



Intersectionality at Work: The Racialised and Gendered Construction of Immigrant Women in Australia

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Abstract

This study explored how institutional language influences how migrant women are represented in Australia, focusing on work, caregiving, and migration status. Its aim was to see how each document frames its policy subjects and reinforces gender and immigration inequalities. Using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) combined with Critical Discourse Analysis, the study analysed two key texts: the federal policy "Next Steps for Paid Parental Leave in Australia" and the advocacy report "Migrant and Refugee Women in Australia: A National Study of Workplace Sexual Harassment, Racism, and Exploitation." The analysis examined lexical choices, subject positioning, intertextual references, and silences, revealing how each document constructs its policy subjects, depicts inequality, and legitimises certain solutions—particularly regarding race, migration status, and precarity. It was found that the government document uses a managerial vocabulary—words like "participation," "productivity," "flexibility," and "best practice"—which generalises the subjects ("parents/families/workers") and silences issues like migration status, racialization, and precarious work. In contrast, the advocacy report highlights inequalities through explicit harms ("harassment," "racism," "wage theft," "fear") and personal stories, linking individual experiences to larger structures such as visa regimes, enforcement gaps, and casualised work. The analysis showed how narratives of benchmarking and modernisation depoliticise conflicts over resource distribution, while a rights-based language brings institutional accountability into focus. Overall, the FCDA demonstrated that

the portrayal of immigrant women's subjectivity in current gender equality discourse is uneven. They are nearly invisible in economic policies, and in harassment reports, they are mainly shown as victims of intersecting harms. This suggests that gender equality is mainly defined in ways that exclude migrant voices.

Keywords: Intersectionality Feminist critical discourse analysis immigrant women Australia

Introduction:

Contemporary debates on gender equality in Australia often signify progress in women's workforce engagement and the extension of parental leave schemas. However, these narratives of progress mantle the inveterate racialised and gendered inequalities which frame migrant women's labour experiences. Despite the inclusive rhetoric of national equality frameworks, migrant women remain over-represented in low-paid, precarious, and undervalued sectors such as caregiving, cleaning, and hospitality (Singh and Mutum 2024). Their labour maintains essential industries whilst their economic and societal precarity remains considerably invisible within official policy discourse. Such invisibility is not accidental but digressively constructed through institutional narratives that shape gender equality as a universalised achievement, overlooking the intersectional natures of race, immigration status, and citizenship. Gender-equality policy in Australia has developed within a liberal and productivity-oriented scheme that identifies fairness with the labour market (Whitehouse and Nakazato

2021). Improvements such as parental-leave expansions, equal-pay legislation, and gender-mainstreaming strategies are typically explained through economic rationales – fostering productivity or reserving skilled workers – rather than reallocated justice. Whilst these methods improve opportunities for some women, they presume a normative subject: the consistently employed, English-proficient, and permanently resident worker. Such an ideal worker archetype marginalises migrant women whose employment trajectories are intruded upon by immigration, visa constraints, and care expectations (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007). Such exclusion represents how neoliberal welfare regimens connect citizenship rights with employability and market productivity, leading to care and immigrant precarities politically secondary (Brennan et al. 2012).

This research examines how gender equality and inclusion are discursively shaped within Australian institutional texts and how these constructions maintain or challenge migrant women's marginalisation. It also investigates two vital sites of discourse: the governmental policy report *Next Steps for Paid Parental Leave in Australia* (Baird and Hill 2022) and the advocacy-based study *Migrant and Refugee Women: A National Study of Workplace Sexual Harassment, Racism and Exploitation* (Segrave et al. 2024). These two documents exhibit contradictory discursive fields – the managerial and the activist – manifesting how institutional power frames the visibility, value, and voice of migrant women within gender-equality discourses. Methodologically, this project introduces Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA). CDA conceptualises language as a societal practice that reinforces ideology and power (Fairclough 2010; Dijk 2008). FCDA expands this by presenting the gendered and racialised hierarchies implanted in institutional communication (Lazar 2005). Taken together, they manifest how the apparently neutral narrative of equality is a mechanism of exclusion. This analysis will further be guided by intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1997, 2005; Cho et al. 2013), which illustrates how overlapping structures of race, gender, and migrant status interplay to shape inequality. Intersectionality here is not regarded as a description of multiple societal identities, but as a critical lens for depicting how power operates across institutional scales (Bilge 2013).

The pertinence of this inquiry leans on the widening gap between progressive rhetoric and reality. Australian policy increasingly refers to global “best practice” models, accentuating flexibility and shared care, but structural obstacles like visa restrictions, lack of childcare, and systematic racism are neglected (Hankivsky et al. 2014). The state-level discourse shapes equality as a behavioural and economic issue instead of a question of social justice. When policy defines gender equality through measurable participatory rates, those whose experiences fall outward the statistical frame such as causal workers, temporary immigrants, and racialised caregivers, become discursively erased. According to Foucault and Gordon's (1980) concept that power functions through both speech and silence, this research will regard omission itself as

a discursive action. What is left silent manifests as much about institutional priorities as what is claimed.

This project tends to make two vital contributions. Empirically, it critically explores high-impact public documents which construct understandings of gender, work, and immigration in Australia. Theoretically, it combines feminist and intersectional discourse scholarship with dialogue with policy-study approaches, indicating how bureaucratic language legislates the governance of difference (Bacchi and Eveline 2010). Through the comparison of governmental and advocacy texts, this research illustrates how equality could be simultaneously professed and undermined. Advocacy discourse, rooted in lived experience, exhibits the limitations of state-centric equality schemes and redeclares epistemic authority for migrant women. By contrast, governmental discourse illuminates how liberal rationales of efficiency and inclusion of appointed feminist language whilst maintaining racialised hierarchies. The central research directing this project is how Australian institutional discourses on gender equality shape migrant women's work and care, and what these constructions reveal about the intersection of gender, race, and immigration in contemporary governance. Addressing this question requires unfolding not only the linguistic features of policy texts but the institutional logics that create them. This analysis thus posits discourse within what Acker (2006) terms inequality regimes – the organisational processes that implant racialised and gendered power in ostensibly neutral systems. Employing CDA and FCDA allows for a miscellaneous interpretation, linking textual patterns to wider societal practices. By doing so, this project showcases how the state's language of equality performs ideological work: it legislates liberal citizenship boundaries and renders marginalised groups governable through silence.

Finally, this research contests that equality discourse in Australia operates as a site of both inclusion and exclusion. Whilst publicly dedicated to fairness, institutional texts secure whiteness, employability, and heteronormative family structures as the thresholds of belonging. Through critical examination of how migrant women are or are not represented within these texts, this project contributes to feminist scholarship that delves into not only exposing inequality but also re-anticipating policy discourses as an instrument for justice instead of for reinforcement of hierarchy.

Literature Review:

The intersectionality theory provides a crucial lens for understanding how migrant women's disadvantages in Australia are derived from the overlapping impacts of gender, race, and migration status (Crenshaw 1997, 2005). These interrelating systems of suppression frame not only women's lived experiences in the labour market, but also how they are represented or rendered invisible within policy and institutional discourse. Scholarship and empirical evidence showcase that whilst Australia's gender equality policies profess to promote inclusion, they often universalise the category of “women”,

mantling the racialised and migration-based inequalities that migrant women experience (Ahmed 2012; Lazar 2005). This review synthesises contemporary studies among four intersecting themes: racialisation and structural disparities, deskilling and occupational segregation, credential recognition, and the invisibility of migrant women in equal discourse. Taken together, these themes manifest how labour market inequality is both materially enacted and digressively maintained.

Racialisation processes extensively frame migrant women's labour force experiences in Australia. Intersectional feminist scholars argue that racism cannot be perceived as simply additive, but as interchangeably constitutive where gendered and racialised stereotypes jointly shape societal hierarchies (Crenshaw 1997; Essed 1991). Migrant women of colour are often categorised through a deficient lens: as linguistically restricted, culturally discordant, or less committed to professional promotion (Syed and Pio 2010).

Empirical evidence supports these models. The Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM) Women's Survey (Diversity Council Australia 2023) found that most respondents experienced racism at work in the past two years, including subtle aggressions, stereotypes, and barriers to promotion pathways. Those respondents demonstrated that racism from mentors and colleagues could often be normalised and merely challenged, illuminating "everyday racism" by Essed (1991). These findings showcase that structural racism operates through routinised organisational interactions, exacerbating gendered labour inequalities.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) partially extends this argument by suggesting how institutional language reinforces these hierarchies. Lazar (2005) argues that gender equality rhetoric could mantle racial inequality when policy language regards "women" as a homogenous and undifferentiated group. In the Australian context, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007) cited that official multiculturalism often treats diversity abstractly, whilst sustaining Anglo and white norms as a default. Hence, even discourses of inclusion could reinforce the marginalisation of migrant women by masking race and immigration under the flag of gender equality.

Deskilling, the descending occupational mobility of qualified immigrants, is one of the most continuous issues of structural inequality confronted by migrant women. The 5-year Productivity Inquiry: A more productive labour market (Productivity Commission 2023) estimates that almost half of permanent migrants in Australia are employed under their skill level, which could cost the economy about A\$9 billion annually. The phenomenon is somehow gendered: women immigrants are more likely than men to work below their qualifications, especially those from Middle Eastern backgrounds (Faaliyat et al. 2021; Raghuram 2008).

Research ascribes this disparity to various and intersecting barriers. Firstly, racialised recruitment practices often privilege local experience and handicap overseas credentials (Colic-

Peisker and Tilbury 2007). Meanwhile, visa-related precariousness restricts immigrant women's bargaining power, making them responsive to under-employment or exploitation (Nagaddya and Stout 2022). In addition, caregiving expectations, particularly for mothers without extended family support, lead women to part-time or casual work, reinforcing occupational segregation (Nagaddya and Stout 2022). From an intersectional insight, deskilling is not merely an economic issue but a discursive one. Policy and media narratives often depict women as underused talent, indicating individual rather than systematic failure. As Acker (2006) argues, such narratives are part of wider inequality regimens where organisational norms of consistent, full-time availability systematically hinder those balancing care and settlement responsibilities. FCDA also helps reveal how these narratives sustain the delusion of meritocracy whilst neglecting structural exclusion.

Another issue closely connected with deskilling is credential recognition, a vital mechanism through which migrant women's skills are underestimated. Whilst Australia officially recognises overseas qualifications, in practice, the process is inconsistent and fragmentary (Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2023). Many employers remain preferential of local experience instead of overseas credentials, intensifying the relegation of highly qualified migrants to low-skill work (Lee et al. 2020). This prejudice is both ideological and structural. Discrimination often occurs through bias towards informal networks and domestic reference systems, which could marginalise new migrants (CEDA 2024). Meanwhile, policy documents seldom challenge employer assumptions; rather, they emphasise the demand for immigrants to adapt to local workplace conditions. Such a framework constructs migrant women as needing integration rather than recognition.

Faaliyat et al. (2021) suggested that skilled Middle-Eastern and North African women migrants often confront both racism and gendered norms regarding their qualifications and family roles, contributing to continuous under-employment. In this case, credential recognition functions as a racialised form of threshold, legitimising exclusion whilst reinforcing meritocracy. Feminist discourse scholars also cited that this process will be maintained through formal silence: when equality frameworks fail to admit racialised barriers to credential recognition, they actively normalise inequality (Lazar 2005).

Even though Australian policy frameworks such as the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 and the WGEA's Gender Equality Scorecard (2023) have promoted data transparency about gender, they remain significantly taciturn on race and immigration. Reports trace income gaps, promotions, and executive positions but rarely disaggregate outcomes by ethnicity or migrant status. As a result, migrant women could be erased within aggregate statistical data. This statistical obscuration (Diversity Council Australia, 2022) exhibits what Ahmed (2012) calls non-performance diversity – language that claims inclusion but enacts exclusion. Policy discourses such as "all women in leadership" or "raising female participation"

presuppose a universalised female subject aligned with white, middle-class, and citizen norms. When migrant women are perceived, it often appears with economic frameworks like skilled immigrants, contributors to productivity, which would mantle their systematic disadvantages (Baird and Hill 2022; Productivity Commission 2023).

Advocacy groups such as Segrave et al. (2024) and researchers including Nagaddya and Stout (2022) offer counter-discourses that reveal these neglects. Their indications underscore the compounded barriers thwarting women who experienced both racial discrimination and caregiving restrictions. However, as Lazar (2005) and Acker (2012) suggested, without intersectional policy analysis, such evidence maintains peripherality to the mainstreaming gender equality report. From a feminist critical discourse insight, these invisibilities are not accidental but ideological. The elimination of immigration and race from equal frameworks narrows the political vision of inclusion. Policies appear advanced precisely as they define gender equality in abstruse and de-contextualised terms. Such rhetorical inclusion camouflages whiteness at the heart of Australian equal projects.

To sum up, migrant women in Australia emerge as subjected posited at the intersection of structural inequality and digressive invisibility. Racialisation in recruitment, deskilling through credential predicaments, and exclusion from equality metrics mutually frame an inequality regimen that restricts their access to appropriate employment. Whilst government and corporate frameworks profess commitment to diversity, their universalised language subtly excludes those who do not fit in the normative category of women labour. Intersectionality and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis collectively uncover that the problem is not only institutional practice, but also the digressive construction of equality, a system that declares inclusivity while reinforcing exclusivity. To demolish these inequalities, scholars like Ahmed (2012) and Lazar (2005) suggest that feminist research ought to politicise discourse, revealing how power operates via policy language. For migrant women, this means acknowledging that authentic equality requires not simply opportunity but visibility in data disclosure, policy text, and in stories Australia talks about its workforce market.

Methodology:

This project will employ a qualitative research design based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to delve into how Australian policy and institutional discourses shape migrant women's labour force market inequality through racialised and gendered representations. Instead of exploring personal narratives or conducting interviews, this research concentrates on textual and institutional analysis to uncover how policy language and equality frameworks symbolically include but structurally marginalise migrant women simultaneously. The qualitative method aligns with the project's theoretical foundation in intersectionality (Crenshaw 2005) and inequality regimens (Acker 2006), both of which highlight how systems

of race and gender are inserted into institutional practices and societal meanings. This scheme is particularly fitting in investigating the discursive composition of equality in a national context where gender and diversity are often celebrated ostensibly but implemented lopsidedly. Fairclough (2010) suggested that discourse both manifests and frames societal realities, and it is the domain where ideologies are normalised. As for this project, CDA will unveil how the language of inclusion in Australia's equality strategies and labour policies obscures structural exclusion confronted by migrant women.

This analysis will be guided by one vital research question: How do Australian policy and institutional discourses construct migrant women's employment inequality through the intersections of gender, race, and immigrant status? To address this question, this research explores three interchanged types of public documents that exhibit crucial institutional voices in the Australian equal landscape:

1. Government policy texts like Next Steps for Paid Parental Leave in Australia (Baird and Hill 2022), which mount care, work, and productivity in gendered terms.
2. Advocacy and NGO reports such as Migrant and refugee women: A national study of experiences of, understandings of and responses to sexual harassment in the workplace (Segrave et al. 2024), which provides counter-discourses that challenge state and institutional narratives.

These public documents are selected by purposive sampling to apprehend the interaction between state power, corporate discourse, and activism knowledge production. Analysis of this threesome of digressive sites could contribute to the identification of both hegemonic and resistant narratives about migrant women in the Australian labour market. This research will follow Fairclough's (2010) three-dimensional model:

1. Textual analysis delves into vocabulary, grammatical structures, and metaphors used to exhibit migrant motherhood and equality. For instance, how "women" are homogenised or presented as economic actors rather than societal subjects.
2. Discursive practice analysis examines how these texts are produced and circulated, like how government schemes shape corporate equality reports or how advocacy texts react with state narratives.
3. Societal practice analysis posits these texts into extensive inequality domains, linking linguistic choices to structures of racialisation, credential recognition, and immigration control.

Such critical, non-interview-involved methodology allows for a profound exploration of the emblematic power of policy discourse. It could connect feminist theory with empirical critiques through dismantling how institutions shape the limitations of inclusion. The qualitative CDA method does not aim for representativeness but for explanatory depth, manifesting how Australia's equal discourse simultaneously

performs inclusion and reinforces intersectional oppression and hierarchies.

Discourse Analysis:

This analysis examines how two impactful public texts in Australia narrate gender equality, work, and care, and how those narratives establish different regimes of visibility of immigrant women: the federal policy review *Next Steps for Paid Parental Leave in Australia* (Baird and Hill 2022) and the advocacy research report *Migrant and Refugee Women: A national Study of Workplace Sexual Harassment, Racism and Exploitation* (Segrave et al. 2024). Guided by Feminist CDA (Lazar 2005; Fairclough 2010; van Dijk 2008), this section focus on discourse and narrative – vocabulary, framing, genre, intertextual authority, and strategic silence, rather than policy evaluation per se. Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989; Cho et al. 2013; Bilge 2013) grounds the reading: we attend to how gender, race, and migration status co-constitute the policy subject. The central question is discursive: How do these texts produce equality as a story, and what does that story render visible or invisible about migrant women's work and care?

Context 1: Next Steps for Paid Parental Leave in Australia (Baird and Hill 2022)

This passage starts with a confident tone of modernisation and optimisation, extending leave to symbolise “a modernised system reflecting best international practice” to promote “participation, flexibility, and productivity” (Baird and Hill 2022). The repeated use of these terms creates a managerial language that focuses more on productivity gains than on justice or fairness. The policy's “subject” is generalised as “parents, ” “families, ” or “workers,” endorsing a universalist view. It claims that “all families will have access to a more flexible scheme, ” implying inclusion but assuming an idealised subject with ongoing employment, stable residency, English skills, and procedural literacy. In FCDA terms, this apparently neutral universalisation serves ideological purposes: it redefines equality as sameness and conceals intersectional differences (Fairclough 2010; Acker 2006). While the review clarifies eligibility via employment and residency, it does not explicitly mention temporary visas, casual employment, language barriers, or credential deskilling- factors that significantly limit migrant women's access. The text's focus on “encouraging fathers' participation” frames equality as a behavioural shift in leave-sharing. However, conditions like secure jobs, supportive employers, childcare, and visa security- key for usability- are largely overlooked. FCDA views these silences as meaningful to power: omitting immigrant or racialised differences is not a neutral lapse but a boundary shaping the very idea of equality (Lazar 2005; Foucault 1980).

As for intertextual authority and depoliticisation, this text legitimises its narrative intertextually through “OECD standards”, “international evidence”, and comparative benchmarks. This borrowing of technical authority projects neutrality and protects choices from normalised dispute

(Fairclough 2010). Equality turns to an engineering problem – how many weeks? Which uptake model? – rather than a justice problem. As feminist policy analysis alerts, regarding equality as technocratic optimisation narrows the policy horizon to what is measurable and administratively acceptable (Bacchi and Eveline 2010; Whitehouse and Nakazato 2021). Further, the text's grammar naturalises an ideal worker subject, full-time, permanently resident, uninterrupted employment – who benefits most from flexible blocks. Care is articulated as a market input for labour supply rather than a public good (Fraser 2016). In short, the language performs universalisation and the institution performs selection.

As for discursive practice analysis, the report delineates legitimacy through in-textual references to “OECD standards” and “international evidence”. Such technocratic borrowing could construct the text as purposive and apolitical. However, as Acker (2006) and Ahmed (2012) cited, institutional neutrality is ideological, privileging white, middle-class citizen subjectivities as the universal worker. By aligning gender equality with productivity, the government normalises a narrative in which women's value is measured by economic output. The absence of a racialised or immigrant lens functions as what Dijk (2008) cited as a strategic omission: a discursive silence that reproduces the predominance of majoritarian norms. Within such silences, policy discourse reproduces what Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007) depicted as “white multiculturalism”: a superficial inclusivity that celebrates diversity emblematically whilst maintaining whiteness as the unmarked norm. Further, the temporal frame of the text, underscoring progress (“next steps”, “modernisation”), establishes an exhibition of continuous improvement. This advanced rhetoric distracts attention from persistent structural barriers, particularly for immigrant women whose care responsibilities overlap with precarious employment. As Tan and Cebulla (2023) argued, migrant women in Australia often confront deskilling and employment uncertainty, leading them to less capacity to benefit from flexible leave arrangements.

When it comes to societal practice analysis, this policy discourse reinforces an ideal worker norm, preferring employees to be continuous, full-time, and permanently resident, which aligns with white, citizen rather than immigrant subjectivities (Acker 2006). Such an ideological framework intersects with migration policy to construct material exclusion: temporary visa holders and those in precarious employment are structurally disqualified from benefiting from equality, even where formal policy professes inclusivity (Tan and Cebulla 2023). The policy's technocratic narratives lead to a depoliticisation of structural inequality: gender becomes an administrative problem instead of an issue of intersectional justice.

Here, DeHart-Davis, Marlowe, and Pandey's (2006) insights about the gender dimensions of public service motivation could be analytically advantageous. Their research indicates that gender shapes orientations toward public service – for instance, women tend to obtain higher scores on

benevolence-related intentions, which could affect policy priorities and bureaucratic sensibility (DeHart-Davis et al. 2006). Nonetheless, institutional restrictions and organisational norms conciliate such motivation. In the Australian parental-leave case, even where public servants might harbour egalitarian sympathies (public service motivation), bureaucratic routinisation, cost-concentrated logics, and politically sufficient frames (productivity and international benchmarks) direct those intentions into technocratic resolutions which could not foreground the demands of marginalised groups. In brief, gendered PSM could motivate concern about societal welfare, yet organisational and ideological structures frame which concerns become policy. Further, DeHart-Davis et al. (2006) demonstrated that masculine and feminine dimensions of public service motivation could be institutionally reconciled, indicating that even well-meaning public servants might create gender-neutrality or supervisory discourses when institutional motives reward technocratic rationales. Hence, Baird and Hill's managerial frame could partially be interpreted as an archetype where PSM is functioned through organisational logics that reinforce rather than correct intersectional exclusions.

Context 2: Advocacy Counter-Discourse: ANROWS / Harmony Alliance (Segrave et al., 2024)

As for the textual level, the ANROWS / Harmony Alliance report adopts an explicit and politicised exhibition naming intersectional harms. Opening sentences connect sexual harassment, racialised discrimination, exploitation, and pay gaps in syntax that resists sectionalisation: "Migrant and refugee women consistently reported experiences of sexual harassment alongside racial discrimination and exploitation, including unequal pay and unsafe work environments" (Segrave et al. 2024, 1). This phenomenon forces analytical attention to intersectionality as lived reality. Quantitative evidence (e.g., 46% reported sexual harassment in five years) is augmented through qualitative validations: "Many women described avoiding complaints due to fear of losing employment, deportation, or community stigma" (Segrave et al. 2024, 10). The effective language – fear, stigma, silence – could be an intentional rhetorical choice that challenges bureaucratic indifference. Distinct from the Baird and Hill's text, the advocacy report foregrounds obscuration to reporting and balance: visa precariousness, language barriers, segregation, and employer exploitative practices. It dispersed experiences by visa category and sector, engendering visible groups that policy metrics typically neglect. The choice of pronouns and narrative voice (utilising collective, first-person validations where possible) retrieves epistemic authority for immigrant women themselves: they are not exterior case studies but knowledge producers. The narrative "Women avoided complaints due to fear of losing employment or deportation" demonstrates that testimony is not just anecdotal; it serves as structured evidence that shifts epistemic authority to those who endure hardship. Connecting fear to visa status highlights the legal and bureaucratic mechanisms that suppress complaints—an institutional layer that PMC's universal language often fails to acknowledge.

When it comes to discursive practice level, as a result of feminist research community and activist alliance, Segrave et al. (2023) intentionally enact counter-discourse. Their methodology accentuated participatory and trauma-informed schemes, accordingly substantiating marginalised voices and undermining top-down knowledge declarations (Lazar 2005). Intertextually, this report outlines human rights instruments, feminist scholarship, and prior immigration research and such strategic reference both establishes and politicises their declarations. This report also introduces narrative sequencing to stimulate moral necessity: micro-level validations are positioned alongside macro data, indicating that individual stories label systematic patterns. From the discursive practice insight, this could be a trial to modify the framework within which policymakers assess problems from technical optimisation to rights-based structural rectification.

As for the societal practice level, the advocacy text exhibits how legitimate and organisational structures discipline migrant bodies. Such reciprocity between immigration law and employment relations implies that reporting harassment could convey consequences beyond workplace retaliation, including visa vulnerability and economic privation. The report showcases that fear of expulsion could be a structural silent mechanism which elaborates vulnerability in the workplace. This analysis aligns with research on deskilling and credential recognition barriers that records how immigrant women are directed into precarious, low-control careers where maltreatment and exploitation are more likely (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007; Tan and Cebulla 2023). This report's assertion that sexual harassment ought to be analysed together with racism and exploitation is itself a political action to some extent: it persists that remedies should be structurally constructed (e.g., legal protection, visa safeguards, sectoral regulation) rather than merely managerial (HR training, informal complaint processes). Such orientation embodies the reform discourse, exhibiting systematic injustice and mobilising institutional responsibility.

Thematic Integration: Intersectional Contradictions and Policy Representations

The comparison of the two texts – the Baird and Hill's (2022) parental-leave review and the ANROWS/Harmony Alliance (Segrave et al. 2024) report – manifests how intersectionality is simultaneously adduced and erased across institutional discourses. The governmental document adopts a liberal-universalised vocabulary that exhibits equality as homogeneity, whilst advocacy text re-politicises differences through intersectional visibility. This strain captures the "multiplicative nature of inequality", where intersecting identities create qualitatively explicit experiences that policy universalism could not accommodate (Cho et al. 2013). In the Baird and Hill's context, discursive inclusion – the repeated citation of "all families" – performs a superficial recognition of diversity, undressed of its critical potential. Intersectionality turns into an aesthetic of inclusion rather than a structural

critique of power. Further, Bacchi and Eveline (2010) cited that policies are seldom neutral responses to existing problems but discursive “problem representations” that outline who counts as a subject of policy. Within such a frame, migrant women are not presented as policy subjects; rather, they are excluded from the problem as defined. Hence, equality turns to a narrowly constructed supervisory target, framed around flexibility and shared care rather than reallocated justice. By contrast, the ANROWS report reflects what Anthias (2013) suggests, an “intersectional positionality approach” – acknowledging how immigrant women’s structural locations within racial labour markets construct their vulnerability to exploitation and harassment. Its validations illuminate intersectionality not as a theoretical construction but as a practical ontology: women’s accounts of “fear of exile” or “community stigma” manifest that the coincidence of gender, migration, and employment regimens societally establishes vulnerability. These narratives, therefore, subvert the universalised logic of Baird and Hill’s (2022) text by underscoring the differentiated realities concealed behind formal equality.

Thematic integration can also demonstrate how both texts negotiate epistemic authority. Governmental discourse tends to emphasise quantification and expertise, such as bureaucracy, econometrics, and technocratic reasoning. In contrast, advocacy discourse focuses on real-world knowledge, tangible effects, and participatory epistemology. This debate aligns with Hankivsky et al. (2014), who propose that transformative policy requires integrating pragmatic knowledge into institutional design. Without this, equality policies risk being merely performative – acknowledging women without addressing differences. An Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) framework offers guidance by examining how problems are framed, which groups are included or excluded, and how power dynamics are constructed and challenged.

Another prominent theme concentrates on the commodification of equality. The Baird and Hill’s report constructs parental leave as an instrument for fortifying productivity, reshaping care as an economic investment instead of a societal right. Such digressive commodification could align with the concept argued by Brennan et al. (2012), which is marketised care regimes where care is treasured only insofar as it promotes labour participation. In such regimens, migrant women occupy a paradoxical position: celebrated emblematically as contributors to diversity but physically demoted to precarious care work. The Baird and Hill text’s neglect of immigrant-specific barriers consolidates this hierarchy through naturalising an idealised, white, citizen mother-worker imagery as the implied norm. By contrast, the ANROWS report reshapes equality as collective justice instead of individual adaptation. It requires institutional acknowledgement of structural racism, aligning with Ahmed’s (2012) suggestion that diversity work should not be performative; rather, it should enact commitment to inclusion without altering institutional practices. Where the governmental discourse neutralises inequality through supervisory generalisation, the advocacy text re-symbolises it through

testimony, effect, and unity. Such discursive disparity accentuates what Bilge (2013) illuminates as the vital risk of mainstreaming intersectionality: the state appoints its vocabulary whilst demobilising its politics.

Finally, the thematic integration manifests that power functions through both speech and silence. The Baird and Hill’s neglect of immigration, race, and visa restrictions exhibits Foucault and Gordon’s (1980) notion of discursive exclusion: power not only restricts what could be said, but also shapes what is left unsaid. Meanwhile, the advocacy text introduces counter-speech, retrieving the right to identify problems and name hurts. This is precisely the kind of praxis expected by Lazar (2005) in feminist CDA: discourse not just as critique but as aversion, establishing an alternative anticipation of justice.

Societal Practice Analysis and the Gendered Bureaucratic Field

As for the societal level, the contrast between these two discourses manifests the deep involvement of policy language, bureaucratic culture, and structural inequality. The Baird and Hill’s report, whilst representing an advanced reformation, implants a “gendered bureaucratic field” (Acker 2012) which privileges gender neutrality and universalisation – the emblems of masculine governance. These bureaucratic norms, maintained by technocratic rationales, succeed in intersectional complication in favour of standardisation and cost-efficiency. The gendered and racialised nature of bureaucratic culture evolves into more explicit forms when examined through the concept of DeHart-Davis et al. (2006) about gender dimensions of public service motivation (PSM). They suggest that women in public service tend to display higher sympathy-oriented motives and more societal equity values, but institutional structures reconcile how these motivations are translated into policy action. In the context of Australian gendered policy, compassionate motives might motivate the aspiration for equality. Still, bureaucratic routines and risk-elusion transform that motivation into executive submissiveness instead of intersectional transform. Compassion turns to bureaucratisation, and care turns to an audit variable.

Meier and Funk (2017) further extend this thinking through showcasing that representative bureaucracies perform better when they represent diverse populations – but only when institutional culture authorises intersectional reactivity. In the omission of such reactivity, diversity in staff does not mechanically provide inclusive policy designs. Hence, even though gender-balanced public teams work on parental leave portfolio, their capacity to alleviate immigrant women’s exclusion remains restricted by institutional priorities that reward efficacy over equity. The bureaucratic domain also reinforces what Bacchi and Eveline (2010) indicate as “gender mainstreaming without intersectionality”. Policies concentrate on women in aggregate, whilst racialised and migrant dimensions are relegated to multicultural or labour policy silos. Such fractionality ensures that gender equality remains congruent with exclusionary citizenship and labour domains.

The societal practice of governance, therefore, maintains what Anthias (2013) points out, “hierarchies of belonging”: a stratified citizenship where migrant women dwell in conditional inclusion – visible as economic contributors but unseen as rights-bearing citizens.

Further, the societal practice of marketisation care has explicit impingements for migrant women, particularly those in precarious employment. Research by Brennan et al. (2012) demonstrates that in liberal care regimens like Australia, marketisation of care services engenders different results for different societal groups: those with economic means fare better, whilst those who have recourse to sponsored or public provision encounter fragmentation and decreased support. When policy texts like Baird and Hill’s report normalise market efficiency and flexibility without recognising such stratified influences, they reinforce hierarchy in the form of universal benefit. Such disconnection between policy design and lived intersectionality accentuates Cho et al.’s (2013) assertion that intersectionality should shift from representation to institutional re-arrangement.

The intersectional feminist insight also illustrates the racialisation of bureaucratic rationale. As Bilge (2013) and Ahmed (2012) cited, whiteness functions as a subtle norm in institutional discourses. The “ideal worker” envisioned by PPL reform – stable, full-time, taxpaying, and English-proficient – is invisibly racialised. Meanwhile, migrant women’s insecurity is coded as deviancy or non-compliance, not as a product of structural exclusion. This reflects what Crenshaw (1997) termed “structural intersectionality”: the institutional forces that make policy neutrality itself discriminatory. From the public administration perspective, incorporating intersectionality into policy design demands altering not only discourse but also bureaucratic inducement systems. Drawing on Hankivsky et al. (2014), intersectional policy design ought to institutionalise participatory knowledge. For instance, formal consultation with immigrant women’s organisations in policy establishment and intersectional metrics in programme assessment. Without these, equality would maintain a symbolic artifact rather than a governmental principle. The intersection of gendered PSM (DeHart-Davis et al. 2006) and intersectional bureaucracy (Meier and Funk 2017) manifests how incubation and structure interchange. Compassionate bureaucrats working within efficacy-driven systems may intentionally perpetuate what Bacchi and Eveline (2010) suggested “gender neutrality as managerial common sense”. The outcome is a policy system that professes equality but performs stratification. Ultimately, the societal practice analysis exhibits a paradox: equality discourse extends emblematically even as institutional frames reinforce exclusion materially. Such a paradox resonates with Bilge’s (2010) concept of the institutional domestication of intersectionality – when pivotal schemes are imbibed into bureaucratic practices stripped of their revolutionary power. Only through restoring the critical edge of intersectionality – via participatory governance, dispersed data and refined accountability – can equality policy escape from its performative snare.

In summary, this FCDA indicates that Australian institutional discourses legislate a twofold dynamic: they rhetorically dedicate to equality whilst physically reinforcing exclusions through technocratic narratives, eligibility criteria, and silence about immigration. Governmental policy discourse normalises a white, citizen-centric ideal worker frame. It shapes parental leave as an economic instrument, therefore marginalising migrant women whose employment and residence conditions render them less accessible to benefits. Advocacy counter-discourse exhibits these silences, politicises embodied hurts, and contends the epistemic authority of technocratic policy design. Further, the thematic integration and societal practice part showcases that both discourse and bureaucracy are domains of power reproduction and contention. The thematic integration indicates how universalism, technocracy, and commodified care obfuscate intersectional inequalities, whilst the social practice analysis, rooted in feminist institutionalism and intersectional public administration, manifests how even well-intentional public servants’ gendered dynamics (DeHart-Davis et al. 2006) are directed through systems that privilege neutrality beyond justice.

Discussion and Conclusion:

This research indicates how Australian institutional discourses on gender equality shape migrant women’s labour market experiences through a delicate interaction of inclusion and exclusion. The CDA and FCDA findings manifest that whilst the federal governmental Next Steps for Paid Parental Leave in Australia (Baird and Hill 2022) facilitates gender equality through generalised rhetoric, its technocratic framework systematically overlooks intersectional disadvantage. In contrast, advocacy discourse, evidenced by Segrave et al.’s (2024) report, reveals the lived realities of racism, exploitation, and precarious employment. The friction between these two digressive formations accentuates the contraventions intrinsic in liberal equality regimens.

Governmental discourse functions within what Harris Rimmer and Sawyer (2016) describe as a managerial model of gender policy, which regards equality as an administrative task instead of a transformative strategy. Terms like “participation”, “flexibility” and “productivity” posit gender equality within an economic domain that privileges measurable outputs over societal justice. Such a technocratic orientation aligns with Fraser’s (2016) terms called “neoliberal turn” in feminism, where the quest for equality turns out to be compatible with market logic. Within this framework, migrant women appear only as abstract workers or parents, not as subjects constructed by racialised labour markets or visa regimens. Their imperceptibility mirrors the “non-performative” nature of diversity narrative suggested by Ahmed (2012) – institutional claims that profess inclusion yet fail to validate it. Advocacy text, however, resists this depoliticisation. The Harmony Alliance report (Segrave et al. 2024) positions a vocabulary of rights, fear, and exploitation that exhibits the racialised and

gendered structures in Australian employment. It allies with Bilge's (2013) critique of "intersectionality lite", recouping intersectional political depth through positioning inequality with physical relations of power. By labelling exploitation, visa instability, and racism, advocacy discourse indicates the sort of counter-hegemonic expression that Fairclough (2010) suggests as crucial to societal change. By credential and compelling narrative, it challenges predominant narratives of meritocracy and underscores the symbolised costs of neoliberal labour governance.

The contrast between these contents also illuminates competing epistemologies. Governmental reports privilege quantitative data, cost-benefit logic, and international benchmarks, therefore reinforcing problem representations – policy frameworks that identify equality in narrow, measurable terms (Bacchi and Eveline 2010). Nonetheless, advocacy reports depend on real experience and participatory knowledge production, resonating with the intersectionality-based policy analysis framework (Hankivsky et al. 2014). This inclusion of first-person language operates not as an individual anecdote, but as an epistemic intervention, averring that knowledge about inequality should originate from those who experience inequality.

Except for linguistic analysis, this project points out wider sociopolitical entanglements. The tenacity of migrant women's labour precarity manifests how the Australian equality structure remains determined in a whitened citizenship idea. As Clibborn and Wright (2023) argued, immigrant workers are often exposed to structural wage theft and regulatory neglect – outcomes that could not be interpreted merely by individual discrimination but by institutional hierarchies ingrained in law and policy. Similarly, Singh and Mutum (2024) suggest that high-skilled immigrant women are confronted with systematic underestimation of overseas credentials, aligned with the systems of deskilling identified in the discourse analysis. These dynamics also reflect Acker's (2006) perspective of unequal regimes: organisational processes that normalise exclusion through superficially neutral practices.

In conclusion, Australian equality discourse posits at a crossroads. It has succeeded in mainstreaming gender concerns yet has failed to address the racialised and immigrant dimensions of inequality. To promote authentic equality, equal policy should shift from universalism to circumstantial justice – acknowledging that equality could not be achieved through sameness but through the reallocation of recognition, rights, and resources. Through manifesting how narratives both facilitate and thwart this revolution, this research contributes to an emergent feminist discourse analysis that treats policy not as a neutral instrument but as a field of struggle. Authentic inclusion would require not only linguistic reform but structural reconstruction – a feminist remanufacturing of citizenship that treasures the work and lives of migrant women as integral to the Australian societal and economic future.

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