

# Three intersectional biographical portraits of principal investigators from the United Kingdom in the context of higher education in Pakistan

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## 1. Introduction

This article explores and discusses the narrative of three Principal Investigators' (PI) experiences whilst coming together on a research project in Pakistan. This work adds to a growing body of knowledge on research methods relating to the experiences generated through the lens of different researchers across many continents. It therefore makes a unique contribution and connection to the field of comparative and international education as it adopts a bilateral approach, exploring the careers of the interviewees alongside the researchers' own experiences of conducting research. Parallel researcher introspection and the role it plays as investigations are negotiated and executed, is an area that challenges us to explore our lived experiences, subjectivities and the ensuing knowledge generated.

The research project on which the analysis in this chapter draws, sought to equip researchers in Pakistan and the United Kingdom with research knowledge and skills to enable them to participate meaningfully and critically in inquiry-led improvement. Whilst seeking to investigate the experiences of women academics, with the aim of making original contributions to the field of knowledge; the project developed research inquiry skills amongst the researchers from the partner institutions. An important element of the research was to present ways to support the development of a group of early career and established researchers, from each partner university, to become researchers of international standing. This would be achieved by participating in the project using mentoring, training, seminars and workshops.

Over a three year period (2012 – 2015), the project initially brought together three female academics from the United Kingdom (UK) and 30 female academics from Pakistan with the intention of providing opportunities for their professional development, research training, and international exposure. Being one of the PI's on the research project, I was interested in the whole experience of developing and delivering the work in Pakistan. It was evident that my curiosity stemmed from the need to explore the way in which three different people come together in a team to manage a research project of this nature which explores women academics across four different universities in Pakistan. I was fascinated with the notion of identity and the way in which it would unfold through the research. The team consisted of a married woman of colour, who had been a Dean of Faculty in Pakistan, until moving to the UK to be with her family; a married white man, who was born and lived most of his life in the UK and me; a Black woman, living in the UK, a single parent who had been raised by German Jewish parents.

The overall aim of the research project was to promote collaboration among international and regional partners in the two countries, for research capacity building with specific focus on development of junior researchers, women researchers, early career scholars, staff and postgraduate students. The project had been funded by the British Academy, which is the United Kingdom's national academy for the humanities and the social sciences. The project established sustainable collaboration between two UK and four Pakistani Higher Education Institutions. A research training programme was designed and implemented with the partners for capacity building, whilst developing and mentoring five junior researchers in the Pakistani

institutions. An important element of the project, was to ensure that there was support, for the continuation of the research training programme after the project ended. A study was conducted to contextualise the research, “Mapping Women Academics’ Carers in Pakistan”, which formed an integral part of the research training programme.

The research project investigated the experiences of women academics and supported the development of research inquiry skills amongst the staff and research students in the partner institutions. The UK team had the opportunity to engage with, reflect on and critique the issues of designing and conducting research in a developing South Asian Muslim post-colonial country context. The collaboration encouraged the sharing of knowledge, expertise and capacity building for all partners which led to joint publications and further research proposals.

## **2. Women and Education in Pakistan**

In Pakistan, there is a general perception that teaching is the most suitable profession for women and this is reflected in school-based statistics with 773,332 female teachers, representing 56.23 % of the number of teachers overall (Meskell, 2013). However, it is important to note that the situation is not the same across the whole country. There is an uneven distribution based on gender amongst academics across the country. It is also notable that the number of female teachers is higher in private schools. Andrabi et al. (2005) noted that amongst private schools, the majority of teachers are female; nevertheless, women do not usually occupy the senior leadership roles in these institutions. Even if the school principal is a woman, she does not have the power to make long-term decisions. Her role is limited to managing day-to-day affairs; true power lies with the School Administrator, Chief Executive or the school owner who is usually a man. Overall, the situation is the same across public sector institutes. Shah (2015) noted that leadership is associated with men, social structures controlled by men have migrated to professional domains; an assertion supported by various leadership theories coupling male personality, characteristics, abilities and leadership styles.

Badat (2014) observed that while women are beginning to “break the glass ceiling” in all sectors of industry, senior positions in higher education remain the preserve of men despite a considerable number of women in the teaching faculty. The Economic Survey of Pakistan (2010) reported that one out of nine teachers were women in 1990–1991 and almost one out of six in 2002–2003. In the absence of current, gender disaggregated statistics on university teacher profiles (British Council Pakistan, 2015), it has been commonly observed that the number of women teachers has clearly increased in certain disciplines such as social sciences, management sciences and humanities. However, it is men who usually occupy leadership positions such as Dean or Director. The British Council’s Pakistan (2015) report “Women in Higher Education Leadership in South Asia” details the number of professors in Pakistani universities as 116 in 2006, representing 19.7% of the total number of professors in universities. In the history of higher education in Pakistan, women have become Vice Chancellors of women-only universities or newly established general universities. No established universities have, however, ever given this top job to a woman; the statistics confirm the notion that the university Vice Chancellorship is a position for men only. Various possible reasons for the lower percentages of women leaders include, culture, lack of trust, motivation, sexism and patriarchy.

The following key question was prompted by the theme of our research. *How are women perceived (i.e. a lack of trust in their ability to do the job because of their gender) and assessed (in terms of their level of competence) for leadership roles in Pakistan?* To investigate this

question, the British Academy research project explored the perceptions of faculty and staff, both men and women, who held key leadership or management positions in various education institutions at the higher educational level. Their perceptions that research participants held of women leaders were important because they highlighted gender-based differences in leadership. At the outset of the study, we assumed that participants' perceptions would either confirm or deny whether or not women were really trusted by competent authorities to assume leadership roles.

### **3. Methodological and theoretical approach**

The theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory, Whiteness Studies and intersectionality are drawn on for self-reflection and to explore and better understand the experiences of the three Principal Investigators. Using these theoretical concepts was important for us, as the team of researchers was ethnically mixed. *Critical race theory* is a theoretical framework in the social sciences, developed out of epistemic philosophy that uses critical theory to examine society and culture as they relate to categorizations of race, law, and power (Howard & Navarro, 2016). *Whiteness theory* is understood as a specific approach in Whiteness Studies, examining how white identity affects a non-exhaustive list of identities in an adult's life (Brooks, J. S. 2018). This list includes, but is not limited to social, political, racial, economic, and cultural identity. *Intersectionality* is a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities might combine to create unique modes of discrimination. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, K. W. 2017, Phoenix, A., & Pattynama, P. (2006) identifies injustices that are felt by people due to a combination of factors.

The methodology for the research project was developed in discussion with team leaders in the four partner universities in Pakistan. Because of the investigative and exploratory nature of the project, it was designed as a mixed-methods study using a survey followed by semi-structured interviews in each institution. Workshops were also held to discuss pilot interviews and to revise and finalise the interview schedule for the main phase of data collection.

The research design on which this chapter elaborates combined autoethnography and portraiture to document and analyse the stories of my colleagues and me; also, to reflect on methods and to really describe to myself, the methodology that I was developing. An impetus for this came for me from the works of Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005). I had come across some of her work when taking myself away from the research for a break, to tease out the emotional maze I found myself in. Autoethnography was part of the answer, but I was unsure which other aspect of this jigsaw was required in order to do justice to the many hours we spent talking about our ongoing relationships. The research design emerged through a series of conversations, discussions and ideas which took place between the three Principal Investigators (PIs) from the UK, and the four higher education establishments in Pakistan.

Much of the initiation of the continuous reflective conversations were a result of needing to explore and appreciate our inter-twining identities. An effort to understand how a multiracial and gendered group of three people would navigate their way through delivering a research project in Pakistan. The pursuit of each of the three people's narrative triggered my interest to capture and explore the differing complexities of our interconnected lives. And how that informed our understanding and perspectives executing the project.

Using autoethnography as a form of qualitative research, this work used self-reflection and observational writing to explore anecdotal and personal experiences. These, in turn, were used

to connect autobiographical stories to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings. In this approach, the researcher becomes an instrument of research by and through her analysis of observing phenomena in the natural environment, which then become the data and meaning. Methods that draw on phenomenological theory and qualitative approaches such as portraiture enable the researcher to bridge the gap between empiricism and aestheticism. Portraiture (2005) cares deeply about rigorous empirical description, whilst it also cares a lot about the artfulness of the “doing of it” and the “displaying of it” in the way in which research is written, composed, developed and presented to the reader. The research materialised through the lenses of the PIs, who had critically reflected on their own experiences and journeys during the research project. Our findings shed light on the way each of us danced and tip-toed around areas of conflict which sometimes surfaced with each other as a team. The next section will present the narratives of the PIs based on conversations taken from the interviews conducted as the research project came to a close.

#### **4. Data collection and the emergence of data**

There were a range of questions which required unpacking as we attempted to understand both the gendered and racialised experiences the respondents encountered over the course of the research project. Considering the complex issues resulting from working across different global contexts and the perspectives each of us brought to the research, it was necessary to examine the intersections of self through our own individual narrative accounts by interrogating:

- the selves and who we were
- the selves we negotiated
- the selves we presented in the context of the research project

The research project and partnerships resulted in the merging and crossing of boundaries. Each of us encountered forms of “border-crossing” as we delved into the career trajectories of our fellow academics in a context that was culturally both different and similar to our own. This evokes several questions associated to ethical implications of our research and measures taken to reduce the impact. Notably, questions pertaining to our positionality in relationship to each other, our different trajectories into the partnership, belonging, the nature of engagements achieved within the research project, our colleagues expectations and how they and we constructed them.

#### **5. Ethical implications**

One of the main ethical issues of autoethnography is that the personal experiences documented may involve people other than the autoethnographer (Tullis, 2013). The use of autoethnography in this project will consider the researcher’s two colleagues, it will include each of their individual experiences. To minimise the effect of this issue, no names or specific details of the research team will be used. Where necessary, they will be referred to using pseudonyms in order to protect their identities. An ethical implication of using autoethnography, which builds on personal anecdotes, is that it may result in self-serving research. The concern is that the researcher becomes too involved in sharing personal experiences, rather than considering the research question more broadly (Lapadat, 2017). The validity and accuracy of autoethnography relies on the researcher’s memory and honesty (Delamont, 2009). Critics raise concerns that the research will not consider things that have not been experienced by the researcher or will fail to acknowledge that not all experiences of the issue being discussed, will be the same, thus limiting the scope of the research (Lapadat, 2017). The design of this study counters such issues

by using autoethnography only as a complementary method for adding another dimension. The research covered also areas that the researcher does not have personal experience of, including narratives of others from different backgrounds who participated in the research project. Validity is additionally supported with well-founded pre-existing literature and a researcher commitment to accuracy, transparency and truthfulness.

## **6. Autobiographical narrative**

During the July 2011 British Educational Leadership Management Administration Society (BELMAS) annual conference I was full of energy and eagerness to connect with educational leadership scholars from across the globe. It was during this conference that I met the colleague who became the PI of this project. We quickly connected and used the time to speak about anything and everything for most of my time whilst at the conference. I felt we connected fully and she said she would not usually speak as freely as she did with me. I suggested meeting up to see if we could perhaps do something together. She invited me to meet her a few weeks later. Our conversation quickly turned to our origins. My colleague, who originated from Pakistan, explained that it was the first time she had developed a friendship with a Black person and somebody she could share her experiences of discrimination with since her arrival in England. I on the other hand had quite a few Asian friends with whom I had shared many similar experiences. Keeping in touch and looking for an opportunity to work together and share our respective skills became a goal. I was not sure what would come out of this as some previous encounters with other academics had not proven fruitful despite initial promises. However, on this occasion, there was a positive outcome.

My colleague and I had been working on a British Academy funded research project, which would take place in Pakistan for some time and it was only when she was able to have a sabbatical to work on the proposal that it became a reality. Notification of the successful bid was announced in December 2012 and we were required to make the project happen in the spring term. My university (UCL IOE) was the co-lead along with the University of Leicester, which was the main lead. Interestingly, I did not reflect on any of the challenges I faced in terms of “boundary crossing” such as my Englishness, Blackness and limited knowledge about Pakistan. This was just another research project and a job which needed to be completed. It was not until we started to plan the work ahead that I started to engage with not knowing the unknown and wondering what I had stepped into. I was, after all, a Black female that had just signed up to work on a project in Pakistan. What I actually knew about Pakistan was based on what I saw on social media, much of which focussed on terrorism, Muslims and difference in the context of whiteness.

I find out that Pakistan, officially the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, is a country in South Asia. It is the world's fifth-most populous country with more than 212 million inhabitants. By area, it is the 33rd-largest country, spanning 881,913 square kilometres (340,509 square miles). As I grew to understand the history of the country, I realised that much of my knowledge had been gleaned through the lens of colonialism, presenting Pakistan as a country with deep roots in terrorism and a place where women were unable to progress.

Being the only Black person in the team made me feel somewhat anxious as I did not know how I would be perceived. However, I did not consider there to be any real barriers that would occur as a result of being a Black academic in the team. On reflection, I wondered if it was something to do with class and how this develops an air of arrogance which is associated with whiteness. Did I believe that acceptance would come without any form of questioning? Would

people be interested in my experience as a Black woman in Pakistan on a research project? If so why, and what aspects of my experience would be relevant? Would I experience any form of discrimination? Racism from Asian communities exists in England. I was aware of that when the two cultures collided and the reality of colonialism and independence meant that individuals felt inclined to uphold cultural values to retain their new-found identity. Racism is a hidden tension moving from the old model of colonialism to the new based on independence.

All learning involves boundaries, whether we speak of learning as the change from novice to expert in a particular domain or from legitimate peripheral participation to being a full member of a particular community (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the boundary of the domain or community is constitutive of what counts as expertise or as participation. Is learning part of identity development? If so, what is the distinction between what is me versus what is not (yet) part of me? My experience in the Pakistan visa office caused me to pause and reflect. Queuing up in the visa office in London as an “other” was something that I was used to but this was a different kind of “other”. There was a sense of “so you are coming to our country and you are not afraid?” I was asked many questions whilst navigating my way around the visa office. I swiftly took the role of the observer. As an observer, there were times when I battled with unexpected intrusive thoughts that drifted through my mind, which were not evidenced. The thoughts focused on my perception of how the visa office was (dis)organised. I challenged myself to consider that it did not mean that the people did not know what they were doing. However, as I took a ticket and waited to be called, I was an outsider and a foreigner going to visit a country which I knew little about. These thoughts may have been a result of my background growing up in the UK and experiencing different systems of practice. Once I received my visa and booked the flight I was filled with so much excitement, I was actually going to work with a group of women across four universities on a project that would focus on gender progression and experiences in higher education.

Colleagues and friends questioned my rationale for going, many making derogatory remarks about Pakistan, including “Why would you want to go to a country like that?”, “Why not?”, was my reply, I was going to the country with an open mind. A colleague used a derogatory term to describe people from Pakistan and continued to say “[...] well the water is dirty and the people smell”. I was shocked as I had not thought about any health risks or indeed whether the people had a particular “smell” about them. I did question this person’s motives as they were also a person of colour and I found it difficult to understand why they used this language as I and they were both Black people who faced racism and discrimination everyday of our lives. Other conversations were filled with forms of embarrassment for not having visited their “home” country since they were teenagers or that they were yet to take their children there. I was curious to know why friends were feeling such guilt. Conversations with my daughters were all about safety and questioning why I would want to put myself at such risk.

As departure for Pakistan approached, I was drawn into a sense of panic, and started to think about the vaccinations required, what clothes I should wear and how and what I needed to do to understand the culture and many more things. Regarding the clothes, I decided that I would reflect and wear the dress which women wore in Pakistan which I felt would be respectful and illustrate I was willing to learn and be part of their culture.

Touching down in Pakistan and walking through customs was overwhelming. The place was filled with so many people navigating their way through customs. There were different queues and I needed to stand in the appropriate one, which was difficult as each of the queues intertwined with one another. After around 30 minutes of very little movement I thought that I

would never get through. I suppressed a rising sense of panic. I still remember coming out of the airport into the warm air which was interrupted by the hustle and bustle from the crowds of people waiting to either say their hellos or goodbyes. The visual presence of the Pakistani military and concrete boulders surrounding the airport, were reminders that Pakistan was a country that was suffering from bomb attacks in crowded places. I started to feel a surge of anxiety as my mind swirled around with ideas and questions. I wondered what would happen if I was kidnapped or caught up in an explosion? I relayed my unease to my colleague whilst sitting in the car. She reassured me that all would be well. I was not sure what to expect once we arrived at the university; however, we were treated with much respect and given the schedule for the week in addition to our onsite accommodation. This was deemed a safer option than staying off campus.

We were served afternoon tea during our first meeting which took place with the Vice Chancellor and other members of the senior leadership team. Being served afternoon tea felt so surreal, but then of course Pakistan had been colonised by the British. The first time we met the Pakistani team was during a twilight session in a grand meeting room that had seen better days. Even though I was the only Black person there, my choice of clothing was really appreciated by the women who saw the effort I had made to embrace their culture. Each day I wore a new Shalwar Kameez suit which many of the women complimented me on. I had taken the lead to develop and design the meetings, workshops and training for the three-year research projects. However, this was very tentative as it was my first time in Pakistan and I had no idea how things would work, including if we could understand each other as women. I realised I needed to start with an ice breaker as the women were coming together from different universities to work on this programme.

It was not until we were introducing each other that I realised that these women had so much to offer which had not been captured until then. It was obvious, I was using a lens created from my own internalised colonialism which indirectly judged these women. They were to be together for seven days and live and eat on campus. Culturally, being away from their home town and family was uncommon and momentous for them. The project was seen as pioneering in its holistic and interactive approach, delivery and implementation. We were keen to ensure from the start that the research project was fully inclusive. Husbands and other family members including children were welcomed to attend, so that the women were able to take part in the research programme with less stress. In hindsight I came to realise that the role I had agreed to play was much more than designing the interactive research programme, it was Co-leader of the project. There were times when I was apprehensive because my colleague needed to attend to executive meetings off site which left me to make the decisions in the development and direction of the project. I came to terms with the idea that I was useful in terms of making the project happen. I found myself working the room to make connections through a sense of haziness caused by jetlag whilst doing my best to blend in as an outsider who had been invited to take a seat at the table.

When the women were placed into groups I could not resist asking what they thought about me as a Black colleague being part of the team. I was surprised with the answer “we really love having you here as we do not get exposed to anyone like you ...”, or, “you are so knowledgeable thank you so much”, or “you are so much like us and so easy to get on with”. Rather than the comments giving me a sense of happiness, I was filled with guilt and found myself making excuses as to why my colleague acted and or approached things differently compared to me. She was formal in her approach due to cultural factors and her position in Pakistani society who saw her as an older experienced academic who was an insider. I came

across as more approachable as I was the “other” so they were able to ask questions which were harder to ask of her due to the her perceived status. In addition, the project to her was both personal and political. The different ways in which we interacted with the women was noticeable but not something which should be criticised, as formal is expected in the university. It created an invisible barrier which perhaps contributed to some unease and whispering when working in groups that included my colleague. So as not to draw attention to this I made sure that we alternated our time in the groups acting as group leader. I was conscious I did not want these comments to create a wedge between myself and my colleagues. The initial team consisted of a British born Pakistani early career researcher who left the team after the first trip to Pakistan. I also needed to provide guidance and direction to this person as they were not familiar with the delivery of research methodology. This added to the power relations which were emerging from the project team. I needed to grapple with the hidden curriculum, meaning the many different layers which were at times clashing and at the same time inspiring the approach of the research project. It should be noted that my colleague was granted respect from the beginning of the project due to her age, as age is respected in Pakistan.

## **7. Portraits cultivated from the conversational interviews**

The Pakistani colleague who was a woman and came from a privileged and highly political background, saw this project as something very personal. Prior to coming to the UK she had been an influential education leader, a Dean at one of the universities in Pakistan. She was part of a network for women leaders in Pakistan. The profile she held in Pakistan was remarkable; she was the first person to be given the best university teacher award in Pakistan, and the youngest woman to become Dean at her university. Her family was well-known in the part of Pakistan that she came from. Given this background information which is really important, when she was appointed to her post in the UK she started from the bottom and had to demonstrate her worth in every way possible to be accepted into the academy. She became classless and undervalued in the UK. I believe this opened up the conversation on diversity and gender we had whilst at the BELMAS conference. It was notable she was passionate about the development of women in Pakistan and given her networks in Pakistan she was determined to use this project to bring about change for women in higher education.

The research project was supported by the Higher Education Commission as a vehicle to enable women to access promotion. Both of us working on this project brought two different feminist perspectives and cultures to the project. My colleague had not been given the opportunity to collaborate with anybody in the UK on any research projects and it was particularly hard to find funding from the UK to work on projects in Pakistan. Our accounts on how the proposal came together were very different; my involvement was motivated by the opportunity to work with a colleague who shared similar ideas. The stance of my colleague was different, she said “I approached Victoria as I could not convince anybody here at ... to be part of the project. I mean I was doing everything just asking people come and visit Pakistan with me” (Principal Investigator 1, informal interview, England, 2012). It was heart-breaking to hear that she had tried so hard but nobody was interested.

I knew we required further support from the UK so I asked a Pakistani colleague who had been struggling after completing her doctorate. This colleague subsequently left and was replaced by a white professor who was a man. I was perturbed as I thought that the dynamics of the project were about to change with the replacement of a British born Pakistani woman with a white British man. We had spent time crafting and honing the project to accommodate a space for women only. Why then would we need a white man to step into that space? When she was



asked during the interview why did you want a man in the project she stated the following; “I think that perhaps one of the reasons is that I wanted a man in the project. I wanted to see how the women would respond to interacting with a male colleague because in a way it would give them the experience of interacting with males and realise they are also colleagues and not a sort of forbidden thing which should not be spoken to” (Principal Investigator 1, informal interview, England, 2012). There were two other Pakistani men in the project, however the women treated these men within a cultural paradigm, which was noticeable. These men represented the two universities which were from outside of the region. Their purpose was to handle the logistics and any academic issues the women may have during the duration of the project.

The white man was invited to join the project in year two. We were introduced at a difficult planning meeting. I remember walking into the meeting with an agreed agenda only for that to be pushed to one side as we spent time redefining the aims and objectives of the project brief. I was mortified and found it really difficult to contain my emotions whilst trying not to appear as the “angry Black woman.” What was I to do? I did not get to know my new colleague until we were in Pakistan on the next project trip. When asked during his interview what his role was he said it was a “fairly technical one [...] I don’t have the background in gender studies. I don’t write about it, I am not knowledgeable about gender and I do not see myself as an academic involved in gender” (Co-Principal Investigator 3, informal interview, England, 2015). However, he believed his role was about exploring research approaches in the context of gender in Pakistan. What was revealing, is that his role was that clear. There was discussion on the valuable work that had already been developed, which he continued to mention. When interviewed (Co-Principal Investigator 3) in 2015 in London he recalled the difficult conversation when we first met.

Well we sat in the front seminar room [...], you and I and I was very conscious of the issues in the background here being you know how can this be a gender based project and have a male colleague involved in our collaboration. I don’t think that was a particularly aggressive strand of our initial wonderings but it was definitely in the air and because it was in the air it was something to talk about and discuss. So I think that was a kind of key event for me so how could I be included legitimately in the project like this meaning the project focused on gender issues and all of the planning meetings, all of the seminars I think I see as key milestones both for myself as part of the team and for participants.  
(Co-Principal Investigator 3, interview, London, 2015)

Whilst in Pakistan in 2013 he was more open and shared that he was married to a Black woman which I must admit softened my approach to him. Perhaps he was someone who was more aware of his hidden privilege as a white man. I was aware that he was getting used to owning his new identity as a professor and the way in which power had been attached to him by our colleague.

## **8. Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed intersectionality and the negotiation of power and resources for a research project dependent of British Academy funding in Pakistan. We were given an opportunity with a relatively small amount of funding from the UK. We utilised further funding from the four universities in the research study, to make it a worthwhile project to represent women in higher education in Pakistan. It was evident that my colleague who was based in

England but was Pakistani, wanted to give something back to “her community” and create something that would open up the conversation on women’s progression in higher education. In order to do this, it was important that the women academics had access to actual research which they were co-designing, researching and delivering. The personal commitment of my colleague, for success in this international collaboration, was extraordinary.

The chapter has portrayed dialogue between research team members and how research team members experienced the collaboration. Differing narratives displayed a joint commitment to ensuring the project would succeed. However, the roles were blurred and not clear, which created an atmosphere which benefited some members of the team but not others. The white man on the team had been placed in a position of power which he was uncomfortable with as he had not earned it. The colleague from Pakistan knew her position, I on the other hand was delivering the project, whilst at the same time struggling to find a position which I felt comfortable with. We needed to create a cultural front and make this project work. Each of the project members grew in their different ways during the duration of the project. Both of my team members grew to appreciate what I brought to the project; whether it was the way in which I interacted with the women or the kind of critical questions which I raised. Our priority was to develop a two-way process for a collaboration that accommodated both English and Pakistani cultures. This UK-Pakistan collaboration project in higher education has contributed to the goals of the Global Citizenship Education (GCE) agenda by making critical “border crossing” possible both for participating colleagues from the UK and Pakistan. This research project provides one example of how higher education can support public sphere spaces that contribute to diversifying the Habermasian public sphere notion (Habermas, 1979) by making room for dialogue and deliberation regarding gender and intersectionality.

## 9. Reflections

Having the opportunity to take part in the international research project was not just fascinating but it also spurred on my own development and independence as a researcher. I was, for the first time, being valued for what I brought and not dismissed or undermined in my knowledge. We as the UK team, along with the Pakistani team grew together and learnt so much about each other’s different yet similar ways of working. I learnt so much working with culturally diverse colleagues in a different cultural climate. Having a member of our team who was an “insider” to all intents and purposes helped, as she understood the cultural nuances and had the social and cultural capital necessary to proceed with the project without finding herself out of step with her surroundings.

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