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When is Research Localized? Eurocentrism in Research on Sexual(ized) Violence in Higher Education. Drawing on the Indonesian Context

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Abstract: Research on sexual(ized) violence in higher education has largely focused on cases from the United States and the United Kingdom. These are often presented as globally transferable best-practice models, while research from the Global South is framed as locally specific. This article examines how such geographic framing occurs through an analysis of metadata – titles, abstracts, and keywords – in three leading journals on violence research. The findings show that Global North cases are frequently presented without explicit country references, contributing to their universalization, while Global South cases are clearly marked and treated as context bound. Drawing on the Indonesian context, the article highlights how locally grounded activism and policy developments challenge dominant academic narratives. It argues that academic publishing practices contribute to epistemic violence by reinforcing global hierarchies in knowledge production.

Keywords: Eurocentrism, Sexual violence, University, Violence against women

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Introduction[1]

Research discussing sexual(ized) violence[2] at higher education institutions (HEIs) has gained significant momentum in the past decades.[3] One reason for this is the realization that student populations of HEIs worldwide "tend to be characterized by both the 'high risk' victim and perpetrators" (Towl 2016, 434) of sexual(ized) violence. Therefore, implementation mechanisms for policies that counteract and prevent acts of violence are fundamental to the creation of a safe learning environment. However, the research has primarily centered around the United States (US) (e.g., Cantalupo 2010; Cantor et al. 2024; Klein 2018; Wooten/Mitchell 2016) and the United Kingdom (UK) (e.g., Anitha/Lewis 2018; Bull/Shannon 2024; Jackson/Sundaram 2020; Page/Bull/Chapman 2019), with a slow but steady increase in literature on some countries of the European Union (EU) (e.g., Hervías Parejo 2023; Joanpere et al. 2022; Lipinsky et al. 2022; Pantelmann/Wälty 2022). Such research does not focus solely on analyzing cases of sexual(ized) violence but often also proposes new prevention and intervention strategies. While these are fruitful contributions to the local context, they are not solely defined as such. Instead, they are often portrayed as globally valid and open for exportation to the world in the form of best-practice models.

In this paper, I ask the question *When does research on sexual(ized) violence in higher education settings become localized?* I apply the content analysis method

1 I would like to thank Anna Bull, Claudia Derichs, and Daniel Bultmann for their constructive feedback on earlier versions of this article. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments and suggestions, which helped improve the final version.

2 In this paper, I am using the terms "sexual violence" and "sexualized violence" as combined into "sexual(ized) violence" to include both stand points. The debate for the use of the term "sexualized violence" seems to be rather prevalent in German academia ("sexualisierte Gewalt"). "Sexualized violence" places the power dynamic at the central focus and sees the sexual act as a form of exercising power rather than as fulfilling a sexual need. For further information on the differentiation between sexual and sexualized violence, see Carol Hagemann-White (2016, 14–16).

3 See, amongst others, Anitha/Lewis 2018; Anitha/Marine/Lewis 2020; Bovill/Podpadec 2023; Lipinsky et al. 2022; Pantelmann/Blackmore 2023; Pantelmann/Wälty 2022; Phipps 2021.

(Krippendorff 2019) to examine how scholarly articles are framed through metadata such as titles, abstracts, and keywords. These elements are central to how publications are indexed and catalogued in databases, catalogued in databases and are key to their visibility. At the same time, metadata is not merely technical – it is a rhetorical space where authors and editors implicitly signal whether a study is positioned as locally bounded or globally relevant. I investigate the hypothesis that sexual(ized) violence research is often framed and presented as localized when it originates from the Global South, whereas cases from the Global North – with the United States as a prominent example – tend to be framed as universal. This framing is not neutral but shaped both by editorial choices and the technical systems that organize and distribute academic knowledge – such as how databases index articles, how search engines rank them, and how disciplines are categorized.

While recent bibliometric studies have highlighted these dynamics in the social sciences broadly (e.g., Castro Torres/Alburez-Gutierrez 2022), the present article addresses a research gap by focusing on how such epistemic inequalities operate specifically within the field of sexual(ized) violence in higher education – a field where research visibility can directly influence institutional policy, student activism, and survivor support systems. By analyzing the way such research is made discoverable and presented, I seek to extend existing scholarship by applying a feminist and decolonial lens to a focused subfield that remains underexamined in current meta-research and to contribute to a growing body of scholarship interrogating global hierarchies in knowledge production. This research is grounded in my dissertation project on sexual(ized) violence in Indonesian higher education and shaped by my position as a researcher based in Germany. This transregional perspective enables a critical reflection on how academic hierarchies determine which contexts are granted global visibility – and which are not.

In what follows, I begin by outlining key debates on Eurocentrism in academic publishing before presenting the findings of a content analysis that examines the geographic framing of research on sexual(ized) violence. I then reflect on these patterns through the lens of epistemic violence, drawing on Claudia Brunner's conceptual framework. Building on this, I introduce the Indonesian context as a case that challenges dominant narratives and underscores the importance of localized knowledge production.

Eurocentrism in academia

The idea of this paper connects to the concepts of "Eurocentrism" and "provincializing Europe". The term Eurocentrism was first introduced by Samir Amin (2009 [1988]) to describe a worldview that positions Europe as the central reference point for interpreting history, culture, and civilization. This perspective tends to obscure the contributions of other societies while amplifying the significance of European historical narratives. Eurocentrism has often functioned as an instrument of cultural imperialism and colonial justification, reinforcing European dominance over non-European societies. While the term itself suggests a geographical focus on Europe, I argue that the United States is deeply implicated in this Eurocentric framework, particularly through its role in advancing Western imperialist agendas (Quijano 2000).

In line with this perspective, it is important to understand Eurocentrism not merely as a European phenomenon in a strict geographical sense but as a broader cultural and ideological construct that extends beyond Europe itself. The United States, as a dominant global power, has played a crucial role in sustaining and reproducing Eurocentric ideologies, thereby reinforcing structures of Western hegemony. As Immanuel Wallerstein (1997, 93) points out, discussions of Eurocentrism in the context of the last two centuries must take into account not only Europe but also North America, highlighting the interconnected nature of Western dominance in global history.

The persistence of Eurocentrism is particularly evident in the structures of academic knowledge production. Dipesh Chakrabarty[4] (2000), in "Provincializing Europe", critiques how European historical narratives have been universalized, calling for a shift toward more pluralistic and decentralized approaches to scholarship. Similarly, Aníbal Quijano (2000) argues that the coloniality of power continues to shape knowledge systems, necessitating the decolonization of academic disciplines that remain rooted in Eurocentric epistemologies. Sharmila Rege (2016; 2006) contributes to this critique by emphasizing the need to challenge dominant frameworks of knowledge production that marginalize local and subaltern perspectives, advocating for epistemic shifts that recognize historically excluded voices. These critiques reveal that Eurocentrism not only marginalizes non-European perspectives but also sustains global hierarchies of knowledge that restrict the visibility and legitimacy of alternative epistemologies (Santos 2014)[5].

4 In the light of accusations of sexual harassment (Anitha 2020; Fair 2017), I cannot neglect that it leaves me with unease to reference Dipesh Chakrabarty in the context of sexual(ized) violence in academia.

5 Similarly to Dipesh Chakrabarty, allegations of sexual harassment and assault have been made public against Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Correia 2023; Viane/Laranjeiro/Tom 2023).

This paper builds on these debates by examining how Eurocentrism operates within academic publishing. A central issue is the asymmetry in knowledge circulation, wherein scholars from the Global South are expected to engage extensively with research from the Global North, while the reverse is not required (Dietze 2008, 71). This critique has been widely discussed in the literature on global knowledge production and epistemic hierarchies (e.g., Bhambra 2014; Connell 2007), highlighting how dominant academic institutions continue to marginalize Southern epistemologies. Publishing houses, journal editors, and the authors they promote play a crucial role in reinforcing these hierarchies. Raewyn Connell (2007) has shown that theory production in the social sciences is concentrated in the Global North, while contributions from other regions are often relegated to the status of case studies or local knowledge. Gurminder Bhambra (2014) similarly argues that the assumed universality of dominant paradigms rests on a narrow and exclusionary intellectual foundation. Although Chakrabarty's critique was articulated more than two decades ago, the mechanisms of exclusion he describes persist in academic publishing today. In the following pages, I analyze how publishing practices continue to privilege research that aligns with dominant Eurocentric paradigms, while sidelining scholarship from and about the Global South. Using the conceptual framework of epistemic violence by Brunner (2020), I further examine how academia reproduces structural inequalities through its processes of knowledge production, ultimately reinforcing the limitations of what is recognized as legitimate scholarship.

The influence of country references in research publications

In order to understand how sexual(ized) violence research is geographically framed in academic publishing, this section examines how country references appear – or are omitted – in key scholarly journals. Drawing on a content analysis of article metadata from three widely cited journals, I investigate which contexts are made visible and which are treated as default or universal. Through this analysis, I trace patterns that point to broader representational inequalities and reflect on their implications for global knowledge hierarchies in the field of violence research.

Selection of journals and analytical focus

To understand how country references are used in publications on sexual(ized) violence, I conducted a content analysis (Krippendorff 2019) of three interdisci-

plinary journals: (1) "Violence Against Women" (VAW), (2) the "Journal of Interpersonal Violence" (JIV), and (3) "Violence and Victims". These journals were selected due to their *h*-index[6] scores and recognized importance within the field of violence research. Additionally, their interdisciplinary nature and engagement with issues of sexual(ized) violence and higher education on a global scale were key factors in the selection process.

The journal "Violence Against Women" (VAW) fits within this scope, as it is one of the most widely cited and influential journals that specifically address gender-based violence. Published by SAGE Publications, VAW describes itself as an "international journal [...] that focuses on gender-based violence against women in all forms and across cultural and national boundaries" (Sage Journals n.d.b). Similarly, the "Journal of Interpersonal Violence" (JIV), also published by SAGE Publications, is an interdisciplinary publication and one of the most widely cited journals in the field of violence research. It covers a broad range of topics, including empirical studies on campus sexual violence, critiques of policy, and global perspectives on gender-based violence. According to its description, JIV "publishes research on all aspects of interpersonal violence from researchers around the globe" (Sage Journals n.d.a). The journal "Violence and Victims", published by Springer Publishing Company, highlights its commitment to a global and cross-disciplinary focus, emphasizing its dedication to publishing a wide range of "international and interdisciplinary contributions" (Springer Publishing Connect n.d.). By focusing on these widely cited and globally influential journals, this study ensures that its findings reflect trends in dominant academic narratives and their role in either perpetuating or challenging Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies.

One could argue that this analysis should focus on journals dedicated to area studies or post- and decolonial research. However, such a focus would neglect the central point of this paper: to highlight the unequal and often Eurocentric portrayal of case studies in sexual(ized) violence research. While area-studies journals provide important contributions, they represent niche fields and do not reflect the mainstream discourse within violence research. The responsibility to address Eurocentrism should not fall solely on journals focused on area studies or decolonial scholarship. Instead, it is essential for mainstream academic journals – such as the ones analyzed here – to reflect on their role in perpetuating global knowledge hierarchies and unequal representations. The journals selec-

6 The *h*-index or Hirsch-type index, named after its inventor Jorge Hirsch, is a measuring tool to quantify the impact factor of an individual scholar. However, the usage of the *h*-index is now also used to show the impact of specific journals (Braun/Glänzel/Schubert 2006).

ted here exemplify a broader trend in academia, particularly in fields that claim to publish globally relevant research.

The fact that all of these journals are based in the United States should not justify the underrepresentation or lack of references to research conducted outside of the Global North. Their readership extends beyond US borders, and their claims to publish internationally demand that they engage with scholarship and perspectives from diverse regions. By examining these journals, I aim to highlight the broader need for structural change in academic publishing practices to ensure that knowledge production in the field of sexual(ized) violence research does not marginalize perspectives from the Global South.

Data collection and coding process

Publications for the analysis were retrieved from Scopus covering the years 2017 to 2021. Articles were selected if their title, abstract, author keywords, or "Indexed keywords"[7] contained at least one of the following terms: "university", "campus", "college", "education", or "students"[8]. This selection process resulted in a total of 798 articles: 125 in the Journal "Violence Against Women", 95 in "Violence and Victims", and 578 in the "Journal of Interpersonal Violence".

For the analysis, I examined each publication to determine whether references to specific countries appeared in one or more of the previously defined categories – title, abstract, or author keywords. The "Indexed keywords" were excluded from this part of the analysis, as they are not determined by the authors or journal editors but are partially generated by artificial intelligence (AI). Additionally, these keywords can vary depending on the platform used to access the article. However, I will revisit the "Indexed keywords" later when discussing articles that do not reference any specific country.

I used an R-code that included all countries, regions, and major cities in the world for a preliminary analysis of the data. I then manually checked all 798 articles to identify any missed country references. The dataset was divided into two categories: articles with explicit country references and those without. For articles with explicit country references, I also examined how often and where in the metadata (title, abstract, keywords) the country was mentioned.

7 According to Scopus, "*Indexed keywords* are chosen by Scopus and are standardized to vocabularies derived from thesauri that Elsevier owns or licenses. Unlike Author *keywords, Indexed keywords* take into account synonyms, various spellings, and plurals" (Scopus 2024).

8 Due to the inclusion of the last two terms, the data is not limited to higher education institutions alone but includes articles that focus on violence in other education settings. However, the analysis showed that other articles that focus on higher education institutions would otherwise have been left out.

Findings: Geographic framing and overrepresentation

Of the 798 articles, only 397 included an explicit country reference, with 154 of these referencing the United States. This means that US-based research is more represented than research from Asia (84 articles) and Latin America (20 articles) combined. This already illustrates the overrepresentation of US-based research in the field.

Unlike articles referencing other countries, those referencing the United States often omit the country name. Instead, they more frequently indicate their US context through references to specific cities or states – such as New York, New Hampshire, or South Carolina – or through mentioning ethnicities such as African American, Asian American, or Hispanic. Among the 154 US-referencing articles, 119 mention the US only in one metadata category, most often the abstract. In contrast, of the 12 articles referencing India, nine mention the country in more than one category.

An examination of the "Indexed keywords" revealed that of the 401 articles without a country reference, 54 indirectly indicated a focus on the US. A closer reading of the abstracts further supported the assumption that many articles without explicit country references were still based on research conducted in the US. Abstracts frequently included terms such as "Southeastern university", "Northwestern", or similar geographic indicators commonly associated with US institutions. To test this hypothesis, I randomly selected 20 articles from those without any country reference. Of these 20 articles, 19 were based solely on research conducted in the US; the only other one focused on students in Australia.

Discussion: Universalizing the Global North and epistemic consequences

These findings highlight a systemic issue: the assumption of US-based research as a universal default. The omission of country references in Global North research reinforces the idea that such studies apply globally, while Global South research is marked as locally bounded. This referencing practice contributes to a distorted global perspective on sexual(ized) violence in higher education.

To illustrate the consequences of these patterns, consider the following: The article by Christina Nieder, Christoph Muk and Joscha Kärtner (2019), which focuses on coping strategies of women in Delhi when facing acts of violence, includes a country reference in the title, abstract, and keywords. In contrast, the article by Laurie Cooper Stoll, Terry Glenn Lilley and Kelly Pinter (2017), which analyzes rape-myth acceptance in the US, includes no country reference at all.

Only upon closer reading – via the term "midwestern" – does its US context become clear. What this labeling does, is create the impression that the Indian case study offers locally bounded insight, while the US example is generalized and implicitly positioned as globally valid.

All this boils down to Eurocentrism, if not US-centrism in particular. Of course, Eurocentrism in academia is not a new phenomenon, but this is precisely the point. Even though the critique of Eurocentrism has been recognized by mainstream Western academia, leading journals that produce publications of research on violence in education settings still portray US-based research in a globalized way while localizing research from the Global South. This pattern aligns with what Donna Haraway (1988) described as the "god trick" – the idea that Western academic knowledge is produced by an objective, disembodied observer. In this context, the "god trick" is reproduced by how journals frame Global North research as contextless, neutral, and universally applicable, thereby reinforcing epistemic hierarchies.

This asymmetrical framing is not only a matter of scholarly misrepresentation but constitutes a deeper form of structural harm – what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1994) and Brunner (2020) call epistemic violence. This concept allows for a more precise understanding of how dominant academic practices marginalize entire knowledge systems – not merely through exclusion but through systemic processes of devaluation, invisibilization, and hierarchization. In this sense, epistemic violence becomes a powerful lens through which we can understand how the structural privileging of Global North perspectives operates in and through academic publishing itself.

This dynamic has tangible implications beyond academic publishing, as the knowledge produced within these journals can shape both policy and legal frameworks. The overrepresentation of US-based research creates a feedback loop in which US policies, practices, and legal approaches to sexual(ized) violence are disproportionately exported and adopted as global best practices. This phenomenon has been critically discussed by scholars such as Leigh Goodmark (2015) and Saltanat Childress (2018), who highlight how US-centered models may not align with the cultural, legal, or social contexts of other countries. Consequently, these knowledge structures reinforce a form of epistemic violence, wherein solutions developed within the Global North are presented as universally applicable, further marginalizing local knowledge systems.

The relationship between academic research, law, and public policy is deeply intertwined. For instance, US research has shaped Title IX regulations[9], which in

9 Title IX refers to a US federal civil rights law that was passed as part of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibit sex-based discrimination in any educational program or activity receiving federal funding. Title IX has been pivotal in shaping policies addressing sexual

turn have influenced global policy trends. However, applying such models without attention to local context can lead to ineffective or even harmful outcomes. The way knowledge is produced and framed in academic journals, therefore, carries significant consequences for how sexual(ized) violence is understood and addressed globally.

Analytical lens: Brunner's framework of epistemic violence

Building on the discussion above, I now turn to the work of Brunner (2020) to develop a more differentiated understanding of epistemic violence as it applies to knowledge production in the field of sexual(ized) violence research. Brunner's framework provides the conceptual depth necessary to grasp the layered operations of exclusion and power that permeate academic publishing, moving from individual experience to institutionalized structures.

The concept of epistemic violence was first introduced by Spivak (1994) in her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?". In this work, Spivak critiques how colonial discourse systematically silences subaltern voices, particularly through the Western production of knowledge about the Global South. She describes epistemic violence as the process through which dominant systems of knowledge erase, distort, or render invisible the voices and experiences of the colonized. In doing so, she highlights how power operates within academia, shaping whose knowledge is heard, recognized, and validated. Spivak's intervention remains crucial in understanding how knowledge production continues to function as a site of asymmetrical power relations, a theme that has since been expanded by scholars working on decoloniality and knowledge hierarchies.

It is in this lineage of critical thought that Brunner (2020) further develops a transdisciplinary framework of epistemic violence in "Epistemische Gewalt. Wissen und Herrschaft in der kolonialen Moderne" ("Epistemic Violence. Knowledge and Domination in the Colonial Modernity")[10]. While Spivak initially focused on the colonial silencing of subaltern voices, Brunner extends this critique by demonstrating how epistemic violence functions at different structural levels – micro, meso, and macro – which she connects to the three layers of coloniality: the coloniality of being, power, and knowledge. Brunner's framework is particularly useful in revealing how violence is embedded not just in explicit exclusions but in the very processes of knowledge production themselves. As she argues, "violence is inherent in knowledge itself" (Brunner 2020, 31), an assertion that is

harassment, assault, and gender-based violence within educational institutions.

10 This and all further quotes from the book by Brunner (2020) have been translated from German by me.

particularly relevant when examining the global academic publishing industry. While the research on sexual(ized) violence in higher education institutions depicts a lot of the violence that is taking place within the academic institutions, I try to direct our attention toward the violence that is taking place within the very same field – that which is inherit in the knowledge making process.

All three layers of Brunner's conceptual framework are important for an understanding of the deep structural problem that I have pointed out in the publishing process of sexual(ized) violence research. The micro level, which Brunner connects to the coloniality of being, is linked to the experience of violence, which can be seen more concrete on the individual level.

> "That which is not said, that which is said but not heard, that which is heard but not understood, that which is understood but not recognized are recurring articulations of epistemic violence that can by no means be justified on the micro-level alone but which become effective precisely there in the concrete experiences of people." (Brunner 2020, 278)

In consideration of the present topic, "that which is said but not heard" or "that which is understood but not recognized" (Brunner 2020, 278) can both be linked to what we see in the data. While research focusing on the Global South does exist, it is often not heard in the international sphere. One reason for this is, connecting to Chakrabarty's (2000) criticism, that research on or from the Global South is not deemed necessary to engage with. Interaction with it is only seen as a necessity if one's own research is situated in the same geographical region. This is partially due to the "transition narrative" (Chakrabarty 2008; 2000) that surrounds the Global South, which proposes that the Global South is portrayed with the idea of being in or in need of transition, of not being there yet, of needing to "'catch up' with the West" (Chakrabarty 2008, 86). This insurmountable task is placed as a reason for localizing knowledge production from the Global South. Similarly, it can be argued that the *research that is heard is not recognized* in the same manner as research located in the Global North, hence not recognized for its validity beyond of the respective regional analysis.

The coloniality of knowledge, which Brunner depicts as the meso-level, focuses on the ways in which knowledge (science) is used to legitimize and normalize violence, while the macro level – in which the coloniality of power is embedded – makes visible "how knowledge (science) contributes to the robustness of the order of violence" (Knorr 2020, 203). Regarding sexual(ized) violence research, we can make the claim that this research is used to inform policies or to establish best-practice models. As already discussed before, in reference to the work by Goodmark (2015), while these policies and best-practice models are well-intended and often useful within the context in which they have been crea-

ted, in other geographical contexts, they may lead to further violence or make it more difficult for those affected to come forward, as they are not contextually grounded. Research can thereby contribute to the permanence of the Western judicial answer to sexual(ized) violence, for example through the strong focus on US Title IX-specific due process.

Locally based research on sexual(ized) violence in higher education institutions is also necessary because the structure of universities and the student body life can differ significantly. Some universities are campus-based, while others are spread out throughout a city; sometimes, students live predominantly in dormitories on campuses, while in other cases, student living is organized outside of the university; some have an institutionalized politically active student body, while others undermine student activism. Furthermore, HEIs worldwide have developed in different historical settings with diverging policies and regulatory structures. Hence, HEIs do not exist in a vacuum but within societies and their wider socio-cultural values and norms. This shows us that universal best-practice models do not offer the necessary tools to confront this multilayered problem.

In summary, this dynamic results in a form of epistemic violence, as it silences or marginalizes knowledge systems from the Global South by framing their research as context-specific while positioning Global North scholarship as universally applicable. By portraying US-based research as the default, academic publishing not only limits the visibility of diverse perspectives but also reinforces global hierarchies in knowledge production. The absence of research on Indonesia in this corpus of journals is especially telling. It illustrates how vibrant, policy-relevant developments in contexts outside the Global North are systematically overlooked – not because such work does not exist, but because it is not framed as globally significant at the point of publication. This epistemic violence perpetuates unequal power dynamics, where the voices and lived experiences of individuals outside the Global North are overlooked or deemed less relevant, ultimately shaping policies and practices that may fail to address the needs of diverse communities.

Against this backdrop of epistemic violence in academic knowledge production, it is crucial to turn our attention to specific cases that challenge dominant narratives and demonstrate the richness and complexity of knowledge emerging from outside the Global North. One such case is Indonesia, where recent developments in addressing sexual(ized) violence at higher education institutions reveal dynamic forms of civic engagement and policy innovation. An examination of the Indonesian context not only underscores the importance of

context-specific knowledge but also highlights the need to critically assess how academic publishing frames research depending on its geographic origin

Indonesia: Localized activism and challenges to epistemic hierarchies

Sexual(ized) violence and student mobilization at Indonesian universities

In 2017, the Indonesian National Commission on Violence Against Women (*Komnas Perempuan*) published a survey showing that women with a high educational background who live in urban areas top the list of victims of sexual(ized) violence (UNFPA 2017). Shortly after its publication, information about sexual(ized) violence cases at high-ranking Indonesian universities was leaked to the media, leading to students' demand for policy implementation and institutional change to foster more effective sanctions against violence at HEIs.

Political participation and social-movement research on Indonesia have traditionally centered around religious mass organizations and armed conflict. The image that emerges is of a religious society with highly structured organizations while at the same time pointing toward an "uncivil society" plagued by corruption scandals and horrendous crimes (Beittinger-Lee 2009). Only recently has social-movement research focused more closely on Indonesian student movements and their contribution to the fall of the New Order regime at the end of the 20th century (Dibley/Ford 2019; Nyman 2006; Sastramidjaja 2016). These studies conceive of the student movements in Indonesia as forerunners of institutional change.

Student organizations and movements protesting the careless handling of sexual(ized) violence cases at HEIs today differ from Indonesian protest movements in the past. Unlike vigilante groups and other "uncivil" actors, the student movements fighting against sexual(ized) violence on campuses have not been accused of being violent or open to bribery, nor have they positioned themselves in the country's highly segregated religious terrain. Students are thus showcasing a very different form of civic participation that repudiates militancy and sectarianism. Remarkable above all is that they bring issues of sexuality and sexual(ized) violence into the public sphere, breaking the assumption that these so-called "taboo topics" in Indonesia are not publicly disputable.

National student outrage regarding sexual(ized) violence at HEIs first erupted after a student press article at Gadjah Mada University (Universitas Gadja

Mada, UGM) covering the so-called "Agni case" gained national attention. Agni is a pseudonym chosen by a female student at UGM, whom a fellow student had sexually assaulted during their community-service program. The case not only led to wide protests at UGM but also created a starting point of conversation for students at other universities, leading to student-led protests at HEIs throughout the country (e.g., Vice 2018; Muryanto/Mariani 2019; Wahyuni/Mariani 2018). The students also established self-organized support groups. One of these is the HopeHelps Network, which currently includes local HopeHelps organizations at 17 universities (HopeHelps Network 2023). HopeHelps provides survivors of sexual harassment and violence with legal, psychological, and sometimes even financial support[11].

The topic was further amplified by various news outlets – namely Jakarta Post, Tirto.id, and Vice Indonesia – which established an investigatory project called *#NamaBaikKampus* (Campus Reputation)[12], referring to universities' fear of reputation loss when dealing with sexual(ized) violence cases. Of the 207 testimonies the project received, 174 are cases of alleged sexual harassment (Cahya/Mariani 2019).

Following a student protest on 10 February 2020 in front of the education ministry, the minister, Nadiem Makarim, established a working group tasked with drafting a policy to define universities' responses to sexual harassment cases. This protest is regarded as a key factor that brought the issue to the forefront of the ministerial agenda. The working group published a policy (*Permendikbud No. 30 Tahun 2021*) that greatly surpassed national regulations. When the regulation was published in 2021, sexual(ized) violence had yet to be defined under Indonesian law, and the parliament had recently rejected the bill that had been set out to do so[13]. The regulation of the education ministry, however, defines 21 forms of sexual violence, ranging from direct physical violence to verbal and non-physical forms. Aside from defining them, the policy also sets out rules on how universities have to respond to cases, including setting up a task force assigned to lead the procedures and support victims/survivors of sexual(ized)

11 The organization is separate from the university and mainly funds itself through the contributions of the volunteers working for HopeHelps. The organization is student-led but sometimes supported by licensed psychologists and members of legal-aid foundations.

12 The Society of Publishers in Asia (SOPA) rewarded the journalists involved in the *#NamaBaikKampus* project with the 2020 Public service Journalism Award (Adjie 2020). While BBC Indonesia was involved in initiating the project, they withdrew their participation later on.

13 The draft of the "Elimination of Sexual Violence Bill" had been delayed and shut down for several years. The main criticism of the law came from religious conservative parties stating that the bill – with the section on marital rape – would not align with Indonesian norms. It was, hence, deemed to be "Western". However, the bill was taken up again, revised, and passed in April 2022, after sexual violence cases had increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, and cases of sexual(ized) violence in schools had gained nationwide media attention (Guzman 2022).

violence (Ministeri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, Republik Indonesia 2021).

As this brief overview demonstrates, sexual(ized) violence at HEIs in Indonesia is not only a pressing issue but is also being publicly and academically debated. While the acts themselves are common worldwide, responses to them are profoundly shaped by local contexts.

The Indonesian context and its visibility in international scholarship

The content analysis, in which I examined how authors and journal editors situate articles through their usage of country references in their titles, keywords, and abstracts, showed that some countries, such as Indonesia, are missing from the international academic debate. Only six articles published in the three journals focused on cases in Southeast Asia, none of which engaged with the Indonesian context. Moreover, an analysis of the publication years 2022–2025 showed that while three articles on Indonesia were published in the JIV, two of them focused on violence at schools, and the one that did focus on HEIs was a comparison between Singapore, the UK, and Indonesia. This latter article did not address the recent changes regarding sexual(ized) violence regulations or student activism; instead, it examined the influence of the Dark Triad[14] and rape-myth acceptance on bystander intervention (Lyons et al. 2022). This lack of engagement does not reflect the vibrant and evolving local debate currently taking place in Indonesia, which has gained significant momentum in recent years.

Nevertheless, questions arise: For whom is this important? Is this context relevant for research outside of area studies or Southeast Asian studies? And if so, why?

Generally, the lack of focus on Indonesia's higher education system is astonishing when considering its size and diversity. Indonesia is a highly religious country – it has the largest Muslim population in the world – with an increasing number of religious HEIs, alongside private, semi-public, and public institutions. With a student population in 2018 of over 10 million people at more than 4,700 HEIs (Pannen 2018, 2), the Indonesian higher education system is among the largest in the world. This size alone could warrant greater academic attention when researching issues related to higher education. Yet, Indonesia's relevance extends beyond its size: its cultural, religious, and socio-political contexts offer insights that challenge universalist assumptions about sexual(ized) violence in educational settings.

14 "Dark Triad" refers to three personality traits: psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism (Lyons et al. 2022).

Moreover, researching local contexts such as Indonesia reveals that processes of change often do not follow a linear path. For example, while positive changes have occurred, such as the ministerial regulation that mandates a process to address sexual violence at HEIs (*Permendikbud 30 2021*) and the recent passage of the long-awaited bill to eliminate violence against women, these advancements coexist with setbacks. Indonesia also recently changed its criminal code, greatly restricting the civil liberties of its citizens.[15] In the context of sexual(ized) violence, the changes to the criminal code can be detrimental, as the code now criminalizes sex before and outside of marriage. Since Indonesia does not recognize same-sex marriage, these changes mean that having sex with someone of the same sex is criminalized altogether. While the changes do not directly address sexual(ized) violence, they can discourage victim/survivor reports, as individuals may fear legal repercussions or social stigma. If engaging in sexual acts outside of marriage is illegal, individuals may hesitate to report intimate-partner rape, and this fear is heightened for LGBTIQ+ individuals, who risk being criminalized due to their sexual orientation. Consequently, when developing support mechanisms for victims/survivors at HEIs, it is essential to consider these legal and social contexts to ensure that individuals can report incidents without fearing prosecution. This necessity highlights a key difference from best-practice models commonly referenced such as those from the US, where such legal barriers do not exist. Localized research on sexual(ized) violence can, hence, present us with a more nuanced look at how sexual(ized) violence occurs and is dealt with around the world.

Sexual(ized) violence is a global phenomenon, but responses to it are diverse. This is also true for the plurality of student-movement protest formations against sexual(ized) violence on campuses. The students – especially at UGM in Yogyakarta – who organized protests against the university's mishandling of sexual(ized) violence were locally grounded. In addition to their online protest and collaboration with student media, they used indigenous alarm signals and symbols to create attention (Muryanto 2018). The use of indigenous protest forms emphasizes the issue as a local one rather than one "imported" from the West. This is especially important when fighting for causes that can be deemed "feminist", as critics in Indonesia have referred to feminism as a Western ideology (Maryani/Janitra/Ratmita 2021).

Another example of the local context's uniqueness lies in the role of social media in building victim-/survivor-support structures. When developing sup-

15 The change of the criminal code is at the same time portrayed as a process of decolonization, as the Indonesian state is breaking its ties with the previous Dutch-colonial criminal code imposed on the country during Dutch colonialism. However, Airlangga Pribadi Kusman (2022) rightfully points out that these changes to the criminal code – especially those criminalizing insulting the government – are very much in line with colonial tendencies.

port systems, it is crucial to consider to whom victims/survivors feel comfortable opening up and under which circumstances. In Indonesia, social media has played a significant role in this context. Local support organizations such as HopeHelps have focused on creating online, partially anonymous hotlines to assist victims/survivors, as students often feel more comfortable sharing their experiences through online media rather than in-person meetings. This digital approach highlights the importance of tailoring support services to the preferences and cultural contexts of the individuals they aim to help.

The Indonesian case also allows us to think more about where we place the borders of the university. What do we consider part of the university, and what not? Some Indonesian universities have community-service programs included in their structure. This means that students – and sometimes staff – must fulfill a community-service program during their time at the university. As such programs often last several weeks and are usually done in remote areas, often far away from the cities where the students live, this additional "space" must be considered when developing sexual harassment regulations for these HEIs.

Similarly, the local analysis offers insights into power structures and hierarchies within the university, that is hierarchies not only between professors, staff, and students but also among students themselves. While in the US, fraternities play a significant role in constructing violent campus cultures (Martin/Hummer 1989; Treat et al. 2021), in Indonesia, it is the senior-junior hierarchy that can foster a culture susceptible to harassment and violence (Ruitang 2017). Junior students are students a year below oneself, and seniors are the ones in the classes above. This structure often connects to social-interaction rules. While this is also seen, for example, in the US between freshman members and the rest of the fraternity organizations, those social-interaction rules only apply to those within the fraternity system. In many Indonesian university faculties, these rules apply for the entire student population. Although comparisons could be made between these systems, the mechanisms through which violence acceptance is cultivated are not directly equivalent. This once again highlights the need for greater localized violence research rather than the continuation of globalized Eurocentric approaches.

Recognizing and integrating research from contexts such as Indonesia is not only essential for representing the plurality of lived experiences and institutional responses to sexual(ized) violence but also offers critical analytical tools for scholars working on Europe. By challenging Eurocentric assumptions about what constitutes valid knowledge or progressive policy, Indonesian cases expose blind spots in dominant frameworks, such as those rooted in liberal feminist or individualist paradigms. Including insights from Indonesia can thus help reframe

comparative analysis, sharpen critiques of institutional power, and inspire more context-sensitive and structurally aware approaches to gender-based violence in higher education globally – including within Europe.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has shown how knowledge hierarchies are reproduced not only through research focus but also through academic publishing itself. By examining how titles, abstracts, and keywords frame geographic context, I have illustrated how Global South scholarship is often relegated to the margins of international visibility. These patterns are not incidental but form part of what Brunner (2020) conceptualizes as epistemic violence – violence inherent to the process of knowledge production.

The content analysis demonstrated how journal editors and authors shape the conditions under which readers encounter and contextualize knowledge: what is read, what is sidelined, and how cases are positioned within global hierarchies. While cases from the Global North are often treated as universally valid, Global South cases – when included at all – tend to be framed as regional exceptions or culturally specific anomalies. Indonesia, as this article has shown, is a case in point: rich, contextually grounded forms of activism and policy innovation are occurring, but they remain largely absent from the dominant international discourse on sexual(ized) violence in higher education.

Editors, reviewers, and scholars all have a role to play in disrupting these hierarchies. Making the geographical framing of Global North cases more explicit – and recognizing the global analytical relevance of Global South contexts – would be a step toward greater epistemic justice.

Sexual(ized) violence, while global in scope, manifests differently across social, political, and institutional settings. Attending to this diversity does more than broaden representation; it deepens our theoretical frameworks and sharpens our responses. Embracing locally grounded scholarship – such as that emerging from Indonesia – not only challenges Eurocentric norms but enriches our collective ability to understand, prevent, and respond to sexual(ized) violence in higher education worldwide.

Data Availability Statement

The analysis in this study is based on self-collected research material. The research material can be requested from Lina Knorr if there is a legitimate interest.

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