

Women in the Academy: experiences on the SNI and Academic Capitalism

Mujeres en la academia: experiencias sobre el SNI y el capitalismo académico

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Abstract: Academic capitalism describes the transformation of the university towards a business model. The effects that it has brought to the university community are diverse, but gender inequality stands out. The objective is to analyze the experiences shared by a group of academics on the National System of Researchers (SNI). These are the results of a study on academic capitalism at a public university in southern Mexico, carried out with a phenomenological methodology and using semi-structured interviews. In general, the academics agree that belonging to the SNI is an important distinction that represents a high cost for them in terms of productivity and the time it takes, but they also face dilemmas related to care work or other vital decisions such as being mothers or having a partner. The analysis reveals that there is still work to be done regarding policies in Mexico from a gender perspective.

Key words: Academic capitalism, SNI, gender, experiences, academics.

Resumen: El capitalismo académico describe la transformación de las universidades hacia un modelo empresarial. Los efectos que ha traído a las comunidades universitarias son diversos, pero resalta la desigualdad por género. El objetivo es analizar las experiencias compartidas por un grupo de académicas sobre el Sistema Nacional de Investigadores (SNI). Estos son los resultados de un estudio sobre el capitalismo académico en una universidad pública del sur de México, realizado con una metodología fenomenológica y utilizando entrevistas semiestructuradas. En general, las académicas coinciden en que pertenecer al SNI es una importante distinción, la cual representa un alto costo para ellas en términos de la productividad y el tiempo que demanda, además de enfrentar dilemas relacionados con el trabajo de cuidados u otras decisiones vitales, como ser madres

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o tener pareja. El análisis revela que aún hay mucho por hacer en relación con las políticas educativas en México desde una perspectiva de género.

Palabras clave: capitalismo académico, SNI, género, experiencias, académicas.

Introduction¹

Perhaps, university as a public place is one of the institutions that has changed the most in its structure and organization since the implementation of neoliberalism at the end of the 1980s in Mexico. Bell *et al.* (2012) explain that this institution was constituted as a company and this process has been called in different ways: corporatization of the university (Berg and Seeber, 2016), commodified university (Blanch, 2014), academic capitalism (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997; González *et al.*, 2013), among others.

In the United States, Slaughter and Leslie (1997) spoke for the first time of what would become *academic capitalism*. From the perspective of these authors, there was a very strong trend in the universities of that country to intensify academic production and place it as the most valuable part of the work of the faculties (through indicators), but with the purpose of turning it into a commercial product. Based on this approach, studies diversified to define academic capitalism and all the effects associated with it.

Slaughter and Leslie (1997) state that the 1980s was the specific time of transformation of some universities in North America and Europe, when they were incorporated into the market. In addition, there are at least four far-reaching implications of globalization and neoliberalism for higher education. First, the reduction of available money (used at government discretion) for higher education; second, the centralized growth of market-involved technoscience fields; third, the closeness between multinational corporations and state agencies concerned with product development and innovation. Finally, the concentration of multinationals and developed industrialized countries in global intellectual property strategies (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997).

Kaidesoja and Kapuppinen (2014) suggest other elements called social mechanisms to constitute academic capitalism. For instance,

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the insertion of a business language to refer to academic life. Clients (students) will obtain a degree, while the institution now seeks efficiency, effectiveness, quality and excellence, among other terms (Vega, 2014). As expressed by González *et al.* (2013), this transformation of the university was being generated from the moment when educational institutions, the State and private companies began to work together, trying to pull the strings of the formative processes (for the benefit of the market). Schulze and Olson (2017) have contributed to explain that academic capitalism is complex and that it is not just one, but rather how each context in its particularities can create diverse academic capitalisms.

In Mexico, academic capitalism came about through "Educational Modernization", during the mandate of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (Ibarra, 1998 and 2001). Villa-Lever (2013) explains that it was a model that appeared at a time when the economy was in one of its worst crises and when the State made significant cuts to the education budget, specially to teachers' salaries. In addition to this the evaluation/financing policies, which permeated the organization of universities through incentive programs, where productivity and performance were the relevant points in the academic life of the teaching staff. Actually, these programs ended up promoting a de-homologization of academic staff salary and competition for resources. Bensusán and Valenti (2018) identify as such the insertion of academic groups and the National System of Researchers.

The transformation of what we speak of as academic capitalism, whether in North America, Europe or Mexico, has brought permanent effects for teachers anywhere in the world, two of which stand out: 1) the stratification of academic staff, who entered into a dynamic of competition to obtain financing, and with it improve their salary and/or the development of their projects and 2) a high incidence of psychological and physical discomforts of academics, associated with a questioning of the use of time and the lack of reconciliation of his private life with his academic life, as a consequence of the high productivity that the system demands and the scarcity of time to achieve it (Clouston 2014; Berg and Seeber, 2016; Chatani *et al.*, 2017; Rodríguez and Sánchez, 2018; Arias *et al.*, 2019).

In this order of ideas, this article introduces the analysis of the partial results of a phenomenological-interpretative study, in which the SNI is exclusively taken up as one of the programs or systems that are part of academic capitalism in Mexico. The SNI is recognized for its high level of quality and demand for academic staff, but it has generated profound

asymmetries between male and female academics, regarding ingress, permanence and promotion within the system. The results show that for all the academics interviewed in this research, entering, staying and ascending in the SNI represents a high cost for personal life, physical and mental health and other aspects that involve vital situations in their trajectories. The reconciliation of their personal and working life is a problem that has not been addressed and considered. This implies questioning the way public politics on education are designed.

It is also necessary to clarify that this work presents only partial results, specifically of the SNI, because it is considered that this system synthesizes in a precise way the gender inequalities of academic capitalism. The latter explains how the university has been organized for 30 years, as well as the inequalities and effects that this has brought, but does not talk about the profound asymmetries that are created by gender. Therefore, the choice of the SNI as the focus of this article aims to emphasize these differences.

Development

Methodology

In order to analyse the experiences of academics in relation to academic capitalism, and thus of the SNI, we resorted to a qualitative phenomenological-interpretative methodology that recovered and analysed diverse meanings, perceptions, stories and experiences of full-time academic staff. The reasons for sticking to a phenomenological design are based precisely on what it provides to the social sciences. Fuster (2019: 203) points out that “the phenomenological approach of research arises as a response to the radicalism of the objective. It is based on the study of life experiences, regarding an event, from the perspective of the person”.

The word *phenomenology* has its origin in the Greek term *phainomenon*, which means “to show oneself, to put in the light or manifest that can become visible in itself” (Barbera and Inciarte, 2012: 201). Consequently, this work tried to reveal the experiences of academic staff about academic capitalism, through different techniques and put in the light or make visible what is not in statistics. To do this, it was essential to know the academic trajectories, as well as the personal and biographical aspects of the participants, to better understand their experience of academic capitalism in the context of Chiapas in southeastern Mexico.

The philosophy and central concepts of phenomenology (Husserl, Heidegger and Schutz) were the guidelines for following the proper procedure in this research. In this experience, the so-called *hermeneutic phenomenology* was resumed, considering the proposals of Hernández *et al.* (2014) and Creswell (2014). *Interpretation* was prioritized, with the following activities: a) Define a phenomenon or research problem. b) Study and reflect on this. c) Discover essential categories and themes of the phenomenon. d) Describe it. e) Interpret it. The task of recovering the experiences could be performed through semi-structured interviews, which consider questions that explore biographical aspects and trajectories of those involved, so as not to lose sight of the particularities of the experience (including gender issues).

Gender perspective in social research

Although phenomenology delves into the subjectivity of people from their experiences. It is also true that it cannot be overlooked that these are crossed by gender. Therefore, adopting a gender perspective was an inescapable task from the first approaches to the field, while the subjective experience of academic capitalism clearly revealed the importance of considering this perspective to show the differences that arise between men and women within university life (public sphere) and those involving personal life (private sphere). Undoubtedly, the adoption of the gender perspective has been a good way to better explain the particularities of the experiences of academic women in relation to their participation in the SNI, within the framework of academic capitalism.

In this regard, it is necessary to reflect on how gender became a tool of analysis to understand inequalities between men and women. Categories such as gender are historically constructed; and although there may be some changes in that symbolization, it generally represents a subordination of women to men, which produces serious inequalities between men and women (Lamas, 2016).

According to Buquet (2011), the gender perspective can be involved in three areas: training, mainstreaming in the structure of the university, and research. Training processes must take place at all levels: students, academics and administrators. While mainstreaming implies that the entire structure is organized in a way that promotes gender equity. As for research is proposed that it should uncover gender inequalities. In addition to the above, Buquet (2011) reflects on the paradox that exists in many higher

education institutions, where, on the one hand, the gender perspective is promoted and evidenced through feminist research. On the other hand, there is no willingness to make institutional changes to address inequality internally.

It is interesting to emphasize how gender-sensitive research is relevant to the university. Biglia and Vergés-Bosch (2016) explain that there is an important diversity of contributions that assume a gender perspective. Some turn to it in data analysis (as with this research) and others that incorporate it from the beginning of the investigative process. In the same sense, González (2009) proposes that gender studies have opened debates and paths for equity in the university, also addressing other social problems and serving “to unravel the pillars of discrimination” (Buquet, 2011: 212).

Beyond the university, studies on gender inequalities are a fundamental basis for generating public policies that allow women a life free of violence and with more opportunities. For instance, the study of gender gaps forms a solid element of evidence that women and men must have equal opportunities in work, education, health empowerment and longevity, including the gaps in the SNI.

On the home page of the latest “Global Gender Gap Index 2020” report of the World Economic Forum (WEF), it states: “None of us will see gender parity in our lifetimes, and nor likely will many of our children [...] the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, which reveals that gender parity will not be attained for 99.5 years” (WEF, 2019). All this means that women continue to have fewer opportunities for political empowerment, and that there is also significant inequality in terms of economic participation and stable job opportunities. This is pointed out by Lamas (2016), when she talks about the fact that women despite having increased their training and education, live a double day, a common problem in the narratives of the researchers who participated in this study.

Therefore, it was proposed to think about the importance of the gender perspective, as proposed by the “Methodological guide for gender awareness” of the National Institute of Women (Inmujeres, 2008) that such a perspective is a look that investigates and analyses how the values, practices, processes and subjectivity of men and women are constructed in society. In this sense, this paper considered indispensable not only to consider the experience of teachers, but to identify how these gender constructions determine certain inequalities in the area of university life (public sphere) and its importance to the private sector.

Techniques for collecting information

The task of recovering subjective experiences was carried out through semi-structured interviews, with broad and general questions, which, according to Creswell (2014) provided participants with greater opportunities to hear details about life and meanings they have or have socially constructed. The main topics explored were central elements of his biography, academic trajectories, organization for work individually and with colleagues, their work and personal relations, as well as the relationship of their working life with their personal life and the future of the university. Due to the health contingency that occurs since March 2020, the collection of information was virtual with the Zoom platform.

Participants

The research involved 5 male academics and 7 female academics from a public university in Chiapas, from academic units or faculties located in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Tapachula, Huehuetán and San Cristóbal de las Casas. The inclusion criteria were the following: to be full-time professors (regardless of the category), to have at least seven years working with the appointment of full-time within the university, have participated or participated in the Teacher Performance Stimulus Program (Teaching Career) and, preferably, be professors who have participated or participate in the SNI. However, for the purposes of this article, the analysis focuses on the experience of academics. These are 7 women with high academic productivity: 2 of them members of the SNI, 2 who did not endorse their permanence and 3 who have decided not to participate. Table 1² summarizes socio-demographic aspects and the academic training of the participants.

Procedure

The stages that were carried out to achieve the objective of the study were: 1) Identification and contact with the participants, by creating a directory of professors who met the inclusion criteria and their subsequent invitation to participate via WhatsApp and e-mail; those who accepted the invitation determined the date and time for their interview;

2 The tables can be found in the Annex at the end of this article (Editor's note).

2) the collection of information through interviews, which were immediately transcribed for feedback and monitoring compliance with the saturation criterion; 3) the information analysis stage was developed through the thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clark (2006), which included the following phases: data familiarization, information, initial code generation, search for topics, review of topics and their definition and denomination (Mieles *et al.*, 2012). Finally, 4) the drafting of the final report became concrete once the interpretation of the information collected in the light of theories was achieved. Undoubtedly, it was the most difficult moment because the stories of male and female academics are full of experiences that arise from their personal life and intersect with their university life, making a very diverse network of meanings and significances.

Ethical considerations

In social science research, ethical considerations must be maintained at all times in order to speak of a work of integrity, which respects the lives of individuals and human groups. Therefore, the informed consent form was presented in each Zoom interview, which explains the willingness to participate in the study, including a brief description of the study and its objectives, as well as the commitment to confidentiality and anonymity, and the authorization to record. In this case, all the participants agreed to be recorded in order to use the information in a way that is in keeping with their discourse, omitting names, easily identifiable personal data and details about the faculties where they collaborate because in some university communities, due to their size, it is easy to identify people or remember events shared among the members of the academic community.

Results

As mentioned before, this paper shows the analysis of the experiences of female academics in a public university in southern Mexico in relation to academic capitalism, specifically about the SNI. Seven women from different faculties and with high academic productivity participated: 2 of them SNI members, 2 who did not renew their permanence and 3 who decided not to participate. Through the interviews conducted —for this article— was grouped according to their relationship with the SNI: those who have never

joined, those who joined and decided not to remain, and those who joined and remain there.

It is worth mentioning, before reviewing the details of these groups, that the university has become more open to women in all senses. Rodríguez *et al.* (2016) find that there are advances in the participation of women in the National System of Researchers, which emphasized in an investigation that documented the growth of this system from 1991 to 2011. However, the feminization of education does not necessarily mean that there is a level playing field to advance trajectories. Buquet and Moreno (2017) reveal that women study more than men, but their trajectories do not materialize in terms of work. They tend to have jobs unrelated to their training and precarious wages, creating deep gaps for better living conditions. In the case of female academics, some specific elements are considered, such as how many hold "C" full-time title or membership in the SNI or the *Sistema Estatal de Investigadores* (SEI) [State System of Researchers] or others. Significant differences in numbers between teachers can be identified, as can be seen in Table 2.

On the surface, it is possible to notice, the aspects in which male academics outnumber female academics, such as the time of dedication (PTC, part time or subject), how many have reached the highest category (Holder "C") and the degree of doctorate, as well as being members of the SNI or SEI. As explained by Buquet *et al.* (2014: 15): "The massive presence of women in higher education is not sufficient evidence of their integration into institutional life in equal circumstances. It is necessary to point out the nuances of gender culture".

In the same Table 2, if the data on the SNI are taken up again, it can be noticed the differences between male and female researchers are decisive: 103 men and 44 women. This public institution is not the only one that presents this wide gap. Studies by Cárdenas (2019), Castillo and López (2019), Izquierdo and Atristán (2019), Contreras-Gómez *et al.* (2020), among others, have already exposed such differences in the figures in other universities in the country, as well as the conditions in which female researchers or scientists work in Mexico, without denying the fact that the SNI has grown exponentially over the years, as Gil and Contreras (2017) point out, from 1984 to 2016 it multiplied its figures by 18. Therefore, it is necessary to ask: What do female academics think about their possible ingress and permanence in the SNI and how can the figures presented here be explained?

Reflections on the conviction of not being SNI

The women academics, who have decided not to participate in the SNI, agree on most of their reasons and share some characteristics: they have long trajectories of high productivity (publication of articles, books, current research projects, etc.). They have at least 18 years of service at the university and all of them are responsible for the care in their homes. This last point implies for them to decide what is the priority in life, since they analyse carefully what personal projects, they have had to leave to dedicate themselves to the academy, considering that this demands a lot of time, even if they do not belong to the SNI.

One of the female teachers mentioned she left her maternity project in order to dedicate herself to the academy. This issue has been exposed by Sánchez *et al.* (2016), by pointing out that the postponement of motherhood is associated with professional success. Or, that choosing maternity has delayed admission to the SNI (Cárdenas, 2019). These situations of choice in female academics were already addressed by Buquet and Moreno (2017) in a study on the trajectories of women trained in technical or technological areas; “it became quite clear that the reconciliation between the ‘outside’ world (study/work) and life in the domestic sphere is particularly complicated for women” (Buquet and Moreno, 2017: 44).

Work-life balance is an issue that goes unnoticed when talking about academic staff. For instance, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (2016) awards a badge to companies that have programs that promote a work-life balance for workers. This does not apply to universities. Studies by Bell *et al.* (2012) and Ylijoki (2013) examine how the lives of male and female professors are highly affected when there is no balance between times designated for work and private life, causing chronic stress. However, when reviewing the state of the art, it is significantly more mentioned that women in the academy are the ones who have greater difficulties in achieving this balance, worsening in times of pandemic (Ramos and Gomez, 2020).

However, there are studies such as that of Ramón *et al.* (2020) that show that the differences between male and female academics are not necessarily so profound in all contexts or institutions. For example, at a university in Tabasco, it was found that the SNI members of that institution were satisfied with their quality of life, referring specifically to the categories of coping, personal and family life. Therefore, their permanence in the SNI is associated, without gender differences, to their abilities, the support of their families, their training and the interest they

have. All the above, without problems linked to care or other domestic issues, or to the conciliation of time.

In the case of this research, the female academics who do not belong to the SNI believe that the system is very demanding: from filling out the curriculum in the platform to the conformation or compliance of all the requirements to become one. They also express that their style or way of researching does not fit with the SNI proposal because their work processes are “slow”, and they would not be able to reach the goals required by the system. Therefore, it would not give them “the life” to be able to dedicate themselves to it.

Well, I tried it when I did my PhD and I dedicated myself exclusively to research. Obviously, it does take me time to analyse, to systematize, the state of the art, to create, to contribute knowledge. Yes, it does take time for me, but I guess there are people who don't, right? So, I am honest with myself, and it will not give me life, I will not be able to create this knowledge that the SNI demands (Nadia, 51 years old, university academic, interviewed on April 5th, 2021).

This situation implies a particular conception of time, since they all express their concern about the time required to carry out the activities requested to receive the SNI appointment. This distribution of time is entirely related to the idea that they are not fully researchers and that they are appointed as full-time professors. Therefore, teaching should be a priority, for two activities so essential to university life cannot be attended to: teaching and research. This does not mean that they are not attracted by both functions, they simply cannot attend to both aspects in hundred percent.

The policies of the National System of Researchers: if you want to be here, you also have to do research, of course! I think that is where this confusion appears. I mean, like this overlapping of functions, right? Where you are a teacher and you are a researcher, but sometimes you are neither a teacher nor a researcher, and then, how does it impact wanting to be in the National System of Researchers [...] I have refused to enter the system, there are times when... they tell me: “No, no, no, now I am going to enter, because if not, it will be very bad for me”, but the truth is like serving two masters, and you know that whoever serves two masters, with someone is bad or with both is bad, yes? (Karla, 63 years old, university academic, interviewed on April 12th, 2021).

This situation could be compared with the results of similar research at the University of Sonora, where SNI female academics find although it is difficult to carry out, it is possible to achieve a balance between teaching and research functions. Even, balance the role of mothers and researchers, without this meaning abandoning the importance of the gender perspective to talk about this issue (Castillo and López, 2019).

From the point of view of Díaz (2020), the substantive functions of full-time academic staff are shaped by federal policies, mainly by the *Programa de Desarrollo Profesional del Profesorado* (Prodep) [Professional Development Program for Teachers] and that, given the multiplicity of tasks, many male and female academics must choose which of them to prioritize. Thus, choosing to be a SNI implies assuming a total willingness to the research work with all that this brings. However, this choice becomes more complex when it comes to female academics because as mentioned before, not all of them are willing to “sacrifice” more of their time on it.

Academics who were SNI: time to meditate on academic

This group of academics includes women professors who have already belonged to the system, but who are no longer interested in it. The two women researchers have at least 25 years of service and they are close to retirement. Although one of them has no children or economic dependents, both do care work at home and maintain high productivity. They have not stopped publishing articles and books and creating or coordinating research projects.

The main reason for not returning to being a member of the SNI is the time it takes to work. Again, the situation of the harmonization or reconciliation of work-life time cannot be ignored, since it is part of the experiences of women and, in this case, of female academics, as Gamboa and Pérez (2017) exposed, because time greatly determines the relationship that is established between these areas (family and work), whether it is a tense, harmonious or challenging relationship.

For instance, a professor interviewed explained that for personal reasons (care work) she did not have the same work rhythm and could not endorse the SNI. She mentioned that although she might try to do it again, she was assessing some family issues. The second academic said that the SNI demands sacrifices or entails the neglect of certain aspects of life:

At the end of the day, the SNI profile for me after all this that I have meditated on my retirement is not worth it. The SNI is not worth it. It is like an ideal, a utopia of higher education institutions, but I feel that to be SNI, you neglect teaching, and you neglect the family, and I was not going to sacrifice neither teaching nor family to be SNI, then I decided not (Elena, 55 years old, university academic, in interview on April 20th, 2021).

That is, the work of care and the fact of having to choose between one or other activities that pertain to academic life are repeated reasons for not

being a member of the SNI. Cárdenas (2019) argues that this situation is common for all women researchers, as women academics spend more time to their families than their academic peers. Baeza (2017) has conducted research where it is exposed that conciliation can be complicated in the case of women who are engaged in academia. Hence, during the pandemic scientific productivity statistics have benefited academics (Bustelo *et al.*, 2021).

Similarly, it reflects on how the system can greatly stress those who participate in it. Feeling constantly “appraised,” evaluated, and sometimes unappreciated, it makes them unwilling to continue. During the confinement and online classes, both professors expressed dismay at how overworked they were and how this also contributed to confirming that they did not want to join the SNI.

I was there for three years, and then, for personal reasons I admit that I could not dedicate the time required because it is true, it requires a lot of dedication, it is an interesting recognition, but it is a tax, huh? I mean, if you dedicate time to this, if you are productive, if you do research, in a nutshell, ok, I put you in another step. So, for personal reasons, I could not dedicate all my time to it, so after three years, I could not endorse my recognition. I am honest with you, at one point I said... ah! What a relaxation because it is something that stresses. It is an activity that needs to dedicate time to and organize your activities very well so that, in addition to giving classes, in addition to supporting academic activities, you dedicate time to research, but it also worsened with the pandemic (Ángeles, university academic, 53 years old, in interview on December 22nd, 2020).

In the project developed in Spain and called “Inequalities uncovered in the university due to the Covid-19 crisis. Gender impact on working conditions, time use and academic performance at UCM”, by Bustelo *et al.* (2021), it was revealed that female academics had less participation in research and other activities because during the confinement they duplicated their domestic tasks and worked in unfavourable conditions for the space where they lived with their families.

In the same vein, Benavides *et al.* (2021) assert that the trajectory of women scientists has been put at risk by the Covid-19 pandemic, which led them to play a double role: the care of children at home and the work of their investigations also at home. This was clearly reflected in their productivity.

Otherwise, the participating academics are close to retirement, and it is possible that now their experiences and broad knowledge of the system and the university will allow them to determine more easily what they want to do and not what they “need” to do to remain current as researchers.

Often at this stage of life and of their careers, female academics have children who are older or who do not require personalized attention, as shown in the study by Caldera *et al.* (2019: 51), in which it is mentioned that the older the age of female academics, the greater the possibilities of climbing in the SNI: "The age factor is important to enter the SNI because it is associated with experience, and the years give experience, but it is also related to the various tasks that one has such as raising children". Caldera *et al.* (2019) intuit that those researchers who are mothers and who have many years of working at the university have older children who do not demand as much work for them. However, despite this apparent age advantage, the female academics interviewed have decided not to re-enter the SNI to attend to their personal life issues.

Being and staying in the SNI: from the PhD to direct competition at the university

In relation to female professors who are part of the SNI and who have remained for at least two consecutive evaluations, common themes already mentioned can be identified: the serious problem of time management in the face of the demand of activities to perform as full time and as SNI members versus the sacrifices this implies in their personal lives, called work-life balance (Buquet *et al.*, 2014; Baeza, 2017; Hernández and Ibarra, 2019), how complicated it can be to fill out the curriculum within the platform (as a bureaucratic process) and the affectations brought about by confinement and online work during the Covid-19 pandemic (Bustelo *et al.*, 2021).

Firstly, it is important to take up the issue of age, since these academics are the youngest (40 and 47 years of age), and with respect to their years of service, they are also the ones with the shortest time in the university as full time. Entering the SNI was a natural step after their doctoral studies, since they could dedicate themselves completely to research and publication. It is in this training process that, in fact, they find the origins of their academic productivity already with a view to joining the SNI.

This is also considered by Díaz (2020) when he analyses the academic careers of the Autonomous University of Queretaro and he establishes that a common characteristic among SNI women is the strong influence of their doctoral training, postdoctoral, research stays and other studies they have had before entering the system. But not all female academics have been able to enter the SNI after the doctorate, as proposed by Villegas and Mendoza-Zuany (2015) since they consider that many female academics do

not obtain the degree immediately and they are not full-time professors (as required in years prior to 2023). Therefore, an imaginary can be constructed about this situation that does not necessarily apply to all female professors.

In addition to these similarities, these researchers expressed their concern about the conditions in which they must work, since it is difficult to work collaboratively in an environment of individual competition, male chauvinist environments and where they must perform many academic activities at the same time. Individualized work is prioritized. The possibilities of working collaboratively are left aside, and even, the possibility of carrying out unethical acts is opened, as described by Rojas (2017) when criticizing the various ways in which this competitive environment harms female academics, who can live a kind of erasure through what Rojas (2017: 115) named “rhetoric of belittlement”.

However, Hernández *et al.* (2019) consider that in any incentive program there cannot be equality, and that both men and women who are part of that selected group (as the authors consider to be the SNI) will try to stay in that space, even performing acts that are not congruent with what the system promotes.

Nevertheless, there are still possibilities of reversing this situation, at least from the point of view of some female academics, who choose to think of themselves differently despite the tendency to individualism:

It is complicated, but it is possible. I learned this precisely from my political activism. If we do not do collegiate work, if we do not take care of each other and we do not support each other so that not only one is SNI, but all are SNI. If you do not have this logic, we will be stained by the blight. So, precisely because of the conditions we need to build. Really, we are very few but I can tell you that I have colleagues both in Social Anthropology and in the academic staff that support each other to the extent of our possibilities (Marysol, 47 years old, university academic, interviewed on May 7th, 2021).

This hope of working in sorority (Lagarde, 2009: 2) involves recognizing that the experiences of women can benefit all: “Together we are building a model because from the experience of one woman we all benefit. Although we may not even know it, the changes we make in our lives have been taken from others”. But above all, work to build something that was called “political pact” (Lagarde, 2009) among women, which implies horizontality and equity.

Moreover, it is important to note that burnout is a recurring factor. Women professors recognize the ravages that work demands cause to their bodies and minds. Additionally, on most occasions rest or vacation times are

used to continue working on SNI issues, reducing their possibilities for self-care. Díaz (2020) alludes to the lack of time to rest, in the sense that female researchers have learned to work without schedules, weekends or vacations, with workdays of up to 60 hours on average. According to Díaz (2020), female academics put their self-care routines, spending time with their loved ones, and even household chores in a secondary place.

As a consequence, the diseases they have presented are completely associated with overwork and stress, as Mayté manifests when she talks about the symptoms and signs of burnout syndrome, a disorder that has also been the reason for research (Cruz *et al.*, 2013; Aarun and Herrera, 2018).

Now, I have all the symptoms of a burnt-out professor just like that! [she says emphatically]. I decided to rest, I said, I have to rest, I can't, I can't demand more of myself physically. I'm not ready for any more right now, no way. It is the year in which I really did nothing, like a blank, but I said, it is necessary because I said: my health is at risk and what is the point of staying awake, why you have to stay awake a lot to write something, you have to sacrifice a lot of time and I said: I do not feel capable, but I renewed it. In 2018 I think it was, and then they gave me level one (Mayté, 43 years old, university academic, interviewed on March 30th, 2021).

Furthermore, receiving an economic compensation from the SNI represents for some female academics the possibility of owning their own home, as expressed by Marisol, who is responsible for paying the mortgage and college tuition for her eldest son:

And above all, for example... well, I have colleagues who do have two salaries, even more things, but when you depend only on your salary, you have a mortgage on your house, no... and you have a child studying at the university. I mean, the truth is that this is when you say: oh well, how hard it is! I completely understand. It is not just what you say. There is the prestige of all that, but we really depend on that income, don't we?... Women like me (Marisol, 47 years old, university academic, interviewed on May 7th, 2021).

Finally, it is important to point out that membership in the SNI represents for some researchers the possibility of having a better livelihood. An example of this is Mayté, who considers that the resources provided by being a member of the system are the support she needs to stay active and to have support in her research: from the opportunity to have an assistant to cover the expenses generated by the projects, which cannot be covered by her salary:

These resources are used to buy our books, to make those expenses for research, for thesis advising, for thesis, for accompaniment that we have to do with the student. There are also expenses there, the congresses that do not pay us. But if you go to a

congress to another state, for hotel, airplane and others, I spend what I earn in two weeks... (Mayté, 43 years old, university academic, interviewed on March 30th, 2021).

However, due to the fact that the figures do not favor female researchers in relation to their income, permanence and promotion in the SNI, it could be said that the resources end up circulating among those researchers who may have more possibilities to do so, because their conditions allow it. In a study about gender equity in research, Cárdenas (2019) analyses the dynamics and he makes visible this problematic about the resources in the hands of some academics within the *Red Medio Ambiente* (REMA) [Environment Network] of the *Instituto Politécnico Nacional* (IPN) [National Polytechnic Institute], and he points out that “institutional policies of resource allocation do not favor collaborative work among researchers and neither gender equity, since the greatest amount of resources benefits the researchers with the highest productivity” (Cárdenas, 2019: 30). This fuels a kind of cycle of inequalities between male and female academics that we present here.

Conclusions

Academic capitalism is a phenomenon that transformed Mexican universities as a function of evaluation/financing policies. Although the National System of Researchers was created to compensate for the low salaries of academic and research staff. Over the years it has generated inequalities due to the lack of a gender perspective. The experiences of female academics —despite being in different moments of their careers— have elements in common: the lack of time to enjoy two important areas of their lives: work and personal as a result of the demands posed by academic capitalism.

This shows that there has been no concrete progress in the reconciliation of work and personal life, even though it has already been discussed in the House of Representatives in 2009. Statistics show that for female academics the possibilities of accessing and remaining in the SNI decrease and represent a high cost. As mentioned above, female professors not only have high productivity (whether or not they are members of the system), but they are also responsible for care work in their homes.

The physical and mental health of many teachers is compromised when they work and struggle to get a place within the SNI or undertake other projects that demand high academic productivity. It is essential to make visible that academic capitalism causes high levels of stress and damages

not only the institutions by promoting the stratification of the teaching staff, but also that when it comes to physical and mental health as essential elements of life there is no turning back.

Diseases may have serious and irreversible consequences, even death. We are in time to address the discomfort generated by competitive environments, where women reach the university and the SNI, but not under equal conditions, making their trajectories more complex and putting their lives at risk. The gender perspective is essential to understand that all of us have the right to improve our work and welfare situation, and not to choose between one or the other.

Therefore, even though the SNI is recognized as a place where there are committed and valuable researchers, an extensive review of its structure and functioning. As well as of other incentive programs is necessary. But it is also important to have a critical analysis of the larger structure that underlies this issue: from academic capitalism that has brought so many negative effects to the university and that can be the origin of new forms of research related to inclusion and exclusion in any educational institution. Also, proposals for intervention from a gender and intersectionality perspective are needed.

This paper shows a panorama from the perspective of women academics, whose conditions are specific to the context where they develop their careers (in the south of Mexico). Hence, we consider it necessary to open the way to listen to university communities in other parts of the country or the world. In this sense, if the advances in public politics with a gender perspective are not consolidated, it will not be possible for other structures to change.

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Table 1

Sociodemographic characteristics of the interviewed academics

Age	Marital Status	Family	Economic dependents	Years of service	PRODEP profile	Teaching career level	SNI	Postgraduate education	Disciplinary field
50	Married	No children	No	24	Yes	8 a 9	No	SCLC	Biological sciences
53	Married	No children	No	28	Yes	9	Ex-SNI	Mexico City	Civil engineering
43	Single	No children	Yes	7	Yes	9	SNI I	Tuxtla Gutiérrez	Humanities
51	Divorced	With children	Yes	25	Yes	6	No	Tuxtla Gutiérrez	Humanities
63	Divorced	With children	Yes	25	Yes	9	No	Foreign	Sociology
55	Married	With children	Yes	27	Yes	9	Ex-SNI	Mexico City	Education
47	Divorced	With children	Yes	17	Yes	9	SNI I	Xalapa	Sociology Anthropology

Source: Author's own elaboration based on data from interviews with participants in the study "The Experience of Teaching Staff on Academic Capitalism in a University in Southern Chiapas".

Table 2

Distribution of male and female academics according to their categories and membership in the National System of Researchers (SNI) and State System of Researchers (SEI)

PTC		Mt		Subject		Holder C		Doctorate		SNI		SEI	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
576	366	132	52	689	471	154	59	314	163	103	44	112	64

Note: PTC stands for *Profesor de Tiempo Completo* [Full-time Teacher] and MT stands for *Profesor de Medio Tiempo* [Part time].

Source: Data were extracted from UNACH (2020).

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