

Book Review

Fraser, H., & Taylor, N. (2016). *Neoliberalization, universities and the public intellectual: Species, gender and class and the production of knowledge*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

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Across the globe, neoliberal reforms are gradually permeating higher education through the consolidation of the logic of consumerism, the increasing control of productivity, the quantification of the value of academic work, and the marketization of education. We are now faced with this pressing question: how can educators and scholars in higher education assume the role of promoting social justice and defending authentic teaching, learning, and scholarship in this increasingly corporate educational environment?

As part of the series on Palgrave Critical University Studies that looks closely into problems of contemporary reforms in higher education, this book, written by Heather Fraser and Nik Taylor, navigates the negative impacts of neoliberalisation and potential ways to strategically resist the power by neoliberalism through teaching and researching in higher education. Drawing on their intersectional feminist work, the authors assert that the neoliberal agenda is also a patriarchal, classist, and speciesist (anthropocentric) one. This thesis is addressed extensively throughout the book. For example, conventional masculinist values such as productivity, individual success, and competition are closely associated with the neoliberal academic life that devalues the ethics of care, collective action, and nurturing. Anthropocentric logic that perceives nature as the inferior other intersects with the neoliberal imperative that sees drug users and other marginalized groups of people as feral others. The obsession of assessment, surveillance, and audit culture leaves little or no room for the decolonialization of knowledge production.

The starting point of this book rests upon the idea that neoliberalism holds that ‘all goods and services can and should be treated as if they have an exchange value’ (p. 3). Based on this definition, the authors examine the tangled web that the marketization of academia, the commodification of knowledge, and social injustices constitute together. The first chapter lays down the central issues of the book, namely the ascendance of neoliberalisation in academia, its impacts, and the potential ways to resist this ill-conceived tide of reform. In Chapter 2, through narrating their personal experiences as researchers in human-animal and critical animal studies, the authors point out that researchers who work for and with marginalised communities are often themselves marginalised in neoliberalised academia. Within a market-based paradigm, animals’ worth is simply valued in relation to their utility to humans. Studies which do not conform to this ideology and promote animals’ rights are constantly trivialised, dismissed, and asked for

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justification, especially when the work is done by women who are historically perceived to be 'closer to Nature' (p. 34). Following this observation and using their focus group research as an example, in Chapter 3 the authors claim that by connecting marginalised issues as research topics, marginalised methodologies (such as emotionally engaged methodology), and marginalised theoretical frameworks, researchers can create solidarity among different oppressed aspects of the neoliberal university. Further, they can build stronger scholarship that investigates the interconnected nature of oppressive practices to resist the neoliberal paradigm.

Chapters 4 and 5 are two illustrative examples of research conducted by the two authors that examine the negative impacts of neoliberalism on marginalised groups in society. Chapter 4 studies the victims of spousal violence in same-sex relationships who are relocated with their companion animals, where the issues of heteronormativity, domestic violence, speciesism, and neoliberalisation intersect with one another. The fifth chapter focuses on impoverished, addicted drug users who are often stigmatised as a 'feral underclass' (p. 89). The study argues that the recovery of these 'feral' drug users has become more and more difficult in a neoliberal time when the budgets for these communities are repeatedly constrained, when they are faced with increasing humiliation and surveillance, and when the dedicated professionals who aid them are marginalised and silenced through gag orders that prohibit them from speaking out.

Chapter 6 demonstrates the necessity of resistance and introduces concrete strategies which students, lecturers and faculties in higher education could undertake every day to resist neoliberalism and ameliorate its negative consequences. For example, getting to know about causal teachers who are often doctoral students can ameliorate the tendency of individualisation and alienation in academia; opening spaces for social justice advocacy against sexism, classism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression can break the silence enabled by the audit culture surrounding researchers, faculties and students. The authors point out that we should keep working for the public good, especially when the practice is not measured and rewarded by standardised metrics and regulations.

This book creates a striking combination of poignant analyses, personal narratives from the authors' lived experiences, and practical, strategic forms of resistance to neoliberalism in contemporary universities. In particular, the book helps us recognise that the devastating consequences of neoliberalisation are not that easy to notice because the normative power of neoliberalism functions through individuals' internalisation of its seemingly benign core values, such as the notion of personal success, the over-dependence on standardised metrics to evaluate the quality of academic work, and the prioritisation of research over teaching. This all contributes to the sanitisation of knowledge that further affects academics' choice of and support for teaching and research interests. For Fraser and Taylor, the key to resistance is to stop being complicit in producing the mainstream, marketised, and overly individualised forms of knowledge, to keep alive in ourselves a critical consciousness, and to create solidarity with one another in higher education.

While it is situated in the context of higher education in Australia, just as Hannah Arendt says in *Crisis in Education*, we should not think the problems the authors describe and tackle

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here are just local phenomena ‘unconnected with the larger issues of the century’ (Arendt, 1961). This book, with its emphasis on the importance of alliance, intersectionality, and practicality, can serve as a helpful resource for contemporary teachers and researchers not only to explore the complexities of neoliberalisation in higher education, but also to generate more inspiration and thoughtful discussion in the area.

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Arendt, H. (1961). The crisis in education. *Between past and future*. New York: Viking Press..



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