

# The Neoliberal/ising University at the Intersection of Gender and Place

**Kadri Aavik, Birgit Riegraf, Blanka Nyklová**

In recent years, in the light of the profound changes occurring in the governance of science globally, a number of academics have turned their scholarly attention to critically examining their own immediate work environments. They have begun to study the conditions under which knowledge is produced and consider what the transformations in the governance of science mean for academic research and knowledge production as well as teaching and instruction. This scholarship, sometimes referred to as critical university studies, deals with the various manifestations and implications of what can be collectively termed ‘the neoliberal university’. Thus far, this scholarship has been produced mainly in and about contexts often described by the terms ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’.<sup>1</sup>

The changes that have occurred in universities within the past few decades are the result of the spread of the neoliberal ideology and the principles of governance arising therefrom. Neoliberal policies have been shown to produce and exacerbate social inequalities (see, for example, Connell 2013; Piketty 2014). This also holds true for institutions – such as universities – which have increasingly started to function according to market principles and a neoliberal logic by adopting new policies and regulations on national and transnational levels of decision-making. The administratively implemented reforms have also often been accompanied by a drive to change the self-perception and behaviour of individual academics and of academic communities, i.e. to change the very embodiment and performance of academic subjects. This has involved the introduction and implementation of market principles in higher education. In particular, the pressure comes from highlighting individual achievement and valuing competition between academics

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<sup>1</sup> We are well aware of the limitations of these terms in encompassing global geopolitical complexities. Our aim here is to point out that certain power inequalities, namely in knowledge production and epistemological position, persist even as the terms as such are contested.

and between universities, while rejecting solidarity and collegiality as core values of academic work. The collective dimensions of human activity, such as research, are downplayed.

Collective efforts, however, are essential for creating new knowledge, as well as for teaching, as they concern issues of diversity and equality. It has indeed been demonstrated that various forms of intersecting inequalities persist and new ones emerge under neoliberal academic conditions (see, for example, Berg, Huijbens, Larsen 2016). Some of this work has focused particularly on the gendered effects of neoliberalisation in higher education and the implementation of the new governance of science, including the impact that such reforms have had on gender studies and research (see Riegraf et al. 2010; Nash, Owens 2015; Liinason, Grenz 2016).

It is to this latter specific line of research within critical university studies that we wish to contribute with this special issue 'Gender in/and the Neoliberal University: Transnational Processes and Localised Impacts'. Our focus is on the category of 'gender' in relation to the neoliberal university and the implementation of mechanisms of new governance in academic settings. Specifically, this special issue seeks to shed light on the following questions: How are processes of neoliberalisation in the academia gendered? How does the new governance of science and research change academic practices in gendered ways? What implications does the neoliberalisation of universities have for existing and emerging gender inequalities and hierarchies in academic settings? How does all this affect the production of 'gender knowledge' in the academia and in the field of gender studies? What does it mean for the recognition of gender studies in academia?

While gender has been in the focus of critical university studies for quite some time, what also merits attention is the fact that most research on gender, gender studies, and the neoliberal university has dealt with Anglo-Saxon contexts. This partly stems from the introduction of reforms in these settings before similar processes in many other contexts, but it is also a manifestation of profound inequalities in the global academic landscape, and speaks particularly of disparities between the Global North and the Global South. We are convinced that an expanded geopolitical perspective is necessary, as it can bring new insights into how contemporary neoliberal academic realities are gendered in the global context as well as in different local and national settings. This is also why two of the texts written by Czech sociologists appear both in English – to contribute to the international debate – and Czech – in order to enrich local debates on the issues discussed.

This special issue includes contributions from settings such as the Czech Republic, Estonia, and South Africa. Yet, we recognise that our scope is limited: while this collection of articles reveals some of the similarities but also the diversity within



Europe,<sup>2</sup> with accounts from different political, social, and historical contexts, all the texts, except one, are nevertheless dedicated to the different faces of neoliberalisation in European academia. This, and the fact that we, the guest editors of this special issue, originate from and are based in Europe, again raises questions about global geopolitics and transnational power relations in science and research as having a profound impact on local academic realities. These realities have influenced the conditions in which this special issue emerged. Here, a consideration of social and material inequalities in the global context is necessary. While processes of neoliberalisation are occurring in the higher education and research landscape in many countries, they intersect with other structural issues, specific to local and national settings, such as profound racial inequalities and violence, and other troubling legacies of colonialism, which might take precedence over injustices caused by neoliberal policies, as, for example, in the case of South Africa (see Deirdre Byrne's article in this issue).

While we critically examine some of the more recent practices and developments at (our) universities, we still take for granted the continued existence of the university and research as sites of knowledge production, both in the material and discursive sense. In some other parts of the world, however, there are also other, perhaps more pressing issues to be addressed regarding the university and the entire system of higher education and research than neoliberalising tendencies. In some ways, then, the ability to focus our attention on the ways in which neoliberal policies affect higher education and research, and our own existence in this system, without needing to ask broader questions about our epistemic and cultural hegemony, is an indication of our privileged geopolitically underpinned position.

To illustrate these issues, we would like to contextualise the birth of this special issue by sharing a personal story that speaks of our own situatedness within the 'neoliberalising academia', where our privileged as well as disadvantaged positions intersect in specific ways.

The idea of this special issue was born out of a series of very fruitful and constructive discussions and research collaborations in a transnational context fostered within the RINGS network. RINGS – the International Research Association of Advanced Gender Studies, initiated in 2015 – aims to bring together research institutions focusing on gender and feminist research from various parts of the globe. However, despite the association's consistent commitment to include institutions from countries all over the world and especially outside Northern and Western Europe, only a few such gender studies centres are among the active members of the network. Initially, this special issue was intended to have broader global coverage than what we ended up with. The final contributions reflect not only the ways in which scholars from different countries

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<sup>2</sup> Moreover, only articles from European Union member states appear in this issue, i.e. not from Europe as such.

are positioned and relate to the processes of neoliberalisation, but also the profound material inequalities and different opportunities in academic settings on a global scale. Crucially, in our case, this is manifested in the availability of institutional resources, or the lack thereof, with which to send a representative to the RINGS annual meetings, where research collaborations, such as this special issue, emerge.

In fact, our own different working conditions and contexts of knowledge production have also significantly affected the work of the editorial team in compiling this special issue. All three guest editors of this issue are feminist sociologists. We are based in and employed at institutions of higher education and research in Paderborn (Germany), Prague (Czech Republic), and Tallinn (Estonia). We occupy somewhat different positions in our institutions: Birgit Riegraf works as a professor, Blanka Nyklová as a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer, and Kadri Aavik as a part-time lecturer.

Our first editorial meeting for this issue was held in Tallinn, Estonia, in November 2016, and this was no coincidence. The process of choosing this venue is an apt illustration of the increasing hierarchies and inequalities within and between academic institutions, and among academics, and a manifestation of some of the processes of neoliberalisation in academic settings that we focus on here. The question of travel costs and time turned out to be key for the decision we made.

Kadri's 25%-workload teaching contract includes the requirement that she perform research and administrative work, but only a minimal amount of such work. In reality she performs significantly more of such work (and is tacitly expected to do so by her by senior staff). In this situation, any additional expenses, such as the costs of travelling to editorial meetings, were out of the question for her. Blanka faced a somewhat similar situation. She has never had a contract for a period of more than two years. She initially intended to cover the travel costs herself, but in the end her employer was able to find funds for travel and accommodation. The only one of us with a travel budget that she can make decisions about herself is Birgit. She has a permanent contract as a professor in sociology and is able to focus on her research interests as long as her research leads to her being able to obtain significant amounts of funding and produce high-ranking publications to preserve this 'freedom'.

Like most academics, we face significant time pressure in our everyday work. None of us could have spared weekdays to perform tasks 'outside' our 'main work', such as editing of a special issue. Consequently, the decision to hold the editorial meeting on a weekend in Tallinn arose out of our particular circumstances and situatedness within the neoliberal academia. This resulted in all of us needing to work on weekends and to see the goals of this special issue as taking precedence over our free time. Each of us feels we work substantially more than is reasonable, healthy (and truly intellectually productive), but in each case in conditions of different material security and different access to financial resources. Even though these conditions made accomplishing this



work more difficult, all of us consider the effort to have been well worth it. The reason for this is not just the texts published in the special issue. It is also that it gave us the opportunity to learn a great deal from each other and to have inspiring discussions, which helped us to better understand neoliberalism as a lived and embodied reality in our different contexts.

Like the diversity that characterises the ways that we as editors are positioned, the academic realities that the authors writing in this special issue inhabit and in which their experience is grounded also differ from each other somewhat.

The special issue contains six articles. We do not provide a comprehensive definition of neoliberalism and the neoliberal university in this introduction, but leave it to the authors of this special issue to paint a portrait of what they understand as expressions of neoliberalism in their respective academic settings. Although the authors rely on no universal understanding of the terms 'neoliberal' and 'neoliberalisation', all the contributions address the reinforced implementation of marketisation and the corollary introduction of business instruments in academic systems.

As the articles demonstrate, the introduction of market logic into academic settings has taken a somewhat different shape in the countries featured here. Nevertheless, the economisation of academia, with its far-reaching consequences for work, study, and research conditions, can be observed in one way or another in almost all the contexts represented herein.

The first article, by Jeff Hearn, has the broadest scope. In 'Neoliberal Universities, Patriarchies, Masculinities, and Myself: Transnational-Personal Reflections on and from the Global North', Jeff analyses, through an autobiographical and transnational lens, his experience working in Nordic and UK universities. He draws connections between the transnationalisation processes of the neoliberal academia, masculinities, and patriarchies. His comparative perspective provides valuable insights into how these processes are played out in different academic settings.

As a contrast to the developments in the Nordic countries and the UK, the next article focuses on the effects of neoliberal reforms on science in the Czech Republic. Marcela Linková's article, titled 'Academic Excellence and Gender Bias in the Practices and Perceptions of Scientists in Leadership and Decision-making Positions', focuses on the concept of excellence in the neoliberal academia in the Czech Republic. Under the new governance of science, the elusive idea of 'excellence' has become a key category through which the performance of scientists and scientific organisations are measured. Marcela examines how lab leaders and research managers in the natural sciences construct the notion of excellence and how this imaginary is gendered.

The third article also deals with the topic of 'excellence in science'. Birgit Riegraf and Lena Weber's article focuses on the concept of excellence from another angle. In 'Excellence and Gender Equality Policies in Neoliberal Universities', the authors take

a look at the German academic setting. Based on two case studies from Germany, the authors demonstrate the nexus between 'excellence' and 'gender' and how this is eroding in the context of the neoliberal academia.

The next article, by Deirdre Byrne, titled 'Teaching and Researching Women's and Gender Studies in Post-apartheid South Africa', deals with processes of neoliberalisation affecting gender studies in South Africa and the ways in which the neoliberalisation of universities is interwoven with colonial legacies. Deirdre argues that the post-apartheid neoliberal state and the managerialist turn in the governance of universities constrain academic freedom to teach and conduct research.

Kadri Avik presents another perspective on the often invisible and unacknowledged divisions between academic settings within Europe. In 'Doing Neoliberalism on Campus: The Vulnerability of Gender Equality Mechanisms in Estonian Academia', Kadri looks at how key stakeholders in Estonian universities construct a gendered neoliberal reality. Her findings suggest that certain key gender-equality measures are filled with meanings that exacerbate inequalities and serve the interests of the neoliberal university, instead of helping to bring about positive change in gender relations.

The final article of this special issue also focuses on the discipline of gender studies. Blanka Nyklová examines how neoliberalising of teaching contexts may be productive in terms of the practice of feminist pedagogy. Blanka's article titled 'Marketing Difference: Two Teachable Moments at the Intersection of the Neoliberal University and Geopolitics' deals with the setting of a US study-abroad programme operating in the Czech Republic and the possibilities it offers to critically investigate the geopolitics that underpins it.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the RINGS network and its members for their on-going work in fostering global collaboration in feminist and gender scholarship, and for raising the issue of the neoliberalisation of academia in this context. Our gratitude goes to people whose dedication and efforts went into compiling this special issue: the editor-in-chief, Zuzana Uhde, the Editorial Board of the journal, and the authors: they all agreed to join this project although most of them work under the very conditions that are deplored in many of the articles in this issue and in this editorial. Last but not the least, we are indebted to the reviewers of the articles, representing diverse perspectives, but all concerned with gender in the 'neoliberal university' in some way or another. The review process for this special issue was especially lengthy and difficult, due to trouble finding reviewers willing and able to dedicate their (presumably free) time and effort to the activity of peer-reviewing, as well as to time constraints faced by those fellow academics who did commit themselves to this process. This is certainly a reflection of the pressures that the neoliberal university exerts on us all, though in different ways. It also says something about the types of academic activities that are valued and that 'count': the crucial

work of peer-reviewing is certainly one of those tasks that typically remain invisible and unappreciated in the neoliberal academia. We are therefore especially grateful to the reviewers for devoting their time and intellectual energy to this special issue.

## References

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Dear readers,

We would like to inform you that the journal will be published under a new title, Gender a výzkum / Gender and Research. Until 2016, the journal was published under the title Gender, rovné příležitosti, výzkum.

The thematic focus and the guidelines for publication remain the same and so does the editorial board of the journal.

Zuzana Uhde  
Editor-in-chief