



## Dystopia of the Modern

### Collaborative Autoethnographic Lenses on Neoliberal Academia

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#### ABSTRACT

In this article, we offer an intergenerational discussion on the *pros and cons* of autoethnography with a view to the dynamics of neoliberal universities.

#### KEYWORDS

*Neoliberalism, mode of knowledge production, autoethnography, collaborative autoethnography, universities*



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## DYSTOPIA OF THE MODERN: COLLABORATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC LENSES ON NEOLIBERAL ACADEMIA<sup>1</sup>

He asks: "Do you believe that you will earn money in this job?"  
 "I mean, no", said I.  
 "In any case, I do not have such an intention", I added.  
 "If I asked for that I wouldn't have worked as an assistant in his university..."  
 "I have hope that I can change something, no matter how small it is."

Reading the academic transformation with a view to dystopia in the phase of global socio-economic crisis, deepening in different geographies, in different forms and different routes brings in looking at a state-of-being that substantiates academic dystopia. This is our shared conviction as we reflect on this topic and write in different continents, in different temporal and spatial settings across oceans. Therewithal, in the writing process we use different forms, notes on the page, adding footnotes, dropping key term(s) in our notebooks, attaching questions to the same notebooks and to online documents on which we write simultaneously, we come up with the patchy writing, which we think is the most suitable style for collaborative thinking & writing when the authors do not share the same physical location. This style parallels the "patchwork" socio-political state that marks contemporary neoliberal order of things (Coşar & Özman, 1980). Besides, it would be apt to note that this style has the potential to reveal the discursive totality of patchwork politics, in effect, it promises the totality that comes out of partial narratives of academia in neoliberal times. This patchiness that overlaps with the claims for totality in knowledge production processes within the pe of modern social sciences also points at the anxiety that arises from the impossibility of a total understanding of the human condition(s), and thus, hinting dystopic states of modern ways of knowing in the academia. Searching for the totality by tracing the connections among the parts via patchy interventions also involves interfering into the dystopia. In this respect, this quest is significant to lay the grounds for an alternative reading—utopia.

Academic reading, reflecting, writing represent a certain form of relating to knowledge. This form of relation has an ethical dimension as it runs through everyday life practices. Trying to abstract this relation from everyday life practices means trying to bring the "ivory tower" onto the earth, and locking the academia to the tower. But, academia above anything else means institutionalization; it involves producing, circulating, transmitting and sharing knowledge within institutional limits. In this respect, academia itself directly marks an everyday practice, the everyday practices of academics. As knowledge production, circulation, transmission and sharing necessitates relationality it involves everyday life practices of the immediate and indirect parties to academic knowledge. As every relationality functions in accordance with time and space, in order to sustain academic knowledge production requires the history of institutions and campuses (Bourdieu, 1988).

Slavoj Žižek's (2008) dystopian reading of liberal utopia (2007-2009) hints at the academic dystopias in neoliberal times. It is possible to note that these dystopias, today, capture the utopias, in which they are imbedded, rendering the alternative ones invisible (Žižek, 2008). Here, we suffice with defining dystopia as part of utopia, "a nightmare in which our fears are realized" (Sargisson, 2009, s.26). We are in a phase when liberal utopia can only be observed in terms of a series

of dystopian practices: capitalism is characterized with probably the most deep waves among the twenty-first century crises; a dystopia, characterized with the demise in the socio-political assets of liberal modernity as they have unfolded since nineteenth century; and, contradiction-powerlessness-irrational use of knowledge, the trio, inherent in utopia of modernity. In the academia of modern times, calculation-control-rationalization are decisive in relating to knowledge. In the utopia of modern academia rationality marks a certain form of relation to knowledge, it points to an ethical stance. This ethical stance values academic knowledge as part of knowing the universal, without locking into immediate benefit. On the other hand, to the extent that the modern academia affiliates directly or indirectly to form(s) of capitalist organization, and to a certain political unit that draws the boundaries of living together, to the extent that academic knowledge is directed to a certain cause, ideal, public good it contains the dystopia of the modern. The dystopia is pictured in the twentieth century in the identification of academic knowledge with market/work/professional knowledge, and in the twenty-first century with the knowledge of the moment. The contemporary dystopia might thus be summarized: knowledge that is locked to the moment, left there, not extended, not discussed, knowledge that wears out once it is discussed, thus one cannot be accumulated; knowledge in gaseous state.<sup>2</sup> This state of knowledge reveals that the rationality criteria that define modern societies and politics can never be totally realized. The rationality criteria are grounded on the exclusion of feelings/emotions from the spaces of knowing-production-acting, and their location in the spheres of feeling-reproduction-behaving. However simultaneously, this exclusion-location duality is refuted in practice: the connection that is formed between nation-states with citizens is one of the most manifest examples. The dystopia that the twenty-first century hosts can also be understood in relation to this contradiction: in a period when reason that is supposed to control emotions have already yielded to the latter academic life exists in the center of dystopia with its social and political extensions. Here, the dystopian picture has two dimensions: the dystopia of the modern knowledge, built on the assumption that emotions do not count; the dystopia of our relation with knowledge that brings in the intimate into knowledge, and locks thinking to privacy through emotions—hence, the dystopia of modern ethics. The socio-political extensions of this academia are manifested in delimitation of existence to personality, and the dislocation of virtue of togetherness, and thus, of the citizen from the socio-political scene.

On the other hand, is it possible that this dystopia can be reversed for the same reason—by means of the long aspired but yet-to-be reached balance in the emotions-reason duality? In this article we try to come to terms with this and related questions. It is written with a concern to find a breathing space in the midst of the futility to explain and to be explained, of our despair in explaining and being explained. It is written with the assumption that the dystopia of modern academia still has the potential to give birth to eutopias, hence, it does not yet utopias. Therefore, it is written in the form of a discussion, from within experience, without ignoring theoretical grounds. One of the questions that orient the discussion is as follows: "Where does feminist methodology stand in the transformation process which we tentatively name as neoliberal?" This is followed by another question that is related to the implications of this transformation process for the connection between theory, on the one hand, and "case", "sample", "street", "field". This question arises from collaborative autoethnography<sup>3</sup> as both a field that exemplifies the transformation in the academic world and a form of looking and narrating that would enable us to relate to this transformation. In other words, as we look

at the academia together, thus, as we have been turned into our own field we try to inquire about the potential role of a collaborative autoethnographic attempt to intervene into the concerned transformations with claims to academic rights.

Certainly, these questions require further research that goes beyond the scope of this article. We take them as our guidelines in exploring the possibilities for the consolidation of alternative readings of the current state of academia. In the first part, we consider the development of autoethnography through the very transformation that brought it into social and human sciences. In doing so, we suggest to look into proximity, subjectivity and relating as assets of a social science narrative, and not distancing, objectivity, impartiality as they are understood in conventional definitions of scientificity. In line with autoethnographic priorities we rely on transparency, dialogue and performance that goes beyond monologue as a matter of autoethnography beyond monologue and (mere) readability (Tedlock, 2005). The first part forms the grounds for the second, where we offer an outline of neoliberal transformation in academic world. In other words, we do not use collaborative auto-ethnography for instrumental reasons, as a technique. We accept it as the grounds on which we construe experience-knowledge relationality that enables us to notice what is objective as we experience the subjective, the self-distancing that becomes inevitable when one looks at herself/proximity and that in order to relate to justice through knowledge one needs connection. In third and final part, we focus on the boundedness of (feminist) collaborative autoethnography on the borders in the process of transformation academia, the possible extensions it might offer for academic subjects to intervene into this process and its respective limits. Above all, this story is ours; we narrate our states-of-being in the academia: we are aware that we can only approximate to the creativity of story-tellers (Benjamin, 2006); we refrain from futile nostalgia, and we use patchy method in line with the spirit of the times. In doing so, we beyond bringing our stories of the conditions and forms of being in the academia as feminist academics from different generations, turning them into narrations that would place our experiences out of personal spaces. We build this narration on reflexive view:<sup>4</sup> as we reflect on the academia through narratives we take note of the lines between the social and personal, and recognize that personal experiences do not exclude the social. We try to use the political aspects of our stories to avoid limiting the narrative to our personal spaces and reflect the hints about the greater picture (Daucet & Mauthner, 2012).

The measures we take to refrain from imposing the personal on the public, surrendering academic knowledge to the private, avoid the risk of individual domination over the shared spaces, inevitably bring in a certain degree of self-censorship. Therefore, the stories of our relations to the academia put forth the processes that universities undergo, and prioritize institutional continuities and changes. Every narrative brings in distancing—i.e., we decide what to include in and exclude from the narratives on which our stories lay—thus, the self-censorship is already in place; in this article it doubles as we prioritize institutional layers. On the other hand, this does not limit our observations and experiences to certain institutions. In order to do so we benefit from anonymizations that we learn from utopian narratives. In other words, we are attentive to avoid constructing our narratives on the institutions with which we have affiliated. We do so because of the articles in the job contracts that are related to work ethics—putting the definition of ethics in difficulty—as well as due to our respect to our colleagues with whom we share the same offices, walk in the same corridors, take decisions together, or in spite of each other, or with

whom we cannot reach any decisions. Hence, the stories told here are ours; not merely because they are the stories of us as the authors of this article, but also as the story of a moment in the academia in Turkey's neoliberal times. We try to give meaning to the relational developments, which “otherwise would remain an unbearable sequence of happenings” (Arendt, 1995, p.104); and thereon, to invite research on the intertwining between knowledge-space-subject relationality and the structure.

## From “Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart”<sup>5</sup> to Turning the Self into Your Field: On Methods

“Tell me your story; you are valuable; you are valuable in your individuality”. These are the sets that summarize the rise of unique individual stories at a “managerial turning point” when the loss of individuality as an inevitable consequence of mass culture, a defining feature of Fordist capitalism was tried to be overcome by capitalist reforms (Salmon, 2010). By the second half of 1970s workplace measures that appeal to the marketability of selfhood to increase employees' motivations became widespread. Christian Salmon (2010) looks at the transfer of story-making as understood in the managerial world to the political space, points at the dominance of the fictive over the possible in politics, and of perception over reality. Considering that academia, especially social science is directly related to the socio-political space both in terms of objects and analysis and policy development, as well as at the ethical level we might note that such story-making has immediate implications for our relation with knowledge. These implications can be outlined with reference to the marketability of knowledge and narration, and the loss of utopia. Theoretically put, “what cannot be realized within the established social order ‘always appears to the latter as mere utopia’” (Marcuse, 1968, pp. 142-142. Quoted in Geras, 2000, p. 51). The borders of the stories, related to data/object/topic/research problem/field are drawn by archives and/or chronological listing, rather than as resource for theoretical extensions. Our individual or collective stories are limited to the extent that we forget the unfolding of memories through generations and across the world, (Murphie, 2007, pp. 122-140. Cited in Mozhaeva & Coşar, 2014, p. 80). and hence ignore the limitlessness of imagination (Benjamin, 2006). Thus, the permeation of private—free market—into the personal sphere is masked while public, collective ties for the personal are woven. This is common in the everyday academic life. It does not break hearts; does not make you happy; it does not work in relation to emotions. Therefore, narrators who focus on the uniqueness of the story of selfhood happens to tell common, identical stories as their stay within the utilitarian limits of social scientific knowledge.

But autoethnography involves the constitution of the story of the selfhood within the scope of a subjective narrative that is not locked into the personal space (Foster, 2014). Ruth Behar connects her research in anthropology to her earlier dreams to become a poet or a writer and her constant search for a home due to her family's immigrant status in the United States, after losing their home in Cuba. Her work is solid example of the proximity between the researcher's approach to epistemology and personal stories (Behar, 1999, p. 474; Neile & Behar, 2009, p. 149). Behar's view and reading of ethnography manifest that the methods we use in our research are not accidental, they, in fact, form the ties between the researcher and her research. In this respect, Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln's (2005) historical outline of the development of qualitative research offers us the grounds to depict the place of autoethnography. Qualitative research, initially, serves as a means for the making of the aborigines',

the local knowledge for the West. The first half of the twentieth century hosts the dominance of positivist research. Between 1945 and 1970 plenty of qualitative research was conducted to understand social processes, social control mechanisms. Ethnomethodology, phenomenology, critical theory and feminist interventions appear on the social science knowledge production stage. The following period (1970-1986) is characterized by the search for different (somewhat ambiguous) research techniques as symbolic interactionism, structuralism, neo-Marxist theories, semiology and ethnic studies flourished to pave divergent theoretical paths. Research strategies that extend from case studies to grounded theories offer the grounds for privileging history, biography, ethnography. In this period, the boundaries between social sciences and human sciences are blurred. In the following decade representation crisis features in qualitative research; observation and analysis tend to involve reflexive forms. Studies that rely on critical theory and feminist research offer multiple tools for critical readings of validity and reliability, based on objectivity. Introducing the memories and experiences of researchers' into the knowledge of the field starts to gain significance for the validity and reliability of the research. Starting from this turn—and closely related to critical, interpretative, linguistic, feminist readings—ethnography faces criticisms in relation to representation, praxis and legitimation. The common point among these readings is the recognition that it is impossible for the researchers to capture the experience in the field in its immediacy, and thus it can only be constituted as a social text by the researcher. This period witnesses the rise of experiential ethnographic writing, and the accompanying argument that theories can be read from within the stories that are told in the field. Local, small-scale research, focusing on a particular question start to flourish despite meta-narratives. Narratives host experiences, and unfold in literary, autobiographic, poetic, multi-vocal, critical, visual, performative forms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Starting with the 1960s, anti-colonial, critical and feminist approaches to history intervene in the conceptualization of ethnography (Behar, 1999) as the totality of theories that interpret culture, social behavior through experience and ethnographers' cultural dispositions (Turner, 2016, p. 185). Autoethnography, on the other hand, emerges as a contested form. By the 1980s autoethnography is used without naming in the search for interdisciplinary methods. In the 1990s, no more secrets as to the naming, and autoethnography is a reference in social and human sciences to counter the claims of grand theories for rational, value-free, objective, universal knowledge (Foley, 2002, p. 474). Autoethnography discloses the ties between the personal experiences of researchers and the social and the cultural (Reed-Danahay, 1997); it calls in reflexivity, thus, gives the opportunity to include the selfhood of researchers in thinking and writing, as well as political, social and academic spaces that they occupy in all the stages of research (Foley, 2002). It points at the possibilities to discover the social aspects in individual sphere, the impersonal, embedded in intimate sphere, and the universal behind the private (Bourdieu, 1990. Cited in Türkoğlu, 2009, p. 285) On a parallel line, in our reading of the academia through our stories we are keen on connecting these stories to the social and the universal.<sup>6</sup>

This contextual setting pushes the researchers to dialogue on the field; it enables them to form responsible connections with the social context (Foley, 2002). The researchers are aware of their ethical responsibilities as they observe themselves and their surroundings, and relate to everyday knowledge. In this sense, they are attentive to the risk of thinking ego. This attentiveness is related to the multi-layered nature of our response to the questions of "what constitutes

the field, and where does it start and end" (Wolf, 2009, p. 423). When field, which we step down, step up, enter into, and stand is our own everyday life we eventually control ourselves as writers, each other as readers, and sometimes tend to self-censoring. Taking our works and ourselves as research subjects requires to consider these assets as subjects we continue with strong ethical concerns on the plane between distancing and involvement. In other words, since the narrative that we try to offer unfolds with other academics and institutions, which complement our academic stories, since telling about ourselves is never merely telling only about ourselves we take our steps with ethical deliberation.

This method connects the autobiographical with the social, cultural, and historical, and enables us to develop sociological understanding through subjective stories (Wall, 2008). It involves the argument that researchers' emotions, actions and narratives cannot be particularized; they cannot be locked into the private sphere. The potential in everyday, ordinary and subjective factors for helping us trace the codes of social structure is recognized. It offers us the opportunity to search for the ways to tell a story, and make it scientific, to derive conceptualizations from such stories, and to understand human beings, institutions, and socio-political facts through these conceptualizations (Holt, 2003, p. 11). Hence the argument that the form of our relation to knowledge and academia as an institution cannot be independent of the historical, political and cultural processes through which Turkey's academia is constructed. Moreover, we are called to observe ourselves when analyzing academia, and the institutions, spaces, and socio-political contexts that host the academic culturalization processes, as we observe ourselves.

In this article that starts with the consideration of the ways qualitative researchers relate to storytelling between qualitative researchers with storytelling (Holt, 2003, p. 5) we think that collaborative autoethnography might help us in reading the everyday lives of academics with a view to utopia-dystopia axis. We start with telling our stories with the expectation that they would offer the platform to discuss the issues that address the relations of academic production. In doing so, we think that the method we pursue questions the modern ways of knowing and research without excluding them, thus, it sheds light on different narrative forms.

### Neoliberal States of Subjecthood in Academia: Fragile Looks<sup>7</sup>

As we note above, autoethnographic approach is the dystopia of the modern academia as we have come to know it—white, masculine, bourgeoisie, and hence, for social sciences working through positivist or rationalist knowledge orders. Here, we shall note that we are not talking about mutual exclusion. Instead, we point that the inner contradictions of the knowledge forms that define modern academia render these forms dysfunctional in certain institutional settings that affiliate to certain socio-political dynamics. Autoethnography puts the intimate, and/or personal, and/or subjective into the public and/or the general and/or the objective in the midst of this dysfunctionality. It can thus be read in terms of the long sought balance between the subject and structure. At this point we have to underline that this inclusion is not about the conquest of the public by the intimate, personal and/or subjective. On the other hand, we are well aware of the futility of the claims to represent the general. Hence, we have no such claims.

In this respect, we try to orient the accounts from within the intimate and private spheres to the narrative of the public by means of a shared

narrative, based on our states of being in academia through different stages of neoliberal period. The shared narrative helps us to maintain anonymity of other academics and related institutions. In our narrative we consider the constants of the neoliberal order of things as they have taken shape in the past four decades. These constants are elasticity, consumption value and marketing rhetoric and aesthetics as the decisive mediums in human beings' connection with the environment, in its broadest meaning. The factors that persist in the feminist perspective of a 50+ woman academic who have been involved in different ways and with different titles in Turkey's universities in the past three decades, as well as the radical turns, systematic and discontinuous changes can be read with a view to these constants. It is apt to note that these constants have persisted in contents and forms, which sometimes seemingly contradicted each other, in the academia both institutionally and in individual terms.

If we start with marketing rhetoric and aesthetics, students who started their university education in the second half of the 1980s were invited by the foundation universities—not private, but foundation universities, since they could act in line with the working of free market while they had access to public funding, and when free market was dysfunctional they had the opportunity to rely on state. Universities sent invitation letters, in time e-mails, personally addressing the senior high school students, if possible they advertised on high school campuses and hosted senior high school students on university campuses. Students were addressed individually; initially, as customer individuals, without any expectations that they act as consumers. In the second half of the 1980s the customer-students of foundation universities were not directly invited to consumption. For, then, their competitors were state universities that were founded and functioned on models, preceding neoliberal period. Therefore, the quality of education was still built on the accumulation of knowledge, Weberian responsibility that flowed through the Fordist logic and Kantian citizenship ethics. Thus, the universities were measured according intellectual development and its compatibility in the job market. In this respect, the early stages of neoliberal transformation did not bring in a rapid displacement of the professional individual, loyal to her/his duties that underlined Kemalist Republican ideal of good human being, good citizen (Yücel, 1978). This was a gradual process, involving the transformation of good human-good citizen into good entrepreneur—to student-entrepreneur gaining entrepreneurial skills during university education.

By the late 1990s universities would step into the competitive stage, introducing themselves to potential students through public relations with a touch of advertisement in institutional and spatial terms. First, the foundation universities started to compete with state universities, then they competed with each other, then the competition got deeper among state universities; finally, as the first decade of 2000s came to close competition became the rule of higher education, regardless of the universities' brand. Through this process, the desirable addressees were initially envisioned as customer student-parents, then consumer student/buyer parents, and then consumer student/parents. Thus, an academic who pursues her/his undergraduate studies in the second half of 1980s, and graduate and Ph.D. studies in the 1990s is cultured in the center of this process. S/he can be considered as a typical subject of neoliberal transformation. S/he represents the reproduction and subordination, a wishful reading of neoliberal subjecthood that is relinquished of the potential to build. However, the codes that are acquired, saved in the other acculturation process, behind (approximately) 30 years, contradict with this state of subjecthood. Flexibility as a neoliberal constant lives in this contradiction; it is observed in different forms of

relation, expression, academic identities. It is possible to state that this constant is a touchstone in the relation between subjects and structure, oppression practices, resistance, subjects' manipulative acts on the structure, and the structural dominance on subjects. Above all, the flexibility constant is also significant in depicting the gender dimension of the generation that has been turned into an experimental object in the transition from Fordist to post-Fordist period: working women in the 1990s, with undergraduate degrees in the late 1980s and who were accultured according to the different criteria of both periods turn out to be the most available carriers of this flexibility. Women's flexibility form the common denominator in the transitivity of patriarchy between these two models of production-consumption. To put it differently flexibility constant invites the subjects of a production-consumption model to womanhood; it calls them to compliance, refraining from conflict, claims to desirability, demands for attracting and insecurity.

Then, 1990s differ from the 1980s in terms of the phases of neoliberal transformation process. Since these phases involve different states of subjecthood the definition of academic knowledge, academic environments, academic relations, the forms of academic production change. The constants in this line—flexibility, market value, marketing rhetoric and aesthetics—are shaped and reshaped in accordance with the dynamics of neoliberal phases. The main argument of this article expressed in this continuous change, unfolding, emanating: reading the neoliberal order of things as the dystopia of modern liberal imagination and the claims of this imagination to practice leads to reading the neoliberal implications for universities in institutional and spatial terms is unfolded in this continuous brings in academic dystopias. This state carries a multi-layered series of contradictions. Today in Turkey, the state of the academia, (im)possible academic subjecthood, boutique campuses, condo classrooms, syllabi that are incapable of making contracts, the contract-based relations that faculty develop with their students, colleagues, administrative units and personnel, and even with office attendants in rotation point to the crisis that defines this state of contradictions. As in crisis moments dystopia and utopia both become visible, here, we do not necessarily conclude with a nightmare (Žižek, 2008). Instead, we are talking about a phase, in Gramscian terms when the old dying, and the new is yet-to-be-born.

The subject of neoliberal academia is different in the decisiveness of quantitative criteria—point system for promotion, number of publications, number of the courses taught—in the academic knowledge (re-)production, circulation, and exchange, and the dominance of marketing ethics that divorces academics' relation to the self from their relation with knowledge. In this setting the ways of competition under varying conditions gains significance. As we compete academic spaces are locked into jobs, without any connotations of vocation. This is true regardless of the differences between state and foundation universities. Here, our relation with knowledge is framed on the lines of working hours. However, since flexibility is a constant working hours can be extended, narrowed down; they can be defined in spatial terms; they can be considered beyond spatial boundaries. Thus, the demands for equality is levelled as in the free-market; inviting the market mentality and practices with its contracts, marketing, flexibility and consumption to academic workspaces. Your compliance to working hours are regulated by institutional arrangements, the spaces where you can make your own production programs are continuously blurred. Flexibility is pursued arbitrarily from within the frame of time - space compression (Harvey, 2014). What matters is only the quantifiability of your doings. These

quantifications are coded with such questions as how many publications in how much time; how many courses taught; how many completed theses. The answers are oriented to consumption as they are formulated from within the time-space compression. Hence, they are destined to the gas state of academic production, despite the aspiration for permanence.

The first step in the invitation of free market to the corridors of academia and the entrance of capital into the university spaces take place by the emergence of foundation universities. The following steps are the expansion of their space at the expense of state universities by governmental policies, extending the call to state universities to enter the free market, and the limitation of the quality and quantity in academic knowledge production to neoliberal free market mechanism. This limitation signifies the last step in a woman academic's everyday experiences—who is pushed to feeling special by the invitations from the foundation universities for undergraduate studies in the second half of 1980s; acculturated by undergraduate studies in a state university, based on Anglo-American model and pursued through a certain academic ethics that is in line with Fordist credentials; whose relation to free market is fair, accustomed to competition but mostly with herself—as this is in conformity with neoliberal times—<sup>8</sup> who refrains from the consumptive implications of this competition by means of Weberian priorities of vocation and Kantian ethics of citizenship, forming her relation to knowledge in line with citizen responsibilities, and thus, in whose academic production the use value of knowledge and saving weigh more. However, the flexibility of womanhood in modern patriarchy makes it easier for her to comply with neoliberal order of things. This also marks the final chapter for neoliberal academia. Such an end does not necessarily mean the dissolution of neoliberal subjects all at once. On the contrary, it asks for deepening in flexibility, increase in quantifiability, more consumption of knowledge, circulating knowledge without saving, nullifying it by limitless expansion, and thus, turning knowledge into information. In doing so, it destroys academic knowledge production, and its producer and circulator. It turns flexibility into insecurity, insecurity into doing one's job for the forms of using knowledge, doing one's job into doing work alone, stripping it of collaborative potential. As the connection between academia and free market becomes immediate we observe the blurring of institutional and spatial lines of the former, and that it is left to the uncertainty of fluctuations in the latter. This uncertainty limits our relation with academic knowledge production and circulation to marketing rhetoric and aesthetics.

A woman academic who starts to work in the foundation universities in the second half of 2000s while pursuing her Ph.D studies in a state university experiences only the neoliberal versions of academia. Thus, she is left in the midst of the race that takes place in the re-construction of neoliberal subjecthoods. In this period when measures are taken to ensure the conformity between the myth of entrepreneurial subject and masculine conditions of free market the universities are conquered by neoliberal minds and practices. The students are called to free market; academics are called to ever more performance. As progress by means of accumulation and cooperation, which was once the *sine-qua-non* for academic work is gradually eradicated in a race where individuals in solitude come to the fore, emerging academics are constantly reminded that they are (left) alone in this cumbersome path. The academic milieu where the rise of individual subjecthood is praised and the personal foreruns the public (Sennett, 1976, pp.259-268), also challenges the prospects for universities as public spaces. The rise of stardom in academia, i.e., academics who organize their own public relations, find followers, get as many likes as possible,

encourages the universities to employ academics who can integrate free market conditions to their preferred methods and processes of knowing. University administrations tend to continue with those who can do projects that appeal to free market, connect with industry and private sector, carry the spirit of the times to classrooms and offices, in a way, who read epistemological concerns through the medium of capital.

Considering the emergence of this setting merely on the basis of the actors' subjectivities, regardless of structural dynamics would be inapt. The Do It Yourself (DIY) approach that has gained popularity in neoliberal times might seem to open up autonomous spaces for the academia and academics; in essence, it reminds them that they are on their own: they are on their own, they have to do it themselves in researching, drafting projects, organizing scientific activities and developing funds for all these activities. One indirect example of how DIY is promoted can be observed in the promotion processes where collaborative works are graded in half for each author, while the first author takes the bulk of the grade. This relation to knowledge is built on professionalism, the limitation of academia to the workplace, carries the production process beyond Fordist mechanization to integrate it to the consumption patterns: while academics are pushed to continuously produce—write and publish—each and every publication is deemed to be worn out and thus insufficient, once it is published. This state of insufficiency locates academic existence—at institutional and personal levels—into continuous insecurity and distemporality. But the intellectual background that forms the basis for academic knowledge production always asks for more time, more caution-slowness, and a bit of non-professional aspiration, if not more. In their absence one is left with professional dependence, without a background. When academics limit the institutional frame of knowledge with paying rents this dependence is constituted merely in free market.

In parallel, demands for “work-life balance” that have become widespread especially since the mid-1990s and related institutional and individual steps to that effect have promoted professional forms of relation with knowledge. Today, one of the examples of such forms of relation can be observed in the separation of academic spaces from their public extension, the weakening of their connection with the individual, and thus, their limitation to free market spaces. Hence, the co-existence “work-life balance” with time-space compression, which can be read as one signifier of the unresolvable inner contradictions of neoliberal capitalism, and the emphasis on flexibility that enters into a complicated exchange with the former two point at the unbearable uncertainty in academia.

In modern academia the process of knowledge production and circulation unfolds from the intimate—the moment of reflection—to the private—expressing the thought—and thereon to the public—sharing. Under the academic conditions that parallel Fordist production this line involves measuring the market value of academic performance in a way to support co-production. More briefly, students, candidates for academics and academics in state and foundation universities are motivated for teamwork, without hampering leadership capacities. Here, general criteria are quantitative balance between individual production and teamwork in line with master - apprentice relationship, coding academic quality on the basis of the academics' accumulation, and not DIY, and the defining academic spaces—campuses—as the primary spaces of academic production. The academic universe that emerged to wither away in the process of neoliberal transformation, academic knowledge is re-shaped as information through the

production and circulation processes in accordance with the constants of flexibility, consumption and marketing. This knowledge-cum-information is defined by indefinability, volatility and desirability. Academic knowledge is produced in a long-term process that evolves slowly, asking for slowness. Information, on the other hand, is acquired in a process that prioritizes speed, short-term outcomes, asking for continuous updating, and thus hindering the possibility to suffice with production—it is just data; it is not defined in epistemological terms; it is restricted to a period/moment; volatile; valuable according to the momentary effect it creates—hence, its desirability. Therefore, academics who are invited to subjecthood in neoliberal institutions are expected to be fast; speed in developing ideas, expressing them, in writing, in publishing, in getting points, in deciding, and administering.

The decisiveness of speed is one of the hurdles that new generation of academics have to face. The prioritization of quantity in production, the consolidation of information that is always rapidly acquired—and responding to momentary demands—lead to a form of knowledge that cannot be registered, accumulated, archived. Emerging academics, thus, are anxious about falling behind. The difficulties in the process of publication where the relation among authors, editors and reviewers is supposed to unfold into collaborative production—an important step in the relation to knowledge and contributing to scientific production—reinforces this anxiety. While editorial and review processes as components of scientific publications that are significant for institutional belongingness fall behind developing the manuscript and focus on questioning what and who the writer the feeling of incompetence surrenders the writers. Such questioning is tied to neoliberal structure and can be read in terms of personalistic approach to knowledge, thus reversing the democratic implications of recognizing subjectivity in academic production. In other words, production is pushed to the intimate sphere; it is defined by intimacy. Hence, imposing the intimate on the public, in Sennett's terms, is reflected in the academic world. In this mode of production where neoliberal form of being is locked to the personal, academic forms of being are built on anxiety, feeling of incompetence and resentment the distance between the rational and emotional declines while the separation between the two sharpens. The distance is decreases, for, the neoliberal subject is above all, and mostly called in terms of psyche.<sup>9</sup> At this point, it is apt to note that autoethnography offers space for the path from the intimate to the personal, and thereon to the public, and thus, for the efforts to reclaim the publicness of academic knowledge. This is exemplified especially in considering the emotions: autoethnographic studies that consider emotions not as research subjects, topics and/or tools to explain the (ir)rational but as conduits, enabling and revealing the transitivity between subject(hood) and object(hood) in research processes (Doucet & Mauthner, 2012).

## Conclusion: As Academic Spaces Change

In this article as two women from different generations we try to tell the academic state of being, and each other's experiences in a country, at a moment of transformation in academia worldwide, when the forms of knowing and circulating what is known to which a generation of academics have been accustomed are dissolved, and a younger generation is defined with anxiety, speed and never sufficing quantitative performance since the related new forms are persistently ambiguous. We collaborated in looking at both ourselves and our academic environments. In this phase, which tie to the dystopia of academia what we do in this article and that we can have it published,

that it can find a publishing platform might be read as a methodological intervention to the established and suggested forms of knowing. In this respect, we hope that this intervention also carries with itself those forms of knowing that stand at a distance to the dissolving and suggested ones, insofar as it adopts, in Levitas' terms, "provisionality, reflexivity and dialogic mode" (Levitas, 2013, p. xviii). Provisionality, reflexive look and dialogic mode, in fact, overlap with different feminist interventions to social sciences. Briefly, feminist research in the twentieth century stand outside the dominant, hegemonic forms, and thus, the knower despite the subject since they place the researcher within research, include researcher's position, her/his doings and experiences among the empirical evidence, and finally, claim "provisional epistemologies" (Harding, 1987a, pp. 1-14; Harding 1987b, pp. 186-187).

Academia, in the history of modernity, has offered a relatively autonomous space for the academics in their relations to the knowledge. This was functional in handling the uneasiness, arising from the dependency of academic knowledge to time and space. Academic offices on campuses could never become a room of one's own; but by the extension and partiality of time and to the extent that campus spaces allowed they could be turned into temporary shelters. In the case of Turkey, these shelters could be rendered jigsaw puzzles by means of "retirement due to age limit" at best, and by the coup d'états, at worst. On the other hand, as the socio-political transformation in the country by the 1980s paved the way for greater decisiveness of free market dynamics over the relation with knowledge campus spaces were carried to markets; stretched, thinned down the office walls and their perimeters, stripped them off their privacy, surrendering them to the speed of advanced capitalism. Substantial outcomes of such transformation for academic knowledge production are publishing with ever-increasing speed and in ever-increasing quantity; ever-increasing fast thinking Bourdieu, 1998); visibility in public eyes evermore and evermore frequently; and having a response for every question. The academia of the modern, as we once knew it, is construed with a view to a comfort space that halts, that is expected to halt, and approved by halting the rapid modern processes. In this frame, academic knowledge production embraces the praise of slowness, and this is recognized as a way to balance the desirability of constructive destruction in modernity. Now, the academia of advanced capitalism, always asking for evermore pace might be read to be destined to a dystopia that calls for its own collapse. If the academia that can only exist with such pace and re-lives continuous demise with the same pace, then one might read it as dystopia-in-itself.

At the risk of repetition, it is possible to note that today the transformation of Turkey's academia involves the exclusion of re-thinking the alternatives by means of the reproduction of the dystopia, defined in terms of speed, quantitative priorities, competition, and the turning of relation to knowledge into market relations. On the other hand, it is also possible to underline that from within the same dystopia, knowledge that is not deemed scientific in modernist academia, border knowledge, knowledge of the boundaries, knowledge that is derived, and that evolves from the knowing subject, and that is in constant transformation, as well as related practices of knowing open the way to alternative forms of knowledge production, and hence, to the utopia of academia that is rendered invisible. Certain forms of autoethnography contribute to this process. In this line, feminist forms of knowing cannot be separated from utopia as a methodological intervention to the extent that they involve opposition

to the working of relations of domination and point at alternative positionings (Haug, 2000; Hartstock, 1987).

Here, we have to underline that rather than academic narrations that are based solely on emotions, emphasizing the vulnerability of the heart, the forms of looking, telling, and circulating, which do not ignore the ties between the subjects and structures, and rely on the the knowledge that states of subjecthood, imposed and/or called by the structure also contain the hints of alternatives, and thus, they have a significant role in escaping from the neoliberal utopia and hence liberal dystopia of the academia. In this respect, collaborative autoethnography is an important step for re-thinking the separation between the subject and the object, between agency and structurality; without eliminating these pairs. Feminist autoethnography, which we try to develop in this article is built on this concern: we write in search of a narrative that is positioned between autoethnography that can be read as the mainstream dystopia of modern social sciences and the narrative that loses the subject, which we consider as the dystopia of ethnography, one that neither tells our stories as such nor can be divorced of our stories. To put it differently, we try to underline a narrative that is not personal, that is not lost in solitude, that does not privilege "I", on the contrary, which loses the "I" in shared stories, and rely on the experience of togetherness in everyday life. Then, this is neither a narrative of I and the state of us, composed of two women nor a narrative of structure in academia that relieves is of responsibility. In essence, we try to create a narrative of the process. In this respect, it is the narrative of a state of being for a certain number of academics.

As a final note and as a hint for further discussion, we argue that autoethnography, situated at the borders, and collaborative autoethnography as a cross-border positioning promise not only methodological but also epistemological and theoretical interventions to the existing academic knowledge production processes.

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## NOTES

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republishing. We would like to thank Gülden Özcan who read the first draft of this text and contributed with her valuable criticisms, thus enriching the text. We are responsible for the errors and defaults in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Here, we do not imply that knowledge, valued by benefit is non-problematic. We think that this type of knowing sets the grounds for momentary knowledge. This can be linked to Pierre Bourdieu's (1988) fast thinker and the forms of knowing that related academics attach to.

<sup>3</sup> Here, we use the term, boundedness in two respects: first, we refer to the positioning of feminist methodological interventions on the borders, edges, corners of modern forms of knowing. Second, we acknowledge the limits and restrictions, pertaining to the feminist autoethnography regarding what can be known, what should be known, and what is worth to be known.

<sup>4</sup> Reflexivity has for some time been translated into Turkish as "düşünümsellik". We are not certain whether this translation totally covers the meaning in English. This is why we use "reflexive view".

<sup>5</sup> We borrow the phrase from Behar, 1996, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> For a similar attempt see Hernández, Sancho, Creus and Montané, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> We use this term with reference to Behar's "vulnerable observer". In her autoethnographic works, Behar notes that when researchers form

their connections with research subject and the field as subjects to be analyzed they open themselves to vulnerability. Here, vulnerability and vulnerable writing is related to the responsibility researchers take on when looking at the subject and involvement in the process. The researchers' responsible approach "... does not require a full-length autobiography, but it does require a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly the topic being studied" (Behar, 1996, p. 13).

<sup>8</sup> Richard Sennett ties the self-competitive state of being to the futile search for satisfaction. In this reading, neoliberal subjects are directed to themselves. There are no difference between the identities that are ascribed to them and what they themselves do in institutions. The prospects that they promise are privileged at the expense of their past. In other words, neoliberal subjects can never be themselves, they never become subjects (Sennett, 1976, p. 327).

<sup>9</sup> Here we recognize the Arendtian argument that reading subjecthood in psychological terms is symbolically significant for the imposition of the intimate on the public (Arendt, 1997, p.83; also see, Pitkin, 1995, p. 65).