



**RECONCEPTUALIZING
CULTURAL SHOCK:
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DISPLACEMENT AMONG ROMA
ACADEMICS IN EUROPEAN
HIGHER EDUCATION**

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RECONCEPTUALIZING CULTURAL SHOCK: INSTITUTIONAL AND EPISTEMIC DISPLACEMENT AMONG ROMA ACADEMICS IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper is based on ongoing research I am conducting which utilizes the experiences of Roma academics in European higher education to rethink cultural shock. Cultural shock, which has historically been described as a temporary reaction to cross-cultural migration, is frequently interpreted as a personal adjustment process. This study presents the argument – based on qualitative interviews – that such interpretations ignore the institutional and structural factors influencing academic experiences.

This working paper introduces three interconnected dimensions – institutional, epistemological, and structural – and conceptualizes cultural shock as an ongoing, structurally embedded occurrence. These characteristics encapsulate the ways in which Roma academics experience unequal power relations, epistemic hierarchies, and exclusionary norms in higher education. This approach places cultural shock within larger discussions on inequality, recognition, and belonging, building on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Sara Ahmed.

The results demonstrate that cultural shock affects identity negotiation and adaptation methods throughout academic trajectories and is not limited to academic admission. The paper advances research in higher education by

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expanding the idea of cultural shock beyond mobility-based frameworks and emphasizing its applicability to minority academics experiences.

Keywords: cultural shock, Roma academics, institutional exclusion, belonging, epistemic inequality

Introduction

Higher education is widely positioned as a site of opportunity, mobility, and inclusion, with European policy frameworks increasingly emphasizing the expansion of participation and the promotion of diversity within academic institutions. Yet, an increasing amount of research indicates that access does not always equate to recognition, belonging, or epistemic inclusion (Ahmed 2012; Tinto 2012; Thomas 2020). Even in situations of formal inclusion, higher education institutions frequently continue to be shaped by implicit norms, cultural expectations, and power dynamics that perpetuate injustice for underrepresented groups (Bourdieu 1988; Ahmed 2012). These dynamics are especially noticeable when it comes to the Roma, the biggest ethnic minority in Europe, whose participation in higher education and knowledge production is still shaped by their past experiences of marginalization (Kóczé 2018; Rostas 2019).

In this regard, Roma academics experiences provide a critical prism through which to analyse the boundaries of inclusion in higher education. While Roma students' access to education has been the main focus of previous studies, those who manage academic careers and engage in knowledge production have received significantly less attention (Kóczé 2011; Brooks 2012). Their paths highlight obstacles to admittance as well as the continuous difficulties of navigating institutional settings that might not completely acknowledge their identities, experiences, or forms of knowledge. These difficulties are frequently encountered as recurrent interactions with unfamiliar, discriminatory, or misidentifying institutional cultures rather than as single events.

The idea of cultural shock offers a helpful foundation for comprehending these kinds of experiences. Cultural shock has been conceived as a temporary psychological reaction to foreign cultural surroundings, usually followed by processes of adaptation and integration (Oberg 1960; Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001). It has traditionally been linked to migration and international mobility. Cultural shock is portrayed in traditional theories as a linear, mostly personal process of adjustment. Nevertheless, it is difficult for these approaches to fully express, the experiences of people who feel dislocation within? their own national or institutional contexts, especially when those experiences are influenced by systemic inequality and power relations.

Similar types of disorientation may occur in institutional settings, including higher education, according to recent research that has started to expand the concept of cultural shock beyond mobility-based frameworks (Gale and Parker 2014). Research on minority and first-generation students demonstrates how exposure to new cultural capital, expectations, and academic norms can lead to emotions of misalignment and displacement (Reay, Crozier, and Clayton 2009; Bathmaker et al. 2016). However, such approaches frequently still treat cultural shock as a phase of transition, failing to adequately account for its enduring nature and its integration into institutional and epistemic frameworks.

This article makes the case that, rather than being temporary reaction to unfamiliarity, cultural shock should be rethought as an ongoing, structurally ingrained experience. The study creates a paradigm that conceptualizes cultural shock along three interconnected dimensions: institutional, epistemological, and structural, based on qualitative interviews with Roma academics in European higher education. Encounters with implicit academic norms and expectations that favour specific types of capital and ways of being are referred to as institutional cultural shock (Bourdieu 1986). Tensions between lived experience and prevailing knowledge systems, when certain points of view are suppressed or deemed illegitimate, are captured by epistemic cultural shock (Fricker 2007; Mignolo 2011). The impact of persistent injustices and power dynamics on these

experiences is highlighted by structural cultural shock (Quijano 2000; Ahmed 2012).

The article places cultural shock within larger discussions on inequality, recognition, and belonging in higher education by interacting with theoretical perspectives on power, habitus, and institutional inclusion, especially the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Sara Ahmed. By performing this, it highlights the relational and political aspects of academic life for marginalized academics, going beyond psychological and mobility-centred views.

This paper provides empirical evidence that Roma academics experience cultural shock throughout their academic careers rather than just when they first enrol in higher education. Within institutional environments that both facilitate and restrict participation, it creates identity negotiation processes, adaptation tactics, and modes of resistance. The paper conceptually expands on research in higher education, by expanding the analytical scope of cultural shock and emphasizing its applicability for comprehending minority academic experiences in structurally unequal environments.

Rethinking Cultural Shock: From Mobility to Institutional and Epistemic Displacement

For a long time, the idea of cultural shock has been essential to comprehending how people react to unfamiliar surroundings. Cultural shock was first defined as a psychological reaction to entering a new cultural context in anthropology and cross-cultural psychology. Cultural shock, according to Kalervo Oberg's pioneering study from 1960, is a process that involves confusion, anxiety, and eventual adaptation. It is usually organized as a series of stages through which people eventually adjust to unfamiliar cultural norms. This paradigm was improved by later research, especially in the field of cross-cultural psychology, which distinguished between psychological and sociocultural adaptation and

highlighted the importance of coping mechanisms and social support (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001).

This traditional structure has a number of significant drawbacks despite its lasting influence. First, it views cultural shock mainly as a psychological and individual event, emphasizing internal adjustment processes over the structural factors that lead to dislocation experiences. Second, it assumes that cultural differences are geographically limited and external, usually connected to international mobility or migration. Third, it minimizes the potential for ongoing or unresolved conflicts by portraying cultural shock as a brief, linear process that ends in adaptation. These presumptions restrict the concept's ability to comprehend experiences that take place across unequal social and institutional positions but within shared national contexts.

Recent research has started to expand the idea of cultural shock beyond mobility-based frameworks in response to these constraints. Researchers studying higher education have shown that first-generation and working-class students entering elite academic settings frequently experience feelings of disorientation and displacement (Reay, Crozier, and Clayton 2009; Bathmaker et al. 2016). These studies demonstrate how implicit norms, expectations, and unevenly dispersed types of cultural capital shape universities, creating a sense of misalignment for individuals who lack the dominant habitus. In a comparable manner, studies on student transitions view admission to a university as a complex process that involves social and cultural negotiation in addition to academic adjustment (Gale and Parker 2014). According to this stance, cultural shock results from coming into contact with strange and frequently exclusive institutional cultures rather than from crossing national boundaries.

Even while these contributions expand the definition of cultural shock, they frequently continue to implicitly emphasize adaptation and transition. Cultural shock is still commonly described as a stage that people go through as they adjust to academic settings. The degree to which experiences of dislocation may endure over time may be obscured by this framing, especially for people whose identities

and ways of knowledge continue to be devalued in institutional settings. In this regard, current methods do not adequately take into consideration the ways in which cultural shock could be structurally replicated as opposed to eventually resolved.

Cultural shock must be placed within larger theoretical frameworks that emphasize power, inequality, and institutional structure in order to overcome these constraints. In this sense, Pierre Bourdieu's work is especially informative. Bourdieu's ideas of habitus, field, and capital offer a way to comprehend how educational establishments perpetuate social hierarchies by giving preference to specific attitudes, behaviours, and types of knowledge (Bourdieu 1986, 1988). According to this approach, dislocation experiences result from a mismatch between an individual's habitus and the academic institution's habitus. Therefore, cultural shock is an expression of organized disparities in access to cultural and symbolic capital rather than merely a response to unfamiliarity.

Critical scholarship on higher education has complemented this stance by highlighting how institutional norms and discourses shape experiences of inclusion and exclusion. According to Sara Ahmed (2012), diversity and inclusion programs frequently serve as non-performative practices that give the impression of institutional commitment without altering underlying power dynamics. People from marginalized backgrounds may be formally included in such settings, yet they may nevertheless face subtle kinds of exclusion and misrecognition. These dynamics imply that experiences of disorientation in educational environments are not coincidental but rather are ingrained in institutional frameworks that specify what constitutes suitable conduct, valid knowledge, and academic achievement.

It's crucial to consider the epistemic aspects of cultural shock in addition to institutional dynamics. Miranda Fricker (2007) argues that the idea of epistemic injustice emphasizes how some groups are routinely disadvantaged in their capacity as knowers because of procedures that minimize or eliminate their views. This could include elevating prevailing epistemological frameworks or

marginalizing knowledge based on personal experience in the context of higher education. Decolonial scholars like Walter D. Mignolo (2011) and Aníbal Quijano (2000) also contend that persistent colonial mechanisms that continue to favor Eurocentric modes of knowing impact modern knowledge systems. According to this standpoint, interactions with academic institutions may lead to instances of epistemic dissonance, in which people feel a conflict between their own knowledge and the types of knowledge accepted by academia.

When combined, these viewpoints imply that cultural shock should be viewed as a relational and structural experience created at the crossroads of institutional norms, epistemic hierarchies, and larger power relations, rather than only as a psychological or transitory phenomena. Understanding the experiences of Roma academics, whose historical marginalization within European societies has been accompanied by processes of epistemic exclusion and misrepresentation, is made possible by this reconceptualization (Kóczé and Trehan 2009; Matras 2015). Research on Roma people has shown patterns of educational disadvantage and restricted access to higher education (FRA 2016; O'Hanlon 2016), but the experiences of individuals who pursue and succeed in academic professions have received far less attention.

By highlighting the significance of Roma perspectives and knowledge production, emerging work within Critical Romani Studies has started to close this gap (Bogdán et al. 2018; Mírka-Kruszelnicka 2018). In addition to highlighting the role of Roma academics as knowledge producers who challenge epistemic hierarchies, this scholarship challenges prevailing images of Roma as objects of study. Conceptual frameworks that effectively represent the actual experiences of Roma academics navigating academic institutions are still needed, especially when it comes to issues of identity, acknowledgment, and belonging.

Reconceptualizing cultural shock as a continuous, structurally embedded experience provides a useful analytical framework in this scenario. It makes it possible to move away from individualizing and temporally limited conceptions of dislocation and toward a perspective that acknowledges the permanent and

relational character of these experiences. This paper develops a framework that places cultural shock within the larger processes of power and inequality that define academic life by combining insights from critical sociology, decolonial theory, and higher education research. By doing this, it offers a basis for examining how Roma academics perceive and move through higher education as a setting marked by both opportunities and enduring forms of exclusion.

Theoretical Framework: Cultural Shock as Institutional, Epistemic, and Structural

This article rethinks cultural shock as a structurally integrated, relational, and continuous experience rather than a temporary psychological reaction to unfamiliar surroundings, building on the shortcomings found in previous methods. This reconceptualization is based on the idea that experiences of misrecognition in higher education are caused by institutional norms, epistemic hierarchies, and unequal power relations rather than just cultural differences. The paper creates a framework with three interconnected dimensions – institutional cultural shock, epistemic cultural shock, and structural cultural shock – to capture this complexity.

Although these dimensions are analytically separate, they are empirically related. When taken as a whole, they offer a multifaceted perspective of how cultural shock is experienced, replicated, and negotiated in higher education, especially by those who are marginalized by prevailing academic structures.

Institutional Cultural Shock

The disorientation brought on by interactions with the implicit norms, expectations, and practices that govern academic life is referred to as the first dimension: institutional cultural shock. Higher education institutions are not neutral settings; rather, they are molded by deeply ingrained presumptions about acceptable conduct, proper communication, and academic achievement.

Although these standards are frequently left unspoken, they are essential in establishing inclusion and exclusion in academic contexts.

Pierre Bourdieu's theories of habitus and field, in particular, are the source of the concept of institutional cultural shock (Bourdieu 1986, 1988). According to this view, people's social trajectories determine their dispositions when they attend academic institutions, which may or may not coincide with the prevailing institutional habitus. People may feel inadequate, confused, or unfit when there is no such alignment. In this perspective, cultural shock is not only a result of being unfamiliar with a new setting; rather, it reflects a mismatch between embodied dispositions and institutional expectations.

Research on institutional cultures in higher education, which emphasizes how implicit norms favour specific types of cultural capital, such as language patterns, ways of presenting oneself, and interactional practices, further deepens this dimension (Reay 2004; Bathmaker et al. 2016). Navigating these standards frequently necessitates processes of adaptation, code-switching, or self-monitoring for those from marginalized backgrounds, which can lead to constant conflict between authenticity and conformity. Additionally, institutional cultural shock does not only occur when students first enrol in university. Instead, it might continue throughout academic careers as students frequently come with circumstances where institutional requirements are ambiguous, exclusive, or challenging to understand.

Epistemic Cultural Shock

The discomfort that results from interactions with dominant knowledge systems that marginalize or devalue alternative ways of knowing is captured by the second dimension, epistemic cultural shock. Epistemic cultural shock is associated with the validity of knowledge and the authority of the knower in academic settings, whereas institutional cultural shock is related to practices and norms.

Miranda Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice, which emphasizes how bias or systemic inequality may penalize people in their capacity as knowers, underpins this dimension. Epistemic injustice in higher education can take the form of devaluing lived experience as a valid source of insight, marginalizing research topics, or scepticism toward specific types of knowledge. These interactions lead to a type of dissonance where people have to reconcile conflicts between their own epistemic views and those accepted by academia.

By placing epistemic exclusion within larger historical and global power structures, decolonial perspectives deepen this approach even more. Experts like Walter Mignolo (2011) and Aníbal Quijano (2000) contend that colonialism, which favours Eurocentric epistemologies while marginalizing subaltern forms of knowledge, has influenced modern knowledge systems. According to this theory, interactions with academic institutions can result in both cognitive dissonance and a feeling of epistemic dislocation when people face the boundaries of acceptance for their views and expertise.

In situations where people are viewed as both subjects and knowledge producers, epistemic cultural shock is especially significant. For academics who are marginalized, this can include balancing the need to adhere to prevailing epistemological frameworks with the need to draw on lived experiences that defy these frameworks. As the boundaries of legitimate knowledge are contested and, in some cases, expanded, this tension simultaneously produces both opportunities and constraints.

Structural Cultural Shock

Experiences of dislocation are placed into larger systems of power and inequality by the third dimension, structural cultural shock. Structural cultural shock emphasizes how persistent social, economic, and political injustices impact these experiences, whereas institutional and epistemic cultural shock concentrate on particular areas of experience.

This dimension is based on critical and sociological perspectives that highlight how structure shapes personal experience. Pierre Bourdieu's research emphasizes how unequal access to cultural, social, and symbolic capital affects people's paths through educational systems (Bourdieu 1986). Similarly, even in settings that prioritize inclusivity and meritocracy, critical scholarship on higher education shows how institutional practices perpetuate larger patterns of inequality (Ahmed 2012; Gillborn 2005).

From this standpoint, cultural shock cannot be understood as a singular or isolated experience. Instead, it is created by structural circumstances that place people in various positions within power structures. Thus, histories of marginalization, unequal access to resources, and varied recognition within institutional contexts are associated with experiences of dislocation. Decolonial perspectives on the continuation of colonialism in modern institutions are another source of inspiration for structural cultural shock. As stated by Aníbal Quijano (2000), colonial power structures still influence social hierarchies and knowledge systems, resulting in persistent forms of exclusion. These processes may show up in patterns of underrepresentation, unequal access to opportunities, and the marginalization of particular types of knowledge in higher education.

Furthermore, structural cultural shock offers a paradigm for comprehending why dislocation experiences endure across time. Such experiences are perpetuated by institutional and societal frameworks that essentially do not change, rather than being resolved via individual adaptation. This angle emphasizes the need to address the structural conditions that lead to cultural shock, challenging narratives that present it as an issue that individuals must solve. This dynamic is one of the main ways that inequality is perpetuated. By portraying structural obstacles as personal challenges accountability is transferred to those navigating the system, masking institutional injustices and maintaining the notion that people must adjust to circumstances that are nonetheless inherently discriminatory.

Toward an Integrated Understanding of Cultural Shock

When combined, the three aforementioned elements offer a thorough framework for comprehending cultural shock as a complex, relational phenomenon. The impact of implicit norms and practices on experiences of disorientation is highlighted by institutional cultural shock. The politics of knowledge and the unequal acknowledgment of various epistemic stances are highlighted by epistemic cultural shock. These experiences are placed within larger systems of power and inequality by structural cultural shock. These dimensions interact and support one another rather than functioning separately. While epistemic hierarchies are ingrained in both institutional practices and larger systems of power, institutional norms are formed by structural disparities. As a result, cultural shock experiences arise from the interaction of several levels of analysis rather than being limited to a single space.

This integrated paradigm allows to see cultural shock as a persistent and socially constructed phenomenon? rather than as temporary and personal experience. Additionally, it offers a theoretical framework for examining how people negotiate, navigate, and even oppose these processes in higher education. This approach is applied to the experiences of Roma academics in European higher education in the following empirical parts. The study aims to shed light on the complicated and frequently conflicting nature of inclusion, belonging, and recognition inside modern academic institutions by analysing how institutional, epistemological, and structural aspects of cultural shock emerge in their academic trajectories.

Methodology

In order to investigate how Roma academics perceive and understand cultural shock in European higher education, this study employs a qualitative research

design. A qualitative approach is especially well-suited to capturing the depth and complexity of participants' perspectives, given the study's focus on lived experience, identity, and meaning making. (Michael Crotty 1998; Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann 2009). The research attempts to create an analytically rich knowledge of how cultural shock is perceived as a continuous and relational event within academic institutions rather than aiming for generalizability (Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln 2011).

Research Design and Approach

The study is based on an interpretive paradigm that holds that social reality is created via interaction and experience (Crotty 1998). This viewpoint is consistent with the study's objective, which is to investigate how Roma academics interpret their experiences with structural injustices, institutional norms, and epistemic hierarchies. The study examines how participants describe their academic paths, experiences of inclusion and exclusion, and navigational techniques using aspects of narrative and thematic analysis.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews with Roma academics from several European countries were used to gather data. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed participants to think back on their experiences while allowing the researcher to delve into important topics including identity negotiation, institutional support, and cultural shock (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). The purpose of the interview guide was to learn more about the participants' educational paths, experiences in academic settings, sense of belonging, and experiences with inclusion and exclusion.

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were combined to recruit participants. Given the comparatively limited and scattered number of Roma academics in European higher education, this strategy was required (Noy 2008). Cultural shock could be investigated across a range of academic trajectories since

the sample comprises academics at various phases of their academic careers, such as PhD researchers, early-career academics, and more established scholars.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics (N = 19)

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Country	Academic Stage	Field	Qualification
P1	Male	50-40	Finland	Lecturer	Anthropology	PhD
P2	Male	35-30	Romania	Lecturer	Education	PhD
P3	Male	40-35	Romania	Lecturer	Anthropology	PhD
P4	Male	35-30	Romania	Researcher	Social Policy	PhD
P5	Male	45-40	Hungary	Senior Lecturer	Sociology	PhD
P6	Male	45-30	Spain	Senior Lecturer	Political Sciences	PhD
P7	Male	55-45	UK	Senior Lecturer	Sociology	PhD
P8	Female	40-30	Romania	Researcher	Anthropology	PhD
P9	Male	40-30	Hungary	PhD Candidate	Sociology	MA
P10	Female	45-40	Spain	Research	Education	PhD
P11	Female	60-50	Romania	Professor	Arts	PhD
P12	Male	50-40	Spain	Lecturer	Political Science	PhD

P13	Male	65-55	Bulgaria	Professor	Linguistics	PhD
P14	Female	45-35	Poland	Lecturer	Education	PhD
P15	Male	45-35	Hungary	Research Fellow	Sociology	PhD
P16	Female	40-30	UK	Research Fellow	Sociology	PhD
P17	Female	35-25	Hungary	PhD Candidate	Social Policy	MA
P18	Male	65-55	UK	Professor	Education	PhD
P19	Female	75-66	Hungary	Activist	Political Science	MA

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was carried out to examine the data in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) methodology. This approach is sensitive to the intricacy of individual narratives while enabling the detection of patterns and themes across qualitative data. Familiarization with the data, preliminary coding, the creation of thematic categories, and the refinement of topics with respect to the study's theoretical framework were all steps in the analysis process.

Although typological profiles of Roma academics were constructed in the larger research, this paper focuses on how cultural shock experiences appear in these narratives. As a result, reinterpreting the data through the theoretical framework's three dimensions – institutional, epistemic, and structural cultural shock – was part of the analytical process. In this way, the analysis is theoretically informed, inductive, and based on participant accounts.

Ethical Considerations

Particular attention was given to ethical issues because of the sensitive nature of the research topic and limited representation of the Roma academic community. Prior to participation, each participant gave their informed consent after being made aware of the study's objectives (Israel and Hay 2006). Identifying information has been changed or eliminated to preserve anonymity, and pseudonyms were used when necessary. Sensitivity to positionality and trust concerns was also necessary for the investigation. Interviews were conducted in a way that valued participants' comfort and agency because conversations frequently touched on experiences of marginalization, discrimination, and identity negotiation. Participants had the chance to direct the discourse and choose not to respond to any questions that made them uncomfortable.

Limitations

The qualitative approach has a number of disadvantages even if it enables a comprehensive examination of lived experience. Rather than being indicative of all Roma academics, the findings are meant to offer an analytically based explanation of how cultural shock is experienced in certain situations. Additionally, both purposive and snowball sampling may produce a sample that reflects specific networks or viewpoints, which could limit the range of perspectives that are recorded. The modest sample size is indicative of the small and scattered number of Roma academics in higher education across Europe. The current paper should be viewed as a scoping study that provides preliminary insights and establishes the foundation for future, larger-scale, comparative research, even though this limits the generalizability of the findings.

Despite these drawbacks, the study offers valuable insights into understudied aspects of academic life, especially the enduring and deeply ingrained nature of cultural shock. It underscores the need for future research that expands on these preliminary findings and advances a more nuanced understanding of inclusion, belonging, and inequality in higher education by concentrating on the experiences of Roma academics.

Findings: Cultural Shock as an Ongoing Institutional, Epistemic, and Structural Experience

The results show that Roma academics' experiences of cultural shock in higher education in Europe cannot be interpreted as a transitory or transitional stage. Instead, it manifests as a recurrent, multifaceted, and structurally integrated experience that occurs at various phases of academic careers. According to participant narratives, cultural shock is not limited to starting university; rather, it develops throughout time as a result of repeated interactions with institutional norms, epistemic hierarchies, and structural disparities. The results are presented in this part using the institutional, epistemic, and structural cultural shock dimensions described in the theoretical framework. The claim that cultural shock is a relational and persistent condition rather than an isolated incident is supported by the fact that, despite their theoretical differences, these aspects typically coincide in participants' experiences.

Cultural Shock Beyond Entry: A Recurring Experience

Participants identified cultural shock as a recurring experience that reappears at various points in their academic journeys, in contrast to traditional models that frame it as an early period of adjustment (Oberg 1960). Similar emotions reappeared during significant transitions, such as enrolling in doctoral programs, attending academic conferences, or navigating professional academic environments, even though the move to higher education frequently marked an initial moment of disorientation. Even after succeeding academically, participants often reported a lingering feeling of "not fully belonging." This implies that cultural shock may coexist with continued perceptions of misalignment rather than being resolved by adaptation. In this way, cultural shock seems more like a phenomenon that needs to be constantly dealt with than a challenge to be solved.

Institutional Cultural Shock: Navigating Implicit Norms

Participants' descriptions of navigating academic settings governed by implicit and frequently exclusionary norms revealed a substantial institutional cultural shock. Many said that they encountered a strange set of expectations about language, communication, and self-presentation when they started university. Although these standards were rarely stated explicitly, they influenced interactions, assessments, and perceptions of competence. Some participants said they were unsure of how to act in academic environments, such as how to interact with instructors, present their work, or talk in seminars. Particularly in the early phases of their academic careers, this uncertainty sometimes caused worry and self-doubt. However, these experiences frequently continued over time rather than fading away, particularly in high-level or global academic settings.

The necessity of self-monitoring and adaptation, such as altering language use, repressing certain facets of identity, or developing academic confidence, was a recurrent issue. Participants were able to negotiate institutional expectations because of to these tactics, but they also created a conflict between conformity and authenticity. In this sense, institutional cultural shock reflects both unfamiliarity and the unequal distribution of cultural capital necessary for academic success (Bourdieu 1986).

Furthermore, participants described institutions as subtly organized in ways that favoured those already familiar with dominant norms rather than as overtly exclusionary. This supports the argument that inclusion in higher education frequently functions through implicit expectations rather than explicit barriers, making exclusion harder to spot but no less significant.

Epistemic Cultural Shock: Negotiating Knowledge and Legitimacy

Participants also spoke about experiences of epistemic cultural shock outside of institutional practices especially with regard to the validity of their perspectives

and competence. Many stated that in academic settings, their lived experiences as Roma were not always acknowledged as reliable sources of information. This led to conflicts between firsthand knowledge and prevailing academic frameworks, which frequently give preference to detached, abstract, or Eurocentric types of knowledge.

Researchers studying Roma communities often faced doubts about the objectivity or scholarly worth of their findings. In certain instances, their study was subtly presented as advocacy as opposed to respectable scholarly investigation. This reflects more general dynamics of epistemic marginalization, in which some subjects and perspectives are viewed as less reliable or universal. Participants also highlighted the dual role of being both knowledge producers and representatives of oppressed communities by describing a sense of obligation to reflect Roma perspectives within academia. Opportunities and limitations were created by this role. On the one hand, it allowed individuals to present additional perspectives and question prevailing narratives. However, it put them under more scrutiny and demands.

Therefore, the conflict between marginalization and recognition leads to epistemic cultural shock. Participants must constantly negotiate the limits of acceptable knowledge in academic settings that both encourage and restrict their contributions. This process is closely related to issues of identity, authority, and belonging and is not only cognitive.

Structural Cultural Shock: Experiencing Inequality Over Time

The experiences of the participants also shed insight on the structural aspects of cultural shock, which are based on more general patterns of inequality that influence participation in and access to higher education. Many mentioned not having the social, cultural, or financial capital necessary to navigate academic settings when they first started their careers. This included informal information about how institutions operate, mentorship, and restricted access to academic networks. Experiences of institutional and epistemic cultural shock were

frequently made worse by these structural injustices. For instance, the lack of acquaintance with academic norms reflected wider differences in educational chances and resources rather than being a personal problem. In the same manner, historical patterns of exclusion that place Roma perspectives at the margins of scholarly discourse have been connected to the marginalization of particular types of knowledge.

The cumulative aspect of these encounters was also highlighted by the participants. Cultural shock was not a singular incident, but rather a sequence of interactions that over time strengthened emotions of exclusion. These contacts were frequently subtle, manifesting as small-scale exchanges, differing expectations, or few chances for progress and acknowledgment. Additionally, structural cultural shock raises question on the idea that dislocation experiences can be resolved solely by adaptation. Underlying disparities persisted even as individuals learned coping mechanisms for academic settings. This implies that cultural shock is created and perpetuated by structural circumstances that go beyond the individual rather than being merely a matter of personal adjustment.

Intersections and Dynamics Across Dimensions

Although the three aspects of cultural shock are analytically separate, participant experiences show how closely related they are. While epistemic hierarchies are ingrained in institutional procedures, institutional norms are affected by more general structural disparities. As a result, cultural shock experiences frequently arise when these aspects converge. For instance, because some kinds of expression and knowledge are valued more than others, the necessity to conform to institutional standards is strongly related to issues of epistemic legitimacy. In a similar way, structural inequality affects one's capacity to negotiate institutional expectations as well as their ability to have their contributions acknowledged. These interactions demonstrate how cultural shock is relational in nature, making it impossible to fully comprehend by looking at any one aspect alone.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the results support the idea that cultural shock is a continuous, relational, and structurally ingrained event. Cultural shock is shaped by repeated experiences with institutional norms, epistemic hierarchies, and structural inequities; it is not limited to transitional situations but rather endures across academic careers. The accounts of participants show that cultural shock reflects larger power dynamics in higher education rather than just a reaction to unfamiliarity. It is felt through routine behaviours, encounters, and standards that establish what it means to be a part of, knowledgeable about, and successful in academic settings.

Discussion: Rethinking Cultural Shock in Higher Education

By analysing the experiences of Roma academics in European higher education, this article aimed to rethink cultural shock. The results show that cultural shock functions as a recurrent, relational, and structurally ingrained experience, challenging prevailing conceptions of it as a temporary and personal process of adjustment. This study advances a more comprehensive reconsideration of how dislocation, belonging, and inequality are experienced in academic settings by examining cultural shock from institutional, epistemic, and structural perspectives.

From Transition to Permanence: Challenging Classical Models

Cultural shock is seen as a transitional stage that people go through when they adjust to new cultural environments in classical formulations, especially those linked to Kalervo Oberg (1960). According to this paradigm, disorientation leads to adjustment and finally integration in a straight line. The results of this study, however, indicate that this kind of framework is not adequate to comprehend the experiences of Roma academics.

Participants described cultural shock as frequent and persistent, reappearing at various periods of academic life, rather than being limited to moments of admission. This calls into question the chronological presumptions included in traditional models and implies that cultural shock is not a stage that can be overcome by adaptation. Rather, it seems to be a persistent state formed by constant interactions with institutional norms and power dynamics.

This reconceptualization is consistent with and expands upon recent criticisms in higher education research, which have highlighted that experiences of dislocation can occur inside domestic institutional contexts and are not just related to movement (Gale and Parker 2014). However, this paper shows that cultural shock may continue long after people have successfully navigated entry into academic institutions, despite the fact that previous studies frequently maintain an emphasis on transition. In this way, cultural shock involves more than just joining academia; it also involves constantly negotiating one's place there.

Institutional Cultural Shock and the Reproduction of Academic Norms

The results of the study on institutional cultural shock emphasize how experiences of inclusion and exclusion are shaped by implicit norms and expectations. These processes can be explained in terms of the connection between habitus and field, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's work (Bourdieu 1986, 1988). Academic institutions function as disciplined domains that value particular types of cultural capital, such as certain ways of communicating, presenting oneself, and engaging in intellectual activities.

Cultural shock for Roma academics results from a mismatch between their habitus and the prevailing institutional habitus, rather than just from unfamiliarity. As people try to handle expectations that are rarely made explicit, this misalignment creates ongoing sensations of uncertainty, self-monitoring, and adaptability. Crucially, these processes are a constant aspect of academic life and do not fade away over time.

This result also supports critical views on higher education that shed doubt on academic institutions' objectivity. Diversity and inclusion programs frequently fall short of changing the fundamental standards that define institutional belonging, as Sara Ahmed (2012) contends. Participants' experiences illustrate this dynamic by demonstrating how subtle kinds of exclusion that are ingrained in daily activities can coexist alongside inclusion. In this way, cultural shock represents both the continuous replication of institutional authority as well as individual disorientation.

Epistemic Cultural Shock and the Politics of Knowledge

By emphasizing the significance of knowledge and legitimacy in academic settings, the idea of epistemic cultural shock expands on this analysis. The experiences of the participants show how some types of knowledge are frequently neglected or devalued within prevailing academic paradigms, especially those based on lived experience. According to Miranda Fricker (2007), this dynamic can be viewed via the prism of epistemic injustice, in which people are at a disadvantage in their ability as knowers.

Roma academics experience epistemic cultural shock as a result of the tension between their experiential, community-based forms of knowledge and dominant academic epistemological standards. This conflict is not just intellectual; it is closely related to issues of acknowledgment, authority, and identity. Participants spoke about negotiating expectations that mirror larger hierarchies of knowledge production, positioning their work as either too subjective or not enough "academic."

By placing these processes within historical and global power structures, decolonial perspectives provide additional light on them. The work of Aníbal Quijano (2000) and Walter D. Mignolo (2011) demonstrates how modern knowledge systems still marginalize subaltern viewpoints while favoring Eurocentric epistemologies. In this sense, epistemic cultural shock can be viewed as a type of epistemic dissonance in which people experience the

boundaries of institutional recognition for their knowledge. The narratives of the participants also suggest the possibility of epistemic agency. Roma academics help to broaden the bounds of acceptable knowledge by interacting with and, occasionally, questioning prevailing frameworks. This implies that epistemic cultural shock is both a possible site of change and a place of marginalization.

Structural Cultural Shock and the Limits of Individual Adaptation

The structural aspect of cultural shock causes the emphasis to shift from personal experiences to more extensive systems of inequity. The results show that unequal access to opportunities, networks, and resources in higher education is a major contributing factor to displacement experiences. These disparities influence academic admission as well as continuing experiences of engagement and acknowledgment. This viewpoint refutes narratives that portray cultural shock as an issue that can be resolved by personal resilience or adaptability. Although individuals learned how to deal with academic settings, the structural factors that led to their experiences persisted. Therefore, it is impossible to properly comprehend or treat cultural shock at the individual level.

Critical scholarship framing higher education as a site of social reproduction aligns closely with the structural dimension identified here. According to Bourdieu (1986), educational institutions are crucial in upholding current hierarchies because they legitimize some forms of capital while excluding others. Roma academic experiences demonstrate how these procedures function both at the level of access and in regular academic activities.

Toward a Relational and Multi-Level Understanding

When considered collectively, the results support the idea that cultural shock is a multi-level, relational phenomenon. Institutional, epistemological, and structural factors interact to influence how people perceive and move through academic settings rather than functioning independently. The interplay of these factors gives rise to cultural shock, which reflects the intricate ways that power

functions in higher education. This reconceptualization makes multiple contributions to the body of current scholarship. It does this by first expanding the notion of cultural shock beyond mobility-based frameworks and proving its applicability to comprehending experiences in domestic institutional contexts. Second, it highlights the significance of power, inequality, and knowledge creation by moving the emphasis from individual adjustment to structural and relational processes. Thirdly, it gives other excluded groups navigating academic settings a conceptual foundation.

Implications for Higher Education

The results have significant ramifications for how inclusion is perceived and implemented in higher education. Increasing access and participation is a common goal of current policy initiatives, which assume that inclusion will follow from representation. However, Roma academics experiences indicate that inclusion is more than just access. The institutional and epistemological factors that influence academic life must be taken into consideration while addressing cultural shock. This entails challenging implicit norms, broadening the definition of acceptable knowledge, and resolving systemic injustices that restrict involvement and acknowledgment. In the absence of these adjustments, initiatives to advance inclusiveness run the risk of replicating the very processes they want to disrupt.

Conclusion

By analysing the experiences of Roma academics in European higher education, this article has rethought cultural shock. The results show that cultural shock is better understood as a continuous, multilayered, and structurally integrated phenomena, going beyond traditional models that define it as a temporary phase of adjustment. The study offers a more complex explanation of how dislocation and belonging are felt in academic settings by highlighting institutional, epistemological, and structural aspects of cultural shock.

According to the research, cultural shock is a recurring phenomenon that happens across academic trajectories and is not restricted to times of transition. It reflects repeated contacts with implicit norms, unequal power relations, and contested forms of knowledge. The paper, which draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Sara Ahmed, has emphasized how institutions of higher learning perpetuate prevailing cultural and epistemological frameworks, frequently casting minority researchers as outsiders even after they have achieved access. The results also show that Roma academics actively negotiate, oppose, and restructure these dynamics, suggesting that academic settings may undergo change.

There are three main ways in which this reconceptualization advances current study. First, it shows the concept of cultural shock's applicability for comprehending experiences within domestic higher education institutions by expanding it beyond mobility-based frameworks. Second, it emphasizes the importance of power, inequality, and epistemic hierarchies by moving the emphasis from individual adaptation to structural and social processes. Third, it provides a conceptual framework that might guide future studies on academically? excluded groups, especially with regard to identity, knowledge production, and institutional belonging.

The findings also have significant ramifications for policy and practice in higher education. Inclusion should focus on the conditions in which Roma academics contribute and are acknowledged rather than just access, recruitment, or official diversity promises. This entails incorporating Roma scholarship into curricula, creating long-term peer support and mentoring programs, acknowledging experience and community-based knowledge as legitimate academic knowledge, and lessening the representational labor burden on minority academics. Additionally, universities ought to be more open about implicit academic expectations, especially for first-generation scholars. Without these adjustments, inclusion can raise awareness without resulting in true institutional reform or a sense of belonging.

Lastly, this study creates a number of new research opportunities. Further research might examine how cultural shock functions in various national contexts, academic fields, and institutional settings, as well as how it interacts with other axes of inequality like gender and immigration status. To better understand how these dynamics change over time, comparative and longitudinal techniques would be especially helpful.

In summary, this paper advances a more critical view of higher education as a venue where inequality is both reproduced and fought by reconsidering cultural shock as a relational and structural phenomenon.

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