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The rules of the academic game: reviewing the history of Australian higher education

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The Australian higher education system has its origins in the "Oxbridge" model, and while traces of its Eurocentric heritage persist, the system has evolved through a blend of continuity and change. To grasp the trajectory of Australian higher education, it is essential to delve into its historical development and the pivotal events that have shaped its current form. This article explores significant milestones in the establishment of Australian higher education, all within the backdrop of Australia's history as a colonized nation transitioning to Federation in the 20th century. Embedded within this commentary is a recognition of the intricate challenges faced by academics within the realm of higher education. Historically, academia has remained an exclusive and elitist sphere, marked by imperial and patriarchal norms that have favored white, heterosexual men. These norms have perpetuated the perception of their superiority, consequently influencing how minority groups have navigated academia, both as students and academics. The institutionalization of political, economic, and symbolic ideologies has further exacerbated the obstacles encountered within academia. Therefore, it becomes paramount to consider the impact of the higher education system's operations on academics and how it has perpetuated the influence of colonialism and imperialism on the shaping of scientific knowledge and practices throughout history.

KEYWORDS

history, academia, Australia, higher education, academics

1 Introduction

Academia exhibits a strongly institutionalized setting marked by a structured, conventional, and exclusive culture (Bomert and Leinfellner, 2017). This environment entails various individual positions, including students, academics, support, and administrative staff, each with distinct responsibilities, access to opportunities, and subjectivities that can either intensify, or perpetuate, social and institutional inequities (Read and Leathwood, 2018). The entrenched traditional culture in academia, characterized by hierarchical and bureaucratic systems, has its roots in patriarchal, imperial, and colonial values (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Blackburn, 2017). These values have historically defined and upheld certain roles and regulations, which potentially place some groups at either an advantage (e.g., white, cisgendered men) or a disadvantage (e.g., minority groups) (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Blackburn, 2017). The functioning of academia mirrors that of other organizational contexts globally, where prevailing discourses on organizational principles, and the definition of organizational norms, are deeply rooted in the perspectives

and worldviews of men (Acker, 1990; Williams, 2000). Due to the organizational framework predominantly favoring men, instigating, and sustaining gender equity-related social changes within academia can be challenging. This difficulty arises from the persistent maintenance of gendered procedures and structures, influenced by heteronormative and gender-specific practices ingrained in the construction and functioning of academic institutions (Blackburn, 2017; Göktürka and Tülübaş, 2021). These institutional processes, often rooted in masculinities, may go unnoticed by many in academia, as they are built upon knowledge systems and beliefs that rationalize and legitimize existing patriarchal and heteronormative practices (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Cumings Mansfield et al., 2014). The endorsement of these current practices contributes to shaping the perception of how the academic system operates for academics (Bomert and Leinfellner, 2017).

The Australian higher education system's foundations began in the "Oxbridge" model, derived from the academic traditions of the University of Oxford, and the University of Cambridge (Barnes, 1996). The collegiate system divides the universities into individual colleges, each with its own identity, fostering a sense of community (Barnes, 1996). A key element is the tutorial system, providing students with personalized, small-group sessions for in-depth discussions and critical analysis (Barnes, 1996; McCrum, 1998). Selective admissions prioritize academic excellence, and the rigorous curriculum emphasizes independent learning and research foci (Barnes, 1996; McCrum, 1998). This education system has a strong tradition of research, and extracurricular activities, that contribute to a holistic educational experience (McCrum, 1998). Finally, the "Oxbridge" model's longstanding traditions, including formal ceremonies and cultural events, reflect a rich history that has influenced higher education globally, inspiring other institutions to incorporate similar elements into their educational systems (Tight, 2014).

Although Australian higher education still bears the marks of its "Oxbridge," Eurocentric origins, its evolution has been shaped by a blend of continuity and change (Welch, 2020). The system has evolved independently over time, incorporating a mix of international influences, and local innovations. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the Australian higher education landscape, it is imperative to explore its historical development, and the key events that have contributed to its current state. This article delves into the significant milestones that have molded Australian higher education, underpinned by Australia's journey from colonization to Federation in the 20th century. It is crucial to examine the historical underpinnings of Federation and its impact on the Australian education system, as this provides valuable insights into how colonialism, imperialism, and neoliberalism have influenced the trajectory of scientific knowledge and practices over time.

Within this commentary, I also acknowledge the intricate web of challenges that have marked the experiences of women historically within academia. Academia, as an institution, has historically operated as an exclusive and exclusionary domain, shaped by imperial and patriarchal norms that have granted privileges to white, heterosexual, cisgendered men (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Krejsler, 2005). These norms have, in turn, molded the way women navigate academia, both as students and academics (Krejsler, 2005). The representation of women within the Australian higher education system has been significantly influenced by two key factors: the historical context of Australian higher education, and the societal expectations placed on women (Cammack and Phillips, 2002). Moreover, the operational dynamics of higher education have been shown to impact individuals with diverse identities that differ from the privileged norm, shaping their experiences and construction of identity within the academic realm (Cammack and Phillips, 2002). The rules of the academic "game" have evolved over time, making it imperative to scrutinize the history of Australian higher education. Such a review allows for contemplation of the role and nature of the 21st century university, providing valuable insights into how the academic context has transformed over time.

2 Part one: tracing the colonial legacy—Shaping Australian higher education in the 19th and early 20th centuries

2.1 The late 1800s: forging Australian higher education and a legacy of colonial influence

In the pre-federation era, Australia was structured as separate colonies, each governed by an appointed official from the British government (Rienstra and Williams, 2015). These colonies recognized the necessity for land and infrastructure development, leading to the recruitment of engineers and other professionals to aid in this endeavor (Grimshaw, 2002). This demand was shaped by the knowledge and perspectives of the colonizers, characterized by Eurocentrism, cultural elitism, and the ambition to acquire "available" lands and resources for global dominance (Atkinson, 2013). The establishment of government institutions, as stipulated in the New South Wales Act (1823), required individuals with higher education. It is noteworthy that, during this period, the emphasis on highly educated individuals was exclusively on white men, largely overlooking the contributions of women beyond their familial and caregiving roles (Acker, 1990; Williams, 2000; Grimshaw, 2002).

In the mid-to-late 1800s, colonists seeking secondary, or tertiary, education had limited options, mainly involving arduous and lengthy journeys to Europe, North America, or Britain (Grimshaw, 2002; Atkinson, 2013). Such journeys separated men from their families for extended periods, and incurred expenses that were beyond the means of most. Consequently, there was a growing demand for more accessible higher education within Australia, and a need for a better-educated workforce (Beasley, 1934; Marginson and Considine, 2000). While some influential colonists (primarily British white men) established private colleges to address this demand, it was evident that a more comprehensive solution was required to meet this rising need for higher education (Beasley, 1934; Marginson and Considine, 2000). However, initial attempts to address this need were gender-biased, with a strong focus on men's representation in academic roles (Acker, 1990; Williams, 2000; Grimshaw, 2002).

Plans were devised to establish additional higher education institutions. In pursuit of this goal, the separate colonies began to assert more control over their lands, governance, and authority over their inhabitants (Beasley, 1934). Over time, the colonies gained greater autonomy, with Britain retaining control over only military and foreign affairs by 1851 (Marginson and Considine, 2000). This increased self-governance facilitated the establishment of higher education institutions across Australia. The University of Sydney was the first to be founded in 1850, followed by the University of Melbourne in 1853, the University of Adelaide in 1874, and the University of Tasmania in 1890 (Marginson and Considine, 2000). These universities were established to meet the growing demand for a well-educated workforce, and to further develop and refine the colonized land and its infrastructure (Beasley, 1934). These institutions were part of the broader civilizing mission aimed at reshaping the population based on Eurocentric principles and knowledge (Jones, 1997). Within these institutions, men dominated, both in terms of student enrolment, and representation among academics and professionals, and women, even when admitted, were notably underrepresented as both students and academics (Acker, 1990; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Williams, 2000).

2.2 1900–1915: colonial power dynamics shaping Australia's federation and higher education

In the pursuit of further control, imperialists—primarily white, Christian, heterosexual men from Britain—played a pivotal role in shaping Australia's destiny. With a compelling argument presented by Sir Henry Parkes, then New South Wales Premier, the six self-governing colonies of Australia united to form the Federation of Australia on January 1st, 1901 (Atkinson, 2013). Initially, this federation was seen as an extension of Britain, Canada, and New Zealand's dominion over Australia, with the country operating under the doctrine of a single empire (Marginson and Considine, 2000). Australia's responsibilities within this doctrine were outlined in the Commonwealth's constitution, which defined the powers and duties of the Commonwealth, while reserving all other matters for the individual states (Beasley, 1934). For instance, the Commonwealth took charge of foreign affairs, customs, posts and telegraphs, defense, currency, banking, citizenship, and immigration, while the states retained control over education, health, taxation, mining, agriculture, public order, land, and transport (Beasley, 1934; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Atkinson, 2013).

In 1901, Australia's population stood at 3,788,100, with fewer than 1,652 university students and staff. Men constituted 78.1% of the university population, leaving women academics representing 21.9% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1911). The gender disparity in academia was glaring, with men occupying most academic positions. Despite limited public demand for universities at the time, there was recognition of the need for further higher education institutions (Forsyth, 2015). Universities were seen as fulfilling the requirements for professional education (especially in medical and legal fields), serving as agents of civilisation, and nurturing future leaders (Moodie, 2008). Consequently, to meet these demands, and establish higher education institutions in each state, the University of Queensland, and the University of Western Australia were founded in 1909, and 1911, respectively (Karmel, 1991). These institutions were under state governance, but reflective of the traditional British university system, incorporating features of the influential "Mother Country," such as self-governance, state founding, and self-accreditation (Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003). As such, they viewed the provision of doctoral qualifications and broad research activities as central to their role in higher education. Additionally, Australian higher education was also being influenced by the Scottish model, emphasizing daytime lectures and vocationally oriented courses, rather than solely the Cambridge and Oxford approaches of personal development through residential colleges (Barnes, 1996; McCrum, 1998; Tight, 2014).

2.3 Colonial roots: shaping academic and cultural paradigms

Particular ideologies shed light on how specific identities, knowledge systems, and modes of existence emerged and were favored in the academic setting. The privileging of these elements is rooted in the concept of coloniality, which, when viewed critically, encompasses human agency, traditional dominant values, and the exploitative use of power (Fox et al., 2013). Coloniality involves structures and practices stemming from settler colonialism and governance, persistently influencing social relations and institutions, originating from historical practices and enduring power dynamics (Staeuble, 2006; Fox et al., 2013). Imperialism also plays a role in perpetuating coloniality by facilitating economic and cultural expansion, as well as exerting control over societies (Staeuble, 2006). This form of extensive dominance succeeds through significant power disparities and the subjugation of minority populations (Cupples and Grosfoguel, 2018). In the context of Australia, coloniality historically served three key functions: diminishing the power of Indigenous nations, compelling the adoption of a Westernized way of thinking, and perpetuating narratives that erase the identities of those not privileged within the prevailing knowledge framework (Moreton-Robinson, 2011; Battiste, 2013).

Practices and policies originating from the United Kingdom (UK) restricted the access of traditional landowners and other minority groups to power and resources (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Jones, 1997). Control over these resources was wielded by individuals from the UK who had taken land from the traditional custodians, namely, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, signifying Aboriginal dispossession and colonial takeover (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Jones, 1997). This colonization was underpinned by the belief in the superiority of European culture and knowledge, enabling Europeans to dictate the world on their own terms (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Jones, 1997). While certain forms of colonialism aim to exploit resources for the benefit of the colonizing country, the colonization of Australian land went further, seeking permanent settlement (Marginson and Considine, 2000). This settlement process had severe repercussions for Indigenous communities, involving the exploitation of human and natural resources, as well as the acquisition, control, and definition of both

resources and land (Bodkins-Andrews and Carlson, 2016). This led to significant harm to Indigenous communities, involving the genocide, forced removal, and assimilation of Indigenous peoples within colonized land (Bodkins-Andrews and Carlson, 2016). The colonial redefinition of land and knowledge marginalized the position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, resulting in the widespread killing of the majority through acts of genocide, such as random killings, punitive expeditions, and organized massacres (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Jones, 1997). Colonizers forcibly displaced Australian Indigenous peoples from their homes, placing them in schools with Westernized education to erase all traces of their Indigenous identity (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Jones, 1997). Punishment was meted out when Indigenous peoples spoke their language, and the working conditions were inhumane, with no compensation or ability to communicate with others (Bodkins-Andrews and Carlson, 2016).

The notion of superiority was firmly entrenched in the majority's beliefs, ideas, and values, giving rise to social representations that validated the European colonists' privilege (Moreton-Robinson, 2011; Battiste, 2013). This enabled them and their higher education institutions to benefit from forms of colonial capitalism, while imposing their ideas and beliefs as the norm (Moreton-Robinson, 2011; Battiste, 2013). This dynamic can be seen as a form of cultural violence, where aspects of culture legitimize violence through both direct and structural means, reinforcing the Eurocentric value of a singular knowledge and form of education (Galtung, 1990). Coloniality further rested in institutionalized and cultural racism, with the former manifesting in organizational practices and policies that hindered oppressed groups from accessing power and resources, and the latter entailing the validation of one group's superiority over others based on specific beliefs, ideas, and values within social representations (Galtung, 1990). The colonizers devised popularized discourses through structural and cultural racism, reinforcing support for their colonial ventures (Battiste, 2013). From their perspective, this justified the oppression, dispossession, and domination of the colonized subjects on intellectual and ethical grounds (Moreton-Robinson, 2011). The European colonists, through their actions, amalgamated these forms of racism to ensure their ethnic group became the primary beneficiary of colonial capitalism, ultimately giving rise to a dominant "western" culture in Australia (Staeuble, 2006).

2.4 So, what does this mean? Constructing the western, eurocentric university culture

Coloniality originates from European perspectives and worldviews, intentionally displacing alternative knowledge systems, and establishing dominance in society (Staeuble, 2006). In academia, cultural racism has influenced knowledge and science, asserting universality over specific worldviews, with the European scientific paradigm introduced during colonization deemed the sole legitimate system of academic knowledge (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1994). The university setting served as the breeding ground for the colonial matrix of knowledge, encompassing categories of thought and epistemic ways of knowing and being, developed by the colonizer in their privileged languages (Moreton-Robinson, 2011; Battiste, 2013). This matrix marginalized any knowledge that diverged from the colonized ontological and epistemic framework (Moreton-Robinson, 2011; Battiste, 2013). Foundational knowledge within the Westernized higher education context is rooted in epistemic racism, where the genocide of people and knowledge is driven not only by material aspects of colonialism, but also by the replacement of other forms of knowledge with Eurocentric ways of understanding and existing in the world (Grosfoguel, 2013).

The endorsement of the European scientific paradigm promotes a mono-cultural, universally Western tradition of Eurocentrism, accepting Eurocentric universal truths, while invalidating other forms of knowledge and dissemination (Mentan, 2015). Eurocentrism mirrors societal values and beliefs that validated and constructed a dominant "western" culture, disseminating the sole valid system of knowledge at the time (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Grimshaw, 2002). The universality of the "Western" worldview, based on European origins, intentionally replaced other knowledge systems, thereby dominating society (Staeuble, 2006). This Eurocentric, "Western" worldview privileged white males as the majority, influenced the construction and positioning of white women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, women with caring responsibilities, and other minorities in society (Cammack and Phillips, 2002). Knowledge from the First World (initially the United States, and later, the UK) was disseminated unilaterally, favoring, and promoting European, and American, academic, cultural, and patriarchal imperialism (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1994).

2.5 Unveiling colonial imprints in higher education: shaping norms and marginalizing identities

Australian higher education was shaped by specific ways of existence and operation that mirror and uphold the predominant European colonial systems and practices (Adam, 2012). Institutions were founded in the epistemic and material histories of coloniality, with Australian universities, influenced by the British, providing education to the colonizers who sought knowledge over those they intended to govern (Macoun, 2016). This establishment was executed in a manner that perceived the expansion of colonial knowledge as inherently dominating (Battiste, 2013). The university, viewed as a context constructed, and funded, through dispossession, enslavement, coloniality, and genocide, was conceived as a space for the development and dissemination of colonial knowledge (Moreton-Robinson, 2011). The knowledge privileged by coloniality was constructed based on the subjectivities of a specific social agent, namely white, Christian, British men, thus elevating identities that aligned with these characteristics, while marginalizing those that did not meet these criteria (Cammack and Phillips, 2002). It was suggested that:

> *Education, like the institutions and societies it derives from, is neither culturally neutral nor fair. Education has its roots in a patriarchal, Eurocentric society, complicit with multiple forms of*

> *oppression of women, sometimes men, children, minorities, and Indigenous peoples (Battiste, 2013).*

Therefore, Australian public higher education institutions, situated within the colonized society, served as a vital arena for navigating the tension between the dominance of coloniality, and Indigenous sovereignty (Moreton-Robinson, 2007). Discussions regarding the interplay between colonial control and power have been raised, with the assertion that:

> *Colonial includes all forms of dominating and oppressive relationships that emerge from structures of power and privilege inherent and embedded in our contemporary social relations...colonial is not defined simply as foreign or alien, but more importantly, as dominating and opposing (Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001).*

Through the process of colonization, political, economic, and symbolic systems are established, and veiled by ideologies that rationalize exploitative uses of power (Adam, 2012; Fox et al., 2013). This reinforcement allows for the assertion of the colonizer's superiority, and the manifestation of inferiority in the colonized (Fox et al., 2013). The enduring presence of coloniality and imperialism serves to sustain privileged norms within academia, where it functions as a patriarchal, exclusionary, elitist, imperial environment that favors the practices of white, heterosexual men as superior (Cupples and Grosfoguel, 2018). Members of the dominant group, specifically white men, enjoy privileges over others who find themselves in a marginalized position and subject to less favorable treatment (Staeuble, 2006). Consequently, individuals with identities differing from dominant patriarchal practices are constructed as inferior within this colonized, imperialist setting (Cupples and Grosfoguel, 2018). Additionally, the structuring of academic knowledge, and the organizational frameworks of higher education, fundamentally reflect imperialist and colonial characteristics (Staeuble, 2006). The academic culture, along with management and governance systems, operates to uphold existing privileges, thereby disadvantaging minority groups (Smith, 1999).

While colonialism in Australia was initially regarded as the starting point, it was anticipated to endure as an unconscious aspect of daily life (Battiste, 2013). Historically, such an environment has consistently demonstrated its unequal and hierarchical structure, fostering exclusion, elitism, and disparities (Smith, 1999; Staeuble, 2006). This setting functions to marginalize many individuals from the security of the ivory tower, where traditional practices reflect and reinforce wider social inequities based on gender, social class, race, and ethnicity (Smith, 1999; Staeuble, 2006). Considering these inequalities, and the social and psychological mechanisms of colonization and imperialism, the dynamics of domination and control become increasingly pervasive across generations (Moane, 1999). Consequently, higher education continues to play a role in perpetuating such practices to this day, aligning with mass media and other Westernized institutions (Smith, 1999). The establishment of definitions of reality can be manipulated to prevail over others, such as exercising power underpinned by psychological imperialism manifested in laws, rituals, instructions, and other forces (Cupples and Grosfoguel, 2018). Academic institutions seem more inclined to emphasize adaptation and conformity to Eurocentric norms and practices, rather than encouraging individuals to challenge them (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1994; Cupples and Grosfoguel, 2018). It is imperative to consciously acknowledge the deeply entrenched and ongoing colonial, Eurocentric processes within the educational context.

3 Part two: evolution and challenges in Australian higher education (1915–1990)—From founding to restructuring

3.1 1915–1945: the evolution of Australian education

In 1915, records indicated that there were approximately 3,300 students enrolled in universities across Australia, accompanied by 290 individuals holding positions as Professors and Lecturers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1914). Putting this into perspective, at the time, these figures accounted for less than 0.1% of the Australian population, considering both students and academic staff (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1914). Students were mostly responsible for covering their own tuition fees, although there were some endowments and State funding allocated to assist (Marginson and Considine, 2000). As Australian universities started receiving increased contributions, a significant decision was made in 1920 to establish the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) (Winchester and Browning, 2015). The primary purpose of the AVCC was to represent the interests of the six universities that had been established up to that point, shaping the landscape of education in Australia (Pearson, 2005).

Education beyond the secondary level in Australia was categorized into two main streams: higher education, and vocational education and training (Australian Government, 2020). Higher education encompassed universities, theological colleges, and graduate business schools, whereas vocational education and training included technical training programs (Australian Government, 2021). Admission into higher education institutions predominantly relied on an end-of-school assessment system, which varied by State (Australian Government, 2020, 2021). This system involved completing assessments and examinations, with the results contributing to what was then known as the tertiary education ranking (TER) (Australian Government, 2020, 2021). Admission to these institutions was determined by the specific degree's ranking, and how it compared to an individual's TER (Australian Government, 2020, 2021). If a student met, or exceeded, the minimum ranking requirement, they were granted admission. **Figure 1** provides a visual presentation of the evolution of the Australian education system at all levels which developed over the course of 1900–1945.

Vocational education and training institutions were initially categorized as "non-university" entities, and primarily conferred technical and trade certificates, diplomas, and professional bachelor's degrees (Marginson and Considine, 2000). A notable distinction between universities and institutes of technology/technical colleges was their involvement in

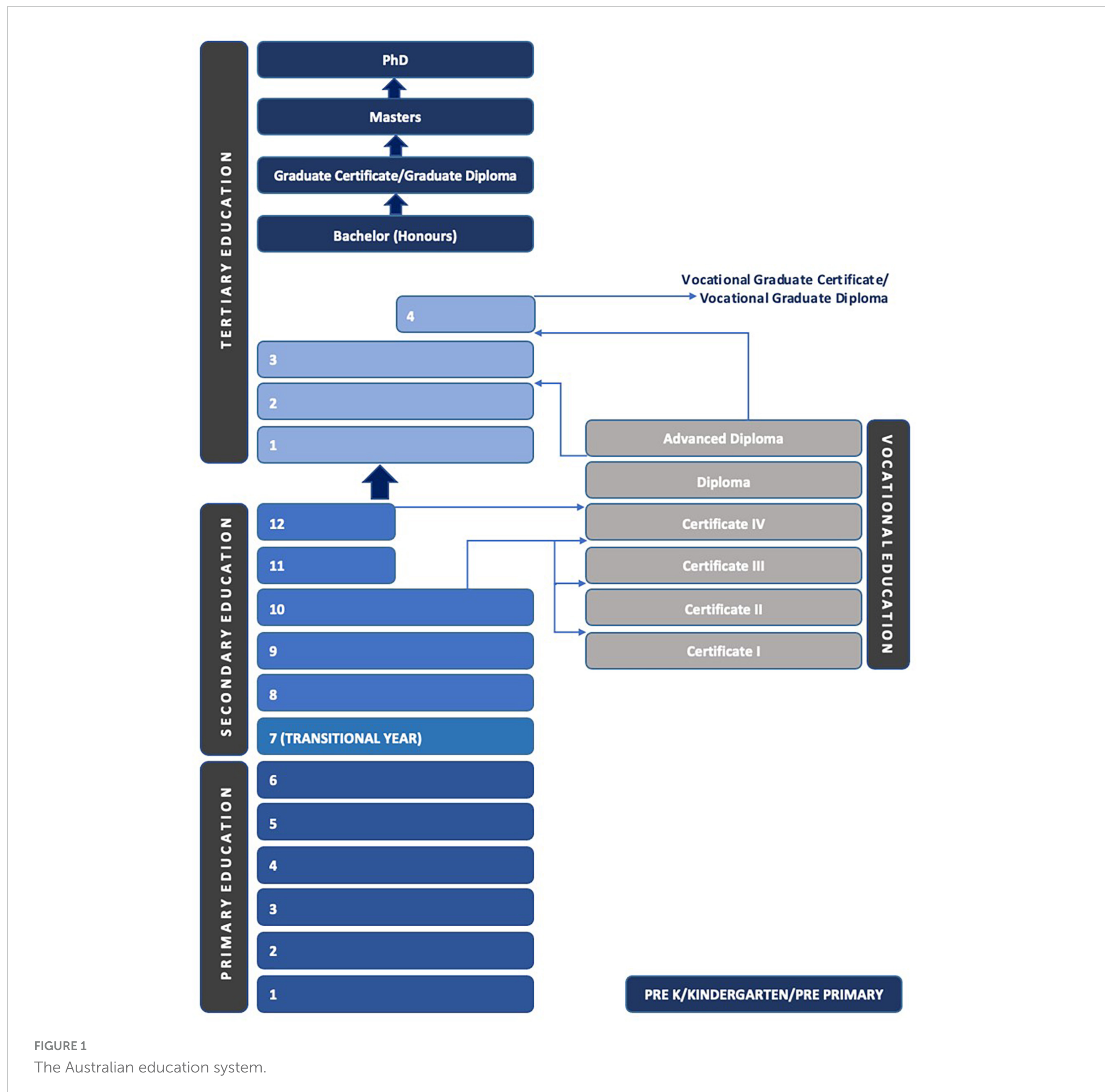

FIGURE 1
The Australian education system.

research activities. To foster Australian scientific research, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) was established in 1916, positioning itself as Australia's national science research agency undertaking diverse research across scientific disciplines to advance industries, society, and the economy through innovation and technological development (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, 2024). Additionally, two new university colleges were founded. Before World War I (WWI), Australia's population had grown to approximately seven million, but the university enrolment numbers remained relatively low at 14,236 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1921). This total encompassed the six existing universities, and two colleges. Within this figure, 10,354 students were pursuing degrees (with 81 pursuing higher degrees by research), while nearly 3,000 were classified as "sub-degree or non-award" students (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1921).

3.2 Breaking barriers: gender gaps in education, and professions past and present

In 1921, although there was some growth in the representation of women in higher education, a significant gender gap persisted (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1921). Women academics comprised 29.3% of the university population, while men accounted for 70.7% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1921). This era of expanding higher education institutions also brought forth discussions about gender, and its role in shaping educational

opportunities. These discussions often revolved around how certain professions were traditionally considered more suitable for specific genders due to entrenched stereotypes (Bryson, 2014). Gender stereotypes had influenced the perception of which professions were deemed appropriate for individuals (Acker and Dillabough, 2007). For instance, certain elite occupations, such as medicine, architecture, ministry, dentistry, law, science, judicial positions, and university teaching, were predominantly associated with white men, who constituted the majority in these fields (Oldenziel, 1945). These professions required specialized training, and those engaged in them were seen as experts with a high level of autonomy, control, and compensation. Elite occupations enjoyed a higher social status and prestige (Oldenziel, 1945; Acker and Dillabough, 2007; Bryson, 2014). In contrast, semi-professions, which required substantial knowledge, education, and experience, were not held in the same esteem, and included careers like nursing, librarianship, primary and secondary teaching, and social work (Oldenziel, 1945; Acker and Dillabough, 2007; Bryson, 2014). These semi-professions were categorized as feminine positions within the prevailing gender norms of society (Oldenziel, 1945; Acker and Dillabough, 2007; Bryson, 2014). During the 20th century, white males were the dominant presence in elite professions, while white women predominantly occupied semi-professions (Oldenziel, 1945; Acker and Dillabough, 2007; Bryson, 2014). It is worth noting that these gendered roles persisted not only in higher education but also in society, and some aspects of these disparities continue to exist today.

3.3 Overcoming barriers: women's journey in higher education professions

Gendered roles also played a significant role in shaping women's representation in academia, as well as access to professions (Bryson, 2014). A complicating factor was the quota system of admission, where tertiary education institutions imposed limits on the number of women admitted, both as students, and in academic roles (Marginson and Considine, 2000). These limits were often based on performance targets and prevailing assumptions about gender and intelligence, with higher education being perceived as a predominantly male domain (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Bryson, 2014). Some universities adhered to policies accepting three men for every one woman (Marginson and Considine, 2000). During this period, there were no policies or legislation in place to address gender-based inequalities (Marginson and Considine, 2000).

A noticeable decline in the representation of women in higher education occurred from the 1920s (29.3%) to the 1950s (10.8%), largely due to the Great Depression and World Wars (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1951). Until the 1960s, elite professions were primarily occupied by white males, with minorities largely excluded (Oldenziel, 1945; Acker and Dillabough, 2007; Bryson, 2014). This underrepresentation of women extended to various fields, such as 6.8% of doctors, 5.8% of clergy, 4.2% of physicists, and 3.5% of lawyers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1951). Within Australian higher education during this period, women were often confined to teaching subjects considered "soft," like home economics, literature, and foreign languages, as opposed to "hard" disciplines, like the sciences (Oldenziel, 1945; Acker and Dillabough, 2007; Bryson, 2014). In the 1960s, the representation of women academics began to slowly increase, reaching a point in the 1970s where women were as well represented as they were before the Great Depression, comprising 14% of positions in elite professions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1971).

The desire for women to attend higher education institutions had been a contentious issue spanning over a century (Booth and Kee, 2010). Some argued it would disrupt women's traditional roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers, while others believed it would enhance their overall experience (Fara, 2015). The primary argument against women's admission to higher education, both as students and employees, was those institutions at the time enforced gender segregation (Booth and Kee, 2010; Fara, 2015). If women were admitted, they were often directed toward fields associated with the semi-professions discussed earlier (Booth and Kee, 2010; Fara, 2015). However, the gendered segregation began to shift during WWI and World War II (WWII) when male enrolment, and faculty representation, in higher education institutions and businesses declined due to conscription policies (Booth and Kee, 2010). With many men serving in the war, opportunities arose for women as students and academic staff. As a result, women filled many vacancies and demonstrated their capabilities (Fara, 2015). Australia's experience managing the impact of WWI (1914–1918) and WWII (1939–1945) highlighted the increasing need for higher education institutions as returning war veterans sought further education and career opportunities (Booth and Kee, 2010; Fara, 2015).

3.4 Unveiling gender dynamics in higher education: heteronormativity, organizational logic, and societal structures

How gender was enacted and performed within higher education (in relation to roles, professions, and subjectivities) was underpinned by heteronormativity, shedding light on the everyday ways in which heterosexuality and gender were normalized, naturalized, and taken for granted (Herz and Johansson, 2015). Heteronormativity is not merely confined to acts, ideas, and concepts of gender and sexuality, but is also viewed as a foundational structure of society and culture (Butler, 2002, 2004; Smith, 2010; Robinson, 2016). Gender and sexuality are ingrained in societal structures linked to social institutions, such as marriage, family, life, waged and domestic labor, economic support, and dependency (Butler, 2002, 2004; Smith, 2010). Recognizing heteronormativity can serve as a tool for analyzing systems of oppression, and enhancing our understanding of how gendered structures and hierarchies are constructed in society (Butler, 2002, 2004; Smith, 2010). This tool allows exploration into how subjectivities are performed and expressed, and how the societal system is structured, organized, and maintained (Herz and Johansson, 2015).

While academia may sometimes be portrayed as gender-neutral, the organizational logic originates in the abstract, intellectual domain of being "male" (Acker, 1990). Available discourses, reality, worldviews, and perspectives are predominantly

viewed from this perspective, making gender difficult to observe when masculine discourses prevail (Acker, 1990; Williams, 2000). Over time, men have shaped their behaviors and perspectives to represent all individuals, leading to the conceptualisation of organizational processes and structures as gender-neutral (Acker, 1990; Williams, 2000). Although women and men academics may be treated differently by their academic institutions, it can be argued that specific gendered behaviors and attitudes are incorporated into gender-neutral structures, effectively separating the organizational structures and hierarchies from the individuals within them (Smith, 2010; Herz and Johansson, 2015; Robinson, 2016). Declaring an organization as gendered implies that exploitation and control, action and emotion, advantage, and disadvantage, and meaning and identity can be constructed through, and in relation to, a distinction between what it means to be male and female, or masculine and feminine (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Acker, 1990). Gender is not an additive element, rather, it forms an integral component of these processes. Therefore, reviewing how higher education operates (as well as its members experiences) cannot be fully understood without analyzing gender.

3.5 1945–1970: the legacy of colonialism and gender inequality in Australian higher education

By the end of WWI and WWII, the impact of colonial subjugation was deeply entrenched worldwide. Economic and cultural expansion, accompanied by the exercise of power and control over societies and institutions, became evident (Staeuble, 2006; Cupples and Grosfoguel, 2018). This domination extended to educational institutions, with significant disparities in power and the subjugation of various groups, including white women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and other minorities (Cupples and Grosfoguel, 2018). The academic landscape also saw the privileging of specific knowledge systems and ways of being, furthering the process of colonization (Fox et al., 2013). This academic colonization restricted human agency and choice and favored traditional Eurocentric values, perpetuating power imbalances against minority groups (Moreton-Robinson, 2011). White men continued to enjoy privilege within Australian society, reflected in academia through the recognition of certain perspectives, who was considered an expert, and who had access to opportunities for success (Bodkins-Andrews and Carlson, 2016).

As the privileging of white men persisted, the Australian Government supported ex-servicemen by covering their university fees. This, coupled with increased demand for teachers, and the recognized importance of higher education in national economic growth, led to a surge in male enrolments in academia (White, 2007). The Commonwealth government sought to centralize control over higher education financing, resulting in the formation of the Universities Commission in 1942, which regulated university enrolments, and implemented the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (CRTS) (Marginson and Considine, 2000). In 1946, the Australian National University (ANU) was established as the nation's sole research-only institution, focusing on research and postgraduate training (Marginson and Considine, 2000). These changes, along with the founding of the University of New South Wales in 1949, led to a significant increase in student enrolments, with participation doubling since 1946, reaching approximately 32,000 students (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1947).

However, the increased demand for university-educated individuals did not translate to increased opportunities for women. With the conclusion of both wars, men returned to their original positions in higher education, displacing many women academics. Around 60% of academic workers terminated during this period were women, experiencing a termination rate 75% higher than men (Jones and Castle, 1983; Reekie, 1991). This drastic reduction in women's representation in higher education, down to 21% by the mid-1950s, coincided with a loss of prominence and respect (Jones and Castle, 1983; Reekie, 1991). Colleagues became apathetic and hostile toward women academics (e.g., men accustomed to a male-dominated academic culture and resisted sharing power and influence), leading to a sharp decline in their representation (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1956). These attitudes were rooted in white male perspectives and normative values, which discriminated against women who identified with positions considered incongruent with their gender (Jones and Castle, 1983; Reekie, 1991). Consequently, women academics faced limited choices and often felt compelled to embrace traditional domestic roles, aligning with the emergence of the baby boom generation in the 1940s and 1950s (Jones and Castle, 1983; Reekie, 1991).

3.6 Transforming higher education: government intervention and challenges

As university enrolment rates surged, resource allocation to institutions became a point of contention. The growth of other state-funded post-secondary institutions, such as teacher training colleges and technical institutes, added to the complexity (Marginson and Considine, 2000). Additionally, the negative attitudes toward working women persisted, necessitating government intervention (Marginson, 2002). To encourage higher education attendance, the Commonwealth introduced incentive covering fees and living expenses (once means-tested) (Marginson, 2002). In 1950, the Mills Committee Inquiry (MCI) was conducted to explore the financial complexities of universities operating under state jurisdiction (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002). The findings led to the introduction of the State Grants (Universities) Act of 1951 (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002). This short-term scheme aimed to contribute one-quarter of the costs of "State" universities, easing the funding burden on the states, and allowing some Commonwealth assistance and control (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002). The resolutions primarily focused on financial matters, with gender-related issues largely overlooked.

The University of New England was established in 1954, and questions arose about the State Grants (Universities) Act's implementation (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002). To assess this, Robert Menzies established the Committee on Australian Universities. Unfortunately, the committee's composition did not include any women, or individuals from minority backgrounds, reflecting the privileging of white men in academia at the time (Marginson and Considine, 2000;

Marginson, 2002). In 1957, the Murray Committee Inquiry, led by Sir Keith Murray from the University Grants Committee, found that the states were not equipped to be solely responsible for universities (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002). The inquiry revealed several shortcomings, including overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, a high dropout rate, weak honors and postgraduate programs, staff shortages, and limited research activities (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002). Additionally, the minimal representation and problematic attitudes toward women in academia was not addressed. As a result of the findings, it was recommended that the Commonwealth take on more control and responsibility for state universities, providing additional funding, and forming a University Grants Committee (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002). This led to increased funding from the Commonwealth, and the creation of the Australian Universities Commission (AUC), to address these challenges and facilitate solutions (Australian Government, 1959).

3.7 Recommendations for a reconstructed education system

The late 1950s witnessed significant developments in Australian higher education. Monash University was founded, and the States Grants (Universities) Act underwent revision (Karmel, 1991; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002; Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003). These changes were prompted by the growing need for increased government funding for both capital and recurring expenses in higher education from 1958 to 1960 (Karmel, 1991; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002; Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003). In addition, the purpose of the AUC underwent a transformation, as outlined in the AUC Act (1959), focusing on advising the Commonwealth government on university-related matters (Karmel, 1991; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002; Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003). During this period, the ten universities collectively enrolled approximately 53,000 students, marking a 13% increase in university enrolments from 1958 (Karmel, 1991; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002; Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003). Among these students, women represented 22.6% of the total enrolments (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1958). Faculty numbers in Australian higher education stood at 3,702, with female representation figures not available (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1958).

A comprehensive review of the higher education sector took place from 1961 to 1964. This review led to further revisions of the tier system, and recommended the adoption of a binary system in Australian higher education to address financial challenges (Meek, 1991). The binary system categorized higher education into universities (offering bachelor's and Higher Degrees and conducting research) and Colleges of Advanced Education (CAE, encompassing institutes of technology, diplomas, and vocational training) (Meek, 1991). The implementation of this system varied by state, resulting in differences across the country (e.g., Victoria had 19 CAEs, while Western Australia had only one) (Meek, 1991). During this period of revision, the representation of women academics increased from 23.2 to 25.9% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1970). This increase can be attributed to the rising enrolments, the evolving nature of the times, and changes in the university's structure.

In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a growing recognition of the problematic attitudes toward women academics in higher education (Karmel, 1991; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002; Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003). This period marked a shift toward promoting workplace and educational equality, leading to a transformation in the way roles were constructed and allocated for women in higher education administration and faculty. Both men and women in academia played pivotal roles in advocating for the equal treatment of minority groups, the elimination of sexual discrimination, and the protection of the rights of employees and students in educational institutions (Karmel, 1991; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002; Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003). These efforts were driven by the desire to bring about change in the higher education system, focusing on goals such as gender equality, and the elimination of prejudices and discriminatory practices (Karmel, 1991; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002; Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003). These movements aimed to pressure institutions to prioritize academic equality, shifting the focus away from gender, and toward function (Karmel, 1991; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002; Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003). The idea was that men and women, in similar roles, could achieve and progress in academia without significant differences in their opportunities or experiences (Karmel, 1991; Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002; Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003). Although the impacts of these movements were slow to take effect, they were instrumental in reshaping the culture of higher education.

In response to the growing population's demand for higher education, the increasing desire for further education, and the need to build professional skills, several new universities were established in the 1960s and 1970s (Marginson, 2002). These universities aimed to diversify their student and faculty populations, particularly by admitting and employing more women in academia. Notable institutions founded during this period include Macquarie University and La Trobe University in 1964, the University of Newcastle in 1965, Flinders University in 1966, James Cook University in 1970, Griffith University in 1971, Deakin University in 1974, and the University of Wollongong and Murdoch University in 1975 (Marginson, 2002). The higher education sector experienced significant growth, with 19 universities accommodating 148,000 students by the early 1970s (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1970). The representation of women faculty improved during the 1970s due to changing societal attitudes about women's roles, and the growing need for academics in the newly established universities (Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003). The percentage of women academics in higher education increased from 29.9% at the beginning of the decade, to 40.3% by the end (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1979).

During this period, feminist scholarship gained prominence within academia, influencing changes in public policy, and contributing to the rise in women's representation in academia (Gaskell and Taylor, 2003). Debates and discussions around women's roles, responsibilities, and representation in academia continued to evolve (Yates, 2008). The second-wave feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s not only raised questions about women's representation and rights, but also

prompted a re-examination of the education system, and the construction and dissemination of knowledge (Gaskell and Taylor, 2003; Yates, 2008). These discussions questioned the ways in which education shaped gender roles, subject positions, and vocational choices. They also challenged the assumptions underlying education, and its treatment of different students, leading to a broader conversation about the nature and purpose of education (Gaskell and Taylor, 2003; Yates, 2008).

3.8 Restructuring tertiary education: the early 1970s

In the early 1970s, the structure of tertiary education in Australia underwent significant changes (Meek, 1991). Tertiary education was divided into three main categories: traditional universities, technical colleges of further education, and institutes of technology, which served as a hybrid between universities and technical colleges (Meek, 1991). During this period, university tuition fees were typically covered either through merit scholarships provided by the Commonwealth, or through individual fee payments (Marginson, 2002). Recognizing the growing demand for tertiary education, and the need to make it more accessible to a broader range of students, including those from the middle and working class and minority backgrounds, the Whitlam Labor Government took decisive action (Marginson, 2002). In 1973, they abolished university fees, a landmark move that had a profound impact on increasing university participation and enrolment rates (Marginson, 2002).

In 1974, the Commonwealth took on full responsibility for funding higher education, leading to the establishment of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002). CTEC played an advisory role and was tasked with distributing government funding among universities and CAEs. Despite the change in funding, there was still a high demand for enrolment in higher education institutions. To manage this demand, CAEs and state-controlled Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges played a crucial role (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002). By 1975, while the government continued to cover tuition fees in full, signs of an impending economic recession and federal political crisis emerged (Marginson, 2002). Consequently, funding cuts were temporarily suspended. Enrolment numbers reached 175,000 and were on the rise. In response to the crisis, some smaller CAEs were merged, and the government exerted control over entry into medical degree programs to address the situation (Meek, 1991).

3.9 1980s: an Australian higher education revolution

In the early 1980s, women comprised 43.5% of the Australian higher education system (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1981). However, the higher education sector was under significant stress. Funding was perceived as static, even as CAEs expanded their offerings to include master's degrees and doctorates (Marginson and Considine, 2000). Some larger CAEs even outperformed major universities in research, prompting the transformation of certain CAEs into universities (Marginson, 2002). This shift set a precedent for others to follow suit. The increased emphasis on research placed pressure on all academics, but women, in particular, felt the strain as they balanced multiple professional and personal responsibilities (Jones and Castle, 1983). Additionally, both major political parties agreed that the concept of "free" tertiary education in Australia was unsustainable given the rising enrolment and participation rates (Marginson and Considine, 2000). These pressures led the Australian Government to recognize the need for change in the higher education sector.

During the early 1980s, the Australian Labor Government led by Prime Minister Bob Hawke and Treasurer Paul Keating initiated a gradual reintroduction of university study fees (Karmel, 1991). This reintroduction was achieved through an innovative system known as the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS). HECS, a method accepted by all political parties, is still in use today. It allows students to defer fee payments until they enter professional employment, or their income surpasses a certain threshold level. Once this threshold is reached, fees are automatically deducted from their income tax. This approached aimed to alleviate the financial burden on the Australian Government previously associated with "free" fees (Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003).

Simultaneously, the Commonwealth government engaged in discussions about the future of higher education in Australia. In the late 1980s, the tertiary education system was still organized as a binary system, consisting of universities and CAEs (Meek, 1991). However, this system had its flaws, and the roles of these institutions, along with the CSIRO, has become increasingly blurred. For example, institutes of technology had shifted from their traditional role of undergraduate teaching and industry consulting, to conducting pure and applied research (Marginson, 2002). These institutes could also now grant degrees up to the PhD level. Recognizing the need for change, discussions in 1987 explored once again restructuring the higher education system in Australia (Dawkins, 1987).

3.10 Higher education transformation: the Dawkins reforms

In the late 1980s, John Dawkins, the Federal Minister for Education, recognized the need for significant changes in Australia's higher education funding and structure. He believed that maintaining the existing funding arrangements would not serve the best interests of the higher education system or the nation in the long term (Dawkins, 1987). To address these concerns, the government published a discussion paper known as the Green Paper. Subsequently, in 1988, a White Paper was released, leading to a complete restructuring of the higher education sector (Dawkins, 1987). The key changes included clarifying the roles of institutes of technology and transitioning from a binary system to a unified national education system (Dawkins, 1987). Under Dawkins' proposal, the unified system replaced the binary system and required several tertiary institutions to merge. Institutes of technology, in some cases, became universities, resulting in the disappearance of some institutes and the establishment of new universities (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002).

The revised two-tier system categorized tertiary education into university education and technical and further education, both offering various degrees up to the bachelor's level (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002). This restructuring aimed to meet the economic, social, and cultural needs of Australia's higher education system through the creation of a more modern and advanced system.

During this period of higher education reform, Australia's first private university, Bond University, was founded on the Gold Coast in 1987 (Marginson, 2002). It was granted university status by the Queensland Government and offered a range of degrees across multiple disciplines. By the end of the decade, influenced by the higher education sector's restructuring and the implementation of the unified national two-tier system, the representation of women academics increased to 47.4% of the higher education system, compared to the 1981 figure (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1989). This increase was driven by both natural growth in the representation of women academics, and the growing demand for academics due to rising student enrolments and faculty and institution mergers resulting from the restructuring (Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003).

4 Part three: shifting paradigms, gender dynamics, and challenges in Australian higher education in the late 20th and early 21st centuries

4.1 1990s–2000s: changing dynamics in academic work

The 1990s marked a significant shift in the landscape of academic work, and research, in Australia. While women's representation in academia marginally increased at the decade's outset, comprising 48.1% of academia, this period saw major changes and revisions in how academic work, research, and productivity were defined (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1991). One of the most significant shifts during this decade was the transformation of the higher education system into a more market-focused, and competitive, environment (Radice, 2013). What was once considered "cushy, comfortable, and leisurely" academic work became increasingly demanding, with contractual employment becoming more common (Henkel, 2010). This change can be traced back to developments in the 1970s, which gradually pressured academic staff to "do more" with limited resources and staff, pushing them to adapt to new ways of working (Gill, 2010). Another key change was the evolving focus of Australian universities toward research with industry applications and real-world relevance, as opposed to the traditional emphasis on fundamental, basic, and pure research (Welch, 2020). Much of this real-world research was supported by the CSIRO, which had a mandate for applied research (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, 2024). Up until this point, Australia had excelled in pure research, leading to the awarding of 12 Nobel Prizes (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, 2024).

4.2 Transforming Australia's research landscape

During the Hawke and Keating Federal Government's tenure, efforts were made to reshape Australia's national research profile. The government initiated several measures to address the need for more applied research, aiming to foster collaboration between academia and industry, and promote research with practical applications (Welch, 2020). One of the key strategies was the introduction of university scholarships and research grants to support postgraduate research and encourage partnerships with industry (Marginson and Considine, 2000). Additionally, a novel national system called Cooperative Research Centers (CRC) was established. CRCs were envisioned as hubs for cooperation between universities, industries, and the CSIRO (Marginson, 2002). They were intended to focus on specific research themes with a clear applied research agenda (Marginson and Considine, 2000). Typically, a CRC comprised university and industry partners, with funding provided by the Federal Government for several years (Marginson, 2002). These centers had access to a poll of funds contributed by the government, universities, and industry partners. The funds were allocated to projects that were industry-driven, and had strong potential for commercialisation (Marginson and Considine, 2000). The ultimate goal was for CRCs to become self-sustaining and financially independent collaborations, although this goal has not been fully realized to date (Birrell and Edwards, 2009). One unintended consequence of the CRC model was the blurring of roles among the partners, particularly in terms of the CSIRO's role in university research. Rather than clarifying specific roles for each partner, the CRCs led to a more complex and intertwined relationship between the CSIRO and Australian universities in the research landscape (Marginson and Considine, 2000).

4.3 Higher education in the new millennium: shifting paradigms

As the world entered the new millennium, the representation of women academics in Australia reached significant milestones, with their presence comprising 48.6% of the academic landscape (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999). Over the initial years of the 21st century, this figure continued to rise, ultimately reaching 51.3% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). However, this period also witnessed a profound transformation in the nature and priorities of Australian higher education. What was once a system grounded in collegiality, the pursuit of knowledge, and the unfettered exchange of ideas, gradually evolved into a research-driven, quasi-commercial enterprise (Koshy, 2018). Universities, traditionally seen as insular institutions dedicated to learning, began to adapt to a more competitive landscape driven by values of efficiency, accountability, and quality (Koshy, 2018). While many Australian universities continued to operate with a predominantly public system, they increasingly adopted the mindset of participants in a competitive learning, teaching, and research market (Archer, 2008). This transition marked a significant departure from the collaborative and collegial academic

culture of the past. The marketisation of higher education introduced individualistic and competitive practices, which, in turn, had a profound impact on the idealized academic space (Archer, 2008). In essence, universities evolved from institutions focused on collective welfare and knowledge dissemination, to market-driven entities with a neoliberal orientation (Archer, 2008; Koshy, 2018). This transformation saw universities view themselves as providers of services and products in an increasingly competitive educational landscape (Archer, 2008; Koshy, 2018).

The neoliberal ideology promotes increased productivity through the marketisation of institutions and encompasses a set of economic policies that have gradually become ingrained in "Western" culture (Archer, 2008). As an episteme, neoliberalism represents a way of knowing that can be observed within the academic environment (Archer, 2008). Neoliberalism manifests as knowledge structures characterized by rationalist scientism, empiricism, and productivity, quantified in a precise manner that prioritizes efficiency and standardization. Neoliberalism is also linked to a positivist epistemology, valuing externally defined rules and evaluative criteria, utility, value for money, and scientific excellence (Connell, 2013). Under the neoliberal episteme, institutions are directed to produce employable workers or subjects, and provide services managed through neoliberal economic strategies (Abendroth and Porfilio, 2015).

The landscape of work and the workplace in higher education underwent significant changes in the new millennium due to those in positions of power, and the influence of processes related to globalization and neoliberalism (Connell, 2013). The dominant socio-economic ideology within Australian tertiary education systems has transformed traditional academic settings, shifting from a liberal environment characterized by a negotiated, flat, collegial governance structure with professional autonomy, to a more competitive, dominated, and hierarchical neoliberal structure where the rights of academics are contingent on market dynamics (Abendroth and Porfilio, 2015; Keast, 2020). This shift has been strongly shaped by the manifestation of the neoliberal episteme. In Australia, the shift in focus from teaching to research-oriented endeavors occurred without adequate capital and resources to support the growing demands of research activities (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002). In 2006, the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research conducted a comprehensive assessment of these issues. Their findings indicated that newer universities, despite their aspirations, struggled to amass the critical mass required in their designated research fields (Karmel, 1991). Moreover, traditional universities experienced a decline in the proportion of research-oriented academics compared to some of the newly established institutions (Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003). Of particular concern was the fact that some newer institutions scored zero, on a 0–100 scale, in their chosen research domains, signaling an inability to meet the required threshold for research activity (Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003). To address these challenges and promote research excellence, available funding was distributed across all Australian universities. This inclusive approach aimed to bolster research capabilities, and alleviate the strains faced by institutions with diminished research capacity (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002).

4.4 Transforming roles and pathways: navigating the academic pipeline

The 2000s marked a period where the inherent value of certain roles within academia became increasingly evident. The traditional academic pathway, which had long been constructed based on prevailing notions and representations of the university experience, began to face critical examination (Gasser and Shaffer, 2014). In higher education, the conventional assumption had been that individuals who completed their first degree might proceed to postgraduate studies, eventually embarking on academic careers, and ultimately ascending to senior management and professorial roles (Bryson, 2014). However, the reality for women academics differed substantially. They frequently entered the academic pipeline at its lowest rungs, and even as their representation grew, they found themselves disproportionately relegated to teaching-only, casual positions (Jones and Castle, 1983). These roles provided limited prospects for career advancement and were often fraught with feelings of uncertainty and job insecurity, a situation that persists in academia to this day (Bryson, 2014). Within the academic hierarchy, roles that combined both teaching and research were traditionally viewed as having higher status and greater potential for success (Jones and Castle, 1983). Moreover, many universities maintained a preference for appointing academics to senior positions only if they had an established research profile. Consequently, the allocation of women academics to teaching-only and casual positions served to curtail their progression, representation, and success in academia (Acker and Dillabough, 2007). In contrast, male academics often encountered smoother transitions through the academic pipeline, with research roles, which remain the primary pathway to senior leadership and management positions, typically favoring them (Acker and Dillabough, 2007). This gendered division of roles and responsibilities has proven resilient, despite the evolving landscape of higher education.

4.5 Addressing gender inequalities: easing restrictions and expanding access

In 2008, significant steps were taken to address the gender-based inequalities that had persisted in higher education. Specific university quota enrolments, which had been a barrier to access for individuals from minority groups—including those defined by gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity—were eased and eventually lifted (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002). These measures aimed to make tertiary education more accessible, marking a crucial milestone in the ongoing efforts to promote diversity and inclusion (Marginson and Considine, 2000; Marginson, 2002). The impact of these changes was tangible. By the close of the first decade of the new millennium, women's representation in academia had risen to 52.1% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). This positive trend continued, with women accounting for 52.9% of academic positions by 2011, reflecting a broader shift in the composition of university faculties and staff (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). However, it is important to note that federal funding during this period was largely tied to student numbers at each

institution (Marginson, 2002). While this incentivised universities to expand enrolment and reach a wider student population, it also introduced challenges. Some institutions began accepting students with weaker academic skills, potentially leading to lower graduation rates, compromised academic standards, and increased workloads for academic staff (Welch, 2020). In response to these concerns, the Australian government implemented a freeze on the amount of money allocated for specific research grants, a measure in effect for two years (Marginson and Considine, 2000). This freeze served as a temporary measure to encourage universities to focus on maintaining both population growth and academic performance, ensuring that the pursuit of higher education remained both accessible, and of high quality (Marginson and Considine, 2000).

4.6 So, what does it all mean? The subtle evolution of government control in higher education

The relationship between government control and higher education has evolved over generations, often taking on subtle and pervasive forms (Moane, 1999). This evolution can be understood through the lenses of colonization and imperialism, which are mediated by social and psychological mechanisms. In contemporary times, higher education institutions continue to play roles in perpetuating colonial, imperialistic, and globalizing practices (Smith, 1999). This subtle exercise of power is grounded in a form of psychological imperialism that operates through various means, including laws, rituals, instructions, and other institutional forces within academia (Mentan, 2015). It shapes the prevailing definitions of reality and influences the ways in which academia operates. Additionally, the neoliberal paradigm governs academic life, defining how scholars conduct their work and exist within this framework (Adam, 2012). Notably, the governance of women academics can be particularly challenging within this context. They often face higher expectations in terms of productivity while juggling various professional and personal responsibilities (Bryson, 2014). These pressures can be compounded by differences in social identifiers and intersectional experiences (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

Within the broader context of capitalist culture, academia has transformed into a government-regulated education market. Here, students are viewed as consumers, academic faculty as producers, and administrators as marketers and managers of the academic output (Connell, 2013). This shift is characterized by:

- A move away from simply educating students within professions, to a focus on producing marketable knowledge and research skills.
- The repositioning of students as consumers in the academic setting, with academic staff seen as service providers.
- Neoliberalism's emphasis on dominance, authority, and control, often at the expense of personal agency (Adam, 2012).

Neoliberalism has brought about shifts in perspectives on teaching, research, and service. This restructuring of universities has altered the expectations placed on academics, creating pressures to enhance productivity within the working environment (Connell, 2013). Academics are now expected not only to generate capital and revenue for their institutions but also to meet academic performance targets, primarily based on research outputs, to align with and sustain the neoliberal paradigm (Keast, 2020). These expectations are often perceived by academics as impossible to fulfill (Adam, 2012). Additionally, there is an implicit expectation that the research pursuits of academics will align with the interests of the schools, faculties, and institutions, prioritizing meeting targets that benefit the institution over pursuing research that academics find personally enjoyable or fulfilling (Abendroth and Porfilio, 2015). In the context of these pressures, higher education has become a setting where decision-making capacity and personal autonomy can be restricted (Keast, 2020). The practices associated with neoliberalism, rooted in its episteme, serve to facilitate specific ways of existence. They also shed light on how certain discourses and ideologies are enacted and sustained (Connell, 2013). Within the context of neoliberal academia, the constructed ways of existence can be seen as practices that enable the normative conditions of academia to prevail (Keast, 2020). While academic institutions may differ in terms of their nature and context, whether public or private, government-regulated, community-oriented, or research-intensive, they share these overarching neoliberal characteristics (Connell, 2013). These characteristics tend to favor certain Eurocentric norms and practices, often perpetuating inequalities (Abendroth and Porfilio, 2015). The historical structure of academia has frequently facilitated exclusion, elitism, and hierarchical inequalities (Abendroth and Porfilio, 2015). It acts as a setting that reflects and reinforces wider social inequalities, such as those related to gender, social class, race, and ethnicity (Abendroth and Porfilio, 2015). In light of these persistent inequalities and the influence of colonization, imperialism, and neoliberalism, the relationship of domination and control in academia has endured through the generations (Mentan, 2015). As a result, contemporary higher education appears to prioritize assimilation and adjustment to capitalist modernisation and culture, rather than challenging Eurocentric norms and practices (Mentan, 2015).

5 Conclusion

In contemporary Western academia, scholars operate within a vastly transformed educational landscape compared to earlier eras. The forces of coloniality, Eurocentrism, and Neoliberalism have introduced various forms of external regulation, creating a new reality for institutions and, at times, imposing significant challenges on academics. These challenges can profoundly influence the identities, beliefs, and actions of scholars. Reflection on one's academic identities often necessitates self-examination and self-regulation, driven by external techniques of governance and governmentality. These mechanisms aim to mold the social persona of academics, compelling them to exhibit behavior desirable within the academic context. In the context of the neoliberal, colonial, Eurocentric academic system, this desirable behavior aligns with the demands of the labor market and capitalist ideals. Critiquing these practices goes beyond the individual level;

it requires an examination of how these institutions shape and influence the conceptualisation of academic identities and ways of being. These institutions may appear autonomous and impartial, subtly perpetuating forms of discipline and conduct that have long operated in the background. Individuals must confront their fears and challenge the insidious nature of the colonial, Eurocentric, neoliberal episteme, which has been legitimized by institutional norms. To understand the impact of these complex and abstract ideologies on academics, it is crucial to engage in discourse surrounding the academic way of being. This discourse helps make sense of how these challenging concepts operate and manifest through the lived experiences of scholars. It is only through this critical examination that we can begin to address the pervasive influences that shape the academic landscape in Western societies.

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