



palgrave▶pivot

**Compliance and
Resistance Within
Neoliberal Academia**
Biographical Stories,
Collective Voices

**Susan Gair
Tamar Hager
Omri Herzog**

palgrave
macmillan

Compliance and Resistance Within
Neoliberal Academia

Susan Gair • Tamar Hager • Omri Herzog

Compliance and Resistance Within Neoliberal Academia

Biographical Stories, Collective Voices

palgrave
macmillan

Susan Gair
College of Arts
James Cook University
Douglas, QLD, Australia

Tamar Hager
Dept. of Education & Gender Studies
Tel-Hai College
Upper Galilee, Israel

Omri Herzog
Department of Cultural Studies
Sapir College
Sha'ar Hanegev, Israel

ISBN 978-3-030-66317-9 ISBN 978-3-030-66318-6 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66318-6>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2021

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Palgrave Pivot imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

The names of the authors are arranged in alphabetical order. The three authors contributed equally to the writing of this manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This unique academic collaborative venture would not have been possible without the funding of Tel Hai College and Sapir College and travel support from James Cook University. We are also grateful to the British and Wellcome Trust Libraries for providing us with an inspiring atmosphere. Long before COVID-19 the zoom was our preferable digital platform which enabled us to meet regularly from across the globe. We are therefore grateful to digital technologies despite the significant threat they pose today to the “university of the students” and the “community of the masters.” We would like to thank our colleagues and students who share with us the stress, the frustration, the intellectual desire and collegial debate which derive from university life.

CONTENTS

Setting the Scene: Research and Writing Against the Neoliberal Grain	1
The Manufactured CV	23
Challenging Knowledge In/Accessibility	51
Tackling Difference in a Neoliberal Classroom	83
Closing Thoughts: Academic Hazards and Opportunities	115
References	127



Setting the Scene: Research and Writing Against the Neoliberal Grain

Susan Gair, Tamar Hager, and Omri Herzog

Abstract This chapter outlines our collaborative research and writing project which recounts personal stories regarding everyday survival in the neoliberal academia. It begins by depicting the characteristics of academic neoliberal regime, such as authoritarian managerialism, accountability processes, standardization measures, performance indicators and benchmarking achievement audits. As previous research shows, neoliberalism impacts the everyday lives and wellbeing of academics, prompting us to take a deeper exploration of academic selves. The chapter then goes on to describe our methodology, collaborative autoethnography, introducing the advantages and disadvantages of personal stories as a research method. It ends by outlining our working method, exploring how we collectively wrote, shared, discussed and reflected on our texts.

Keywords Neoliberal academia • Audit culture • Academic selves • Performance • Collaborative autoethnography

The names of the authors are arranged in alphabetical order. The three authors contributed equally to the writing of this manuscript.

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature
Switzerland AG 2021

S. Gair et al., *Compliance and Resistance Within Neoliberal
Academia*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66318-6_1

Susan appeared on screen sitting at a desk covered with papers and books. It was 6 PM in Townsville, Australia. She apologized for not being able to stay for long because her grandchildren were coming over. In Tel Aviv, Israel, Tamar, who first appeared against the background of her study at 11 AM, was constantly changing rooms and corners in her flat, apologizing for the unstable Wi-Fi connection. Omri's face looked hazy in the light from the window of his rented flat in London. Originally from Sapir College, Israel, Omri had tackled COVID-19 while on a sabbatical in the UK. He was apologizing for his drowsiness at 9 AM caused by working late into the night.

Work meetings via computer screen have become common during the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital images have replaced human contact. Yet for us it has been a routine for the last two years. In fact, the decision to write about life in neoliberal higher education had been dominated by Zoom from the end of 2018. During the two years of our collaboration we have met virtually quite frequently to refine our ideas, plan our writing retreat in London, consider and then reconsider the book structure and discuss the division of our work. We shared ideas in exciting conversations full of disputes and divergent thinking. Zoom and emails served as a shared space for continuous discussions, for writing in real time, for sharing relevant texts and for exchanging international, local and personal stories as our collegial relationship deepened—the climate crisis, the pandemic, the fierce bushfires in Australia, the outbursts of violence in Israel, individual academic accomplishments, failures and tensions, family dramas and holiday plans.

Other transnational research and writing gatherings have been conducted in a similar way, mixing the professional and the personal. Before the pandemic, when budgets could be allocated and flights were still an option, international research projects like ours allowed physical face-to-face meetings somewhere on the globe. Our book was at first quite a common pre-pandemic academic venture. We met frequently online, we had one encounter “in person,” face to face, away from our respective countries and we mostly wrote separately at our desks in Townsville, Tel Aviv and London. Yet our research has its singularity and uniqueness. Rather than describing, analysing and theorizing common neoliberal institutional processes, we chose to write personal stories in which we have explored and reflected on their damaging effects on our everyday lives as academics.

While negotiating disciplinary and national differences, we were enthusiastic to discover that despite strong similarities in our stories, each of us had interesting unique experiences to tell. At first the notion of a collection of articles seemed most appealing. An edited collection is easier to produce and edit and everything is faster; it is a better method in the

“publish or perish” regime. But we wanted a different book, one that goes against the grain and introduces deep co-thinking, collaboration and dialogue among scholars into the academic context. We wanted to question the way academic knowledge is created and represented through theories and generalizations. We aspired to challenge the standardization of academic writing forms. And we wanted to defy feelings of isolation and competitiveness which are integral parts of our everyday academic lives.

Our autoethnographic stories illuminate the emotional, psychological and mental costs of engaging in a highly stressful working environment. They primarily are divided across three chapters, each dealing with a different academic task. The first addresses the construction and management of an institutionalized “proper” academic CV; the second raises issues concerning the complexities of publishing within the framework of the constant neoliberal demand of “productivity” and the third tackles the challenges of teaching diverse classrooms of students/clients. Our stories demonstrate the impact of the contemporary neoliberal academic regime on our own emotional wellbeing, and on our relationships with research partners, students, colleagues, management and people in our personal circles. The critique of the neoliberal academy is thus a woven thread throughout the book, and it is personalized, hesitant and cautious.

Personal stories have been used as a research methodology during the last few decades by researchers who have believed that other research methods are futile, insufficient or inadequate for exploring certain social and cultural phenomena (Hager, 2019). Evading disciplinary jargon and professional language, personal stories provide immediacy—an artfully strategic elicitation of insights, feelings and experiences which allow deep immersion in the world portrayed—a sense of verisimilitude, and an encounter with dynamic, messy and chaotic reality (Banks, 2008; Brewer, 2010; Diversi, 1998; Frank, 2000; Rinehart, 1998).

In the neoliberal audit culture, where everything is measured and numbered, such a research method is uncommon and exists only on the margins of the social sciences and the humanities. Diminishing the significance of analytical generalizations, it emphasizes narrativized and particularized data usually regarded as superfluous by most academic discursive practices.

However, grounded in feminist epistemology, our research is based on the notion that the personal is political, and thus our individual detailed experiences illuminate recurring mechanisms of oppression and coercion in the academic maze. Determined to write our autoethnographies in dialogue, we present our collaborative writing as an alternative to the increasingly individualistic and competitive ethos of academic culture which

tends to dismiss the fact that all knowledge is constructed by intellectual exchange and cooperation. Therefore, our project could serve as a challenge and alternative to current academia.

FROM UNIVERSITAS TO NEOLIBERAL ACADEMIA

The COVID-19 pandemic led to an extensive worldwide closedown of academic campuses, sending faculty and students to work online at their homes. However, as lecturers we were aware of previous attempts at diffusing digital tools into higher education, introducing them as being more efficient and cheaper than face-to-face seminars and lectures. The pandemic ironically has provided a magnificent opportunity and an immediate laboratory to examine this familiar capitalist vision.

The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2020) expressed his concerns regarding the extensive use of online teaching in a post he submitted during the global lockdown. He referred to the disappearance of the teachers' and students' physical presence as their being "permanently imprisoned in a spectral screen." He emphasizes how virtual teaching has killed group discussions, the liveliest part of instruction.

However, he was particularly bothered by:

[...] the end of being a student [*studentato*, studenthood] as a form of life. Universities were born in Europe from student associations—*universitates*—and they owe their name to them. To be a student entailed first of all a form of life in which studying and listening to lectures were certainly decisive features, but no less important were encounters and constant exchanges with other *scholarii*. [...] This form of life evolved in various ways over the centuries, but, from the *clerici vagantes* of the Middle Ages to the student movements of the twentieth century, the social dimension of the phenomenon remained constant.

Agamben evokes one of the oldest models of a "Western university" initiated in Bologna during the twelfth century. Students who came from all over Europe to study in the city and hence were deprived of citizens' rights decided to protect their common interests by organizing themselves (Moore, 2019). Employing the commonest term for corporation (a guild, a trade, a brotherhood etc.), and community being in use at the time, they called themselves "universitas scholarium," the university of students in Bologna (Verger, 2003). When such student associations became powerful, and gradually spread to other parts of Europe, they could control

learning establishments (i.e. Bologna, Padua), appointing the professors, hiring their services for a year, supervising their teaching and fining them when they failed to fulfil their duties (Verger, 2003). Students could also threaten the municipal and clerical local authorities saying that if their rights were not acknowledged they would move away, taking the prosperity and wealth they had brought to the city elsewhere. The power of students' *universitas* was better exemplified by the decision of the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa in 1155 to grant the students and faculty of Bologna immunity from civil law, thus initiating what has later been known as academic freedom, much eroded lately in the current neoliberal academia.

However, in focusing on his concern for the evaporation of students to within the digital space, Agamben disregards another mediaeval model—the University of the Masters (*universitas magistrorum*). At the University of Paris, teachers were those who lacked citizenship and needed to protect their interests, and thus created an organized community (Moore, 2019). At such a university, like Paris and Oxford, the teachers were full-fledged members of the institutions, gradually becoming a status group which transcended local and disciplinary boundaries. Possessing a distinctive corpus of knowledge, they enjoyed a high degree of cultural and social prestige which is still recognized today mainly when referring to “academic celebrities” (Verger, 2003). By pushing the scholar-teachers away from the campuses, compelling them to use digital technologies to converse with screen-images of their students and colleagues, COVID-19 has in fact threatened to terminate not only the survival of the *universitas scholarium*, the university of students, but also the *universitas magistrorum*—the community of the masters.

Moreover, these institutional processes also defy the vision of the modern university represented by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the nineteenth century. In a memo published by Humboldt in 1810, prior to the building of the University of Berlin, he argued that the university should produce new, rationally scrutinized knowledge as well as cultivating students to become responsible free thinkers and researchers. “Attending lectures is only secondary,” he demonstrated. “What is essential is that for a series of years one lives in close connection with like-minded people of the same age, who are aware that in this same place there are many thoroughly learned people, dedicated solely to the elevation and diffusion of science” (quoted in Ruegg, 2004, p. 21).

Another concept of academia that could be relevant here is the welfare university that flourished following the Second World War, mainly in the

1960s. During that time, universities opened their gates to diverse population in the United States and Europe, challenging institutional meritocracy, providing scholarship and stipends to all people who wanted to study, and job opportunities, good salaries and research funds to faculty even for those engaged in the humanities (Williams, 2006; Moore, 2019). Although the postwar university represented the democratic vision of equal opportunity, it was also built on the spectre of perpetual struggle. Students' movements which flourished all over the globe were the principal medium for successive transformations, such as the civil rights movement, 1960s–1970s student power and grassroots democracy, 1970s feminism and more (Marginson, 2011). Despite differences within local contexts, these movements shared a persistent call for equality and freedom to all people, irrespective of political, religious, socioeconomic and cultural background, and occasionally cooperated with interested faculty who held anti-war, anti-racist ideologies (Moore, 2019; Marginson, 2011). Academic institutions during these decades were diverse and bustling with intellectual interactions as well as activism—demonstrations, sit-ins and other types of provocations, actions and events.

These three concepts of the university demonstrate that these institutions serve several roles: an educator, a producer of knowledge and a social institution. Philomena Essed (1999, p. 212) describes higher education institutions as “functional structures and social relations between students, academic staff and administration the nature of which is informally determined by cultural politics privileging some groups and excluding others.” Campuses have been perceived as social spaces, as microcosmos of society at large, where people from different classes, ethnicities, nationalities, sexual preferences physically meet. A common vision has been held by academics who are engaged in diversity work, like Essed and Sara Ahmed (2012). Such academics are familiar with the complexity of institutional hidden curriculum, that is the transmission of norms, values and beliefs in the institutional social environment and the opportunities of changing oppressive social structure it potentially entails. This mandatory institutional space which encourages the essential intellectual and social interactions began to evaporate as use of technologies infused academic life and accelerated when campuses were closed down during COVID-19.

However, it would be wrong to assume that these perturbing processes are new ones. Our academic experience reveals that teachers and students, as they were defined by the old universities and by Humboldt's more modern vision, started vanishing several decades ago, not by a pandemic

but rather by neoliberal ideology and practices. The logic of the capitalist market has turned the universities from quasi-independent communities of scholars engaged in free thinking in a fertile supportive institutional climate, into an educational market economy where teachers are service providers, students are customers and the administration dictate the institutional rules and actions.

This is the academia that the three of us have experienced for many years, where we teach, research and have been engaged in administrative and community work. This is the academia we are exploring via our personal stories written about and within the neoliberal maze. To fully appraise our accounts some explanation and clarification regarding the neoliberal institutional context is needed.

NEGOTIATING THE NEOLIBERAL CULTURE

Neoliberalism is grounded in logics of globalization, marketization, privatization and individualization. It has penetrated most areas of public life as well as public institutions, changing their culture and functioning with increasingly disastrous effects. Jane Goodall (2019) defines neoliberalism as a set of political beliefs, values and practices informing heightened regulation, accountability, competition and justification of public expenditure. Early proponents of neoliberal ideology were optimistic and promoted its potential to bring freedom from poverty and inequality through universal involvement in the market economy. Yet it assured only the “survival of the fittest,” turning out to be predominantly about corporate control and competitive self-interest (Goodall, 2019, p. 58).

Neoliberalism infiltrated higher education from the 1980s in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia and Canada and increasingly in other parts of the world, through authoritarian managerialism, “accountability processes, standardization measures, performance indicators, [and] benchmarking achievement audits” (Brule, 2004, p. 247). Rising targets on research grants and annual publication outputs have been common examples of eagerly collected metrics in such a regime. Norms and values of education as a public good of the previous decades have been gradually abandoned, while knowledge has become a product like any other (Olssen & Peters, 2005; Naidoo & Williams, 2015).

Jarvis demonstrates that so-called quality has “become an increasingly dominant regulatory tool in the management of higher education sectors around the world,” imposing “quasi-market, competitive based

rationalities [...] using a policy discourse that is often informed by conviction rather than evidence” (Jarvis, 2014, p. 155). Other phenomena include the branding and marketing of the university/college; the decline in public spending on higher education; the speed-up of academic careers and the casualization and precarity of the teaching workforce as well as the decline of tenure track positions, research opportunities and promotion paths (Maskovsky, 2012; Connell, 2013). The challenges for academics are thus complex:

diminishing budgets, multiplying audit mechanism ensuring ‘accountability,’ technological developments that appear to throw traditional teaching practices into question, closed publishing models, spiralling student-staff ratios, ... increasingly rigid and competitive research funding mechanisms, and perceived threats to academic freedom and independence. (Whelan, 2015, p. 131)

Consequently, as academics we live with eroding conditions, uncertainty, ever-increasing teaching, administration and service loads, and prescribed publishing targets to demonstrate our worth. In such a climate, lack of achievements and inadequate financial resources are viewed as personal failures rather than as a reflection of larger systemic problems (see e.g. Gill & Donaghue, 2016). The emotional costs, as Rosalind Gill (2016, p. 40) reports, are “exhaustion, stress, overload, insomnia, anxiety, shame, aggression, hurt, guilt and feelings of out-of-placeness, fraudulence and fear of exposure.” Yet these embodied experiences are silenced in the public spaces, that is conferences or departmental meetings, and only talked about in informal locations such as corridors, coffee breaks or during intimate conversation with friends (p. 40). When Gill decided to break the silence, she seemed to comply with the common academic notion that moaning, complaining and unhappiness are undesirable, therefore, reframing these responses as “analysis or a (political) demand for change” (p. 41).

The unhappiness, high levels of stress and weariness are intensified when having to teach students who are referred to and behave as consumers (Ball, 2012; Naidoo & Williams, 2015; Molesworth et al., 2010; Saunders, 2007). Early expectations that if referred to as clients, students would become empowered autonomous beings, exercising free choice, has been defied by their growing passivity and instrumental learning (Naidoo & Williams, 2015). We, their teachers, have gradually turned into

anxious and oppressed suppliers compelled under increasing audit surveillance to avoid autonomous judgement about curriculum and pedagogy in the interest of our students (Connell, 2013, p. 108).

In such a context, educators find it increasingly difficult to fully embrace the liberal humanist motivation to turn their students into either free responsible thinkers who create new well scrutinized knowledge or courageous critical agents with aptitudes to recognize, analyse and work towards reducing injustices. This confirms Henry Giroux's argument that, due to the controlling and "corrosive effects" of the neoliberal corporate culture, civic discourse would be eroded (Giroux, 2002, p. 425). The pressure to obey market considerations obligates teachers to deliver quantifiable and measurable services and skills, limiting their educational assignment to prepare their students for the capitalist and corporate job market (Brule, 2004, p. 248; Vallally, 2019; Connell, 2013).

Using Giorgio Agamben's term "bare pedagogy," Giroux (2010, p. 185) describes current academic education as a pedagogy that places "an emphasis on winning at all costs, a ruthless competitiveness, hedonism, the cult of individualism," while minimizing and even removing ethical considerations. Such a context preserves social, national, ethnic, class and gender hierarchies and divisions and appears entirely at odds with dissent thinking and radical critique of social and political power relations as well as with values like social justice, equality, anti-racism and care for others (Giroux, 2010; Jones & Calafell, 2012; Feigenbaum, 2007). Lynch (2006) points out that such circumstances pose a challenge to academics who develop a "counter-hegemonic discourse, a discourse that is grounded in the principles of democracy and equality that are the heart of the public education tradition" (Lynch, 2006, p. 11). Social justice discourse which often causes discomfort, and/or elicits controversy in the classroom, leads to accusations of politicizing what is expected to be (and never was) a neutral space.

Therefore, teachers who persist in challenging their students with social critique are facing hostile learners as well as antagonistic colleagues and administration (hooks, 1994; Jones & Calafell, 2012; Hager, 2015). Since students' evaluations of teachers' aptitude can determine an educators' career progression, promoting counter-hegemonic discourse becomes a risk many teachers are not willing to take. Moreover, social activism in such atmosphere may become "something one does after hours [...] a private pursuit or hobby [...] even frowned upon" (Bowles et al., 2017, p. 2). Since pressures to invest in publishing and gaining grant money are

increasing, free time is very sparse and is expected to be used “productively.”

How can academics resist such an oppressive climate which seems to deprive them of purpose and agency? In researching neoliberalism, we encountered articles and books which attempt to pursue “alternative priorities, resistances and refusals” to the market-driven academia (Bottrell & Manathunga, 2018, p. 2) *Resisting neoliberalism in higher education: Seeing through the cracks* (2018), for example, is a collection of articles which shed light on how academics negotiate and survive the managed life and diminishing space of “traditional” academic objectives by finding ways to work in collegial ways, thus defying neoliberal logic in teaching, researching and writing.

Our project is an addition to these illuminating ventures which expose the hidden costs of an academic’s daily routine in the present higher education net, while challenging and opposing neoliberal oppressive processes. It is rooted in feminist epistemology, and as such it does not accept the standard academic distinction between the rules of knowledge building and the constructed knowledge itself, acknowledging the fact that this division is an inaccurate abstraction intended to create a fictive external vantage point from which one can objectively and neutrally look and evaluate knowledge (Duncan, 1996). According to researchers such as Nancy Hartsock (1983), Donna Haraway (1988) and Sandra Harding (1987), intellectual activity is always implemented from a certain standpoint, thus it is situated knowledge, and therefore, by definition, it is non-objective but rather subjective and politically biased and its bias is an integral aspect of the research. Academic knowledge, which reflects a political standpoint of white western male and capitalist values, remains unmarked, transparent and positioned as analytical and as academic status quo (Haraway, 1988, p. 581; Duncan, 1996, pp. 3–4). Feminist researchers called for examination of what this standpoint excludes, in our case, stories opposing the neoliberal rule which damages academic knowledge, institutional interactions and the wellbeing of individuals (Harding, 1987, p. 29; Scott, 2004, pp. 20–21). Our project is thus not a clear-cut academic theoretical critique, but rather an embodied act of resistance to the individualistic and competitive ethos entrenched in the academic setting. In such context, subjectivity becomes a key site of political struggle against the current governmentality (Ball, 2016). Writing our personal accounts regarding the impact of neoliberal regime on our views, beliefs, academic practices and persona becomes our opposition to this oppressive institutional regime.

COLLABORATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIES

When we imagine a successful scholar in the contemporary academy, we picture, often with envy, a rational, ambitious, driven, individualistic, competitive, efficient, calculated and accountable subject, whose apparent masculine prototype discloses that he is often a male. We rarely identify with this competent-focused persona, but rather have often felt unqualified and powerless when contending with institutional pressures and workloads. However, when meeting colleagues and members of management, we are compelled to adopt the invincible neoliberal façade of those who effortlessly carry the burden of the unbearable academic demands. Gradually this recurring effort becomes a ritual performance which presents itself as “our real self.” Observing our colleagues navigating the same labyrinth, we are sometimes, perhaps incorrectly, convinced that they have undergone a real personal transformation.

Philip Mirowski (2013, p. 117) sees these subjective processes and shifts as forming a fragmenting self, providing a gloomy description of the outcome:

The fragmentation of the neoliberal self begins when the agent is brought face to face with the realization that she is not just an employee or student, but also simultaneously a product to be sold, a walking advertisement, a manager of her résumé, a biographer of her rationales, and an entrepreneur of her possibilities. She has to somehow manage to be simultaneously subject, object, and spectator. She is perforce not learning about who she really is, but rather, provisionally buying the person she must soon become.

Our book explores this disturbing fragmentation by interrogating our experiences with the enforced neoliberal performativity and with the awareness of turning into human capital. By telling our biographical accounts—autoethnographies—of coping with current academic pressures, we oppose the familiar “academic biography” we must provide to promotion committees, while creating and contributing new knowledge regarding the daily lives of academics under neoliberal governability and managerialism (Cannizzo, 2018).

Autoethnography has been theorized as a form of autobiography scrutinizing the cultural, social and political context. Heewon Chang (2008, 2011) defines it as a research method that enables researchers to use data from their own life stories as situated in sociocultural contexts in order to

gain an understanding of society through the unique lens of the self. Ellis (2004) suggests that its primary focus is a certain self, or some aspect of a life lived in cultural context. If “culture circulates through all of us,” she writes, “then how can autoethnography not connect to a world beyond the self?” (Ellis, 2004, p. 34). Observing the self as embedded within a certain social context implies that autoethnography differs from the autobiography criticized by Bourdieu for “divorc[ing] the life trajectory from any social constraints” (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9), by providing socio-cultural interpretation of self-society connectivity (Chang et al., 2013). Focusing on the self, this approach often is criticized and defined as uninteresting self-indulgence by academic hegemony which overtly promotes and values objectivity, neutrality and the (false) distancing of the researcher from his/her subjects (see e.g. Delamont, 2007; Bradely, 2016; Chang et al., 2013).

Inscribing individual identity within and relative to a socio-political context also entails the transcendence of familiar and instinctive everyday conceptions of selfhood and social life. Personal stories which are written and read within the social, political and cultural context of the current academia do both. They adhere to and confirm the competent individualistic academic persona, and at the same time challenge its construction, thus revealing how it is conjured and embedded in the power relations of the academic audit culture (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Moreover, as reflective observers, we, the authors of these autoethnographies, transgress our automatically assigned selfhood, in the process acquiring multiple identities, displaced and necessarily “not at home,” in the stabilized definitions of the power structure (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 4). Therefore, although our stories at times echo the familiar image of the accomplished academic, they equally reflect other personas and thus predominantly testify to the fluidity and hybridity of the self, disclosing among other things its contradictions, hesitations, anxieties, anger, insecurities, stress and satisfactions.

Janet Gunn demonstrates that the real question of autoethnography is not “Who am I?” but rather “it is a question of ‘where do I belong? [...] the question of the self’s identity becomes a question of self’s location in a world” (Gunn quoted in Neumann, 1996, p. 184). Positioning through autoethnography problematizes social and political perceptions, challenging the fallacy of the self/other, individual/social dichotomies (Spark, 2002, p. 217), while posing representational questions such as: Who is representing whose life? What interests does she/he represent?

However, depicting, dismantling and resisting the neoliberal academic self requires a partial collaboration with, and appropriation of, the discourse developed within the neoliberal academia, that is concepts, methodologies and ways of writing. Our autoethnographies, then, can be written and read as a cooperation with hegemonic power (they use academic jargon and will contribute to our promotion, and will be measured by the academic metrics) and simultaneously as a rebellious and subversive response to this power (by questioning neoliberal notions of meritocracy, quality, difference and objectivity).

Caren Kaplan (1998) and Sidone Smith (1998) also have stressed the oppositional potential of autoethnography. Kaplan classified it an “out-law genre [...] autobiographical but eclectically ‘errant’ and culturally disruptive” (Kaplan quoted in Smith, 1998, p. 433). Out-law genres, wrote Kaplan, “require more collaborative procedures [...] more closely attuned to the power differences among participants in the process of producing the text. Thus, instead of a discourse of individual authorship, we find a discourse of situation; a ‘politics of location’” (Kaplan, 1998, p. 208).

Following Kaplan, we see our autoethnographies as collaborative multivocal texts. However, writing our autoethnographies in dialogue, we take the collaboration further. Chang et al. (2013) define collaborative autoethnography as a research method that combines the autoethnographies of several researchers situated in a certain sociocultural milieu—in our case the academia—interacting dialogically. Collecting and sharing autobiographical materials, analysing and interpreting this data collectively, we gain deeper insights regarding the neoliberal academia as a sociocultural phenomenon (Chang, 2008, 2011; Blalock and Akehi 2018). Since we come from different countries, disciplines and experiential perspectives, our stories represent multiple points of view on neoliberal cultural scripts and systematic oppression. Collaborative autoethnography is a powerful method of community building. It enhances trusting relationships, provides for deep listening, promotes creativity and offers collegial feedback and mentorship (Lapadat, 2017; Chang et al., 2013).

Yet, while writing together we also faced methodological and ethical challenges, such as role division, individual accountability, ethics of authorship and data ownership. Very early on we realized that the book’s final version would not be exactly what each one of us personally aspired to. As individuals we have developed distinct rhetorical styles and different disciplinary habits. Collaborative writing compelled us to negotiate and to compromise. Yet the power and the significance of such writing depended

on our ability to conceive the intellectual gains of minimizing power struggles and questions of authority, while enjoying the experience of working and learning from each other. It entails retreating at times to the shadows and letting others lead, a move which is less common in the individualist neoliberal academic training and writing. As others who were engaged in similar collective academic work, we see our project as a radical act of resistance against the hegemonic discourses of individuality who push us all to compete (Brooks et al., 2020; Charteris et al., 2016; Hernandez et al., 2015).

For us, it has been an interesting and rewarding journey which has enabled us to better comprehend the obstacles and difficulties we confront in our respective institutions as well as the prices we have paid and still must pay for surviving the neoliberal maze. Moreover, it provides us with some understanding regarding our ability to develop adequate strategies of resistance, refusing to abridge our existence into being solely human capital.

WRITING IN DIALOGUE

Collaborative academic writing is quite a challenge. In the past, the three of us co-authored articles with colleagues, but they were based on a division of responsibilities: Each writer had their own role and segments and their respective final word. The old unofficial academic guidance was that co-authoring should be used infrequently, at least in the humanities, because of the ethos of individualized research capital. It has been less respected, and is also ranked lower, especially if the author doesn't appear first in the list of authors. More recently collaborations across disciplines (mainly in exact, life and social sciences) have gained increasing favour. Yet it still reflects academic hierarchy and intellectual ownership as echoed by the order of authors' names on each publication (see e.g. Efthyvoulou, 2008; Igou & van Tilburg, 2015). How do we step down from this pyramid into a more equal sphere? How can we write collaboratively, without a hierarchy or a distinct division of responsibilities?

In our video meetings, we discussed how we would like to work together. For Susan and Omri, it was their first experience in collaborative writing using the distinctive methodology of collaborative autoethnography. We decided there would be no supreme editing authority, and we wouldn't allocate responsibility for various contents. Each of us was to write a story, send it to the others for reading and editing, and then we

would assemble the chapters together. Chapters do not “belong” to anyone, and personal stories would undergo a shared metamorphosis, zapping between personal and political-systemic stories, reflecting coinciding perspectives and similar experiences.

These decisions were accompanied by uneasiness. Some of us were concerned that basing a book on our personal stories would put us at institutional risk. It seems perilous in the current competitive academic climate to write a book which emphasizes our difficulties and failures in academia rather than our accomplishments in coping with the demands of the neoliberal system. It could label us as wilful and incompetent, or as indulging ourselves with complaints while other people dream of acquiring our permanent academic positions.

Such disqualifying framing however is in fact an effective type of censorship which prevents academics from disapproving the current academic regime (Gill, 2016). It threatened to silence us. Fearing to be criticized for self-indulgence, we thought to replace our personal stories with interviews with other academics. It took us some discussions to realize that by transforming the original plan—to tell our own stories—we were in fact silencing ourselves and re-censoring significant knowledge.

Initially there were four of us. A British researcher was part of our team at the primary phases of our thinking. After writing the first drafts, she decided to leave, being concerned that this research and writing project was outside her usual academic field. In the neoliberal academia you are expected to be focused and efficient and exploring subjects out of your academic discipline is often regarded as a distraction. Perhaps it has been an example of how neoliberal academia forces academics in senior positions to restrict their interests and their intellectual horizons for the sake of promotion.

We’d hoped to bring a young German scholar in the postdoctoral phase on board, but he was engaged in the Sisyphean task of applying for grants and building a proper CV for a permanent academic position. Being a historian, he was concerned that a book which lies outside the bounds of his field of expertise and criticizes current academia might taint him as a subversive non-compliant, and problematic for the academic system. We regretted his decision, because the voice of a junior academic who was just starting his career was important to us. Yet, being aware of the difficulties of finding a permanent academic post and the necessary adherence to the rigid “specialization” system, which requires a coherent professional portfolio of publications, his decision was sensible.

Fairly protected by our academic privileges—Tamar and Susan are associate professors and Omri is a senior lecturer—we continued with the project. Perhaps only in these advantageous positions can critical uncensored stories and opinions be voiced without damage to careers. Too often it seems that current academia behaves like commercial companies, disciplining and punishing rogue junior workers who criticize and challenge the rules of the game, regarding them as unwanted rebels. Our permanent job positions might make us somewhat immune to such reprimands.

Via transatlantic video sessions and lots of discussions and arguments, we shaped a work process. The first step for each of us was to write a story based on a personal experience relating to each theme. We exchanged these stories in a shared folder. We read and commented on the others' stories, aiming to support and mentor each other in order to develop and improve our accounts. Here we encountered the first pitfall. We are trained in diverse genres of academic writing. Crossing the boundaries into personal narratives, which do not necessarily adhere to citation of sources and to analytical argument, was not always straightforward. In the first few rounds, we wrote comments like "No need for this theory here," "You need to give more details," "But how did you feel? Try and describe your experience more" and "Then what happened? And don't stop here." We had to constantly keep each other from slipping into the academic comfort zone of the imposing researcher/writer, who exercises superior authority while imposing unequivocal interpretations. We had to evade the familiar academic tone, formal, discreet, empirical and distant. Our task was to write about academia from within the academic setting while using essayist and literary tools. It meant using the first-person, recording and describing in detail events, real characters, experiences, weaknesses, dilemmas and failures.

At the beginning of this road, still somewhat unsure (What would it ultimately look like? How will our voices merge?), with partial drafts and quite a few creative barriers, we met in London. It was crucial to meet face to face, to overcome self-constraints, to put forward ideas for stories and to think them through together, and to offer each other a supportive shoulder. It was hard work. We met in London and spent a week together, working on our chapters and stories. Each morning we met to talk and write. Gradually we got to know each other. Our discussions prompted stories; we held writing sessions, sitting side by side in different libraries or in our hotels, taking coffee breaks to discuss new ideas and different angles of our subjects. These sessions and our dialogue invaded our stories.

The week went by quickly. Back at our desks in Australia and Israel we confronted a crucial moment of writing and editing. In our video meetings we wondered how to reflect upon the fact that our stories were written in cooperation and collaboration when representing each theme. How to construct auto/biographies or auto/ethnographies in the dialogue of academics in neoliberal reality within each chapter and as an overall structure of the entire book? In collaborative writing, there is no chief writer-editor who decides what stays in and what is left out, what is the frame story and what needs to be shortened or tightened.

We grouped together the three stories in each file and continued working in rounds. Each chapter had a first editor, who arranged the order and wrote the frame story that reflected our dialogue back in London. Next, we transferred each chapter to the second editor and then to the third. But the dilemmas intensified. We wondered whether at this point, when the chapter was already organized, we could intervene in the personal stories, ask questions, suggest cuts. To what extent and in what way should we invade each other's narratives and/or step aside and let the other take control over our own story or the dialogue?

Eager to learn from the experience of others, we read accounts of collaborative writing endeavours (i.e. Brooks et al., 2020; Charteris et al., 2016). We discovered that there was no prescription. The writing process depends on participants' personalities and aims, and it involves constant negotiation and consequently each venture is unique. It seems that each collaborative project entails traversing a terra incognita, where writers must invent rules, rather than obey dictated ones.

The editing tool that proved to be controversial was Track Changes. Should we use it, thus leaving the changes we made visible while passing on our edited version or send a clean copy to the next in line? It was a crucial question, not just a technical one, because our preferences clearly illuminated our sensibilities and habits. At times, we have found it hard to agree about the "best interests of the text," and who decides what those are. Susan edited with comments, Omri preferred to send in a clean copy, Tamar worked with Track Changes. Friction and disagreements ensued, but also creative solutions and new ways to support one another. Writing together we learnt required flexibility: In each chapter, we worked differently. One chapter was reedited in increments, back and forth, without Track Changes; we each received a clean copy and changed it as we saw fit. In another chapter we used Track Changes, with each one adding, accepting or rejecting.

The episodes accumulated, and it was their lack of uniformity or imperfection which makes them powerful. Our subjective perspectives dictate uncertain, hesitant and at times even indecisive writing as well as apparent information gaps. These qualms and data cracks exist in every research, yet unlike traditional academic writing, we point them out and don't obscure them. They are an integral and organic part of the process.

Thinking and writing differently provided opportunities to experience the possibilities inherent in the Greek word *akadēmeia*—a grove outside the city walls. Our book allowed us to cross the academic barriers and stay for a while in the “wood” surrounding the neoliberal labyrinth. Looking from there at our professional territory we could see ourselves and the system that has both fed and oppressed us clearer and more deeply.

REFERENCES

- Agamben, G. (2020, May 23). Requiem to the students (A. D. Dean, Trans.). *Medium*. <https://medium.com/@ddean3000/requiem-for-the-students-giorgio-agamben-866670c11642>
- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.
- Ball, S. J. (2012). Performativity, commodification and commitment: An I-spy guide to the neoliberal university. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 60(1), 17–28.
- Ball, S. J. (2016). Subjectivity as a site of struggle: Refusing neoliberalism? *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 37(8), 1129–1146.
- Banks, S. P. (2008). Writing as theory: In defense of fiction. In J. G. Knowles & A. L. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research* (pp. 155–165). Sage Publications.
- Blalock, A. E., & Akehi, M. (2018). Collaborative autoethnography as a pathway for transformative learning. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 16(2), 89–107.
- Bottrell, D., & Manathunga, C. (Eds.). (2018). *Resisting neoliberalism in higher education, volume I: Seeing through the cracks*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bowles, K., Bosanquet, A., & Luzia, E. K. (2017). Activism and the academy. *Australian Universities' Review*, 59(2), 2–4.
- Bradely, G. F. (2016). Composing academic identities: Stories that matter? *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22(5), 377–385.
- Brewer, J. (2010). Microhistory and the histories of everyday life. *Cultural and Social History: The Journal of the Social History Society*, 7(1), 87–109.
- Brooks, S. D., Dean, A. S., Franklin-Phipps, A., Mathis, E., Rath, C. L., Raza, N., Smithers, L. E., & Sundstrom, K. (2020). Becoming-academic in the neoliberal academy: A collective biography. *Gender and Education*, 32(3), 281–300.

- Brule, E. (2004). Going to market: Neoliberalism and the social construction of the university student as an autonomous consumer. In M. Reimer (Ed.), *Inside corporate U: Women in the academy speak out* (pp. 247–264). Sumach Press.
- Cannizzo, F. (2018). Tactical evaluations: Everyday neoliberalism in academia. *Journal of Sociology*, 54(1), 77–91.
- Chang, H. (2008). *Autoethnography as method*. Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Chang, H. (2011). Autoethnography as method for spirituality research in the academy. In H. Chang & D. Boyd (Eds.), *Spirituality in higher education: Autoethnographies* (pp. 11–29). Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Chang, H., Ngunjiri, F. W., & Hernandez, K. A. C. (2013). *Collaborative autoethnography*. Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Charteris, J., Gannon, S., Mayes, E., Nye, A., & Stephenson, L. (2016). The emotional knots of academicity: A collective biography of academic subjectivities and spaces. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 35(1), 31–44.
- Connell, R. (2013). The neoliberal cascade and education: An essay on the market agenda and its consequences. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(2), 99–112.
- Delamont, S. (2007, September). *Arguments against auto-ethnography*. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Institute of Education, University of London. <http://www.ethiopia-ed.net/images/2059477569.doc>
- Diversi, M. (1998). Glimpses of street life: Representing lives experience through short stories. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4(2), 131–147.
- Duncan, N. (1996). Introduction: (Re)placings. In N. Duncan (Ed.), *BodySpace: Destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality* (pp. 1–12). Routledge.
- Efthymoulou, G. (2008). Alphabet economics: The link between names and reputation. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 37(3), 1266–1285.
- Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Sage.
- Essed, P. (1999). Ethnicity and diversity in Dutch academia. *Social Identities*, 5(2), 211–225.
- Feigenbaum, A. (2007). The teachable moment: Feminist pedagogy and the neoliberal classroom. *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies*, 29(4), 337–349.
- Frank, K. (2000). The management of hunger: Using fiction in writing anthropology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(4), 474–488.
- Gill, R. (2016). Breaking the silence: The hidden injuries of neo-liberal academia. *Feministische Studien*, 34(1), 39–55.
- Gill, R., & Donaghue, N. (2016). Resilience, apps and reluctant individualism: Technologies of self in the neoliberal academy. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 54, 91–99.
- Giroux, H. A. (2002). Neoliberalism, corporate culture and the promise of higher education. The university as a democratic public sphere. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(4), 425–463.

- Giroux, H. A. (2010). Bare pedagogy and the scourge of neoliberalism: Rethinking higher education as democratic public sphere. *The Educational Forum*, 74(3), 184–196.
- Goodall, J. (2019). *The politics of the common good*. NewSouth Publishing.
- Hager, T. (2015). Seeing and hearing the other: A Jewish Israeli teacher grapples with Arab students' underachievement and the exclusion of their voices. *Radical Teacher*, 101, 46–53.
- Hager, T. (2019). 'If they cannot take it straight, they will get it in fiction'. The power of literature. *Poetics Today*, 40(1), 33–57.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575–599.
- Harding, S. (1987). Introduction: Is there a feminist method? In S. Harding (Ed.), *Feminism and methodology* (pp. 1–14). Indiana University Press.
- Hartsock, N. C. M. (1983). The feminist standpoint: Developing the ground for a specifically feminist historical materialism. In S. Harding & M. B. Hintikka (Eds.), *Discovering reality* (pp. 283–310). D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Hernandez, K. A. C., Ngunjiri, F. W., & Chang, H. (2015). Exploiting the margins in higher education: A collaborative autoethnography of three foreign-born female faculty of color. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 28(5), 533–551.
- Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- Igou, E. R., & van Tilburg, W. A. (2015). Ahead of others in the authorship order: Names with middle initials appear earlier in author lists of academic articles in psychology. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 469.
- Jarvis, D. S. L. (2014). Regulating higher education: Quality assurance and neoliberal managerialism in higher education—A critical introduction. *Policy and Society*, 33, 155–156.
- Jones, R., Jr., & Calafell, B. M. (2012). Contesting neoliberalism through critical pedagogy, intersectional reflexivity and personal narrative: Queer tales of academia. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 59(7), 957–981.
- Kaplan, C. (1998). Resisting autobiography: Out-law genres and transnational feminist subjects. In S. Smith & J. Watson (Eds.), *Women, autobiography, theory: A reader* (pp. 208–216). University of Wisconsin Press.
- Lapadat, J. C. (2017). Ethics in autoethnography and collaborative autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(8), 589–603.
- Lynch, K. (2006). Neo-liberalism and marketisation: The implications on higher education. *European Educational Research Journal*, 5(1), 1–17.
- Marginson, S. (2011). Higher education and public good. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 65(4), 411–433.
- Maskovsky, J. (2012). Beyond neoliberalism: Academia and activism in a nonhegemonic moment. *American Quarterly*, 64(4), 819–822.

- Mirowski, P. (2013). *Never let a serious crisis go to waste: How neoliberalism survived the financial meltdown*. Verso Books.
- Molesworth, M., Scullion, R., & Nixon, E. (2010). *The marketisation of HE and the student as consumer*. Routledge.
- Moore, J. C. (2019). *A brief history of universities*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Naidoo, R., & Williams, J. (2015). The neoliberal regime in English higher education: Charters, consumers and the erosion of the public good. *Critical Studies in Education*, 56(20), 208–223.
- Neumann, M. (1996). Collecting ourselves at the end of the century. In C. Ellis & A. P. Bochner (Eds.), *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing* (pp. 172–200). Altamira Press.
- Olssen, M., & Peters, M. A. (2005). Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: From the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(3), 313–345.
- Reed-Danahay, D. E. (1997). Introduction. In D. E. Reed-Danahay (Ed.), *Auto/ethnography: Rewriting the self and the social* (pp. 1–17). Berg Publishers.
- Rinehart, R. (1998). Fictional methods in ethnography: Believability, specks of glass, and Chekhov. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4(2), 200–224.
- Ruegg, W. (2004). Themes. In W. Ruegg (Ed.), *A history of the university in Europe: Vol 2, Universities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries* (pp. 3–32). Cambridge University Press.
- Saunders, D. (2007). The impact of neoliberalism on college students. *Journal of College and Character*, 8(5), 1–9.
- Scott, J. W. (2004). Feminism's history. *Journal of Women's History*, 16(2), 10–29.
- Smith, S. (1998). Autobiographical manifesto. In S. Smith & J. Watson (Eds.), *Women, autobiography, theory: A reader* (pp. 433–440). University of Wisconsin Press.
- Spark, A. C. (2002). Autoethnography: Self-indulgence or something more? In C. Ellis & A. P. Bochner (Eds.), *Ethnographically speaking: Autoethnography, literature and aesthetics* (pp. 209–232). Altamira Press.
- Vallally, N. (2019). From the margins of the neoliberal university: Notes towards a nomadic literary studies. *Poetics Today*, 40(1), 59–79.
- Verger, J. (2003). Patterns. In H. De Ridder-Symoens (Ed.), *A history of the university in Europe: Vol. 1, Universities in the Middle Ages* (pp. 35–76). Cambridge University Press.
- Whelan, A. (2015). Academic critique of neoliberal academia. *Sites: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies*, 12(1), 130–152.
- Williams, J. J. (2006). The post-welfare state university. *American Literary History*, 18(1), 190–216.