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Avoiding failure in academia: strategies from non-Western early career researchers in the UK

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of neoliberalism affecting the higher education sector, critical research in marketing and management remains dominated by Western Eurocentric theories. As a result, non-Western researchers are expected to socialise with the Western theoretical discourse to succeed and progress in Western academia. In this paper, we reflected on our personal experiences as early career researchers from Southeast Asia who have studied and are currently working in the UK as we navigate around the structural expectations, challenges, and strategies in pursuing our research. We merged our voices with those of other doctoral students from non-Western backgrounds in the discipline to present some coping mechanisms that researchers like us adopt to avoid failure in academia. We argue that the conformity to Western academia and its hidden struggles produce risk-averse junior researchers; thus, limiting creativity, diversity, and potential growth in the discipline.

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Failure; academia; non-Western; doctoral students; academic identity; knowledge hierarchies

Introduction

Existing literature examines the knowledge hierarchies that prevail in marketing and management scholarship (Dar et al., 2021; Kravets & Varman, 2022; Sandikci, 2022). Although our discipline has broadened from a managerial to a critical and societal one, it is still predominantly rooted in a Eurocentric theoretical canon and practice (Alvesson et al., 2009; Kravets & Varman, 2022; Tadajewski, 2010). Research on non-Western contexts is not only influenced by a US-style application of marketing or management theory, but is constantly judged by Western yardsticks and traditions (Alcoff, 2017; Sandikci, 2022). Despite the increasing attention towards inclusivity and diversity in academia, the current dynamics in learning, teaching, and researching remains Western-oriented (Olberding, 2015). The purpose of this paper is to unpack the expectations, challenges, and coping mechanisms of non-Western researchers attempting to be integrated into the Western academic structure.

The paper adopts a Douglasian lens to analyse failure as a consequence of alienation or inability to belong in the dominant institution. In a Western academic world, non-conformity to the Western hegemonic theoretical discourse and academic identity

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reproduces the feeling of alienation, but also results in failure to establish an academic career (Ahmed, 2014; Archer, 2008a). For the present paper, an interpretive study was carried out (Tadajewski, 2006), involving an autoethnography of the two authors, followed by in-depth interviews with 15 non-Western doctoral researchers in business schools in the UK.

Findings reveal the struggles and strategies adopted by non-Western Early Career Researchers (ECRs) to avoid failure in academia, namely by being theoretically cautious, (non)conforming with authority, and engaging in deep labour. Our data reveal that researchers are faced with expectations to integrate themselves within the dominant philosophical and theoretical standpoint, which tends to be Eurocentric in nature. Along with this, our data show that researchers need to conform with figures of authority in the institution, even though it may be incongruent with their principles, in order to avoid failing in their academic pursuits. Moreover, our data show the intense mental and material labour, what we define as deep labour, that non-Western scholars need to perform in order to avoid failure in the scholarship. We scrutinise the implications of their strategies for the discipline at large.

The contributions of this paper are two-fold. First, we show the hidden challenges and strategies adopted by non-Western junior scholars to integrate into Western academia. Although there are increasing concerns about the changing nature of higher education against the backdrop of market-oriented reforms, higher workload, pressure of publications, and junior scholars' ability to construct an academic identity (Archer, 2008a, 2008b; Harris, 2005; Henkel, 2005), the lived experiences of junior non-Western scholars attempting to gain a foothold in academia remains limited. In analysing their struggles and decisions regarding choice of theory and research process, we show the limitations in rebutting the status quo to avoid failure. Second, we demonstrate the consequences of avoiding failure in academia and how they harm our discipline. In an era of publish or perish (Moosa, 2018), we argue that junior scholars' strategic decisions have implications for the discipline and their academic identity. Conformity to Western ideologies and figures of authority lead to producing risk-averse junior researchers, resulting in repetitive ideas, lack of creativity, and a dangerous absence of deep connection with their own research.

Taming ourselves in the Western academic world

Dirt, as framed by Mary Douglas (1966, p. 41), refers to 'matter out of place', or things that do not fit within a particular system of classification. Dirt refers to things that are not accounted for or eliminated from 'our normal scheme of classifications' (Douglas, 1966, p. 37). In the context of Western academia, a displaced cultural identity can be seen as an anomaly or matter that is out of place. A cultural identity provides a structure to how individuals might think, feel, and behave in society (Gollnick & Chinn, 2006). According to Carjuzaa and Ruff (2010), cultural identity is constructed through ethnicity, race, religion, gender, age, socioeconomic, geographic origins, and language. Despite the increasing attention towards cultural diversity and inclusivity in contemporary learning environments, the receptivity towards non-Western ideologies, epistemologies, and philosophies remains low (Olberding, 2015). More specifically, cultural identities outside of the Western

hegemonic forms of knowledge and academic identity tend to be associated with non-conformity; thus, becoming problematic.

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social worker-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements. (Foucault, 1991, p. 304)

For Foucault, the conceptualisation of standards and their normalisation emerge from institutionalised knowledge (Turkel, 1990). The by-product of such normalisation is deviance. Here, we reflect on how normative standards in academia are framing success and that nonconformity might be seen as failure. Failure is defined as the 'consequence of incompleteness' or the inability to control projects (Malpas & Wickham, 1995, p. 39). Rather than viewing failure in contrast to success, Malpas and Wickham (1995) argue that failure is an intrinsic part of society, as the human quest for control or completeness can never be fully achieved. Inspired by this definition, we view failure through a Douglasian lens, as it is the inability to feel that you belong that leads to a sense of alienation. For us, failure is not a disruption that can be overcome but it is the constant state of limitation to integrate ourselves in the institution that does not provide us adequate space to fully belong. Following Ahmed (2014, p. 147), we can consider academia as a 'sanitised space' or a 'comfort zone' where those who *can* occupy such spaces with ease would experience comfort; thus, causing those who are out of place to experience discomfort.

Against the backdrop of neoliberalism and market-oriented policies driving the higher education sector in many parts of the West, especially in the UK, academics are already under extreme pressure to conform to new institutional forms of labour and competencies (see Archer, 2008a, 2008b; Harris, 2005; Henkel, 2005 for the UK context; see Billot, 2010; Shams, 2019; Tulubas & Gokturk, 2022; Ylijoki & Ursin, 2013 for discussion on other Western contexts). Core academic values such as autonomy, intellectual freedom, creativity, criticality, and production of intellectually stimulating ideas are constantly judged against the ability to produce research outputs, and secure grant funding and high teaching evaluations (Harris, 2005; Henkel, 2005). As Moosa (2018) discusses, this is an era of publish or perish and new academics need to be extremely prolific and strategic in their research output to survive in the current academic environment. In the UK, the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which is an exercise designed to evaluate the quality of research in higher education institutions, has further created a pressure to conform to institutional demands for research outputs, further threatening intellectual autonomy (Bhopal, 2016; Murphy & Sage, 2014).

This shift in academic labour influences how young and intersectional scholars develop their academic identities, a notion that interlinks the professional and personal sense of self (Archer, 2008a, 2008b). Academic identity has been defined as the '*ideas, beliefs and values of academics regarding the core values and principles of academic work*' (Tulubas & Gokturk, 2022, p. 1). In line with the neoliberal agenda, researchers are encouraged to construct their academic identities as a 'principled personal project', based on agency in exercising their academic values and self-regulation in deriving a sense of meaning from their work (Clegg, 2008, p. 343; see also Henkel, 2005). Depending on their orientations

towards neoliberal academia, Tulubas and Gokturk (2022) highlight that academics can produce different narratives to construct their academic identities. For instance, they can become a) the enterprise academic (e.g. one who positions themselves in line with managerial culture and is calculative and strategic about their publications for advancing their career); b) the ambivalent academic (e.g. one who is critical about neoliberalism but feels pressured to conform); or c) the authentic academic (e.g. one who does research for knowledge acquisition and self-fulfilment rather than any careerist or material gains) (Tulubas & Gokturk, 2022). Authenticity plays an important role in becoming an academic, however as Archer (2008a) argues, the system tends to privilege a certain race, age and gender to succeed in developing legitimacy and fulfilment from their work. Academic identity is, according to Archer (2008b), a process of 'becoming', but it is also 'embodied, culturally entangled, and produced within layers of structural inequalities' (p. 269).

As intersectional ECRs working within Western academia, we are constrained in performing an authentic academic identity. Here, we refer to intersectional scholars as colonised researchers who are compounded by multiple identities (e.g. non-Western, Black and Minority Ethnic, Muslim, Women) which challenges them to belong in various contexts and times (Scharrón-Del Río, 2018). Our cultural identity is fundamental to how we are perceived in academia and how we communicate our values in our work. As Archer's (2008a, 2008b) research on junior academics reveals, Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) junior academics are often treated differently by the institution, and this is attributed to their race, religion and negative assumptions about their academic abilities and literacy competencies (Archer, 2008a, 2008b). Other studies have shown how Black and Minority Ethnic academics experience marginalisation and exclusion (Johnson & Joseph-Salisbury, 2018; Sian, 2017), or have to meet higher performance thresholds than their White counterparts for career progression (Bhopal, 2015). The work of minority ethnic colleagues is also constantly questioned for legitimacy, is over-examined, and given lesser value (Bhopal, 2015; Bhopal & Chapman, 2019; Lander & Santoro, 2017). Along with the pressure to publish in top quality journals, intersectional academics face more disparate treatments in judgements of their research outputs; for instance, as Bhopal (2016) reveals, several minority ethnic academics highlight the subjective nature of the REF exercise where they felt that certain articles (e.g. those in Asian contexts) and areas of research (e.g. on race and diversity) are not scored as highly as those on Western contexts and theories.

Practices within Western academia can alienate some researchers, by focusing on aspects of the researcher's personal and cultural identity rather than by viewing them and their work as a whole (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010). Against these odds, scholars who reported delivering the *right* products in terms of research and who held a strong support network were able to progress in their careers, although this can still be considered a failure in authentic academic identity terms (Archer, 2008a; Bhopal, 2020). Alienating researchers from their epistemological stance further constrains them from developing their authentic academic identity.

Muteness in non-Western theories and ideas

Bias often surfaces against those who hold any epistemological stance that deviates from the mainstream perspective (Scheurich & Young, 1997). When comparing

with canonical authors in the West such as Shakespeare, Said (1985, p. 92) argues that the kind of 'attentions, judgements, scholarship, and performances' are rarely allowed for non-Western thoughts due to the muteness imposed upon them. In one of his works, Said discusses orientalism, which refers to the constructed views of the non-Western societies in ways that favour the Western readers. Orientalism still exists today even within universities, as seen through the lack of representations in members of the teaching team, syllabus, and curriculum, that gives the West a superiority over the East (Varisco, 2007). Orientalism has led to false assumptions about non-Western ideologies and has ultimately privileged and legitimised some philosophies over others (Alcoff, 2017). Enveloped within Western ideologies, many Other schools of thought, perspectives, and paradigms (e.g. Islamic, Palestinians, Black and Buddhism) are silenced as they become matter that is out of place despite their potential contribution and value (Kennedy, 2000; Varisco, 2007).

Alcoff (2017) argues that philosophy itself is rooted in Eurocentricism and colonial ideas. To be considered legitimate and included in the discourse, non-Western philosophies need to abide by Western rules, norms, practices, and assumptions, offering not only a new line of thinking but something that can be easily understood by Western intellects (Alcoff, 2017; Posholi, 2020). They must be able to 'demonstrate what they can philosophically accomplish that Aristotle [or the like] cannot' (Olberding, 2015, p. 15). Such a Eurocentric theorisation results in a one-sided conversation, ignoring the fact that there are historical, cultural, and religious influences on Western philosophical ideas too (Alcoff, 2017). It also leads to the reproduction of colonialism and the experience of imperialism in the curriculum, clearly exemplified by how one might judge the legitimacy of research contexts for knowledge production. Other scholarship (e.g. Black, non-Western) are grounded in 'epistemic struggle', associated with a lack of legitimacy, prejudice, devaluation, and structural constraints against 'racist academia' (Muzanenhamo & Chowdhury, 2021, p. 6). Mainstream acceptance of non-Western/non-White theories and philosophies emerge only after Western academics start to engage them (Muzanenhamo & Chowdhury, 2021; Oswick & Noon, 2014), further reproducing the epistemic inequality in knowledge dissemination.

Within marketing and management scholarship, recent works have criticised the knowledge hierarchies and Eurocentric epistemologies that exist within the business school (Bajde et al., 2021; Dar et al., 2021; Kravets & Varman, 2022; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2021). In their introduction to the special issue on knowledge hierarchies, Kravets and Varman (2022) discuss that marketing and 'what counts as [theoretical] knowledge' in the discipline is overwhelmingly dominated by a Eurocentric canon (p. 128). Non-western knowledge, philosophies, practices, and people are always viewed through the Western theoretical lens, or compared in terms of difference or absence against the Western framework (Kravets & Varman, 2022; Sandikci, 2022). Such framing through negative terms, as Sandikci (2022) argues, reproduces, and legitimises a hierarchical mode of knowledge that privileges Western theories and ideologies over Other ways of knowing. This hierarchy is further reproduced when Western and predominantly European theories are treated as normal and ideal to study marketing phenomena, without reflection of their historical context or colonial influence (Kravets & Varman, 2022; Sandikci, 2022).

As doctoral researchers in a Western and predominantly White business school, we are encouraged to socialise into the European theoretical discourse, as many top business journals in which we aim to publish celebrate neo-colonial intellectual ideas and scholars (Boussebaa & Tienari, 2021; Murphy & Zhu, 2012). In order to work interdisciplinarily, we need to socialise with elite European philosophers such as Bourdieu, Giddens, Foucault, Marx, Miller, and Hegel to show our intellectual capability (Dar et al., 2021). We also need to transcend into a particular style of writing that is widely accepted in the curriculum (Tietze & Dick, 2013); thus, falling outside of these norms may be framed as problematic too (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010). Those who do not or cannot conform to these expectations are perceived as messy, or inadvertently, as failures (Harrowell et al., 2018). Hutton and Cappellini (2022) argue that Other knowers and knowledges are subjected to 'epistemic injustice' due to their silencing and neglect (p. 155); they are not given the same credibility and agency to reproduce as European and other Western epistemologies. In order to create an epistemic shift, Hutton and Cappellini (2022) suggest that we need to have a 'deeper engagement with the marginalised authorial subject positions' (p.157).

In this paper, we take this position by asking, how do non-Western ECRs working within Western academia cope with the inequity imposed upon them? As a result, what are the consequences of failing to create critical and inclusive pathways for intersectional academic identities in marketing and management research? Inspired by a Douglassian lens of looking at failure as the inherent inability to belong, we reflect on our own experiences along with those of other non-Western peers to show the challenges and decisions in adopting specific theories and paradigms over others, and the implications of these choices for failing at performing an authentic academic identity. We focus on the experiences of scholars in UK business schools as they particularly aid in normalising and privileging Western, particularly European and American epistemologies (Dar et al., 2021). Against the competitive nature of higher education, business school academics in the UK are expected to churn out publications following the Chartered Association of Business Schools' (CABS) guide for their Institutional Research Excellence Framework (REF) (Tourish & Willmott, 2015), speeding up the process of muteness in Other theories.

Methodology

Our approach in this study was based on both authors' reflections as doctoral researchers who have come to the UK from Southeast Asian countries (Thailand and Malaysia) to pursue our academic goals. Inspired by Cappellini and Hutton's (2022) chapter on marginal testimonies, 'The politics of epistemic marginality', our reflections as accounts of autoethnography are incorporated within the findings. Our study builds on an interpretive paradigm (Tadajewski, 2006), by drawing on personal experiences whilst engaging with those shared by junior scholars and ECRs alike. A multi-method research design was conducted (Saunders et al., 2016), combining an autoethnography of the two authors with in-depth semi-structured interviews with other 15 non-Western doctoral students in UK-based business schools.

In the literature on epistemic injustice, there is an acknowledgement that dominant structures in knowledge hierarchies produce practices of silencing and ignorance (Hutton & Cappellini, 2022). It is in these practices that there remains a distortion and exclusion

experienced by some who are not fully integrated into collective understandings of the world (Fricker, 2007). Autoethnography enables us to reflexively become aware of our experiencing self, while at the same time acting as a liberator to our marginal and silenced representation (Watson, 2011; Whitinui, 2014). In this paper, we performed a collaborative autoethnography, where we ‘collected autobiographic materials, and analysed and interpreted it collectively to gain a meaningful understanding of the sociocultural phenomena’ (Chang et al., 2016, p. 24). According to Ellis et al. (2011), autoethnographic data can be collected at different times and places, through interactions with oneself, re-encountering memories and past experiences, as well as through consulting journals, objects and people. Our autoethnography in this project started from our reflexive notes documented during our PhD journeys. We both kept reflexive diaries that not only aided to reduce biases in our research (Finlay, 2002) but also helped us reflect on our individual struggles of marginalisation, inferiority, and inability to voice our Other ways of knowing (Hutton & Cappellini, 2022). At the beginning of this study, we exchanged discussions based on our reflexive notes but did not intend to develop them into an autoethnography; however, as we progressed in the paper, we decided to adopt a more feminist approach of reducing power hierarchy between us and our participants (Oakley, 2016), thereby deciding to share and combine our reflexive notes along with the voices of our participants. Due to this, certain parts of the reflexive notes needed to be selected and extended for this paper. Inspired by the marginal testimonial approach (Cappellini & Hutton, 2022), we treated our autoethnographic notes as another piece of interview transcript to be analysed. Considering our personal experiences, we set out to investigate the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of our non-Western peers.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 non-Western doctoral researchers in business schools in the UK. Participants were recruited through a snowball sampling technique to find those that fit the criteria (Handcock & Gile, 2011). There were three main criteria in the recruitment process. In our research, participants: 1) were enrolled in a PhD programme in a school of business or management at a UK institution; 2) had received primary education and upbringing outside the UK; and 3) identified themselves as non-Western. Both authors recruited eight participants each, however due to one participant contracting the COVID-19 virus and withdrawing from the study, our final data set consisted of 15 participants. Prior to data collection, both authors worked collaboratively to prepare the interview questions and ethical approval was acquired from the second author’s institution. All participants were informed of the aims and scope of the research prior to the interviews, and we retained a written consent of their voluntary participation (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016; Saunders et al., 2016).

The interviews focused on the theoretical and philosophical orientations that participants had adopted for their PhD dissertations to reveal the experiences of the marginalisation of non-dominant ways of knowing and the subordination to conform to academic convention. Our interview questions included asking how participants chose their theoretical framework, and if they had considered alternative or indigenous theories which are reflective of their own cultural and philosophical backgrounds, and the challenges they faced in doing so. We decided to focus on the experiences of PhD students, as the theories adopted in a doctoral thesis often shape the researcher’s identity and career (Hall & Burns, 2009). Furthermore, the empirical challenges of this group of PhD students are often under-reported (Hou & Feng, 2019). With participants’ permission, interviews were conducted via

Table 1. List of participants.

No.	Participant ^a	Nationality	Gender	Year of PhD	Key Theories/Theorist	Methodology
1	Amir	Turkish	M	1	Internet of Things and Innovation Theory	Qualitative
2	Anita	Indian	F	2	Practice and Routine by key theorists	Qualitative
3	Ariam	Eritrean	F	4	Work and Social Exchange by Mauss and Others	Mixed method
4	Devina	Indian	F	3	Entrepreneurship and Ethics by Gomez and colleagues	Qualitative
5	Farah	Iranian	F	2	Customer Experience and Artificial Intelligence models	Mixed method
6	Fei	Chinese	F	4	Identity by Hall and colleagues	Qualitative
7	Gamila	Egyptian	F	4	Action and Surveillance by Foucault	Qualitative
8	Hafiza	Pakistani	F	4	Work-life balance by key theorists	Qualitative
9	Ikemba	Nigerian	M	4	Crowdsourcing through an indigenous theory	Qualitative
10	Ishita	Indian	F	4	Power and Institution by Foucault	Qualitative
11	Kaira	Indonesian	F	1	Inclusive Innovation by key authors	Qualitative
12	Khadijah	Saudi Arabian	F	4	International Financial Reporting for SMEs by key theorists	Qualitative
13	Micky	Chinese	M	4	Symbols by Baudrillard, Lacan, Marx	Qualitative
14	Natasha	Malawian	F	4	Empowerment and Capability Approach	Qualitative
15	Saira	Iranian	F	4	Deep learning by key authors	Qualitative

^aPseudonyms are used.

Skype, Zoom, or Microsoft Teams platforms, and were audio-recorded. All interviews were transcribed and anonymised. Pseudonyms prescribed to their narratives are included in the paper.

Whilst our participants differed in terms of their nationality and ethnicity, all of them are considered international PhD students, who make up the minority group culturally in the UK (Office for Students [OFS], 2022). Our participants include men and women, aged between 28 and 38 years old, and ranging from different stages of their doctoral research. Apart from two participants who adopted a mixed-method approach, all participants adopted a qualitative research design for their theses. A summary of our research participants is shown in Table 1.

The autoethnographic data and interview transcriptions were analysed via a thematic analysis approach involving coding and categorising segments of data into themes (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Both authors were equally involved in the process of data analysis. Thematic analysis was performed on two levels: first, we analysed the data separately, and then collaboratively, by sharing our initial descriptive codes and interpretations to create the categorisations together (Spiggle, 1994). Reflexivity played a key role in our collaborative analysis (Voice Group, 2008), as we discussed our personal accounts, challenges, and strategies of working with Western paradigms, comparing with that of our participants. Inspired by the testimonial approach (Cappellini & Hutton, 2022), and to anonymise author identities, our autoethnography data was combined together in a free-spirited manner and included in the findings. As two non-Western ECRs from different countries, cultural backgrounds, and religion, we both reflected on how we tamed ourselves, in becoming less brown or less Muslim, to be integrated into the Western academic world. Both authors have successfully secured Grade 8 lectureship positions at top UK universities, and we believe that our success in this regard is attributed to the tamed and risk-averse versions of ourselves.

Findings: avoiding failure in academia

Our findings reveal how non-Western ECRs navigate through the complex terrain of Western academia in UK Business Schools. We analyse the efforts involved to be integrated into the curriculum as coping strategies in understanding and avoiding failure. In this section, we highlight three main strategies adopted by non-Western ECRs to navigate around the feelings of alienation in the system, conceptualised as being theoretically cautious, (non)conforming with authority, and performing deep labour.

Being theoretically cautious

The majority of our interviewees highlighted how the selection of a theoretical framework that guides their research involves careful deliberation. They were cautious in choosing certain theories over others for their PhD theses, as they acknowledge the role of involving recognisable names and concepts as a safety measure to bring their research forward. Many reveal a preference to adopt dominant theories in their research, often written by Western canonical theorists, to ensure that their theoretical or empirical contributions will be accepted in the scholarship. Rather than using a marginal theory or less popular philosophies to challenge dominant thinking, they steered away from theories outside of Western-European perspectives that may originate from their cultural backgrounds. For Hafiza, who came from a conservative middle-class family in Pakistan, she admits that despite being exposed to the British education system due to colonisation, her experience of such an exposure is merely a continuation of systemic colonisation.

So there's this thing that because, again, I have done some postgraduate education in Pakistan as well and this thing was drawn to us here, I don't know if it's common in the UK, but during our masters, for example, our professors went out of their way to say that we have to look at Western theories in order to rectify something that. you know how we talk about where knowledge is generated from, where it's come from and how, and how there's a world vision and there's a world's truth and things like that. Our professors actually ingrained into us that even if we are observing something and that we know it to be true to our particular context, if we want our work to be published, if we want our research to be valid, we need to find Western theories, philosophers, philosophies, that sort of support uhm aspect. (Hafiza)

The superiority of Western theories has long been engrained in the educational system of developing countries, especially the colonised. In order to qualify for publication, Hafiza highlights how it was instilled in her since her secondary and tertiary education that she needs to submit to Western theories. Here, she shares that it has always been embedded within the colonial system that the Western theories and opinions are superior to others. In fact, validation is acquired through Western theories or philosophies. This confirms Jafari's (2022) argument that non-Western scholars and institutions oftentimes play a role in reinforcing Western superiority in knowledge reproduction, however as Hafiza discusses, this submission to Western theories and the lack of criticality towards them has been engrained in the colonised from a young age. Although Hafiza studies the culture of work-life balance and acknowledges that there are Islamic references to interpreting the phenomenon and context, she finds it difficult to demonstrate the influences of her philosophy to the cultural understanding of work and life. Since the context of her research is in Pakistan, Hafiza feels that it is difficult to separate these notions (work-life,

wages, benefits with faith) as they are intertwined. Yet, being self-critical, she tries not to use Islamic resources even though she feels they are directly interconnected with the phenomenon. Instead, she tries to find third party validations to qualify for Islamic citations *'because I don't want to sound like I'm over promoting something from my religion'* (Hafiza). Experiencing discomfort and fear about being labelled a certain type of academic (Broeckerhoff & Lopes, 2020), she resisted her theoretical capital to fit in with the academic discipline. Thinking long-term about her academic career and what would be acceptable in a viva, Hafiza feels the need to *'shut away to focus'* and ignore the *'oh but'* moments.

Similarly, Ariam, who is from Eritrea, talks about the privilege in theory production and the publication of new theoretical works. Studying idiosyncrasy of flexible working in the British workplace, she highlights how the adoption of unpopular or lesser-known theories may be a risk considering the scrutiny of the PhD examination process: *'no one has used it before, do you want to get into the trap of risking it?'*. Reflecting on her choice to use a known social exchange theory, Ariam highlights that it is a conscious decision that fits in with her research. Despite her choice, Ariam contemplates her suspicion on the origins of the theory. She is sceptical about how it was created by *'White men'* who went to observe the behaviour of indigenous people in Papua New Guinea and may or may not have acquired appropriate ethics of consent in their observations. Overall, she feels a lack of connection with her thesis:

[This theory] was created by these White men but it's not a White theory [...] We have been made to believe that they are the only theories you can apply but there's so much more out there. There's so many philosophies. There's so many more ways of thinking. You know my research now, and this is towards the end of my PhD that I'm getting this epiphany. I have created research for the White Western society. I'm not representing my people. I'm not representing my heritage [...] Because the theories I've used, the way of thinking, you know, the lifestyles I've used, the participant sample, is not representative of any, you know. All of my research participants are White English women. (Ariam)

As Ariam reveals, whilst Western dominant theories, which are mostly created by *'White men'*, are privileged in academia, there are Other perspectives that could be adopted to explore the same phenomenon. However, there is a risk in adopting alternative philosophies, especially if one is studying a Western context. Although Ariam is using what she calls *'White theories'* for her PhD, she experiences a sense of alienation with these theories as they are not representative of her cultural understanding. Such a process leads to an emotional detachment from the theory she uses, as Ariam reveals: *'I have detached myself from, theoretically, from my research. So, I'm writing it from a Western perspective, but even my way of thinking and my understanding of the world is not aligned to the theory I'm using, so it's like you've detached yourself emotionally from the lens you try to make of your PhD'*. However, considering the capitalist structure of the academic system, the competitiveness of academia and the expectations of students to *'publish as much as possible and as quickly as possible'*, she contemplates that it is better to play it safe rather than risking her academic pursuit by using alternative theories for her research. In order to secure a job in academia, she knows that she needs to publish in high-ranking journals and *'have done enough'* so that it can get published. Such a pragmatic approach is also one of the reasons why she explores the British workplace as a context of study rather than representing her people. Like Ariam and Hafiza, other students also relate the use of dominant or Western

theories to '*opportunity for publications*' (Kaira) and '*a job in [British] academia*' (Gamila). Rather than resisting dominant forms of knowledge or fighting their colonial past in their research (Brownlie, 2006), these ECRs are careful in what they research and their portrayal of political ideologies.

Our own reflexive notes reveal our socialisation into the Western theoretical discourse, and the emotional struggles that accompany it. For our doctoral dissertations, we adopted interdisciplinary canonical theories from Hegel, Giddens, and Miller to Foucault to study mainstream consumption phenomena in the UK. Concurring with our participant narratives, we cast aside our theoretical capital even though it could be applied to diversify the concept, mainly because we were risk-averse and afraid of failing, both in publishing in leading journals and in passing the viva.

Although being from an interesting cultural background, I'm not interested in studying about culture, ethnicity, or racial identity. My research interests are in studying consumer routines, family habits and sustainable consumption. If I could adopt Hegel to study consumer practices, whose doctrines fundamentally lead to Christian theology; Why can't I use Thai or Indian philosophies to look at body routines and habits?. I don't think I can use Ihsan, an Islamic concept that echoes the principles of surveillance, and expect it to be accepted just as how I use Foucauldian lens of surveillance and discipline. A monotheistic religion such as mine is apparently backwards and medieval but a panoptic surveillance gaze that sees and hears all, which is fundamentally similar is always relevant and appropriate ... Having language competences in English, Thai, Hindi, Punjabi and minor Sanskrit, I have a body of literature from non-traditional philosophers to draw from. But I'm limited to explore the notion of Nisai (Habit) from a Western/European intellectual perspective, just like how mindfulness and deceleration has been academically appropriated from my culture. (Authors)

On the one hand, we feel judged for studying Western consumers, as Asian researchers typically tend to study their own context. On the other hand, we wanted to borrow theoretical capital from our context but these options were not in our theoretical reach. Although we experience discomfort in muting our theoretical capital, it feels safer to use known authors for the intellectual pool of knowledge available in the review process (Boussebaa & Tienari, 2021). As such, by adopting Westernised theoretical tools in conducting research, non-Western PhD students alike reflect on these decisions as strategies to cope with feeling, being, or thinking differently; thus, reducing their risks of failing in academia.

(Non)conforming with authority

In the previous section, we showed how students deliberately chose to apply certain theories over others to avoid risks of failure in academia. Apart from this, our participants reveal how they needed to conform with the requirements as set out by the institution, albeit incongruent with their principles. Here, we refer to (non)conformity as a process of conforming and non-conforming at the same time, which exists in parallel but as contradictory forces. Although our participants need to conform to the dominant institution and people within them in order to avoid failure in their academic pursuits, there is still an element of non-conformity as they critique the system and its forces. For example, Gamila, who is from Egypt and taking a PhD-by-publication route, feels that academia is lacking in sympathy; thus, she often receives harsh comments in publishing. In navigating through

this, she focuses on the output that she would like to get her work published and align her work towards the requirements of those journals. For Gamila, she understands the role of a PhD researcher as contributing unique work as well as offering contribution through critique. In her case, Gamila practices an academic boycott policy, where she does not cite or engage with work affiliated to Israeli universities. However, in her final PhD revision, she was asked to include a journal article that violates her boycott policy; thus, placing her in a difficult situation:

I think if it's a PhD, you can do pretty much anything but if you want to get published, that's something else. I am in that position where I need to cite that paper and submit my revision. I don't disagree with that paper. I had a look at it and said you know what? It's not a big deal. Because then I think the journal was OK and at the end of the day I looked him up and saw the work and what they are doing. (Gamila)

As Gamila highlights, early career researchers need to be flexible in bending their principles when revisions are required by examiners or reviewers. This is especially the case for early career researchers who need to secure a publication to enter the job market or are bound by certain visa restrictions. Initially, Gamila did not want to include the paper in her revision due to her strong political and religious views. Nevertheless, after deliberating with close colleagues, reading the work of the peer-reviewed article that she needed to include, and considering the ranking of the journal, she succumbed to her examiner's request. Including an '*I did what you wanted*' reply to the reviewers, she bent her own principles to avoid rejection. Such acts of conformity not only lead to disempowering the junior scholar (Goode, 2007), but also constrains their agency in constructing an authentic academic identity. Although the issue of conforming to reviewers' comments may be pertinent to Western ECRs and scholars alike, we argue that the pressure to conform is greater for non-Western ECRs due to the higher threshold they need to meet to secure a job in Western academia. Along with finding an institution ready to sponsor her work visa, Gamila highlights how she needs to deliver the right product, i.e. publications in a good journal, to secure a job in Western academia. The pressure to conform to the reviewer's comments is therefore higher, as disobedience comes with a risk of failure in her academic pursuit. Gamila similarly reveals how she had to be pragmatic about getting her PhD signed off and bend her own rules and policy by agreeing with her supervisors: '*If you want your PhD signed off, and you want to get your certificate. You're going to have to play it strategically. You're going to have to say, I did what you wanted*' (Gamila). According to Gamila, supervisors play an important role in shaping a PhD journey, as students would inevitably inherit their supervisors' worldview. The relationship between supervisors, students, and the institutions is never equal, as students need to fulfil certain requirements to keep the relationship functioning.

Conformity with the supervisor's viewpoint is a long-standing and complex issue in a PhD environment (Goode, 2007; Grant, 2010). Although there are some students that fulfil their supervisor's every request, the majority of the PhD students that we interviewed highlighted that they challenge their supervisors if feedback is incongruent with their personal views. However, many students regard their supervisors as experts in the field, and therefore follow their directions and suggestions accordingly. Another illustrative example is by Anita, who is in the second year of her PhD. Growing up in India and having completed her primary education in a system where '*the teacher is right*', Anita

highlights how she feels that her supervisors are experts in the field and therefore you *'do not disregard'* their suggestions. Whereas, if it is not in line with her views of the research, then she *'communicates it in [the] supervisory meeting'*. For instance, she had initially wanted to conduct a cross-cultural research of fashion consumption behaviour comparing India and the UK. Upon discussions with her supervisor and also reading up on the literature of buying behaviour, she decided not to pursue a cross-cultural comparison but instead focus on Indian practices only:

So I was thinking of drawing differences and similarities between consumer behaviour of sustainable fashion in the Indian market and in the UK market, how the consumers react to such products, being more fixated on buying behaviour. But then my supervisors they guided me that there's a lot of research which is being done in and around buying behaviour, it's really overused [. . .] so they advised me to look at Indian fashion practices only, and practice theory came up as the most appropriate theory to be used [. . .] I read up on the literature, and I agree with that. (Anita)

Anita highlights how she took her supervisors' advice to adopt a dominant theory to study practices in the Global South. As she reveals, their suggestions helped put her research into perspective, and she can now focus on analysing Indian fashion from a deeper and critical perspective. Although agency is important for academic success (Goller & Harteis, 2014), Anita reveals that supervisors can give directions, and indeed, it is helpful to receive a guide especially when one is attempting to integrate into Western academia. It helps speed up the process of learning, though they never *'tell'* her what to do. Reflecting on the narrative, Anita also acknowledges that the PhD is a continuous journey, one *'cannot always do what you initially thought. As you read and research more, you develop you own critical thing and change from where you start'*. Hence, over the course of her PhD, she has developed her own understanding of the topic and at times challenges her supervisors as well. However, for many PhD students, disagreeing with their supervisors or not following their suggestions is risky and it may lead to falling out with them in the journey. As Anita and other participants have pointed out, they know of colleagues that have had to abandon their PhD pursuits or request for a supervisory review due to falling out with them. Especially if one wants to work with non-Western theories, supervisors may be uncomfortable and resist the doctoral project altogether (Grant, 2010). Rather than a two-way relationship between the researchers and supervisors, there is an imbalance dynamic within the relationship that needs to be managed.

Our reflexive notes reveal how there is a prejudice and lack of acceptance for alternative or non-traditional theories in academia, and how we needed to comply in order to avoid failure in the PhD journey. We obliged to the superior voices, whose (dis)approval is meaningful, for fear of failing.

The methodology textbooks, like Duberley, Johnson and Cassell (2012) and Saunders et al. (2016) suggest that reflexivity in thinking through the researcher's own beliefs is a key premise to being a qualitative researcher. Here, I thought it was a perfect opportunity to be transparent in declaring how my philosophy of life has shaped the way I present myself as a researcher. Apparently, my reflexive writing makes the examiners question my scientific rigour. I did not quite understand that. I guess it is easy to spot something that stands out but should it be completely dismissed just because it was unfamiliar? Being silent in your own PhD thesis is undeniably demotivating. My monograph was a space I feel so invested in, as others do with their own, but in that state of vulnerability, as a PhD researcher wanting the

best outcome for her viva, I felt the need to oblige when the examiner expresses her opinion that my religious and cultural identity does not really matter and should be taken out from my thesis. In fact, it makes her question the scientific rigour of my thesis – which I failed to defend, just because I was scared to say anything. I just want to pass my viva. (Authors)

Despite being optimistic researchers, we quickly accepted the dominant critiques as we associate disobedience with failure. At the beginning of our doctoral endeavour, we believed that we could show academia how our cultural identity influences our beliefs, values, and worldviews (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010). It was our ethical stance; an extension of our axiology to perform an authentic version of ourselves. However, we are constantly reminded about how our culture has a reputation in the Western space. Although theories from the Enlightenment were developed from non-Western contexts, and in fact many through observing *our* people in colonised countries, they are widely celebrated. Yet reverse anthropology is not accepted, as we are not able to study the dominant Western culture through our theoretical and philosophical lenses. Reverse anthropology is when the marginal treats the dominant as the exotic Other (Tedlock, 2009). We are indeed studying the Other in their own world, but we succumb to our fears of failing, which ironically left us feeling like a failure in our own right.

Performing deep labour

Apart from being theoretically cautious and conforming to the authority of supervisors or institutions at large, many of our participants also reveal the extra labour and effort needed to avoid failure in their research. Despite having an adequate understanding of the English language, following the requirement for enrolling in UK institutions, English remains a foreign language amongst our participants. Hence, to adopt, analyse, and critique any Western-dominant theory, they need to go the extra mile to verify their understanding to avoid any misinterpretations. Take for instance, Micky, who is from China, conducts fully theoretical research on the concept of symbolic value and money. He mostly reads and uses European philosophies for his research, from the likes of Lacan, and Zizek to Baudrillard. Highlighting his frustration with the lack of translated books of the original texts in English, Micky must rely on the translated versions available in the UK or online. At times, these may be informal translations by other scholars who have cited or written about the phenomenon. However, he found some of these translated publications to be *'problematic'*, as Micky argues that *'Baudrillard misread Freud'*. This issue prompted him to start learning French and German, two other foreign languages, so that he can *'make things reliable, clear, and clarify in detail'* in his understanding of the phenomenon. Many times, he also uses dictionaries to translate the text word by word:

There are 33 or 34 seminars of Lacan, and only about half is translated in English [...] So I had to learn [the language] a little bit by myself. So that at least I can guarantee what I read or what I explain is correct. Of course, I [still] base on others translation but also base on dictionary. But uh, at least I indeed make some effort [...] I read word by word to check to explain my understanding of it. (Micky)

On top of his English, which according to him is *'not very good'*, learning other European languages such as French and German to attempt a deep level of understanding of the topic is an effort that Micky feels he needs to make. To avoid

misinterpretation of the concept, he has to *'read it again and again'* or *'find other books to explain this point'*. Language competence has been shown to be a dominant force in one's ability to publish, secure funding, and for career advancement (Pudelko & Tenzer, 2019). Especially in the UK, foreign academics are expected to demonstrate proficiency in the English language in order to build academic habitus (Sliwa & Johansson, 2015). Of course, English proficiency is necessary especially within the UK context, however as Micky narrates, there is a direct correlation between European linguistic competence and adopting European theories. Although Western colleagues with different language competences may experience the same issue, we argue that there is a double barrier for non-Western ECRs as they need to rely on translated works which are often in English. In order to show competence in adopting a grand European theory, non-Western ECRs must engage in mental and physical labour to translate, understand, and adopt the theory that is not part of their origins or habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), and do so from translations in another foreign language. Comparing himself to native speakers, Micky feels that they have the privilege of gaining knowledge from its original source, and therefore they are in a better position to acquire *'advanced knowledge'* than him, as he reveals: *'some authors who can read French have advanced Lacanian knowledge. Like why do they know so many things'*. However, he feels that *'it's an obsession'* to answer the philosophical research question, even if this means that he has to sacrifice his mental health: *'I indeed feel tired and anxiety, and then being exhausted of all things'*. On the other hand, the labour undertaken in order to avoid misinterpretations is also prevalent amongst participants who do not adopt a dominant Western theory.

For Ikemba, there is an extra effort to use a non-Western perspective to explore his research questions. Ikemba is from Nigeria and studies crowdsourcing in the African context. In his research, he highlights that *'context really matters'*, and therefore conducted an ethnography to interpret the concept from *'the ground'*. Arguing that Western perspectives are not always applicable, he uses an indigenous theory to explain the phenomenon in his context. Although highlighting that his use of the theory is not *'intentional'*, in his opinion using Western theories would *'dilute the argument'*. Highlighting that his supervisor is African, Ikemba feels that he is in a privileged position to adopt alternative theories as they share the same cultural capital and aspirations in academia: *'I think it would not be applicable to a lot of people, because if your supervisors don't understand it and the people around you don't understand it and you want to finish your PhD on time, you want to publish an article, you just have to bend'*. With the support from his mentor, Ikemba feels that he can take a risk in adopting alternative theories. Taking a PhD-by-publication route, Ikemba and his supervisor would deliberately target special issues to navigate around the adoption of indigenous theories, framing their strategy as a matter of just *'finding the right journals'*. Nevertheless, Ikemba expects a certain level of scrutiny from the reviewers who may not have heard or explored indigenous concepts, prompting him to include further explanations in his work:

I think one of the things I did in most of my writings is that I put down quite a few footnotes just to explain what I'm trying to say in the paper, yeah, just to put the footnote like 'OK, this is exactly what I'm saying' and kind of put a lot of definition. A lot of definition like OK, this kind of clarifies exactly what I'm saying. In some of the papers I've seen some of the reviewers just arguing 'don't you think this is this' and you could easily know this is someone that doesn't

actually understand what I'm trying to say, so we had to kind of clarify a lot of things just to bring some clarity. (Ikemba)

As Ikemba reveals, he would add footnotes to explain and clarify his arguments in the paper. Expecting harsh reviews for adopting an alternative theory, he knows that he needs to do the extra labour for his ideas to be accepted or even considered for publication. At times, he finds that definitions of a dominant concept can be rigid, and subverting the accepted definition is not always welcome. For instance, in order to explain the concept of crowdsourcing from a different perspective than what is commonly adopted or discussed in the literature, he has to explain it well and clarify that '*this is what it is on the ground*', supported by his empirical findings. Ikemba's narratives highlight the issues with hegemonizing theoretical concepts, especially in management studies (Boussebaa & Tienari, 2021). Top management journals are dominated by Anglo-American scholars, which affects the pool of intellectual knowledge available for the peer-review process. As such, this lack of intellectual resource reproduces colonial forms of knowledge dissemination (Murphy & Zhu, 2012). Highlighting how he had to spend much of his discussion disputing the rigid terminologies presently used in the literature, this extra labour not only disrespects the cultural specificities in contexts, but also limits Ikemba from being creative in formulating meaningful contributions.

Our reflections further expose the deep performance labour needed to show our legitimacy and credibility in attempting to socialise with Western-hegemonic theories and philosophies. Although the academic community expects us to conform to Western ways of knowing, they do not want us to fully belong or to critically engage with their elite authors. As intersectional non-Western scholars, we can apply Western theories to advance knowledge about *our people*, but not use them to study Westerners in their own world.

There is a certain look, maybe a condescending nod, raised eyebrows, tapping pens on the table, when I say 'I use Foucault'. There was a 'don't think you understand Foucault' feedback. There was also a 'don't think this is how you apply Foucault'. Some discouraging words that I carry with me despite knowing, I understand his work and I believe in how I apply it. I don't read his books just once. I read them multiple times because I don't understand French, and English is not my first language too. I put in more effort in reading, studying, dissecting, summarising, interpreting, synthesising. But I could do it. Especially before any presentations or conferences, my preparation seems to take longer than my White peers. I have extra steps ... making sure terminologies are used precisely, pronunciations are correct, and accents can be well understood. And that I prepare myself in managing those difficult comments that emerge from time to time ... They stare at me in conferences when I say I research couples in London using this interdisciplinary theory ... I have recently been socialising with Kaufmann, whose work has not been translated from French, but they have been used in English language journals. I always try to go back to the original source, no matter if I need to use Google Translate to help me. There are some articles that I have solely relied on informal translations, but that's what I need to do to engage with the concept ... (Authors)

Our deviance from normal academic identity problematises the expectations about knowledge producers (Johnson & Joseph-Salisbury, 2018). Our bodies and capabilities became invaders of Western space, as it conflicts with the institutional norm. As we resist and perform Western theories, we experience intense anxiety and vulnerability in order to

show our legitimacy. Our cultural, spiritual, and academic identity is not separable, but we are judged separately not as a whole.

Discussions and implications

This paper demonstrates how emerging non-Western ECRs navigate through the expectations, challenges, and strategies of avoiding failure in pursuing research in Western academia. Inspired by a Douglasian lens, we view failure as the inability to integrate within the Western academic world, both through lived experience and marginalisation of our theoretical forms of knowledge. Our reflections and participants' narratives highlight how non-Western scholars attempt to integrate themselves into the institution that presents limitations to them fully belonging. In doing so, these narratives are framed not merely as struggles but also as strategies to cope and succeed within the systemic limitations. Discourses around failure are a privilege (Clare, 2019), and as non-Western junior scholars, as our participants reveal, we simply cannot afford to fail or discuss our failures. This paper offers two main contributions to the literature on knowledge imbalance and the debate around failures in management studies.

First, we show that socialising with theories or philosophies outside of a Western-dominant paradigm comes with a risk of failure in doctoral research. Despite the ongoing conversations around decolonising the curriculum and including non-Western perspectives into the scholarship (Alcoff, 2017; Kravets & Varman, 2022; Olberding, 2015; Sandikci, 2022), the experiences and struggles of non-Western junior scholars, as demonstrated in our findings, have proven otherwise; the support for engaging with alternative ways of thinking and knowing remains limited. Western, and pre-dominantly European, epistemologies are treated as the norm and the framework to be compared against without much reflection of their historical context or colonial influence (Kravets & Varman, 2022; Sandikci, 2022). As our participants' narratives show, we are expected to know and socialise with elite European philosophers and social theorists, applying them to various contexts; and if we want to use a non-traditional theorist or theory, we would need to measure it against the dominant one. Failure to do so could result in falling out with supervisors, failing the viva, and/or failing to get published in top quality journals, as many of the top business school journals we aim to publish in reproduce knowledge hierarchies of the West (Boussebaa & Tienari, 2021; Murphy & Zhu, 2012). Although there is the rhetoric of diversity and inclusivity in our field, the system does not nurture a culture of inclusivity that enables different forms of theoretical capital to circulate. Our non-Western philosophies and views are not easily accepted and afforded the same agency and credibility to reproduce. As Douglas (1966, p. 36) asserts, dirt, as matter that is out of place, is a 'suggestive approach'. It implies a system with conditions that set out orders and its contravention.

Our findings speak of a subversion of failure as strategies for success adopted by non-Western doctoral researchers in business schools in the UK, namely by being theoretically cautious, observing conformity with authority, and engaging in deep labour. Although success in a doctoral project can be measured by PhD completion or gaining traction in publication (Goller & Harteis, 2014; Sutherland, 2017), we argue that there is a sense of incompleteness in this success as we experience a lack of emotional connection with our research consigned to the Western academic practice. 'Dirt then, is never a unique,

isolated event. Where there is dirt, there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements' (Douglas, 1966, p. 36). To reduce the risk of rejections in publishing our work and increase the chances of securing an academic position, foreign ECRs are strategic and pragmatic with how their research is designed, conducted, and presented. This translates into producing a pool of junior researchers who are receptive towards theories and paradigms that are widely accepted in the Western structure. Although fear of failing is a mutually shared emotion amongst all doctoral students and ECRs, we argue that it is not experienced in the same way for non-Westerners.

Second, we argue that there are consequences for the discipline when doctoral researchers are strategic in avoiding risks in the scholarship. We highlight three main consequences that emerged from our analysis: produces risk-averse scholars; repetitive ideas and lack of creativity; and inauthentic academic identity.

Production of risk-averse scholars

The first consequence of avoiding failure in academia is that the scholarship is producing a pool of risk-averse junior researchers who are cautious on both theoretical and methodological fronts. Non-Western ECRs tend to become risk-averse by choosing theories that their Western counterparts are familiar with for fear of rejection. Such reservations are especially prominent when researchers are trying to secure lectureship positions to start their career in academia. Considering the competitiveness of higher education and the pressure to publish as quickly as possible in business schools (Moosa, 2018; Tourish & Willmott, 2015), it would undoubtedly take a long time to acculturate to new non-dominant theories in these established outlets. As our participant Ikemba's experiences highlight, indigenous theories are more scrutinised in the review process, and there is an issue of privilege given to certain theories and schools of thought over others.

In our own cases, we were pragmatic in our choice of theoretical framework. Even though there are routine and surveillance concepts that have been explored from philosophical texts other than Enlightenment, we avoid *risky* theories to succeed. Carjuzaa and Ruff (2010, p. 71) identified some key sources of difference in the way we may produce our work: 'identity, relational framework, contextualisation of the situation, and spirituality'. For Muslim female researchers, it is almost impossible to tame their physical appearances to fit in the seminar room or during fieldwork. However, it is easier to conceal their epistemology, ontology, and other aspects of Islamic beliefs on paper. Islam is often seen as an extreme religion, focused solely on worshipping. Islamic philosophies are misrepresented and misinterpreted in news agencies owing to the global political and economic propaganda (Kennedy, 2000). As Shaikh (1992, p. 62) narrates, the 'over-powering vitality of the West' has shaken and distorts the Islamic foundations and has challenged the intellectual capacity of Islamic culture. It is then unsurprising to note that this is indeed an unpopular epistemology in academia. It is in fact, not just a religion or mere practices of worshipping, but also, 'a way of life' (Hasan, 1992, p. 83), and provides a broad concept of rituals, norms, and moral behaviour (Neuwirth, 2014, p. 9). It is worth noting that whilst there are non-dominant theories emerging in the scholarship (e.g. queer theory), not all non-dominant theories are equally scrutinised and welcomed. Non-dominant theories, which are attached to contemporary social and political movements,

may carry some moral obligations that drive their acceptance; but they leave some of their own, minorities within the minority, as primitive, veiled, oppressive, and medieval.

Repetitive ideas and lack of creativity

The second consequence of avoiding failure in academia is that researchers tend to appear repetitive and uncreative in approaching research and producing knowledge. 'When we lived in a hierarchical culture, we used to think that either a thing was known to be true or it was wrong; a fact was a fact, and as such it guaranteed deductions made from it' (Douglas, 1992, p. 32). To avert undesirable scrutiny linked to using non-established theories in the discipline, unsurprisingly we block ourselves from the possibilities of making completely new discoveries. Fear of failing combined with a lack of encouragement to explore uncharted philosophies in the discipline leads to limiting potential in research diversity.

For a Thai-Indian researcher who grew up practicing insight meditation with her family, there is a rich historical and philosophical understanding of mindfulness, sustainability and embodied habits in her tradition. Although there are discourses and texts of the topic from Thai and Indian philosophers, researchers avoid using these unlegitimised untranslated concepts which have not yet been published in Western peer-reviewed journals. On the one hand, there is a lack of encouragement to use these theories that have been unexposed to the Western literature. On the other, there is a fear of failing to publish in top mainstream journals. This begs the question: Who has the power to legitimise new or non-Western theories? And with such an imbalance, whose failure is it for the lack of inclusivity that is feeding these hidden struggles in academia? As such, if non-Western researchers continue to internalise the normative expectations in using Western theories, our management discipline may suffer from a lack of creativity in steering critical discussions and making meaningful contributions. As Douglas (1966, p. 37) outlines, 'ambiguous ones tend to be treated as if they harmonised with the rest of the pattern. Discordant ones tend to be rejected. If they are accepted, the structure of assumptions has to be modified'. This paper is not set out to condemn Western philosophies, as we acknowledge their importance and contribution in advancing knowledge production, but rather, this paper invites a call to find solidarity and recognition that there are counterparts in philosophy that are ready to be explored, scrutinised, and developed.

Inauthentic academic identity

The third implication that this paper unpacks is that avoiding failure in academia leads to an inauthentic academic identity production amongst junior scholars. This stems from a lack of deep connection, or its absence, to the Western theories used by non-Western scholars. Concurrent with the increasingly capitalistic nature of higher education across many parts of the West, scholars who were strategic in delivering the right products for their institutions (e.g. publications) were able to construct their academic identities as a personal enterprise project (Archer, 2008a; Billot, 2010; Clegg, 2008; Henkel, 2005; Tulubas & Gokturk, 2022). Several of our participants revealed how they played the game by focusing on publications (e.g. 'you have to play it strategically', as our participant Gamila reported). This enabled them to embody and perform the

conditions of neoliberal academia within which they are located and by which they need to construct their academic identities. However, this enterprise academic is not necessarily an authentic one, as a lack of ability to derive meaning and self-fulfilment from their work constrains their authenticity (Archer, 2008a, 2008b). As an example, our participant Ariam reveals how she feels an emotional detachment from the theoretical lens through which she is constructing her PhD. Previous works have looked at how the cultural identity of minority ethnic academics constrains them from progressing in academia, as minority ethnic academics are often marginalised and their work is constantly questioned (Bhopal, 2015; Bhopal & Chapman, 2019; Sian, 2017). Here, we argue that alienating us from aspects of our cultural identity – our views, philosophies, theoretical capital – constrains us from developing an authentic academic identity. Academic values of intellectual freedom and agency, and the ability to produce stimulating ideas from one's capital, that are offered to Western colleagues, are not available to us, alienating us from our own marginal epistemology. By taming parts of our identity to conform with the standards of Western academia in producing a harmonic voice of 'we' and 'us' in our research (Thomas et al., 2009), we are also limiting our full potential as researchers.

As non-Western researchers, we have proven ourselves to be capable of understanding the Western-hegemonic theories, and our scholarship demonstrates our analytical capabilities in applying these theories into contexts. Whilst we *can* use these theories, we still experience a lack of deep connection with these theoretical tools due to, by nature, our historical, political, and cultural differences. Paradoxically, as minority scholars, we almost feel further judged and scrutinised for daring to socialise with these grand theories: as Asian researchers, how can we discuss French, German or British male philosophers? How dare we adopt them or critically discuss them? We often get surprised reactions in conferences when we present our research amongst our Western colleagues. This is evident in our PhD fieldwork too, where we often feel uncomfortable about revealing our foreign backgrounds to our participants, as we attempt to study British contexts in Britain. In our cases, there is a reverse anthropology at play where we are indeed studying the dominant as the Other; thus, presenting ourselves as untidy and disruptive for violating some norms (Douglas, 1966) in the current academic structure.

Conclusion

This paper calls for there to be attention given to embracing non-Western and Other epistemologies in research by allowing diversity in researchers and in academic thought to be represented in management and marketing studies. The aim here is to connect and not to separate (Said, 1994). Too often, the current pedagogical climate is too quick to dismiss, or fails to examine, non-dominant theories. We agree with Hutton and Cappellini (2022) that we need to give voice to Other consciousness, allowing them the same agency and credibility to reproduce, as we demonstrate here how success in conforming to dominant theories in research might inevitably produce risk-averse researchers, with repetitive ideas and inauthenticity in their academic identity constructions. In order to do this, we need to look at non-Eurocentric epistemologies in their own terms, as 'difference-in-itself' (Sandikci, 2022). Whilst our conformity to the dominant theoretical and methodological tools is one way of

reorganising our foreign identities as matter that is out of place and needs to be restored to some sort of order (Douglas, 1966), these structures need to be shifted and revised.

The lack of inclusivity is a complex phenomenon, but not a strange one. Even in this shifting climate of social and political society, the lack of inclusivity is a Catch-22 situation. The current lack of understanding, and the literature on non-dominant philosophies invites scrutiny, and uncertainty in accepting these 'foreign' theories. As such, a further gap is produced and the circle of reusing similar theories in the disciplines continues. Whilst our research offers useful and raw insights, this paper has some limitations. Further research can analyse how doctoral projects are influenced by the doctrines and world-views of supervisors, and the doctoral supervision of post-colonial theories. Another area of future research could explore how academic identity and identity-work develops and changes over time as these young intersectional academics progress through their careers. Arguments against non-Western philosophies and identities are often made prematurely or by academics who themselves are distant from these doctrines, prompting discomfort in engaging with them. We wonder, would the same be accepted if the doctrines were in fact reversed?

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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