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Miami Florida Jean Monnet Center of Excellence 2023 EU FACULTY CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT GRANT Interview with grantee Dr. Michaela Moura-Koçoğlu



Dr. Michaela Moura-Koçoğlu is the Associate Teaching Professor and Undergraduate Program Director at the Center for Women's and Gender Studies at Florida International University (FIU).

She received the Miami-Florida Jean Monnet Center of Excellence Curriculum Development grant this year for developing a new course focused on "Women, Representation, and Violence in Europe: Barriers to Gender Equity in the Public Sphere".

She was kind enough to answer a few questions about her research.

MFJMCE: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

As an Associate Teaching Professor and Undergraduate Program Director at the Center for Women's and Gender Studies at FIU, I teach courses on Gender Violence, Global Women's Writing, Women and Genocide, and Feminist Theory. My teaching initiatives have a global focus: I have been designing and implementing collaborative online international learning (COIL) projects in my curriculum since 2018. Students in my courses work together on short-term projects with international students at universities in Brazil, Mexico, Canada, and soon Türkiye. My research interests include Studies in Gender Violence and Trauma, Women and Genocide, Online Violence Against Women and Minorities, Indigenous Feminism, and Postcolonial Literary Studies.

MFJMCE: In a few words, can you tell us what the focus of the research project for which you received this grant is?

Violence against women and female identifying politicians, journalists, and human rights activists is a significant and growing problem worldwide. This project examines the prevalence and impact of gendered violence against women in the public sphere, recognizing this phenomenon as a violation of human rights that poses significant barriers to gender equity, women's participation in and contribution to societies across diverse cultural and geographical contexts.

MFJMCE: How did the idea for this research come up?

Given my research interest in gender violence, for years I have observed the escalation of violence against women in the public sphere globally, such as the murder of Indigenous environmental rights activist Berta Cáceres from Honduras, of politician Marielle Franco in Brazil or Jo Cox in Britain, or of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta. Increasingly, we observe that gender violence – the offline discrimination and oppression of women and LGBTQ individuals – is replicated in diverse online spaces. Online violence is an attempt at intimidating, silencing or otherwise extending power and control over targeted individuals. Whether online or offline, all forms of violence have the chilling effect of curtailing the ability and willingness of women and minorities from participating in society as equals.

When I tasked students for a COIL project to create a research-based awareness campaign on online violence against women and minorities, an overwhelming majority reported that they refrained from voicing their opinions online and to some extent offline themselves, for fear of retribution. That sparked the idea to create a course that would illuminate the pervasiveness of



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the phenomenon of online violence against women and minorities voicing their opinions online, particularly public facing women, and to encourage students to ponder the strategies employed to silence women's voices, as well as the legal efforts to address this insidious form of violence.

MFJMCE: Your grant proposal says that you would use this research for classroom teaching. What do you hope students will gain by attending the course you are developing?

The first step is to understand the nature of violence against public-facing women in Europe in comparative perspective with the U.S. where we have ample evidence, such as the attacks on female politicians, including the kidnapping plot against Governor Gretchen Whitmer or the assassination attempt of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords.

While this course requires students to critically analyze the causes and consequences of gender-based violence against women journalists, politicians, and human rights activists, more

importantly, they will actively examine and develop strategies for preventing violence against public-facing women.

MFJMCE: Why do you think the focus of your course has specific interest for students in the U.S.?

In general, the content of this course is highly relevant in a rapidly changing world not least due to technological advancements; and if women, who constitute half of the population, are prevented from participating in or contributing to public life, the range of perspectives and voices in decision-making processes will be limited, ultimately resulting in the undermining of democratic processes. Students in the U.S. will undeniably benefit from a global perspective to navigate the complexities of gendered violence, particularly in the digital era. Examining the commonalities and differences in the experiences of women in public life across different regions and cultures empowers students to critically interrogate the efficacy of and gaps in contemporary strategies and legislation.

MFJMCE: Where will your research take you in the future? Do you plan to continue developing this project, or do you have others in mind?

I am hoping to develop a COIL project for this course together with a Turkish partner institution to collaborate in producing real-world solutions. I am currently developing a project with Yasar University in Izmir to research and find solutions for the gender gap in education in Türkiye, and we are working closely with a local NGO whose mission is to encourage the participation of women and girls in public life.

MFJMCE: Do you have any last thoughts to share?

Only that I am excited about the opportunity to design and hopefully teach this course, and connect with colleagues across Europe in the process.

By Christine I. Caly-Sanchez

► For Dr. Michaela Moura-Kocoglu's Bio, [click here](#)

► For more information on the MFJMCE Faculty Curriculum Development Grant, [click here](#)

