

5th Letter

It happened to us at the Centre for Social Studies, not to the Centre for Social Studies¹

We are an International Women’s Collective that emerged after the publication of the chapter by Lieselotte Viaene, Catarina Laranjeiro, and Miye Nadia Tom titled “The Walls Spoke When No One Else Would: Autoethnographic Notes on Sexual-Power Gatekeeping Within Avant-Garde Academia.” This chapter was included in the book *Sexual Misconduct in Academia*, edited by Erin Pritchard and Delyth Edwards (Routledge, 2023). Despite criticism from the international academic community, imploring the publisher to resist censorship pressures, the book remains canceled due to legal action initiated by Maria Paula Meneses— who self-identified as one of the central figures in the described harassment scheme.

Considering the entirety and diversity of our experiences, we confirm the existence of a consistent pattern of abuse within the teams led by Boaventura de Sousa Santos at the Centre for Social Studies (CES), University of Coimbra. This pattern encompasses sexual harassment, moral harassment, and intellectual extractivism, as previously identified by the authors in their publication (also involving Bruno Sena Martins and other members of the institution).

Our inaugural letter, titled ‘It is not defamation, nor revenge. It has always been harassment’ was published on April 17—interestingly, a symbolic day in the history of resistance of the University of Coimbra. The occasion celebrates the audacity to speak out when silence is imposed. **Lieselotte, Catarina, and Miye courageously addressed a topic that had long been suppressed, creating space for our voices to resonate.**

The way we experienced and dealt with the abuses was profoundly varied. Yet we share an unwavering belief that harassment should never have happened. We all recognise that violence does not remain confined to the past, with psychological and material repercussions persisting to this day. Our conviction is unwavering: our voices matter. Guided by these principles - that amidst fear and trauma, we kept reminding each other - we found the strength and determination to do what was right. We

¹ This update letter corrects point 4, which had mistakenly indicated that complainants would have access to the report when they in fact will not. Additionally, this letter clarifies point 5, as complainants will not be able to view the public presentation of the Independent Commission’s report online. The Commission’s finding will only be published following the public report.

embarked on the painful journey of reclaiming each detail of our memories of suffering.

Our letters were used to respond to the immediate attacks leveled against the authors. They also served to widen the collective to include women who had not previously met and to create the necessary conditions for reporting violence. Meaning: complete independence for the Independent Commission investigating and an unwavering commitment to a victim-centered approach. The latter requires not prioritising CES' institutional image or the interests of those who perpetuated or benefitted from the aggressions/harassment but the needs of those who suffered the violence and had to rebuild their lives by themselves.

On September 30th, we submitted a comprehensive file to the Independent Commission, full of narrative details and evidence. We have done our part to await the Committee's results patiently. Despite the inherent anxiety of this struggle, we willingly accepted a two-month extension on the Report's delivery deadline. Our understanding stems from an awareness of the magnitude and intricate complexity of the material that we provided. We firmly believe that our grievances represent only a fraction of the complaints and evidence received by the Commission.

We intended to speak only after the presentation of the Report expected for the end of February. However, that presentation did not materialise, and recent developments have cast a shadow of pessimism. The Independent Commission's report is now scheduled for presentation on the 13th of this month at 2:00 p.m. (WET), at a yet-to-be-disclosed location, before the CES community. Subsequently, at 5:30 p.m. (WET), it will be shared with the public, in a CES room that can accommodate 80 people.

The information we've received from the Centre for Social Studies directors and the Independent Commission leads us to strongly suspect that the dignity and safety of the victims are not the central focus of this process. More alarmingly, **it gives us reason to believe that the victims have been forgotten.**

To date,

1. We have not received any response regarding the assessment of our complaints nor any commitment to obtain the Report prepared by the Independent Commission. The original deadline for this Report was March 1, 2024, which has already passed;
2. The Report, derived from our collective narratives of suffering, will first be presented to the researchers of CES before it is presented to us;

3. CES researchers will have reviewed details relating to the Independent Commission's Report before the complainants receive any information.

4. As complainants, we will not have the opportunity to learn whether or not our narratives about the violence we endured have been validated weeks after the report is completed, simultaneously with the media and the general public;

5. CES declined the collective's request to make the report presentation available online despite being aware that many victims reside outside Portugal and lack the necessary resources and emotional well-being to travel to the institution's premises.

We implore you to honor our dignity, stop dehumanising us, and cease silencing our voices as if we were invisible. Please, share the Report with us as soon as possible. Promote a presentation accessible to all who seek insight into the results—a hybrid session conducted in at least two languages. In a Research Centre that thrives on internationalisation and technological prowess, the failure to do so would signal a lack of good faith, which leaves us perplexed and apprehensive.

Let us not forget the undeniable truth: the violence happened to us at CES; it did not happen to CES. CES is now responsible for learning from the past, to do better for those who follow, and to do better for us. None of us chose to go through this or anticipated this. As we navigate survival, we implore the CES to learn alongside us—embracing the full weight of political and legal accountability for past actions. Only through collective growth and shared accountability can we pave the way toward a different future.

5th of March, 2024,

Group of Victims