

RETHINKING CAREER AND CAREER GUIDANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRANT WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY NETWORK

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Research interests

Social in/exclusion, marginalised groups, outreach guidance and guidance in communities, young people, adult migrants, critical and social justice perspectives in career research

Theoretical & methodological interests

Sociology, youth studies, feminist theory, qualitative analysis, ethnography, post-structural theories, relational sociology and relational ontologies



ABOUT ME

AIMS OF THIS WORKSHOP

- 1) Present and demonstrate a framework of co-agency to rethink career and career guidance when working with minority groups
- 1) Engage you to actively discuss both theoretical and practical approaches inspired by the framework to promote career wellbeing and social justice of people with a minority background



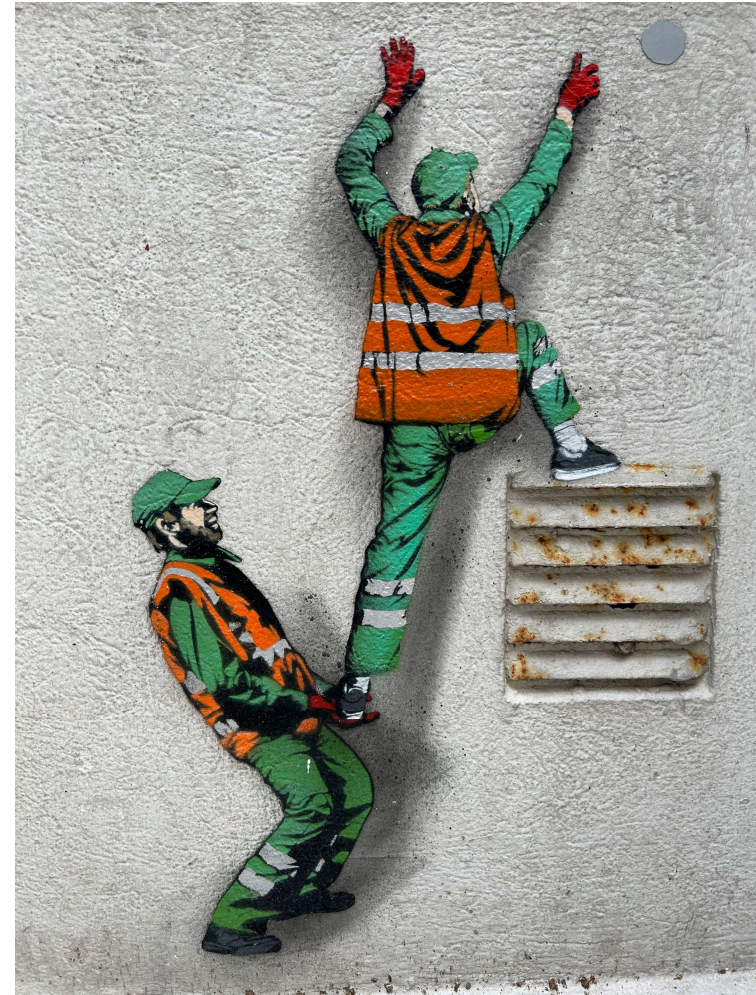
CO-AGENCY AS COUNTER-NARRATIVE



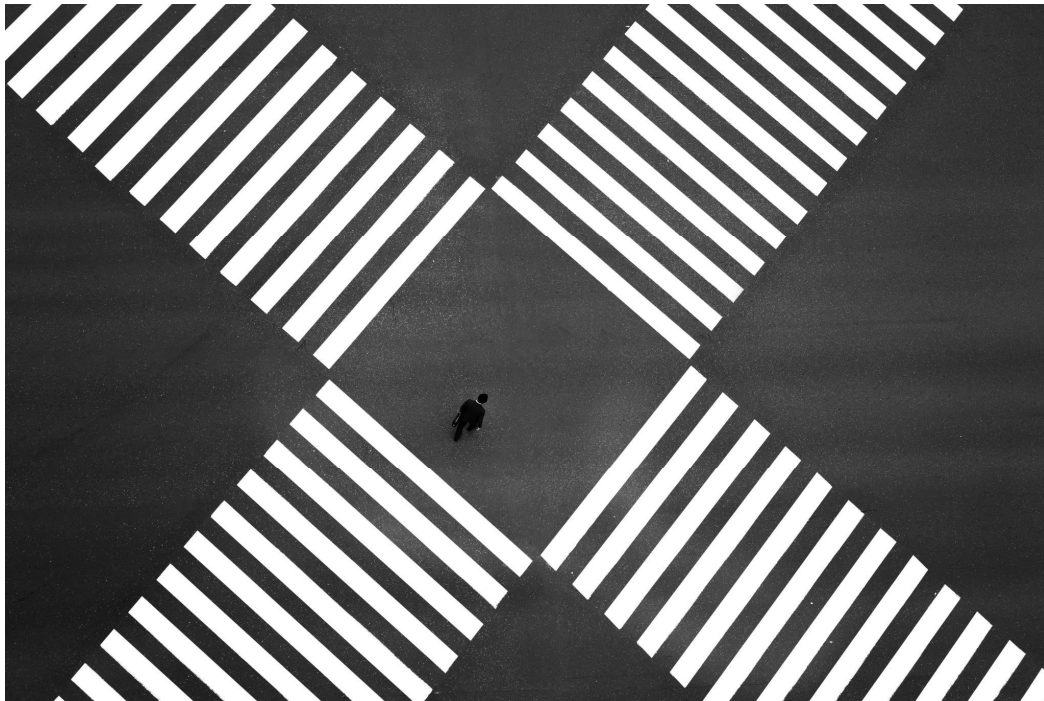
- Feminist critique on the concept of agency: different definitions of agency are culturally, socially and politically situated
- Challenging Western/neoliberal/masculinist perspectives on agency dominating in career theories and models
→ Seeking for alternative (silenced) perspectives on agency from the hinterlands of (capitalist) career construction

CO-AGENCY EMBEDDED IN RELATIONAL THINKING

- Co-agency resigns from the idea of an truly “independent”, “free” or “adaptive”, “flexible” career agent
- Instead, agency in the context of life-careers emerge as a relational, joint effort
- Mutually, social practices, relations and structures related to both career and career guidance are maintained and challenged jointly and collectively



RELATIONS AS SOCIAL AND SOCIETAL RELATIONS



- Relations refer to **other people** and **discursive and societal power** relations
- Dominant discourses can be challenged and interrogated in light of situational/marginalised knowledge and experiences (Haraway 1989)
- Career guidance **critical reflection** and **changing** the social and societal context and power structures constructing agency (Hooley, Thomsen, Sultana 2022).

CO-AGENCY IN CAREER GUIDANCE PRACTICE (elaborated from Toiviainen 2022)

Co-agency in dyadic counsellor-counsee encounters

- Co-agency is emerging in guidance **encounters that are relevant for** client's life-career setting
- Both actors have relevant yet differing **resources for agency construction:** social, cultural and institutional
- **Power** and privileges are dispersed differently according to the actors' social and societal positions. These positions are historically, socially and culturally shaped.
- **Narratives* of past, present and future are co-constructed**

Co-agency emerging within a guidance community

- Giving authorship of the «**what** (themes), **where** (place), **when** (time, situation), **who** (participants) **and how** (methods)» of guidance to the community (Thomsen 2012)
- Re-framing individual issues as shared, **collective issues** (Hooley et al. 2018)
- Community as a source for **recognition and validation** of individuals' experiences (Ribeiro, 2019)
- Network building through bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam 2000)
- Joint production of **embodied knowledge** and experiences – sharing and creating a joint "history"

Co-agency as engaging with systems, structures and discourses

- Uncovering the **social and societal structures** in which agency is embedded eg. gender, ethnicity, class, age, dis/ability
- Unmasking cultural and political origins of **dominant discourses** which maintain certain social orders that marginalise and problematise alternative career 'realities' (Rice 2018; Irving 2018)
- Forming **alliances** to 'talk back' to the dominant discourses (Souto & Sotkasiira 2022)
- Enabling **democratic** and **political participation**
- Identify and overcome systemic and institutional barriers
- Alternative social value-systems that promote equity, fairness and social justice (Irving & Malik, 2019)


*Narratives as multimodal forms of expression and communication

**CASE: MIGRANT WOMEN'S
SOLIDARITY NETWORK – POTENTIAL
CONTEXT FOR COMMUNITY FOR
GUIDANCE AND RETHINKING CAREER
FOR MIGRANT WOMEN?**

+

How do
the three
dimensions
of co-
agency
apply to
this
context?





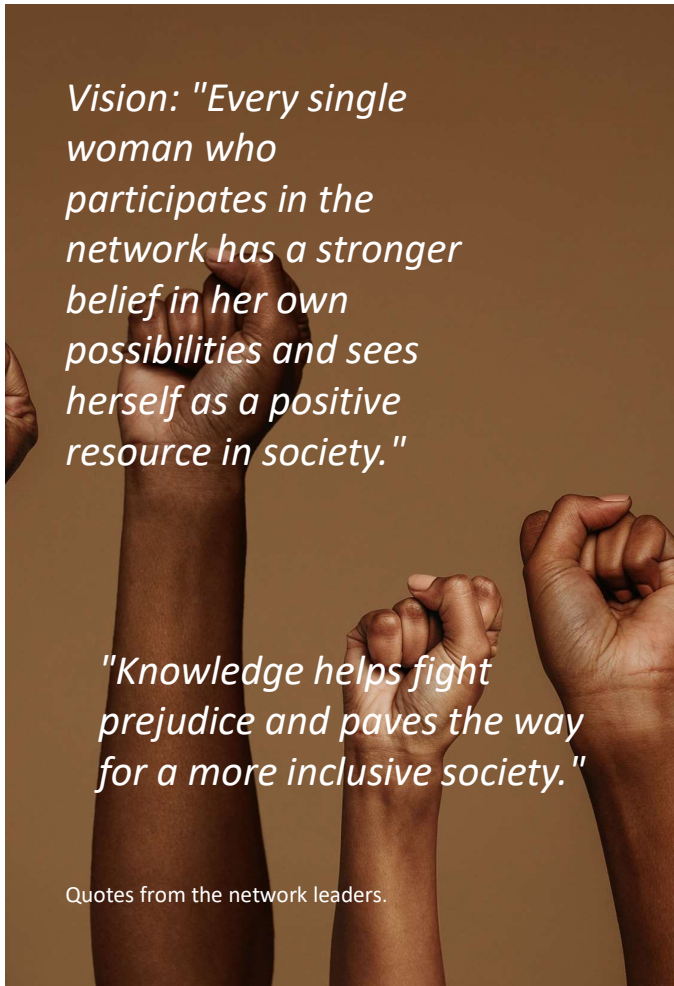
As part of struggle for recognition, we need to reframe the types of unpaid contributions that are vital to us and our community's social and physical wellbeing but currently mostly unrecognised in dominant understandings of what a career is (Rice 2018; Richardson 2012).

The current challenge is to design [career guidance] interventions to help people think about forms of active life that promote the development of a 'good life, with and for others, in just institutions, to ensure the sustainability of a genuine human life on earth (Pouyaud & Guichard 2018)

Constructing, having and enacting a career is not automatically economically quantifiable, but a signifier of the complex ways in which lives play out, and can also have environmental and social justice implications (Irving & Malik-Liévano 2019)

BACKGROUND: FRAMING MIGRANT WOMEN´S CAREERS AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

- Migrant women are key actors in the development towards more sustainable societies, however, their efforts go often invisible and are commodified as cheap labour
- Migrant women are particularly vulnerable to poor working conditions, receiving low wages and experiencing exploitation and misrecognition
- Through their paid and unpaid labour efforts, they support families, preserve and share knowledge, care for the environment, and ensure household food security, nutrition, and health
- Making migrant women´s concerns and issues more visible in political arenas and facilitating their social inclusion and social and economic participation is key in developing participatory, empowered, integrated and caring communities



Vision: "Every single woman who participates in the network has a stronger belief in her own possibilities and sees herself as a positive resource in society."

"Knowledge helps fight prejudice and paves the way for a more inclusive society."

Quotes from the network leaders.

CONTEXT: MINORITY WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY NETWORK IN NORWAY

- A network established by four women with an immigrant background who wanted to have a social meeting place and «fill the hole» in the Norwegian integration system they collectively experienced
- Over the years, the network has expanded its activities, reaching out to over 400 participants
- It collaborates with welfare and employment services and offers internships and trials for women with requirements for more adapted working conditions/part-time work (over 60 women per year have done their internship at the network's premises)
- The median age of the members is 48 years, living in Norway between 8–20 years.
- Activities have developed from members' wishes and needs
- Café is an open meeting place and at the same time a low-threshold information and resource center
- Activities open up women to discuss common concerns and hopes and need related to integration, learning, work and future

«NOW IT'S YOUR TURN" (FIELD NOTES)

We are on a Norwegian course and Noura (from Afghanistan, 55 years old) says to Tetiana (from Ukraine, 44 years old) "You know Norwegian so well! I've been here for many years and can't continue Norwegian. Noura talks about her internships in kindergarten, in a shop and in a cafeteria, but she has only done the tasks, "not speaking". She has thought "Noura is stupid". The others in the group react with a lot of protest, and the teacher says "don't say that" and that "it's good that you're here now". Noura then lists the children's "successes", how one is a doctor, the other an engineer and the third studying at university. And the others in the group tell Noura that she has been a good mother, and that it is valuable in itself. The teacher says that "here" in Norway they say that "I come first", but where "we" come from, it is often the children who come first, "for some the children come first, for others the husband - and the mother comes somewhere at the back of the queue" The group mumbles agreeingly. "Now it's your turn", teacher says and she points at the group with her finger. "Now it's your turn!"



«Raising up their children between two cultures is an important societal task the women do.»

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

How does a minority women's solidarity network contribute to the career development and integration of the participants from a co-agency perspective?

- What kind of a space the women's solidarity network occupy in relation to the participating women's integration, learning and career processes?
- How do these kinds of organizations provide career learning contexts?
- Do such networks enable social justice and facilitate social sustainability?

DATA

- **Participant observation/fieldnotes 2022 –2023**
- **Practice portrait interview (n=3) and oral feedback session with central figures (n= 6) of the solidarity network, 2023**
- **Individual in-depth audio recorded interviews with participants/members (n=12), 2023–2024**

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

- **Participant observation/fieldnotes** in the network's activities and locations (shop, café, sewing facility) 2022 –2023 (approx. 30 days, 70 pages notes). During fieldwork:
- **Practice portrait interview (n=3) and oral feedback session with central figures (n= 6) of the solidarity network**
 - Interview focuses on perceived goals and purpose of the network, forms of organisation and activities, identifying main focus group and their resources and challenges, collaboration with other actors, development challenges and possibilities of the network, future prospects
- **Individual in-depth audiorecorded interviews with participants/members, 2023–2024 (n=12).**
 - Open narrative interviews
 - These interviews focused more closely on women's life stories, especially 2) past and present experiences from work, learning and career 3) their experience in women's networks
 - Interviews last from 40 min–1,5 hours

CO-AGENCY AS DYADIC 1-ON-1 ENCOUNTERS

- Women as a resource: “What **can you?**”
“What **do you want** to do here?”
- To “be seen” – empathy, someone listening in a respectful way
- Fulfilling immediate needs a “door opener” – helping, supporting, inviting to activities, concrete daily matters (assistance, language, social, technical needs, information)
- Advocacy, using network contacts
- Help in navigating bureaucracy
- Legal consultation



CO-AGENCY AS COMMUNITY-EMBEDDED SUPPORT

- Reducing social isolation– a place to come to
- Providing social support network and a source of bonding capital – we support and «lift each other»
- Providing paid work and volunteering opportunities – «bridging» capital through contacts and collaborating with different groups and associations
 - Cooking, sewing, secretary work, social business development, ICT skills
- Opportunities to «learn something new»
 - Language courses tailored
 - Leisure: knitting, dancing, artwork, hiking, drama, swimming, theatre trips,
- Education about basic rights, health and wellbeing – themes emerged collectively:
 - Theme nights: domestic violence, women´s health rights, basic citizenship rights (voting), employee rights etc.
 - Questioning strong patriarchal gender norms, reducing over-reliance on family members (independent economy, own social networks, visiting the doctor etc.)

CO-AGENCY AS ENGAGING WITH SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES



Theatre performance based on the individual life stories of solidarity network members.

- Changing representations of minority women and what it means for them to have a 'career'
 - Seeing women as a resource, «we lift each other»
 - Positive role models – women with a migrant background contributing to the network as volunteers
- Follow-up of racist and discriminatory incidents among network members (staff)
- Being active in local and national political forums, acting as a collective voice of migrant women's experiences
- Compensating need for having «face» in the faceless support system
- «We are not the public system» - building trust
- Help in accessing and navigating relevant support in the public support system

RETHINKING «CAREER»

“It's the fact that you have joy in life and manage your life. You balance life. If you are unemployed, if you are retired, if you have disability insurance, if you are simply unemployed, you cannot find a job. Or a part-time job, whether you go on social welfare or on various initiatives. But that I can actually manage the life I have, with the health I have too. Because there are many people who have lots of health challenges. And to be able to live, master life, and have joy in life, and have a sense of belonging to a place where you can come and be three days a week, two days a week, an hour a day. We don't demand anything more»

– Isabel, founder of the network



GROUP DISCUSSION: HOW CAN WE RETHINK CAREER AND GUIDANCE FROM A CO-AGENCY PERSPECTIVE?

Discuss in groups of 3–4 about the co-agency framework introduced and demonstrated.

How could you use the framework in your own work as a career adviser, practitioner or professional in your practice to promote career wellbeing for different social groups in the society?

Write your ideas down in the Task Cards (read QR code with your phone):



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Thank you!

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