



Virtual Roundtable on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in Academia and 30 days of reflection

25 November 2020, UiT The Arctic University of Norway

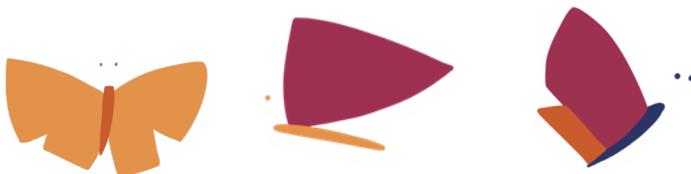
Katrin Losleben, Centre for Women's and Gender Research, UiT The Arctic University of Norway (SKK)

Arianna Porrone, PhD student Global Studies. Justice, Rights, Politics, Department of political science, communication and international relations, University of Macerata, Italy

Margherita Paola Poto, Faculty of Law, UiT The Arctic University of Norway

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Illustrations: Valentina Bongiovanni, Italy



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Authors	Katrin Losleben, Arianna Porrone, Margherita P. Poto
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Rights	© 2021 The authors. This is an Open Access publication distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
Acknowledgements	<p>Dát čoagganeapmi lágiduvvo Romssas mii lea oassi Sámis. With this positioning, we would like to acknowledge the virtual roundtable took place in Romssa/Tromsø, which is located in Sápmi.</p> <p>Our gratitude goes also to our keynote speaker: Josephine T.V. Greenbrook for having shared her own personal story and for having weaved it so gently with others and our story.</p> <p>Val Napoleon and Rebecca Johnson, Indigenous Law Research Unit, University of Victoria, Canada trained Arianna Porrone and Margherita Paola Poto on indigenous law and methodology and gave them special permission to engage with the materials adopted in the conversation, and namely: (1) Indigenous law, gender and sexuality, UVic Indigenous Law Research Unit ILRU: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9Lsda4lDoo (2) Story of Porcupine in James Teit, “The Shuswap” in Franz Boas, ed. The Jesup North Pacific expedition: Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol II, Part IV, Leiden: EJ Brill/New York: GE Stechert, 1909, p. 658 in Gender Inside Indigenous Law Casebook, Indigenous Law Research Unit, Faculty of Law, University of Victoria, p. 27 (3) Gender Inside Indigenous Law Toolkit, Indigenous Law Research Unit, Faculty of Law, University of Victoria). Margherita Paola Poto thanks the University of Turin, Department of Management. All the authors thank SKK’s center leader Hege K. Andreassen for co-hosting the event, Siri Gerrard for establishing the collaboration, the student assistant Annabelle Yabsley for managing all the communication that this event encompassed.</p>



Summary

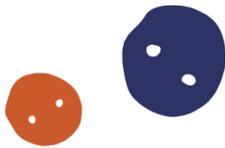
The overall aim of this report is to record the emotions, aim, objectives, results and conclusions that we developed during the Virtual Roundtable for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in Academia, on November 25, 2020. The report is built around the event and is meant to enclose our *space of reflection* (30 days, initiated on the Facebook page of the Centre).

The report is divided into five sections: 1. Introduction; 2. Welcome; 3. Keynote speech; 4. Engaging with a story; 5. References; 6. Appendix.

We hope you find yourself in this space.

Romssa/Tromsø-Kiel-Trondheim

30 December 2020



1 Introduction

What

On November 25, 2020, the Gender for Women's and Gender Research, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, in Tromsø hosted the Virtual Roundtable on the Elimination of Violence against Women in Academia. The event concept had been designed by the shared efforts of Katrin Losleben, Arianna Porrone, Margherita Paola Poto, and with the help of Annabelle Yabsley (communication) and Valentina Bongiovanni (illustration). The aim of the event was to develop a conversation around a virtual roundtable on the theme of the elimination of violence against women in academia. Other main institutions participating in the event were the Faculty of Law, UiT The Arctic University of Norway; the Department of Management, University of Turin, Italy; the Department of political science, communication and international relations, University of Macerata, Italy.

The event was chaired by Katrin Losleben. Invited guests were Hege Kristin Andreassen, Josephine T.V. Greenbrook. Other speakers were Arianna Porrone and Margherita Paola Poto.

The event was structured into three main parts:

- A. Welcome Session (Section 2 of this Report)
- B. Keynote speech (Section 3 of this Report)
- C. Engaging with a Story (Section 4 of this Report)

Section 5 of this Report suggests implications of our Roundtable for the future research in the field of knowledge.

The Welcome Session was opened by the words of Hege Kristin Andreassen., followed by Katrin Losleben, and closed by the video broadcast kindly authorized by Rebecca Johnson, ILRU. The keynote speaker, Josephine T.V. Greenbrook, invited and introduced by Arianna, talked about her choices, life path and experience in Academia that led her to found and chair the "I Should Be Thriving: Advancing Minorities in Academia" Facebook group. In the third part, Arianna and Margherita led a short workshop on the Story of Porcupine.

Why

As said, the aim of the event was to develop a conversation around a virtual roundtable on the theme of the elimination of violence against women in academia, engaging with researchers on the search for meanings and interpretations with the tool of storytelling. Stories can be important resources for challenging and talking about gendered conflicts in all societies and power relations.

Who

Our target audience were researchers, students, and anybody interested to engage in a conversation on violence against women in academia.

Where – location and venue

Our location was Romssa/Tromsø and the venue the virtual platform (Zoom).

When

The event took place on November 25, 2020, and lasted the whole morning. Participants from different places joined and enriched the conversation with their own presence and comments. Parallel to the event, and for 30 days (from mid-November to this day) we developed a *space for reflection*, named “30 days of reflection”, where we exchanged letters, ideas, videos on stories in academia, untold stories and the need for multi-faceted stories, stories of women (outlets: Facebook page and this report). All shared materials from our *space for reflection* can be found in the Appendix to this Report. Our long term aim is to transform this virtual space in a one-to-one conversation – with all interested individuals – through the institution of a weekly or monthly newsletter. The format and architecture of such project are yet to be defined. Our vision is to encourage conversations around the theme of violence(s) in Academia even beyond November 25 to: 1) shed light on an institutional and structural issue, 2) bring awareness, 3) share (experiences, empathy..), 4) be open to engage with the trouble/the uncomfortable, 5) nurture reflections and actions.

2 Welcome

November 25th is the UN’s International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women: From 1930 to 1961, the Dominican Republic had been ruled by the dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, both directly and from the back. These years went down in history for being the bloodiest decades in the Americas, with the murder of an estimated 12000 Haitians and the constant assassination of political adversaries. Three of the latter were the Mirabal-sisters, Minerva, Patria and Maria Teresa Mirabal, born in 1925, 26 and 35. That Minerva had turned down Trujillo’s sexual advances in 1949 costed the law-student her admission as a lawyer at his direct behest. Together with their husbands and a group of opponents, the Movement of the Fourteenth June, the three sisters fought Trujillo’s tyranny with pamphlets, but they also engaged to prepare to fight with weapons. The 25th of November 1960, the three were strangled to death. The murders were said to be ordered by Trujillo himself, but they might have paved the way to Trujillo’s own assassination half a year later.

There was a fourth sister, though. Bélgica Adela Mirabal, known as Déde, the second of the quartet, did not directly engage at that time in the resistance struggle, but after the death of her siblings, she took care of their six children and raised them and engaged heavily in remembrance work. It is also her merit that we gathered under these strong paragons.

Violence – in war, in public and private spaces, in schools, at work; sexual, environmental, digital, emotional or physical violence – is ubiquitous and affects all genders. On November 25th, however, the light is shed on women. The UN draws attention to intimate partner violence like battering, psychological abuse, marital rape, femicide, to sexual violence and harassment like rape, forced sexual acts, unwanted sexual advances, child sexual abuse, forced marriage, street harassment, stalking, cyber- harassment, to human trafficking like slavery, sexual exploitation, to female genital mutilation; and to child marriage.

In 2020, domestic violence might have been an obvious topic as Covid19 has had a lock on our lives. Shelter in place, isolation, home-schooling, sickness, unemployment and grieve put an extra portion on families which makes women against women even more likely. Domestic Violence

against women and girls is a pandemic by itself: 243 million women and girls were abused by their partners only within the last year, the estimated numbers are way higher. A decline of incidents of domestic violence – as noted among others by Norwegian authorities – does not mean an actual decline; it may rather indicate that for many women the chance to reach out to advisory centers might have shrunk to zero. With this year’s event in our series, however, we wanted to explore a realm where some of us spend even more time than they may do at home: violence against women in academia and its many faces. For some of us, it might be sexual harassment and assault between professor and student, between students or between colleagues that first comes to mind. Others might experience epistemological violence: when they feel that their credibility as a speaker or as contributor in knowledge seeking processes is underestimated because of group based prejudices. Others again might think of structural injustice, where social structures as “culturally shared concepts, propositions and norms that enable us collectively to interpret and organize information and coordinate actions, thought and affect” (Haslanger 2015:4) discriminate a person or a group of persons, which might sum up to the experience of violence as they will not live the life they aspire to and are trained for. Still others feel again and again the violence of being made invisible and inaudible in meetings, they might feel ridiculed or do not get provided with relevant information.

3 Keynote speech

Josephine T. V. Greenbrook is a medicolegal scholar, clinician, lecturer, and researcher working in migration medicine and transcultural psychiatry. She is currently Deputy Director of the Mason Institute for Medicine, Life Sciences and the Law at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, and a tenured at the University of Gothenburg’s Medical School, at the department of Life Context and Health Promotion in Sweden. She is also affiliated with the department of General Psychiatry at Sahlgrenska University Hospital and the Department of Research and Development of Angered Hospital in Gothenburg. She is founder and chair of “I Should Be Thriving: Advancing Minorities in Academia” (ISBT) community. Whilst ISBT has been around for longer, the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a shift to a virtual platform in March 2020. The community is now on Facebook and hosts near 2000 members coming from all corners of the globe. As stated in the official group’s description, the community aims to provide a refuge and platform, where anyone pertaining to minority groups, of all academic ranks and backgrounds, can share, discuss, and ask for support on issues relating to research, writing, publishing, and teaching, as well as the many factors existing in contemporary academia that may be impeding these processes. The platform aims to provide a sense of community and belonging for those struggling, as well as daily free hosted and interactive virtual retreats, which function as a work and social space. Minorities, here, includes anyone who does not feel encompassed in the dominant majority gender, ethnicity, social class, etc., in society and/or in their academic field. This also includes sexual minorities, religious minorities, and persons with disabilities. Members of the community who do not identify as a minority in their personal and/or professional lives are welcome, acknowledging that their presence in the community is primarily to offer support and encouragement to others.

Based on this premise, Josephine’s talk focused on three main topics. First, she gave a personal account of her life story and pathway to and in academia. The two cannot be separated – she affirms. Having had a life filled with ambiguities and challenges, she is well aware that her personal academic journey is not and cannot be unaffected. Rather, it is punctuated by the

presence and absence of other individuals, who facilitated or impeded her advancement, as well as by external factors such as social relations, culture, etc. Second, she showed how her story inevitably connects and is intertwined with the stories of others. Pathways in academia are and should be different, and having a variety of stories also help shape the diverse academia we aspire toward. Josephine's story is an example of a chaotic path to academia. Having shifted in direction and purpose multiple times, her research on clinical empathy has guided her on a deeply personal level: toward recognizing the power of words, and the power of making space for someone's story. More so, how holding someone's story, even for a moment, can serve as a strong act of change over time. Finally, she illustrated what led her to founding ISBT, as a digital platform for advancing all minorities in academia.

The academic system holds the ability to make people believe that they do not belong. Archaic and normative structures also actively and continuously silence a plethora of systemic inequalities and injustices in academic spaces. As a whole, modern academia sells the hardened and well established idea that if only you works a little harder, publishing a little more, you will make it. "And this is perhaps the most toxic lie that people tell themselves" Josephine adds, as well as the fastest route to getting lost in the system and become consumed by it; or worse, mentally and physically agressed by it. Inherently, contemporary academic work is fueled by capitalist ideas of productivity and commodification. Successes are largely counted merely through output (for any kind of position, for advancing in any discipline). ISBT was founded on the refusal of this culture of productivity and commodification, and guided by the idea there has to be more to research, to teaching, to science, to academia as a whole. Fundamentally, humanity must be maintained, and cannot only be reflected through numbers. So, how to support thriving in academia? We need a structural and cultural shift. What initially constituted of only a convenor, soon became a collectively led community – transforming into a space to come up for air, a refuge where someone will always be on your side whenever you show up, regardless of your position. As a community, there is a strong emphasis on fostering a sense of belonging, and accenting each person's individual and legitimate right to belong, regardless of their level of identities, their status, their hierarchical position, or their competences. Academic spaces should serve as foundations for growth, comradery, and solidarity in the production of knowledge, and knowledge should be underpinned by a diversity of voices. ISBT is attempting to lead by example on this front. *Note: The community welcomes all and excludes no one, and can be found at www.ishouldbethriving.org.*

4 Engaging with a Story

The choice of a story was grounded on the need to engage in a reflection concerning violence, stereotyping, exclusion, and essentializing in a proactive, positive, thoughtful, interesting way – and of course. We are aware that it is really difficult to raise the discussion in a place such Academia. The issue is complex and often avoided: uncountable resistances and cemented dynamics are there to support a system of domination and oppression that inevitably benefit some, eclipsing others. We want to shed light on the 'otherness', because *we* are, *were* and *could* be the 'others'. Reflecting through stories allows to enter into a collective continuum thinking (Kelly 1988), which means breaking the chain of making sense of individual violent actions in relation to a continuum of related experiences across a lifetime, sharing the burden of these

events, learning how to support each other and holding hands, recognizing the system of violence, and eventually distancing from it.

To this end, we were strongly encouraged by Val Napoleon and Rebecca Johnson, Indigenous Law Research Unit (ILRU, University of Victoria, BC, Canada), who trained us in 2018, to work on and with their learning toolkit. It is the result of an immense work conducted by broad minded, knowledgeable, sensitive indigenous and non-indigenous scholars, de-colonized minds, open to diversity and to listening. They intend to respectfully engage with indigenous laws (stories are in fact among the sources of law in indigenous societies) and reflect on the plurality of legal traditions, on the fact that there is not one side of the story, but many, and all deserving recognition and validation. Our experiment was conducted by searching for meanings and interpretation of violence dynamics in the Story of Porcupine (see references and appendix).

The story was read by Margherita and Arianna, then the floor was open to the audience's interventions. Several interesting interpretations were prospected on the role of the different characters and on the role of violence in the solution of the story problem. At the end of the discussion, the story was re-read, to de-construct preconception and to develop a different understanding of violence dynamics.

5 Outlook

Violence against women in academia comes in manifold shapes – epistemic, structural, physical, psychological – can be executed and experienced individually or collectively, in a system that supports the disguise of violent actions. Violence is difficult to grasp and, within own professional relationships, highly sensitive especially for non-academic and junior colleagues. This event was carried out with the awareness of the responsibility that senior scholars have towards guiding young colleagues in the search of the most appropriate tool to explore and overcome violence in academia. Storytelling seems to be a highly appropriate method to be adopted in combination with theoretical undergirding and cooperation on projects that address specific forms of violence (e.g. Prestisje, UiT), for ultimately changing the status quo.

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Appendices:

Story of Porcupine

Flyer

Porcupine reached Elk's house in an exhausted condition, and all covered with ice and snow. After warming himself, he delivered his message to Elk, and asked for sinew and awl with which to sew his moccasins. After he had done so, he left for home, bearing Elk's reply. Elk promised to visit Swan on the following morning together with all his people.

When Elk and his people arrived, Swan feasted them and when the feast was over, he and all his people knelt down before Elk. Swan told him all he knew of the affairs of both people and told him in what way he thought they did wrong. Swan gave Elk all his knowledge and all his advice.

Then Elk and his people all knelt down before Swan, and Elk gave him all his ideas and knowledge. Each people gained full knowledge of the other, and together became able to plan doing what was right. After this they lived much easier and happier than before and the methods of one party did not come into conflict with those of the other.

The laws made at the council are those which govern animals and birds at the present day. Porcupine got his rich present of dentalia, and was much envied by Coyote.

Excerpt from "Story of Porcupine". Reproduced with permission from the University of Victoria.

Virtual Roundtable on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in Academia & 30 days of reflection

Wednesday, November 25th 2020
10.00am CET

AGENDA

10.00-10.30am Opening session

- * Welcome
- * A day of remembrance of the Sisters Mirabal
- * Indigenous law, gender, and sexuality (UVic - ILRU)

10.30-11.00 Keynote speakers interventions

11.00-11.05 Break

11.05-11.50 Engaging with a story (Margherita Paola Poto
and Arianna Porrone)

[Click here to join the event \(25 Nov.\)](#)

[Click here to join our newsletter \(9 Nov.-7 Dec.\)](#)



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Illustrations by Valentina Bongiovanni