food and affection and cuddles and kisses and playtime in my child-minder’s house, and I think that that made the decision much easier to take a break to go back.” (Aida)

Ibtisam, similarly to Aida, has acknowledged the role of family helping her to raise children:

“Yeah, I think, yeah, because we don’t have family here, as I said I have a brother in Leeds and so it’s a bit far away and then we depend on each other mainly so my mother-in-law will come and help like whenever she can but it’s not easy because that’s where one misses one family.” (Ibtisam)

Ibtisam draws a distinct line between obtaining help from the UK part of the family (parents of her husband), and her own family from back home. When having to raise a child and work in the UK she feels herself slightly isolated and misses her family. Raffsndottir and Heijstra (2013) and Qi (2016) discuss the role of extended family in helping a working mother with family responsibilities and getting back on professional track. The researchers argue that conducted empirical study showed equal

distribution of work hours (approximately 60 hours per week) for both genders, women repeatedly had more home-related chores to be taken care of when compared to their husbands or partners (Raffsndottir & Heijstra, 2013).

Magda has shared her experience of discussing family plans with her partner. They both decided to equally split family-related responsibilities, to allow Magda to get back to work as soon as possible. Equal distribution of responsibilities may have also been the factor that influenced her partner and Magda to make a decision to have only one child:

“I see the links that those, you know, who have either young children or elderly parents and look after them, it’s a struggle to tick all the boxes. I personally haven’t felt it but I should also say that I did take a decision to not have more than one children, I mean I think that I felt, I mean this was something that my husband also felt that they thought, you know, it’s okay with one child sort of to manage but he didn’t want to be in the position where all he was doing was childcare and then feeling resentful about me travelling and so I think that was a compromise, but a compromise that we both felt comfortable with.”(Magda)

In this case, Magda is using an important disclaimer “a compromise that we both felt comfortable with” to highlight her position of a free choice individual, as opposed to being a victim to institutional obstacles related to gender. The interviewees felt it was important to use disclaimers throughout the parts of the interview concerning sensitive topics of ethnicity and gender, as if to re-assure the investigator that they are indeed not victims of gender oppression, but professional women who take responsibility for their own choices.

5.5.2. Balancing work and home and slowing down for children

It is argued that the most difficult part of life where the merit for academic success and home responsibilities seem to compete is raising children. There is multiple empirical evidence demonstrating that employed academic mothers and spouses experience high levels of stress, and find it increasingly difficult to meet the work-related deadlines, as well as expectations posed by the society in regards to motherhood (Sliwa & Johansson, 2013). The Female researchers who want to advance in their academic career have to constantly think about how much of their time and presence and maternal involvement is needed to satisfy growing emotional needs of their child or children (Sliwa & Johansson, 2013). This and other similar dilemmas put an extreme burden of pressure and responsibility which only adds to the existing pressure to advance within highly competitive academia. It can therefore be argued that academic woman experiences two contradicting pressures – the one to succeed within her professional field by complying with high merit standards, and another woman – to fulfil her obligations as a mother (Sliwa & Johansson, 2013).

Finding a work/ home balance was another re-occurring narrative that was commonly encountered within the respondents` answers. Most of the interviewed respondents chose to discuss the topic of combining work and home-related responsibilities and recognised its importance in their career and life decisions. Durra, one of the respondents, shared that she lives with her partner but does not have children, and in her opinion this has a major effect on her work and career:

“They (home responsibilities) don’t really. I work at home and I work at work, I just work all the time really. I don’t have children, I can imagine if I had children then that would really impact on my work, on my, yeah, work responsibilities but...” (Durra)

Interestingly, one of the respondents has mentioned that with years she learned to appreciate children taking her time and distracting her from long (although apparently enjoyable) working hours in academia:

“No, it doesn’t, it actually, I actually, the older I get I really look forward to being slowed down a bit by the kids because you know, this morning I have come to work, I’ve got into work around nine-thirty, I’m going to be here till about six or six-thirty, tomorrow I’m going to have to start teaching at nine, I have stuff to do at work till seven, I’m actually looking forward to when the kids come to mine so that I can leave at four-thirty and be with them you know, finish my work at home...” (Aida)

But once again, the female researcher has stressed that this combination has successfully worked for her due to a sequence of successful events: friendly department ran by a Female academic, divorce with her husband and him taking care of children every second week, child-minders living across the street, etc. Aida has admitted that an attempt to combine family and work in a similar way has not been as successful for some of the Female colleagues she knows.

Maternity leave and its impact on professional career also came up during the interviews, although many of the respondents did not have children. While some of the respondents recognised negative impact of leaves on female professional career, others, like Elham, who was pregnant with her first child at the time of the interview, refused to agree that a few months of interrupted work can have a long-term effect on her advancing within the UK academia:

“For my career, no. It will have some short-term effects on my work. Sadly the baby’s coming in the summer which is when I would do my research so this, going back to the kind of very stressful and difficult expectations of early career

researchers I have a very, very heavy teaching load which keeps me from doing research during the academic year because I'm so overwhelmed by students and teaching." (Elham)

It can therefore be seen that Elham recognises short-term negative effect on her work (but not career) because "sadly the baby's" will be born in summer. As it turns out, Elham, similarly to many other interviewees has a significant amount of teaching load, which basically prevents her from doing research all the year round. She sets her summers apart for focusing on her research and writing, however due to the upcoming birth of her baby she won't be able to do it:

"So the summer is the time when I really need to do research and produce publications to get my research output where it needs to be to progress in my career, so the baby's coming at that time so it's taking my research time and so I'll be back in time for teaching in the fall but taking the time that I need to do my own work. However, I will get special allowances for being on maternity leave so in the REF which is the research exercise which is how we're assessed and our research is judged every five or six years I'll probably have less outputs to have to submit because of maternity leave. So it shouldn't have any long-term impact." (Elham)

Elham, along with Najat stress that the modern UK academic system accounts for maternity leave in a way that neither their pay check for that period or performance standards or expected output suffer. However, it can be argued that even though inside Elham's department, her records after maternity leave will be adjusted to accommodate for the months she was absent, her overall competitiveness and employability in the long run will suffer. When or if she applies for a job in another university, she will have to present publications as a proof of her academic merit, and due to her maternity leave

she will not just lose three months of summer, she will lose a whole year of academic research – as her summers are the only period of time when she can conduct it.

However, special considerations and decisions are needed for academic women not only when planning their motherhood, but also all the time for the rest of their lives. Ibtisam shares her experience of finding the right balance between her work and family obligations. While still advocating for multiple roles of professional women, she admits that fulfilling these roles demands a lot of sacrifice on both fronts – at work and at home:

“It’s hard because you would have to... I mean, there are so many interesting things like for example, I get lots of new PhD students that have fascinating projects, now I have to say no, I cannot have more or I cannot do your project, I say no which is very difficult because... But I realise that if I keep saying yes, I’m not a good academic, I’m not a good mother and not a good wife either. [Laughs] So this is something that I’m really learning, I don’t have a definite answer but...” (Ibtisam)

For Ibtisam to feel satisfied with herself as a researcher, mother and wife, she has to find a balance between all three commitments. It is argued that both tangible and intangible rewards within the academic environment come from evaluations that are mostly based on scholarly productivity (i.e., number of scholarly publications per year).

“Well when the kids were younger I worked part-time so I went from not working to working one day a week, working two days a week so as they got older and started nursery I would increase my working days and I was lucky I was in that position. “ (Widad)

5.5.3. My family comes first

The researchers argue that most of the academic women are faced with dilemma: work or family (Sliwa & Johansson, 2013). While some decide that it is impossible to have both, and either begin to solely focus on career and never have children, others, like Zainab, choose to slowly start abandoning work and give their full attention to their families. Many of the academic women, however, find a compromise between the two and divide their time and energy between work and family. All of the respondents with families noted that family is their first priority: “I have, my kids are my first priority, and then it’s my job, and then it’s my friends”(Aida).

Even though family, and especially children, remain the key priority, the Female researchers note that a lot of effort and time has to be dedicated to their work, which often requires working overtime for both partners:

“... we do shopping online, it’s not easy but then we work a lot, we work long hours, we work over the weekend, sometimes we have to catch up but our priority is of course our son so we try to spend more time with him whenever we can which means we sleep less or... But I don’t think it’s easy because that’s where I believe Eastern roots comes back because I think if you are surrounded by your family members, like your parents or your sisters or your cousins, they help a lot so...” (Ibtisam)

Trotman and Greene (2003) argue that academic environment is characterised by high degree of competition, and in order to succeed one has to dedicate long hours, as well as possess strong character and ambition needed to move up the career ladder. According to Ibtisam, academic career ambition and motherhood are almost mutually excluding. The researcher argues that once she made a plan to have a child, she immediately realised that she has to give up some of her career plans and ambitions:

“... so I realise that if I want to have a child I will have to change my ambitions, my career prospects will have to change a big deal and so it was clear to me that that’s going to happen but I guess it happened also because when you have a child your priorities changes as well so my priorities are no longer just to succeed, like to have a brutal ambition, like my ambition is that now is that I am a good mother as well, I want to have...” (Ibtisam)

But while for Widad or Zainab, saying no to some of the career ambitions literally means quitting professional activity, for Ibtisam it means that she just has to give up some of her most ambitious plans (such as becoming a full professor within a short period of time):

“I want my son to be well, to be good, it’s very important for me so I would like to be, this is my motto, I would like to be good in my work, I don’t want to be behind, I always say this, I don’t want to be behind my work, I don’t want to be less performing but I’m not brutally ambitious, I don’t want to be a professor next year, if you see what I mean.” (Ibtisam)

5.5.4. Children need their mother

“Children need their mother” was another re-occurring sub-interpretive repertoire within the respondents’ narratives. Jamila, when discussing work/ home balance, has mentioned that even though her husband played an equal role in helping raising children when they were young, she still felt like there are instances when more attention from their mother is needed:

“In terms of the father, yeah, I mean I would say... I don’t know if one can say it’s like 50/50 but definitely he played an active role when the kids were small, he still plays an active role but still at the end of the day I think the kids particularly when they’re smaller, there are many times when they want their

mother, I mean no matter, with all due respect, you know, no matter how wonderful a father is, still there are certain things you feel as a mother that you should be there or you ought to be there and also you want to do, you know, you want to be there, you want to be doing things so...” (Jamila)

Apart from recognising the need of her children to get attention from her, Jamila also admitted that the quality time spent with her children is important for her as well. The researcher has noted that in her opinion, maintaining the right work/ life balance helps people improve their motivation and work performance, will focusing on one activity (i.e., work) negatively affects the end output:

“I mean in some ways I don’t believe that people are more productive if the only thing they do is work, I don’t think that’s healthy for anyone, I think it’s actually good to spend some time not working and doing something totally different. In some ways I feel I’m actually more productive being forced to spend time playing with her or, you know, doing other things, I see some of my colleagues, you know, who don’t have children who, yeah I mean working all the time but I don’t see in terms of that they’re necessarily having more of an output.”

(Magda)

Widad noted when she had children she experienced the need to stay with them and take care of them, and it was her individual choice to do so:

“Well I can’t see how, I didn’t want to put him into nursery so I know lots of female friends who have kept both but the thing that has to happen is that the child goes into nursery or one has a career and I didn’t want to do that.”

(Widad)

Despite having a financial opportunity to pay for nursery and therefore, continue her career, Widad chose to stay at home and perform her responsibilities of a mother, until children were older. Then she felt she can return to part-time academic work.

5.6. Postfeminist Interpretive Repertoire – Retreatism: Middle Eastern tradition of extended family (of origin) obligations

The interpretive repertoire of extended family obligations was re-occurring within the interviews. The interviewees shared stories of their families and family relationships that ranged from falling in line with traditional Western perceptions (Luke, 2001), as well as those that totally contradicted them.

5.6.1. Extended family obligations and expectations

The data analysed from the interviews clearly shows that expectations of the extended family played important role in professional and personal development of the interviewed MEFAs. Ibtisam, similarly to other female researchers, noted that her family insisted on her obtaining foreign education. In addition to that her family insisted that she experiences the sense of independence. As a result, she has indeed obtained higher education, and discovered the experience supported and inspired by her family liberating and inspiring:

“I think something happened that I started to appreciate my sense of independence, that I don’t fit into a collective, I mean this is not a stereotype really, it’s just that it gives you a sense of your existence as a person and that you don’t have to be what your family want you to be, you can be your own person somehow, which was liberating I think, it was interesting, it doesn’t mean that it’s not liberating in the country, I don’t want to produce a stereotype there because I think if I worked in Morocco I wouldn’t have worked in my home town, I would have worked in Casablanca or Rabat and I would have that

sense as well of independence because I would be living on my own but I think it's just a sense..." (Ibtisam)

Ibtisam characterised her family as being traditional and non-traditional at the same time. Her father highly valued and recognised the importance of education, and therefore all children regardless of gender were encouraged to study. Ibtisam, similarly to many other researchers draws upon the role of extended family and often uses various disclaimers to highlight that she has been encouraged to study and develop as a personality regardless of her gender, and so were the other children in the family. While Gill et al. (2016) highlights the use of such disclaimers within the discourses of professional female musicians, who stress that they succeed and are treated equally despite them being women, the present study argues that the interviewed MEFAs actively draw on postfeminist discourse to discuss their professional experiences and integrate the narrative concerning the role of their family in the story.

Interestingly, Gill et al. (2016) have demonstrated that professional women often imply that gender inequalities take place elsewhere, in another country. This doing disavows the whole issue of gender discrimination and therefore implies the irrelevance of it to the context they work and live in. The present study, however, has not encountered such approaches among the interviewed MEFAs, most of whom had experience of either studying or working in the Middle Eastern country. The interviewed women however never attempted to compare working conditions, or roles of families between the UK and Middle East.

5.6.2. Parent approval of work and life choices

Parental approval was a re-occurring sub-interpretive repertoire within the interview transcripts. Ibtisam was more successful in her studies when compared to her

brothers, and therefore her father made a fair decision that she deserves foreign education more.

“Like a traditional family but open, not traditional in the sense that in a way that different shades between treatment of man and woman so my father was very keen on educating all his children, women and men, girls and boys and he always says whoever deserves to be encouraged must be encouraged, whoever has the potential must do it whether it’s a girl or a boy so he was very consistent in that sense and because I excelled more than my brothers he told me, well you deserve it and you will get accepted UK university so I think... I don’t think I would have the courage to do it without his encouragement because it was a big factor in my mind to take that decision and I really am very grateful for that.”

(Ibtisam)

Therefore family encouragement and support played a crucial role in the career of Ibtisam and many other Female researchers.

“I see my other Middle Eastern friends, it doesn’t seem to be... I mean, I think to a large extent I would say yes, that I come from a traditional family where my mother was the home-maker, my father was the one who was the breadwinner so I guess I was socially conditioned so for me that’s part of my, like I guess it’s part of who I am in a sense that I do all these things with my son, maybe I work more at home than my husband but my husband does other things like other logistics of our life, like paying bills, mortgaging, doing other things and financially we are very much in the sense we share our finances so we are together” (Ibtisam)

While recognising the role of her family in encouraging her to pursue higher education, Ibtisam also admits that she has inherited some of the traditional values and

therefore, for example, does not mind spending more time taking care of home-related responsibilities when compared to her husband.

Discovering, or other understanding one's identity in relation to the country of origin was another common discourse, shared by the interviewed female academics. While some respondents stressed, that the notion of ethnical identity is artificial and they do not like being labelled as Arab or British, others expressed opinion that they can easily identify themselves with one of the ethnic backgrounds (i.e., on a basis of culture, language, shared values, etc.). However, some of the narratives were more complex, particularly of those women that had parents from different countries (i.e., mother comes from the UK, father is Iranian, or vice versa). These individuals indicated that the question of finding or defining their identity is much more complicated for them, because they spent a considerable amount of time in both cultural surroundings, and it is not easy to choose one place to identify yourself with. The most interesting and extreme case was described by Latifa, a female researcher whose father came from the UK, while her mother was of the Middle Eastern origin. Latifa has shared her experience of working in the UK and regularly visiting Middle East to see her mother's side of the family. She has mentioned that she has kept her trips almost secret from her colleagues and even friends. When asked why did she hide it she shared:

“I have no idea. I think, I wish I could explain it... I think partly because to some degree I would have to say that I experienced myself as so divided, as so, as Britain and Iran as being two such completely separate places that you would never even think to say about the other to the other.” (Latifa)

She has further metaphorically compared her inner struggle to understand her double identity with her choice of the PhD research:

“I think at some level it was that basic and I say it’s that basic because I think in some way, to give you an example I wrote my PhD, it’s not like I didn’t talk about Iran all the time at some level but not in any article, so I wrote my PhD on Simone de Beauvoir and I wrote it on bisexuality and my, the thesis in my, the argument in my thesis was that it is impossible to be bisexual. So if you look at the way in which Simone de Beauvoir as a cultural figure is constructed in biographies, in text, in discourses, it is impossible to understand her as a bisexual person. Bisexuality as a category I argued is unintelligible.” (Latifa)

Here Latifa is using an analogy of bisexuality as a way to express how one person cannot be of the UK and Middle Eastern origin at the same time (or at least cannot perceive and identify her/ himself with both), because the two regions are simply too different in social, cultural and political senses. Latifa further elaborates on her subconscious choice of the PhD research topic:

“Why am I doing a PhD on bisexuality? I think that PhD had nothing to do with sexuality, that PhD had everything to do with Iran and Britain and it was basically through another route at that time saying “this is an impossibility, it’s intelligible to come from these two places”. (Latifa)

Latifa’s example and cognitive journey to understand her identity can be arguable described as extreme and marginal, however, migrant women entering a new country to study, work or start a family do experience all these new impressions that not only shock them, but also are in contradiction with their previous set of beliefs and cultural norms they are used to.

“I think for that reason, that they seem so utterly two worlds and it just didn’t, I know it’s insane and I have deeply profoundly paid the price, although I say that now as somebody who has been able to reconcile the two, but I think at that time

and for a long time I couldn't make any points of connection between the two worlds, or at least not any points of connection that were positive.” (Latifa)

When asked if she felt like she had to make a choice:

“I think, not explicitly but I think that's right. I think not in a conscious way but I felt that you had, I had to make a choice. And also I think I felt, I mean another thing that's happened in Britain is that it's not just me, so I can tell you my story and we'll see how I've changed but it's not just me who's changed, the types of Iranian people who now come to Britain are different.” (Latifa)

Interestingly, this ambiguity and uncertainty has continued to influence Latifa's personal and work life. At one point of her career, Latifa decides to take a sabbatical and work on the topic that is of deep interest to her personally – the relationship between England and Iran, and particularly the routes of confrontation and aggression:

“I applied for a grant with the [...] Library to get the paper preserved in the archive, I mean it was a very big project with many different dimensions so it kept me really busy and occupied for this time. But all the time it's about the relationship between Britain and Iran, it's not about Britain and it's not about Iran, it's an opportunity to meet people who come from Britain and Iran, it's a possibility to work through that history, to read original documents related to the coup against Mosaddegh in 1953 which is the seminal moment when the seeds of hatred for Britain were planted in Iran, you know, it has, that archive was, had everything in it that I needed in a way.” (Latifa)

Jamila has shared her experience from the early career days in one of the UK universities. While trying to be very careful with phrasing and an overall message, Jamila mentioned that during the first years of employment she was often mistaken for a

student, as probably many of the administrative staff or employees from other departments assumed that because she is a minority-looking young woman, she cannot be a lecturer. According to Jamila, at some point these experiences and encounters have transformed into her perception of not being taken seriously:

“And then it does change I think but this thing about being taken seriously I think is also a valid thing, I think that you... Again, I don't have any evidence to prove this because I'm trying to think of specific examples but I think it is the case that you do have to prove yourself more, you have to prove that you are, you know, in terms of your... I mean, for me it's not an issue now because I'm an established academic and I've established myself through my publications and my presentations and so on.” (Jamila)

As Jamila points out, these encounters only had a negative effect early in her career, and as she professionally grew and got published, she felt that she needs less external validation in order to feel worthy and successful. Zikic and Richardson (2015) discuss the experiences of women in academia who constantly feel compared to male colleagues or feel pressure to prove that the university made a right choice hiring them. The researchers emphasize that this phenomenon has negative psychological consequences for academic women, who feel stressed and pressured to prove their professionalism and worth.

“But I think that when you're building up your career, you know, if you have the double thing of, you know, you're ethnically different and you're Female, the assumption is that... I mean I do think that you have to work harder to prove yourself, you have to be better than perhaps you would have to be.” (Jamila)

Jamila rightfully points out that these types of experiences are particularly harmful early during somebody's career, when external validation may seem like the

only way to assess one`s achievements. Interestingly, Jamila`s observations and conclusions correspond to those made by Zicic and Richardson (2015), who argue that the exercised pressure to comply with some vague stereotypical standards is particularly pronounced in the case of ethnic minority women, who end up feeling double marginalized. These women not only try to find their way to integrate into the male-dominated system, but also into new and sometimes unusual culture (Zicic & Richardson, 2015).

“No, I don’t, I don’t hide it and I know there are Iranians who would rather say, for example, rather than saying they’re Iranian they’ll say they’re Persian because there’s that kind of aspect of... Because Iran and Persia, Persia is the term that the west used for Iran for a long, Persian Empire and all that so a lot of Iranians try to disassociate themselves from current Iran by using the word Persian because they know that has more positive connotations for the west. No, not at all, in fact for me it’s the complete opposite, I use every opportunity to show that, yes, I am, you know, okay I wasn’t brought up there but I have that heritage in order to contribute to a more positive image of what it is to be Iranian because there’s so much negative propaganda in the media and everything about Iran and so on so I think it’s important for people to see that.” (Jamila)

Aida expressed an opinion that she does not like being labelled as Arab or Middle Eastern, as then there might be a big chance she will be limited in her professional opportunities as she will be pigeonholed to study the topics she has no particular interest in.

Magda discusses her experience of not being able to fit in and being foreign within her work environment. The Female researcher has adapted to the circumstances

and have stopped seeing it as a problem. Instead she decided to dedicate her efforts to solving the issues related to gender and ethnic inequality within the workplace:

“No, I mean I can’t really say that, I mean I don’t feel that I have, you know, I have friends, I have now, I have friends from different parts of the world, my husband is Jamaican so he’s not Middle Eastern, I mean I have friends from all over the world, I have friends who are professors and I have friends who have nothing to do with academia, I don’t feel... I mean there are places I don’t fit in but I don’t feel I have a choice, now I don’t feel that my problem, I feel it their problem. So you know, I don’t have to try, I don’t feel that I have to try. I mean I think that the only place I have tried and I have maybe come to a conclusion that it’s not my place is because I do feel, I do feel that I wanted, you know, again this, the possibilities that I had and the privilege that I have and, you know, being a professor, I didn’t just want to sit there and do my own thing, I decided to get involved in the union to make sure that there is more justice and more equality within the university and I felt that, you know, I had ticked all the boxes for that so I felt I can give some time to it. And I’m, you know, it’s, I’ve been doing this now, most equality diversity now for two years and two years now a chair, I’ve agreed to do it one more year, but I start to think in terms of the wider union maybe I don’t fit in because I think it is still... I am actually trying to decide whether I am going to take this on as a struggle and run for women, they have these national union kind of representations and they have some seats reserved for women, whether to run for that or next year or not and I’m sort of on the verge, part of me feels it’s a lot of struggle, and part of me feels no I want that challenge, so I haven’t yet got further with it [both laugh], yeah.” (Magda)

A number of the participants have highlighted an important role of family in their life and career choices. A common pattern emerged that families of the interviewed women often did not agree or disapproved of their decisions regarding future career plans, and this disapproval was perceived as one of the major obstacles needed to be overcome:

“So when I first said to my father that I wanted to do a Master’s degree he said he, they weren’t very happy, they said “why? We thought you were going to be a lawyer, you’ve studied law so you ought to be a lawyer” and I was surprised by that because I thought “but, you know, you are an academic and this is what you did with your life so why do you not value it?” And I suppose I rationalised it in terms of thinking well your parents always want better for you than whatever they had and so he asked me “why do you want to do that?” and then I said “because I really enjoy studying, I want to carry on studying” and he said “that’s not a good enough reason, you know, you need to have a career plan” or whatever.” (Durra)

For instance, the respondent Basma noted that she has been hiding her enrolment in the university from her immigrant family for a while fearing disapproval. Eventually the family found out about education choice:

“I think they, surprisingly well, you know, really, I’m thinking now, I mean you know, they’re conservative, they’re not religious but they’re, I would say you know, they’re conservative, so I think they, I think that I forced them really but they weren’t, you know, I was going to study law, they couldn’t really argue with that so!” (Basma)

At the same time, according to the narratives of some of the respondents, parent’s approval was perceived by Female academics as one of the motivators in their

life, particularly when it came to education and work. The respondent Durra noted that the pressure exercised by her father to make her and her sister study and work harder, allowed her to be significantly ahead of her classmates in school and realise that she is good at studying new material:

“And then I think it becomes a bit more difficult to separate exactly when I began to do things for myself rather than because my parents told me to because of course I did start to do things because I wanted to be good at them but I know that there was a lot of pressure there in terms of thinking “well this is also what your parents expect”. (Durra)

At the same time the respondents acknowledged the fact that it was an important step in their life to draw a line between what their families (communities) want them to be and what they themselves as individuals aspire for. Durra has shared her opinion that although her family (mostly father) played an important role in motivating her to study and work harder, she did not appreciate this pressure when it came to her personal life:

“I’ve done enough to please them so there are, you know, there are places where I draw the line and I think like personal life is really somewhere where you have to draw the line what you’re happy with and what you’re not.” (Durra)

On the other hand, some interviewees reported being fully supported by their female relatives regarding their family and career-related life choices. The respondent Fadia has mentioned that her family, particularly her mother, is protecting her from social pressure exercised by her home community, to get married sooner:

“Yeah, it’s kind of social kind of sayings, I think my mother was more pressured socially than me ‘cos people would always question her, they never once anyone dared to say anything to me, ‘cos they know I wouldn’t be polite about this [both

laugh], so they don't mention anything to me but they go and question my mother all the time, and my mother is strong enough to, you know, chat with that, protect me, you know like..." (Fadia)

In her narrative, Elham as well as most of the interviewed female academics addressed another important issue – the one concerning role of family in their life, education and career, as well as identifying herself as Middle Eastern. Latifa noted that her decision to change her last name to her Iranian family name has provoked an emotional reaction from her family, who apparently approved of her choice and made her feel more accepted than ever.

"Okay, maybe not very strongly because there are certain things that associate people in the Middle East, some of them are religious related and I'm not sort of a religious believer so I am... that's one point that perhaps doesn't give me a strong connection with the Middle Eastern community. The second one is I don't speak Arabic and like most of the Middle Eastern countries speak Arabic so it's kind of a non, you know, again another connected point between Middle Eastern that when you don't speak a common language with the majority perhaps you broke connection anyway." (Ghada)

It appears that support and motivation by parents and families contributed a lot to professional development of the interviewed Female researchers. Ibtisam noted that her father encouraged her to continue education abroad and has contributed to it financially. The researcher notes that in her opinion she does not come from a traditional background, and this may have also partially contributed to her family insisting on her independence and experience of living and studying abroad:

"... there was an opportunity for me to come and I had a very supportive father, my father passed away twelve years ago and he was very supportive and he

suggested that I should go and carry on with my studies in the UK, which was really impressive because I was very scared, I didn't want to, that was the first time I ever left home but he was very pushy, he said, that is an opportunity, you have to go and he actually sponsored my studies, he spent a lot of money for me to study my MA here so it's actually a combination of factors that was the right study path for me and also encouragement from my family, particularly my father..." (Ibtisam)

When discussing her parents' reaction to her academic career and success, Fadia notes that while her father was not very willing to share his feelings regarding her career, she discovered that the fact that she has published an article has really moved and impressed him and made him share with the community how proud he is of his daughter's professional success:

"... just reading one article that I've written, you know, I've written, written one for him is essential, but no my dad has always been, he likes the fact that he has, you know, his daughter that has a career so he appreciates that. You know, he doesn't say like in my face, that I know from lots of people around him that he always says that he's proud, my father." (Fadia)

5.6.3. Parental Involvement in Middle Eastern tradition

Within the context of Middle Eastern tradition, the parental involvement was two-fold. First of all, the father figure was viewed as having an important influence of life and career choices of the professional Middle Eastern women. Secondly, the role of father referred to the parental involvement of husband. For instance Yumma has mentioned that her extended family has placed some expectations on her, concerning her family responsibilities, and particularly her role as mother and wife.

“I feel like I have to comply with certain expectations... I do not have to, it's not like I ... It is more of a tradition, and of course nobody can reinforce the tradition, you know? But at the same time, I feel like my husband's family is waiting for me to slow down with my work, and instead let my husband be the sole provider... While I focus on family, home ... That sort of thing” (Yumma)

Yumma, similarly to some other respondents used a disclaimer – “this is a tradition, and it cannot be reinforced”, highlighting that it in fact has little or no effect on her life. Majority of the respondents, however, have mentioned that their partners/ husbands/ extended family exercised no pressure on their life choice, and have not pressured them to focus solely on the home-related responsibilities.

Another integral part of postfeminist discourse is retreat to home as a woman's choice (Coontz, 2006). Most of the interviewed women considered that modern academic women are fully capable of either combining motherhood with work, mostly focusing on work, or retreating home to take care of their families. While some acknowledged certain difficulties and institutional barriers encountered on the way towards combining work and family life, others denied existence of such.

Ghada agreed that there exist a number of discriminatory practices that could have been addressed on an institutional level, however her argument was that the discussed problem is relevant not only to academia, but is instead characteristic to any professional environment:

“I don't know and to be honest I think this is more generic than only academia or anywhere else, for example, I personally believe that maternity leave and paternity leave should be equal and obligatory and if all males have the same amount of leave and it was obligation they had to take it, they didn't have option to either take it or not then equality could be presented better.” (Ghada)

During the interviews a number of female researchers have brought up academic practices characteristic to Nordic countries that ensure that both partners take mandatory leaves in order to take care of a child, as opposed to only women taking maternity leave and postponing their careers while males can still continue their advancement (Husu, 2015). Ghada agreed that these practices can be helpful if implemented within the UK context.

Suraya pointed out that gender discriminatory practices can occur at different stages of professional advancement. For instance, she stressed that she has never felt discriminated against when participating in an interview for a specific academic job. At the same time, she notes, if she chooses to have a baby at a given point of time, she will be put into a disadvantaged position when compared to her male colleagues:

“I think, getting a job within the department I think is equal, I don’t think [...] I would suggest. Career progression would be harder if you take maternity leave, but I don’t have any children so this hasn’t affected me, but I think if you take maternity leave, then it’s very hard to progress in my department, and in that sense it makes it a bit harder for women to progress within it ...” (Suraya)

Ghada makes an important observation that modern day racism or discrimination against women does not occur on an individual level, but instead is incremented into the institutional rules and constructs:

“Yeah, I know that that would be, you know, I kind of know that that would be an obstacle, like having a child would be an obstacle but I think everything comes with its good or bad thing or so I admitted it but what I was trying to say is like that inequality, like the inequality gap mainly comes from the... it doesn’t come from the way the individual treats you, it comes from the design of the system which is in a way that leave, even if it’s a short leave like maternity

leave, would have a significant effect on your career, it doesn't have that significant effect on many careers but it has a significant effect on the academic career with the way that it is designed. So I don't think it's based on individual, it's not that my colleagues treat me differently really." (Ghada)

Ibtisam concludes that even though as it appears women have a free choice to make whether they want to focus on career or children, or even successfully combine those, in reality they are faced with a dichotomic decision: either do not have children and remain competitive, or have a child but come back as soon as possible and juggle home/ work responsibilities for a number of long years:

"I don't think it's very encouraging for women to have children because I have to go back to work before the end of the six months because we have a big mortgage and so my husband wouldn't be able to cope on his own, we need two salaries so I was actually, I had to go back to my job, if you see what I mean so..." (Ibtisam)

Qamar has shared her experience of being invited to teach in some higher education institutions in Gulf countries. Although she found the invitations very interesting from both professional and personal perspectives, she still had to decline them due to the fact that her children were not used to living outside the UK:

"You are established, you have a family now and the children are born, I mean they're born and grown up here, for them this is their country, number one, although they have another country, this is their number one country. So I think it's not sensible to leave your children and go, one settles for the children and one settles also for the career, once you become established, yes." (Qamar)

Urooj shares her way of ensuring the proper life/ work balance: in line with her “strategic planning” she dedicates different stages of her life first to work and then (in future) to family and having children. At the same time, when interviewed, she shares that she is caught up in a “vicious circle”, and while trying to combine both work and family life with her husband, she feels like she is failing both:

“Yeah, yeah, definitely, I have my priorities straight, I was very career driven during my first period of life, I was quite a high achiever, and whenever anybody talked to me about getting married and, you know, how the pressure is [laughs] in our culture and I would say, “Look, I want to enjoy every stage, so I want to enjoy doing a PhD, being a student, I want to enjoy then getting married and having a family,” so I now don’t see this as... I’m very clear about where my priorities lie, it’s just that I think I’m in a vicious circle at the moment because on the one hand with the commute it’s not helping me to think about having a family, but at the same time I’m going on with my career and I know that my priority is having a family [laughs] so there is a tension there.” (Urooj)

Urooj argues that a major problem faced by modern women, both non- and ethnic minority, is the fact that the society places too much pressure and expectations on them to look good, to advance in their careers and fulfil their ‘natural’ responsibilities of a mother:

“I think it’s part of a larger problem of the perception of women, which we always talk about women, you know, a woman who’s got a career, is that you are supposed to be home-maker, you’re supposed to be a good mother, a good wife, you’re supposed to look good, you’re supposed to look attractive and good and young but at the same time you’re supposed to excel in your career, work hard and you are juggling so many things and I think society has not moved in

really well, I mean of course men are very engaged now more than before, I mean my husband helps but I do feel that I'm more engaged than he is with childcare and home-making than he is, whether this is to do with me being Middle Eastern or not..." (Ibtisam)

5.7. Chapter summary

The present chapter has identified a number of interpretative repertoires recruited by the interviewed 20 MEFAs to describe and reflect on their experiences in the UK academe. The repertoires, along with the characterised sub-repertoires, suggest that in line with the argument by Dosekun (2015), postfeminism should not be viewed as sensibility which is recruited only by white upper class women in the Western world, but instead should be regarded as a transcultural notion, actively recruited by women of colour within the UK academe. The key repertoires identified within the narratives of the interviewed MEFAs were: individualism, choice and empowerment; 'natural' sexual differences; western tradition – working mothers and Middle Eastern tradition – family of origin. While the first three repertoires were commonly discussed within postfeminist literature (Lewis, 2014; Gill et al., 2016), the fourth one – Middle Eastern tradition – family of origin – to present knowledge has not been discussed within the scope of postfeminist studies focusing on inclusion of women within the professional environment. The discussed interpretative repertoires will be used within the next chapter to construct three key female identities – femininities, which will be discussed in greater detail along with the obtained examples from the interviewed MEFAs.

Chapter 6. Female identities

6.1. Introduction

The present chapter attempts to highlight the differences of experiences among academic women of the Middle Eastern origin through characterisation of the various identities. In course of the research a number of female identities have been identified among the 20 interviewed academics: the independent academic woman, the academic mother (Western traditional), and the Middle Eastern academic (Middle Eastern Traditional).

The discussed three female identities have been derived from the interpretive repertoires discussed above. One discussed identity thereby often combines more than one repertoire, which resulted in emergence of three different academic femininities as subject positions. For example, an identity of the independent academic woman was largely constructed on the basis of such repertoire as individualism, choice and empowerment. At the same time the discussed identity has also been, to a lesser extent, shaped by the two other repertoires – natural sexual differences and Middle Eastern tradition. One of the most striking examples of such identity was Aida, who consistently recruited the interpretive repertoire of individualism and choice to discuss her career path, and also acknowledged existing perceptions regarding ‘natural’ sexual differences dominating the UK academic sphere. In her interpretation, she owed her success to being able to disregard these differences, and act in contrast to the existing stereotypes concerning female behaviour. In Aida’s interpretation, this approach was her strategy to be included into the male dominant world. The third repertoire, which contributed to construction of Aida’s identity, was Middle Eastern tradition. The female academic herself negotiates her identity in a multiple of ways, depending on the situation: American, the UK citizen or Iranian. Aida uses a disclaimer, that she is not altering her

identity in order to gain benefit for herself, but instead only to challenge the way people in different environments see her:

“...one of the strategies that, whether consciously or subconsciously, I use is to negotiate my identity in different ways, I negotiate the ways in which people identify me in different ways and present myself in different ways, so, and, but not in, always in ways that benefit me, but rather in ways that sometimes could challenge people, so I say I was born in the US but I was raised in Iran, I say I lived in these different places in the US before I emigrated to the UK, I say I carry an American passport as well as an Iranian one, as well as a British one, but I very often don't say I am an Iranian or I am an American or I am a Brit...”
(Aida)

The other identified identities – that of an academic mother or traditional Middle Eastern academics, are also rather complex in nature derived from a number of interpretive repertoires discussed above. For example, academic mother identity, is constructed on the basis of such repertoires as Retreatism – both Western and Middle Eastern. Although these are the two most essential repertoires for the discussed identity, it is important to acknowledge that the women who could be identified within it, utilized other interpretive repertoires as well, not limiting themselves to family of origin obligations and expectation, and work responsibilities and retreat home (Western tradition) only.

The Middle Eastern female academic Ibtisam is a vivid example of such identity – the academic mother. Her feminine identity is constructed based on a number of repertoires, the most significant of them being retreat to home (Western tradition). The most common discourse re-occurring throughout the interview transcript is that of balancing home and family responsibilities. Although Ibtisam constantly highlights that

her family comes first, she also adds a disclaimer that since her becoming a mother, both her family and work have been affected. Although Ibtisam and other interviewed MEFAs argue that combining work and family is highly challenging for them, they still continuously draw on such postfeminist interpretive repertoire as individualism and choice. Ibtisam along with others highlight that becoming a mother was their choice, implying that both work- and family-related difficulties are merely the consequences of this choice, they as free professional women have made. Gill (2007) emphasises importance of choice and empowerment within the third wave of feminism, and Lewis (2015) highlights the role of choice within the context of organizational studies. Lewis (2015, p. 7): “Within the context of work organizations three of these postfeminist features are important – individualism, choice and empowerment, notions of ‘natural’ sexual differences and retreat to the home as a matter of choice not obligation. These three elements capture the tension between feminism (understood in terms of achievement in the public, masculine world of work) and femininity (understood in terms of feminised behaviour and domestic responsibilities in the private, feminine world of home”.

In addition to such notions as choice, empowerment and individualism, the present research argues that Middle Eastern female academics try to embody two identities – masculine and feminine. This observation is in line with that made by Lewis (2015, p. 10) concerning female entrepreneurs: “... involves performing and embodying the feminine characteristics of nurture, emotion, passivity and attractiveness alongside the masculine (individualised) traits of economic and emotional independence, assertiveness, rationality and autonomy”.

Lewis (2014) argues that postfeminism should be understood as the co-existence between modernity (feminism) and tradition (femininity). The first academic femininity

discussed in the present chapter (that of an independent academic) lean more towards the modernity side of Postfeminism, although it still have some traits of tradition. At the same time, the two remaining identities (academic mother and Middle Eastern academic) are more concerned with the tradition side of Postfeminism, although they both still have some modernity traits in them.

6.2. The independent academic woman

The independent academic woman was a common identity characterised by a number of features, and behavioural attitudes. Within the present study, the independent academic woman can be described as a woman who highly values her profession, and is ready to commit to it despite other responsibilities (partner, family). Similarly to other identities, this is a rather complex one, as even if the independent academic woman is fully committed to her work, it does not mean that she often/ always chooses work over family, or sacrifices the latter. For instance, the respondent Aida has two children and has to divide her time and attention between work and family. As an independent academic woman, Aida reported being highly satisfied with her position and choices: “I have a great life, I have made the best decisions ever to do what I’m doing and I couldn’t be happier, I love my job” (Aida). The identity of an independent academic woman was recognised in a number of narratives. This complex identity was constructed from various repertoires, such as: little or no family obligations (attachments), masculinity or femininity, Middle Eastern origin, the role of empowerment, individualism and decision-making, etc. The concepts of individualism and empowerment are particularly important to the identity of the independent academic woman. Gill et al. (2011) argue that these two notions became central to the postfeminist discourse as well as Western culture in general, and are widely discussed and depicted in media.

The discourse of family and corresponding obligations was re-occurring within the narratives of the independent academic women:

“Maybe because again I don’t have any specific attachment here so I haven’t, I’m not married, I don’t have children and my parents, as I said, live back home so it’s not that there is any personal thing that attach me here, basically it’s zero, apart from being more comfortable because I am used to the system.” (Ghada)

Ghada has thoroughly highlighted the fact that she was free of family commitments, such as taking care of children or elderly parents. This, in Ghada’s opinion, allows her to make choices and take actions that are practically impossible for her female colleagues with children or other family commitments. Blackaby et al. (2005) describes the modern academia, and particularly the career paths within it, as an environment tailored to male perspective and opportunities. Being “free”, and with no “attachments”, is therefore viewed by Ghada as a way towards succeeding within a male dominating environment.

The identity of the Independent Academic Women is complex and can be divided into two subgroups: firstly, women who empower themselves by acknowledging their ‘Otherness’, and secondly, women who seek independence and empowerment by purposefully ignore their difference.

Researchers discuss experiences of minority women within Western academia and identify a number of challenges, associated with their minority status (Trotman & Greene, 2013, Monroe et al., 2008). Monroe et al. (2008) argue that these female professionals become double marginalized due to them being women and foreign to the white male dominated academic culture. Interestingly, while analysing the identity of Ibtisam, it becomes clear that she considers her ethnicity and Middle Eastern origin as a source of empowerment:

“Um, no, I didn’t because I grow up in Morocco, I come from... I grow up, I’m very proud of my Moroccanness, my Moroccan identity, I’m very proud of being a Muslim so I never had any inferiority complex throughout, I didn’t have a problem. I think, I feel very... I mean, I felt very depressed for a long time because of the way... There’s a lot of Islamophobia, particularly after 9/11 attacks and I try to do lots of work through my teaching, through my behaviour as an Arab woman, through teaching my students, I was teaching a whole class on race and racism in Birmingham for undergrad students and I was teaching another class, a Muslim woman, so I try through my teaching to promote a complex, a more complex understanding of Arab culture, of Islamic culture, of the causes of violence and things like that.” (Ibtisam)

While being proud of her “Moroccanness”, Ibtisam shares her experience of encountering nationalism and islamophobia in the Western world. Being an independent and strong academic woman, Ibtisam chooses to find an individualist strategy to combat negative consequences of islamophobia in the university where she is employed. Similarly to narratives of other successful academic women, Ibtisam uses the notions of empowerment and individual choice to not only resist, but also address the problem. Ibtisam is using her professional experience to deliver a message to her students and colleagues, and this message aims to educate people about her region, and prevent aggression and violence. Zikic and Richardson (2015) argue that migrant minority women experience all kinds of challenges within their workplace which put them into disadvantaged position: getting used to new policies and work ethics, integrating into dominant culture. In addition to these issues, many interviewees have brought up the problem of English being their second, or even third language, and feelings of insecurity and pressure to outperform native-speaker colleagues just do demonstrate their

worthiness. However, to the knowledge of the researcher, nobody has thoroughly examined benefits which a minority ethnic background can offer an academic woman.

A number of the interviewed academic women has shared their experience, according to which being of Middle Eastern origin provided them with a number of benefits that allowed them to succeed in the Western academia. Some of these benefits were knowledge of Arabic, understanding culture and political context, etc. All of the women, who reported this or a similar experiences found their career path in researching various aspects of the Middle East politics, media, culture or business. Therefore, the discussed phenomena is not relevant to all academic women, but instead only to those who pursue career path related to their ethnical or cultural background.

At the same time, overly positive or neutral reports regarding ethnicity-related experiences within the professional environment, should be treated with caution. As discussed above, Kelan (2009) and Lewis (2014) point out that professional women often choose to ignore or hide experiences of gender inequality or discrimination, as these women believe that if they want to be perceived and treated as equal they have to ignore negative experiences and develop individual strategies of coping.

While some of the interviewed women mentioned that their origin has positively contributed to their professional growth and moving up the career ladder, Jamila has shared her experience, according to which, she was literally pigeonholed into pursuing a research topic which was of no particular interest to her:

“I ended up writing my dissertation about Iranian music but I hadn’t had any particular interest in Iranian music before then, I’m a pianist and I was trained in western classical music but I became interested in it and I also had a big interest actually before that in South American music but I think because of my, there was a kind of bit of cultural determinism and because of my cultural

background, the fact that I speak Persian I was sort of encouraged to kind of take my research in that direction.” (Jamila)

While the respondent was very careful with phrasing and expressing her attitude towards the course of the described events and the underlying reasons, it is still clear that she would rather enjoy a freedom of making her own choices, than being influenced by her ethnic backgrounds, particularly since she has highlighted that she does not identify herself as an Iranian, but rather as a British-Iranian:

“So I mean, in a sense, I could say I think of myself as kind of British Iranian but I haven’t really lived in Iran and there was a very long period when I didn’t, I went and visited once as a child and then I didn’t go back for about thirty years so my cultural connection to Iran is mainly through my family connections...” (Jamila)

Magda shared her perception of the position of Middle Eastern women within the modern UK academic environment. In line with argument of Turner (2002), the female researcher perceives modern academia as an environment dominated by white males, and even refers to it as a union, therefore implying that they (white males) exercise some extra power and control over the institutional organization: “... where I feel more sexism and in some ways also I can’t say racism but very very much controlled by white men is the union actually, it is such an unreconstructed, macho white men space...” (Magda).

As an independent academic woman, Magda discusses instances of male colleagues perceiving her as a threat and even being offensive towards her:

“I mean as an anthropologist but also as a person I’m good in picking up sort of dynamics between people and I’ve realised at one point that often what is behind

what seems to be quite arrogant demeanour is actually insecurity. Having said that I do strongly believe that there are structural issues within the education in this country and anywhere in the world, that makes it difficult for women and for Middle Eastern women, but these are linked not only to institution, they're also linked to issues around lack of confidence, lack of role models, lack of proper mentoring, yeah." (Magda)

However, the most interesting point, that Magda makes is the reaction of some other strong academic women to this highly competitive white male dominated environment. Magda suggests that due to the existing competition and overall underprivileged position of women, and particularly the ethnic minority ones, many of them adopt masculine type of behaviour, while other choose to become aggressive and highly competitive towards other Female rivals:

"And I think what is the problem with women that often women who do get to these positions then turn into like the most horrendous, they also think that the only way to survive is to use their elbows and become very much, become quite nasty against other women. I think that's a very common phenomenon and that's I think very unfortunate and I think as a woman I'm very conscious of that and I feel I don't want to..." (Magda)

This observation is in line with the criticism of Hult et al. (2005) directed at using mixed gender boards of HR committees as a solution to overcome the problem of women's underrepresentation among higher rank academic positions. The researcher argues that despite common perception that female recruiters will ensure equal opportunities for both genders, the empirical evidence demonstrates that very often female committee members instead of favouring female candidates behave hostile towards them (Hult et al., 2005; Van Der Brink et al., 2010).

As mentioned above, each of the identified femininities was an intermix of multiple interpretive repertoires. In addition, to the repertoire of individualism, choice and empowerment, the interview participants characterised as the independent academic woman, also drew on other discourses. For example, Magda, also recruited the identity of the academic mother (Western tradition). Specifically, Magda was actively drawing on her experience of juggling work and family responsibilities. It is very interesting how Magda and other interviewed Middle Eastern academics combine different features within one identity; the observed phenomenon is closed to what Lewis (2014) has described as mumpreneurs. Lewis (2014) argues that these mumpreneurs adopt identity which can be characterised as "... The location of maternal entrepreneurial femininity between liberal (masculine) feminism and femininity is connected to discourses of individualization and retreatism and constituted by qualities connected with them" (p.13). Magda`s identity is also clearly combining these two extremes; from one side it is suggested that traditionally she should choose to focus on her family and children, as something she has to do in line with "a postfeminism regime" (Lewis, 2014, p. 13). At the same time she is determined to continue with her academic career, despite the traditional approach.

Magda, when discussing her experience of juggling work and family responsibilities has brought up an important contribution of her husband who fully shared family-related responsibilities with her, and even chose to stay home with children when Magda felt ready to go back to her career:

"Well I mean I have a very supportive husband, partner, and I mean I have to say that from when I was... when initially when I went back to full-time work, I went back to full-time work with a three month old baby, commuting between London and Exeter which was hell, it was really difficult, but from when our

daughter was one year old I would actually leave her with my husband and be away for three days, so I would go on a Tuesday morning onto the train to Exeter, spend two nights there and come back on a Thursday evening, okay. “

(Magda)

The case of Magda and her husband was unique to the entire research and demonstrated the reverse switching of traditional roles: when a husband chose to sacrifice his career (Luke, 2001). This instance along with other scenarios described above demonstrates that without some extra help (husband volunteering to stay at home, childminders, extended family) it is extremely difficult for an academic woman to fulfil her responsibilities and roles of a successful professional and mother.

Apart from the “pure” identity of academic mother, the present study has also identified a more “Westernised” version of this identity, which relies on equal distribution of responsibilities inside a family. During the interviewing process various family arrangements were discussed, as the Female researchers have shared their own stories and those of their friends and colleagues. Most of the interviewed Middle Eastern who did have families stressed that the only way for them to continue productive career was dividing family-related tasks with their partners/ husbands or paying for special childcare. While most of them reported their husbands and partners actively participating in the child raising process, Magda has shared an experience of her friend as well as her overall perception of involvement of both parents into raising children when they both originate from the Middle East:

“Yeah, I think so, I think that’s... I know, I mean I think that’s difficult if they’re expected ‘cos actually, ah, there’s someone in Leeds, she actually had a conversation but she’s North African, but she was studying, she was complaining, especially if the husband is also an academic, you know, how

although they are both academics but she's the one who has to do all the childcare..." (Magda)

According to Magda this experience has extremely negative consequences for the career of her friend, as well as for many other women in the UK academia.

Therefore, Magda acknowledges that major structural barriers are still preventing women from professional growth. Magda also describes a hypothetical situation where both parents originate from Middle East:

"... and, you know, the housework and she feels it's very unfair and she feels it's really affecting her ability to produce, and I think that is, yeah, and I think particularly... I mean particularly Middle Eastern woman married to Middle Eastern man, I think that without wanting to Middle Eastern men but [both laugh], yeah, I think that might be an issue, yeah." (Magda)

When analysing the interpretive repertoires that outline the academic woman identity, it became evident that their interpretations were often centered around how they perceive and behave themselves in relation to their foreignness, or otherness. Gill et al. (2011) argues that the so-called "Muslim" migrants (whether it is a prescribed label or identity that was self-chosen) are often being discussed as key characters that threaten European or Western values, and represent otherness. For the professional women of Middle Eastern origin this means that they have to find a way to find their place within a new society. One of the options, discussed above is adopting an identity of an independent postfeminist: the individuals simply attempt to blend in, without drawing too much attention to their native culture, views, etc. An alternative approach is admitting key 'natural' differences between them, Middle Eastern academic women, and the UK majority, and embrace the consequence of always being treated as an outsider to the dominant culture.

Gill et al. (2011) further argue that Muslim migrants are often required (or rather expected) to prove that their values are no different from those of the local nationals. The researcher argues that modern legislature and social pressure puts migrants into an unprivileged position, where the latter feel obliged or pressured to demonstrate their loyalty to Western values in order to “earn” citizenship and acceptance. At the same time, non-migrant citizens find it appropriate to police various hurdles on the way of the immigrants` integration (Gill et al., 2011).

Latifa, for instance discussed how her family was opposed to her mother marrying a UK citizen at first, but then after she did marry him, established a very warm and close relationship with him and often hosted them both:

“And we moved to Iran very soon after that and my father has a very, very close, had, my grandfather’s dead now but had a very, very close relationship with my Iranian family and in fact considered my mother’s parents to be the closest people to him in his life, far closer than his own parents. And then so I grew up in Iran and then...” (Latifa)

Changing her last name for an Iranian family name was another experience described by Latifa as a way to merge with her origin and Iranian family:

“I applied for a grant with the [...] Library to get the paper preserved in the archive, I mean it was a very big project with many different dimensions so it kept me really busy and occupied for this time. But all the time it’s about the relationship between Britain and Iran, it’s not about Britain and it’s not about Iran, it’s an opportunity to meet people who come from Britain and Iran, it’s a possibility to work through that history, to read original documents related to the coup against Mosaddegh in 1953 which is the seminal moment when the seeds

of hatred for Britain were planted in Iran, you know, it has, that archive was, had everything in it that I needed in a way.”(Latifa)

Latifa has initiated a life-long quest to discover, or rather understand her identity, and in order to do that she decided to find more about relationship between two countries that she associated herself with: the UK and Iran. The quest to learn more about national history and traditions also led to her becoming more close with her Iranian family and an established feeling of acceptance and understanding.

As she expressed in her interview, the Latifa felt like an outsider in the UK for the most of her life.

“it’s a really bad thing to say but to feel free in that way, to feel at home is completely changed world. But it wasn’t like that when I came here then, I was very isolated in this kind of like ridiculous school that I went to and I mean a really seminal moment for me was the Falklands War, the moment the Falklands War, the revolution had happened in Iran, there was Iraq War going on in Iran and in this school we never watched the news, we never talked about it, nobody ever cared about it, Falklands War happened “oh Britain, oh there’s a war, oh let’s watch the news”...” (Latifa)

Latifa shares an experience, according to which her perception of herself or other is shaped by cultural norms and even media practice within the UK: the fact that the coverage of foreign news, particularly those occurring in her home country, is so disproportionately small when compared to that of the news concerning the UK politics, contributes to her feeling isolated and alone:

“... and at that moment I knew, I mean at that moment I’ve always had very, very ambivalent feelings towards England but real sense of hatred for ignorance

and their insularity and the parochialness of it. So it was a different world, Thatcher, Falklands War, England, it's hard to imagine now what it was like but that just kind of stayed on with me right up until I was very much older.”

(Latifa)

The childhood experience and perception of social ignorance has for a long time contributed to Latifa's not feeling at home and instead feeling as a foreigner. Johansson and Sliwa (2013) argue that foreignness can be viewed as a quantitative trait, in the sense that some people experience it more than the others. In the case of Latifa, it can be argued that she experienced the UK as somewhat of an alien culture and this personal reaction shaped her entire life, from youth to professional career:

“So the isolation that I already had through school and through not speaking was compounded by an intellectual isolation where I couldn't, I'm just not going to be a black feminist and that was, so I never felt like I could find a space in that intellectual work. Now, now I would look back and say possibly you could have done, you could have been braver but because I had all of those other personal factors in the mix it was impossible for me to do the intellectual, to have the intellectual courage which I think I've got now. So part of, one reason for taking a name is to be identified, is to have a flag to say “I'm not English” and unfortunately I have to express that for you in ways that are, fit into this culture...” (Latifa)

Latifa argues that her situation and particularly the quest for her real identity has lasted too long and resulted in a number of “mistakes” and missed professional and intellectual opportunities. During the interview, she often expressed her regret over decisions or actions she could have taken if she had more “intellectual courage” to admit her foreignness. At the same time, from an alternative point of view, it can be

argued that the life-long quest has inspired some of her research works, and therefore largely contributed to Latifa`s own professional development as well as body of knowledge in general. However, for Latifa, the topic of identity is very sensitive and concerns a number of negative experiences, which may be one of the reasons why she undermines her successes and contributions to research in general.

Interestingly, Latifa compares her own journey with that of another minority woman also employed within the UK academia. While some interviewees (i.e., Elham) perceive foreignness or being a woman in a male-dominant culture as something potentially harmful to their integration, acceptance or professional growth, Latifa finds a much deeper and less practical implication of being an outsider.

Johansson and Sliwa (2013) discuss different degrees of foreignness and corresponding applications of that: “One mediating factor of the experienced foreignness which emerges in the accounts is cultural distance, whereby a felt cultural proximity – defined in terms of food and drink, the climate and patterns of interaction – between the UK and the country of origin contributes to a lessened experience of foreignness”. In the situation of Latifa, it is indeed the degree of difference between the UK and her Middle Eastern country of origin that contributes the emerging feeling of ambivalence and confusion regarding her identity.

At the same time, Latifa acknowledges that experiences of women-outsiders differ significantly and depend on personal choices. She discusses the experience of another minority woman, also from an academic background, who turned her experience of foreignness and being a woman in a male-dominant environment into her quest for equality rights and acceptance:

“And she has many experiences of racism and she can give you lots of experiences of institutional racism towards her. She can, she’s been hugely

active in a very good way in helping women particularly and but especially black women in all kinds of, so, you know, she's just very productive, she does very interesting work and so on." (Latifa)

While comparing the two experience, one of her own and that of a Female-activist, Latifa reveals her own perception of the existing differences: while the life story of a Female-academic is very straightforward and presents an evolving journey, the path of Latifa is more cantered around self-discovery and understanding of her origin:

"But I often compare us and I think our stories are quite different and my story, when you have a story like mine you don't go through life in stages, the level of discrimination or whatever is so profound it shapes a whole life, you know, you don't speak the right intellectual language, you don't have a coherent sense of where you come from, it is not sexy to be foreign, it's not exotic, it's awful, you know, it bleeds basically and you make a mess of everything, you write the wrong PhD, you get in the wrong area, you marry the wrong person, that is the story in some ways, that is how I see that story. And so I think if there is a sense in which how it's affected me they're not really two parts, I was just lucky to have come out this way in the end but it's one..." (Latifa)

Johansson and Sliwa (2013) argue that foreignness is often used as a sort of metrics system applied to judge deviation from "normal" behaviour or culture – the ones of minority. At the same time, the researchers note that foreignness can also be used as a resource of perceived differences that can be exploited for personal or professional purposes. For instance, Aida argues that her foreignness (knowledge of Arabic, culture, habits, connections in the Middle East) served her as a source of a sort of a competitive advantage as they opened more opportunities in the research sphere. Interestingly, Latifa refuses to see her foreignness as an advantage and instead views it,

or rather a life-long quest associated with it, as a sort of disadvantage that led to a number of poor professional (“wrong PhD”) and personal (“wrong marriage”) choices.

“So I think basically for me, another thing I should say is nearly all my work, every single academic piece I’ve worked is anti-identity, anti-identity, anti-identity politics against those kinds of things because I think things are so complicated that to reduce them in that way is just, it’s a violation in some way. But I see that many people benefit greatly on both sides of the colour line from identity politics.” (Latifa)

It can be concluded that the story of Latifa represents some sort of not even double, but rather triple marginalisation. Being an ethnic minority woman in white male dominated UK academic environment, she also finds it difficult or rather impossible to relate to the experiences of other ethnic minority women. Therefore, she further isolates herself in her anti-identity quest. At the same time, Latifa highlights that even though her key focus was finding her identity and researching the complex relationship between the UK and her country of origin, she completely recognises the existing institutional barriers and discriminative practices existing within the academic environment:

“I really do think that the politics of race, ethnicity, feminism are really, really important. I do think there are absolutely structural and institutional discriminations against people who are black, people who don’t come from the UK, people whose first language is not English and so on, women, childbearing, I absolutely think those things exist so it’s not for a minute that I don’t think those things exist.” (Latifa)

Tara’s experience is diametrically different from Latifa’s narrative. First of all, very early in her life Tara has made a decision not to identify herself with a country, but rather with a culture or socio-political norms and democratic values. Tara also openly

accepts that she will be perceived as Turkish by people in the UK and this has little to do with how she herself identifies her:

“Well I mean I would presume as Turkish, even if I don’t identify myself as Turkish they would perceive me as Turkish and there is nothing you can do about it really.” (Tara)

The researcher also recognises that perception of people surrounding her are often based on her country of origin, and though being careful in phrasing and demonstrated attitude expresses slight dissatisfaction with “being placed in that box” due to the fact that she originates from Turkey:

“Well I mean it would be just implicit anyway, you know, people don’t come to you and say “oh you are Turkish” or something but you could sense that their perception of you is based on your national origin. Well I mean this is just how it is and there is nothing you can change it and sometimes people will think, you know, like they would think that “oh we have diverse people here, for example [Tara] is Turkish” and so on, so you would, you see also that, you know, in people’s mind actually you are in this box.” (Tara)

Tara further argues for importance of feminism and understanding the role of gender and ethnicity in exploring experiences of female ethnic minority researchers in the context of the UK academia:

“And I would identify, I would identify myself as an ethnic minority academic as well because I mean I am experiencing the challenges of it, I mean being I’m an ethnic minority in Britain, you know, and I’m an ethnic minority in my workplace and I experience this. So feminism is something, you know, maybe closer to how I see myself but ethnic minority thing it is imposed from outside

but at the same time I think it's important politically for me to have it as my identity. And, you know, some people would say I'm British, I wouldn't say I am British, you know, I'm an ethnic minority so if I say I'm British I'm ethnic minority British but I wouldn't say I'm British. And I think it's, politically it's important I think to recognise that you are an ethnic minority." (Tara)

While an independent academic woman positions herself firmly, and sometimes aggressively, often in opposition to the established regime, or other women who try to blend in.

Fadia is another Middle Eastern academic employed in the UK who best fits the identity of the independent academic woman. In the case of Fadia, such interpretive repertoire as individualism, choice and empowerment was the most influential parts of the identity construct. Fadia has actively highlighted that she has made a choice of focusing on her career as opposed on building a family, and that neither her gender, nor ethnicity have anything to do with her career and professional trajectory. To the contrary, as discussed by Gill et al. (2016) the female academic has highlighted on multiple occasions that she does not find the topic of family sensitive, and that if anything her ethnic origin has presented her with an advantaged when compared to other women, specifically the UK ones:

"... personally I don't mind at all. No, I don't have a family [laughs], not married, I don't have kids or..." (Fadia)

During the interview, and when family and work responsibilities were discussed, it was clear that the interpretative repertoire of individualism, choice and empowerment strongly shapes Fadia's identity. Throughout her narrative, Fadia makes it clear that she views herself in an advantageous position when compared to her female colleagues with families. The academic highlights that she sees children being a more difficult

responsibility to cope with than work. Although she does not directly state this, she implies that children and having a family in general would be a great obstacle to her career, and this is where the identity of the independent academic woman emerges:

“See that would be, I think having a family is more difficult than work [laughs] in a sense that, you know, we can schedule work in a way, but you can’t schedule family commitments in a sense that if you have a child and they’ve got sick, there are things that you would have agreed with your friends to do it and then something might happen, your kids fell in the school or whatever and then they just went out of the window, I know all of this because I have so many friends with children and I know exactly how difficult it is to actually run a normal life with friends, especially when you have young kids, and I’m okay with it, and I assume my friends later on if, you know, if I have children they should be okay with it because I’m okay with [laughs] their own hiccups and I totally.” (Fadia)

6.3. The Academic mother - Western traditional

Ibtisam, along with some other female academics has discussed the battle she is continuing every day – a battle to find balance between her work and family responsibilities. The respondent has highlighted that since she got married and had a child, her professional life has changed significantly as well: “Oh yes, definitely, I mean having children does have a big impact on career ambitions” (Ibtisam). Hewlett and Luce (2005) discuss the key consequence of professional women trying to juggle their work and family responsibilities as feeling more stressed and tired when compared to their male colleagues. On the other hand, apart from major physical effect, the academic mother also experiences some serious psychological challenges, such as constant feeling of guilt (Hewlett & Luce, 2005):

“I mean I used to travel a lot but now I can’t, like I’m invited to go to New York in October for a conference and I’m rethinking it because in January I went to Tokyo for a conference and I had, it was a week without seeing my son and it was very difficult so another week not to see him is very hard so it’s a kind of... I mean, there are other women who don’t have these issues, they just travel because my son will be with his dad, he will be very well looked after but I just feel like I cannot spend more than a week not seeing him...” (Ibtisam)

Hull et al. (2005) argues that apart from worsening psychological well-being, women who have to constantly combine and juggle multiple responsibility may experience other consequences, such as low overall satisfaction with their job. The permanent perception that a woman does not give her profession or family enough time, gradually accumulates and may negatively reflect on their job performance through low level of motivation, as well as missed opportunities (Hull et al., 2005). Ibtisam continues:

“... so sometimes I say no, so this year I said no to a few things which would be very good for my career and also in terms of workload, like before having Samir I used to publish more, now it’s responsibilities but I talk to... I mean, this is very important, I talk to mothers of different nationalities, European, Asian, African and they say the same thing, I mean it’s not easy to be a mother and to have the same level of career progress because your career go a little bit flat and then hopefully it will pick up. But I’m keeping the balance.” (Ibtisam)

Ibtisam shares her experience of juggling numerous responsibilities, as well as the eventual outcomes for her family and professional lives. As a mother, she often ends up feeling guilty for “abandoning” her son, even though, she understands it perfectly well, her husband is willing to and takes good care of their only child. Despite this,

accumulating feeling of guilt makes Ibtisam take decisions that negatively affect her career growth, as she has to cut down the number of hours dedicated to research and miss some professional trips that could help her establish useful connections.

Interestingly, Ibtisam, highlights the fact that the experienced challenges have little to do with her nationality, as according to her narrative, her British female colleagues and friends struggle with the same kinds of issues. Śliwa and Johansson (2013), however, argue that the experiences of local women and the ones who have immigrated are totally different. Local women often have their family members living close by (mother, sisters, aunts), who are often willing to help with some of their family responsibilities and can babysit if there is a need for it (Śliwa & Johansson, 2013).

Arguably, an attempt by Ibtisam to describe her situation as similar (and not more difficult) than those of the UK-native women, is very alike to the scenario described by Kelan (2009) and discussed by Lewis (2014), when professional women try to ignore existing gender inequalities, or at least characterise them as rare and not having any effect on their normal career lives. This can be viewed as an integral part of the postfeminist concept, where professional women deliberately ignore existing inequalities or design individual strategies to combat them on their own (Lewis, 2014).

“... that’s life isn’t it, I mean you can’t, you can’t have everything so... But I don’t, for me personally, I see a lot of academics, a lot of female academics who make the decision not to have children or they don’t have children because it’s never the right time and then it gets too late or whatever and for me personally I still would rather, you know, have the family and be stressed out and not have time than not to have that. I also see many Female academics in my field who have been able to progress high, you know become promoted because they’ve had more time to get the publications, etcetera, etcetera. I mean, you know, I

have a fair number of publications but I could have been much more productive if I hadn't been putting the time into the family so I don't regret that personally at all, I'd rather be, I'd rather have my family and okay, so I'm not a professor yet, that doesn't matter but I do see this is a real, this isn't so much about middle-eastern academics or Female, I think it's a general thing about Female academics." (Jamila)

However, according to Nahas (1999), despite common perception, academic job is characterised by high level of competitiveness and stress and requires researchers to dedicate their full time an effort in order to succeed. Therefore, even though Nahas does enjoy a certain degree of flexibility when planning her research versus teaching activities, she still has to work over 40 hours per week in order to stay competitive and productive within her field.

Qamar, although highlighting the role of tradition, extended family and her Middle Eastern heritage, more complies with the Western tradition of the academic mother, than the Traditional Middle Eastern Academic. The academic draws on such discourses as juggling home and work responsibilities, parental involvement, career choice and disadvantaged position of women. According to Qamar, the only way for her to have a career in the UK academe was to make a number of sacrifices, which in turn strongly affected her family.

"For example, I didn't have a social life, I didn't go out like some people would do, I stayed like three years without going anywhere, I did just work. When my children were very young I was giving them some time and giving the rest of the time to my research and teaching and everything. I managed to steal hours from the day, like when people are sleeping in the morning I would wake up at four to do some work, when I went to the office I would have done half a day already,

you know, because then I know that in the early hours of the evening I have children to look after, so I made, they are the kind of sacrifices I made, I didn't go out to, I don't know what kind of things people do, going out shopping, socialising, and to be honest, as a foreigner I, it was easier for me because I had no family here to take my time, you see, that's another sacrifice, and I did see my family like two weeks in a year, that's another sacrifice, you understand?"

(Qamar)

Along with other complex identities identified by the present research, that of Qamar is based on a number of interpretative repertoires, also including the one of her gender and ethnicity having nothing to do with career, etc. The researcher has highlighted a number of times throughout the interview, that she views her origin as an advantage, and not as a drawback when it comes to her personal life and professional career:

"... but before I became British I was Algerian so I am still Algerian and I am British and I respect the fact that I am a British person, I can see the privileges that I get for being British, but I also see the privileges I get for being Algerian, so this duality of passport, of cultures, really gives you so many advantages basically" (Qamar)

Here also the duality of tradition versus modernity can be observed. Throughout her narrative Qamar highlights importance of extended family in her life, and her obligations in front of them. At the same time she actively recruits postfeminist discourse of individualism, choice and denial of gender discrimination to eliminate any possibility of her being perceived as disadvantaged.

6.4. The Traditional Middle Eastern Academic

Both identities, The academic Mother and The traditional Middle Eastern academic identities are very complex in their nature, and are perceived within the Western society through a prism of stereotypes and old beliefs. Gill et al. (2011) argue that Muslim migrant families (i.e., families from Turkey) are perceived as ones having incredibly strong family ties, traditional patriarchal structures and a set of responsibilities and expectations that differ from those of the Western families. These perceptions, according to Gills et al. (2011) create an exaggerated dichotomy, according to which, the Western society is considered democratic, modern and progressive, with focus on equal rights and personal freedom, while “Muslim” world is seen as traditional, full of inequalities, and characterised by declined economic opportunities. Another key point of the discussion is that many Western non-migrant citizens perceive “Muslim” migrant women as victims of oppression (by family or society) and gender discrimination. Gill et al. (2011) note that Western media often portrays “Muslim” women who managed to obtain higher education as a minority survivors and fighters for their rights. It is important to understand that gender inequality practices exist in the Middle East, however these perceptions are constructed without even considering an individual situation of a given Middle Eastern woman.

During the course of interview, many of the Middle Eastern Female academics addressed the issue of their family and family relationships in relation to their choices and career, and family-related decisions. Gill et al. (2011, p. 233) note: “... the stereotype fixes migrant women to the figure of victim of gendered oppression: this gendered oppression is explained as a consequence of cultural or religious aspects”. As pointed out by Magda: “when you speak about cultural norms I think you have to be very careful to not generalise about Middle Eastern cultural norms where gender is concerned...”. While the prevailing stereotypes tend to homogenize family and gender

relationships within the Middle Eastern families, and an overall dominating role of “Muslim” culture in it, a number of respondents have contributed towards building a picture which is much more diverse and complex.

Urooj, on the other hand discussed a somewhat Western stereotypical vision of a Middle Eastern family: her husband`s family continuously pressure her to dedicate more time and effort to her husband and family-related responsibilities:

“That’s a discussion we had, and I, sometimes I just feel I was so overwhelmed that I thought, you know, I’ve never said, “I’ll give up,” but it is the pressure particularly from the family in Egypt, like every time I meet his family, “Are you still in Manchester, are you still in Manchester?” and it’s like, it’s rather than feeling how much I’m putting effort into actually going back and forth, you know, in order to maintain the family, but keep my work, I’ve been seen as this, you know, not bad wife but, you know, the wife who’s always going to Manchester and leaving her husband behind, which adds another layer of guilt again which because, you know, on the one hand you feel you’re sacrificing [laughs] and the other hand you’re still accused of not being good enough, despite all what you’re trying to put into. So we have that discussion and I think I made it very clear to him that from a financial perspective it’s, you know, I don’t think it is possible for me not to work, even though for a large part of my salary goes into the commute, but still I am, you know, having a salary makes me a bit more self-sustained.” (Urooj)

Urooj argues that professional activity gives her an important feeling of self-fulfilment, which is crucial for her self-efficacy and motivation. While she herself admits how important the work is to her, she notes that due to a number of considerations, when time comes for her to become a mother she will abandon work and

focus solely on her family obligations. Arguably, her husband's family plays a certain role in affecting this decision:

“, but there is also the element of self-fulfilment, that I've been always quite an achiever at work, and you know, staying at home I'm more than happy to stay at home, you know, if I become a mum, so I'm... if it's about priorities, family for me immediately comes first, it's not something I'm going to think about twice, but so long as it's not, you know, I don't have to... at the moment we don't have kids, I don't have some, you know, the responsibility to be at home with the kids, I think I could try work out, you know, my career, until I have to make that trade-off.” (Urooj)

Urooj shares her experience of trying to combine work and family life as well as how she attempts to plan future motherhood. According to the researcher, her Middle Eastern identity puts extra pressure on her, as her husband and his family (according to her impression) make two assumptions about her: (1) being an academic she is more flexible and in control of her free and work time; (2) being a wife she has to be able to sacrifice her work in order to be able to fulfil the responsibilities of a wife and a future mother:

“It's not... well this is again one of the dilemmas of being Middle Eastern because as you might know it's always... well it's sort of the trade-off is put at the wives end, if you want to work you're going to have to make that sacrifice and because... well there are two layers of it, one is the idea that I'm an academic and I have supposedly a more flexible schedule, he's a doctor so he's got nine to five, or maybe shifts nine to nine, so it's better to be living where he works, whilst I have a more flexible schedule so I can sort of work things out easier. And the other layer is the idea of again the cultural dimension where

okay, if you're the wife, you're supposed to be where your husband works and if you want to work good for you, but then you're going to have to make that sacrifice of commuting, so that's another dimension of being, you know..."

(Urooj)

Urooj shares her prospect plans, according to which, once she is ready to have children with her husband, she will sacrifice (at least partially) her career.

"No, the family [sighs] was pressuring me, but I'm quite, although I'm really vulnerable I'm quite a strong personality, so [laughs] I don't buy into pressure, either from my family or from his family. But it does... the pressure, so I don't buy into the pressure it's something I want, so regardless of whether they're pressuring me into, or asking me about, "Why don't you have kids, why don't you have kids, you've been married for six years, why haven't you had kids?" that kind of, or I say that, "Well," or it's something I want, regardless of whether they're pressuring me or not but I'm immune [both laugh]. I've been immune to the marriage pressure, and I think I'm immune from the pressuring, the kids pressure as well." (Urooj)

The way Urooj and other Female researchers present their possibilities to combine work and family or instead choose to focus solely on one or another, may seem like the widely discussed opportunity of women to retreat to home due to their choice and not obligation (Lewis, 2014), however deeper analysis of the discourses suggests that this choice is never an exercise of the free will of a woman. It appears that there exists a complex system of external and internal factors that pressure and push woman towards a certain decision: opinion of husband and family, negative effect of maternity leave on career prospects, low pay that is insufficient to ensure proper childcare, etc.

Widad argues that full gender equality and free choice won't be achieved "... until men start giving birth to children...".

Basma's identity can be best described as Traditional Middle Eastern Academic, and although it actively recruits individualism, choice and denial of gender discrimination interpretative repertoire, it is also largely based on such sub-interpretive repertoire as parent's approval.

"I mean they're both, they're both sort of very high, high achievers and I, they, so I mean obviously I was only eighteen, you know, so, that's very young in Middle East, you know, in an Arab family, it's not like being an adult or anything, yeah, so it was definitely guided, yeah, but I'm very glad I did law, I found that I was." (Basma)

At the same time, while highlighting how important parent's opinion was for her career choice and academic performance, Basma highlights that most of the decisions she made were based on her choice, and her practicality. The example of Basma therefore clearly demonstrates how postfeminism can be viewed as an intersection of traditional approach (e.g., role of family) and modernity (individual choice, empowerment, etc.). Interestingly, while Basma is open about the role of her parents and even discusses some pressure that was exercised on her when her family decided she is too dedicated to her academic career, she still denies it had any negative effect on her career:

"I needed to be in the library and my dad was saying 'well, you know, I have to travel a lot on business and your mother's here on her own and it's not fair' and using this kind of blackmail, emotional, you know, pressure, but they didn't force me, you know, they still, they still supported me and they still supported me financially so they, so they argued but they still let me do it, yeah." (Basma)

Despite this disclaimer the topic of traditional Middle Eastern family is re-appearing throughout Basma`s narrative again and again, as she discusses the arising conflict between her traditional Lebanese upbringing and values she was used to at home when living with her mother and father, and new impressions, views and values she has encountered when studying in the UK, and later during her career as an academic:

“Because I just wanted to breathe, you know, I just didn’t want them, you know it was just I was responsible for myself, cooking for myself, going out, meeting, you know, talking to whoever I wanted, you know, I had access to all these friends that they didn’t have to approve of, you know, I could hang out and it was, and these, and this, you know, relationships with people was part of the whole of the kind of intellectual freedom that I was gaining as well, through study, you know, I was, the two things went together, you know, so, and Kent in those days was a very, very radical Law School, it still is, the Law School, so, you know, it was, it was an emancipation, a political emancipation and a personal emancipation, I thought ‘God, I’m not ready to go back to my conservative mum and dad’, you know, Lebanese mum and dad telling me what to do every day...” (Basma)

Hadeel also discusses the role of her family in her making her professional choices, forming values and later – constructing her identity as an Egyptian, and not just Arab, or Middle Eastern.

“Of course, because I didn't have, I mean, I still had kind of guidance of what was, you know, what was okay, what wasn't, and since my family's behaviours were complying with the culture, then I was just doing what, you know, there was no dissonance, there was no separation between what I was doing and the

culture I moved into, everything was in harmony, everything was comfortable, so it didn't..." (Hadeel)

Similarly to most of the interviewed female academics, Hadeel emphasises that her family was rather liberal, implying that her decisions to continue education and become an academic abroad were always supported by her family. This disclaimer, frequently used by most of the interview participants is somewhat similar to the one used by female academics or other professional women (Gill, 2016) who emphasise that their gender has never been a subject of discrimination or unfair treatment within the workplace. In a similar manner, the Middle Eastern women try to emphasise that despite possible perceptions of the Westerners regarding a traditional Middle Eastern family, they were never limited, but instead – encouraged in their pursuit of education and professional career.

Some of the experiences, discussed by interviewees (i.e., the one of Magda) barely fit within the traditional Western perception of Middle Eastern families and their role in woman`s personal and professional life. Klesse (2007) argues that the researchers have to account for the fact that family relations just like any social aspect modernise, and therefore experiences of migrant women should not be viewed solely from the perspective of old traditional approaches.

6.5. Chapter summary

The present chapter has discussed the three identified femininities – the independent academic woman, the academic mother – Western tradition, and the traditional Middle Eastern academic. As demonstrated above, all of the identities are composed of multiple interpretative repertoires characterised within the Chapter 5: individualism, choice and empowerment, natural sexual differences, western tradition – working mothers, and Middle Eastern tradition – family of origin. All of the identified

femininities in line with argument by Lewis (2014) can be viewed as a complex combination of tradition and modernity, including that of the traditional Middle Eastern academic. The figure below illustrates such combination and a process of identity construction adopted within the present work (Figure 5):

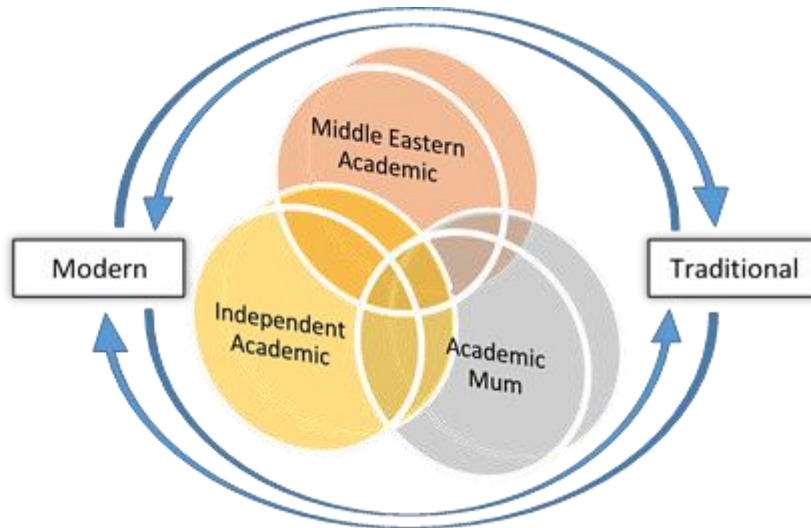


Figure 5. Construction of MEFAs academic identities

The present work considers the Independent academic woman the identity which utilises most of the modern repertoires, among the three identified, and draws mostly on such resources as choice, individualism and empowerment. At the same time, the remaining two identities – the academic mother (Western tradition) and the Traditional Middle Eastern Academic focus more on traditional values (feminine side), such as role of extended family, taking care of family responsibilities, juggling work and home commitments, etc.

Chapter 7. Discussion and conclusions

In what follows, the contributions of this thesis will be outlined, organised according to the research questions in the first chapter.

7.1. Research Question 1: Appropriation of postfeminist discourses by Middle Eastern Female Academics

According to the results of the present study, Middle Eastern women frequently draw upon postulates of postfeminism to explain their experiences within the predominantly white UK academia. As the analysis has demonstrated, the respondents' accounts of their work experiences were largely positive with this positivity associated with their recurrent use of postfeminist interpretive repertoires. Lewis (2014) points out that postfeminism is often recruited to analyse professional experiences of women, because this analytical lens, unlike others (e.g. feminism) does not focus on exclusion, thereby providing a viable alternative to the frameworks which mostly re-assure oppressed and discriminated position of modern women in the society and within the modern organisations. In line with this logic, the present research has eventually rejected the initially recruited feminism stance, as it did not fully explain/ help understand discourses of the interviewed MEFA's focused on the practices of inclusion, empowerment, individualism, while almost not mentioning issues related to discrimination, oppression or disadvantaged position when compared to men. In line with the argument by Lawler (2002) recruiting the framework of postfeminism has allowed the present study to successfully explore how modern MEFA's integrate their femininity and professional qualities to advance their careers within the UK universities. Lewis (2014) has successfully developed four different female entrepreneurship identities based on exploring how they integrate their feminine and

masculine intentions and behaviours to form their identities. Similarly, the present study has also, with the use of postfeminism framework, constructed such identities for the UK MEFAs by exploring their conventional masculine and feminine behaviours and intentions. The present study also argues that it is the acceptance of existence of the natural sexual differences that makes postfeminism specifically the most appropriate framework to recruit in the present and similar studies.

As a means of exploring and interpreting the positive accounts of the respondents, the analytical category of postfeminism was used to frame the analysis, allowing us to make visible the way in which the respondents denied gender and ethnic inequality. Thus, the first contribution of this thesis is to highlight a shift away from “tales of discrimination” as the existing literature on female academics reports. Instead, the emphasis in this study was placed on personal decision-making and personal choice as the key reason for current career positions. The present study argues that postfeminism is the most appropriate framework to adopt within the context of the present study due to the fact that the analytical lens does not assume existence of single man or female entities, but instead views the latter as a complex combination of gender, ethnicity, occupation, social class, etc. (Dosekun, 2015). This property of postfeminism is particularly important and relevant to the present research because it aimed to construct and explore identities of (1) females and (2) ethnic minority females occupying academic positions in the UK universities. Such approach allowed to understand specific of their position and experiences related to exclusion and inclusion in the modern academe. Adoption of other frameworks (e.g. feminism or radical feminism) would only allow to focus on disadvantaged position of women as a group without proper attention and understanding of the specific ethnic/ cultural context.

In addition to this, although many of the interviewees acknowledged and discussed the existence of major barriers preventing women from achieving the high

rank positions, one of the most common shared experiences was that "... my gender and ethnicity have nothing to do with my work..." and when negative experiences connected to gender or ethnicity were faced, the preference was to adopt an individual coping strategy to deal with it. Similarly to gender discrimination practices, racial discrimination within the UK academic environment appeared to be another taboo topic, which many of the interviewed women declined to recognize as valid and persistent. As shown in the data analysis, various disclaimers (e.g. I handle things myself) were drawn upon when the women discussed some incidents of gender or ethnic discrimination, depicting gender and ethnic inequality as a matter of the historical past. By drawing on four postfeminist interpretive repertoires, the respondents actively drew on the discursive formation of postfeminism when reflecting on their personal and professional experiences.

An important question arises of why have the interviewed MEFAs recruited postfeminism discourses instead of feminism ones. Gill et al. (2008) point out that the notion of postfeminism has been majorly ignored or not properly discussed within the literature dedicated to understanding gender roles within organisations. The present thesis suggests that modern MEFAs draw on postfeminism discourse as an attempt to present, and maybe – experience themselves accepted within a given educational institution. Gill et al. (2008) and Ahmed (2012) discuss the discourses of gender issues being a matter of past, tales of assigning inequality practices to distant countries (e.g. Arab countries and Islamophobic discourse) as typical elements of narratives of modern professional women. Built on these multiple discourses, discussed within the scholarly literature (Gill et al., 2008; Lewis, 2008; Lewis, 2014) and the ones identified within the present thesis, the professional women employed within the UK universities. According to Lewis (2014), postfeminism as a framework allows the researcher to adopt a great degree of freedom and flexibility when exploring issues related to gender. Moreover,

stance of postfeminism allows to avoid discourses typical to feminism era (e.g. women being attractive to men, girly, dependant or infantile) (Lewis, 2014). Indeed, within the scope of the present study, most of the interviewed females avoided lexicon typical to feminist framework, and instead chose to draw on discourses of empowerment, equality, advantageous position when compared to men, etc. The researcher therefore hypothesises, that the interviewed respondents avoided discussing actual institutional problems related to gender inequality persisting throughout the UK academe, as it would put them apriori in a disadvantaged position when compared to men. Instead these women manifested that they are empowered, achievers and families or other responsibilities cannot hold them back from achieving their goal – becoming successful researchers.

The present study also argues that the point made by Gill (2007) may be valid within the context of the MEFA research. More specifically, Gill (2007) argues that postfeminism as an analytical framework emerges due to the evolutionary processes taking place in the modern society. Such processes, for instance, include but are not limited to overall liberalisation of attitudes towards gender roles, family, marriage, etc. (Gill, 2007; Lewis, 2014). At the same time, along with these liberal changes, an opposite point of view remains valid – concerning traditional roles of men and women in society and family (Gill, 2007). This point is especially true and appropriate when applied within the context of Middle Eastern women, academics originating from various countries but finding their professional career in the UK academe. First of all, the interviewed MEFAs were exposed to traditional gender roles existing in their home countries, and then had an opportunity to experience a different, Western work environment. However, most of the interviewed MEFAs highlighted that as young women, kids or teenagers, their families *encouraged* and *empowered* them to obtain good education and pursue professional (academic) careers, thus demonstrating that the

notion of locating gender inequalities to distant (Islam) countries does not hold. Despite this contradiction, the present thesis argues that postfeminism discourses within the context of the interviewed MEFAs originated as a result of collide of two different processes – one concerning changing role and position of women in society (empowerment) and another – supporting traditional view of gender roles (e.g. natural sexual differences).

Dosekun (2015) makes a valid point concerning adoption of postfeminist framework as an analytical lens to study complex female professional experiences. The researcher argues that because postfeminism can be regarded as “... a neoliberal, individualistic, and consumerist discourse, we may find its sensibilities not only in developed or even rapidly developing national contexts” (p. 7). Neoliberalism and consumerist cultures are both dominating the globe, and postfeminism is not only relevant to the Western females, but also to immigrants or citizens of non-Western world. Dosekun (2015) moreover argues that postfeminism can no longer be perceived as a framework to study experiences of white upper class females, but instead as a lens that can be applied to analyse personal and professional experiences of any woman. These arguments are also valid to the scope of the present research, as it has been demonstrated by the conducted interviews that Middle Eastern women originating from various countries also adopt and draw on most typical postfeminism discourses when sharing and reflecting on their professional experiences in the UK academe. Therefore, the present thesis supports arguments by Lewis (2014) and Dosekun (2015) who warn against perceiving postfeminism as the framework appropriate “for white girls only”.

Another important consideration can serve as a key rationale for adoption of postfeminism as an analytical lens within the present thesis. According to Dosekun (2015), “... postfeminism requires the positioning of feminism as no longer locally

relevant, such that it can only be meaningful in “ostensibly egalitarian societies” – in Japan versus India, say” (p. 8). Dosekun (2015) makes a point that due to the fact that traditional feminism- based approaches was recruited to help women around the world to improve their social or economic position via grassroots approaches, higher educated and urban women may not find such framework relevant for their situations/ experiences. Therefore, they may simply ignore or abandon feminism and instead draw on postfeminism to form their unique identities (Dosekun, 2015). The present research has focused on such urban highly educated non-Western females, who mostly drew on postfeminism to reflect on their academic experiences in the UK.

7.2. Comparing and contrasting narratives of MEFAs with tales of discrimination

The positive account of their experiences is in direct contrast to the majority of the existing research on female academics. The literature review (Chapter 2) demonstrated how the academic literature on women working in universities, widely accepts the fact that women experience major barriers on their career paths within the global and the UK academic context. These barriers can be classified into institutional, structural and psychological (Monroe et al., 2014; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Lawler, 2002; Hoffmann, 1986; Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1993). Women are systematically and significantly underpaid when compared to their male colleagues (Booth & Frank, 2005; Luke & Gore, 2014), underrepresented among the academic higher rank jobs (Ward, 2011; Monroe et al., 2014), and sexually harassed at their workplace (Hoffmann, 1986; Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1993). Furthermore, female academics often face a dilemma whether or not to become mothers, and if they choose to have children, many find themselves torn between trying to multitask and fulfil professional obligations and their family commitments (Currie et al., 2002). These negative discriminatory factors accumulate and eventually lead to a number of

psychological issues experienced by academic women, ranging from stress and being permanently tired, to nervous breakdowns and serious conditions (Monroe et al., 2014). In addition, the contemporary academic literature has demonstrated that ethnic minority academic women experience double marginalization that is based on both factors – their gender and ethnicity (Sang, Al-Dajani & Özbilgin, 2013).

In contrast to the existing literature, this research does not begin with a focus on discrimination and exclusion, largely because the respondents, who were interviewed as part of this project, were adamant that they were not discriminated against or excluded from the academic work environment. The abovementioned observation is in line with the argument developed by Morrison et al. (2005) and Webber (2005) who demonstrate that modern females who professionally related to the academe (e.g. undergraduate or graduate students, professors, etc.) often deny existence of gender discriminatory practices, even despite being taught feminist-oriented courses and exposed to feminism via their social life and activities. Instead these females adopt a so-called coping mechanisms, based on denying of discriminatory practices and discrimination per se (Webber, 2005). The present thesis concludes that such observations are also true for the interviewed MEFAs who reconstruct their personal and professional experiences without acknowledging existence of any form of gender discrimination against them.

After considerable hesitation, some of the interviewees would reluctantly share incidents of gender discrimination against them or their friends/ colleagues. However, in most cases the interviewed MEFAs refused to classify the discussed cases as discriminatory or relevant to sexism. Therefore, the present study has encountered a major inconsistency – on one hand, modern scholarly literature demonstrates for persistence of gender discriminatory practices within the UK academe; on the other hand – the interviewed MEFAs refused to acknowledge existence of such practices within their personal or professional life. Interestingly, a number of studies have

encountered such phenomenon (Kaiser & Major, 2006; Stephens & Levine, 2011; Hunter, 2002), and a number of psychological mechanisms have been proposed to explain such inconsistency between female experiences and behaviours. For instance, Stephens and Levine (2011) have conducted a comparison study of how two groups of stay-at-home mothers have perceived their loss of job and overall gender issues within professional organisations in the US. The two discussed categories concerned females who perceived their new status of a stay-at-home mother as a personal choice, and those mothers who believed they were forced to leave their jobs due to factors related to institutional barriers existing for women (Stephens and Levine, 2011). According to Stephens and Levine (2011), the first category of females, who perceived their new status as a direct result of their free choice, also had a higher perception of their overall well-being. On the other hand, the second group of females, according to Stephens and Levine (2011), perceived themselves as less happy. In line with the presented psychological explanation, it can be hypothesised that the interviewed MEFAs who perceived their status and career as a direct result of their choices and free will would be significantly more happy than females who perceive themselves as victims of persistent gender inequality. The theory of Stephen and Levine (2011) is at least partially supported by Tara and Ghada, who seemingly regarded being able to choose motherhood and associated career sacrifices as manifestation of female`s free will. Zainab has also shared that her decision to have a child had nothing to do with external pressure or gender discrimination, and that she was completely happy with her status. The interviewee Aida has shared that in her experience, the decision to have children and being able to “slow down for them” was an advantage in life rather than disadvantage. Aida, furthermore, has reported a positive effect of having to abandon some of her work-related responsibilities for her children on her overall well-being, similarly to the stories of mothers collected by Stephen and Levine (2011).

An alternative hypothesis has been voiced by Kaiser and Major (2006), who conducted a series of empirical experiments to understand how encounters with ethnic discrimination affects victim`s ability and willingness to report such incidents. According to the obtained results, direct exposure to racial comments made Afro-American job-seekers less likely to report such incidents when soliciting for a job. Moreover, such practices also made the candidates more reluctant to admit existence of racial issues within a given organisation (Kaiser & Major, 2006). Kaiser and Major (2006) draw an interesting and controversial conclusion out of the collected evidence, according to which ethnic minority employees or job-seekers may be unwilling to admit or report ethnic discrimination due to their fear of being perceived as blow whistlers or complainers by their prospect management. However, such explanation does not make it clear why the studied Afro-American job seekers denied existence of ethnic discrimination to third-party researchers (as opposed to potential recruiters). The present study has encountered no direct evidence of the interviewed MEFAs being indeed afraid to be perceived as blow whistlers or complainers among their colleagues or direct management. However, a number of MEFAs have indeed shared that they do not want to be perceived as being weak or viewed to have stereotypical female qualities, as the latter, according to them, interfere with their prospect career growth options. Therefore, the conducted research, suggests that for some of the interviewed MEFAs the discussed issues may be relevant in their unwillingness to recognise existence and persistence of gender stereotyping and discrimination within the UK academe.

Hunter (2002) yet offers a third explanation for the unique phenomenon of discrimination denial. The researcher has conducted a study of professional experiences of female and male barristers in the UK bars. According to the obtained narratives, the female barristers have commonly shared stories that could be classified as gender inequality and discrimination. Most of these stories, however, concerned their friends or

colleagues, and did not directly involve the story-teller herself (Hunter, 2002). The interviewed females have therefore often attempted to distance themselves from the great majority of women in their profession who may have experienced gender discrimination, and highlighted that they, on the contrary, did not have such an experience (Hunter, 2002). Hunter (2002) critically discusses possible psychological explanations for the observed phenomenon, and concludes that the most adequate one explaining barristers' behaviour may be that the interviewees construct their identities as being genderless. This allows the professional females existing in a male-dominating environment, distance themselves from possible negative effects that may be associated with being a female (e.g. decreased chances for professional growth, sexual harassment, etc.). Hunter (2002) concludes that such practices may have positive effects on well-being of the females working in majorly male environments. However, such positions also has negative outcomes for society in general, as the problem of female discrimination is ignored and barely recognised (Hunter, 2002).

The present paper argues that the explanation offered by Hunter (2002) may be the most applicable when understanding and analysing experiences of MEFAs within the UK academe. Similarly to barristers interviewed by Hunter (2002), the studied population of MEFAs attempts to build a successful career within the field which is historically dominated by males. The situation is even more difficult and complicated for MEFAs due to the fact that their otherness is highlighted not only by their female, but also by their ethnic statuses. The narrative of a female excluding herself from the group of other females (Hunter, 2002), was encountered frequently in conversations with MEFAs, who often compared their situation with that of other female colleagues and highlighted the existing or perceived differences. In fact, majority of the interviewed females (interviewees Aida, Basma, Eiham, Ghada, Hadeel, Ibtisam, Magda, Najat, Suraya, Tara, Yumna, Zainab) have at least once directly implied that

their behaviour in professional and personal sense was significantly different from that of women who at one point or another face gender discrimination. This common implication may mean the following: according to the interviewed MEFAs, if a female behaves in a certain way, she will not encounter any negative effects of gender discrimination. This *certain way of behaviour* may mean different things, depending on the interviewed MEFA. For some (e.g. Aida), this type of appropriate behaviour was concerned with being able to abandon traits of a stereotypical woman, and instead mimick male behaviour. Working very hard and making good decisions was another common theme which emerged multiple times during discussion of why are MEFAs not subjected to gender discrimination. In line with these considerations, the present paper concludes that the recorded narratives of MEFAs denying incidents of gender discrimination or discussing them as a matter of past, or something that only happens to “other” women, can be considered a psychological mechanisms that helps these women cope with pressure and possible hurdles they face when making life choices related to their personal life or professional career. However, it is important to note that the present research cannot exclude assumption of Kaiser and Major (2006), who argue that resistance to admit gender discriminatory practices may also be an indication of women fearing to be perceived as whistle blowers within a given organisation and denied chances and opportunities to advance in their career.

7.3. Research Question 2: Postfeminism and Academic Femininities

The second contribution of this thesis relates to the delineation of a set of academic femininities derived from the postfeminist analysis of the interview data. This analysis has made visible the feminine subjectivities available to the Middle Eastern female respondents working in British universities. Within the context of the present research question, adoption of postfeminism as a critical lens to examine identities of

MEFAs in the UK, allowed to better understand the relationship between feminism and femininities. When researching the female identities among the entrepreneurs, Lewis (2014) makes a point when suggesting that postfeminism allows to understand the tensions between traditional and modern approach to gender issues within organisations. For instance, Lewis (2014) points out that the key premises of postfeminism – individualism, free choice, empowerment and existence of natural sexual differences, highlight the existing tensions between two concepts critical to the present study – feminism and femininity. While the first is understood from masculine point of view (e.g. it is often measured in terms of professional achievement), the other usually refers to obligations of women at home (Lewis, 2014). These two concepts were integrated within the narratives of MEFAs to result in their academic identities discussed below.

In drawing out three academic femininities – independent academic woman, academic mother and Middle Eastern academic woman – this thesis has contributed to the body of literature on female academics by presenting a set of academic identities currently available to those women who draw on postfeminist discourses. However, in mapping out academic femininities, it is important to recognise that these are not static, meaning that a woman will not necessarily take-up the same academic identity throughout her career. At different points in her life, it is possible that she may move between these academic femininities. For example, a female academic who constructs an independent academic woman identity, may move from this identity into the academic mother identity, if her personal circumstances change (i.e. she has children). Secondly, while the postfeminist analysis presented in this thesis has drawn out the “doing” of these academic femininities, ‘...it is important to remember that this enactment occurs within a context characterised by the continued dominance of (academic) masculinity’ (Lewis, 2014: 1860). What this means is that the independent academic woman femininity is likely to be more highly valued because of its fit with

academic masculinity, placing the other two academic femininities in a weaker position. Thirdly, the ability to take up and hold on to the independent academic woman femininity is likely to be effected by the level of tradition – Western and Middle Eastern – that individual women are subject to.

On the other hand, the academic mother and the traditional Middle Eastern academic identities are highly complex in their nature. The present research has revealed that although traditionally strong family ties played an important part in the Middle Eastern Female academics` lives, they often also served as a source of empowerment and motivation to pursue education, become career-oriented or even move to another country away from family. These two identities were described among the same MEFAs, who have adopted postfeminist concept and refused to perceive themselves as excluded victims, but instead focused on inclusion, empowerment and free choice. Therefore, the two traditional identities served as a combination of two different perspectives – modern and traditional ones.

Essers and Benschop (2007) argue that identity formation is a complex process, and it is particularly true for migrant women, who`s familial regulations, ethnicity, gender and occupation majorly affect the identity work. The present research demonstrates that women of colour, similarly to white women, actively draw on postfeminist concept to describe their professional and personal experiences.

7.4. Research Question 3: Elaborating the concept of postfeminism by extending our understanding of tradition

Understanding postfeminism as a discursive formation means that we approach this cultural phenomenon in terms of the co-existence of modernity and tradition, where the former is understood as the ability to participate in the public world of work and make individual choices and the latter refers to the active take-up of childcare

responsibilities. In the western context, tradition is mainly understood in terms of motherhood (i.e. work-home balance, child care, etc.), but this research shows that tradition for those women also attached to the family of origin and the cultural demands and expectations that are put on them. The third contribution of this thesis, is to suggest that our understanding of tradition and its relationship to participating in the public world of work, needs to be expanded to include the impact of the extended family of origin on decisions and choices made and the subject positions that can be taken up. This research develops and expands the notion of tradition that is embedded in postfeminism to show its impact of Middle Eastern female academics.

Importantly the topic of extended family obligations and expectations played an important role in narratives shared by the interviewees. Most of the Middle Eastern women admitted that their parents' approval and recognition of their achievements played an important role in their professional career. While the majority of respondents placed an emphasis on their own ability to choose and make decisions, their family of origin placed high expectations on women and their future roles as mothers and wives. While a number of respondents, when discussed their extended family, used disclaimers such as "we were all treated equally regardless of gender" to stress their equality with male family members, others referred to the traditional expectations that were put on them.

Another way in which family tradition manifested in the interviews is that many respondents mentioned that obtaining their parents' approval and permission to pursue a particular career path or particular course of study was a highly challenging and stressful step. Interestingly, as most of the interviewed professional women choose their field of study on the basis of personal interest and scientific curiosity rather than practical application or prospective higher income, many parents considered the choice incorrect and were openly opposed it. At the same time, many MEFAAs reported that it

was the family tradition, or sometimes – the influence of their father, that taught them the importance of hard work and education and gave them a habit of inquiring and studying every day. Therefore, it can be argued that within the obtained narratives family of origin and traditional expectations played a highly complex, multi-faceted role of both positive inspiration and traditional expectation which applies judgement and pressure on their daughters` choices. This example demonstrates how Middle Eastern women combine postfeminist perspective together with traditional Middle Eastern gender roles and family expectations to function and succeed within the UK academic environment.

The research has demonstrated that most of the interviewed Middle Eastern women continuously draw on both postfeminist concept and their traditional values to describe and explain their specific experiences. The study aims to unravel a complex understanding of Middle Eastern traditions that concern not only the role of woman as a mother, but also as a member of her family of origin.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

8.1. Thesis overview

A growing volume of academic literature suggests that the notion of postfeminism can be considered a modern cultural sensibility, according to which contemporary women are empowered and encouraged in their freedom to pursue a career, and therefore feminist discourse is outdated and no longer needed (Gill, 2007; Taylor & Francis, 2015). Most of the literature on Gender in Organization Studies suggests that women, and especially ethnic minority women, are excluded in the workplace (i.e. through discrimination, wage gap, limited access to senior positions, sexual harassment, etc.). On the other hand, the concept of postfeminism has been recently introduced in the Gender and Organization Studies field and there is an emerging body of work (e.g. Gill et al, 2016; Kelan, 2009; Lewis, 2014; Lewis & Simpson, 2017) that is based on the assumption of the inclusion of women in the contemporary workplace, exploring their experiences as an important group in organizations. But one of the criticisms of postfeminism is that it is limited to a white western view, and that view should be expanded to include women of colour. Dosekun (2015) argues that there is an overwhelming tendency to perceive and understand postfeminism as a Western cultural phenomenon. Some researchers suggest that this is due to the very origin of postfeminism, as a result of the liberalisation of Western society and second-wave activists of feminism (Dosekun, 2015; Tasker & Negra, 2007). Dosekun (2015, p. 2) continues: “It is widely noted within the literature that post-feminism does not address or concern just any Western women, however”. Feminism as the sensibility is rather attributed to white women, belonging to the middle class (Dosekun, 2015). Butler (2013) however, argues that the researchers have to adapt a transnational approach to studying postfeminism, in order to acknowledge that

globalisation and cultural trends and tendencies affect not only women in the West, but also women from all over the world. The researchers suggest that the division itself into Western and non-Western worlds is a direct result of colonialist agenda and served to separate and highlight the privileged position of “more developed” and wealthy nations from the rest of the world (Dosekun, 2015).

The present thesis investigates and explores the work identities and the accounts of work experiences of Middle Eastern Female Academics in contemporary British universities. It has done this by mobilising the critical concept of postfeminism understood as a ‘cultural dispositif’ (Gill et al, 2016: 5).

8.2. Empirical contribution of the present research

In addition to the contribution illustrated in the answers of the research questions above, this thesis also provides an empirical contribution to the existing literature.

While most of research suggests that ethnic minority women are excluded, this research shows how Middle Eastern Female academics actively draw on Postfeminism to explain their experiences of inclusion. Postfeminism is largely understood as a white concept, though this research develops it to include women of colour. It appears, Middle Eastern academic women in the UK draw on Postfeminism postulates (i.e., empowerment and individual choice, ‘natural’ sexual difference, retreat home as a woman’s choice) to characterise their professional and personal experiences within the UK.

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Another important implication of the current research is that it highlights a major cultural/ social change that has occurred within the last few decades. This change relates to (1) position of women within the modern professional organisations, and (2) how women perceive/ present themselves in the light of such organisations. As pointed out by van de Brink (2011), when interviewed a few decades ago on whether professional women experience or encounter any forms of gender discriminatory practices or institutional barriers, the response would definitely be – yes, these practices exist and are regularly experienced by women. A few decades later the situation has significantly changed. While discriminatory practices are still common in the world in general and the UK academe in particular, when asked about any sort of gender- or ethnic discrimination the females respond that no, no such practices exist or are encountered. This finding has a number of important implications, including practical ones. For once, such tendencies/ changes make research dedicated to gender and organisation much more complicated and challenging. When conducting empirical research, the scholars have to be aware that the interviewed professional women may simply not provide any reflection/ information on existence of gender barriers. Instead professional women may draw on their experiences of inclusion, professional success

and empowerment. While these answers are interesting and important from the standpoint of constructing female work identities, the responses may give no information (or even more likely result in false information) concerning current position of women in the modern organisations.

8.3. Recommendations for future research

The present study has identified a number of existing research gaps concerning professional experiences of ethnic academic women in British universities, and therefore the two key approaches towards conducting future research are proposed: exploring the topic further using ethnic groups other than Middle Eastern, and comparison of their experiences within academic and business environments.

Postfeminism remains an understudied concept within the context of non-Western women. Western world is traditionally recognised and perceived as a centre of cultural development, progressive policies and free thinking. Dosekun (2015) argues that this type of rhetoric tends to cast diverse Western feminist scholars and activists as some sorts of prophets or saviours of “other” (or foreign) women. Dosekun (2015) further discusses emergence of a so-called “singular monolithic subject” (Mohanty, 1988, p. 61), which represents a notion of the Third World Woman. The present study has provided an argument that the notion of postfeminism cannot be reserved for Western women alone, instead clearly women of Middle Eastern ethnic origin also commonly use postfeminism on their path towards socio-cultural and professional inclusion. It could be argued that the observed phenomena can be explained by the fact that all of the interviewed participants have spent a significant amount of time in the UK, Europe or US, and therefore culturally are quite similar to women postfeminist culture is most commonly associated with. In order to prove or reject this assumption and further expand our knowledge and understanding of professional experiences of

diverse women of colour, it is important to conduct similar studies on women from different cultural backgrounds (i.e., Asian, African, etc.) who migrated to the West to pursue their academic career, and compare their interpretative repertoires to their counterparts who stayed home.

8.4. Summary of conclusion

The present research demonstrates that Middle Eastern academic women in the UK experience a number of structural and institutional barriers on their career development path. Supported by both theoretical and empirical evidence from the literature, professional women experienced a number of direct and indirect discriminatory practices within the setting of the UK academia (Lawler, 2002; Genz & Brabon, 2009; Monroe et al., 2014). Female academics were majorly underrepresented among higher rank academic jobs, significantly underpaid and experiencing heavy physical and psychological load due to necessity to combine work- and family-related responsibilities. But, despite that many of the interviewed Middle Eastern academics admitted that the structure of the UK Academia forces women to make difficult career and life choices, they assert that it is ‘their’ choices and they are in-control of them.

The study concludes that postfeminist concept is an efficient tool that helps unravel and understand professional and personal experiences of academic women of Middle Eastern origin, as well as formation of their professional identities. While often being treated differently at their workplace due to their ethnic or gender status, most of the interviewed Middle Eastern academic women refused the idea that their ethnicity or gender “have anything to do with” their work. This discourse is consistent with the core one of postfeminist concept, according to which women focus on the process of their inclusion, as opposed to considering themselves underprivileged or victims of male-dominant meritocratic UK academia.

As the present research demonstrates, Middle Eastern academic women draw to postfeminist concept as well as traditional and cultural guidelines of their native countries to construct their identities in the new environment. The research demonstrates a unique combination of modern and traditional social constructs that are used by these Middle Eastern academic women to include themselves into white male dominated UK academe. Therefore, in line with Dosekun`s (2015) argument, postfeminism should not be as a cultural innovation applicable and used only by Western women; instead women of colour also draw on the concept of postfeminism to understand their professional and personal experiences. The present research supports the argument (Dosekun, 2015) that the notion of postfeminism is transnational, and therefore can be applied to study and understand ethnic minority experiences of women around the world, as opposed to studying “white girls only”.

The present research has also encountered a number of limitations, the key ones being the overall sensitivity of the topic and male researcher interviewing female interviewees on the topics related to choice, career and postfeminism. The study concludes that further research of other ethnical academic groups of women can further improve our understanding of women`s experiences within academia, as well as role of postfeminism as a concept to understand and interpret them.

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Appendix 1. Email sent to the MEFA candidates prior to conducting an interview

Dear (Name),

I hope you don't mind me contacting you directly. I am emailing to ask if you are available and interested in participating in my research. Your participation would entail a one hour conversation with me. I am happy to travel to where ever is most convenient for you for the purposes of this meeting. And, I would be very grateful if you can find the time for this interview.

I am a PhD researcher at the Kent Business School, University of Kent. My research area is Gender & Organization Studies with a particular focus on the intersection between gender and ethnicity. My research is exploring the career strategies, identity work and choices of Middle Eastern Female academics working in the UK.

The interview is completely confidential. Your name, institute, and any other information that might identify you will not be used in my research.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

Thank you (Name) for taking the time to read this email. I would be delighted to meet with you and hope that my research is something you would like to participate in.

Best regards,

PhD Student (Name)

Appendix 2. Interview guide developed for the purpose of study

Interviewee:

University:

Interview Guide

1. Self, family, education
2. Career (history, why this job, was it your first choice)
3. Particular career strategy (e.g. goals to achieve at particular times, promotion)
Planned career or “free-flawing”? If yes, how is the plan going?
4. Personal choice influence on career. When? How?
5. Any restrictions on choice regarding career. When? How?
6. Any career breaks through working life (Children? Maternity leave?)
7. Any difficulties combining family life with work. If yes: what are they? If no:
How to combine both?
8. Any effects on career or aspirations. If yes: In what way?
9. Priorities in life. (Job, career development, self-enhancement, relationships,
family and children?) order of priority.
10. Treated differently at work? response?
11. Being a woman, Middle Eastern, or both?
12. Universities you worked for valued diversity? Providing equality of opportunity
for ethnic minority women?

13. If white, more advantage at work?

14. Community view on career and success

15. Family responsibilities (white female colleagues)

16. Are you working where you were always aspiring to? Is that your 'ideal' job?

Why did you think of entering this profession?

Appendix 3. List of figures and tables utilized within the study

Figure 1. The global trend of woman participation in higher education during the period of 1970-2010)

Figure 2. Percentage of women employed by academic institution by professional status in the US for 2001

Figure 3. Promotion of men and women within academic environment (science and engineering) during the period of 2002-2010 within the EU states

Figure 4. Construction of MEFAs academic identities

Table 1. Percentage of Female professionals in “top 50 disciplines” (source: Reitsamer, 2009)

Table 2. Five areas of sexual harassment used while interviewing potential victims

Table 3. Three understandings of identity in organization studies

Table 4. The demographic data concerning the 20 interviewed MEFAs

Table 5. Comparison of study participants and individuals who did not respond or refused to participate in the study

Table 6. The four postfeminist interpretive repertoires and their subsidiaries