



WISCONSIN
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

May 11, 2023

[Redacted]

Dear Dr. [Redacted], and the Routledge editorial board:

We write to express deep concern over the ethical problems stemming from your publication of the article “The walls spoke when no one else would: Autoethnographic notes on sexual-power gatekeeping within avant-garde academia” by Lieselotte Viaene, Catarina Laranjeiro and Miye Nadya Tom, in *Sexual Misconduct in Academia: Informing an ethics of care in the University* (Routledge 2023).

As you know, the article alleges a culture of harassment at a Coimbra University research center, referring to individuals who are labeled ‘star professor’, ‘watch woman’ and ‘apprentice’, without naming them. Using an approach known as ‘autoethnography’, none of the authors actually claim that they were themselves significantly harassed. Instead they assert that an unnamed ‘star professor’ and a ‘watch woman’ were responsible for creating or enabling a culture of sexual harassment throughout the institution.

Although the article did not identify the site of the alleged harassment, readers could, and did, instantly identify the only institution that all three authors have in common: the University of Coimbra, in Portugal. Readers could thus identify the ‘star professor’ as Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Moreover, within days of the book’s publication, newspaper articles named all three individuals, and repeated and amplified the accusations against Professor de Sousa Santos and others at the institute. Thus the article’s pretense that it was not accusing anyone in particular was, to put it bluntly, disingenuous.

Department of Sociology

[Redacted]

Aside from repeatedly referring to an anonymous piece of graffiti, the article offers no concrete evidence that they observed any sexual harassment. By claiming to be using ‘autoethnography’—an approach that surely has value--the authors seem to believe that they have a right to rely on rumors, anonymous graffiti, and their personal discomfort to support their accusation that Coimbra’s Center for Social Sciences fostered a culture of harassment and rape.

Further, as the authors explicitly acknowledge in the chapter, no attempt was made to seek a response from either the accused individuals or the institution. This meant that none of the accused had an opportunity to respond to the authors’ accusations before they were published— a fact that should have led the book’s editors or the press to make certain that both the institution and individuals were anonymized.

We consider it unprofessional, to say the least, and dangerously unethical, that you would publish accusations without evidence and without effectively anonymizing the accused. The impact of the chapter on both the accused individuals and the institution is potentially devastating.

Given Professor Santos’ international visibility, the chapter has provided ammunition to conservative outlets in Portugal, who immediately began to use the accusations to challenge a public intellectual who has long defended and supported feminist and indigenous rights. Both of us have known Boaventura de Sousa Santos for many years, and have never seen any indication of the kind of behavior described in the article; we fear that despite the lack of supporting evidence, the chapter could undermine the work of Santos and his institute, as well as harming the careers of the more junior scholars who have been affiliated with the center.

Of course we understand that too many universities have turned a blind eye to sexual harassment; indeed, we ourselves have witnessed harassment and unfair treatment of women in many universities around the world. So we recognize the importance of the work this volume tries to do. But the accusations included in this chapter, directed at an easily-identifiable institution and specific scholars, surely require more substantiation than the chapter offers.

We would like to be able to count on academic presses such as the distinguished Routledge, to scrutinize, even minimally, the reliability of what it publishes. While we realize that it is the authors of the article who are making these unsubstantiated accusations, the editors and publishers of the volume clearly have some responsibility to ensure that attacks on individuals’ personal reputation and careers

are either substantiated, or fully anonymized; and to give them the opportunity to respond.

Unsupported allegations such as these do not help women in academia in their struggle for equality and respectful treatment, but rather provide support for attacks on academia and thereby undermine respect for feminist scholars. They also blur any lines between ethical and unethical approaches to addressing institutional cultures that enable harassment.

We realize that the book is already available around the world, but we hope that you as the editors and publishers of this volume will seek ways to address the problems the chapter has created, both for identifiable individuals and the institutions. At the very least, we urge you to provide some path that might allow the individuals whose reputations have been permanently tarnished to offer some kind of response to the chapter's accusations; we would also hope that you could find a way to clarify that the allegations in the chapter are just that-- unproven allegations.

Sincerely,



Gay W. Seidman
Professor of Sociology
University of Wisconsin-Madison



Linda Gordon
Professor of History (retired),
New York University and
University of Wisconsin-Madison



Gender Studies Editors
Routledge Press
London / New York

Re: "The walls spoke when no one else would: Autoethnographic notes on sexual-power gatekeeping within avant-garde academia" by Lieselotte Viaene, Catarina Laranjeiro, and Miye Nadya Tom in Pritchard and Edwards, eds. *Sexual Misconduct in Academia* (2023)

I write in strongest protest against Routledge's publication of "The walls spoke when no one else would." I'm surprised that an essay so underconceptualized and so close to vengeful defamation was published by your press. Though the collection of essays is published and in circulation, I urge you to reconsider its free availability online or at least the free availability of the Viaene, Laranjeiro, and Nadya Tom essay. (I realize you now list the book itself as "under review" on your website. But I would hope you can make some finer grained statement.)

Let me be clear. I do *not* write in complaint about the critique of institutional structures and their leaders or about allegations and instances of discrimination, harassment, abuse or, yet, about personal stories of abuse and harassment. I do write in complaint about "The walls spoke when no one else would" for its accusations that are defamatory not least because the institution and people accused are so clearly identifiable, its dubious ethical positioning, and its intellectual conflation of personal experience and (casual) institutional analysis, which also includes contorting the scholarship it cites to fit that conflation.

Viaene, Laranjeiro, and Nadya Tom's essay makes serious and consequential charges against an institution and its people that – because of where and how those charges are articulated – border on the slanderous. The silly titles given to characters in the essay's stories – "Star Professor," "Apprentice," "Watchwomen" – are hardly opaque given that the authors' affiliations with the Center for Social Studies in Coimbra Portugal is specified in their biographical statements. The essay defames CES and its former and current leadership in an arena for which there can be no counter narrative, no defense against allegations. To be accused is to be guilty. Their essay reads like a complaint – against CES, against its leadership, against the authors' own precarity as doctoral and post-doctoral researchers (though they are all three currently well located professionally) in neo-liberal higher education systems which they never recognize by name. Instead, they've chosen to focus on "avant-garde academia."

In addition to what may be the legal question of the essay's defamatory accusations, there is also an ethical question of writing – and publishing -- such a rancorous essay that so patently indicts easily identifiable people and institutions. Precisely because the clear-headed, pointed struggles against gender (and class and race) discrimination, harassment, and abuse are crucial in moving towards a more just society and more just social structures, charges made against an institution and its leaders must surely do more than make claims to being a "survivor" of institutional and personal abuse. It would be one thing if the authors (and your press) meant to write (and publish) an account of the authors' experiences. Experiences and memories of them are, as the authors themselves point out, fluid and variable. But Viaene, Laranjeiro, and Nadya Tom's essay makes much broader claims about an institution and its leadership, about what occurred or didn't occur for themselves and for others when "no interviews were conducted" (210). Making such claims in a scholarly essay without anything other than rumor, graffiti, and the authors' memories of their experiences is surely to push the limits of ethical intellectual work. And publishing such an essay is surely to push the limits of the ethical responsibility of a scholarly press.

In addition, the intellectual conceptualization of the essay itself elides telling the stories of its authors' experiences with a structural analysis. There is a great deal of careful work that needs to be done to connect the two. And it is not done in this essay. Furthermore, the essay cites literature on abuse and harassment in the academy and elsewhere that frequently misconstrues that literature. I don't mean to write a review of the article. But I'm happy to detail those misconstruals if it's helpful. Finally, the authors' claim of refuge against evidentiary specifics or scientific investigation or formal complaint or corroborative research of any kind in the name of autoethnography and against re-traumatization is dubious both ethically and intellectually. It is an affront to those who deal with trauma and its painful retellings to end abuse and have spent their lives as advocates and activists for gender, class, and racial justice.

If this letter should also go to someone else at Routledge, please let me know or feel free to forward it yourselves.

Thank you for your time and attention.

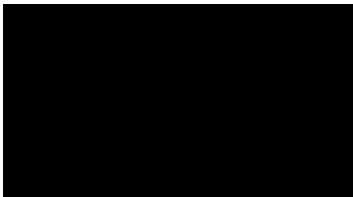
A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mary N. Layoun". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Mary N. Layoun,
Emerita Professor of Comparative Literature
University of Wisconsin, Madison



DEPARTAMENTO DE ANTROPOLOGÍA SOCIAL
Facultad de Geografía e Historia

Dear Dr. [REDACTED], and the Routledge editorial board



I am writing regarding a chapter included in one of your publications and entitled “The walls spoke when no one else would: Autoethnographic notes on sexual-power gatekeeping within avant-garde academia” by Lieselotte Viaene, Catarina Laranjeiro and Miye Nadya Tom, in *Sexual Misconduct in Academia: Informing an Ethics of Care in the University*. Ed. Erin Pritchard, Delyth Edwards (Routledge 2023).

I must say I was astounded that such a questionable and unscholarly article could have been accepted for publication in such a prestigious publishing house. To my mind, the negative repercussions of this text have tremendous impact in different fields. It affects the credibility of researchers concerned with qualitative methodologies, it affects such an internationally recognised first-rate research centre as the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, as well as the scientific reputation of Routledge itself. I, myself, feel very much affected – as professor of social anthropology at the University of Seville since 2004, with a steady trajectory of methodological innovation.

It is unbelievable that a text of such low quality could have passed editorial reviewing. Any researcher knowledgeable about these methodologies would be immediately aware of how poor the scientific production is. A non-scientific text for lack of rigour, once being the object of critical analysis, its authors’ biases come out, as well as a kind of instrumentalizing discourse typical of non-scientific productions for the media. One cannot but wonder about the authors’ intentions, considering the instrumental and distorted use of the bibliographical references and of autoethnography itself.

On the other hand, given my experience as guest researcher and professor for 8 months at CES in 2015, I consider myself well qualified to contradict the authors’ description of the academic relations there. Indeed, given my personal experience as a woman of science with an ample trajectory, I can assert that descriptions of labour and sexual harassment are far more obvious in other European and Latin American universities than at this centre.

It stands to reason that such a text could have been published, a text with such negative consequences for the people it defames, as was clear in the resulting media



DEPARTAMENTO DE ANTROPOLOGÍA SOCIAL

Facultad de Geografía e Historia

procedures for criminal activities. The authors use the methodological anonymity as a tool, thus denying internationally distinguished researchers the presumption of innocence and the right to defend themselves through the appropriate juridical channels that our democratic societies provide.

Considering the serious damage caused, I urge that measures of reparation be taken soon enough.

Thank you.
Looking forward to your reply,
Yours sincerely,

Seville 26 June 2023.

Ángeles Castaño Madroñal
Social Anthropology
University of Seville





Dear Dr. [REDACTED]

I am writing to you in reference to a text whose reading and analysis has surprised me greatly, mainly for two reasons: the guarantee of quality that I have always associated with your publishing house, on the one hand, and the dire consequences that the publication of said article is producing, on the other.

I am referring to the controversial chapter "The walls spoke when no one else would: Autoethnographic Notes on Sexual-power Gatekeeping within Avant-garde Academia", by Lieselotte Viaene, Catarina Laranjeiro, and Miye Nadya Tom, included as a chapter in *Sexual Misconduct in Academia: Informing an Ethics of Care in the University*, ed. Erin Pritchard and Delyth Edwards (Routledge 2023).

Concerning the scientific quality of the text, I would like to tell you that my assessment is so negative that I am surprised that the reviewing process of the editors has not resulted in a refusal to publish it. I have been a full professor in the Department of Social Anthropology at the Pablo de Olavide University since 2011. I earned my a Ph.D. in 2005 and have engaged in research ever since. I am an expert in qualitative methodologies, although, actually, it does not require a high degree of specialization to

[REDACTED]

affirm that the story developed by the authors of the chapter cited above does not meet a minimum of rigor to be assessed as autoethnography.

The description made by the authors of the Center for Social Studies as being an institution governed by labor and sexual harassment, according to their subjective appraisals, does not at all use the tools of autoethnography to guarantee a minimum of rigor, even including subjective perceptions. It never takes into account the analysis of the observer-observed interactions in search for consensus and continuous reflexivity of the different subjects' ways of being, which is the hallmark of autoethnographic methodology, and as is well recommended by the article that the authors cite as a reference, without, however, following its conclusions. The description is rather a supposedly anonymous biographical account (names are hidden under clichéd and harsh pseudonyms) just like bad television series match the characters of a fiction with a story supposedly based on real events. The descriptions the chapter offers are based on partial memories, exclusively on hearsay and testimonies that match these memories, with no description of other opinions and assessments that show a heterogeneity and diversity typical of the broad group related to the center. Those of us who have had the opportunity to share visits and activities at CES have observed there a reality very different from that of other universities, which would fit more with the precarious situation and hierarchical abuse denounced in the text.

Secondly, I am astounded that such a text would be published without the necessary guarantees, given the very serious consequences for the people involved, as a result of the media campaign that has followed its publication. This type of denunciation has other legal channels before the institution itself and before the courts, since it may constitute a crime. However, the





anonymity and the means of expression protects the authors (an allegedly scholarly paper) and, what is more serious, denies the researchers targeted the presumption of innocence and the possibility of facing their defense through the channels that democratic societies have provided us with.

Given this situation, and given that the authors are obviously aware of the relevant bibliography, although they systematically misapply it, and in view of the whole style of narration, could it be that the purpose of this chapter is other than to denounce sexual harassment? Charges of sexual harassment would certainly have to follow other institutional procedures, in which testimonies, evidence, and identification of the victims are presented, and accusers and accused have to be called to a hearing.

Taking all this into account, and given the serious damage caused, I would ask you to contemplate removing the chapter and apologizing to the targeted researchers specially to Professor Boaventura de Sousa Santos, a world renowned and esteemed scholar. Without further ado, thanking you for your attention and looking forward to your response, I send you my best regards.

Elodia Hernandez León


Professor of the Department of Social Anthropology, Basic Psychology and Public Health Universidad Pablo de Olavide.


Iberian Network of Epistemologies of the South.



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

July 31, 2023




Dear Drs  and Members of the Routledge Editorial Board,

I have just read an extraordinarily disturbing chapter in your new book, *Sexual Misconduct in Academia*. I write now to ask you to consider withdrawing the chapter, "The Walls Spoke When No One Else Would," from further printings of this book, or, failing that, to withdraw the book from the market.

I have never made such a request before, and do not make this request lightly now. But, I found the chapter's assertions so filled with innuendo, unsubstantiated accusations, and conclusions drawn from generalizations about university life in general, that they do not meet the most minimal standards of scholarly publication. The lowering of standards to this level harms both those named in the piece and the scholarly community as a whole. It undermines our reputation for fairness, and raises questions about the training that all of us, women as well as men, offer to graduate students.

To be more specific, the piece argues that the authors and others they know about have been victimized by an "institutional cover up designed to protect "Star Professors" who favor abuses of power towards young women researchers." The Institution and the Star Professor are not named, so the authors pretend to a certain sort of anonymity. But identification is easy, even for an American far removed from Portugal, making the insinuations more, not less, targeted. To be fair, I am familiar with the CES, have spoken there once or twice, and am professionally friendly with some of its officers. But I am also familiar with the harm done by unsubstantiated assertions, and even when they are delivered in the name of feminism (with which I identify), find them to be inordinately destructive.

In this respect, I find the accusation of academic incest particularly repulsive with respect to the implication that the Star Professor and his wife colluded in a power play against female students. This is affirmed by a section on the failure of radical feminists in general to support women who accuse their supervisors of sexual violence. Undoubtedly this sometimes happens; women, just like men, do not knowingly jeopardize their careers; But there is no evidence that it happened in this institution. And coming from a generation of academics that routinely refused jobs to even



the best qualified women and simply repudiated those who were married, I find this accusation not only insensitive, but lacking in verisimilitude.

I take the point made by the authors that this piece is an auto-ethnography that cannot by its nature be objective (210) But even as they make this point, they offer evidence as though it in fact represented some form of truth. The authors locate themselves among a panoply of victims of sexual abuse and harassment and selectively choose examples that illustrate the broader points they are making. Few of these illustrations come from their own experiences. Most are rooted in theory, or are third hand—as in observed graffiti, tales told by colleagues, and inferences drawn from widespread rumors. Evidence as to sexual mis-behavior comes from the ‘whisper network’ and from anonymous graffiti. Once again, I take the point that such evidence has to be taken seriously and explored; it might adequately describe what students fear or suspect, but it cannot be taken for granted as descriptive of individual guilt. No historian would cite as evidence of a perpetrator’s guilt a sign on a door accusing him of rape; or a feeling of marginalization conveyed by a fellow student. These suggest the existence of a rumor mill, or a whisper network, not individual guilt.

Of the explicit accusations there is little to say. Some of them are stories about The Star professor asking students to quote him explicitly, stories about the professor relying on the words and knowledge of his students, and stories about implied promises of jobs based on the Professor’s recommendations. Others involve the actions and comments of an apparently young ‘apprentice’ whose actions are conflated with those of the institution, and who was never brought to justice. I defend none of these, and agree that such actions often prevent students from calling attention to genuine misbehavior. Indeed I don’t dispute that institutions are often structured in racially and gender biased ways. But to make that argument on the backs of a highly respected research center without adhering to professional standards of evidence, smacks of the politics of grievance.

The piece does not deserve publication in the pages of an academic analysis; its presence undermines the credibility of the book, and invokes condemnation of a revered institution that cannot defend itself. It is not worthy of publication by a distinguished press such as Routledge. I hope you will withdraw it from an otherwise serious book.

Sincerely,

Alice Kessler-Harris
R. Gordon Hoxie Professor of American History, Emerita.