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Relations of extraction, relations of redistribution: Empire, nation, and the construction of the British welfare state

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Abstract

The consolidation of the British welfare state in the mid-twentieth century did not only coincide with the systematic dismantling of the British Empire but was significantly shaped by the empire that preceded it. The story that tends to be told about the welfare state, however, situates it firmly within the national context. Such understandings go on to shape contemporary political debates centered on questions of entitlement and concerns over legitimacy. In this article, I reassess the standard accounts of taxation and welfare that are claimed to be central to the construction of the nation to demonstrate how taking the empire into account offers the possibility of a different political response to the challenges we are faced with today.

KEYWORDS

colonialism, empire, nation-state, taxation, war, welfare

1 | INTRODUCTION

The British state emerged through an Act of Union between the Kingdoms of England and Scotland in 1707. The long-standing personal union of the Kingdom of England with the Kingdom of Ireland was later formalized through the 1800 Anglo-Irish Act of Union following the brutal repression of the 1798 Irish rebellion. Whereas Ireland had been "a separate, albeit dependent, kingdom within a wider British composite state," it was now formally integrated into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (Walsh, 2013, p. 632). This also incorporated Ireland

into the broader project of British Empire in complex ways—"as an old adage about the empire implied: 'The Irish fought for it, the Scottish and Welsh ran it, but the English kept the profits'" (Cook, 1987, p. 509). Although, it is important to note that the English were not the sole beneficiaries.

The composite nature of the British state is part of the reason why a simple presentation of a *national* history is not possible; its national histories are several. Another reason is the broader colonial entanglements that come to constitute the British state. By the late eighteenth century—in the aftermath of the loss of the Thirteen Colonies of the US—the Home Office and Foreign Office were established as distinct administrative units within the British state. Responsibility for the remaining colonies was initially located within the Home Office; that is, under the remit of domestic, and not of foreign, affairs (Sainty, 1975). This continued for twenty years until a separate War and Colonial Office was established in the early nineteenth century, followed by the India Office in the mid-nineteenth century when the British state formally took over control of the subcontinent from the East India Company—although the East India Company had been turned into a colonial ministry as early as 1784 (Richards, 2006).

All this is to say that the territorial boundaries of the British state, as well as its organizational structure, have never been congruent with what many see as the imagined nation and, at times, the imaginary of the state has also extended to include territories beyond the island or islands. In a similar way, the populations that inhabit the variety of territories encompassed within the British state have been differentially included in understandings of national identity. It is not clear that many of the inhabitants of the islands were always regarded as British, but rather only came to be systematically included towards the end of the nineteenth century, just as the claim to that identity will be removed from others in the late twentieth. But, in this article, I am less interested in the identity of the state, or the identities of its inhabitants, than in the practices and structures that constitute it. My concern is with how we have come to a national framing of the state and its political community in the present, notwithstanding the wider relationships that have historically defined it (Bhambra, 2016).

In brief, my argument here is that the British state was an imperial state with a national project at its heart. The imperial state was constituted, in part, through "relations of extraction"—to use Daunton's (1996a) resonant phrase for taxation—while the national project comes into being through "relations of redistribution," or welfare. The asymmetry between these relations, I argue, calls into question the dominant conceptualizations within social science of issues of distributive justice and welfare; both historically and in the present.

2 | RELATIONS OF EXTRACTION

The "relations of extraction"—or taxation—that bind together rulers and ruled are central to the social contract deemed, from Locke onwards, to be at the heart of the modern state (see Bhambra & Holmwood, 2021). The idea that citizens and their property were to be protected and, in their turn, they provided financial support to the state to do so through taxes—and that the levels of both were to be determined through some form of deliberation, usually via a legislative assembly—has come to be commonplace. As the authors of a call for a new fiscal sociology set out: "Taxes formalize our obligations to each other. They define the inequalities we accept and those that we collectively seek to redress" (Martin et al., 2009, p. 1). Martin et al. (2009, p. 3) go on to argue that taxation is crucial in the development of the "imagined community" of the nation to the extent that it "enmeshes us in the web of generalized reciprocity."

A focus on taxation—and the distributed returns to citizens of that taxation—then, clarifies the nature of the state, its limits and its boundaries. While taxation was initially seen to be a significant factor in the state's ability to wage war, by the mid-twentieth century it became more extensively bound up with its execution of domestic issues of welfare. This can be seen in the shift from Charles Tilly's pithy statement that, in the early modern period "war made the state and the state made war" (1975, p. 42) to the claim by Titmuss (1958) that, by the mid-twentieth

century, we can see how modern war had had a profound influence on social policy as demonstrated by the emergence of the welfare state (see also Mann, 2012). What is at issue is what sort of state was made by imperial wars and whose welfare did those wars secure.

Income tax had first been raised in Britain in 1798 to cover the costs of its wars with revolutionary France. After the end of these wars in 1815, however, it was discontinued as a consequence of strong public opposition to it. Income tax was not reintroduced in Britain until the mid-nineteenth century. First, as a temporary measure by Peel in 1842, before coming to be an established part of the social contract of the state through Gladstone's reforms in 1853. These also brought Ireland into the income tax regime following the earlier Act of Union that established the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. During this period, and through to the end of the nineteenth century, the "fiscal constitution" of the state—with its emphasis on a judicious balance of taxes and taxpayer consent—has been regarded as being remarkably successful by historians of British taxation (Kanter, 2012).

One such, Martin Daunton for example, argues that the tax system was designed "to be carefully balanced to ensure proportionality … to be a means of integration and not conflict" (1996b, p. 173); as such, "no group or interest felt it was unduly burdened" by taxation (1996a, p. 885). In this way, the British state is seen to have established a high level of trust in the central state and fellow taxpayers. But, as Douglas Kanter argues, one of the problems with this narrative is that the UK was not just "British," but also included Ireland and "Irish fiscal policy fits uneasily into this account" (2012, p. 1123). At the very outset of reintroducing income tax into the British state, Peel omitted Ireland from any obligation to pay due to a concern with exacerbating opposition to the Act of Union. However, when the famine occurred in 1845, there was then resistance to the provision of relief by central government due to the Irish being deemed to have not paid their share of taxation.

The grants that were provided for famine relief were converted to loans, which accrued interest, increasing "the total sum owed by some 75%" (Kanter, 2012, p. 1139). Later negotiations around the partial remission of these consolidated annuities turned on the requirement to bring Ireland into the income tax regime. There was a belief among many in Ireland that not only should famine relief have been a moral responsibility of the central government, but that the new regime of taxation would generate a surplus that would be used to reduce taxes in the rest of Britain; that is, as Kanter (2012, p. 1151) argues, that the poorer periphery would subsidize tax breaks at the wealthier center.

The consensus on taxation that Daunton otherwise represents as a feature of the British state, then, did not exist in Ireland where the debate on fiscal policy—in particular arguments about over-taxation—remained a strong feature in movements for Home Rule from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Such debates find their parallel, Kanter (2012) suggests, within the wider empire, where arguments about economic justice intersect with those of social entitlement in movements of colonial opposition. This was particularly the case in India, as Bayly (2000), among others, has also suggested.

One of the key expenses of the state, for which income tax was initially raised, was war. However, over the nineteenth century, the military costs of the British state were largely exported to the wider empire and specifically to India. As Bayly notes, both through indirect means of "tribute" as well as "directly through the overseas use of the Indian Army," the company-state sustained the domestic military-fiscal machine (1994, p. 15). The Indian peasant, he goes on to argue, "bore a heavy part of the costs of Britain's world role which the British people were not prepared to bear" (1994, p. 16). The standard idea of the "nation-at-arms," then, should actually be understood as the empire-at-arms as both personnel for the army and the costs of war through colonial taxation were increasingly borne by the wider empire. This reduced the claims of the British state on the national economy to below the levels of the eighteenth century and eased the burdens of domestic taxation. It also removed any requirement for national military conscription and allowed "the domestic state to disarm and 'civilianize' itself" (Bayly, 1994, p. 18).

One consequence of this was that that while continental Europe was convulsed in revolutions in 1848, Britain, in contrast, saw the demise of equivalent struggles, such as Chartism. One explanation for this, as Daunton suggests, is that the rhetoric of equity and the generally low levels of domestic taxation "meant that the working class was assimilated to the state rather than viewing it as coercive or exploitative" (1996a, p. 885). Similarly,

Miles Taylor argues that "by displacing the tax burden from metropole to periphery" and generally facilitating an improvement in living conditions, working-class discontent in Britain during this period was eased (2000, p. 158). However, while there was no fiscal revolt in Britain, Taylor notes that there was an eruption of serious discontent across the empire: with riots and rebellions in "Ceylon, the Ionian Islands and the Orange River" together with fiscal crises across the wider empire, including in the Caribbean (2000, p. 152). A major uprising was temporarily averted in the Punjab, but not stayed. The subsequent events of 1857 were precipitated by factors that had mitigated against such disturbances domestically—primarily a sense of an unfair burden of taxation.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, within Britain, there was a single rate of income tax imposed upon the domestic population. Those earning below £160—which was four times the national average wage of around £40 in 1900—received a full abatement and did not pay any income tax. Those earning up to £400 "were granted an abatement of £160, which fell to £70 on incomes between £600 and £700" (Daunton, 1996b, p. 176). In 1909, a super-tax was introduced on large incomes, over £5,000—the salary of a high court judge or the Chancellor of the Exchequer—and "a tax-free allowance of £10 was introduced for children under 16" (Daunton, 1996b, pp. 176–177). The abatements together with the tax-free allowances for children meant that the working class and much of the middle class did not pay any income tax at all until the First World War.

Considerations around the proper balance of taxation operated somewhat differently in the empire. The East India Company, after the defeat of the local rulers at the Battle of Plassey in 1757, had, in 1765, obtained the right to collect taxes in the Provinces of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. The Company initially maintained the structures of the existing taxation regime, with land revenue forming the bulk of its taxation income, but this was diversified over time to include new taxes such as the salt tax and the opium tax (Richards, 2006). An income tax was explicitly implemented after the British Crown took over direct rule a century later.

The Indian Income Tax of 1860 was closely modelled on the British version; except, as the Governor of Madras, Charles Trevelyan noted, while the financial system was transplanted to India, "a basic requirement of that system, representation of taxpayers, was wanting" (Bhattacharya, 2005, p. 52). There was an exemption for those earning less than Rs. 200 a year, but there was no system of abatement such that tax was paid on the whole income once it reached the taxable minimum. There was also no allowance for children. The average income at the time was around Rs. 20–27 which meant that the exemption limit was at eight to ten times the national average. The exemption limit was raised to Rs. 1,000 by 1903, which at the time, was over twenty times the average income of Rs. 45. This led to some within Britain arguing that India was lightly taxed. However, by examining the revenue raised in taxation as a proportion of national income, Naoroji (1901) demonstrated clearly that India bore the heavier burden. Further, if land revenue was considered as a form of taxation rather than rent, which many argued that it should be, then the recognized tax burden would have significantly increased.

There were a series of full exemptions from income tax. However, these all fell "on the side of government servants, pensioners, … foreign shipping concerns, tea agents, and the holders of sterling debt rather than in favour of the general taxpayers" (Pagar, 2012 [1920], p. 98). Further, as Pagar (2012 [1920], p. 187) sets out, no tax was deducted from the salaries of employees of the India Office in London despite those salaries being paid out of Indian revenues—this included the Secretary of State for India whose £5,000 salary would have put him amongst the highest earners in the entire empire. While there is much to discuss about the forms and rates of taxation, the central issue for my purposes here is the following, paraphrased from Naoroji: not only was India more heavily taxed than Britain, but there was another additional circumstance; the whole of British taxation returned entirely to the people themselves from whom it was raised, but that which was obtained out of India did not all return to them (1901, p. 314).

As George Wingate wrote in 1859 and whom Naoroji quotes: "Taxes spent in the country from which they are raised, are totally different in their effect from taxes raised in one country and spent in another. In the former case, the taxes collected from the population at large … are again returned to the industrious classes. … But the case is wholly different when the taxes are not spent in the country from which they are raised. In this case, they constitute no mere transfer of a portion of the national income from one set of citizens to another, but an absolute

loss and extinction of the whole amount withdrawn from the taxed country" (1859, pp. 57–58). To put it in anachronistic, Keynesian, terms, the "multiplier" has its effects elsewhere while the extraction depresses activity locally.

What we see through this discussion is (a) that Britain established domestic legitimacy and quiescence through imperial revenue; and (b) that that imperial revenue included the taxes extracted from a colonized population. In the following section, I go on to discuss the "relations of redistribution" more explicitly in terms of their construction as welfare and examine the extent to which "the web of generalized reciprocity" applied to all those under British rule.

3 | RELATIONS OF REDISTRIBUTION

Scholars of distributive justice, such as Walzer (1983), argue that redistribution presupposes a bounded world. Collective solidarity relies on an understanding of "us," as insiders, as opposed to "them," as strangers. Such a demarcation determines who ought to be seen as the legitimate beneficiary of the distribution of collective goods and social entitlements. This is a widespread and commonplace understanding of welfare systems which are understood to pool and redistribute wealth raised through taxation for the benefit of the members of the political community. While the necessity of boundaries to the possibility of just distribution is regarded as self-evident, what is rarely considered is where the resources that are to be redistributed come from. Further, and relatedly, there is little discussion of what the entitlements are of those broader constituencies who have contributed to the building up of those collective resources, but who are under the rule of the political community without being seen to be part of it.

The community constituted through the relations of political extraction is much more extensive than that which comes into being through the relations of redistribution. This raises the further question of how legitimacy comes to be established for using the resources extracted from the imperial community and redistributing them solely to the national community. The provision of welfare in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example, occurred through a "mixed moral economy" of limited state interventions supplemented by the work of voluntary organizations, friendly societies, and private charitable activity (Johnson, 1996). The low burden of domestic taxation, made possible through the imperial relations of extraction, meant that, until the twentieth century, the state had less involvement in the direct provision of national welfare. For example, as Thane (1996) notes, at the end of the nineteenth century it is estimated that more money was transferred to the poor through charities in London alone than was expended nationally via the Poor Laws.

While much is written about how charities were organized, who benefitted from them, and the relations of deference they created, there is remarkably little systematic work on where the money that was disbursed through philanthropic initiatives came from. There is a separate literature on the extent of money brought back to Britain from empire, but the connections between the two are rarely made. The salaries paid to those working for the East India Company, for example, were exceedingly high and regardless of rank all employees received an annual pension of £1,000 so long as they had completed between 25 and 35 years of service. In addition, there were various allowances—not to mention the private investments, or loot as William Dalrymple has called it—which meant that they were able to retire well on their return to Britain. As an example from Margot Finn and Kate Smith's edited volume on the *East India Company at Home*, David Williams writes: "John [Melvill] spent the whole of his working life as a civil servant and judge in India before retiring back to England in 1813 with sufficient funds to purchase an 8,200-acre estate in Sussex" (2018, p. 390).

The "Nabobs," as returning East India Company employees were known, were recognized as part of Britain's growing philanthropic community. As Tillman Nechtman notes, for example, "[n]ewspaper subscriptions show that Company employees were substantial donors to charities" (2007, p. 76); but scholarship on the relationship between charity and welfare rarely acknowledges this association with imperial wealth. An exception to this is a recent chapter by Andrew Mackillop which make a more substantial connection between the circulation of imperial

wealth and charitable initiatives within early modern Scotland. Mackillop sets out how wealth made in the empire was deployed to secure status back at home through charitable activities such as contributing to the poor relief of a parish, funding hospitals and infirmaries, and donating to institutions of learning. To give one example that highlights the extent of the money being disbursed, Mackillop writes: The Bombay opium, textiles, and shipping entrepreneur John Forbes donated £10,000 for the construction of Aberdeen's new asylum in 1819. This made up 76% of its entire costs (and would be close to £1 million in today's money) (Mackillop, in press). Further, he also shows how an imagined community of belonging was often mobilized to elicit charitable donations from members across empire for national welfare projects.

The situation was somewhat different in terms of charitable initiatives in relation to issues of colonial welfare. As Andrea Major argues, "British philanthropic interest in the subcontinent tended to be more concerned with its moral rather than its material condition" (2020, p. 230). This was despite the fact that across the period of British rule—from the East India Company onwards—India faced a series of devastating famines and periods of food scarcity. One of the most intense periods of famine and scarcity was from 1860 to 1910—coinciding with the implementation of the income tax in India. During this period, it is estimated that over 14 million people died of starvation; they died in the context of grain being exported by rail from the famine regions and taxes continuing to be collected even in the worst affected areas.

While environmental factors, such as the failure of the monsoon, contributed to food shortages in specific areas, these shortages were never absolute. As Ajit Ghose argues, in the latter half of the nineteenth century India was a food-surplus country; the issue was that "[e]xports of foodgrains were taking place even in years when thousands, or perhaps millions, were dying of starvation" (1982, p. 378). The maintenance of exports was a consequence of what were presented as colonial laissez-faire policies which prevented officials from interfering in the natural operation of free trade. These policies did not, however, prevent them from collecting tax from an impoverished population; tax in such circumstances was coercive and in breach of the voluntarism otherwise inscribed in the idea of laissez-faire. Famines were products of colonial public policy.

Decisions on famine policy, as Kate Currie notes, reflected broader policy struggles "over the efficacy or otherwise of state intervention … within the spheres of the market and taxation" (1991, pp. 26–27). Deliberations by British civil servants in India tended to go along the following lines: around 80% of the people dying from starvation come from the laboring classes and do not earn sufficient to pay taxes; to keep them alive through famine relief would stretch the wage funds of the tax-paying population and lead to a further increase in the population at the lowest levels; this would put further pressure on the food supply and lead to further famines; such a course of action would demoralize the population and increased debt together with taxation would be more fatal to the country than famine itself (Ambirajan, 1976). Public finance trumped public health in such considerations; especially as any measures to avert deaths in the colony would have had an impact on imperial finances and the preferred activities that this income was to support—that is, celebrations in India to proclaim Victoria Empress of India and preparations for the war with Afghanistan funded by Indian taxes (Davis, 2002).

Discussions about whether Indian subjects were entitled to any relief from the government occurred in the context of earlier arguments about the Poor Laws in Britain and Ireland. Apparently, the encouragement of idleness in the local population, as a consequence of providing any material relief in times of food shortages, had to be avoided as a priority. In addition, there were increasing discussions about over-population and famines were regarded as one way in which such concerns could be addressed. Perhaps more pertinently, the case against famine relief was made in the fear that if the arguments for such relief at such times were accepted, then that would lead to arguments for the permanent maintenance of the Indian poor, that is for their inclusion within the generalized web of reciprocity. The 1880 Famine Commission, for example, set out the following: "The doctrine that in time of famine the poor are entitled to demand relief … would probably lead to the doctrine that they are entitled to such relief at all times, and thus the foundation would be laid of a system of general poor relief, which we cannot contemplate without serious apprehension…." (quoted in Davis, 2002, p. 33).

This was at a time when general poor relief was provided as a legal right to the destitute poor in Britain—whether deserving or undeserving (Shilliam, 2018). While provisions made through the Poor Laws were not regarded as particularly generous, they were deemed, as Boyer argues, to be "enough to ensure that unemployed workers and their families could subsist in good health" (2004, p. 432). Further, Lorie Charlesworth (2010) argues that had Poor Law entitlements in England and Wales not been protected as legal rights, then the level of relief would have been as little as it had been in Ireland in the 1840s. During the Irish famine, she argues, the British Government and its Irish administration were permitted, as a consequence of the limited poor law structures introduced into Ireland, "to legally abdicate responsibility for preventing deaths by starvation" (2010, p. 179). Mike Davis similarly draws the links between Ireland and India stating that in both contexts, they were turned into laboratories for utilitarianism, "where millions of lives were wagered against dogmatic faith in omnipotent markets" (2002, p. 31).

As such, not only was there not a general commitment to the alleviation of poverty in India, but even calls for the mitigation of the worst effects of famine were denied as they could potentially lead to calls for a more general entitlement. One of the few dissenting voices in such discussions by British officials in India was that of James Caird who "drew attention to the fact that India spent on famine relief less than two per cent of what Britain spent annually in relieving the poor" at home (Ambirajan, 1976, p. 11). As a final note, a Famine Fund was started after the 1880 Famine Commission had recommended that extra taxation should be imposed on the Indian population for the purpose of raising money that could then be stored up for the specific purpose of providing for future famines. This Fund was maintained at around £1 million annually, but when there was need to call on it in relation to a future famine, the money was found not to be available, having been expended on the Afghan War among other non-famine related activities (Davis, 2002).

The relations of extraction—both political and economic—explicitly bound India into the British polity and were implicated in its general conditions of immiseration. There was little acceptance, however, that these relations generated "a web of reciprocity" in terms of equivalent relations of redistribution. Indeed, actions were taken specifically to limit any reciprocity arising motivated out of private philanthropy or individual charitable concern. Classical liberal theory may have enunciated a principle of voluntarism applied to the recognition of the distress of others and eschewed what it regarded as compulsion in the provision of relief. However, in the case of the recognition of the distress suffered by subjects of empire, voluntarism was strongly dissuaded under accusations that it would undermine the Government of India (Currie, 1991). The hypocrisy of the Government's attitude under such privation brought forth a stinging satire by William Digby (1878) that it was as if it had passed an Act criminalising voluntarism. [1] The issues of asymmetry were to become even starker across the twentieth century highlighting further what King (1999) calls the illiberalism of the liberal state.

4 | IMPERIAL REVENUE AND NATIONAL WELFARE

The balance that Daunton argued had been so central to the deliberations and domestic activities of the British state in the nineteenth century came to be significantly disrupted by the wars of the subsequent one. The burden of taxation increased during the period of the First World War as "the heavy interest payments to holders of the national debt came into conflict with demands for increased expenditure on education, health and housing" (Daunton, 1996a, p. 884). Military conscription was brought in in 1916 and the level of income-tax exemption was cut from £160 to £130 which drew many more people into the payment of income tax. Within a couple of years, however, the number of taxpayers was reduced again "by raising the tax-free allowance for children and extending it to wives" (1996a, p. 889). It was with an eye to this particular history of balance that, in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, there were a number of debates among welfare economists about the feasibility of setting up a system of national welfare to be funded through taxation.

One such was Bowley (1919), who sought to ascertain the amount of money that could be taken from the rich and added to the wages of the poor such that it would both alleviate poverty and not be an undue burden on the rich. In making his calculations, Bowley determined the national income, which was made up of the total income of people within the United Kingdom as well as income received from abroad, deducted the amount that would be necessary for running the government and then divided the remainder by the population of the UK. The national dividend, then, that was to provide the economic basis for welfare provision was, as Pigou writes, "the objective income of the community, including, *of course, income derived from abroad*" (1929, p. 31, my emphasis). The national dividend was explicitly an imperial dividend distributed nationally.

As Temple (1884) had noted in his earlier presentation of the "General Statistics of the British Empire," of the £203 million at the disposal of the British state for general government £89 million came from the UK, £74 million from India, and £40 million from territories and colonies in the rest of empire. Over half the money at the disposal of the government at Westminster came from the labor, resources, and taxes of those within empire and beyond the national state. The taxes and resources of colonized subjects were taken into account when making calculations about the feasibility of national welfare provision in the metropole (i.e., in terms of calculating the size of the national fund) without ever taking them—colonized subjects—into account as the recipients of the distribution of that fund; not even in the most extreme cases of famine and starvation.

It goes without saying that these resources were then also used to fund such schemes as they came into being in the twentieth century, just as they had been used to fund the infrastructure of the state over the previous two centuries. Indeed, no less a figure than Winston Churchill, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, stated the following: "The income which we derive each year from commission and services rendered to foreign countries is over £65 million. In addition, we have a steady revenue from foreign investments of close on £300 million a year … That is the explanation of the source from which we are able to defray social services at a level incomparably higher than that of any European country … These resources from overseas constitute the keystone … of our economic position" (April 15, 1929).

This statement was in response to an interjection by Ellen Wilkinson MP in the House of Commons claiming that the post-war sacrifices that Churchill was calling to be made were "class sacrifices, not national sacrifices." As Churchill sets out, while there were disparities among the classes in Britain, all classes benefitted from overseas resources, especially as these were used to defray the costs of social services. Radical arguments about class were countered by conservative claims about the nation, but each was belied by the colonies and empire—and their "classes"—that underlay both claims. This common erasure comes to be central to the development of politics oriented to the welfare state (Noble, 2015).

It was the shared experience of "total war," that, according to Asa Briggs among others, "forced politicians to consider the 'community' as a whole" and to deploy communal resources "to abate poverty and to assist those in distress" (1961, p. 226, 228). Warfare and welfare, then, were conjoined in bringing together the idea of citizens as a nation. This was reinforced through the processes by way of which material resources "were distributed and redistributed within national boundaries" (Mann, 2012, p. 463). As such, the national frame can be regarded as explicitly coming into being in terms of determining the population to whom recompense was to be made in the aftermath of two devastating wars in the context of a growing national electorate able to lobby for such demands.

However, not only were the wars fought by the British Empire, and not simply the British nation, but they were also significantly funded by that wider population through increased taxation. The "small wars" of empire across the nineteenth century had been almost entirely fought and funded by India, as mentioned earlier; and Indian troops were also used in the Crimean War and African soldiers in the Boer War. During the First World War, over one million Indian soldiers served overseas and over two million fought for the Allies in the Second World War, where India's contribution "roughly equalled that of South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, and other Commonwealth territories put together" (Singh, 1982, p. 569).

In addition, as Anita Singh sets out, India was "a financial reservoir for imperial defence" (1982, p. 569). During both wars, the Home Charges that India paid to Britain for colonial rule were dramatically increased as was expenditure on the military. After the First World War, India provided a coerced gift to Britain of £100 million to aid

the war effort and Britain's debt to India of £55 million was unilaterally erased through currency manipulation. During the Second World War, alongside the increase in military expenditure attributed to the Indian budget, India further supported the British war effort through a series of "forced loans" that provided goods and services to the British in return for "I.O.U.s," that is, sterling balances. As Aditya Mukherjee states, the rapid expansion of the currency—together with the fact that nothing returned to India for the goods and services provided—"led to severe shortages and runaway inflation" in India (1990, p. 231).

In earlier discussions about how the war was to be funded, Keynes had argued that one option was to let prices rise more than real wages. This would redistribute incomes away from wages to profits, which could then be taxed in order to pay for the war. Such a scheme, however, would disproportionately hurt the poorest classes and in order to ensure domestic working class support it was disregarded in favor of a system of graded taxation (Patnaik, 2017, pp. 206–207). However, the scheme which was regarded as too regressive for implementation in Britain was, as Utsa Patnaik argues, implemented in India upon "a colonised population with one-thirtieth of the per head income" and which, in 1943, led to the deaths of over 3 million civilians in the Bengal famine (2017, p. 208). This was a consequence of public policy decisions made in Britain which again valued national lives differently from the lives of those in the colonies.

Britain, in contrast, was able to contain inflationary pressures at home and was also able to develop and implement welfare policies. Policies, which, as Noel Whiteside argues, had as their objective "to protect the whole population—but particularly the working population—from the consequences of the conflict" (1996, p. 87). Specifically, there was a concern to redistribute national income through cost-of-living subsidies as well as providing other social services. How this was to be paid for, however, was a real issue given that in the immediate post-war period "the Labour government faced enormous economic difficulties" including a "lack of raw materials, productive capacity and financial resources" (Whiteside, 1996, p. 86). The balance of payments crisis, of 1947–1948, further exacerbated these issues.

Britain emerged from the Second World War owing more than £3 billion to her creditors while also being committed to the construction of the welfare state (Newton, 1984). How this was to be managed was how Britain had always managed its domestic responsibilities—by turning to the empire. The two primary ways in which Britain did this was: first, it ran down the amount it owed to India and Pakistan after independence; and second, it subordinated the economies of its remaining colonies to its national concerns. In other words, the imperial dividend continued after the end of empire and was integral to the construction of the post-war welfare state.

By the end of 1945, Britain owed India £1.3 billion, "a third of the total built up by Britain … [and] almost one-fifth of Britain's net receipts from the United States under Lend-Lease" (Balasubramanian & Raghavan, 2018, p. 82). From the outset, British officials sought to write down the balances owed, given that they could not unilaterally write them off, even though this had initially been attempted (and had actually been done after the First World War). de Paiva Abreu (2017) sets out the many ways by which Britain managed what was called "concealed cancellation": the lower rates of interests on the loans obtained by Britain from India, higher pension charges including liability for all pensions of civil and military personnel working in India prior to independence, and perhaps most importantly, the devaluation of sterling in 1949, which occurred without a gold clause such as that which had protected creditors like Argentina and Brazil. Officially, there was a cancellation of around a third of outstanding Indian balances, although this figure is considered a serious underestimation all things considered (Balasubramanian & Raghavan, 2018).

In addition to cancelling a significant amount of its debt to India, Allister Hinds (1999) argues that Britain also harnessed colonial resources from its remaining empire and aligned colonial fiscal and monetary policy to the needs of its own national economy. As he sets out, "Malaya was the most valuable of Britain's dollar earning colonies"—with its exports of rubber and tin—closely followed by the Gold Coast, to become Ghana, and Nigeria (1999, p. 107). The dollars earned by these countries, through sale of their raw products, were put into a "dollar pool" controlled by Britain. The dollar earning capacity of the colonies that remained under Britain's control was central to Britain's domestic recovery. In this way, as David Fieldhouse argues, British colonies were made to tie up funds that they might have otherwise used for their own development "in order to give Britain cheap credit" and "to subsidize Britain's post-war standard of living" (1984, p. 96).

While the British government maintained a "benevolent rhetoric of economic development" toward its remaining colonies, the reality, as Fieldhouse argues, was rather one of "economic exploitation" (1984, p. 95). From 1946 to 1951, for example, "the colonies were lent or given some £40 million" through the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts and, at the same time, were required "to lend or tie up in London about £250 million" (1984, p. 98). The colonies were thus used "to protect the British consumer from the high social price which continental countries were then paying for their post-war reconstruction" and were unable to use their own funds to pay for development at home (Fieldhouse, 1984, p. 99). Britain's policies were condemned by a variety of figures and the Nigerian newspaper, the *West African Pilot*, ran an editorial stating: "Colonial socialism is aimed at developing the resources to expand the production of foodstuffs and raw materials which Britain needs badly to carry out her socialism at home" (quoted in Hinds, 1987, p. 160). As such, the health of the sterling area in the post-war period can be seen to have been "central to the [possibility of] success of the Government's domestic programme" (Newton, 1984, p. 392).

The development of the British welfare state in the post-war period, then, depended on the writing down of the debt that Britain owed to newly independent India and Pakistan, appropriating the dollar-earnings of its remaining colonies, and subordinating the economic development requirements of those colonies to its own needs. The economic health of the British state relied on these relations of economic and political subordination and yet there is almost no discussion of them in the literature discussing the emergence of the domestic welfare state.

5 | CONCLUSION

As John Hills argued, in an altogether different context but useful for my purposes here: "the redistributive effect of the welfare state cannot be judged just by looking at who benefits from it … One also has to look at who pays for it through the tax system and in other ways" (1995, p. 33). Once we consider the state to have been an imperial state and not just a national state, we come to understand the deeper inequalities that the welfare state represents that we have not yet systematically thought about let alone come to terms with how we might provide reparation. The relations of extraction of the British state constituted it as an imperial state; its relations of redistribution exemplified the national project at its heart. The asymmetry here is reproduced within mainstream social science every time the nation-state is taken as the unit of analysis and not the wider empire, or imperial state. The injustice embodied in that asymmetry is central to arguments about the legitimacy of the white working class and is reproduced in discourses and practices that privilege national citizens over others.

The historical provenance of the material resources available to be redistributed was broader than the nation; it was imperial. Yet, the imperial community is neither acknowledged in terms of the contributions it has made to the resources appropriated by the state, nor is it regarded as a legitimate beneficiary of the distribution of those collective resources. There were both direct and indirect benefits to the domestic population of taxation within the wider empire. The direct benefits resulted from the simple accrual of additional wealth and resources for domestic purposes, including the reduction in the domestic tax burden of the national population and increased social services available to them. The indirect benefits involved the compounded loss suffered by the colonized populations and the global patterns of inequality that continue through to the present (Bhambra, 2021). The end of empire did not bring an end to the legacies of its social structures, including their modes of legitimation.

My call here is for a better social science, located in a more adequate understanding of the shared histories that have configured our present, in order to find more expansive and generous solutions to the problems that face us. That "us" must be inclusive of those currently presented as "other" and outside the webs of reciprocity in which obligations are recognized—both historically and contemporaneously. The imperial relations of extraction maintained the standard of living of the national population at the expense not only of the livelihoods of colonial subjects, but often their very lives. The recurrence of famine throughout the period of British rule was a consequence of colonial policies of extraction for which there was no mitigation and no consideration that there ought

to be any mitigation through systematic welfare provision to these taxpayers. While it may have been the metropolitan bourgeoise that explicitly exploited colonized populations, as Aditya Mukherjee argues, "metropolitan society as a whole benefit[ed] at the cost of the entire colonial people" (2010, p. 76).

There is an urgent need for us to reconsider the broader, shared histories of the polity undivided as central to the future possibilities of the welfare state. This will involve a reconfiguration of our disciplines, what I have elsewhere called epistemological justice, as well justice through material reparations.

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ENDNOTE

[1] William Digby (1878) provides a text of a draft of an 1877 Act against Humanitarian Practice – sometimes also called The Anti-Charitable Contributions Act – offered as published in the *Government Gazette*. It is a satire equivalent to Swift's earlier 'A Modest Proposal' on British policy in Ireland.

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COMMENTARY

WILEY

Decolonization and the spectre of the nation-state

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Gurminder Bhambra's Annual British Journal of Sociology Lecture ends with a call 'for a better social science'. Such a science would be 'located in a more adequate understanding of the shared histories that have configured our present, to find more expansive and generous solutions to the problems that face us.' (Bhambra, 2021, p. 15) Bhambra practices what she preaches. Argued with remarkable clarity, her talk delivers both compelling theoretical claims and much corroborating empirical evidence. As such, the talk is highly original and leaves no doubt as to the great amount of work and meticulous historical research that have gone into it.

But Bhambra's intervention does so much more than live up to its call for a better social science. Upon a careful reading, I will argue, the implication of her arguments should rather be seen as nothing less than a call for a paradigm shift in how the social sciences approach the nation-state, both historically and in our own times. That is to say, perceiving of Britain historically as a nation-state *or* as an imperial state will make all the difference; and, as Bhambra argues, it is precisely the failure to grasp the imperial fact that prevents us from grasping 'the shared histories that have configured our present'.

Below I will reflect on the crucial imperial fact outlined by Bhambra and apply its radical consequences for our approach to the broader Western European scene and the world at large in the postwar period. If Britain was not a nation-state, neither were most Western European states. Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain all held colonial possessions in the postwar period. Italy was eager to regain its colonial foothold in Africa and was given the trusteeship of Somaliland (its former colony) by the UN in 1950, and it also sought the trusteeship over Libya's Tipolitania region. This is enough to shed light on the fact that the world in the postwar period was not national but rather imperial or colonial. Adding the ambitions of the two superpowers clarify the picture further. Hence, there was no general nation-state system in place, and the creation of the United Nations in 1945 had little intention of changing that fact. As Mazower (2009, p. 23) has shown, '[t]he UN's later embrace of anti-colonialism has tended to obscure the awkward fact that like the League [of Nations] it was a product of

empire and indeed, at least at the outset, regarded by those with colonies to keep as a more than adequate mechanism for its defence'.

What I will argue, then, is that our contemporary nation-state system is not the invention of Westphalia and European objectives, but rather the product of decolonization and thus a reaction and alternative to the European designs for the modern world order, in general, and the postwar order, in particular. Delhi in 1947, Dien Bien Phu in 1954, Accra in 1957 or Algiers in 1962 are, thus, more accurate symbols of the birth of the nation state system than our current fictions around the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Asians and Africans pioneered the nation-state system that most people—formally speaking—live in today. And since the Europeans opposed such a system, its implementation was often a very bloody affair, as seen in the numerous wars and crimes against humanity that colonial powers waged in the postwar period—all for the purpose of preventing the advent of the nation-state system and preserving the colonial system.

In relation to this, I will also argue that Bhambra's work helps establish a historically informed critique of methodological nationalism, as opposed to the many misconceptions perpetuated by our current theoretical consensus of what 'methodological nationalism' entails.

* * *

Bhambra opens her talk with the following statement:

> The consolidation of the British welfare state in the mid-twentieth century did not only coincide with the systematic dismantling of the British empire but was significantly shaped by it. However, the dominant narratives situate it firmly within a national context. This is as true of academic scholarship as it is of popular representations. For example, one need only think of Ken Loach's *The Spirit of 45*.[1]

Ken Loach's celebrated documentary about the sweeping social reforms ushered in by the Labour government in 1945 is a very good example indeed. As put by one voice in the film's official trailer: 'The older generation has got an absolute duty to come forward and join with young people and start talking about what was the vision in 1945.' But the Labour government that is remembered for its social reforms is the same Labour government that in 1945 was determined to consolidate the British empire. As the foreign secretary Ernest Bevin declared in the House of Commons in February 1946:

> When I say I am not prepared to sacrifice the British Empire what do I mean? I know that if the British Empire fell, the greatest collection of free nations would go into the limbo of the past, or it would be a disaster. I know, further, it would mean that the standard of life of our constituents would fall considerably.
>
> (quoted in Saville, 1993, p. 4)

The spirit and vision of 1945 was imperial; and as Bhambra shows, the building of the postwar welfare state on the British islands was partly premised on the continuation of colonial exploitation around the world. By the same token, the narrative about the national and social spirit of 45 is premised on being kept dissociated from the imperial spirit of 45.

There are countless similar examples of such necessary dissociations. Let me just point to a couple more, one from the French and the other from the EU context. Take the well-known images of the masses of people in Paris on 8 May 1945 (Victory in Europe Day), flocking the streets to celebrate the defeat of Nazi-Germany. For this VE day narrative to remain joyous and rosy, however, it needs be left divorced from the fact that 8 May 1945 also was

the day when the massacres in the Algerian cities of Gulam, Kherrata and Sétif began. Algerian pro-independence demonstrations on 8 May unleashed a wave of mass slaughter by the French army that left thousands dead. Hence, the spirit of liberation from the Nazi tyranny walked hand in hand with a determined and tyrannical effort of colonial reinforcement.

Five years later, almost to the day, on 9 May 1950, French foreign minister Robert Schuman presented what was to become known as the Schuman Declaration, or Schuman Plan, announcing the Franco–German initiative to jointly regulate extraction and production of coal and steel. The Schuman Plan gave birth to the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and subsequently to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957—today's European Union. Since 1985 the EU officially celebrates 9 May as 'Europe Day': 'on 9 May 1950, the foundation of the European Union as we know it was set out in an extraordinary declaration based on two core principles: peace and solidarity.' (European Council, 2020) But when Robert Schuman pleaded for 'World peace', which are the very first words of his Declaration, Schuman was also busy overseeing an extremely brutal colonial war in Indochina, killing as many as half a million Vietnamese. This is what needs to be erased for the EU to celebrate the spirit of the Schuman Declaration as a plea for 'World Peace'.

The Schuman Declaration is interesting also for what it explicitly includes. As stated in the two-page declaration: 'With increased resources Europe will be able to pursue the achievement of one of its essential tasks, namely, the development of the African continent.' (European Union, n.d.) Most likely the Declaration's Africa passage was prompted by René Mayer, then Minister of Justice, and Jean Monnet, both of them keen on having the African colonies incorporated into the European project. According to them, France could give Africa as a 'dowry to Europe' and as a way to 'seduce the Germans' (McKay, 1963, p. 139; Monnet, 1978, p. 300; Uri, 1991, p. 80).

* * *

In 1950, it was still unquestionably natural for European statesmen to deny sub-Saharan Africa any political agency whatsoever. Whether or not 'Africa' was an inherent part of the European project was not for the Africans to decide. The same approach applied to the individual states that colonized Africa. African independence was not on the agenda. From the British perspective, Africa was the place where 'a permanent line of British defence could and should be decisively drawn', the place 'where the British Empire might be maintained indefinitely' (Louis, 1984, pp. 108–109). This stood in sharp contrast to how Western Europe perceived of their empires in Asia, the Middle East and, to some extent, North Africa. Strong anti-colonial sentiments and independence movements had been brewing here since well before the war had ended with Japan's capitulation in August 1945. Numerous such movements had formed already in the wake of World War I and its 'Wilsonian moment' (Manela, 2007), which, at first, had seemed to elevate national self-determination to a universal principle and thus produced the impression 'that a window of opportunity had opened and thrust the issue of colonial liberation to the fore' (Manela, 2007, p. 220). Although this turned out to be a deceptive impression, it served to galvanize and radicalize anti-colonial movements vowing not to let the moment slip a second time once the window reopened in 1945.

Knowing full well what was in the offing, however, colonial powers were not ready to give in, but where equally engaged in preparing for the opposite development of stemming the tide of independence movements in Asia and the Middle East—and also in North Africa, as the massacres that began on VE day in Algeria make clear. Britain's initial imperial actions in 1945 and 1946 actually effectuated a significant expansion of European imperialism in Asia. Through military interventions in French Indochina (Vietnam) and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) in 1945, Britain helped pave the way for France's and the Netherlands' restoration of the colonial control that had been lost during the war (Bayly & Harper, 2007). The British decision rested with the firm belief that the rebuilding of the French and Dutch empires in Asia would be imperative for Britain's ability to hold on to its own Asian possessions. As Bhambra (2021, p. 13) points to in her talk, the lifeline of dollar earnings coming from Malaya's rubber and

tin production, for one, could simply not be lost at this critical hour (see e.g., Lawrence, 2007). 'The frontiers of Malaya', said Britain's ambassador to Thailand, 'are on the Mekong' (quoted in Lawrence, 2007, p. 122).

But as the 1950s wore on European powers soon lost the great majority of their colonial possessions in Asia and the Middle East. Europe's declining influence walked hand in hand with Asia's rapid transformation into a major theatre of the early Cold War, climaxing with the communist victory in China in 1949 and the Korean War shortly thereafter. At the same time, developments in the Middle East and Iran were moving in a similar direction, with colonial and Cold War struggles often inextricably intertwined. Given Africa's (with the crucial exception of Egypt and, to some degree, North Africa in general) relative distance from this nexus of Cold War and anti-colonial struggles, many Europeans thus believed that a reinforcement of Europe's African possessions would serve to prevent the push for decolonization in Asia from gaining a foothold on the African continent. In so doing, this would also keep the superpowers at arm's length from African affairs, thereby preventing the Cold War logic from infiltrating Africa.

Both Britain and France advocated such a development. Britain's strong-minded commitment to the revival of African colonialism was owed chiefly to the belief in the continent's magnificent economic potential. As such, and as emphasized by Bhambra (2021, p. 13), it presented Britain with a priceless opportunity to resolve its appalling financial situation, its overall economic decline and, not least, its embarrassing dependence on the U.S. (see also Butler, 2002, pp. 81–85). This manifested in Britain's unparalleled investment in its African colonies in the early postwar years; and as Britain's economic situation showed further signs of structural weakness after 1947, this precipitated, as Butler (2002, p. 82) puts it, 'a brief, but unprecedented fixation with drawing on colonial resources'. As the Chancellor of Exchequer, Stafford Cripps, spelled out before the African Governor's Conference in November 1947:

> The economies of Western Europe and Tropical Africa are so closely interlocked in mutual trade, in the supply of capital and in currency systems that their problems of overseas balance are essentially one. Tropical Africa is already contributing much, both in physical supplies of food and raw materials and in quite substantial net earnings of dollars from the sterling area pool. The further development of African resources is of the same crucial importance to the rehabilitation and strengthening of Western Europe as the restoration of European productive power is to the future progress and prosperity of Africa. Each needs and is needed by the other. In Africa indeed is to be found a great potential for new strength and vigour in the Western European economy and the stronger that economy becomes the better of course Africa will fare.
>
> (quoted in Kent, 1989, pp. 58–59)

Under the headline 'Cripps says colonies hold key to survival', The New York Times (1947a) underscored that Cripps' contention had 'been widely accepted by the country's top economists and business men'.

'Despite drastic changes in her position abroad', *The New York Times* (1947b) wrote in October 1947, 'Great Britain remains a powerful imperial nation.' To be sure, the report went on, India was lost, Palestine on its way and, while still strong, its ties to the Middle East and the Far East were certainly also showing signs of strain. In contrast to this development however, the *Times* could also confirm that 'Britain's interests in Africa—from Kenya, the Sudan and Nigeria right down to the Cape—are expanding.' Indeed, in 1947 Africa was taking the place of India 'as one of the ultimate justifications of the British Empire'. As Louis (1984, p. 109) puts it, much of it echoed the spirit of the late nineteenth century's scramble for Africa: '[T]he map of tropical Africa would be painted a new shade of British red from Mombasa to Lagos, with the vital centre in the Sudan. In the Sudan rail or air links could be provided, if the Egyptians were amenable, to Cairo and Cape Town.' In addition, Kenya (and possibly Tanganyika too) was seen by prime minister Clement Attlee, as he suggested in 1946, as the primary candidate for hosting a new main base for the protection of Britain's imperial interests, serving first as a backup to Egypt and ultimately as its replacement (Bullock, 1983, p. 243; *The New York Times*, 1946).

Africa's splendid economic prospects notwithstanding, Britain's initial enthusiasm could not rest with this alone. The presumed viability of the enterprise was also intimately bound up with an equally presumed temporal buffer. As already noted, then, Britain felt it could work under the assumption that its African plans had time on their side, given that the nationalist and communist currents materializing elsewhere in the Empire still were seen to be at a safe distance from tropical Africa. 'With regard to the African and his aspirations', it was asserted in *International Affairs* in 1948, 'rapid political evolution is not of much concern to him; nor is it his primary need.' Rather, what the African was said to be seeking, and what Britain should provide for, was 'nourishment for his body and his mind' (Kraft, 1948, p. 225). 'Africa', to use Gallagher's (1982, p. 146) depiction, 'would be the surrogate for India, more docile, more malleable, more pious.'

This is crucial, because the same temporal calculus was embraced by France and by many of those pushing for European integration in the 1940s and 50s. And whereas Britain's African enterprise would run out of steam as the 1950s wore on, France and what became the EEC would press on with the plans to tie the African colonies closely to the European enterprise. This plan went under the name Eurafrica and was successfully concluded with the EEC's decision, in the 1957 Rome Treaty, to absorb or associate France's and Belgium's African colonies. In fact, the African colonies and their enormous natural resources figured prominently on the agendas of practically all the postwar organizations and institutions of European integration (see further Hansen & Jonsson, 2014).

At the European Movement's grand Congress of Europe in The Hague in May 1948, for instance, it was agreed that '[t]he European Union must, of course, include in its orbit the extensions, dependencies and associated territories of the European Powers in Africa and elsewhere, and must preserve the existing constitutional ties which unite them.' (quoted in Hick, 1991a, pp. 335–336). One of the key actors at the Congress, the European Union of Federalists (EUF), maintained that 'Europe as an entity will be viable only if the links which unite it with countries and dependent territories scattered all over the globe are taken into account.' The EUF was also adamant that the Council of Europe, which was founded in 1949, should take a leading role in the development of the colonies in Africa, arguing that '[t]he era of national ownership of colonial territories is past. [...] From now onwards a common European policy of development for certain regions of Africa should be taken in hand, for the benefit of all the peoples concerned.' (quoted in Hick, 1991b, pp. 84–90)

Bhambra brings up the crucial importance of colonial exports for Britain's much needed dollar earnings after the Second World War. The dollar deficit was a huge and chronic problem shared by all Western European states in the postwar period, and organizations such as the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC/OECD) and the Council of Europe invested a lot of energy in trying to resolve it. The answer? Africa! Immediately after its establishment in 1948, the OEEC decided to form an Overseas Territories Working Group in order to promote European cooperation in colonial affairs, particularly in Africa. In its extensive report from 1951, focusing on investments in the colonial territories south of the Sahara, the OEEC (1951, p. 20) stated that '[i]t is in the interest of the whole free world that the [colonial] territories, which form part of it, should endeavour to speed up and increase the production of scarce materials.' Important too is that the report was completely void of indications that colonialism in Africa might someday come to an end; on the contrary planning for the African colonies was unreservedly described as 'a long-term task' in an African terrain characterized by 'political security' (OEEC, 1951, p. 72).

The Council of Europe's *Strasbourg Plan* also called for Western Europe's joint large-scale investments in the exploitation of the African colonies' vast yet largely untapped natural resources. In so doing Western Europe would be able to reduce its dependence on dollar imports of raw materials, which, in turn, would facilitate Western Europe's transition into 'a third economic group standing midway between the Communist and the dollar areas' (Council of Europe, 1952, p. 15). As explained by the French representative Raphaël Saller during the Council of Europe's Consultative Assembly debate on the *Strasbourg Plan*: '[N]o European Political Community can survive without the support and co-operation of overseas countries having constitutional links with Europe. This is an ever-present economic reality which Europe must perforce recognize if

she is not to be doomed to perish.' (Council of Europe, 1952, p. 16) Meanwhile, the UK representative Lord Layton argued that 'it is clear that we have to think of these overseas territories not as the possessions of any one country [...]; they have to be integrated with all the countries of Europe and all the overseas territories' (Council of Europe, 1952, p. 140). This chimed with practically all of the representatives. For instance, Denmark's Hermond Lannung emphasized 'the overriding importance of greater co-operation and of a major joint European effort in Africa if we do not wish to see Africa lost to European influence, culture, trade, etc. and, in the long run, for that influence to be replaced by that of another continent.' Europe had just lost the 'battle of Asia', Lannung asserted, and now its members needed to unite in order to not also lose 'the battle of Africa'. 'Here we have before us a great concrete and practical task which calls for the utmost collaboration of us all.' (Council of Europe, 1952, p. 154)

This outlook also permeated and enabled the EEC's colonial association regime that was agreed in the Rome Treaty in 1957. During the treaty negotiations, colonial matters were assigned to a special intergovernmental Ad-Hoc Overseas Territories Group. In December 1956 it presented a report that outlined the benefits of associating the French and Belgian African colonies:

> Economically speaking, the European member states of the common market have an essential need for the cooperation and support that the overseas territories—particularly the African ones—are able to offer in order to establish long-term balance of the European economy. The sources of raw material, variegated and abundant, which the overseas territories dispose of are likely to ensure for the entirety of the European economy of the common market the indispensable foundation for an expanding economy and present the additional advantage of being situated in countries whose orientation may be influenced by the European countries themselves. In addition to the mineral riches of all kinds and the agricultural and exotic products of the overseas countries, it is fair to mention as a concrete incentive, the results of very recent prospections in the petroliferous area carried out in connection with the systematic inventorying of the immense African reserves of metals, phosphates, hydraulic energy, etc.[2]

In a later section, the report compared this project to the Marshall Plan for Europe, insisting that the association of the overseas territories should be undertaken in a similar spirit. The report concluded as follows:

> The proposed enterprise entails consequences of major importance for the future of Europe. [...] In aiding Africa and supporting itself on her, the community of the six is able to furnish Europe with its equilibrium and a new youth. It is with this perspective that all other elements of information assembled in the present report should be understood.[2]

* * *

This brief and impressionistic overview of Western Europe's approach to colonialism up until the late 1950s serves to clarify why Bhambra's argument has general bearing, well-beyond the British context. That is to say, her approach needs to be adopted for all of Western Europe (and beyond), *including* those states in Western Europe that did not possess colonies or played a very minor role in postwar colonial relations.

As shown above, the various organizations for Western European unity, cooperation and integration are crucial to consider here since these included states without colonies but which, nevertheless, could be very eager to preserve and reap the benefits of colonialism by means of European cooperative frameworks. Take the case of West Germany. True, postwar West Germany did not have any colonies and was no empire. Yet, its governments under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer were warm friends of European colonialism and wanted to use the EEC to

strengthen and develop it for the benefit of West Germany and to bolster Europe's geopolitical and cultural stamina vis-à-vis both the Soviet and the Anglo-American blocs. A diehard champion of the Franco–British Suez campaign against Egypt in 1956, equating—as so many European statesmen did—Nasser with Hitler, Adenauer contended that Western Europeans, and especially the French and the Germans, had to stick together in support of the invasion (Schwartz, 1997, pp. 240–245). Suez, for Adenauer, thus proved his point of a united 'third force' Europe as the only antidote to what he saw as the US and Soviet policy of carving up the world between them (Granieri, 2003; Schwartz, 1997, p. 243). Adenauer also justified his moral support for France's intervention in Egypt with reference to France's unconditional right to keep Algeria and to protect it soldiers against rebels who, according to Paris, were supported by Nasser. 'Algeria', Adenauer asserted in November 1956, 'is not a French colony, but a province of France since 1830 with 1.5 million white French men and women.' (Schwartz, 1997, p. 190)

Not only did Adenauer believe in the 'superiority of Western civilization'; he was equally convinced of the inherent racial inferiority of Africans, and it was therefore inconceivable, as he phrased it, '"that Africa, as a black continent, could be independent alongside the other continents"' (quoted in Schwartz, 1997, p. 191) As Schwartz (1997, p. 238) notes, 'Adenauer spoke of the "appearance of non-white peoples on the political stage of world events"' and found it deeply disturbing since he thought it could have detrimental effects on the future constitution of the UN (Schwartz, 1997, pp. 254–255). Indeed, when U.S. president Eisenhower visited Achmad Sukarno's Indonesia—one of the Bandung movement's most prominent leaders—in May 1956, this 'sent shivers through Bonn'. Not only had Eisenhower's visit been friendly, but the president had also publicly accepted the non-alignment, or neutrality, of some of the newly independent countries—something that was anathema to Adenauer (Brady, 2010, p. 175). Adenauer's hostility towards the liquidation of colonialism would not let up. In early 1960 Adenauer informed his cabinet that he had received a note from de Gaulle during their most recent consultations that recounted the expected new members of the UN. Adenauer, Schwartz (1997, pp. 254–255) writes, 'read out: "Thirty black states, twenty Islamic states, eighteen Asian, non-Muslim nations, twelve Soviet states, eighteen Central and South American countries—ninety-eight in all." Compared with fifteen Western states. "These are the prospects for future world policies."'

* * *

1960 marked the end of colonialism in large parts of Africa. This was a surprise that European leaders just 2 to 3 years prior had not been able to anticipate. And Adenauer was certainly one of them. On 15 February 1957 Adenauer explained the great advantages of the EEC's colonial association regime to his cabinet. 'The Chancellor', the cabinet protocols relate, 'is of the opinion that in the long term, France offers much better economic prospects than Britain. France possesses a latent wealth, just think of the Sahara with its oil and uranium deposits. Equatorial Africa also constitutes a significant reserve. In comparison, Britain's development points to a substantial decline.' (Kabinettsprotokolle der Bundesregierung, 1957/2000, p. 144). Yet, only three years later the world had changed beyond all recognition. In June 1960, an article in the German daily *Die Welt* carried the anxious headline 'Läuft Afrika der EWG davon?' (Is Africa running away from the EEC?). The article asserted that at the time when the Treaty of Rome was drafted, 'the fact that Europe would be faced by independent states in Africa within only a few years could scarcely have been anticipated'. Such independence, the author warned, risked upsetting the EEC's entire edifice of African association. Lest a new EEC strategy towards Africa was promptly launched, the article concluded, the situation could soon prove 'dangerous for Europe and hence for the West in its entirety' (Himpele, 1960).

Die Welt was certainly right in its judgement that the Treaty of Rome was negotiated under the assumption that colonialism in Africa would continue for the foreseeable future. As put by Columbia economist and UN and US government consultant in 1961, Emile Benoit, 'the assumption of the Rome Treaty that the overseas associated areas were chiefly to comprise dependent territories is no longer valid.' To this he added:

> The Community is aware that the rapid pace of change in Africa is undermining some of the assumptions upon which its original program for association between the EEC and the African countries was based. It is also aware of the enormity of the stakes involved, and it is striving to reconstruct its program in line with emerging requirements. […] If it succeeds, its historic role will far transcend its accomplishments in Europe alone.
>
> (Benoit, 1961, pp. 58–59)

In 1962, the Secretary of the Council of Europe's Economic Committee, Kitzinger (1962, p. 98), commented on the Rome Treaty's colonial association provisions, saying: 'They were based on a largely static conception of the political relations between the African countries and the metropolitan Member States. In the past three years that relationship has evolved beyond all expectations.' Writing a few years later, Carol Ann Cosgrove (1969, p. 77) also stressed this crucial point: 'The treaty was drafted at a time when rapid decolonization was discounted by the European metropoles, with the result that no reference was made to the possible attainment of sovereign independence by the associate except in the case of Somaliland.'

The dismal outlook on the EEC–Africa relations expressed by *Die Welt* in 1960 thus starkly contrasted with the Eurafrican and colonial buoyancy at the time for the Treaty of Rome's signing only three years prior. Indeed, if *Die Welt* agonized over the prospect of 'Africa running away from the EEC' on 2 June 1960, on 26 March 1957—the day after the Rome Treaty's signing ceremony—*The New York Times* (1957a) took note of Europe's latest move in its run—or should we say *Drang*—to the South: 'Germans go to Africa: Bonn mission to study ways to develop resources.' As reported, a German delegation was heading for 'France's African colonies to survey the joint development of industrial raw materials required by West Europe'. It was also related that this formed part of the EEC accord, 'signed today in Rome', and its objective to secure 'the joint financing of the economic development of France's African colonies.' A few months later another headline in *The New York Times* (1957b) ran as follows: 'Europe may get new oil source: Common Economic Market could mean shift from Mideast to Africa: Resources big factor'. Again, we are reminded of the self-evident stability and durability with which the EEC's ownership of Africa was perceived in 1957. Here, in the wake of the agreement on the EEC, *The New York Times* recounts the upbeat mood concerning the great economic prospects proffered by the new European community's joint development of Algeria and its member's 'overseas possessions'. In as little time as 5 or 6 years, the article informs, the EEC may very well, thanks to the recently discovered oil reserves in Algeria 'bring about a most important and perhaps permanent change in the European oil picture and a partial solution to a tough foreign exchange problem'. As also noted, the EEC's 'ultimate goal appears to be a self-sufficiency in oil and some other raw materials available from the overseas possessions, mostly in Africa'.

With India and Pakistan's independence in 1947 Europe's colonial empires in Asia and the Middle East started to decline, although they were still far from done. But this was not true for Africa. Here a reverse movement took place after 1945, based on a belief that Europeans could keep Africa within its power orbit by working to isolate Africa from the cold war logic and by instituting cooperative frameworks, such as the EEC, that could pool and thus synergize colonial sovereignty, investments and benefits. For Ghana's first president, Nkrumah (1962, p. 12), the EEC thus 'represented a new-fangled system of collective colonialism which will be stronger and more dangerous than the old evils we are striving to liquidate'. For the leaders of the EEC and many more, then, national independence in French and Belgian Africa was not on the table until the late 1950s, and for Algeria, which was an integral part of metropolitan France, it would take even longer.

* * *

Studying the political developments and debates in the years 1945–1960 concerning the future of colonialism in Africa is very instructive. What these demonstrate is that the states that founded today's European

Union in 1957, if we just stick to them, did neither act nor speak as the nation-states that much of our current scholarship assumes. We have already got a glimpse of West Germany's thirst for 'Grossraum' in Africa. We could also look at the Netherlands staunch support of France's war in Algeria, its foreign minister, Joseph Luns, describing the Algerian leadership as 'murderous cutthroats with whom it was impossible to deal' (quoted in Wall, 1991, p. 131). At the signing ceremony for the Treaty of Rome on 25 March 1957 Luns spoke of the treaty as assuring 'the conditions of an increasing prosperity to our old continent and permits the continuation of her grand and global civilizing mission [sa grande mission civilisatrice mondiale].' (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014, p. 238) As for Mr. Europe himself, Belgian foreign minister and socialist Paul-Henri Spaak, defending Europe's colonial course in Africa was an existential cause. Following Egypt's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal in the summer of 1956, for instance, Spaak (1971, p. 126) wrote to the British foreign secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, calling 'for a policy of absolute firmness from the Western Powers' towards Egypt: 'If Nasser's coup is allowed to go unpunished, the prestige of this new dictator will grow vastly, and so will his ambitions and audacity. The entire situation in North, and even in Central Africa, may be affected to our detriment.'

If Western Europe dreaded the prospect of a collapsing colonial order it also tried to convince the colonized to feel the same. One of the strategies pursued was to reiterate the world's growing 'interdependence' in the post-war era—similar to our time's globalization mantra. As part of this, a nation-state system was portrayed as obsolete and anachronistic, even before it had seen the light of the day. 'Dependent peoples' were thus to be persuaded to see national and political independence as a dead-end and instead welcome their incorporation into larger communities, foremost the French Union, or empire, and the EEC. Only such a larger *franco-africaine* or Eurafrican community could reconcile with the new and commanding stage of 'interdependence' that the world had entered.

In a speech on Algeria before the UN in February 1957, France's foreign minister, socialist Christian Pineau, spoke of 'the so-called right to independence' and of 'the right of peoples to self-determination' as 'a sort of mystic aim of the international organization' that 'would end in multiplying the number of states at a time when, on the contrary, the peoples should be brought together in a common action'. Just like Adenauer, the French foreign minister was apprehensive about the proliferation of states that would result from decolonization. For Pineau and France, therefore, '[t]he most important thing is to promote throughout the world an acceptable standard of living which would enable men of all countries to enjoy true liberty and enable the nations to become something other than states.' Nations, just like the French nation, could be recognized, but they should remain inside the French imperial state and the newly created European or Eurafrican association regime. 'On the day', Pineau asserted, 'when a large common market—in which the overseas territories will be associated—has been created, she [France] would like to promote the formation of a Eurafrican whole. Europe in its entirety, bringing to Africa its capital and its techniques, should enable the immense African continent to become an essential factor in world politics.' (quoted in *The New York Times*, 1957c). In contrast to this colonial vision, Pineau pointed to the grim alternative: 'What would remain of the prospects thus offered to Algeria if it were to become a foreign land pledged to fanaticism […]. On the other hand, its participation in Eurafrica would mean for Algeria comfort, riches, in other words, the true conditions of independence.' In conclusion, Pineau reiterated France's contention that the nation-state had had its day, saying '[o]nce again, most nations can no longer keep pace with the world. They must enter into partnership, cooperate with each other, or give themselves up to the worst forms of ideological or economic bondage.' (quoted in *The New York Times*, 1957c)

Felix Houphouët-Boigny, the first West African cabinet member under Guy Mollet socialist government and future president of Ivory Coast, also argued vehemently in favour of the EEC's association regime, embracing the concepts of interdependence and independence without statehood. Addressing the United Nations in 1957, Boigny criticized the 'notion of absolute independence', adding: 'In this century each nation feels more and more cramped within its boundaries. The nations, even the largest, the most powerful, can no longer enjoy the deceptive luxury of isolation.' (quoted in The New York Times, 1961) Yet again, we see how important it was to insist on a topsy-turvy history, wherein that which had yet to appear (i.e., the nation-state system) was made to look as if

its time had passed, in order for colonialism—disguised as interdependence, association or partnership—to look modern and equipped for the future.

* * *

It is crucial to note that in denying independent statehood to the colonies, Western European states—whether as imperial states or as members of the EEC—were also refusing to *become* nation-states themselves. Hence, it is not enough to understand decolonization as the folding of European empires and the birth of nominally independent states in the former colonies. Losing their imperial privilege did not only spell the *end* of imperial statehood; it also entailed the *beginning* of national statehood in Europe, or at least the horrible prospect thereof. It was a horror, of course, because it would imply a loss of influence and status. Bhambra (2021, p. 2) frames this elegantly by speaking of the British state as 'an imperial state with a national project at its heart'. This compels us to think about nation and empire together, rather than to treat them separately, which is the current norm within the social sciences. Bhambra demonstrates why such a separation is both empirically-historically and theoretically mistaken; and she shows how this fatal mistake enables us to treat empire and colonialism as irrelevant for our studies of the development of the 'national' welfare state.

In contrast to today, many scholars and intellectuals in the postwar period understood very well the inseparability of the imperial state and the national or metropolitan project. And for many of them, like for their peers in government, the prospect of transforming from an imperial system to a system of nation-states caused a lot of debate and trepidation. As so many others at the time, Raymond Aron, one of France's foremost scholars and public intellectuals, worried about what seemed to be a looming multiplication 'of completely independent African states'. 'The ideology of total independence', he agonized, 'triumphs over all arguments, even those of wisdom' (Aron, 1960, p. 186). But when Aron wrote this (in 1958–1959), all was not lost for France: 'the French government has solid reasons for not giving up its sovereignty across the Mediterranean. […] Without the European minority the Algerian masses would know a still worse fate […] Algeria is the indispensable southern base of defence of western Europe; it is the access to the oil of the Sahara.' (Aron, 1960, p. 134) As indicated, it was with the help of the EEC that France could keep Algeria and retain its standing as a great power. Going it alone, however, would be very difficult since France lacked the resources to develop Africa on its own. Aron thus saw the EEC as a vehicle through which Western Europe could re-establish the great power status that the members could not attain individually, as nation-states:

> [I]t is the will to transmute this community, now under domination [by the superpowers] into an autonomous community of action which is at the root of the European plan. The nations of the old continent are living one and the same historical experience. Will they insist on answering the challenge of their abasement individually? Or will they unite in order to find an answer in common?
>
> (Aron, 1960, p. 163)

For Aron, then, the nation-state was not an option for the 'old continent', unless, that is, 'abasement' was an option. 'If Algeria, in its turn, becomes an independent state', Aron (1960, p. 111) exemplified, 'then France will be reduced to the metropolitan hexagon, dedicated to a quasi-Spanish mediocrity.' As Hoffmann (1963, p. 75) put it a few years later, 'the advocates of little France' had little success, some of which owed to the fact that France was 'a nation which obstinately refuses to behave like Switzerland and which sees in the Swiss form of happiness a solitary confinement rather than a solitary delight.' 'By losing their military positions around the world', Aron (1960, p. 155) wrote, 'Europeans lose, in a way, their autonomy.' As we saw above, Aron wanted the EEC to compensate for that loss by developing 'into an autonomous community of action'. This is absolutely crucial since it clarifies why so many Western scholars and intellectuals at the time dreaded the nation-state. The nation-state spelled weakness, it compromised sovereignty and thus meant a loss of autonomy on the world stage.

* * *

In conclusion, this clarification also points to something fundamental in our present, something that prevents us from gaining that 'more adequate understanding of the shared histories that have configured our present', which Bhambra calls for. Because what should be discernible now is that the alleged and globalization-induced waning of the nation-state' sovereignty and autonomy—which the social sciences have spent decades describing and theorizing—builds on a poor historical understanding. Sovereignty, autonomy of action and many of the other attributes we are taught to associate with the nation-state are rather attributes of empire, of 'great powers', of states with the muscle to colonize others. As shown here, governments of the folding empires in the postwar decades, as well as their intellectuals, all understood this very well. That explains the refusal to give up, the wars, the crimes against humanity, but also the parallel efforts to launch Western European cooperation and integration schemes as means to retain world influence and mitigate the negative effects of the potential degradation to nation-state status, to the 'quasi-Spanish mediocrity'. This was of course also understood by many in the former colonies. In his advocacy of Pan-Africanism and African integration schemes, Kwame Nkrumah, for one, was very clear about the inherent weakness of the newly independent states in West Africa, and, not the least, their vulnerability to continued 'dependence' on and exploitation by their former colonial masters. In 1963, Nkrumah (1963, p. 173) thus issued the following warning:

> The greatest danger at present facing Africa is neo-colonialism and its major instrument, balkanization. The latter term is particularly appropriate to describe the breaking up of Africa into small, weak states, since it arose from the actions of the great powers when they divided up the Europe part of the old Turkish Empire and created a number of dependent and competing states in the Balkan peninsula.

Much of the scholarly work today seems unaware of the wide-ranging debates around empire, colonialism and the nation-state that carried on in the postwar period. Brown (2010, p. 22) is thus symptomatic of our current impasse when she mistakes the imperial state for the nation-state, asserting that 'over the past half century, the monopoly of these combined attributes [proceeding from sovereignty] by nation-states has been severely compromised by growing transnational flows'. 'I argue', Brown (2010, p. 23, 24) continues, 'that the key characteristics of sovereignty are migrating from the nation-state […]. In sum, in a post-Westphalian order, sovereign nation-states no longer exclusively define the field of global political relations'. As I have tried to show here, following Bhambra, it was empires, *not* nation-states, that played that role.

Charles Maier is similarly symptomatic in his book *Leviathan 2.0*, where he defines 'the modern state' as prevailing from the 1860s to the 1970s. The last decades of the 19th century, Maier (2012, p. 5) explains, 'signaled the last stand for indigenous political autonomy'. After that, there was only one game in town with the victory of 'the most efficient engine of expansion and governance that the world had seen for centuries: the modern nation-state.' Until the 1970s, Maier goes on to argue, the institution of modern states and their 'units of territorial organization prevailed without any real alternative institutions to contest their triumph. Then they entered a period we still live in, one that seems to have imposed some important limitations on their freedom of action' (Maier, 2012, p. 14). As Rupert Emerson wrote in 1963, '[t]he Atlantic Community is in the process of transition from a more or less global domination, exercised by a few of its members, to the establishment of a new style of relationship with its formerly subject or subordinate peoples'. (Emerson, 1963, p. 111) Again, the debate at the time disrupts the alleged stability and continuity of Maier's modern nation-state—just think of decolonization's amazing transformation of the 'territorial organization' of states. As Aron (1960, p. 152) pointed out at the end of the 1950s, '[i]t is in relation to empire that the very meaning of what we call adjustment to the world of today is disputed.'

In part, our current impasse may stem from the fact that much current scholarship keep to the old beaten track of perceiving of the nation-state, and its alleged sovereignty, as the inventions of Thomas Hobbes. For Brown, Hobbes is one of 'classical theorists of modern sovereignty' and, as such, he serves as a benchmark for her theorization about the nation-state's waning sovereignty in what she terms the 'post-Westphalian order'. For Maier, as stated in the first sentence of the abstract for *Leviathan 2.0*, 'Thomas Hobbes laid the theoretical groundwork of the nation-state'. There is some truth to this, of course, but given that Hobbes defined the commonwealth, or state, as always the potential possessor of colonies, the Hobbesian state has much less affinity with a nation-state that is commonly assumed; and this simply because a nation state and an imperial state are not the same thing. 'The procreation, or children of a commonwealth', Hobbes (1651 [1996], p. 168) wrote in *Leviathan*, 'are those we call plantations, or colonies; which are numbers of men sent out from the commonwealth, under a conductor, or governor, to inhabit a foreign country, either formerly void of inhabitants, or made void then by war'. Hobbes, thus, often modelled his commonwealth, or state, on the Roman empire, which makes a lot of sense given that it is here, in the imperial state, that Hobbes' notion of sovereignty applies in full. Hobbesian sovereignty, then, is imperial since it inheres one party's ability to expand its sovereignty at the expense of the sovereignty of others: 'The Athenians, and Romans were free; that is, free commonwealths: not that any particular men had the liberty to resist their own representative; but that their representative had the liberty to resist, or invade other people.' (Hobbes, 1651 [1996], p. 143) 'And as for very little commonwealths', Hobbes (1651 [1996], p. 175) clarifies, that is, those not modelled on the Roman empire, 'there is no human wisdom can uphold them, longer than the jealousy lasteth of their potent neighbours.' Here, then, we may have an apt definition of the quintessential nation-state, the one that, in sharp contrast to the imperial state, lacks both the liberty to resist and to invade. As Carr (1945, pp. 69–70) put it in 1945: 'It is an illusion to suppose that security for the individual or for the nation can be attained through the limited resources of the small or medium-sized nation-states or through the untrammelled and independent action of national governments.' Max Weber thus also mistook the empire for the nation-state when he wrote that '[w]e hesitate to call them "nations", not because of their relative smallness—the Dutch appear to us as a nation—, but because these neutralized states have purposively forsaken power.' (Weber, 1978 [1922], p. 397) While small on the European landmass, the Netherlands had not 'forsaken power'. Why? Because it had a huge empire and thus was *not* a nation-state.

This should also destabilize the prevailing notion that decolonized states sought to model their new independent states on the European nation-state. The problem with this notion is that there was no such nation-state to copy. The only thing available for them to imitate was an imperial state, and, obviously, they did not try to do that. Neither Guinea nor Algeria pledged to model their states on the French imperial state; neither they nor any other of the decolonized states pledged to colonize their former masters, plunder their resources and subject their peoples to crimes against humanity.

Until the Suez invasion in 1956, the British and French imperial states 'had the liberty' to invade in Africa. In Hobbesian terms, they were 'free commonwealths'. That is also why Suez became such a huge crisis of sovereignty. But it was certainly not a crisis of nation-state sovereignty. When presented like this, I think all would agree that Suez constituted a crisis of *imperial* sovereignty. Yet, for the past decades, scholars have been claiming, ad nauseam, that 'nation-states no longer exclusively define the field of global political relations', when, in fact, they never did.

As Bhambra shows, British governments needed imperial state sovereignty in order to make their national project viable. Imperial crisis, therefore, also spelled national crisis, and, as I have pointed to here, it spelled a crisis for Western Europe as a whole. Having the scope and reach of state sovereignty reduced to the island or, as in the French case, to the hexagon was never an option. In this sense Bhambra's conception does not dispose of the nation and nationalism; rather, what it does, is to restore these concepts and histories to their proper global contexts, hence paving the way for 'a more adequate understanding of the shared histories that have configured our present'.

Finally, this should also help us clear up the confusion that permeates some of current ways of critiquing methodological nationalism. In her article Bhambra does not explicitly address methodological nationalism, yet she does it implicitly by asking and then investigating 'how we have come to a national framing of the state and its political community in the present, notwithstanding the wider relationships that have historically defined it' (Bhambra, 2021, p. 2). This, then, is the valid and historically cognizant critique of methodological nationalism. That is to say, we are not methodological nationalists today because we fail to grasp that the allegedly age-old Westphalian nation-state system has been transformed and significantly challenged by global and transnational forces in recent decades. Rather, we are methodological nationalists for mistakenly projecting back the nation-state system into an age when it did not exist. Nonetheless, and as seen in my critique of Brown and Maier above, it is the former perspective that prevails. As put by two of the foremost theorists of methodological nationalism:

> Only now that the nation-states have lost some of their power to transnational corporations and supranational organizations can we see, looking backward, what shape modernity has taken during the last 200 years. It was cast in the iron cage of nationalized states that confined and limited our own analytical capacities.
>
> (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002, p. 302)

For Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002, p. 302, 304) this failure to spot 'the national framing of modernity', 'in the high days when the nation-state bounded and bundled most social processes', constitutes one of the main forms of what they conceive of as methodological nationalism. But again, this fails to recognize, comprehend and analytically account for the imperial framing of modernity.

Learning about empire and colonialism, as Bhambra urges us to do, is, thus, the best way to un-learn the engrained myths about the nation-state as the great moulder of modern history. By the same token, an improved social science is necessarily also a historically informed social science.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Bhambra's reference to *The Spirit of 45* is made in her talk (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvzYMt0XBDs) but not in her article.

[2] Historical Archives of the European Union, CM 3/NEGO 252, "Groupe Ad hoc territoires d'outre-mer, Projet de préambule," 18 December 1956.

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School-to-work transition and subjective well-being in Australia

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Abstract

The school-to-work transition is a demanding period during an individual's life course in all societies particularly because the educational decisions made during this period have long-lasting consequences in multiple life domains. Moreover, adverse starting points after secondary school are likely to lead to adverse outcomes that might cumulate over the life course. This study analyses subjective well-being during this sensitive period and examines the following two questions. First, how do different school-to-work transitions relate to subjective well-being changes? Second, how does subjective well-being develop during and after secondary schooling? As the school-to-work transition period is structured by gender, each analytical step aims to identify gender differences. Furthermore, based on life course theories, this study investigates whether adverse starting points after secondary school lead to cumulative effects in the development of subjective well-being. Based on data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey and fixed effects regressions, our results reveal that transitions to employment increase subjective well-being, while transitions to unemployment decrease subjective well-being. Furthermore, transitions to study increase subjective well-being only among men, while such transitions

appear to decrease subjective well-being among women. The results related to the development of subjective well-being indicate that subjective well-being decreases during secondary schooling and continues to decrease after individuals leave school. This decrease is stronger among men. Finally, our results reveal the negative cumulative effects of adverse starting points on the development of subjective well-being. Overall, the results reveal great intra-individual variation in subjective well-being during the school-to-work transition period in Australia.

KEYWORDS
fixed effects impact functions, HILDA, life satisfaction, youth

1 | INTRODUCTION

The school-to-work transition during adolescence structures status and labor market attainment (e.g., Müller & Gangl, 2003; Müller & Shavit, 1998) and constitutes a crucial period for adolescents' physical and mental development and their social relations (Schoon & Mortimer, 2017). Moreover, research shows that adverse events during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood, such as unemployment or poor educational achievement, affect subjective well-being at later life course stages (e.g., Bell & Blanchflower, 2011). In addition to adopting a life course-related perspective, research has scrutinized the immediate effects of school-to-work transition states on individual well-being (e.g., Landstedt et al., 2016; Schoon & Silbereisen, 2009; Schulenberg et al., 2004).

Research focusing on the development of subjective well-being during the transition from youth to young adulthood shows that subjective well-being decreases during this period (e.g., Baird et al., 2010; Beatton & Frijters, 2012; Burger & Samuel, 2017; Herke et al., 2019; Wunder et al., 2013). Furthermore, transition-centered studies indicate that transitions to post-compulsory education are positively related to subjective well-being (Salmela-Aro & Tuominen-Soini, 2010; Siembab & Stawarz, 2019). Moreover, research investigating the associations between different transition statuses shows that young individuals enrolled in post-compulsory education are happier than young individuals who work (Dockery, 2010). However, research has not provided comprehensive evidence regarding how transitions from school to different post-secondary education or labor market statuses introduce intra-individual changes in subjective well-being. Furthermore, evidence concerning how subjective well-being develops during compulsory schooling and the transition from youth to young adulthood is lacking.

This study closes the outlined research gap by using rich longitudinal data, employing state of the art life course methods and adopting a comprehensive perspective of the school-to-work transition process. Moreover, as previous research concerning labor markets suggests that gendered pathways exist from school to work that have the potential to lead to gender-specific school-to-work transition effects and a gendered development of subjective well-being, this study analyses subjective well-being among men and women separately.

This study is the first to apply a comprehensive perspective to explore how subjective well-being changes during adolescence. In particular, this comprehensive perspective comprises three analytical steps. First, we analyze how subjective well-being changes when individuals move between school-to-work statuses. In contrast to prior research, which mainly focused on education-to-education, education-to-work or work-to-unemployment

transitions, this study analyzes how the subjective well-being of young individuals changes when they transition to post-secondary education (i.e., certificate training or study), (un-)employment, inactivity or self-employment. Therefore, this study considers the complexity of individuals' school-to-work transitions, which do not always follow a clear temporal order.

Second, we provide evidence regarding the development of subjective well-being during and after high school. In particular, we investigate the development of subjective well-being in young people aged 15–16 years during their transition from secondary school to the labor market. Thus far, research has mainly focused on the development of subjective well-being within the education system or over the entire life course. Research providing an in-depth analysis of how life satisfaction develops during school and after compulsory schooling is scarce. Moreover, research has not yet systematically addressed gender differences in the development of subjective well-being in the transition from adolescence to young adulthood, which is surprising because earlier work concerning mental health, which is an important domain of subjective well-being, shows pronounced differences between young men and women that persist throughout the school-to-work transition (e.g., Landstedt et al., 2016).

Third, this study takes a first step to account for the complexity of different pathways from school to work (Schoon & Silbereisen, 2009). Therefore, this study explores how the development of subjective well-being among young individuals differs by the first transition state after compulsory schooling. Thus, we investigate whether smooth transitions (such as education-to-education and education-to-employment transitions) or turbulent transitions (such as dropping out or early youth unemployment) have long-lasting effects on the development of individuals' subjective well-being.

Our empirical analysis focuses on Australia. Australia provides excellent longitudinal data that are highly suited for our study. The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA; see Department of Social Services; Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, 2019) survey provides data facilitating in-depth analyses of subjective well-being during the transition from youth to young adulthood as life satisfaction is measured in each wave of the survey. Moreover, the sampling used in the HILDA survey is also an advantage, as young individuals who are members of HILDA households are interviewed personally for the first time at age 15 or 16, depending on the timing of the interview. Therefore, we are able to construct a data design based on HILDA entry cohorts. Each entry cohort starts when participants are aged 15–16, when young individuals typically are still enrolled at school, and in this study, we follow participants through the HILDA waves until age 25.

Drawing upon the outlined data, the aim of this study is to provide a meaningful and comprehensive description of how different school-to-work transition statuses relate to subjective well-being and how subjective well-being develops during this period. Therefore, this study employs fixed effects regressions and analyses intra-individual change. Analyses of change should always rely on fixed effects regressions because these models account for unobserved individual time-constant heterogeneity. Although self-selection, reverse causality and time-invariant confounders remain an issue (Angrist & Pischke, 2009), an approach relying on intra-individual variation provides the most meaningful description of how subjective well-being changes after compulsory schooling.

Furthermore, this study employs fixed effects impact functions. These models are ideal for describing intra-individual change during and after compulsory schooling. Moreover, the impact function approach allows testing whether group heterogeneity already develops within the school context and investigating whether out of school transitions have long-lasting effects on the subjective well-being development of young individuals. Thus, by employing state of the art life course methods, our study contributes to research concerning causation and selection effects. Moreover, the combination of transition-centered fixed effect regressions, which focus on the transition effect of single events, with the more holistic view of impact functions, which focus on the development of subjective well-being, our study provides a first step to account for the complexity of school-to-work transition patterns and their effect on young individuals' subjective well-being.

2 | SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION AND LIFE SATISFACTION

The school-to-work transition period plays a pivotal role in an individual's further life course. This period structures one's educational attainment, labor market situation and employment career (Bhuller et al., 2017; Bönke et al., 2015; Manzoni et al., 2014), health progress (e.g., Leopold & Leopold, 2018; Mirowsky & Ross, 2008) or overall life satisfaction (Easterlin, 2003).

2.1 | Theoretical considerations and related literature

As differences in familial or individual endowments or other structural conditions at early stages of the life course determine the allocation process of vital resources (i.e., advantage or disadvantage) throughout the life course (Dannefer, 2003; Ferraro & Shippee, 2009), school-to-work transition outcomes are of great importance for the development of individuals' well-being. Social production function theory (Lindenberg, 1996; Ormel et al., 1999; Steverink et al., 2020) particularly highlights the importance of the educational attainment process and emphasizes the school-to-work transition as a pivotal period in an individual's life course. From a more general perspective, social production function theory conceptualizes subjective well-being as the overall outcome of an individual's life. From a mental health perspective, Proctor and colleagues conclude that life-satisfaction is a key indicator of well-being that is "integrally tied to emotional, behavioural, environmental, and psychological outcomes" (Proctor et al., 2009, p. 605).

From a general life-course perspective, we know that life satisfaction decreases during childhood and adolescence. Herke et al. (2019) report a significant overall reduction in subjective well-being during school careers from grades 5 to 12. Employing both HILDA data and data from the Childhood Happiness Survey, Beatton and Frijters (2012) report a decline in life satisfaction from 9.5 points (out of 10) at age 9 to 8.5 at age 15 to 7.8 at age 23. School and friend interactions explain 40% of that decline in life satisfaction.

However, from a closer institutional perspective, Salmela-Aro and Tuominen-Soini (2010) analyze Finnish data and show that life satisfaction increases during school transitions from comprehensive education to an academic or vocational track. Siembab and Stawarz (2019) find increasing levels of life satisfaction after individuals leave comprehensive school, regardless of occupational status or vocational track. Similarly, Dockery (2010) reports that successful transitions from school to work (e.g., the transition from secondary to post-secondary education) have a positive impact on happiness. Burger and Samuel (2017) conclude that school-related stress shapes individuals' life satisfaction but that this effect tends to be relatively unsteady.

Regarding unemployment experience, evidence clearly suggests that transitions to unemployment negatively affect individuals' life satisfaction. A series of studies across countries consistently confirm that unemployment experience has strong negative effects on individuals' levels of life satisfaction (see Andersen, 2009; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Boreham et al., 2013; Clark et al., 2008; Diener et al., 2013; Headey et al., 2013; Kahneman & Krueger, 2006; Lucas, 2007; Marks & Fleming, 1999; McNamee & Medolia, 2014; Oesch & Lipps, 2013; Paul et al., 2016; Winkelmann & Winkelmann, 1998). Dockery (2005) indicates a systematically declining level of happiness in adolescents during periods of unemployment. Griep and colleagues (2016) find a negative association between unemployment and life satisfaction, with the duration of unemployment as a mediator. In their study, recently unemployed people reported higher levels of life satisfaction than those who had been unemployed long term, and Winkelmann and Winkelmann (1998) observe that the levels of life satisfaction do not improve as the length of the unemployment spell increases. Kahneman and Krueger (2006) find that those who are recently unemployed have lower levels of life satisfaction than those who are employed, even after the monetary costs of unemployment are controlled, thus providing support for Jahoda's (1981) claim that unemployment denies individuals opportunities to fulfil their basic non-economic needs (see also Lucas, 2007; Winkelmann & Winkelmann, 1998).

From an agency-based perspective, Strandh (2000) argues that the level of well-being of the unemployed depends on the economic situation of the unemployed, the predictability of possible transitions out of unemployment and the embeddedness in the individuals' life course. Referencing Jahoda's research, who analyzed the negative effect of unemployment on subjective well-being in a consistent theoretical framework, Strandh (2000, p. 461f) highlights the relevance of the relative position of unemployment experience within individuals' life course.

Regarding employment, quality and type of work are important (Dockery, 2005). Chesters and Cuervo (2019) report a strong negative association between engagement in precarious employment and levels of subjective well-being. Based on repeated cross-sectional data, Sironi (2019) finds that job satisfaction has a strong positive effect on well-being.

In addition to the short-term effects of the labor market status on subjective well-being, Steverink et al. (1998, p. 456) state that there are "cumulative effects of differences in early 'tracks' (in schooling and otherwise), which cause individuals to differ increasingly from others with respect to acquired resources and encountered restrictions". The outcomes of the school-to-work transition are very important for the ongoing life course and the formation of subjective well-being. For instance, Kratz and Patzina (2020) show that educational attainment structures the development of life satisfaction over the life course. School dropout has a negative impact on lifetime wealth, health and happiness at later life course stages (Oreopoulos, 2007). Unemployment experience during the transition from youth to young adulthood has a long-lasting scarring effect on both employment opportunities and life satisfaction in later life (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Gangl, 2006; Schmillen & Umkehrer, 2017).

The model of cumulative advantage assumes that small differences based on social origin cause cumulative effects on the allocation of advantage and disadvantage over the life course (DiPrete & Eirich, 2006). As Biewen and Tapalaga (2017) demonstrate, differences in social origin generate differences in subsequent educational decisions. Herke et al. (2019) report severe effects of social origin on descendants' well-being development from grade 5 to grade 12 in school. In addition to class position, parental marital status is a relevant social origin-related dimension. Brüderl et al. (2019) show that social origin gaps further increase as individuals age, leading to pronounced life satisfaction gaps at age 60.

Employing HILDA data, Ulker (2008) reports the negative effect of divorce on descendants' happiness and mental health during youth. Adolescents living with intact families and cohabitating grandparents have higher levels of life satisfaction, while parental divorce has long-lasting effects on happiness, self-esteem and depression (Lin & Yi, 2019). Based on data from the Children's Society Well-being Survey, Cho (2018) identifies strong associations between poverty and children's well-being; again, family relations are identified as a relevant mediator and moderator. Based on HILDA data, Cobb-Clark and Ribar (2012) report the negative effects of financial stress due to leaving home early and forming a family on subjective well-being.

The association of health and life satisfaction is well documented (Diener et al., 2013; Julkunen, 2001; Landstedt et al., 2016; Steverink et al., 1998). Furthermore, Baranowska (2010) provides clear evidence of the effect of family formation on well-being, which is moderated by institutional and cultural factors (see also the meta-analyses of subjective well-being and happiness by Proctor et al., 2009).

2.2 | The moderating role of gender in the school-to-work transition

Findings from comparative research investigating life satisfaction show that women and men differ in overall life-satisfaction during the school-to-work transition period (Batz & Tay, 2018). This difference might be driven by a gender-specific pattern of school-to-work transitions, institutional variation, gender-specific valuations of specific transitions during the school-to-work transition period or the overall turn of the life course during that period of life (e.g., educational and vocational choice, establishment in the labor market, and family formation).

Educational episodes and first transitions into and within the labor market constitute the two main domains of school-to-work transitions. Research suggests that both educational transitions and pathways into and within the

labor market are gender specific. Research also indicates that the development of subjective well-being during the transition period from youth to young adulthood might differ by gender.

In the last decades, the gender gap in education has reversed in most Western societies, and females outperform males in the level of degrees and grades (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013). Buchmann and colleagues (2008) highlight a set of possible mechanisms fostering females' attainment in higher education. While less evidence suggests that resources important for educational decisions within families are employed in a gender-specific manner (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006), Buchmann and colleagues (2008) especially highlight gender-specific aspirations. Moreover, gender-specific choices emerge due to gender-specific incentives and expected returns to college (Averett & Burton, 1996; Beattie, 2002), gender-role attitudes and stereotypes (Bertrand, 2020; Eriksson et al., 2020; Goldin, 2006), gender–specific effects of educational institutions (van Hek et al. 2019), and gender-specific effects of military service (MacLean, 2005; MacLean & Elder, 2007).

Regarding employment, since the 1970s until the 1990s, female labor market participation increased, and the gender wage gap declined, especially among women with high levels of human capital (in terms of education and labor force experience), who experienced the greatest increase in their wages (Katz & Autor, 1999). In recent decades, change has slowed and, based on some indicators, stalled entirely (England et al., 2020). This trend is consistent with the increase in the median age of first marriage among college students in recent decades, which also played a role (Goldin, 2006).

Brzinsky-Fay (2015) shows that women spend more time in labor market inactivity after school, and although women attain the same amount of education as men, they are still more likely to become unemployed or inactive during the transition period from school to work. Key drivers might be gender-specific educational decisions or gender differences in occupational preferences (e.g., Ochsenfeld, 2016). In the case of Australia, recent research investigating the school-to-work transition has demonstrated that despite the low levels of occupational specificity in the labor market, pronounced gender differences exist (Buchler & Dockery, 2015). Buchler and Dockery (2015) also show that in Australia, women earn lower wages than men in their first jobs, even when men and women are in the same occupational groups, and that wage growth is steeper among men. As money positively contributes to high subjective well-being levels, such differences between the genders in the school-to-work transition are likely to translate into differences in life satisfaction. Men's life satisfaction should be more sensitive during the transition to the labor market because of gender differences in role models (i.e., male as the breadwinner model), career orientation, and income maximizing strategies (Aassve et al., 2015; Eirich & Robinson, 2017; Vanassche et al., 2013). Furthermore, research (Vanassche et al., 2013) indicates that men's happiness and life-satisfaction respond more severely to adverse labor market events (unemployment and layoffs).

Research investigating the importance of the quality of employment (measured by job satisfaction) shows that job satisfaction has a stronger impact on males' life satisfaction than females' life satisfaction (Della Giusta et al., 2011). Moreover, McNamee and Medolia (2014) report that unemployment has a stronger negative effect on life satisfaction among men than women. Thus, the different outcomes and transition states during the school-to-work period relate differently to the subjective well-being of men and women.

Research investigating subjective well-being during education episodes also indicates differences in life satisfaction by gender. By employing the five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), Salmela-Aro and Tuominen-Soini (2010) report group-specific gender effects on life satisfaction in adolescence and school-to-work transition-related dimensions. Their empirical analysis indicates lower overall levels of life satisfaction among females in early grades but group-specific improvements in life satisfaction during the school-to-work transition. Herke et al. (2019) report severe gender effects during youth: females report higher levels of life satisfaction than males in lower secondary school, but females' life satisfaction decreases more steeply than that of males in upper secondary school. However, after upper secondary school, females' life satisfaction increases more steeply than males' life satisfaction.

In summary, research concerning the relationship between school-to-work transition outcomes and subjective well-being indicates gender-specific differences in the effects of certain school-to-work transition states on

subjective well-being. Furthermore, research concerning the development of subjective well-being during education episodes in the school-to-work transition indicates significant gender differences. Thus, our research design particularly addresses these gender-differences. Therefore, we contribute to research concerning gender-specific subjective well-being during the school-to-work transition period.

2.3 | Expectations

In sum, based on previous research and the presented theoretical considerations, we expect the following:

1. Subjective well-being decreases during secondary school and in the first years after secondary school. However, some empirical findings also indicate (slight) increases in subjective well-being after secondary school. Thus, due to the state of the research, a clear prediction is not possible. However, findings from Australia using the one-item life satisfaction question indicate a general decrease in subjective well-being during this period.
2. Transitions to post-secondary education increase subjective well-being.
3. Transitions to unemployment decrease subjective well-being, and transitions to employment increase subjective well-being.
4. As suggested in previous research, there are pronounced gender differences in the development of subjective well-being during the school-to-work transition period.
5. Theoretical considerations stemming from life course theories and empirical findings suggest that the cumulative effects of education non-completion or early unemployment lead to decreases in life satisfaction in the long run. Thus, we expect a steeper decrease in subjective well-being among individuals who experience youth unemployment and those who do not complete their education.

3 | EMPIRICAL DESIGN

3.1 | Data

The data for this study come from the HILDA survey, which is a household-based panel survey that collects data from household members each year. Persons who leave the household remain in the panel, and persons who enter the household are included as new persons. Young persons in the household are interviewed for the first time when they are aged 15 at a given cut-off date. In the first year of the survey, 2001, a nationally representative sample of all Australian households was selected, and 13,969 individuals aged 15 years or older living in those households were interviewed (Summerfield et al., 2015).

We use data collected in the first 18 waves of HILDA from 2001–2018. For our analytical sample, we include young people who were included as new HILDA participants at age 15 to 16 between 2001 and 2017 and who had completed the survey in at least two consecutive years. We follow them up to the age of 25. We truncate the sample at age 25 because our analyses focus on the school-to-work process, which is mainly completed by age 25. Therefore, we reduce potential biases due to increasing heterogenous effects (i.e., an increasing prevalence of other important life course events that might moderate the school-to-work transition process) or time-variant unobserved heterogeneity (i.e., life course events, such as forming or dissolving a relationship or experiencing trouble at the workplace).[1]

In total, the sample for our analyses consists of 28,082 records from 3,605 individuals. The individuals included in our analytical sample had participated in a median of 5 HILDA waves at HILDA 2018 (and the mean number of waves was 4.9), which indicates a high share of long-term HILDA participants. Table A1 in the Appendix provides the details of individuals' panel participation.

3.2 | Analytical strategy

We take three analytical steps in this study. First, we employ fixed effects regressions to investigate how school-to-work transition statuses are associated with changes in life satisfaction. Second, we employ fixed effects impact functions to describe the development of life satisfaction during the transition from youth to young adulthood. Third, we employ a set of robustness checks.

The literature suggests that the school-to-work transition process is highly gendered (e.g., Brzinsky-Fay, 2015; Buchler & Dockery, 2015). Thus, in addition to an overall model, we estimate all fixed effect models separately for men and women to elaborate on potential heterogeneous status effects by gender. The main advantage of fixed effects models is that the regression specification relies entirely on within variation (e.g., Allison, 2009). Thus, individual time-constant unobserved heterogeneity does not bias the results. However, fixed effects models can address only how changes in an explanatory variable translate into changes in an outcome variable. As we are particularly interested in how certain school-to-work transition states introduce changes in life satisfaction, fixed effects models constitute the perfect model class to describe this process. For the specification of a fixed effects model, it is important that we define a meaningful baseline category. Therefore, we employ individuals' life satisfaction in the senior high school years as a baseline for intra-individual changes in life satisfaction due to status changes during the school-to-work transition period.

To assess the development of life satisfaction during and after high school, we estimate two sets of fixed effects impact functions (e.g., Brüderl et al., 2019) in a second step. Therefore, we construct a count variable indicating years to and years since the transition out of school. These time dummies indicate how subjective well-being changes until individuals leave high school and afterwards. Fixed effects models again have a major advantage because they rely entirely on within variation; therefore, the retrieved estimates are not prone to individuals' time-constant unobserved heterogeneity. The use of within-person variation, however, permits the interpretation of level differences (i.e., differences in group-specific means). Nevertheless, this model class allows testing for effect heterogeneity in changes in life satisfaction if time dummies are interacted with group variables. As we are interested in gender differences in the development of life satisfaction, we interact our time dummies with gender to examine differences in life satisfaction changes before and after individuals leave high school. When testing how life satisfaction changes according to certain transitions after high school, we introduce triple interactions (i.e., an interaction of the time dummies, gender and transition type).

As described in the literature, many factors likely influence the school-to-work transition and subjective well-being development during this period. Therefore, in a final analytical step, we conduct a series of robustness checks. To this end, we introduce lagged life satisfaction, mental health (assessed by the MH5), domain-specific life satisfaction, critical life events and family formation. In doing so, we rule out the possibility that important time-variant factors that are available in the data distort our general conclusions.

As explained earlier, one key advantage of an individual fixed effects model is the exclusion of between-person variation. Thus, factors such as the social origin of individuals are controlled by default. However, the literature review suggests that social origin is an important determinant of life satisfaction during the school-to-work transition and that effect heterogeneity could still lead to a distortion of our general conclusions. To account for potential unobserved effect heterogeneity based on social origin, we re-ran all models for three origin groups separately. Social origin is measured as the prestige of fathers' jobs when children are aged approximately 14 years. This variable captures the socio-economic resources available in individuals' households at an early life course stage. Social origin fixed at age 14 also captures comparable patterns of socialization (Mayer, 2009).

In summary, as the fixed effects approach accounts for many possible selection processes by default and relies on weaker exogeneity assumptions than random effects or OLS approaches (Brüderl & Ludwig, 2015), it constitutes the best way to describe the development of life satisfaction during the school-to-work transition. Nevertheless, we can never rule out that time-variant unobserved heterogeneity biases the presented results. Thus, the presented estimates reflect associations rather than causal effects.

3.3 | Variables

The key outcome variable is subjective well-being, which is evaluated with the one-item life satisfaction question. This well-established instrument is used in many surveys, including the World Values Survey, the European Social Survey, and the British Social Attitudes Survey (Bellis et al., 2012). The HILDA survey employs the same single item as the German Socio-Economic Panel ("All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life?"), using a scale from 0 (totally dissatisfied) to 10 (totally satisfied) to measure subjective well-being. As Diener et al. (2013) show, this one-item question assesses both the subjective and objective dimensions of well-being. Clark et al. (2008) argue that life satisfaction indicators derived from surveys are good indicators of well-being (see Diener et al., 2013). Several researchers have used this question to measure (e.g., Ambrey & Fleming, 2014; Beatton & Frijters, 2012; Cummins et al., 2014; Green, 2011; Kristoffersen, 2017; Manning et al., 2016; McNamee & Medolia, 2014; Oesch & Lipps, 2013).

The HILDA panel data offer sufficient within and between variance. The mean life satisfaction score was 8.47, with a standard deviation of 1.30, at age 15–16 in the first measurement. As reported in the literature, the mean life satisfaction score deteriorates from age 15 to the mid-twenties.

As a key explanatory variable, we include a time-variant status variable that indicates an individual's status during the school-to-work transition period. This variable reflects both the educational system in Australia and the labor market. Regarding educational position, the status variable indicates whether individuals still attend secondary school, vocational, or certificate training, vocational study or academic study. Although there are some minor variations between the education systems of Australian states and territories, the majority of students complete the 12th grade in secondary school. Tertiary education in Australia has the following two main strands: the higher education sector and the vocational education and training sector (see Figure 1). Within the higher education sector, universities offer 3- or 4-year bachelor's degrees and various postgraduate degrees. In the vocational education and training sector, public and private training organizations generally offer certificates, diplomas, and advanced diplomas. For example, apprentices complete a Certificate IV to qualify as a tradesperson. Additionally, the status variable indicates individual labor market positions (employed, self-employed, unemployed, and inactive). Furthermore, Figure 1 shows that the school-to-work transition process of men and women is completed at age 25 in most cases.

To investigate changes in life satisfaction over time, we model the time effect as flexibly as possible and employ time dummies. These dummies indicate the years prior to the first year out of secondary school and all other years after the first year out of secondary school. For the estimation of the impact functions, we group four and three years prior to the first year out of school together as well as the seventh, eighth, and ninth years after the first year out of school due to low numbers of cases. In doing so, we gain more statistical power. We also test the full time range, and the substantive conclusions remain the same (these results are available upon request).

To account for effect heterogeneity, we employ a gender dummy and two further group variables. The first group variable indicates the first school-to-work transition status after secondary school and has the following four categories: (i) education, indicating that an individual transitioned directly to any education after secondary school; (ii) employment, indicating that an individual transitioned directly to any type of employment after secondary school; (iii) unemployment, indicating that an individual transitioned directly to unemployment after secondary school; and (iv) residual, indicating that an individual transitioned directly to inactivity or a status that could not further be specified after secondary school (the results of this group are not shown). The second group variable indicates whether an individual graduated secondary school or left secondary school without a certificate (a so-called drop out).

As further time-variant control variables, we employ an individual's perception of the risk of job loss, the cumulative number of unemployment episodes and long-lasting health problems and regional mobility as time-variant individual information. Additionally, we capture macro trends in the fixed effect specification with year

Post-compulsory secondary education accreditation	VET accreditation	Higher education (HE) accreditation	International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) equivalent
	Certificate I		2C
Senior secondary certificate	Certificate II		2C
	Certificate III		3C
	Certificate IV		4B
	VET diploma		5B
	VET advanced diploma		5B
		Associate degree	5B
		Bachelor's degree	5A
		Honours degree	5A
		HE graduate certificate	5A
		HE graduate diploma	5A
		Master's degree	5A
		Doctoral degree	6

FIGURE 1 Australian educational system (stylized) and International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels. Authors' adaption based on Hoeckel et al. (2008) and the Australian Government (https://www.austrade.gov.au/edtech/the-australian-education-system/)

dummies, while the impact function specifications control for the regional unemployment rate per year/region to account for period effects.

The literature reports distinct conditioning effects on the measurement of life satisfaction (Wooden & Li, 2014). Following Frijters and Beatton (2012), we address the time-in panel effects by including three dummy variables indicating the first three HILDA-interviews (see Table A1 in the Appendix for an overview of the distribution of all model variables).

4 | FINDINGS

4.1 | School-to-work transition and subjective well-being—General findings

Before presenting the results of our models, we provide a descriptive analysis of the school-to-work transition states. As the graph in Figure 2 illustrates, the average life course status of individuals follows an age-specific pattern. At age 15, almost all young people were still in secondary school. By age 19, all of the young people had left secondary school. The majority were engaged in education and training (either in the VET system or higher education). Post-school study activities declined over time. The finding of increased labor market participation at age 25 in addition to the increasing potential of sample selectivity motivated us to truncate our observation window at age 25.

Figure 2 reveals distinct gender-specific patterns in the school-to-work transition. While the transition patterns generally appear to be similar across the genders, we observe some systematic differences as follows: higher proportions of females than males engaged in academic study, while a higher proportion of males received certificate training. Furthermore, males have higher employment rates at almost all stages of the school-to-work transition. The share of females being temporarily inactive in the labor market is twice as high as the share of males typically due to reasons related to family formation. Between the ages of 15 and 25, overall unemployment was rare (3.6%). Periods of unemployment occur more often among males than females. Typically, unemployment periods occur at the transition from school or higher education and entry to the labor market. However, a certain

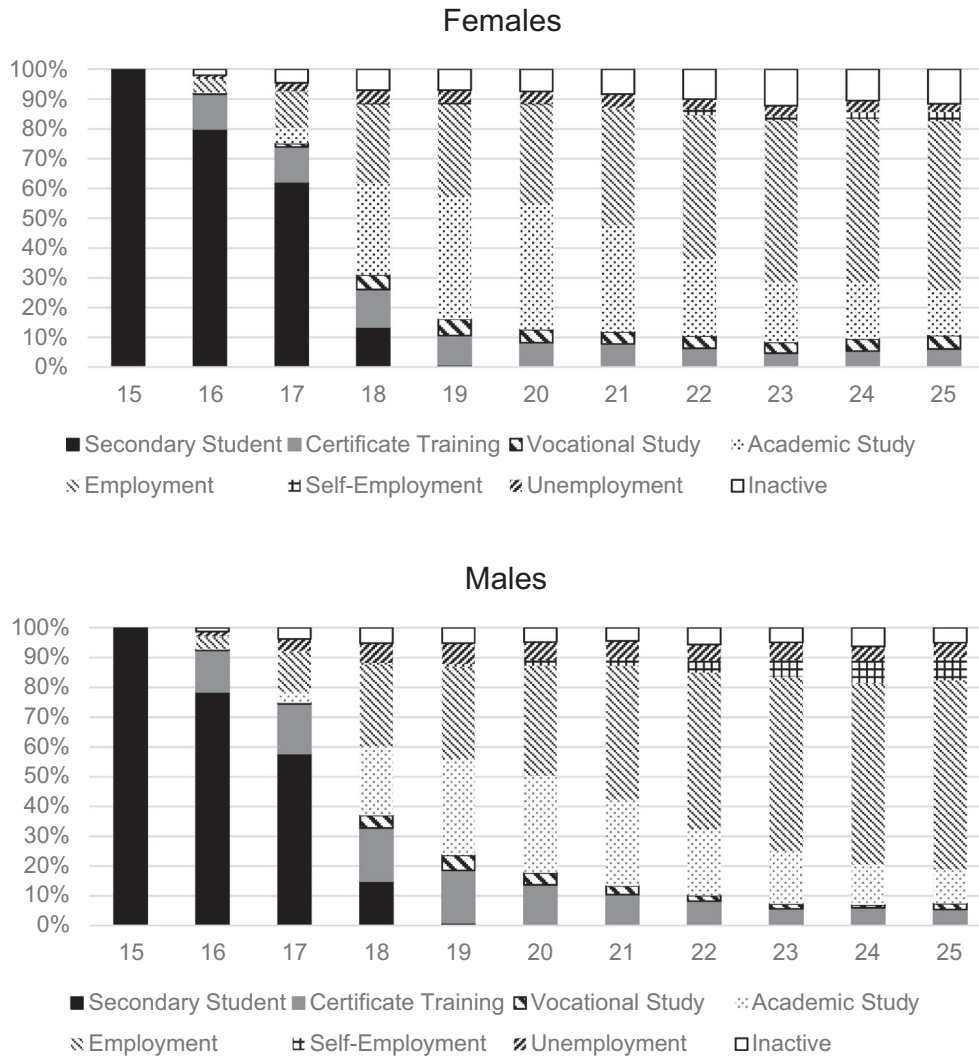

FIGURE 2 StWT pattern. Data. HILDA waves 1 to 18

risk of becoming unemployed is typical during individuals' overall school-to-work transition period (Dietrich et al., 2018). As Clark (2019) shows, subjective well-being is structured by age, but individual characteristics and life course characteristics diversify the age effect.

To investigate the effect of school-to-work status changes on subjective well-being, we employ fixed effects models and impact function models (Table A2 in the Appendix provides the full regression results of the impact function analysis). The overall fixed effects base model (Table 1) indicates insignificant and weak partial correlations between transitions from school to education or training and subjective well-being. A transition to employment is associated with increased subjective well-being compared to subjective well-being during secondary school, while a transition to unemployment reduces subjective well-being significantly by 0.11. The effect of a transition to unemployment is rather important because the presented partial correlation is the net of the perceived risk of becoming unemployed and the duration of unemployment. A transition to self-employment increases subjective well-being by 0.11, while transitions to inactivity are only insignificantly and weakly correlated with changes in subjective well-being.

Furthermore, Table 1 reveals a gender-specific pattern. While transitions to certificate training are only weak and insignificantly correlated with changes in subjective well-being, study is significantly positively correlated with subjective well-being among males (0.09) and negatively correlated among females (−0.08). We observe a similar pattern in employment, which improves subjective well-being by 0.11 among males but does not improve subjective well-being among females. In contrast, females respond more sensitively to a transition to unemployment (−0.17), while a transition to self-employment significantly increases females' subjective well-being (0.32). The corresponding association is much weaker among males (0.09) and is statistically insignificant. Again, the associations between inactivity and subjective well-being are statistically insignificant and weak.

Furthermore, we analyze how subjective well-being develops during the school-to-work transition. To this end, we present the findings from the fixed effects impact functions. Figure 3 replicates the findings from prior research (e.g., Beatton & Frijters, 2012). During secondary school, subjective well-being decreases by approximately 0.2 points (on an 11-point scale), and in the first seven years after secondary school, subjective well-being decreases by an additional approximately 0.2 points. Figure 4 shows that this process is gendered. While the development of (i.e., the change in) subjective well-being during secondary school and the first three years after school is rather similar, pronounced, and statistically significant gender differences are observed in the development of subjective well-being. While subjective well-being steadily decreases during the observation period among men, among females, subjective well-being development follows a slight u-shape.

In the next analytical step, we explore the development of subjective well-being during the school-to-work transition based on the first transition after secondary school. Therefore, we are able to explore whether the development of subjective well-being during and after secondary school differs among individuals with different post-secondary school transition types. The upper part of Figure 5 shows findings for individuals who transition directly into education after secondary school, the middle part of Figure 5 shows findings for individuals who transition directly into employment, and the lower part of Figure 5 shows findings for individuals who transition directly into unemployment after secondary education.

The transition to education mirrors the overall pattern presented in Figure 4, which is not surprising, as the transition to education after secondary school reflects the standard transition type. The findings of the transition to employment also show no gender-specific differences, and the overall development of subjective well-being is similar to the overall patterns presented in Figures 3 and 4. Interestingly, the findings of the change in subjective well-being conditional on a transition to unemployment directly after secondary school reveal different patterns. Among females, secondary school subjective well-being does not decrease, and the overall development of subjective well-being appears to be rather constant. The decrease in subjective well-being among males, however, starts in the first year before graduation and is particularly pronounced in the long run.

In the last step, we explore the differences in subjective well-being changes based on individuals' education completion or non-completion (Figure 6). Here, we again find gender differences. Among male dropouts, subjective well-being decreases during the entire school-to-work transition, while among female dropouts, subjective well-being mainly decreases during secondary school. In sum, the observed patterns for dropouts are similar to the patterns of graduates. However, the slightly u-shaped pattern for women reported earlier appears to be driven by female dropouts. Although the differences in the patterns are small, the overall decrease in the dropout groups differs from the change in subjective well-being among the individuals who graduate high school. In the comparison of the overall change in subjective well-being during the school-to-work transition between the dropout and graduate populations, subjective well-being shows a slightly more pronounced decrease among female dropouts than female graduates (a 0.35 decrease among female graduates vs. a 0.43 decrease among female dropouts). The same pattern is observed among men. Among the male dropouts, subjective well-being decreases by 0.72 during the school-to-work transition, while among the male graduates, subjective well-being decreases by 0.58. Thus, these results reveal the importance of education completion.

TABLE 1 Life satisfaction during the StWT—males versus females

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Overall	**Females**	**Males**
Transition Status (ref. Secondary School)			
Certificate training	0.0264	0.0150	0.0321
Study	0.0063	−0.0767^{+}	0.0887*
Employment	0.0536^{+}	−0.0040	0.1078**
Unemployment	−0.1139**	−0.1727**	−0.0609
Inactive	0.0183	0.0229	−0.0488
Self-employment	0.1053	0.3172**	0.0932
Subj. job loss probability	−0.0025***	−0.0031***	−0.0019**
Cumulative unemployment experience (in months)	−0.0015***	−0.0017**	−0.0012*
ASGC 2001 remoteness area (ref. major city)			
Inner regional Australia	0.0648*	0.0966*	0.0238
Outer regional Australia	−0.0134	0.0001	−0.0443
Remote Australia	0.1057	0.0689	0.1243
Long-term health problems	−0.2704***	−0.2989***	−0.2414***
Panel conditioning (ref. fourth year in panel or later)			
First year in panel	0.3001***	0.2794***	0.3049***
Second year in panel	0.2037***	0.1614***	0.2338***
Third year in panel	0.0948***	0.0148	0.1694***
Year (ref. 2011)			
2001	0.2241**	−0.0230	0.5328***
2002	0.2116**	0.0285	0.4415***
2003	0.2473***	0.1513^{+}	0.3745***
2004	0.1175*	−0.0081	0.2632***
2005	0.0988*	0.0511	0.1637**
2006	0.0515	−0.0519	0.1707**
2007	0.0735*	0.0214	0.1367**
2008	0.0686*	−0.0009	0.1465**
2009	−0.0157	−0.0543	0.0270
2010	0.0026	−0.0219	0.0264
2012	−0.0516^{+}	−0.0347	−0.0710^{+}
2013	−0.1115***	−0.0697	−0.1641***
2014	−0.1459***	−0.0750^{+}	−0.2307***
2015	−0.1400***	−0.1039*	−0.1921***
2016	−0.2363***	−0.1650***	−0.3292***
2017	−0.2569***	−0.1463**	−0.3888***
2018	−0.1918***	−0.0856	−0.3215***
Constant	8.1639***	8.1682***	8.1738***
Person-years	28,082	14,361	13,721
Number of persons	3,605	1,820	1,785
R^2 within	0.049	0.041	0.067

Note: Fixed effects regression coefficients. Dependent variable: overall life satisfaction.

Data: HILDA waves 1 to 18.

Statistical significance at

$^{+}p < .10$.

$^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$.; $^{***}p < .001$.

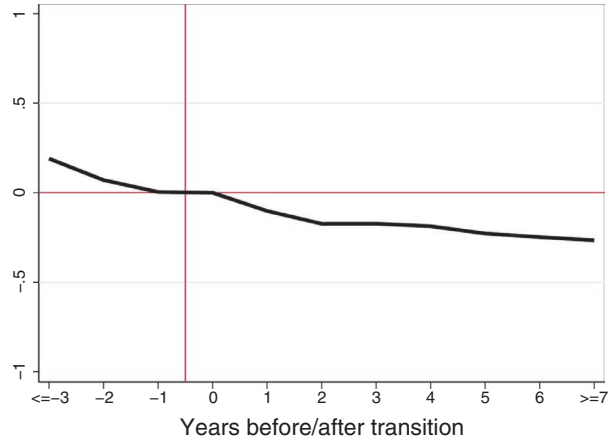

FIGURE 3 Results of the fixed effects impact functions—overall effect. Dependent variable: overall life satisfaction (0 to 10). Controls: long-term health problems, area changes, period effects, and panel conditioning. Data. HILDA waves 1 to 18 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

4.2 | Robustness checks

As we are interested in the effects of different school-to-work transition states on subjective well-being, we apply parsimonious modeling. Thus, checking the robustness of our results is of pivotal importance. Therefore, in the first step, we include further possible factors influencing subjective well-being. More specifically, we include lagged life satisfaction, mental health (as assessed by the MH5), domain-specific life satisfaction, critical life events, and family formation as variables of interest. We calculated a fixed effects model investigating the associations between school-to-work transition states and subjective well-being among males and females separately (see Tables A3a and A3b in the Appendix). Moreover, we check whether the inclusion of the mentioned factors influences the development of subjective well-being during the school-to-work transition (see Figure A1 in the Appendix).

In general, all models confirm the robustness of the main results. Notably, mental health, as measured by the MH5 mental health score from the SF36 (Kristoffersen, 2017), was strongly associated with subjective well-being, which is expected based on the literature. However, the overall trend of the school-to-work transition associations holds. The same applies when we introduce domain-specific measurements of life satisfaction (Dockery, 2003). Critical life events are typically rare during an individual's life (Hentschel et al., 2017). Nevertheless, our robustness checks reveal that such events have strong and gender-specific impacts on subjective well-being. However, in most cases, the school-to-work transition-subjective well-being associations do not deviate from the trend found in our main specification. Gaps in participation in the HILDA waves reduce subjective well-being and tend to indicate that negative life episodes cause both temporary unit nonresponse and negative effects on subsequent levels of subjective well-being.

Moreover, the literature suggests that the family formation status influences subjective well-being (Baranowska, 2010; O'Rand, 2002; Perelli-Harris et al., 2019). To check whether family formation changes the associations observed in the main specification, we include the following three variables: marital status, living alone status, and single parent status. All three variables affect subjective well-being; as expected, getting married or transitions to cohabitation are positively related to subjective well-being changes, while the subjective well-being of females who start to live alone or become single parents decreases. However, again, there are only weak indications that these variables alter the effects of the associations found in our main specification. The inclusion of the discussed factors has almost no influence on the development of subjective well-being (see Figure A1 in the Appendix).

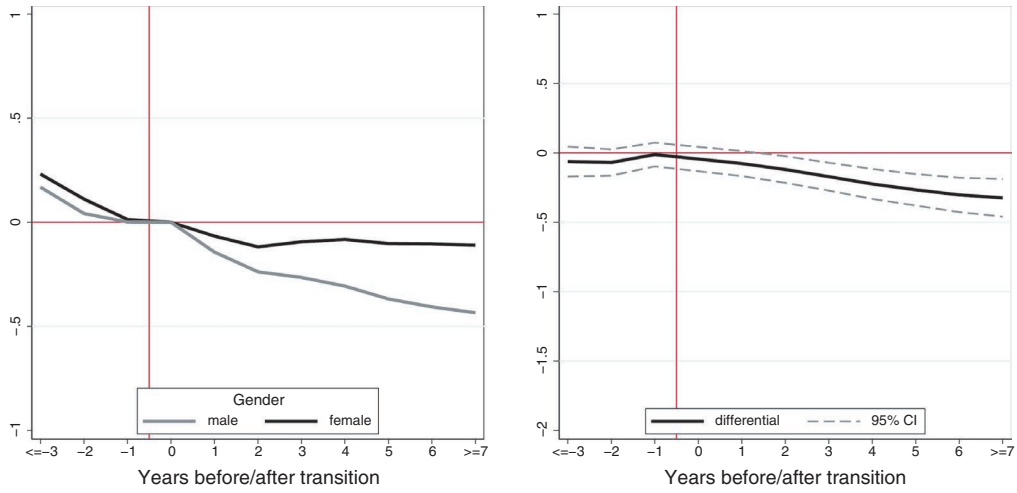

FIGURE 4 Results of the fixed effects impact functions by gender. Notes. The figure shows a profile plot on the left-hand side and an effect plot on the right-hand side. Dependent variable: overall life satisfaction (0 to 10). Note that the baseline is year 0; therefore, no differences in coefficients can be calculated at this time point. Controls: long-term health problems, area changes, period effects, and panel conditioning. Data. HILDA waves 1 to 18 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

In the second step, we calculate fixed effects regression models and impact functions separately for different social origin groups (see Table A4 and Figure A2 in the Appendix). The results of this analysis suggest that compared to individuals from a high social origin, individuals from a low social origin are more sensitive to both unemployment experience and long-lasting health problems. Individuals from higher social origins gain more subjective well-being from self-employment. However, the general conclusions of all models are consistent with those of the main specification. Thus, the social origin differences are negligible with respect to our modeling.

In summary, our robustness checks are consistent with findings reported in the literature. More importantly, our analysis indicates that the results of our main specification are not sensitive to the inclusion of many further important factors influencing subjective well-being. Moreover, the robustness checks do not indicate effect heterogeneity by social origin.

5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we aimed to examine the intra-individual development of subjective well-being during the school-to-work transition period. The transition from school to work is a pivotal period in the life course because it structures educational attainment, early labor market outcomes, and the overall employment career (Bhuller et al., 2017; Bönke et al., 2015; Manzoni et al., 2014). In turn, school-to-work transitions have implications for individual levels of subjective well-being over the life course (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Kratz & Patzina, 2020). Our analysis of panel data collected by the HILDA project over a period of 18 years reveals four main findings.

First, our findings based on individual fixed effects models suggest that as expected, transitions to employment are associated with increasing intra-individual levels of subjective well-being, whereas transitions to unemployment are associated with declining intra-individual levels of subjective well-being. This pattern has been widely reported in the literature (see, for example, Ambrey & Fleming, 2014; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Biddle, 2014; Dockery, 2005; Headey et al., 2013; Manning et al., 2016; McNamee & Medolia, 2014; Oesch & Lipps, 2013; Strandh, 2000). We also found that transitions to self-employment are positively correlated with subjective well-being.

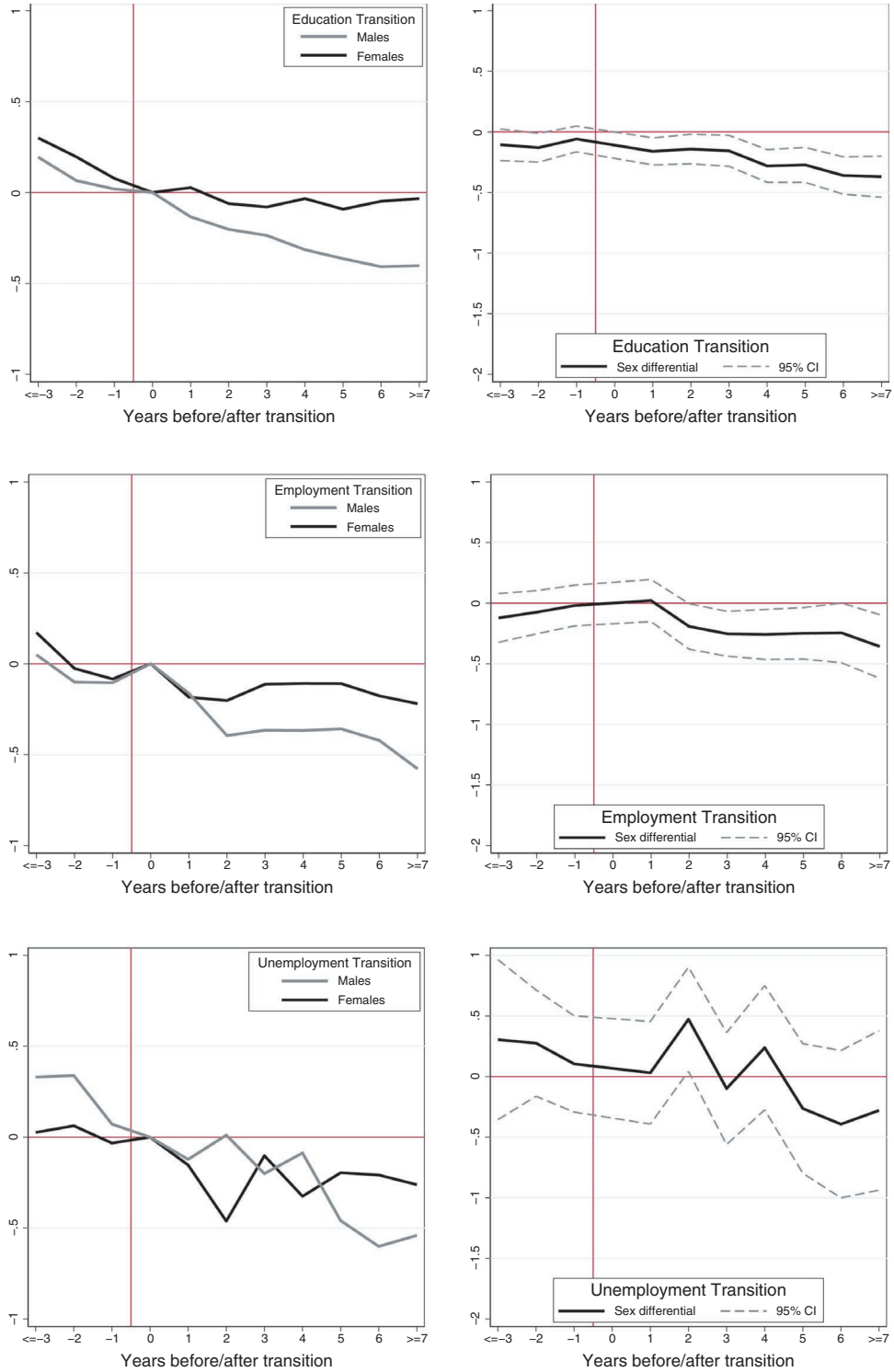

FIGURE 5 Results of the fixed effects impact functions by first transition after high school. The figure shows profile plots on the left-hand side and effect plots on the right-hand side. Dependent variable: overall life satisfaction (0 to 10). Note that the baseline is year 0; therefore, no differences in coefficients can be calculated at this time point. Controls: long-term health problems, area changes, period effects, and panel conditioning. Data. HILDA waves 1 to 18 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

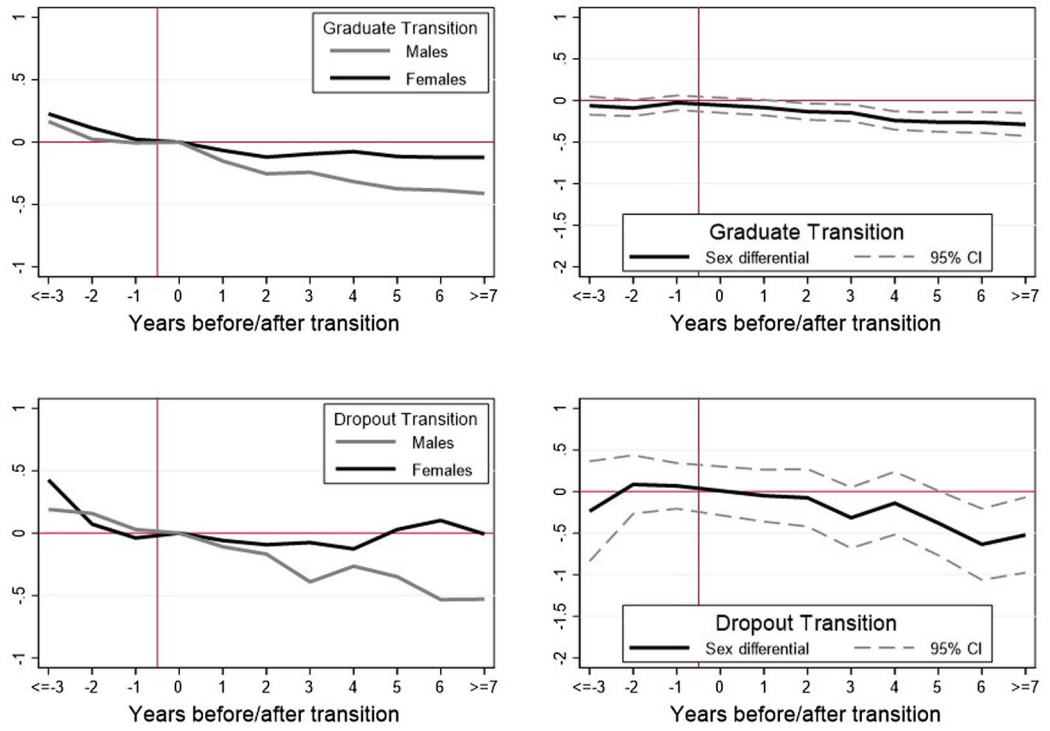

FIGURE 6 Results of the fixed effects impact functions by school graduates versus non-graduates. The figure shows profile plots on the left-hand side and effect plots on the right-hand side. Dependent variable: overall life satisfaction (0 to 10). Note that the baseline is year 0; therefore, no differences in coefficients can be calculated at this time point. Controls: long-term health problems, area changes, period effects, and panel conditioning. Data. HILDA waves 1 to 18 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Second, our findings suggest gender differences in the associations between some specific transitions and subjective well-being. Interestingly, transitions to study (vocational and academic) are positively related to subjective well-being among men, whereas these associations appear to be negative among women. These findings add to previous research reporting gender-specific well-being patterns during secondary education (e.g., Herke et al., 2019). Moreover, the results of the fixed effects models show positive changes in subjective well-being among men entering the labor market as employees, while females' subjective well-being sharply increases with transitions to self-employment.

Third, we further exploited the longitudinal character of the HILDA data and examined how subjective well-being changes during the school-to-work transition conditioned on individuals' subjective well-being level at the first transition after finishing schooling. Consequently, we estimated fixed effects impact functions to describe changes in subjective well-being before and after leaving secondary schooling. Here, we investigated effect heterogeneity by gender and conditioned on the first transition after students left secondary school (i.e., school-to-higher education, school-to-work, and school-to-unemployment transitions). While transitions from school to education represent the standard model of school-to-work transitions to prepare for the labor market, a transition from school to work or from school to unemployment as the first transition after secondary school constitute non-standard transitions and possibly have long-term scarring effects. With these analyses, we add to the literature concerning scarring (Gangl, 2006; Schmillen & Umkehrer, 2017), which indicates that early unemployment experience and labor market entries in precarious jobs have long-lasting negative career effects (Chesters & Cuervo, 2019). The overall picture revealed by the analyses using impact functions shows that subjective well-being already decreases during secondary school and that this process continues in the first seven years after secondary school. Again, we focused on gender differences and found

pronounced and statistically significant heterogeneity by gender in the development of subjective well-being after individuals left secondary school. Disregarding the absolute level of subjective well-being, from an intra-individual perspective, the subjective well-being of men continuously decreases, while subjective well-being development among females follows a slightly u-shaped pattern. The conditional assessment of subjective well-being development reveals that transitions to early employment or unemployment have longer-lasting and more severe negative impacts among both males and females, i.e., the absolute changes in subjective well-being during the school-to-work transition are stronger among individuals with these transitions.

Fourth, we analyzed subjective well-being changes conditioned on the (non-)completion of secondary schooling. Our findings related to education non-completion show that female dropouts' subjective well-being decreases only during secondary school, while male dropouts' subjective well-being decreases monotonically during the school-to-work transition. Furthermore, the total change in subjective well-being during the school-to-work transition is more pronounced among male and female dropouts than male and female graduates. These findings supplement the previously mentioned indication of early scarring among individuals with non-standard school-to-work transitions. Thus, leaving school without a graduation equivalent or not following the standard transition to higher education appears to induce early scarring, which is expressed by a more pronounced decrease in subjective well-being. In contrast, successfully graduating from secondary schooling and following the standard school-to-work transition appears to buffer against an overall decrease in subjective well-being. However, the importance of standard transitions appears to be stronger among males, who show steeper decreases in subjective well-being when following non-standard transitions than females.

With the employed fixed effects regressions, we focused on the possible effects of time-variant factors on subjective well-being and were unable to investigate group-specific level differences. However, the advantages of fixed effects analyses compensate for the limitations of our framework. As fixed effects models use only within-person variation, they rely on weaker exogeneity assumptions than other panel estimators (e.g., random effects models or hybrid models). Therefore, we obtained meaningful results regarding the association between school-to-work transition states and individuals' subjective well-being.

In summary, our study employs an analytical framework that builds upon state of the art life course methods, setting the stage for promising future work investigating the long-term impact of gendered school-to-work transition patterns and life course outcomes. This focus on intra-individual change is only able to scratch the surface of a very promising future research agenda. Our study especially focused on gender differences in the associations between different school-to-work transition states and intra-individual changes in subjective well-being and the development of subjective well-being in the transition from youth to young adulthood.

Future work should employ a wider set of institutional and cultural factors. As O'Rand expressed, economic, health, personal, social, and cultural resources, which may be considered forms of life course capital (O'Rand, 2002), accumulate or are depleted over the life course at variable rates (O'Rand, 2002, p. 15f). To address the institutional and cultural dimensions, cross-country variation seems to be required based on comparable longitudinal datasets (e.g., the British Household Panel or the German Socio-Economic Panel; see Frijters & Beatton, 2012; Headey et al., 2013). Such a design could be advantageous for addressing the contribution of institutional or cultural differences to individuals' transitions from school to work and the further life course. Moreover, our research reveals the scarring effects of non-standard school-to-work transition on subjective well-being, which is a finding that needs further investigation in the future. A potential fruitful avenue might be in-depth analyses of how youth unemployment influences subsequent subjective well-being levels and its development in the long run.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data subject to third party restrictions. The data that support the findings of this study are available from the National Centre for Longitudinal Data, Australian Government Department of Social Services. Restrictions apply to the availability of these data, which were used under license for this study (http://dx.doi.org/10.26193/3QRFMZ).

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ENDNOTE

[1] To check whether the sample truncation distorts our conclusions, we re-conducted all analyses until the age of 30. Our substantive conclusions do not depend on the sample selection. The results are available upon request.

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APPENDIX

TABLE A1 Distribution of the dependent variable, explanatory variables and control variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
Life satisfaction	8.13	1.31
Gender: female	0.51	
Transition status		
Secondary school	0.31	
Certificate training	0.10	
Study	0.21	
Employment	0.28	
Self-employment	0.01	
Unemployment	0.04	
Inactive	0.05	
Transition type		
Education transition	0.60	
Employment transition	0.27	
Unemployment transition	0.06	
Residual	0.08	
Years before/after transition		
<=−3	0.08	
−2	0.10	
−1	0.12	
0	0.13	
1	0.11	
2	0.10	
3	0.09	
4	0.08	
5	0.07	
6	0.06	
>=7	0.07	
Education non-completion	0.14	
Subj. job loss probability	6.37	15.27
Cumulative unemployment experience (in months)	21.07	32.90
ASGC 2001 remoteness area		
Major city	0.64	
Inner regional Australia	0.25	
Outer regional Australia	0.10	
Remote Australia	0.02	
Long-term health problems	0.13	
Panel conditioning		

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
Fourth year in panel or later	0.62	
First year in panel	0.13	
Second year in panel	0.13	
Third year in panel	0.12	
Unemployment rate in major statistical regions	5.22	0.99
Year		
2001	0.01	
2002	0.02	
2003	0.02	
2004	0.03	
2005	0.04	
2006	0.04	
2007	0.05	
2008	0.06	
2009	0.06	
2010	0.07	
2011	0.08	
2012	0.08	
2013	0.08	
2014	0.08	
2015	0.08	
2016	0.08	
2017	0.07	
2018	0.06	
Persons	3,605	
Person-years	28,082	

Note: Data: HILDA waves 1 to 18.

TABLE A2 Regression results of the fixed effect impact functions

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Overall	**By gender**	**By transition**	**By education completion**
Years before/after Transition (ref. 0)				
<−3	0.1904***	0.2315***	0.3003***	0.2269***
−2	0.0705+	0.1114*	0.1962***	0.1136*
−1	0.0039	0.0133	0.0773+	0.0215
1	−0.1021***	−0.0665+	0.0266	−0.0665+
2	−0.1733***	−0.1181**	−0.0613	−0.1202**
3	−0.1729***	−0.0939*	−0.0799	−0.0948*
4	−0.1872***	−0.0826*	−0.0337	−0.0763+
5	−0.2280***	−0.1022*	−0.0917+	−0.1151**
6	−0.2480***	−0.1038*	−0.0483	−0.1221**
>=7	−0.2658***	−0.1105*	−0.0333	−0.1227*
Long-term health problems	−0.2778***	−0.2816***	−0.2789***	−0.2829***
ASGC 2001 Remoteness Area (ref. major city)				
Inner regional Australia	0.0677+	0.0635+	0.0620+	0.0631+
Outer regional Australia	−0.0089	−0.0209	−0.0205	−0.0190
Remote Australia	0.1197	0.1076	0.1049	0.1022
Panel conditioning (ref. fourth year in panel or later)				
First year in panel	0.1994***	0.1887***	0.1870***	0.1875**
Second year in panel	0.1363**	0.1283**	0.1276**	0.1310**
Third year in panel	0.0593*	0.0553+	0.0531+	0.0548+
Unemployment rate	−0.0015	−0.0013	−0.0008	−0.0014
Time Dummies # Male				
<=−3 # Male		−0.0627		
−2 # Male		−0.0693		
−1 # Male		−0.0121		
1 # Male		−0.0768+		
2 # Male		−0.1198*		
3 # Male		−0.1713***		
4 # Male		−0.2240***		
5 # Male		−0.2661***		
6 # Male		−0.3028***		
>=7 # Male		−0.3242***		
Time Dummies # Gender # Transition Type				
<=−3 # Female # Employment			−0.1287	
<=−3 # Female # Unemployment			−0.2743	
<=−3 # Female # Residual			−0.3060	
<=−3 # Male # Education			−0.1056	
<=−3 # Male # Employment			−0.2508**	

(Continues)

TABLE A2 (Continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Overall	By gender	By transition	By education completion
<=−3 # Male # Unemployment			0.0303	
<=−3 # Male # Residual			−0.0490	
−2 # Female # Employment			−0.2223**	
−2 # Female # Unemployment			−0.1336	
−2 # Female # Residual			−0.1915	
−2 # Male # Education			−0.1305*	
−2 # Male # Employment			−0.2972***	
−2 # Male # Unemployment			0.1425	
−2 # Male # Residual			−0.0735	
−1 # Female # Employment			−0.1616*	
−1 # Female # Unemployment			−0.1099	
−1 # Female # Residual			−0.1808	
−1 # Male # Education			−0.0585	
−1 # Male # Employment			−0.1813**	
−1 # Male # Unemployment			−0.0055	
−1 # Male # Residual			0.0791	
1 # Female # Employment			−0.2105**	
1 # Female # Unemployment			−0.1802	
1 # Female # Residual			−0.3635*	
1 # Male # Education			−0.1606**	
1 # Male # Employment			−0.1894**	
1 # Male # Unemployment			−0.1490	
1 # Male # Residual			−0.1884	
2 # Female # Employment			−0.1415+	
2 # Female # Unemployment			−0.4005*	
2 # Female # Residual			0.0118	
2 # Male # Education			−0.1414*	
2 # Male # Employment			−0.3341***	
2 # Male # Unemployment			0.0725	
2 # Male # Residual			−0.1603	
3 # Female # Employment			−0.0328	
3 # Female # Unemployment			−0.0219	
3 # Female # Residual			−0.0601	
3 # Male # Education			−0.1564*	
3 # Male # Employment			−0.2860***	
3 # Male # Unemployment			−0.1207	
3 # Male # Residual			−0.1405	
4 # Female # Employment			−0.0753	

(Continues)

TABLE A2 (Continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Overall	By gender	By transition	By education completion
4 # Female # Unemployment			−0.2916	
4 # Female # Residual			−0.1811	
4 # Male # Education			−0.2810***	
4 # Male # Employment			−0.3333***	
4 # Male # Unemployment			−0.0534	
4 # Male # Residual			−0.1920	
5 # Female # Employment			−0.0178	
5 # Female # Unemployment			−0.1040	
5 # Female # Residual			−0.0276	
5 # Male # Education			−0.2723***	
5 # Male # Employment			−0.2670**	
5 # Male # Unemployment			−0.3673+	
5 # Male # Residual			−0.3011	
6 # Female # Employment			−0.1285	
6 # Female # Unemployment			−0.1597	
6 # Female # Residual			−0.1701	
6 # Male # Education			−0.3601***	
6 # Male # Employment			−0.3740***	
6 # Male # Unemployment			−0.5527*	
6 # Male # Residual			−0.0975	
>=7 # Female # Employment			−0.1866+	
>=7 # Female # Unemployment			−0.2281	
>=7 # Female # Residual			−0.1706	
>=7 # Male # Education			−0.3693***	
>=7 # Male # Employment			−0.5447***	
>=7 # Male # Unemployment			−0.5071*	
>=7 # Male # Residual			−0.0592	
Time Dummies # Gender # Dropout				
<=−3 # Female # Dropout				0.1996
<=−3 # Female # Graduate				−0.0618
<=−3 # Male # Graduate				−0.0367
−2 # Female # Dropout				−0.0414
−2 # Female # Graduate				−0.0905+
−2 # Male # Graduate				0.0441
−1 # Female # Dropout				−0.0602
−1 # Female # Graduate				−0.0276
−1 # Male # Graduate				0.0079
1 # Female # Dropout				0.0073

(Continues)

TABLE A2 (Continued)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Overall	**By gender**	**By transition**	**By education completion**
1 # Female # Graduate				−0.0854^{+}
1 # Male # Graduate				−0.0429
2 # Female # Dropout				0.0272
2 # Female # Graduate				−0.1340**
2 # Male # Graduate				−0.0481
3 # Female # Dropout				0.0185
3 # Female # Graduate				−0.1478**
3 # Male # Graduate				−0.2959*
4 # Female # Dropout				−0.0507
4 # Female # Graduate				−0.2407***
4 # Male # Graduate				−0.1892
5 # Female # Dropout				0.1431
5 # Female # Graduate				−0.2594***
5 # Male # Graduate				−0.2345^{+}
6 # Female # Dropout				0.2224
6 # Female # Graduate				−0.2636***
6 # Male # Graduate				−0.4111*
>=7 # Female # Dropout				0.1136
>=7 # Female # Graduate				−0.2888***
>=7 # Male # Graduate				−0.4068**
Constant	8.1914***	8.1958***	8.1946***	8.1964***
Person-years	28,082	28,082	28,082	28,082
Number of persons	3,605	3,605	3,605	3,605
R^2 within	.046	.049	.052	.050

Note: Fixed effects regression coefficients. Dependent variable: overall life satisfaction.

Data: HILDA waves 1 to 18.

Statistical significance at

$^{+}p < .10$.

$^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$.

TABLE A3A Robustness check—life satisfaction during the StWT for males by different model specifications

	Lagged LS	Gap	MH5	Life domains	Life events	Family formation
Transition status (ref. secondary school)						
Certificate training	0.0477	0.0353	0.0480	0.0484	0.0784^{+}	0.0358
Study	0.0862*	0.0931*	0.0632	0.0596	0.0917^{+}	0.1013*
Employment	0.1100**	0.1135**	0.0756^{+}	0.0900*	0.1071*	0.1132**
Unemployment	−0.0790	−0.0525	−0.0623	−0.1383**	0.0121	−0.0546
Inactive	−0.0757	−0.0425	0.0261	−0.1099*	0.0251	−0.0390
Self-employment	0.1009	0.0970	0.0483	0.1352^{+}	0.0056	0.0952
Subj. job loss probability	−0.0014*	−0.0019**	−0.0022***	−0.0005	−0.0017*	−0.0018**
Cumulative unemployment experience (in months)	−0.0016**	−0.0012**	−0.0007	−0.0008*	−0.0010^{+}	−0.0011*
ASGC 2001 remoteness area (ref. major city)						
Inner regional Australia	0.0193	0.0233	0.0400	−0.0606^{+}	−0.0145	0.0121
Outer regional Australia	−0.0225	−0.0433	−0.0287	−0.1582**	−0.1160	−0.0469
Remote Australia	0.1132	0.1212	0.0398	0.1093	0.1700	0.1058
Long-term health problems	−0.2025***	−0.2413***	−0.1911***	−0.0852**	−0.2326***	−0.2401***
Panel conditioning (ref. fourth year in panel or later)						
First year in panel		0.3104***	0.2764***	0.1185**	0.3598***	0.2876***
Second year in panel	0.2227***	0.2409***	0.2070***	0.0852*	0.2515***	0.2213***
Third year in panel	0.1591***	0.1732***	0.1450***	0.0828**	0.1532***	0.1627***
Year (ref. 2011)						
2001		0.5214***	0.4758***	0.2131*		0.5993***
2002	0.4582***	0.4310***	0.3365***	0.1981*	0.3209**	0.5015***
2003	0.3736***	0.3688***	0.3262***	0.1374*	0.3549***	0.4282***
2004	0.2726***	0.2571***	0.2394***	0.0412	0.2426***	0.3099***
2005	0.1144^{+}	0.1610**	0.1668**	0.0158	0.2026**	0.2061***
2006	0.1647**	0.1682**	0.1542**	0.0506		0.2061***
2007	0.0950^{+}	0.1347**	0.1011^{+}	0.0385		0.1613**
2008	0.1304**	0.1476**	0.0799	0.0732^{+}		0.1657***
2009	−0.0060	0.0285	0.0037	0.0118	0.0190	0.0432
2010	0.0228	0.0264	−0.0023	0.0333	−0.0006	0.0317
2012	−0.0693	−0.0686	−0.0498	−0.0415	−0.0700	−0.0776^{+}
2013	−0.1714***	−0.1609***	−0.1530***	−0.0699^{+}	−0.1727***	−0.1744***
2014	−0.2248***	−0.2268***	−0.2253***	−0.1235**	−0.2355***	−0.2451***
2015	−0.1759***	−0.1856***	−0.1370**	−0.0725^{+}	−0.1805***	−0.2131***
2016	−0.3176***	−0.3226***	−0.2651***	−0.1497***	−0.3128***	−0.3556***
2017	−0.3571***	−0.3809***	−0.3302***	−0.1667***	−0.3820***	−0.4242***
2018	−0.2681***	−0.3139***	−0.2400***	−0.1130*	−0.3092***	−0.3598***

(Continues)

TABLE A3A (Continued)

	Lagged LS	Gap	MH5	Life domains	Life events	Family formation
Gap		−0.1762**				
MH5score			0.4268***			
Satisfaction with home				0.1155***		
Satisfaction with safety				0.1145***		
Satisfaction with belonging to local community				0.0443***		
Health satisfaction				0.1678***		
Satisfaction with neighborhood				0.0283***		
Satisfaction with free time				0.0845***		
Separation from spouse					−0.2059***	
Victim of physical violence					−0.1262+	
Detained in jail					−0.4957**	
Fired or made redundant					−0.0848	
Major improvement in finances					0.1437*	
Major worsening of finances					−0.4632***	
Marital status (ref. never married)						
Legally married						0.2738**
Married de Facto						0.0977*
Separated						−1.1242+
Divorced						0.6199
Person living alone (hhfty-d24)						−0.0647+
Single parent (hhfty-d13–22)						−0.0325
Constant	7.6923***	8.1700***	6.1519***	3.7809***	8.2333***	8.1780***
Person-years	11,963	13,721	11,751	13,721	9,793	13,721
Number of persons	1,785	1,785	1,759	1,785	1,746	1,785
R^2 within	.057	.068	.138	.280	.076	.069

Note: Fixed effects regression coefficients. Dependent variable: overall life satisfaction.

Data: HILDA waves 1 to 18.

Statistical significance at

+$p < .10$.

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

TABLE A3B Robustness check—life satisfaction during the StWT for females by different model specifications

	Lagged LS	Gap	MH5	Life domains	Life events	Family formation
Transition status (ref. secondary school)						
Certificate training	−0.0211	0.0164	0.0020	0.0110	0.0325	0.0221
Study	−0.0744^{+}	−0.0747^{+}	−0.0683^{+}	−0.0664^{+}	−0.0508	−0.0588
Employment	−0.0160	−0.0021	−0.0323	−0.0390	−0.0008	0.0064
Unemployment	−0.2056**	−0.1702**	−0.1556*	−0.2826***	−0.1562*	−0.1735**
Inactive	−0.0229	0.0254	0.0012	0.0072	0.0460	0.0140
Self-employment	0.2604*	0.3198**	0.3707**	0.0828	0.3918**	0.3204**
Subj. job loss probability	−0.0034***	−0.0031***	−0.0023***	−0.0010^{+}	−0.0025***	−0.0030***
Cumulative unemployment experience (in months)	−0.0024***	−0.0017**	−0.0014**	−0.0011*	−0.0019**	−0.0017**
ASGC 2001 remoteness area (ref. major city)						
Inner regional Australia	0.0961*	0.0966*	0.0957*	−0.0566	0.1089*	0.0715
Outer regional Australia	−0.0044	−0.0002	0.0119	−0.1423**	0.0354	−0.0333
Remote Australia	0.0816	0.0674	0.1544	−0.0347	−0.1238	0.0101
Long-term health problems	−0.2788***	−0.2993***	−0.1595***	−0.0905**	−0.2373***	−0.2980***
Panel conditioning (ref. fourth year in panel or later)						
First year in panel		0.2809***	0.2414***	−0.0052	0.3086***	0.2667***
Second year in panel	0.1466**	0.1635***	0.1649***	0.0176	0.1584**	0.1546***
Third year in panel	0.0067	0.0164	0.0662^{+}	−0.0515	0.0298	0.0129
Year (ref. 2011)						
2001		−0.0245	−0.0676	−0.1694^{+}		0.0418
2002	0.1466**	0.1635***	0.1649***	0.0176	0.1584**	0.1546***
2003	0.0067	0.0164	0.0662^{+}	−0.0515	0.0298	0.0129
2004	−0.0193	0.0263	−0.0249	−0.1773*	−0.0069	0.0904
2005	0.1042	0.1496^{+}	0.1320^{+}	−0.0916	0.1075	0.2097*
2006	−0.0055	−0.0086	−0.0118	−0.1377*	−0.0186	0.0435
2007	0.0490	0.0515	0.0461	−0.0647	0.0326	0.0995
2008	−0.0725	−0.0527	−0.0769	−0.1500**		−0.0106
2009	0.0512	0.0210	0.0097	−0.0603		0.0541
2010	−0.0207	−0.0007	−0.0316	−0.0636		0.0265
2012	−0.0144	−0.0344	−0.0085	−0.0590	−0.0358	−0.0374
2013	−0.0401	−0.0689	−0.0567	0.0082	−0.0998*	−0.0801^{+}
2014	−0.0319	−0.0742^{+}	−0.0413	−0.0484	−0.0862^{+}	−0.0895*
2015	−0.0700	−0.1025*	−0.0379	−0.0367	−0.0943^{+}	−0.1274**
2016	−0.1226*	−0.1635**	−0.1155*	−0.0686	−0.1708**	−0.1899***
2017	−0.1013^{+}	−0.1445**	−0.0782	0.0073	−0.1527**	−0.1775**

(Continues)

TABLE A3B (Continued)

	Lagged LS	Gap	MH5	Life domains	Life events	Family formation
2018	−0.0512	−0.0834	−0.0171	0.0149	−0.1042	−0.1248*
Gap		−0.0491				
MH5score			0.4979***			
Satisfaction with home				0.1155***		
Satisfaction with safety				0.1467***		
Satisfaction with belonging to local community				0.0427***		
Health satisfaction				0.1804***		
Satisfaction with neighborhood				0.0369***		
Satisfaction with free time				0.0863***		
Separation from spouse					−0.0839+	
Victim of physical violence					−0.2492***	
Detained in jail					−0.6842*	
Fired or made redundant					−0.1800**	
Major improvement in finances					0.1460+	
Major worsening of finances					−0.2168*	
Marital status (ref. never married)						
Legally married						0.1905**
Married de Facto						0.1095**
Separated						0.0586
Divorced						0.3076
Person living alone (hhfty-d24)						−0.1426***
Single parent (hhfty-d13–22)						−0.1314***
Constant	7.9729***	8.1670***	5.8865***	3.4957***	8.1888***	8.1944***
Person-years	12,559	14,361	12,853	14,361	10,691	14,361
Number of persons	1,820	1,820	1,801	1,820	1,788	1,820
R^2 within	.029	.041	.146	.304	.044	.045

Note: Fixed effects regression coefficients. Dependent variable: overall life satisfaction.

Data: HILDA waves 1 to 18.

Statistical significance at

+$p < .10$.

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

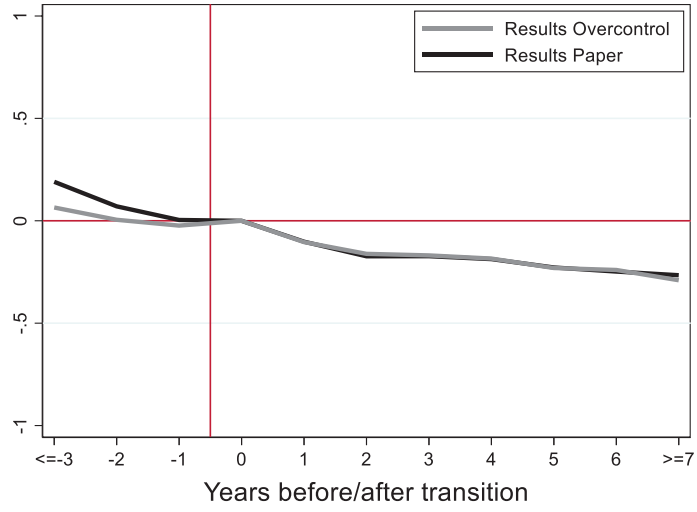

FIGURE A1 SWB changes with life events, mental health and family formation controlled. Data. HILDA waves 1 to 18 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

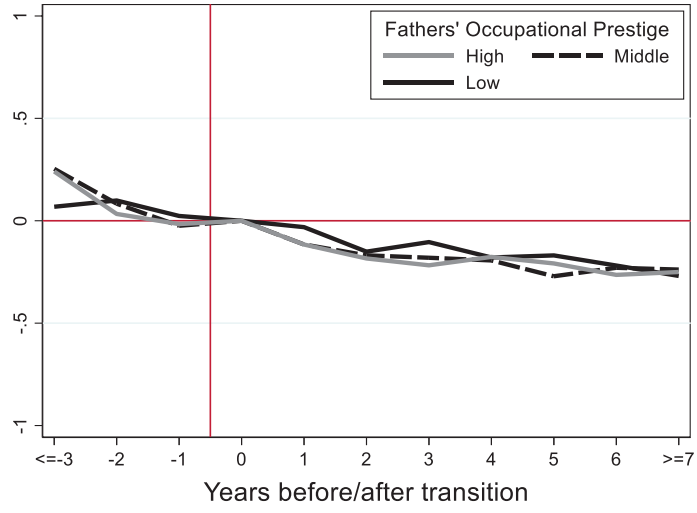

FIGURE A2 SWB changes by social origin. Data. HILDA waves 1 to 18 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

TABLE A4 Life satisfaction during the StWT by social origin

	Low	Medium	High
Transition status (ref. secondary school)			
Certificate training	0.0199	0.0341	−0.0354
Study	0.0330	0.0079	0.0057
Employment	0.0216	0.0700	0.0627
Unemployment	−0.1614*	−0.0565	−0.0731
Inactive	−0.0655	0.0249	0.1514+
Self-employment	0.0212	0.1147	0.1942
Subj. job loss probability	−0.0025**	−0.0027***	−0.0027***
Cumulative unemployment experience (in months)	−0.0019**	−0.0013+	0.0006
ASGC 2001 remoteness area (ref. major city)			
Inner regional Australia	0.1867**	0.0123	0.0367
Outer regional Australia	−0.0343	0.0280	0.1077
Remote Australia	0.3271	0.1823	0.1959
Long-term health problems	−0.2798***	−0.3054***	−0.1663***
Panel conditioning (ref. fourth year in panel or later)			
First year in panel	0.2380***	0.3422***	0.3171***
Second year in panel	0.1722**	0.2151***	0.1880***
Third year in panel	0.1357**	0.0894*	0.0456
Year (ref. 2011)	0.1633	0.1750	0.3609**
2001	0.0866	0.3232**	0.3296**
2002	0.0695	0.4644***	0.1985*
2003	−0.1158	0.2530**	0.2703**
2004	−0.0469	0.1201+	0.2304**
2005	0.0249	0.0275	0.1815**
2006	0.1115	0.0583	0.0900
2007	0.1644*	−0.0094	0.1322*
2008	0.0102	−0.0337	0.0078
2009	0.0099	0.0226	−0.0349
2010	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
2012	0.0153	−0.0800	−0.0394
2013	−0.1448*	−0.0894+	−0.0698
2014	−0.1132+	−0.1623**	−0.1244*
2015	−0.1261+	−0.0876	−0.1950***
2016	−0.1390+	−0.2354***	−0.3295***
2017	−0.2571**	−0.2265***	−0.2808***
2018	−0.0990	−0.1731*	−0.2978***
Constant	8.0756***	8.1797***	8.1921***
Person-years	7,718	9,365	7,989
Number of persons	992	1,197	999
R^2	.044	.058	.060

Note: Fixed effects regression coefficients. Dependent variable: overall life satisfaction.

Data: HILDA waves 1 to 18.

Statistical significance at

+p< .10.

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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(Dis)Engagement with queer counterpublics: Exploring intimate and family lives in online and offline spaces in China

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Abstract

There have been ongoing discussions about the ways in which the Internet has created new spaces for sexual minority individuals to meet, communicate, and build their communities in recent decades. Nevertheless, previous studies have paid disproportionate attention to identity politics, civil society, and rights-based movements. They have largely overlooked other possible forms of, and orientations toward, engagement with cyberspace, particularly those that have emerged and been restricted in non-Western contexts. This article examines Chinese lesbians' experiences of using cyberspace and the extent to which these experiences help them develop their intimate and family lives. Drawing on interview data and developing a framework that combines queer counterpublics scholarship with insights drawn from the notion of relational selfhood, this study reveals a wide range of personal, familial, and socio-political motivations for (not) engaging in cyberspace and the mixed feelings of connection and distance experienced by participants. By identifying three forms of (dis)engagement with cyberspace: those demonstrated by 'pioneers', 'skeptics', and 'conflicted pragmatists', this study expands the notion of queer counterpublics beyond its

focus on civic and political participation and illustrates the contested and contingent nature of Chinese queer counterpublics. It shows that Chinese lesbians' interactions in cyberspace enable them to explore non-traditional paths to family formation and motherhood. Meanwhile, these interactions expose them to tensions between the new possibilities revealed by online spaces and established socio-political and familial norms. I argue that prevailing heterosexual norms, coupled with material concerns and the regulatory power of the family and the state, continue to restrict the transformative potential of cyberspace and push some lesbians to withdraw from cyberspace into themselves and refrain from taking part in collective action. The article concludes with some reflections on queer counterpublics and the complex interplay between online and offline lives in the digital age.

KEYWORDS

family, Internet technology, lesbian, motherhood, queer counterpublics, relational self

1 | INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that many sexual minority people, especially those who lack offline resources and cannot disclose their sexual identities offline, have moved away from physical locations and into cyberspace, relying on it to create their own social networks and mitigate their experiences of social exclusion (Bartone, 2018; Jenzen, 2017). It is generally believed that online sites now play an indispensable role in the everyday lives of sexual minority people and have given rise to queer[1] counterpublics (Cavalcante, 2019; Friedman, 2017). Warner (2002) conceptualizes counterpublics as discursive spaces that enable groups who are aware of their subordinate status to articulate and develop their identities, interests, and needs in opposition to the dominant group and norms. Inspired by this conceptualization, discussions about virtual queer counterpublics have primarily focused on sexual minority people's experiences of belonging and affiliation, and/or the mobilization of political action via online platforms in Western contexts (Cavalcante, 2019; Jenzen, 2017). However, this body of work has largely overlooked other possible forms of, and orientations toward, engagement with queer counterpublics, particularly those that have emerged and been restricted in non-Western contexts where human rights and activism remain limited and even suppressed. This article aims to fill this gap and examines the extent to which cyberspace creates new spaces for Chinese lesbians, who identify themselves as lalas,[2] to challenge established heterosexual and family norms and envision and actualize alternative family forms in the Chinese context, where same-sex relationships remain stigmatized (Miles-Johnson & Wang, 2018) and state control over the Internet has been tightened (Liao, 2019).

My study builds on Ho's conceptualization of 'cyberspace' as 'both an imagined and real space' (2010, p. 101), in which one's online experiences are closely linked to offline ones. As the rise of the Internet destabilizes the conventional public/private boundary and reconfigures the 'realities' of both the public and private realms (Couldry et al., 2016; Moor & Kanji, 2019), this article investigates lalas' experiences of cyberspace as part of their

family-building processes in China. The research questions I seek to answer are: To what extent have lalas' experiences of cyberspace helped them to define and develop their intimate and family lives in the face of persistent heterosexual family norms in China? What are the constraints imposed on their search for new visions of family life via cyberspace?

The objectives of this article are twofold. Firstly, this study aims to contribute to current discussions on queer counterpublics and to sexuality and family studies by investigating the roles of cyberspace in lalas' intimate and family lives. Combining queer counterpublics scholarship with insights drawn from the notion of relational selfhood (Barbalet, 2014; Qi, 2016), which I discuss in the next section, this article identifies the extent to which the features of counterpublics are reflected in lalas' engagement with cyberspace. It also highlights the deep tensions between the transformative potential of cyberspace for lalas' family life and the pressure lalas feel to accommodate socio-political and familial norms. I argue that these tensions reveal the persistence of heterosexual norms and the regulatory power of both the family and the state, which continue to restrict the potentially liberating effects of lalas' experiences of cyberspace on their offline lives.

Secondly, by exploring counterpublics in a restrictive context under state control and self-censorship, this article provides empirical evidence of different approaches to engaging with queer counterpublics. Rather than an ethnocentric understanding of publics and counterpublics as mainly political or civic in orientation, or as a continuum between the two orientations (Breese, 2011), this study draws attention to a wide range of personal, familial, and socio-political motivations for (not) engaging in virtual counterpublics and the mixed feelings of connection and distance experienced by participants. I argue that understanding lalas' accounts of intimate and family life in relation to and in tension with cyberspace provides a particularly useful viewpoint from which to study the potential and constraints of queer counterpublics. It raises important questions about the extent to which individuals use personal and/or collective agency to respond to established norms through online and offline spaces in different contexts.

The article begins by discussing the dynamics between freedom and control experienced by lalas in Chinese cyberspace and critically reflecting upon the notion of queer counterpublics. I then provide a brief description of methods before presenting the interview findings and considering how and under what circumstances lalas may benefit from their involvement in cyberspace to find alternative ways of navigating their intimate and family lives. The article concludes by discussing the implications of the findings for a better understanding of the complex power dynamics involved in queer counterpublics within a digital but still heteronormative environment.

1.1 | The co-existence of freedom and control: Reflecting on the Chinese relational self in online and offline spaces

It is important to attend to the complex power dynamics within Chinese cyberspace, where 'state control, a degree of freedom of expression and self-censorship' coexist (Ho, 2010, p. 99). One of the most significant changes in urban China in recent decades has been the growing visibility of topics related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ)[3] issues on the Internet (Bao, 2020; Engebretsen, 2014). Despite tightening state control over the Internet, which will be elaborated below, the potential of online platforms to open up new forms of intimacy and sociality has been widely discussed in the literature (Chan, 2021; Liu, 2017; Martin, 2009). The emergence of cyberspace, including that of dating apps, has enabled lalas (and gay men) to explore their sexualities and connect with each other through low-cost and often anonymous online communication (Chan, 2021). This provides an alternative to face-to-face interaction, which used to put them at risk of involuntarily revealing their sexual identities and exposing themselves to stigmatization (Ho, 2010). As shown in the findings, cyberspace also plays a key role in enabling lalas to obtain information about potential paths to family life, such as same-sex marriage and the availability of assisted reproductive technology (ART) overseas, neither of which have yet been legally permitted in China (Lo, 2020).

Expanding on prior research examining the impact of online engagement on identities, sexual exploration, community, and activism among Chinese lalas and gay men (Chan, 2021; Engebretsen et al., 2015; Martin, 2009), my study investigates lalas' experiences of cyberspace as part of their family-building processes in China. I argue that the extent to which cyberspace helps give rise to new possibilities for imagining and realizing non-heterosexual intimate and family relationships needs to be understood in relation to a person's relational selfhood and the online and offline environment.

It is almost impossible to decipher lalas' (dis)engagement with queer counterpublics in cyberspace without understanding their 'relational self', which is inclined to pursue self-interest and yet simultaneously strives to meet family expectations and interests in their family-centred context (Lo, 2020; Qi, 2016). China and other East Asian contexts, such as Japan and Taiwan, share similar Confucian values, which attach great importance to traditional family values and make it difficult for same-sex relationships to be acknowledged in the family of origin (Brainer, 2019; Khor & Kamano, 2019; Tang, 2020). However, the parental and societal pressure on adult men and women, especially that on women, to marry the opposite sex and have children is extraordinarily pronounced in China (Jackson, 2019; Lo & Chan, 2017). Due to the previous one-child policy and the minimal role of the state in providing welfare and care support, older Chinese parents are inclined to arrange matchmaking dates for their single adult children and push them to have children, who can then provide some sort of support for older family members (Hildebrandt, 2019). The lack of siblings generally increases this pressure on lalas (and gay men). Worse still, women who remain single in their late twenties are often stigmatized as 'leftover women' by state-led propaganda, the media, and society (Ji, 2015; Xie, 2021). These gendered and socio-political forces serve as key stumbling blocks to lalas' family-building experiences. Consequently, many lalas may hide their sexual orientation and/or marry a heterosexual/gay man with the goals of appearing to be heterosexual and avoiding disappointing their parents (Choi & Luo, 2016; Engebretsen, 2014; Lo, 2020). As I explain further in the findings, it is within this context that cyberspace appears to be a site of tension, a place where lalas tend to locate themselves in relation to their wider family and social worlds and find themselves entangled in a series of self-conflicts while simultaneously having to navigate heteronormative norms, parental expectations, and state control.

Another important point to note is that China's move toward neoliberal governance has given rise to a 'new ethics of self-management and self-orientation' (Zhang & Ong, 2008, p. 8), which urges people to pursue self-interest without challenging the limits set by the government (Kong, 2017, 2019). Scholars have alerted us to the overstatement of the potential of cyberspace for transforming people's thoughts and lives (Berry et al., 2003; Chan, 2021). In particular, recent years have witnessed tightening Chinese state control over the Internet. One example is the recent crackdown on LGBTQ accounts held by university student groups on the WeChat platform in 2021 (Ni & Davidson, 2021). Also, since 2017, homosexuality-related content in online shows and programmes has been banned by the state (Liao, 2019). There have been constant changes and ambiguities in state regulations, which have led to self-censorship by Internet users and businesses in China (Shaw & Zhang, 2018).

These institutional restrictions do not mean, however, that the possibilities of utilizing online platforms as a tool to enhance LGBTQ visibility are completely eliminated (Bao, 2020; Yang, 2019). For instance, some LGBTQ-related NGOs and filmmakers have used the Internet as a 'networked discourse platform' to increase the public visibility of LGBTQ issues and question established sexual norms (Shaw & Zhang, 2018, p. 284). Differently from many of their Western counterparts, who generally enjoy greater freedom to make use of cyberspace to mobilize individual and collective agency for rights-based advocacy and movements (Cavalcante, 2019; Jenzen, 2017), lalas (and gay men) have to tread carefully in exploring online spaces while being sensitive to potential state intervention (Shaw & Zhang, 2018).

Extending this line of enquiry, the current study goes beyond the focus on political and civic engagement and examines the interplay between cyberspace and lalas' intimate and family lives in order to tackle the unexplored

question: To what extent can cyberspace help lalas form counterpublics and navigate non-traditional paths to family formation and/or motherhood?

1.2 | Re-mapping the diversity of queer counterpublics

Grounding the analysis in a framework that combines queer counterpublics scholarship with insights drawn from Chinese sexuality and family research, the present study engages with important questions about the extent to which cyberspace provides opportunities for lalas to counter the status quo and realize their desired non-heterosexual intimate and family lives. Cyberspace has generally been considered a constructive space that helps organize queer counterpublics (Breese, 2011; Gray, 2014). The notion of 'counterpublics' is premised on the belief that there are multiple and diverse publics in society and that some publics have been excluded from or subordinated to a dominant group or culture due to unequal power relations (Asen, 2000; Warner, 2002). To Warner (2002, p. 112), the 'counter' aspect of counterpublics is manifested in both the awareness of one's subordinate status and the attempt by the subordinate group to 're-create itself as a public'.

The notion of counterpublics has been widely adopted in studies of sexuality, gender, ethnicity, religion, and other forms of difference (Breese, 2011; Soliman, 2017). In particular, in developing a typology for describing the variety of public spheres, Breese (2011) plots the counterpublics formed by various LGBTQ groups along a continuum between political and civic in orientation. This represents the range of political actions, movements, and civic engagement through associations, clubs, and small groups. The notion of queer counterpublics is useful for my analysis of whether and to what extent Chinese sexual minority women invent counter-discourses in opposition to the mainstream public.

It is noteworthy that current discussions on queer counterpublics have largely been grounded in Euro-American contexts, with a primary focus on the individual and collective construction of pride and activism. Studies focusing on the use of social media among LGBTQ people have highlighted how online counterpublics serve as an ideal vehicle for the practice of 'intimate storytelling', enabling individuals to freely narrate their identities and intimate lives and fostering a sense of pride and community (Cavalcante, 2019, p. 1719). Furthermore, the Internet has become the principal space, especially for young LGBTQ people, to exercise political agency, as evidenced by the prevalence of personal blogs/vlogs and online political campaigns aimed at enhancing LGBTQ visibility and rights (Cavalcante, 2019; Jenzen, 2017).

However, the queer potential of cyberspace does not necessarily apply to individuals or communities from different backgrounds. For instance, Roth (2017) acknowledged that the Internet served as a key social resource for coming out among German lesbian-queer people. Meanwhile, the study also found that the participants who encountered most difficulties in coming out offline due to the heteronormative environment also refrained from coming out online, thereby highlighting the importance of understanding online and offline experiences as closely interlinked (Roth, 2017). In other words, the potential of cyberspace to generate queer counterpublics has to take the local context and personal circumstances into account. It does not necessarily translate into the amelioration of social exclusion (Bartone, 2018; Gray, 2014). As I further illustrate with my findings, lalas' experiences of cyberspace may even result in a sense of alienation due to the considerable offline constraints in the Chinese context, where neither the act of coming out nor activism is favored (Kong, 2019; Tsang, 2021).

Few studies have examined the ways in which cyberspace may reconfigure conceptions of intimate and family life in Western contexts. For example, by studying families headed by lesbian couples or single heterosexual women with children conceived through sperm donation, Andreassen (2017) revealed how these families created new forms of intimacy and extended family bonds by online and offline interactions with 'donor siblings' conceived by the same donors but, at the same time, experienced fear that connecting with donor siblings might threaten the existing nuclear family. Similarly, Cooper (2010) discussed how lesbians in

opposite-sex marriages connected with the online community to share similar feelings and experiences of exclusion from not only mainstream society but also from LGBTQ movements, which advocate the pride of coming out. Such exclusion, however, put them in a difficult position when attempting to decide whether and how to maintain or choose between their two separate identities and relationships. These studies demonstrate the different ways in which lesbians may attempt to resist the heteronormative family model by engaging in practices of sharing and community-building in cyberspace. They also highlight the importance of studying the tensions related to, or ambivalences toward, the use of cyberspace and a wider range of forms of, and orientations toward, engagement with online queer counterpublics. This article attends to the generally neglected aspects of queer counterpublics that arise in the family-centered and authoritarian context of China and untangles the ways in which the 'counter' aspect of counterpublics is manifested in lalas' engagement with cyberspace.

2 | METHODS

The themes that I explore in this article are based on in-depth interviews conducted with 35 lala-identified participants. Rather than analyzing online content, I draw on participants' personal narratives of their experiences of cyberspace in order to illustrate their subjective experiences and meaning-making processes. Interviews of around two hours were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, audio-recorded and transcribed, and then translated into English. They included discussions of: participants' experiences of realizing their lala identities, finding same-sex partners, engaging in lala-related online and offline activities, and their views and experiences of intimate and family lives. Ethical approval was provided by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Sociology at the University of Oxford before the fieldwork commenced. Pseudonyms have been used to ensure confidentiality.

Recruitment and fieldwork took place in Beijing, the capital of China, between 2017 and 2018. This city serves as an important site for investigation because of its unique position as the political and cultural hub of China and the co-existence of freedom and control within it. Lalas can generally enjoy more opportunities to explore the city's vibrant lala community culture than their counterparts in smaller cities. Yet they continue to be subjected to tight political control, such as intermittent crackdowns on lala public events (Engebretsen, 2014). To diversify the sample, I recruited participants through various channels, including LGBTQ-related and gender-related organizations, my personal networks, and participants' referral to their networks.

Participants' ages ranged from 25 to 45. At the time of the interview, about two-thirds of participants were in a same-sex relationship. The majority had white-collar jobs, working in a variety of sectors, namely the media, finance, logistics, and administration. Over two-thirds had a bachelor's degree and only three had not received a university education. According to recent research (Li, 2019), because the post-1980 cohort in China has generally benefited from government support for basic education and the expansion of university enrolment policies, this generation tends to enjoy greater access to university education than previous generations. As most participants were born in the 1980s, they had experienced these better opportunities to enter university. All participants had had access to the Internet since the rapid development of the Chinese Internet industry during the 1990s. While the relatively small sample size and the hidden nature of the lala population limit the generalizability of the findings, this study is explorative in nature and reveals the complexity of lalas' experiences of cyberspace in relation to their family-building processes.

All the interviews were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with the assistance of NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. I checked each of the potential themes against the coded data extracts and the entire data set to ensure that they coherently and meaningfully captured the relevant data. The particular cases discussed here were chosen because they reflect key aspects of themes that are typical among the wider

sample. They serve as examples of the generalized patterns of meaning concerning participants' experiences of cyberspace.

3 | FINDINGS

3.1 | The pioneers: 'Opening the door' to alternative conceptions of intimate and family life and avenues to motherhood

Almost all the participants said that they would have found it very difficult to resist parental and societal expectations of opposite-sex marriage or to pursue their desired way of life as lalas if they had never been able to access the Internet. 'I would have kept my affections deeply hidden. Perhaps forced to get married? Probably. But my married life would definitely have been unhappy, tragic' (Wen, aged 35). 'It turns out that I can live the way I like. It's not a problem' (Cong, aged 31). These remarks illustrate how lalas' experiences of cyberspace had enabled many of them to challenge established heterosexual norms. Participants also shared their experiences of watching American television series and Chinese lala movies online, which opened their eyes to diverse family forms beyond the traditional heterosexual model. The sharing of such open spaces by lalas echoes, to a large extent, Fraser's description of counterpublics, 'where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs' (1992, p. 123).

In addition, the experiences of some participants showed that the Internet can be not only a catalyst for self-recognition but also a way of building bridges between parents and adult children. For instance, Qin (aged 35) explained why and how the Internet had been important to her: 'At that time I needed a medium to locate my sexual orientation, to give it a place in society. So I went online and searched for a great deal of information'. This remark highlights her need to navigate her relational selfhood and agency in order to find her own place in her social world through the Internet. Additionally, she had taken the initiative to make use of the Internet to expose her mother to lala-related online information and offline events after years of concealing her sexual orientation. She elaborated on her motive for doing so:

> After all, the accumulation of knowledge and information is all that matters. You have to let your parents know about and receive information about this [sexual orientation] … When they know about it and become familiar with it, they won't find it horrifying, or weird, or terrible.

Qin was one of very few participants who had gained parental support after coming out. While she attributed the support from her open-minded parents to the fact that her family was always receptive to new ideas and different sources of information, given her father's job in the film industry, she also highlighted her continuing efforts to advance her parents' understanding of her sexuality 'step by step' and the key role of cyberspace in facilitating this gradual change. As suggested by Jackson (2019), despite being constrained by the available social and material resources, people can reflexively make and remake their sense of self and locate themselves in relation to others and their social worlds. Qin's experience highlights that cyberspace offers a platform for lalas to actively reflect upon their relational selves and, more importantly, to counter the heteronormative expectations endorsed by their parents.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that participants who were considering having children or had already become mothers tended to attach the greatest importance to the lala community they found via online platforms. For this group of lalas, cyberspace was commonly regarded as an indispensable site for developing feasible ways of forming alternative families within heteronormative Chinese society, which denies them access to ART and refuses to recognize them, socially or legally, as parents (Yu et al., 2018). For instance, Li (aged 36) was seeking ART overseas and planning to conceive during the coming year. She expressed deep gratitude for the practical and

emotional support she had been receiving from an online/offline support group, which targeted lalas who wanted to become or had become mothers.

> In the past I didn't dare to believe that I would be able to have my own children. I thought I should just be very thankful to find a partner in my life. But when I met them [the group] online, I came to realize that there is a new path for us, and I really want to pursue it … It's no exaggeration to say that they're the lighthouse, giving us a clear direction when we were like a lost boat drifting at sea.

Additionally, Li and her spouse took the initiative to share their tips for registering same-sex marriage and seeking ART overseas on the online platform. She explained the motive behind this: 'Because we think this would be especially helpful to everyone in our group … Sharing and being shared complement each other.' The couple's act of sharing their personal experiences online could be considered an example of 'counterhegemonic practices' (Leung & Lee, 2014, p. 343), which helped the group of (prospective) lala mothers to counter the traditional heterosexual family model and pursue the family life they wanted.

The view that the online community of lala mothers could help to create an offline community for their prospective children to socialize with other children raised in lala families was echoed by other participants who were contemplating having children or had already become mothers. They had joined the same online/offline support group because it was the most well-known and established group within the lala community in Beijing. 'There are gatherings from time to time. The child would develop a sense of belonging and understand that he/she is not alone' (Kun, aged 37). 'I don't want the kid to feel that he's that different from others. That's why I've joined the group online to find similar families for him to socialize with other kids' (Ya, aged 34).

In short, the features of counterpublics are reflected in lalas' engagement in cyberspace in the sense that lalas involved in cyberspace may attempt to overcome social exclusion and explore non-traditional paths to family formation and motherhood. Meanwhile, it is also worth noticing the internal heterogeneity within these counterpublics (Soliman, 2017). For instance, only women with relatively more material and social resources might try to pursue motherhood and thus engage in the online community of lala mothers. Also, familial and socio-cultural factors, such as their relationship with their parents and parents' education and occupation, might come into play in lalas' decisions about whether or not to use cyberspace to directly challenge their parents' heteronormative beliefs.

3.2 | The skeptics: Distancing from online/offline communities of lalas and reorienting the focus toward oneself

Although cyberspace was found to help many participants in countering parental and societal expectations toward opposite-sex marriage, it is noteworthy that several participants expressed a sense of alienation from the online community of lalas, and some even revealed a sense of skepticism toward the online community. The suspicion that lalas they met online were 'unreliable' was commonly expressed by my participants. For instance, rather than seeking external support from the online/offline community of lalas, Xuan (aged 27), who was single, shared the common belief held by other participants that it was important to rely on herself. In the past, Xuan had frequently used online dating apps to find potential partners because she found it hard to identify other lalas in real life. Nevertheless, as she aged, she had decided to distance herself from the online community of lalas:

> Although we are all lalas, I don't feel as if I belong there … I feel like everyone is just there for fun … Perhaps some people feel it's good to just idle the days away. To some people, it's totally fine to have recognition from a partner only, or recognition from family. But there are people who need

> recognition not only from their partners but also from society. I probably need recognition in many respects.

What mattered most to Xuan was not only a stable same-sex family but, more importantly, parental and societal recognition for herself and her family. At the time of the interview, she reported that she had not come out to her parents, who arranged matchmaking dates for her with men from time to time. To cope with the pressure being exerted on her to marry the opposite sex, she worked long hours every day with the goal of achieving career success and eventually gaining recognition from others. In her opinion, her craving for recognition and career success marked a clear distinction between herself and other lalas, who indulged in cyberspace for frivolous purposes.

Moreover, the belief that some lalas who used online dating platforms were just muddling along and/or seeking casual relationships needs to be understood within the wider social context. Di attributed her unpleasant experiences of meeting 'unreliable' lalas to the social problem in Chinese society, where same-sex relationships and LGBTQ events cannot be 'open' or 'publicized'. She added:

> This is a problem that particularly leaves me at a loss. What you can do is to sneak around, or search [for partners] through apps and online … because this is the only way of finding a friend or a lover or developing a relationship. Is there another way out?

Di's sense of loss and helplessness illustrates the lack of channels, apart from the Internet, for lalas to develop the intimate and family relationships they desire. As mentioned by Di and other participants, the Internet was seen as overflowing with 'unreliable' lalas, who were mostly deep in the closet and reluctant to expose an 'authentic' account of themselves. This echoes the existing literature, which suggests that the 'multiple self-formations' endorsed by lalas (and gay men) in the face of heterosexual norms may complicate the ways in which their sexual identities and intimate relationships are compartmentalized into private and public spheres (Kong, 2016, p. 506). Such compartmentalization further curtails the transformative potential of cyberspace. It is evident that some lalas were not complacent about the increase in freedom brought by exploring their sexual lives online and that they were active in improving their own offline lives by developing their careers and earning a decent living.

On the one hand, participants' decisions to distance themselves from online/offline communities of lalas and rely on themselves could be considered an instance of personal agency. As suggested by Jackson (2019, p. 52), agency 'arises from the human capacity for self-reflexivity, the ability to reflect on ourselves and our social situation, and from relationality, our interactions with others'. My participants were able to actively reflect upon their relational selfhood in the sense that they were trying hard to climb up the social ladder and navigate a better position in relation to others, with the aim of overcoming the stigma attached to their sexual identities and gaining parental and societal recognition.

On the other hand, such agency needs to be understood within the specific context of the neoliberal market economy in China, where people are expected to both obey authoritarian rule and become self-enterprising subjects in pursuit of wealth and personal advancement (Kong, 2017, 2019; Zhang & Ong, 2008). This context might explain why some of my participants set great store by personal agency and development, instead of community-building together with other lalas. It should also be noted that my participants' dislike of casual relationships formed online has rarely been found in previous studies about the use of cyberspace among Chinese gay men. Recent studies on the use of social apps among Chinese gay men show that seeking casual sexual partners and meeting sexual needs are their primary motivations for using these apps (Wang, 2020). In Western studies, it has also generally been found that, compared with lesbians, gay men engaging in online dating tend to attach less importance to monogamy and hold more open attitudes toward uncommitted sex (Potârcă et al., 2015). Such gender differences, coupled with the emphasis on familial stability in Chinese culture (Kong, 2019), might explain why the

majority of participants in my study expressed a strong desire for a monogamous and stable family relationship with their partner. In short, the above-mentioned gendered, familial, and socio-political factors play a role in some lalas' decision to turn their backs on cyberspace and devote their energy to their careers.

3.3 | The conflicted pragmatist: Avoiding being too 'radical' and navigating local and global discourses about rights and same-sex marriage

Another important finding concerns the ways in which lalas made sense of the local and global discourses about rights and same-sex marriage that they witnessed online in relation to the restrictive reality in China, where such discussions remain sensitive (Ho et al., 2018; Liao, 2019). When asked about their views on effective ways of improving the living conditions of lalas, most participants shared the common belief that cyberspace, due to its capacity for spreading messages at high speed and with wide coverage, serves as the most ideal platform for advancing the rights of lalas, particularly the right to same-sex marriage and the right to be free from discrimination. 'There are more and more lala movies and TV series featuring Internet celebrities from this circle [lalas] … Politics or other means is neither efficient nor effective enough' (Yi, aged 33). 'Relatively speaking, the Internet is a free platform. Although they [the government] can delete your message, your autonomy is relatively stronger. No matter what you say, there could be certain power and effects' (Xian, aged 40). These remarks highlight that cyberspace, on which the state tends to keep a relatively looser grip than on physical spaces despite tightening Internet censorship (Bao, 2020; Liao, 2019), was perceived to be a comparatively freer platform for the concerns and needs of lalas to be heard and advocacy of their rights to be publicized, at least among Internet users. They demonstrate that the key feature of counterpublics, which allow socially marginalized individuals to generate and circulate counter-discourses (Soliman, 2017), can be realized in Chinese cyberspace.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that none of my participants had thought about challenging the political authority of the government or claiming any rights for lalas through institutional channels. They were alert to the fact that they could only express their opinions about LGBTQ issues online within acceptable limits. They reported witnessing tightened control over the Internet in recent years. The ban on homosexuality-related content on the online platform Weibo[4] is an example of Internet censorship that was commonly raised by participants. Despite participants' different responses to the ban, there was a common belief that it is unwise to be 'too radical' and that it is important to 'mind your own business' rather than challenging the government. For instance, Lu (aged 38) was one of the very few participants who revealed her attitude toward the ban via the Internet. She shared a photo in which two men are secretly holding hands in the dark environment of a cinema with the intention of highlighting the invisibility of same-sex couples in public, and yet the persistence of true love between them. She explained how and why she had responded to the ban:

> I didn't express my opinion, but I just shared a post [the photo] … I'm relatively prudent, but I do express my thoughts within my scope … To be honest, it's hard to say whether it's useful or not … As a matter of fact, you can just mind your own business. As for me, I just want to be with a person of the same sex. So I keep searching for her …

Lu's statement reveals how lalas' experiences of cyberspace tend to be shaped by the state and self-censorship and how, in turn, these experiences shape their life prospects. It is evident that she exercised self-censorship on the Internet by carefully framing her resistance to the ban. She added: 'Deep down, I feel it's a bit unfair, but I won't ask for too much … I'll just play my part well'. Lu was single at the time of the interview, and she made it clear that finding a same-sex partner and forming a stable family was her top priority, taking the restrictive environment in China into consideration. She touched upon many of the ways in which other participants also reported

experiencing limited agency in cyberspace due to various offline constraints. Her belief that lalas could not 'ask for too much' was echoed by other participants, highlighting an inner conflict between the realization of new life possibilities via cyberspace and the burden of conforming to established social norms and the authoritarian regime.

Xia (aged 38) also admitted that she had been thrilled to witness the growing visibility of LGBTQ lives through the Internet, such as the legalization of same-sex marriage in other countries. Nevertheless, as she aged, she had developed a stronger belief that entering same-sex marriage would never become a feasible option in her real life. This view had much to do with the lack of state and familial support in China in general and her own experience with her parents in particular, who had 'little education' and were unwilling to accept her identity after she came out. Xia explained her reasons for becoming less involved in lala-oriented cyberspace and losing interest in keeping up with the latest trends in global LGBTQ movements:

> Knowing about Pride Parades, public speeches, or the legalization of same-sex marriage in other countries, I was particularly excited, and I felt that our world is getting bigger and bigger … However, now I can't stand others [lalas] getting married … it's too distant from me, although I really want to do it … But for me, without the presence of the parents of both of us, there's something missing.

Xia represents a typical example of how most of the participants were caught in a predicament as they experienced a collision between the excitement and hope triggered by witnessing global LGBTQ movements and the lingering gloom of not gaining recognition in the local Chinese context. On the one hand, her experience of cyberspace, where global discourses about LGBTQ rights abound, had enabled her to recognize her own identity and affirm her previous and current same-sex relationships. On the other hand, as Xia aged, she had come to believe that it is totally unrealistic to fight for rights for lalas in China, given its authoritarian regime. Similarly to many other participants, Xia stressed the importance of paying more attention to her personal finances and practical concerns, such as maintaining a harmonious family relationship with her partner and their families of origin. Thus, she was willing to take up different roles, including the role of a lala in the private sphere and that of a good citizen who would never challenge the heteronormative rules of the state in public.

Such a perception and actualization of social roles could be seen as evidence that runs counter to the Western 'liberal' understanding of selfhood, which overemphasizes individualized choices and neglects the continued significance of the relational ties and structural constraints that shape people's ways of leading their lives (Jackson, 2019; Jackson & Ho, 2020). Xia's experience highlights the continued significance of relational selfhood and family obligations, which largely restrict the extent to which cyberspace can be fully utilized as a platform for counterpublics or can liberate lalas from established norms.

4 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article has shown that lalas' experiences of cyberspace enable them to imagine and realize alternative routes to intimacy and imagine family lives beyond the traditional heterosexual model but, simultaneously, expose them to tensions between the new possibilities revealed by cyberspace and established socio-political and familial norms. The findings show that the constant need to navigate such tensions may push some lalas to withdraw from cyberspace into themselves, prioritizing personal interests instead of community building. Lalas continue to struggle with various constraints that limit the extent to which they can exercise individual and collective agency in order to challenge established norms and bring changes to their intimate and family lives in the digital age. These constraints include the prevailing heteronormative expectations endorsed by parents and society at large, tightening state control, and their own material concerns. My study contributes to current discussions on queer counterpublics and to sexuality and family studies in the following three important ways.

Firstly, by combining queer counterpublics scholarship with insights drawn from Chinese sexuality and family research, my study links the personal and the familial to wider social processes, including the expansion of cyberspace and online LGBTQ and mothering communities. It thereby sheds new light on different opportunities for online and offline resistance to heterosexual family norms. Due to the huge pressure to engage in opposite-sex marriage imposed by their parents and society in general (Engebretsen, 2014; Lo, 2020), participants explained that pursuing their desired forms of family life would not have been possible without cyberspace. These new findings about lalas' family-building aspirations and practices inspired by cyberspace echo previous research showing that online platforms, such as online forums and dating apps, play a key role in helping lalas to connect with each other and attain mutual emotional support against the backdrop of widespread societal disapproval of homosexuality (Chan, 2021; Liu, 2017).

More importantly, as the first of its kind, this study reveals some lalas' active efforts to build mothering communities, both online and offline, which challenge the traditional belief that homosexuality and parenthood are mutually exclusive. In this sense, cyberspace serves as a vital platform for lalas to resist traditional sexual and family norms and seek recognition for their pioneering forms of family life and parenthood in China. These findings show that one should not assume the absence of counterpublics or the incompatibility of queer counterpublics scholarship in China in view of its authoritarian regime. Rather, it is of empirical and theoretical significance to examine how 'personal' or 'family' matters are transformed into matters of online public debate in the digital age. This ties in with the feminist concern to share and politicize everyday life, and potentially allows for new opportunities to counter the status quo (Moor & Kanji, 2019).

On the other hand, the simultaneous sense of connectedness and distance experienced by participants in cyberspace reveals its complex nature and highlights the interplay between online and offline explorations of selves and intimate and family relationships. It is evident that, overall, participants felt inspired by local and global discourses about LGBTQ lives and rights in cyberspace and had discovered new possibilities for forming their own families and pursuing motherhood. However, their relational selfhood, coupled with the wider context of heteronormativity and the regulatory power of the state and the family, could explain why many found themselves entangled in a series of self-conflicts while attempting to navigate established socio-political norms and parental expectations. From this vantage point, this study makes another contribution by generating a deeper understanding of the full terrain of queer counterpublics in different contexts. As mentioned in the introduction, current discussions on LGBTQ people's experiences of cyberspace have been largely grounded in Euro-American contexts, with a primary focus on the discourses of civil society and human rights (Breese, 2011; Cavalcante, 2019). By focusing on lalas' accounts of their intimate and family lives in relation to and in tension with cyberspace, my study extends beyond this focus on political and civic engagement in cyberspace and draws attention to a wide range of personal, familial, and socio-political motivations for (not) engaging in cyberspace, and the mixed feelings of connection and distance experienced by participants. The power of the state and self-censorship in cyberspace, coupled with deep-rooted family norms and material concerns, came into play in cyberspace and even compelled some participants to refrain from actively engaging in it, prevented some from fighting for their own rights, and discouraged some from acting on the family aspirations inspired by their engagement with cyberspace. The current study highlights the contested and contingent nature of Chinese queer counterpublics, in which lalas attempt to adjust and readjust their counterhegemonic practices and to resolve the tensions between the self and established norms by taking their own specific circumstances into account.

Rather than relying on Western-based conceptualization of queer counterpublics, which mainly focus on their political and civic aims (Cavalcante, 2019; Jenzen, 2017), I argue for the importance of contextualizing people's experiences of queer counterpublics within the socio-cultural, economic, and political realms of everyday life. Extending the discussion of relational selfhood, my study reveals the complexity of the tensions between non-normative family aspirations constructed through cyberspace and deep-seated socio-political and family conventions. It suggests that any counterpublics facilitated by cyberspace continue to be subjected to the mainstream, still-heteronormative social environment. It calls for more attention to be paid to how and why certain individuals and groups engage in or distance themselves from queer counterpublics, or shift between engagement and self-isolation.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Sociology at the University of Oxford.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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ENDNOTES

[1] I use the term 'queer counterpublics' as a broad category to refer to the counterpublics engaged by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and other groups of gender and sexual minority individuals.

[2] 'Lala' serves as an umbrella category that denotes same-sex sexual subjectivity among women in urban China (Engebretsen, 2014; Kam, 2013). As all my research participants identified themselves as lalas, this article uses the term to precisely capture participants' identities and document their lived experiences. This is preferable to borrowing Western terms that cannot be seen as equivalent to the term lala, given its cultural specificity.

[3] LGBTQ is used as an umbrella term to refer to issues related to gender and sexual minority people in general. Although diverse Chinese terms have been used to denote LGBTQ subjects in China, including not only 'lala' but also 'gay' (male same-sex sexual subjectivity) and 'tongzhi' (a gender-neutral term for same-sex sexual subjectivity) (Bao, 2018), an in-depth exploration of these identity categories is beyond the scope of this article.

[4] Similar to the functions of Twitter, Weibo serves as the largest microblogging platform in China. To protest against the platform's proposed ban on homosexuality-related content announced on 13 April 2018, many online users of Weibo used the hashtag #IAmGay# to share their experiences of coming out, advocate for LGBTQ rights, and condemn social media censorship (Liao, 2019). As a result, Sina reversed the ban on 16 April 2018 and announced that no more homosexuality-related content would be removed from the platform.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Professionalism in the era of accountability: Role discrepancy and responses among teachers in the Netherlands

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Abstract

The roles and identities of professionals have undergone significant transformation in an ever-globalising world shaped by neoliberal values. In the field of education, standardisation and outcome-based quality measures have become the norm. Teachers are held accountable through their students' results, with their work subject to ongoing surveillance (performance-based accountability). This has changed the nature of teachers' tasks, and what it means to be a "good teacher". Based on 20 teacher interviews across six primary schools in the Netherlands, this study examines teachers' practices and beliefs, asking: do they experience role discrepancy? What responses do we see as a result? And, what does this reveal about teachers' sense of professionalism today? Findings show that all teachers experience the pressure of high workloads and the need to prioritise tasks. Whereas a small minority of respondents understand performative tasks as having a crucial function of supporting student learning and achievement, others experienced a discrepancy between these performative tasks and the tasks they believed to be at the heart of good teaching. Confronted with this, teachers responded in different ways; either incorporating all tasks into their schedule, or feeling

forced to choose between them. Beyond this, findings indicate that teachers' understandings of key aspects of the profession, such as autonomy, are changing in response to the policy environment. This supports conceptualisations of professions and professionalism as not only "being changed by" external reform, but changing from within.

KEYWORDS
performance-based accountability, policy enactment, professionalism, role discrepancy, teachers

1 | INTRODUCTION

The neoliberal agenda has acted as a major catalyst of change across the professions which have seen a growing adoption of business values in the quest for efficiency and effectiveness (Ball, 2016; Muzio et al., 2013). This has not only transformed the requirements and roles of professionals, but has also transformed how they see themselves and the nature and purpose of their work. This is no truer than in the field of education, where managerial reforms have increased decisions taken at the school level, while external "surveillance" mechanisms ensure that stakeholders remain accountable (Verger et al., 2019). Primarily, this accountability hinges on the attainment of core standards, measured by way of performance "outcomes." Certainly at a policy level, rather than acting as a proxy of quality, test-based performance indicators have, therefore, come to represent quality. As well as being expected to "perform" (see Ball, 2003), teachers are also expected to account for their work more broadly through the ritual (and predominately recorded), planning, monitoring, and evaluation of teaching and learning. These policy tools are collectively referred to throughout the paper as "performance-based accountability" or "PBA."

These reforms have fundamentally changed the concept of quality education and what it means to be a teaching professional. "Successful education systems" are those topping the international league tables in large-scale student assessments; "successful schools" are those that outperform their neighbors in standardized tests, and "successful teachers" are those that add the most "value" (grade points) to their students. A considerable amount of research has examined the transformation of the professions over the decades (see for example: Evetts', 2003; Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2012) and teachers' changing roles and identities through their enactment of these reforms constitutes a significant part of this (Day, 2002; Sachs, 2001; Valli & Buese, 2007). The degree to which teachers' beliefs and practices align with policy varies (Ball, 2003; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Moore et al., 2002), linked to a complex interplay of factors at various levels. What is clear is that, like all professionals, teachers are not passive implementers of policy; they are key actors who shape policy through processes of interpretation and translation (Ball et al., 2011). The policy demands on teachers may be at odds with their own understanding of what it means to be a good teacher, inevitably resulting in compromises being made—either on behalf of the teacher's professional beliefs, on behalf of the policy, or both.

Based on 20 interviews in six primary schools in the Netherlands, this study examines teachers' professionalism in the era of (performance-based) accountability, using the concept of *role discrepancy*. More specifically, it seeks to discover whether teachers experience a divergence between what they do—those tasks they actually engage in (or are expected to engage in) at work, and what they believe—those tasks they consider at the heart of good teaching. It is framed around three questions:

1. What are teachers' experiences of their work tasks: what tasks do they engage in, to what extent are they "performative," and how do they feel about these tasks?

2. Do teachers experience role discrepancy and if so, what work-management approaches are adopted?
3. What does the examination of teachers' roles, practices, and beliefs, reveal about their professional identities in the era of PBA?

The study forms part of a broader research project [ReformEd] which examines globally-spread school autonomy and accountability policies and their development and enactment in various countries [reformedproject.eu]. The paper aims to contribute to our understanding of the enactment of accountability reforms, and more broadly, to the possible impact of PBA on the teaching profession, in a number of ways. Regarding the study's *conceptual contributions*, although the core aspects of "beliefs" and "practices" cut to the heart of professionalism (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Hendrikx, 2019), the concept of "role discrepancy" is still rather limited. While it has been applied (quantitatively) to some professions, including nursing (Takase et al., 2006a; 2006b) and school social workers (Agresta, 2006), its use in teaching, and as a part of a qualitative exploratory study is largely absent. Further, the paper contributes new conceptualizations of policy enactment that go beyond the dichotomous labels of "resistance" and "compliance," providing a deeper understanding of teachers' working realities. Regarding the study's *contextual contributions*, while widespread in certain neoliberal, high-stakes contexts (particularly England and the U.S.), there is insufficient research examining the enactment of PBA in systems with different institutional traditions and differently-constructed policies, and therefore insufficient understanding of which formulations of PBA produce which effects. Further, in the Netherlands, little research has focused on the enactment of such policies and their impact on primary school teachers (for research at the secondary level, see Hendrikx, 2019), and yet, the Dutch policy changes imposed over the last dozen years have fundamentally reshaped the primary education system (Browes & Altinyelken, 2021). Finally, the study has important *policy and social implications*. Research has found that a change in teacher's roles and excessive role regulation can result in: "job dissatisfaction, reduced commitment, burnout, loss of self- esteem, and early departure from the profession" (Calderhead 2001 in Valli & Buese, 2007, p. 521). Similarly, role discrepancy has been found to be linked to intention to quit (Takase et al., 2006b) and job dissatisfaction (Agresta, 2006). Given the instabilities and uncertainties currently surrounding the teaching profession in the Netherlands (including ongoing national strikes and crippling teacher shortages), a better understanding of teachers' practices and beliefs in the current policy environment is crucial.

2 | PROFESSIONALISM, ROLE DISCREPANCY, AND ENACTMENT

Professionalism is an elusive and changing concept. It is multi-faceted, multi-scalar, and multi-purpose. According to Evetts (2003, 2009), the term can be understood as a set of normative values, practices and discourses around a given profession which can generate and facilitate alterations of the occupation. While efforts to exclusively define "the professions" are somewhat outdated (Evetts, 2003; Muzio et al., 2013), certain key aspects have traditionally been associated with this group of workers including autonomy and the ability to make discretionary judgments, a "public service" dimension, and (development of) competency and "expertise" (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010), as well as collegiality and collaboration (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000). Evetts (2009), highlighting the dynamic nature of professionalism, has identified two "types;" *occupational professionalism*: understood as produced from within and defined by collegiality, trust and autonomy, and *organizational professionalism*: produced through an external discourse of control and defined by managerialism, standardization, and external accountability.

A number of studies have examined the concept of teacher professionalism and, more specifically, its metamorphosis through educational reform (Day, 2002; Hargreaves, 2000). Essentially, we can understand professionalism here as the development of the individual teacher in order to improve quality and standards of practice for the student, not to be confused with *professionalization*, where the concern is with (improving) teachers' status, standing, regard, and reward (Hargreaves, 2000). Based on the Anglo-American experience, Hargreaves (2000) describes professionalism in teaching as passing through several stages; from the pre-professional, to the autonomous

professional, the collegial professional, and finally, to the post-professional of today, where teachers struggle to counter centralized curricula, testing regimes, external surveillance, and the economic imperatives of marketization.

Whether "post-professionalism" (Ball, 2003; Hargreaves, 2000), "organizational-professionalism" (Evetts, 2009), or one of several similar constructs, there is a strong argument that professionalism today is shaped by new public management values: efficiency, standardization, and competition. This is challenging teachers' broader identities: "teachers and other public services workers succeed only by satisfying and complying with others' definitions of their work" (Day, 2002, p. 682), yet teachers' own perceptions of their work might diverge from these definitions, resulting in a mismatch between (required) practices and beliefs. The distinction between what teachers do and what they feel they should do (i.e., their professional values), can be understood as *role discrepancy*: "the incongruence between their [the professionals'] ideal roles and the roles they actually engage in at work" (Takase et al., 2006a).

This concept has been applied to a number of professions, including nursing (Takase et al., 2006a, 2006b), school social workers (Agresta, 2006), and occupational therapists (Lloyd et al., 2004). These studies have found role discrepancy to be prevalent. More specifically, Agresta (2006) notes that school social workers wanted to spend less time on routine tasks, particularly report writing, and more time on those tasks considered at the core of their profession: individual and group counseling. Lloyd et al. (2004) similarly found that occupational therapists desired to spend more time on their areas of specialism. These quantitative studies have also shown experience of role discrepancy to be negatively associated with job satisfaction (Agresta, 2006) and positively associated with intention to quit (Takase et al., 2006b).

Application of the role discrepancy concept to the teaching profession has not been found, at least not within major English literature databases, yet research has built on similar ideas. Studies, particularly U.S.-based, have revealed the largely negative impacts of high-stakes PBA on teachers' roles. Olivant (2015) saw teachers struggling with time pressures, diminished autonomy and professionalism, and creativity in the classroom. Valli and Buese (2007) found teachers who were governed by prescribed curricula and standardized testing to be experiencing role increase, role intensification, and role expansion, with negative impacts on pedagogy, "professional well-being" and student relationships. The authors' discussion of "role expectations" and the conflicts surrounding this, are particularly close to the notion of role discrepancy.

Teacher response to PBA has also received considerable attention, with studies showing significant variation in enactment strategies. Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) examined the "principled resistance" of teachers in a Californian policy context, who refused to follow a heavily-prescriptive literacy program on ideological grounds. Other, more subtle responses include Perryman et al. (2011) notion of "policy evasion," whereby, rather than outright resistance, teachers in English secondary schools were constrained to selecting the aspects of policy considered (not) worth implementing. Similarly, Moore et al. (2002), also observing the English context, found teachers—whether adopting more "compliant" or "resistant" positions—to adopt an eclectic, pragmatic approach to policy enactment. The authors use the term "contingent pragmatism" to describe teachers who see their practices as somewhat of an enforced survival strategy, and "principled pragmatism" for those who better reconcile their beliefs and practices, often justified through their students' performance outcomes. In the Dutch context, a recent study in secondary schools (Hendrikx, 2019) found that mismatches between teachers' beliefs and practices were common, resulting in compromises being made on one side or the other. The (qualitative) study also identified a third response, in which teachers reduced their contracted work hours without reducing their actual work hours, enabling them to engage in the work meaningful to them while still fulfilling obligations.

Similar studies in the enactment field have indicated that, as well as factors at the school, locale, and system levels, at the individual level a teacher's professional experience might play an important role in their perception and experience of daily work tasks. It has been found that more experienced teachers feel more frustrated with their roles and experience of PBA, perhaps as their training and formative teaching years were shaped in a different policy environment (Day & Smethem, 2009; Holloway & Brass, 2018) or perhaps because they are simply worn down by "repetitive educational change" (Hargreaves, 2005). Teachers who entered the profession more recently (for whom, such demands have been a constant reality) were found to have had their professional beliefs and identities inherently shaped by this policy environment (Holloway & Brass, 2018; Wilkins, 2011).

Notably, Takase et al.'s study (2006a), which explicitly tested the relationship between role discrepancy and years of (clinical) experience, presents a contrasting premise:

> … it has been assumed that experienced nurses perceive less role discrepancy than inexperienced nurses, either because the former adjust themselves to their actual practice or because they have the expertise to improve their practice…. (p. 751)

In fact, the study's findings revealed that more- and less-experienced nurses experienced similar levels of role discrepancy, yet more-experienced nurses reported more positively on their work roles.

3 | TEACHERS AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE NETHERLANDS

3.1 | The Dutch teaching profession

Over the years, the teaching profession in the Netherlands has been steered in different directions. It has recently been experiencing severe teacher shortages, particularly in urban areas, and ongoing teacher strikes over high workload and insufficient pay (Inspectorate of Education, 2019). With a perception that teaching is no longer the respected profession it once was, attracting new recruits is proving a difficult task (only 10% of Dutch teachers are under the age of 30; OECD, 2019). According to the recent TALIS secondary education data (OECD, 2018), teaching was a first career choice for only 53% of Dutch teachers, considerably lower than the 67% TALIS average. While teachers' salaries are somewhat higher than average for OECD countries, they are lower than those of other Dutch professionals (OECD, 2019), particularly at the primary school level.

Over the last decade, the government has been making a clear attempt to professionalize teaching to raise its status and desirability and to encourage into the profession, more men and candidates with academic backgrounds. Initiatives include: reduced training time for those with an academic or professional background, "the hybrid teacher" (encouraging professionals from other fields to combine their work with teaching), reduced tuition fees for teacher training, grants for teachers to complete Masters or PhDs, a teachers' "competency framework" (a professional statute and standard for teachers), and the "teachers' register" whereby teachers must complete a minimum amount of (certified) professional development hours (see "de lerarenagenda 2013–2020"). In response to the aforementioned strikes, primary teachers have recently been granted a pay rise along with extra money at the school level to help reduce teacher workload. Teachers considered these steps insufficient and at the time of writing, intermittent strikes continue.

The goal of these initiatives is teacher professionalization (concerned with status), not professionalism (concerned with practice; Hoyle, 2001). One reason for this may be the high levels of decentralization and autonomy in the Dutch system, inhibiting government involvement in the teaching *process*. Indeed at the input level, legislation is scarce, including a lack of a national curriculum and a centralized system of teacher appraisal. While teaching quality forms an important part of the inspectorate's framework, this is only evaluated at the school level. Yet, the (governance of the) Dutch system has been described as one of the most complex in the world (Waslander et al., 2016) and despite this "school autonomy" label, surveillance operates as a chain. As well as intermediary "sector organizations," such as the council for primary education, which use a variety of steering mechanisms to manipulate school practice, school-boards (under strict accountability themselves) implement various measures and place pressure on school principals to ensure sufficient school performance. These may be formal requirements—since 2006, boards must keep competency files on teachers and ensure that annual performance reviews take place (Nusche et al., 2014)—but equally, may be additional, protective measures. These layered structures mean that teachers are operating under internal, as well as external surveillance (see Skerritt, 2020).

3.2 | Accountability and performativity

Despite little *direct* government involvement in their work, teachers are certainly not free from the demands of performativity. PBA policy tools have been introduced incrementally, most significantly between the period 2007 and 2016 (Browes & Altinyelken, 2021). Core learning standards, measured by compulsory standardized testing throughout primary education, manipulate teachers' goals, values, and teaching practices. This is amplified by the presence of administrative and market tools that increase the stakes attached to school performance: Average test scores are published and compared with national averages. Parents are encouraged to consult this data, whether choosing a school or "keeping an eye" on one. Performing below average for three consecutive years, a school will be labeled "very weak" and subjected to an intensive and extensive inspection process (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2020). Tests also have significant stakes for students given that they are tracked into secondary education based on their performance at primary level. This is an added pressure for teachers (Browes, 2021).

Companies have developed subject packages or "methods" to support schools in meeting government outcome requirements. These include detailed syllabi, textbooks, and end of unit assessments. It is extremely common for schools to purchase and follow these methods, particularly in the core learning areas. Schools are also required to show data-oriented working and the use of effective quality assurance systems. This has led to the purchasing of student administrative systems, on which teachers are expected to record student progress and performance, as well as other student-related matters such as behavior and meetings with parents. Also indicative of a data and documentation culture—producing, updating, and evaluating "class plans" has become a core part of teachers' work. Not to be confused with daily lesson plans, these are longer-term, standards-oriented plans for each school period, often broken down by teachers into weekly plans. Class plans (usually) differentiate students by ability and organize learning accordingly. Ability groupings and lesson content are heavily influenced by standardized tests. Contrary to common belief, class plans are not a government requirement. This fact has been lost under layers of governance, and the plans have come to play a pivotal role in the organization of learning and often in schools' own evaluation of teachers (Browes, 2021).

4 | RESEARCH METHODS

This study aims to uncover new ways of understanding teacher enactment of, and beliefs toward, PBA through a qualitative research strategy. For reasons outlined in the introduction, teachers in Dutch primary schools were sampled to explore the impact of "global" education trends through a case-study approach (Yin, 1984). Subscribing to the work of authors such as Stephen Ball, Anette Braun & Meg Maguire, enactment is understood as context specific and teachers are seen as pivotal actors in the interpretation and translation of policy. For this reason, a realist evaluation approach was adopted to guide data collection and analysis (see Pawson & Tilley, 1997), acknowledging the, often unobservable, mechanisms that impact teachers' (different) policy experiences.

Interviews were conducted with 20 teachers in six primary schools across three small cities in the central west "Randstad" region.[1] Three of the schools are public "openbaar," two independent "bijzonder" and one, a merger school, is described as both. All are fully government-funded, yet the public schools are also government-established meaning they do not align with any specific philosophical, religious, or social movement (also true of the merger school). The remaining two independent schools are "Protestant," yet background discussions with principals revealed this to be more reflective of the history of Dutch education (Strum et al., 1998) than of school culture. The schools varied in terms of their student populations and their approaches to education. Two of the schools (schools 5 and 6 in Table 1) had recently adopted a project-based, student-centered approach to learning, in which teachers took on a "coaching" role. A third school (school 4) had started using this approach in some non-core subjects. Three of the schools (1, 4, and 6) are located in affluent areas with homogenous "native Dutch" populations, two (2 and 5) in "mixed" neighborhoods, and one (school 3) in a majority immigrant area.

TABLE 1 Respondent information

School no.	Province	Type of school	No. interviews	Name* & position	Years teaching
1	North Holland	Public	4	Sanne, group 3	12
				Emma, group 6	10
				Lotte, group 8	4
				Roel, group 7/8	<1
2	North Holland	Public	4	Mirjam, group 8	12
				Robbie, group 5	4
				Julia, group 6	5
				Emily, group 7/8	17
3	North Holland	Public	3	Lisa, group 2	10
				Thom, group 7	12
				Nick, group 6	11
4	North Holland	Public/ Independent: General	4	Sophia, group 8	17
				Matthijs, group 5	14
				Femke, group 7	18
				Daan, group 8	19
5	Flevoland	Independent: Protestant	3	Tessa, group 7	7
				Lynn, group 8	14
				Martine, VP (previously group 6)	6
6	South Holland	Independent: Protestant	2	Lucas, group 7	1
				Lianne, group 8	25
Total:			20		

*denotes the pseudonyms.

Due to teacher shortages and reportedly high workloads, securing participation was challenging. Four of the schools were contacted "cold" and the remaining two through the network of the second author. Participant selection prioritized teachers from the upper level[2]—groups 6, 7, and 8—where PBA is at its most pronounced (stakes attached to testing are higher for students and for the school than in previous years). One respondent had recently dropped her teaching responsibilities to focus on a management position, and is therefore cited as a "vice-principal." In total, the sample consists of 13 female and 7 male teachers. Years of teaching experience varied considerably, from less than one year to over 25 years. Four teachers had less than 5 years of experience, and 5 teachers over 15 years. For an overview of respondents and their schools, see Table 1.

Interviews were semi-structured and averaged 40 min. They were transcribed verbatim and coded using software for qualitative data analysis. All participants have been given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity. The interview script was guided by the study's research questions and realist evaluation perspective, and by a backlog of previous work which has examined the mechanisms and impacts of accountability and managerialism (for example, Evetts, 2009; Verger & Parcerisa, 2017). Themes included "work schedules and work tasks," "accountability," "ideal work tasks and working strategies," "professional image," and "school environment." It was semi-structured, allowing room for probing and ad hoc questions to adapt to teacher's individual situations and experiences. Coding was initially guided by the interview script and research questions, yet, it was also iterative in the sense that interviews were (re-)read to uncover themes and reflect the meaning behind teachers' responses, with the coding

protocol revised accordingly. The uncovering of various types of "working approaches" in response to PBA for example, initiated a new round of coding.

5 | FINDINGS

Findings are organized around the three research questions. The first section examines teachers' experiences of their work tasks and to what extent these tasks are performative. As well as teacher practices (how they spend their time) it also explores teacher beliefs (how they would ideally spend their time). The second focuses on the differences between these beliefs and practices, asking whether role discrepancy is experienced and if so, how this impacts teachers' working approaches. Finally, section three considers, in this PBA environment, how teachers might be (re)orienting their sense of professionalism.

5.1 | Teachers' tasks: Practices and beliefs

The majority of teachers' in-school time is spent teaching their students. Teachers across the six schools follow similar routines; dedicating (at least) morning lessons to the core subjects in an effort to better utilize student concentration. Respondents unanimously experience teaching time as intense: following crowded teaching plans, prescribed curricula, and fixed attainment goals. For some, this resulted in a sense that there is no time for flexibility, fun, and exploration in the classroom.

> In these developments in the last 10 years, we've become more and more slaves of the method; "we need to do lesson 5 and then you need to go to this topic and then… ." There's very little room to do something for fun, to do something because it is just interesting but it doesn't add up to any measurable results.
>
> (Emma, group 6, school 1)

Several teachers reported that these demanding schedules force a choice between "keeping up" and student understanding, and results in constant "clock watching." Within these teaching schedules, the assessed areas of learning appear to dominate. Many respondents desired to spend more time teaching topics and subjects not part of the core standards. Teachers in four out of the six schools expressed concern that creative subjects such as music and art are being squeezed out. Teachers also want the time and flexibility to be able to address ad hoc socio-cultural or behavioral issues, such as bullying. Yet here, the data reveal a perceptual difference, seemingly stemming from the value that teachers attribute to standards-based learning: whereas respondents generally agreed that more time should be spent on creative subjects, some thought this should come at the expense of core subjects, others, who see these subjects as critical part of their students' education, did not.

> But of course we sometimes say, "*but how? when?*" If I take an hour and a half painting that means I haven't done dictation, so next week I have to squeeze it in. And for some kids it's okay to miss a little lesson, but for the weaker kids, they need that extra time, we can't say "okay, we're all going to paint, but *you* can't!—*You* have to sit and do your extra practice."
>
> (Sanne, group 3, school 1)

Teachers working in schools which adopt project-based approaches generally spoke more favorably of their teaching experiences. Martine, who had recently moved schools, had seen the benefit of this approach first hand:

> [At my previous school] the teacher was leading, and not the children. There, I had a tight schedule; math, spelling, language. And the children there, they did not get the space to discover and to explore.
>
> (Martine, Vice-principal, school 5)

It was common for teachers in the more "pedagogically-traditional" schools to perceive their classes as regimented and inflexible. These teachers felt their students would benefit from a more student-centered approach and many desired a move to project-based learning in particular.

In four of the participating schools, the teaching period has become intensified over recent years due to a shortened school day: The result of devolved responsibilities that have given school boards the flexibility to choose opening hours. While this shortened day is preferred by some, others were not so keen. Robbie, for example, believed these condensed teaching hours were contributing to an erosion of collegiality and ultimately, an increased workload:

> They [the students] are off at 2 o'clock, but what about finishing at 3 and having an extra 45 min of break? (…) And it would save me time, as it would give me time to talk to colleagues, to be together and talk about ideas (…) "I have a measurement lesson in maths, what can I do—any tips?" So that would be good, and it would mean more bonding and you exchange ideas more to reduce the workload. I think that would be my ideal thing.
>
> (Robbie, group 5, school 2)

Other teaching-related tasks are scheduled for afternoons, once students have gone home. In particular, this includes lesson planning for the following day and checking and marking students' home and class work. The majority of respondents felt they have insufficient time for these tasks due to other responsibilities, meetings, responding to parents' emails, and administrative duties. Most of these respondents desired more time for lesson-planning in particular, believing this would enable their students to benefit from more impactful classes and result in a more enjoyable teaching experience.

Beyond these core teaching tasks, test-based activities occupy a considerable portion of teachers' schedules and the vast majority of respondents experience a workload increase during testing periods. Test-based tasks chiefly consist of: preparing for tests (preparing students, organizing papers, and preparing the classroom), inputting and analyzing test data (the majority of tests are done by hand and must subsequently be digitized) and "acting on results" (meetings with management, group meetings with colleagues, parent meetings, student reports, ability grouping and teaching content, and timetables are all based around results). Testing is generally seen as a necessary part of school life, and although numerous respondents felt its role has become too dominant, it is still understood as a useful way to establish goals, assess progress and tailor teaching. Testing itself does not clash with teachers' professional values, yet for some, the *centrality* of testing, and the administrative burdens connected to it, do.

These administrative or more specifically "documentation" tasks reportedly demand a considerable amount of teachers' time. Their general purpose appears to be teacher surveillance and accountability. Teachers are required to show plans and records of students' (differentiated) work, and regularly evaluate and modify these plans to demonstrate they are aware, data-oriented, and responsive. Opinions about the value of such tasks vary. A small minority of respondents had a positive outlook, reporting them to be a necessary way to stay "on track" and abreast of their students' progress. A much larger number considered these documentation demands excessive and never-ending. Some teachers in this second group found the tasks entirely unnecessary:

> Well, the principal of the school wants that [daily report]. I asked why he thinks that's necessary, I said "It's total nonsense! It's absolutely not necessary, because I'm the only teacher here in my

> class—I work 5 days." I can imagine that if you have another colleague—you work 3 days and they work 2—you have to show what you've done and explain the difficulties, but I'm by myself, so should I get into a dialogue with myself? That's nonsense. *I know*, I have in *my head* what's happened.
>
> (Matthijs, group 5, school 4)

Finally, teachers' communication with parents was commonly reported to be highly demanding and a generally undesirable task. Notions parents may have of the "accessible teacher" are also symptomatic of the PBA agenda, connected to the goals of transparency and participative accountability. Respondents felt, at times, overwhelmed by parents' questions and demands: For less experienced teachers, this was something they had not expected. For those in the profession longer, it was something they had seen change.

> Twenty years ago it was easy. When I started, internet was just upcoming, e-mailing was not a priority. But now parents don't come to your class anymore, [they] just send an e-mail. Sometimes, an angry e-mail. You feel that the tone is angry, but you never know in what mood they texted, always guessing. And that is, that irritates me the most nowadays. Just sending problems.
>
> (Daan, group 8, school 4)

5.2 | Role discrepancy and teacher response

The account of teachers' experiences provided above, reveals strong and recurrent themes of heavy workloads, task-management pressures, and, for many, insufficient time in the working week. Essentially, teachers appear to be experiencing a task-overload. These tasks are heavily influenced by the PBA agenda: teaching, testing, and administrative demands are ultimately shaped by the pursuit of good, or at least sufficient, test scores.

A small minority of teachers (3 out of the 20 respondents), accepted the importance of this agenda, to the extent that they expressed an *alignment* between the tasks they engage with at work and the tasks they considered at the core of good teaching: Essentially, these teachers have seemingly aligned their practices and beliefs: This group of respondents attached importance to PBA tools: Learning standards were considered to keep them focused and abreast of what is important, standardized tests were perceived as an essential way of checking their students' and their own progress, and record-keeping and careful planning were considered to make them more effective teachers, better able to keep track of their students and foster improvement.

> Well in your lessons of course you try to see if everybody gets the [learning] goals, and for me it's to see, *what are* the goals? And you need to put those in a report for home [parents] and it's like… well it keeps you *alert*.
>
> (Lotte, group 8, school 1)

While the numbers are small, it is still noteworthy that all three of these teachers were in the very early stages of their careers (teaching for less than five years). They were not blind to the issues that an over-focus on performance could generate and still would have liked more time for particular tasks, yet they wanted their students to achieve to the best of their abilities—believing this to be the essence of teaching—and saw the contribution that performative tasks made to this goal. In this way, their students' test scores were considered to reflect on their own professionalism.

The remaining majority of respondents can be understood to be experiencing a mismatch between those tasks they are (expected to) engage with, and those tasks they considered at the core of good teaching. Performative

tasks were perceived to be numerous and highly demanding. Respondents felt these tasks detracted from those they considered to be at the heart of the profession; planning and delivering engaging, thought-provoking lessons, and helping students to maximize their abilities. Teachers discussed various responses to these role discrepancies. Some, position role discrepancy as something that can be "managed," with teachers finding time for performative tasks *as well as* time for those tasks they felt to be most important. Others, position it as something to submit to, with teachers feeling forced to choose between tasks. Attached to each response are particular working attitudes and approaches. While most respondents can be understood as adopting one position or the other (being fairly evenly spread between the two), and taking one particular approach to their work, a minority of teachers can better be understood as moving between the two.

5.2.1 | Role discrepancy "management"

Some teachers described trying to manage role discrepancy by adapting their way of working to make space for their beliefs as well as required practices. In this way, all tasks are integrated into teachers' working schedules. Respondents spoke of one of two ways in which this was achieved.

The first way is through the *integration* of tasks. Despite not attaching particular importance to the performative tasks required of them, some respondents felt able to integrate these tasks into their work routines in such a way that they were not perceived to impinge on tasks considered more important. Four teachers spoke of their work approach in this way. They seem to have adapted fairly smoothly to the "new realities" of teaching by accepting documentation and data-based tasks as part of the job, without feeling compelled to make them a priority, or to make (significant) compromises.

> Well there are things that *have to* be done—things with parents have to be done, tests have to be checked, but, for example, a meeting doesn't have to be prepared. So that's the reason, that's the difference, and most of the time, perhaps it's a bit braggy, but I have very good memory so everything that has been said I can recall weeks later, so when I have conversations with parents, I don't have to put them in the computer immediately, I can do it a few weeks later (…).
>
> (Lucas, group 7, school 6)

While at times, expressing frustration with managerial demands, these respondents did not see them as worthy of real concern. Teachers who employed this approach had a range of teaching experience, from less than 5 years to almost 20. Interestingly, however, all were male and held positions of responsibility in ICT. Indeed, a technological confidence and an-ease-of-use of the digital systems that have become part of teachers' daily work life, might be central to this more relaxed, integrative approach to administrative performative demands.

Second were respondents who spoke of task *accumulation* being able to meaningfully engage with both lesser-valued but required tasks, and the tasks most important to them by incorporating out-of-hours work as a fixed part of their weekly schedules. Most often, tasks undertaken out-of-hours were core teaching tasks (lesson planning and checking and marking students' work) that teachers reported to have insufficient time for during school hours.

> … because we really like to *teach* children something and when we can manage that, and we can see the *fun* of it and *see* it with the kids, well, that's so nice. So that's [lesson planning] something I do on the weekends and that's why I do it on the weekend, because I really like teaching.
>
> (Sophia, group 8, school 4)

5.2.2 | Role discrepancy "capitulation"

A significant number of respondents (between one-third and a half) felt, at times, forced into a position of compromise: Having to prioritize tasks and choose between (required) practices and those they considered central to good teaching. This was particularly true of those teachers who had made a conscious decision not to work regularly out-of-hours (most of whom had suffered previously from burnout). In these situations, two contrasting working approaches were reported. First, those teachers who reported to economize on required performative tasks in order to make time for other tasks; tasks they considered central to student development. This can be understood as a form of policy *evasion*.

Interviewer: So which tasks do you tend to prioritize then?
Julia: Everything that's most important for the children. [...] So *preparing* my lesson I think is more important than *typing down* the plan for the whole period.

(Julia, group 6, school 2)

The term "evasion" is borrowed from Perryman et al. (2011). This response appears to stem as much, if not more, from practicality as it does ideology: As reported by Lisa, cutting "non-core" tasks is sometimes the only option.

> The middle testing period was in January, and then [again] in May or June. And halfway through you have to make an evaluation of your plans… [whispering] and I didn't do that. So I said to [names of management] "I have no time for it—I have *a lot* of tasks *next to* teaching, I have only two days with an extra assistant, so when do I do it?" And it is in my head… it must be enough!
>
> (Lisa, group 2, school 3)

The ability to adopt this approach appears largely dependent on school management. Certain administrative tasks could be disregarded only because teachers had the trust and support from their school management to do so.

> But I think if I would work at a different school, that would be different. Then you really have to put so much more time in it. But that is something that I would like to do even less of… stupid plans and those kind of things… I never look at those plans when I am teaching.
>
> (Nick, group 6, school 3)

Second, teachers who felt consistently forced to economize on tasks they value and consider central to good teaching, expressed a strong sense of *resignation*. These respondents reported a frustration with their everyday work; drowning in lists of daily demands and a sense of constraint; forced to compromise on what and how to teach. Martine (now vice-principal) cited this as her reason for leaving her previous teaching job.

> For a really long time, I tried to do both, but, it was impossible. So you would go with what the management wanted.
>
> (Martine, vice-principal, school 5)

More specifically, this "response" was characterized by a strong feeling from teachers that demanding workloads have resulted in insufficient time to plan the sort of lessons they want, and a lack of opportunity to teach the lessons they consider really stimulating and beneficial to students. It was primarily reported by more experienced teachers, who spoke of the changes they had seen in the profession and the growing demands upon them. Matthijs, teaching

for 14 years, explained that this was not what he expected from the profession, and it had compromised his enjoyment of the work:

> But since a few years, with all this… what I mentioned a few times, all these extra *things*… I think "shouldn't we get on with teaching, and leave all these other *things* outside the classroom?"
>
> (Matthijs, group 5, school 4)

5.3 | A Shifting sense of professionalism?

Beyond teachers' experiences of performativity and the responses this incites, it is pertinent to consider the impact that is had on teachers' professional identities—their sense of professionalism—and the ways respondents may have (re)oriented their beliefs and expectations to (better) align with the daily realities of being a teaching professional today.

One striking way the data indicate this might be happening, is through teachers' experience of autonomy, traditionally considered a key characteristic of the professions. Accounts indicate that traditional notions of professional autonomy may be shifting: Many respondents understand it as something constricted, to be earned rather than a given. This was commonly described as autonomy "between the lines."

Robbie: I feel like I am in control of what I would like to do. It's only that the IB'er [member of management] and colleagues, they help me to be on the red line, the main path, but which way I would like to go—it's up to me. As long as I achieve my goals that I talked about with management.
Interviewer: And goals in terms of…
Robbie: Numbers. Purely results.

(Robbie, group 5, school 2)

When asked what would happen if these goals were not met, Robbie's response illustrates the creeping normalization of the paramountcy of student achievement.

> … so, I'd have more observations in the class. So as soon as that happens then, I hope, to be honest, *I hope*, there would be more focus on me than there is right now.

Only a minority of respondents reported to have a meaningful role in choosing and shaping curricula—connected to their school's pedagogical and managerial approach (Browes, 2021)—and yet, most, reported to be content with the autonomy afforded to them. For some, namely those "aligned" teachers such as Robbie, these conditioned "micro-autonomous spaces" (Wilkins, 2011) were sufficient for them to consider themselves autonomous professionals. For others, this stance was merely practical; there was not the time for utilizing the luxury of more meaningful curricular freedom. Indeed, teachers' inabilities to teach lessons with the desired levels of creativity and inspiration, as reported earlier, is generally not attributed to a lack of autonomy, rather, to a lack of time. In environments where time is scarce and tasks are many, we should not assume that curricular autonomy is desired. While often described as "possible theoretically," teachers do not have the time to spend developing curricula (unless this is an integral part of school culture), and many claimed to prefer to work from the textbook. Those who *did* desire more curricular autonomy were are almost exclusively teachers who have been in the profession a decade or more;

> I really feel that it's too little. […]. We have a method for every single subject.
>
> (Emma, group 6, school 1)

Tight working schedules have other impacts too. Collegiality, (in terms of taking time to discuss, share ideas, and support colleagues) may now also have low precedence:

> Sometimes after work I am like: I *could* go to a colleague, but if I want to ask a question I know I will be there for 10 min, because we start talking about other things while I also want to finish it [other work], and I want to leave at 4 o' clock for example.
>
> (Nick, group 6, school 3)

Finally, it is important to re-stress that the aim of recent reforms has been the *professionalization* of teachers. In the Netherlands, this has included the development of teacher competency standards and professional development courses aligned with these standards. These measures incite changes to the profession by (re)defining its parameters and what it means to be a good teacher. Respondents' experiences of this are mixed: Several (predominantly, but not exclusively, younger) teachers see the teaching standards and courses on offer as an opportunity for professional growth, others generally more advanced in their careers, see the initiative as tokenistic, externally controlled, and narrowly-focused on standards-based learning.[3]

It is, therefore, perhaps accurate to describe teachers' experiences of their professionalism as divergent: separated into those who have (re)oriented their values, expectations, and practices to (better) fit their reality, and those who feel frustrated, holding onto previous experiences and more "traditional" notions of what it means to be a teaching professional. Although a small data set, findings indicate that members of these groups can perhaps best (if not always) be identified by their years of teaching experience. Despite these differing perspectives and the daily compromises some teachers feel they are making, all respondents appear to be able to reconcile their beliefs and practices to some extent; claiming they are still, in some form, able to be the sort of teacher they want to be. Particularly for those who feel they are making significant compromises daily, this is due to expectation realignment, the ability to take refuge in small successes, and the hope that, in whatever way chosen, they are providing crucial support to their students.

Interviewer: and do you feel that you can be this teacher?

Emma: Yeah, at this point I can. But at other levels I can't be, I can't. The challenge is that you always somehow feel it's never going to be perfect—there's always rules and things that you just forgot and missed out on and it's the process of letting go and accepting it, and thinking "well, that was a good day anyway."

(Emma, group 6, school 1)

> … you hope to make a difference, you hope that someday the kids will look back and maybe think of *me*, not about the math I explained, but as a person, as a teacher who listened and was there for them.
>
> (Lynn, group 8, school 5)

6 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This study has taken a look at a group of professionals operating within environments of surveillance, whereby they are increasingly held accountable through the recording of their work and their performance outcomes. This has been through a focus on primary school teachers in the Netherlands, using the concept of role discrepancy to understand what teachers do and how they feel about their work. In doing so, while situating professional change as an impact of broader, educational reform, it also demonstrates at the micro level, how the teaching profession might be changing from the inside, through the manner in which teachers' perceive their roles and responsibilities (Ball, 2016).

Findings suggest that primary teachers in the autonomous Dutch system share many experiences with those working in notoriously high-stakes, highly-controlled PBA contexts. Respondents were found to be operating in a "post-professional" environment (Hargreaves, 2000), struggling under time pressures and overburdened with tasks, directly impacting what and how they taught (see Berryhill et al., 2009). The impact of this on teaching however, was reported to be less for those teachers working in schools that adopt project-based learning. Nonetheless, in all schools, tasks traditionally at the core of teaching are apparently being pushed out by tasks that, instead, have the function of *measuring* teaching and learning. In these work environments, as in other professions, role discrepancy was found to be prevalent. As found among social workers (Agresta, 2006) and occupational therapists (Lloyd et al., 2004), teachers desired to spend more time on their areas of specialism and less time on more generic, administrative tasks. Yet, role discrepancy does not necessarily result in feelings of frustration or compromise, rather, teachers were found to adjust to these realities and negotiate policy boundaries in quite different ways.

Teachers' responses to role discrepancy constitute either an adaptation of their work to allow space for beliefs and required performative practices, or regular compromises being made between the two. Whereas the first approach might enable teachers to minimize their experience of role discrepancy, this was not always in a desirable way. Teachers' perspectives and approaches to their work discussed in the paper should not be considered an exhaustive list, rather, were those identified among this study's sample. Neither should they be considered entirely exclusive. The majority of teachers described particular ways of working, yet a small number seem to adapt their approach as deemed necessary; feeling the weight of task accumulation, for example, and thereby regularly working from home, while also at times "evading" policy by avoiding particular performative tasks.

Significantly, a small minority of teachers, all early in their careers, did not appear to experience role discrepancy. Subscribing to the PBA agenda, they measured themselves as professionals against their students' performance outcomes and, despite some frustrations, did not feel the need to compromise or significantly adjust their practices to accommodate their professional values. In this sense, these teachers display the characteristics of Wilkins (2011) "post-performative" teachers, "knowing" themselves as professionals through performative measures (Holloway & Brass, 2018).

These teachers' formative professional years took place before key PBA reforms had (fully) taken hold, and their values and expectations were shaped within different environments (see Holloway & Brass, 2018). Their experiences contrast with their more experienced colleagues (in the profession for at least a decade), who were more likely to feel the burden of compromise and a greater sense of frustration with their work. This finding is contrary to the hypothesis presented in Takase et al.'s (2006a) study on the nursing profession; that more experienced workers may experience role discrepancy to a lesser degree as they are *better able* to adjust or "improve" their practice in line with their beliefs. Rather, teachers are not able to "adjust" the multitude of demands upon them, and thus experience a sense of being pulled in two directions at once. Indeed, it is for this reason that the term policy *evasion* is used to describe those respondents who do, essentially, try to "improve" their practice. As discussed by Perryman et al. (2011), performative policies have become woven into the fabric of teaching, and normalized to the extent that "policy resistance" is not possible. Instead, teachers in this study were found to "drop" particular performative tasks for largely practical reasons, and only if they had the support of management to do so.

These findings complement those from Dutch secondary education, with Hendrikx (2019), noting that teachers either compromise on their beliefs, their required practices, or their time. Yet importantly, they also reveal a greater complexity to policy enactment, highlighting not only the importance of *compromise*, but also the importance of *adaptation*. It is clear that respondents' different perspectives toward PBA and their various responses to the challenge of role discrepancy, reinforce the conceptualization of teachers as "pragmatic" and "eclectic" policy actors (Moore et al., 2002): positioning their professionalism in a way that aligns with policy demands (principled pragmatism), feeling forced into "resignation" and compromising on professional beliefs (contingent pragmatism), or finding themselves somewhere in the middle of this "continuum," and altering their practices to accommodate beliefs, by accumulating tasks, integrating them, or evading them.

From these various positions, teachers held particular views on key aspects of their professionalism. Many respondents were content with what appears to be constricted autonomy or "autonomy between the lines." Whether for pragmatic purposes or ideological ones, such findings point toward a re-professionalization, rather than a de-professionalization of teachers (see Ball, 2016; Noordegraaf, 2013). Despite the small sample, when considered alongside studies such as Holloway and Brass (2018), Moore et al. (2002), and Wilkins (2011), this study suggests that performative policies might be creating a divisive chasm. For those "post-performative" teachers standing on the mainland who have either been professionally socialized within these realities or who have effectively adapted to them, PBA perhaps offers clear and useful professional guidance. For others, whose professional values were shaped in a different policy context, they may feel stranded, unsure of what their profession has become. Moore and Clarke's (2016) "attachment to professionalism" concept is useful in understanding this potential disjuncture, and may explain empirical data showing why some of these "stranded" teachers feel the need to resign to the managerial demands upon them. Further research in the Netherlands would be needed to test this idea.

Policy makers should be wary here, and strive to narrow potential chasms rather than risk the (further) alienation of a large part of the teaching profession. Stubbornly-narrow and, now cemented, quality measurements appear to restrict teachers in the classroom, and unclear quality assurance frameworks have led to the documentation of all aspects of their work and a task overload. In these ways, teachers' autonomy is constricted both directly and indirectly. Surveillance has its impacts: Traditionally-autonomous professionals in a traditionally-autonomous system are being micro-managed through various layers of governance, and, based on shortage figures, it seems teaching has become an undesirable profession. Rather than continue struggling to save the profession through forced, external efforts to raise its status, attention should turn to the nature by which teachers are held accountable, and steps taken to support the development of accountability tools that are rooted within the profession itself, and based upon trust.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has been approved by the ethical committees of both the Autonomous University of Barcelona—the university hosting the wider project, and the University of Amsterdam—the partner university supporting the research in the Netherlands.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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ENDNOTES

[1] An area of high urbanity encapsulating the country's four biggest cities.

[2] It is common however for teachers to rotate groups every year or few years (usually keeping within the lower, middle, or upper level).

[3] These competency standards have since been rescinded.

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