Struggling within and beyond the Performative University: Articulating activism and work in an "academia without walls"

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S Y N O P S I S

In many regions, the past decade has been characterised by significant transformations of models of organisation and evaluation of academic work. These include processes of extensification, elasticisation and casualisation of academic labour, and the institutionalisation of regimes of "performativity" (Ball, 2003), enacted by apparatuses of measurement and auditing (Burrows, 2012). These interacting trends are having significant impacts not only on academic working conditions, but also on opportunities for sociopolitical intervention outside the academy. This article draws on an ethnography of Portuguese academia, and on debates about the "toxic" (Gill, 2010) and "careless" (Lynch, 2010) nature of contemporary academic cultures, to analyse the current (im)possibilities of articulating activism and academic work. I argue that in the present day "academia without walls" (Gill, 2010) this articulation is extremely difficult, but we must reject conceptualising that difficulty as an individual challenge, and reframe it as a structural problem requiring – urgently – collective responses.

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Introduction

It is extremely likely that at this precise moment you are feeling 'exhaust[ed], stress[ed], overload[ed], (…) anxi[ous], [a]shame[d]' (Gill, 2010, p. 229) — that is the key finding of several recent reports of academics' experiences in contemporary universities across the world. These feelings, for long discussed primarily in hushed and exasperated tones by the photocopier, in the departmental staff room, or over conference meals, have in the last decade received increasing critical attention in public scholarly debates, and become the explicit focus of many academic events, university and professional association meetings, books and journal articles. It is no longer a (thinly veiled) secret that in contemporary universities many scholars, both junior and senior, are *struggling* — struggling to manage their workloads; struggling to keep up with insistent institutional demands to produce more, better and faster; struggling to reconcile professional demands with family responsibilities and personal interests; and struggling to maintain their physical and psychological health and emotional wellbeing.

This constant individual struggle to meet rising productivity requirements renders it more difficult for many scholars to be involved in another kind of *struggle*: collective struggles for sociopolitical change and for social justice within and beyond the academy. As María Puig de la Bellacasa argues, "many academics, old and young, have increasingly little *time* to invest (…) in [social] movement[s]" (2002, p. 94, original emphasis) and "these complaints are too frequent to be "personal"" (2002, p. 92). At the same time, however, we might argue – as I will do here – that some of the current transformations in academia have, on some levels, actually created new possibilities for the development of forms of publicly and politically engaged academic practice. In the face of these contradictory pulls, it becomes necessary to adequately understand how the current trends of reconfiguration of the nature and conditions of academic labour shape the (im)possibilities for articulation of activism and scholarly work. This is especially important and urgent within the context of feminist scholarship, a field which emerged from the groundbreaking insight that academic practice and activism can and must inform each other, and which has taken the articulation between the two as *raison*

d'être, *modus operandi*, guiding force and primary contribution to broader debates about epistemology and pedagogy (ATHENA, 2010; Collins, 2013; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Haug, 1987; hooks, 1994; Messer-Davidow, 2002; Neves & Nogueira, 2004; Pereira, 2013b; Reinharz, 1992; Santos, 2012; Stanley & Wise, 1993).[1]

In this article, I seek to contribute to the collective project of problematising these recent trends, drawing on an ethnographic study of academia in Portugal. The material from the ethnography will be my starting point, but the aim of the article is not just to present the *findings*, *possibilities* and *achievements* of academic scholarship; its aim is, also, to show what can get *lost* as we develop our scholarly work, what tends to become *impossible* in the current scholarly context, and what *failures* are produced by that changing context. I begin by presenting my study and summarising its key observations on how the status of women's, gender, feminist studies has been changing amidst broader transformations in academic cultures. I then use interview excerpts from this ethnography to raise questions about the current opportunities and challenges for the articulation of activism and academic work. In the last sections of the article, I explore those questions through the interdisciplinary literature on the conditions of contemporary academic labour.

The negotiation of the epistemic status of feminist scholarship: an ethnographic approach

In 1973/74, Adrienne Rich wrote that "women's studies are (like Third World studies) [seen in the US as] a "fad"; (…) feminist teachers are "unscholarly," "unprofessional," or "dykes"" (1995, p. 130). At around the same time, in Australian universities the field was being described as ""nothing more" than consciousness raising", according to Helen Crowley (1999, p. 137). Indeed, feminist scholars' avowed commitment to articulating academic inquiry and political action was, since the field's emergence, invoked by others as evidence that their work could, and should, not be taken seriously as "proper" scholarship. As Nicky Le Feuvre observes in relation to the French context, "lecturers who have specialised in women's/gender studies are finding that their career paths are hampered by the nature of their research, which, despite often widespread international recognition, still tends to be branded as militant and therefore (implicitly) as unscientific" (2000, p. 180). Therefore, in many countries the field can be said to "langui[sh] toward the bottom of the hierarchy of regard and status of academic disciplines" (Price & Owen, 1998, p. 185) and feminist scholars continue to be regularly dismissed as "not academically qualified" (Chen, 2004, p. 245) and even as "imposter[s] in a university dedicated to the neutral, balanced pursuit of disinterested scholarship" (Boxer, 1998, p. 161). Authors have noted that these claims about feminist work do not just constrain the possibilities for feminist research and study, and the level of circulation of, and mainstream engagement with, feminist scholarship; they also have a detrimental impact on scholars' and students' motivation, self-confidence, and career progression (Griffin, 2005; Griffin & Hanmer, 2005; Marchbank & Letherby, 2006; Morley, 1998; Silius, 2005).

Therefore, in a recent research project I was keen to analyse how feminist scholars and scholarship become marked as not quite "proper" academic knowledge and how that marking is being reconfigured amidst broader transformations in academic cultures. I did so through an ethnographic study conducted in Portugal in 2008 and 2009. This study sought to analyse how – in their everyday practices of academic work and sociability – academics demarcate the boundaries of what counts as 'proper' knowledge, and how feminist scholarship gets positioned in relation to those boundaries. In other words, it was a study of the negotiation of the epistemic status of women's, gender, feminist studies (WGFS)[2] in Portugal. In that project, I propose the term "epistemic status" to refer to the degree to which, and conditions in which, a knowledge claim, or body of claims, is recognised as fulfilling the requisite criteria to be considered credible and relevant academic knowledge, however those criteria are defined in specific spaces, communities and moments. My formulation of the concept articulates three modes of analysis of the processes through which knowledge claims and knowledge producers become marked as authoritative: a) feminist epistemology, especially Lorraine Code's (1995) work ; b) sociological studies of science and higher education, particularly Thomas Gieryn's (1999) analyses of scientific "boundary-work"; and c) Michel Foucault's proposal of the term *episteme* (as redefined in his later work) to refer to an ""apparatus" which makes possible the separation (…) of what may from what may not be characterised as scientific" (1980a, p. 197). Like these authors, I consider that the separation and ranking of claims on the basis of how scholarly or scientific[3] they are is not a process of objective identification of the intrinsic epistemic properties of those claims. Rather, I conceptualise such demarcations as ongoing, context-specific discursive and performative achievements (Gieryn), generating truth- and power-effects (Foucault) in ways that generally reflect, and reproduce, broader sociopolitical structures of inequality that tend to mark "women (and other Others) [as] (…) unknowing" and less credible (Code, 2006, p. 147).

To study these negotiations and their change over time, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork over 10 months (2008–2009) in several academic institutions throughout Portugal. This included participant observation in over 50 public and semi-public academic events (conferences, undergraduate and postgraduate classes, book/journal launches, meetings, etc. across the humanities and social sciences); 36 in-depth interviews with senior and junior[4] WGFS and non-WGFS scholars, undergraduate and postgraduate students and representatives of funding bodies; and research in the archives of institutions who played a key role in institutionalising Portuguese WGFS. Much like other ethnographies of scientific practice, I use "ethnography (…) with discourse analysis components (…) [as a method] furnish[ing] the optics for viewing the process of knowledge production as "constructive" rather than descriptive" (Knorr-Cetina, 1995, p. 141). Therefore, fieldwork material was examined through a discourse analysis approach, drawing both on Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse "as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (2006 [1969], p. 54), and research on the discursive strategies used by scientists when making claims about the status of their, and others', work (e.g. Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984). For more on the methods used and the challenges of conducting ethnographic studies in/of academia, see Pereira (2013a).

Through this study, I found that a range of national and transnational processes – particularly transformation in the models of governance and funding of universities (Pereira,

2015) and the globalisation of academic knowledge production (Pereira, 2014) – have been causing significant transformations in the discourses that circulate in Portuguese academia about the epistemic status of WGFS. For many years, it was common to hear academics say explicitly and publicly that WGFS had no scholarly value or relevance, and thus was not worthy of space in academic institutions; this created significant obstacles to the emergence and development of feminist education and research in Portugal.[5] However, from the mid-2000s, as institutions sought to adapt to changes in scientific policy and manage severe higher education cutbacks (Pereira, 2015), the epistemic climate changed. The recognition that WGFS could have *financial* and *institutional* value (by generating income through student tuition-fees, research funding, or publication ratings) dissuaded many scholars from publicly questioning its *epistemic* value. Thus, there is in contemporary Portuguese academia an increasing public recognition of the epistemic status and relevance of feminist research. This transformation has not, however, been straightforward. Although feminist work is now very commonly framed publicly as capable of generating credible and valuable knowledge, most non-feminist scholars continue to describe it as useful *only* in some instances and in limited ways, and to represent it as epistemically inferior to other approaches or areas of inquiry (Pereira, 2012a). Moreover, the general public climate of greater acceptance of WGFS coexists with a regular unofficial dismissal of feminist scholarship and scholars: claims that WGFS cannot count as "proper" knowledge are frequently made informally and in humorous tone in corridor talk[6] and closed meetings (Pereira, 2015).

This ethnographic study also found that where (as is the case in Portugal and in many other countries) the institutional position of WGFS is relatively marginal and precarious, and its epistemic status is not fully recognised, feminist scholars are always susceptible to being dismissed. Thus, negotiations of the epistemic status of WGFS are ongoing, unrelenting and extremely arduous. This is an observation that has been made many times in the pages of this journal since its launch. In 1983, Rosalind Brunt et al. wrote that when designing a proposal to set up a Masters degree in Women's Studies at Sheffield City Polytechnic (now Sheffield Hallam University), they "underestimated the extent of ignorance and prejudice about the field amongst the backwoodsmen in our institution. One reaction (…) was 'Women's Studies? Whatever next — Budgerigar Studies?' — a comment which clearly equates women with small, brightly coloured fluffy objects which live in servitude and are not noted for their intellectual faculties." (1983, p. 286). Later articles speak of increasing recognition of WGFS, but in a piece published in 1995, Beverley Skeggs draws attention to the "enormous amount of daily effort and politicking" (1995, p. 479) involved in running WGFS centres and explains that "Women's Studies staff have to be constantly clued up to the institutional [and, I would add, epistemic] conditions of being made invisible, being ignored, and, there-fore, losing out" (1995, p. 480). Ten years on, articles in this journal continue to speak of a dismissal of WGFS. Michelle Webber, for example, analyses "the kind of knowledges that students [in a Canadian university] understand to be legitimate knowledge or real knowledge" and finds "a tension between students' notions of an imagined "ideal professor" and the actuality of feminist faculty as knowledgeable" (2005, p. 181), a tension which leads to WGFS teaching being seen by many

students as not legitimate. One aspect of WGFS scholars' practice that seems to have an impact on whether they are "made invisible", "ignored" (Skeggs, 1995) and dismissed by institutions, colleagues and students, and whether they are recognised as credible within academia, is the degree and type of their political activity beyond the academy. It is to this particular aspect of their everyday experience that I now turn.

Articulating activism and scholarly work in contemporary academia: new possibilities?

For many years, researchers with an active involvement in social movements reported that one of the biggest obstacles to maintaining and deepening their political intervention beyond academia was the fact that their institutions perceived activism as a practice incompatible with the production of rigorous and credible academic knowledge (Knopp, 1999; Stanley, 1997; Walsh, 1995). In many academic communities and institutions across the world, active political participation was understood to constitute an undesirable transgression of the supposed fundamental boundaries between science and politics, and between academics and the social world they study. The feminist scholars in the United Kingdom, Sweden and Greece who were interviewed by Louise Morley in the late 1990s reported that their feminist practice was seen by colleagues as "a pollutant in the otherwise hygienic process of knowledge production" (1998, p. 12). Studies and testimonies written by other authors – within WGFS, LGBTQ studies, and other fields (Cascais, 2012; Knopp, 1999; Santos, 2011; Walsh, 1995) – echo this, and unpack "the risks and difficulties emerging from the double-agency status of scholar–activists, that is, academics who are also actively engaged in collective action" (Santos, 2014, p. 9). This literature demonstrates that beliefs that activism equals an unacceptable contamination of academic practice (undermining the value and rigour of knowledge claims) are regularly invoked in different sites and situations to question researchers' work, monitor their activities and block their career progression.

The Portuguese WGFS scholars I interviewed as part of the ethnographic study described above report similar experiences: involvement in social movements and political mobilising is understood in many academic contexts in Portugal as a factor that can undermine, and indeed jeopardise, the validity and credibility of one's work. Two senior feminist scholars based in different institutions and disciplines explained[7]:

> "As long as [the activism] you're doing isn't too significant, no one will say anything. But from the moment that you begin participating too much, then you start getting comments about the problems of contamination of science by activism, you get told that you're producing biased scholarship, and anything you say is liable to be dismissed."
>
> "Some of my colleagues consider that being an activist and carrying out research on the themes that you work on as an activist doesn't give you the necessary objectivity to be able to produce good research. (…) I've been frequently told (…) by my colleagues "you only say that because you're affiliated with [name of political organisation]". I know that some people would like to be more politically active, but they won't do so because they're afraid of having others dismiss their academic work by saying that they only make a given

claim because they are activists of a particular political or ideological orientation. Of course political activity isn't as much of a problem when they're situated in the more mainstream political groups and in the government parties, because that's seen as more acceptable and respectable and less biased. It's worse if your political activity is in less mainstream sectors. The criticism I get is that I mix up research with politics and activism, and so my work is seen as too contaminated by activism, and dismissed on that basis."

According to these quotes, some (though not all) forms of political participation carry the risk of epistemic disqualification. Thus, many scholars in Portugal feel that they have to carefully manage the nature, frequency and visibility of their involvement in activism, in order to minimise disqualification. These efforts become especially significant and crucial for those scholars in junior or insecure positions, or doing less conventional work, because being seen to do "too much", or the "wrong" kind of, activism can further jeopardise their already precarious institutional or epistemic positions, at a heavy cost.

However, this institutional repudiation of the scholarly value of extra-academic social and political intervention has begun to shift in recent years, as the models of governance and evaluation of academic labour have changed, not just in Portugal but throughout the world. Against the backdrop of broader discourses of "austerity", it is increasingly argued in many countries that investment in higher education and science must provide the best value for tax-payers' money, namely by engaging with, and having effects on, communities and sectors outside the academy (Bellacasa, 2001, 2002; Collini, 2012; Santos Pereira, 2004). In Portugal, this has resulted in scholars being encouraged – indeed, in some institutions, expected – to be involved in so-called "extension" activities beyond the academy and to become more pro-active in engaging with relevant stakeholders, policy-makers and other interlocutors. In the UK, a country where these trends are especially pervasive, these principles are reflected particularly clearly and centrally in the changes made in the 2010s to the cyclical nation-wide research assessment exercise, which evaluates institutions' research performance and serves as the basis for the allocation of funding in subsequent years. In the latest round of this exercise, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) (2014), "impact" became one of the elements assessed, with a weighting of 20% of the overall classification awarded to each department.[8] In this exercise, "impact" refers to "[a]n effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia" (REF, 2011a, p. 26). Despite this apparently broad and inclusive definition, there are concerns that the measurement of "impact" is being operationalised in very narrow terms – focused primarily on income-generation for business and industry and direct influence on public policy – and that this will penalise the humanities and social sciences, as well as critical, emancipatory scholarship (Atwood, 2010; Fernández-Armesto, 2009; Holmwood, 2011; McKibbin, 2010).

Many of these transnational changes in governance and policy have explicitly been driven by a desire to reconceptualise and reposition universities as institutions subordinated to, and shaped by, the needs of the economy and the demands of the market, and in this sense they presume and promote an understanding of education and research that clashes violently with key principles of feminist pedagogy and politics (Evans,

2004). And yet, as Bettany (2014) observed in a recent public lecture, "[t]he notion of feminist praxis, broadly conceptualised as the mediation between theory and practice, in order to invoke change, has interesting parallels with the current impact agenda". Indeed, my fieldwork in Portugal shows that these trends can in some instances actually create openings and opportunities for WGFS researchers who wish to articulate academic work with activism. Some of the scholars I interviewed report that in recent years their institutions' views on their activism have begun to shift: if their political intervention is understood as something that can help enhance the social, political and media visibility of their institution, they cease to be dismissed as a "contamination" of scholarly practice, and become reframed as valuable work that may lead to better research ratings and increased recruitment. In those situations there tends to be less resistance to activism on the part of colleagues and managers (although this does not guarantee that WGFS scholars' activism will entirely cease to be disparaged as epistemically disqualifying in corridor talk). This is how one of my interviewees, a senior feminist scholar, described these changes:

> "There used to be more resistance to my [feminist] work, but things are changing now. Departments are now keen for people to produce a lot and do innovative things, with connections beyond the university and the works. (…) If you publish a lot and in important journals, they don't care about you being more political in your work and doing activism. (…) Producing lots is very important for research centres, as it guarantees more funding. Then they no longer worry about you being feminist, it makes no difference (…), as long as you produce and keep producing."

What this interview extract demonstrates very clearly is that the increasing acceptance of feminist scholars' activism is *conditional*: institutions embrace critical research and do not raise problems about academics' activism *as long as* they produce and keep producing. It is precisely this condition of constant and intense productivity that generates what I consider to be the main paradox of the articulation of activism and academic work in contemporary universities. The current transformations in models of academic governance seem to be opening up new possibilities for activism and to be increasing institutional recognition of, and support for, feminist scholars' work with political allies and civil society organisations outside the academy. However, those same transformations in academic governance are imposing strict requirements for enhanced productivity, which significantly limit the time and energy that feminist scholars have available for social and political intervention and for community-based or advocacy research, which generally takes more time and includes "extra layers of labor" (Sprague & Laube, 2009, p. 260). These requirements, and the impossibilities they generate, are the topic of the next section.

Articulating activism and scholarly work in contemporary academia: new impossibilities?

Several authors, writing about a range of contexts in Europe and beyond (see, for example, Bellacasa, 2002; Gill, 2010; Moss & Pryke, 2007), argue that the past decade has been characterised by large-scale transformation and degradation of the working conditions in research and higher education, a process that

both reflects and reinforces broader transformations in the nature of labour in contemporary societies. Two of the major trends observed are the extensification (Gill, 2010, 2014; Jarvis & Pratt, 2006) and elasticisation (Lynch, 2010, p. 57) of the time and space of scholarly work. Adapting Negri's (1989) concept of "factory without walls", Rosalind Gill argues that we are currently working in an "academia without walls" (2010, p. 237). As a result of the vertiginous development of information and communication technologies in recent years, any place and moment can, in principle, be used to do one's academic work. Moreover, in many countries academic work-loads have increased, and the current "normal" workload is so heavy that academics can only complete all their teaching, research and administration duties by working beyond the contracted number of working hours — at night, during the weekend, in the holidays (Butterwick & Dawson, 2005; Gill, 2014; Herbert, Coveney, Clarke, Graves, & Barnett, 2014)… and even on Christmas Eve (Buikema & Van der Tuin, 2013). A survey conducted in the UK by the Trades Union Congress shows that in 2013 54% of education professionals (including, but not limited to, academics) worked, on average, an extra 12 h per week of unpaid overtime, with the number of hours rising every year. According to this study, teachers and lecturers are more likely to work unpaid overtime, and accumulate more hours of unpaid overtime work, than workers in any other occupation or sector in the UK (Grove, 2014). These processes of change dissolve the boundaries between the space and time of work and of leisure, and thus academics (like workers in many other sectors) become always potentially contactable and on duty (Alvanoudi, 2009; Fantone, 2007; Sifaki, 2016–in this issue).

These trends are happening alongside, and in interaction with, another significant change: the institutionalisation of models of evaluation of academic work which are driven by, and based on, logics of *performativity*, a concept developed by Stephen Ball to designate "a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation (…) [in which] the performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as (…) displays of "quality" (…). As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization" (2003, p. 216).[9] These regimes of performativity rest on two fundamental pillars. One is the reconceptualisation of academic activity as work which must aim to achieve the highest possible levels of productivity and profitability possible, and whose quality can and must be assessed on the basis of the number of products produced (whether that be articles, patents or successful – or satisfied – students) and income generated (Blackmore & Sachs, 2003; Burrows, 2012; Collini, 2012; Leathwood & Read, 2013; Lund, 2012; Shore, 2010; Sifaki, 2016–in this issue). As Rosemarie Buikema and Iris Van der Tuin write in relation to the Dutch context, "[b]oth the competitive mode that tenured staff are entrained in and the flexibility that is asked of the non-tenured are predicated on a running-after-the-money that is mind-boggling" (2013, p. 311). Commenting on the situation in the UK, Ursula Huws argues that "we are being forced, over and over again, to go through a dual process which I have called begging and bragging. Even the lucky few in permanent jobs can't escape it" (2006, cited in Gill, 2014, p. 23).

In order to monitor individuals' and institutions' productivity (and hence reward or punish them), it is necessary to design and maintain complex structures of auditing and surveillance (Gill, 2014; Power, 1999; Shore, 2010; Shore & Wright, 2000;

Strathern, 2000), which constitute the second pillar of regimes of performativity. These structures are grounded on extremely complex technologies of metricisation and ranking, which enable and legitimate a "quantified control" of academic labour (Burrows, 2012). An example of this is the growing importance of citation indices, impact factors and other bibliometric indicators in processes of academic evaluation of individual and collective performance. These metrics become reified: they have "taken on a life of [their] own; (…) [they have] become a rhetorical device with which the neoliberal academy has come to enact "academic value"" (Burrows, 2012, p. 361). These metrics are represented as instruments that are merely technical and hence objective, and this representation plays a key role in their affirmation and legitimation as key components of governance (and monetisation) of academic practice. These metrics are, in fact, not neutral: they are produced on the basis of largely arbitrary criteria and very particular definitions of what counts as a quality outcome, they exclude a large number of publications and citation forms, and are computed by large companies in a context of near monopoly (Burrows, 2012; Erne, 2007).

According to Burrows (2012), systems of quantified control have come to occupy such a central and decisive role in contemporary academic cultures in many countries that they cease to function merely as auditing procedures; they also "*enact* competitive market processes" within academia (2012, p. 357, original emphasis), thus directly contributing to the marketisation of higher education and academic knowledge production. Another effect of these structures of auditing and systems of quantified control is that they themselves generate further requirements for intense additional labour, as scholars and institutions are forced to regularly produce reports, portfolios and plans that describe and demonstrate their performance. As Shauna Butterwick writes in an article published in this journal, "the performance dossier I have to prepare every year is (…) incredibly nerve-wracking and time-consuming. It's as if I spend more time preparing the dossier than doing the work that the dossier is supposed to document. Last week I missed an important publication deadline because the dossier deadline came first" (Butterwick & Dawson, 2005, p. 54).

These two trends – the extensification and elasticisation of academic labour, and its reorganisation on the basis of logics of performativity – have unfolded against a backdrop of precarisation of work (Fantone, 2007; Gill, 2014; Lopes & Dewan, 2015) and cuts to funding in higher education and scientific research (Pereira, 2015; Santiago, Tremblay, Basri, & Arnal, 2008). This produces an explosive combination with profound and profoundly toxic (Gill, 2010) impacts on the professional, personal and emotional lives of those who work in academia, particularly in temporary positions (Beetham, 2012; Lopes & Dewan, 2015; Reevy & Deason, 2014). With the number of candidates increasing and institutions keen to hire the most productive candidates, it becomes crucial – indeed, an issue of survival – to produce continuously, as much as possible and at any opportunity. Even when the tasks that compose one's official paid job are completed, one must continue to work to extend the CV and hence increase the chances of securing a job or funding in a few months, when the current temporary contract or grant ends (Lopes & Dewan, 2015; Roy, 2010; Withers, 2013). According to Laura Fantone, "ultimately, (…) a precarious

worker loses any capability to distinguish between the labour market [and] self-improvement" (2007, p. 87).

All of this has impacts on academics' subjectivity (Leathwood & Read, 2013; Shore, 2010). According to Sarah Amsler,

> where the worth of work is judged according to how much surplus economic or cultural value it generates in competitive commodity markets, all workers are haunted by perpetual threats of devaluation, exclusion and "redundancy". Under these conditions, academics labour to prove that we are not unproductive, unprofitable and unfit for purpose, often being pressed into competing against or disregarding each other in order to do so. (…) [It] is exhausting and divisive labour.
>
> [2014, §3]

Ball considers that in these kinds of working cultures "[we] become ontologically insecure: unsure whether we are doing enough, doing the right thing, doing as much as others, or as well as others, constantly looking to improve, to be better, to be excellent" (2003, p. 220). It is instructive to analyse these processes and their effects through the lens of Michel Foucault's (1980b) conceptualisation of regimes of power that function not by prohibition, but by normalisation, self-regulation and self-discipline (Leathwood & Read, 2013). Even when one is not explicitly asked to do so, one works harder and longer, and vigorously reorganises one's life with a view to maximising levels of productivity. As Valerie Hey writes, "[w]e hope that if only we work harder, produce more, publish more, conference more, achieve more, in short "perform more", that we will eventually get "there"" (2001, p. 80).

As a result of this, scholars internalise the monitoring and auditing of academic work, but in many cases are actually more demanding and rigorous with themselves than any employer could be.[10] This leads Rosalind Gill to argue that "academics are, in many ways, model neoliberal subjects, with their endless self-monitoring, flexibility, creativity and internalisation of new forms of auditing and calculating. Neoliberalism found fertile ground in academics whose predispositions to "work hard" and "do well" meshed perfectly with its demands for autonomous, self-motivating, responsibilised subjects" (2010, p. 241). It is, therefore, not surprising that in many countries academics regularly (and increasingly) report acute levels of stress, higher than those found in the general population (see, for example, Catano et al., 2010; Grove, 2012; Reevy & Deason, 2014; and Shaw, 2014).

Kathleen Lynch (2010) argues that these regimes of academic labour presume, and attempt to create, what she calls "care-less workers". For Lynch, workloads are so heavy and expectations of productivity so high that they can only be achieved by workers who have no relationships or responsibilities that might constrain their productive capacities, i.e. workers who do not have to take care of others and who do not take care of themselves, either because they have someone – often a female partner – who cares for them, or because in the name of work they sacrifice rest, exercise and other practices of care necessary for physical and emotional well-being. Lynch focuses on the impacts that these regimes of performativity have on relationships of family, love and friendship, and Sue Clegg (2013) extends Lynch's ideas to reflect on the impact of these regimes on our relations of care for students.

I would argue that Lynch's argument can be expanded further to also think about activism, an activity which I propose conceptualising in this framework as a practice of caring for the local and global communities one belongs to. When we work in a context of precarity and performativity, in an "academia without walls" where we are expected to produce always and at any moment, what time, space or energy do we have left to care for our community, to intervene in it and transform it? For many junior and less junior scholars, the intensification, extensification and elasticisation of academic labour generate a mode of existence where work expands to fill all the time and space available, infiltrating each crevice of our diaries and minds. Institutions may not create formal obstacles to activism, and may even increasingly embrace it enthusiastically in the name of "social relevance" or "impact", as I show in my study in Portugal. However, when there no longer exists a clearly delimited space and time "outside" academic work, and we are so tired and overworked, it becomes exceedingly difficult to realise our desires and duties to care for the community, for others and for ourselves, precisely at a time when those practices of care are urgent and indispensable.

The limits of individual solutions to a structural problem

What can we do, then, to survive and thrive in the "academia without walls", and create opportunities to engage more actively in political struggle beyond it? Perhaps attempt to work faster and smarter, and manage our time more effectively, in order to better articulate academic work and activism? I would argue that this is certainly not the answer, and that in fact we must actively resist framing the issue in those terms. For many feminist scholars, the most immediate reaction to these structural problems is conceptualising the impossibilities outlined above as a personal failure. Many of us say to ourselves that "I could do more activism if I were more productive, got up earlier, organised my time better, and were more efficient with my e-mail. Others seem to be able to do it so if I can't it must be my fault!". To try to cope with these apparent individual failures, we seek individual solutions centred on enhancing our working practices and adjusting our lifestyle. As Sandra Acker and Carmen Armenti found in two studies in Canada, many female scholars respond to increasing pressures in academia by regularly "work[ing] harder and sleep[ing] less" (2004, p. 3) over very prolonged periods, a strategy that unsurprisingly has extremely negative impacts on their health and family life (see also Herbert et al., 2014; Shaw, 2014). Bellacasa explains that "[t]oday's [working] conditions [in academia] are naturalised, reified: it is *reality*, we have to adapt to it (and) (…) survival depends on individual adaptability" (2002, p. 98, original emphasis). Indeed, what many feminist academics do to try to cope with contemporary academic pressures is to focus on *adapting* to them: we work on the self and tighten self-regulation and self-discipline; we "go without sleep to produce a better curriculum vitae" (Acker & Armenti, 2004, p. 21); we purchase gadgets, download apps and read books that promise to make us more productive; we design and manage our timetables with military precision; we organise our environment and diaries with an eye to maximising opportunities for multitasking; we attend courses on project management, on speed-reading, on time management and priority-setting, on controlling our email inboxes (Gill, 2010, 2014) and even on

"resilient adjustment" to academic and institutional change, often organised by our universities.

There is no doubt that changing our practices and behaviours can be useful in addressing the structural problems above, especially if what drives those changes is an effort to create boundaries or "walls" around academic work, with a view to limiting the space and time we dedicate to it. However, it is absolutely crucial to resist this tendency of individualisation of the problem and of our responses to it. We must resist it because individual solutions are *ineffective*. In an article published in this journal over 20 years ago, Chris Ruggiero (1990) provides a compelling argument for the need to repoliticise WGFS teaching amidst changes in academic cultures. Ruggiero writes "[m]any of us will claim that we don't have the time for this kind of [close, sustained work with students]. To this I say nonsense; we can make it a priority" (1990: p. 474). I and many others no doubt agree with this sentiment… But as Ball argues, "prioritization becomes impossible" (2003, p. 220) in education systems which produce and promote a constant sense of urgency and where workers feel always monitored and assessed.

We must resist the tendency of individualisation also because it is *dangerous*. If we frame the contemporary impossibilities of academic labour — staying on top of our email; doing everything on our to-do list; juggling research, education and administration whilst achieving excellence in all three; taking proper care of ourselves, of others and of our communities; articulating academic work and activism — as personal limitations or problems to be resolved individually, we internalise the logic of performativity. In so doing, we normalise the scandalous intensification and extensification of academic work, and reinforce it by modelling unsustainable lifestyles and working practices to our students and younger colleagues (Vihlman, 2009). Approaching these problems through the lens of personal adaptation (Bellacasa, 2002) reproduces neoliberal modes of governmentality that frame structural problems as matters of individual responsibility that can best be solved by self-regulation and self-improvement (Ball, 2003; Gill, 2010, 2014).

As quickly as we may be able to read or as many tasks as we may be capable of doing simultaneously, we will not succeed in coping with these toxic impossibilities only through individual tricks and tweaks; we need – urgently – actions of collective resistance. I would echo María Puig de la Bellacasa's claim that "[t]he present world is challenging indeed, but there are other answers to challenges than *adaptation* to current practices and discourses" (2002, p. 106, original emphasis; see also Davis, 2011; Pereira, 2012b; Sifaki, 2016–in this issue). We must radically change the way in which we think about ourselves and our work. We must realise that nothing is wrong with, or lacking in, us, and stop fixatedly striving to do ever more and always better. It is a tempting strategy, because it can make one feel reassuringly in control and often produces its own "perverse pleasures" (Hey, 2004; see also Leathwood & Read, 2013). It is also a necessary survival strategy at times, especially for academics in marginal fields such as WGFS, as I have demonstrated through my study in Portugal (see above and Pereira, 2015). But this strategy simply does not work. It is in the nature of a performative, intensifying and rankings-based system that the labour is never complete and never enough. As Joey Sprague notes, "[t]he quantity standard for research productivity is such that a faculty member can never have too many publications" (2013, p. 14). In contemporary academic

cultures, our work goals are an ever-receding horizon that cannot be reached. Once we have realised this, we must continue to keep realising it over and over again… As Roger Burrows writes, academics "know [all] this; yet somehow we feel unable to reassert ourselves" amidst the "deep, affective, somatic crisis [that] threatens to overwhelm us" (2012, p. 355). Indeed, it is extraordinarily easy to forget this realisation amidst the unrelenting incitement for "more, better, faster!" that characterises dominant discourses in present-day academic cultures.

The importance of "talking about it"

Precisely because it is easy to forget that realisation, it is not enough to make personal changes to how we see ourselves and engage with our work. We must regularly and publicly denounce these problems as structural. As Acker and Armenti write, "[g]oing without sleep will not change things but talking about it might" (2004, p. 21). In all the five occasions in which I presented the ideas discussed in this paper – separate academic events in different countries and with distinct audiences – more than one delegate was moved to tears by the relief of seeing someone publicly "break the silence" and make visible "the hidden injuries of the neoliberal university", to use Gill's (2010) title. These audience reactions are not unusual. In his article on the embodied experiences of scholars struggling to cope with academic audit cultures, Andrew Sparkes includes comments from some of his readers. One reader, an early-career male academic, writes "[t]he end result of reading [this article] was – I had to lock my door – I cried… Maybe, if I'm being honest, perhaps I also cried for myself — which surprised me. I wonder if I'm cut out for this game. How can I survive in it? Do I want to do this? Do I want to be part of this? Am I really any good? And I hope it moves people to some form of action. It has stirred 'something' in me." (2007, pp. 541–542).

Therefore, we must create within our institutions supportive environments where we can "tal[k] about it" (Acker & Armenti, 2004, p. 21). It can be extremely effective, for example, to set up fortnightly or monthly meet-ups over lunch or coffee, where colleagues can step back from the hectic pace of academic labour, resist the (often self-imposed) pressure to use one's working time always and only to do "productive" things, and get together with other colleagues to discuss the toxic effects of these working conditions and to provide peer support. Pro-actively setting up such meeting spaces – whether physical or virtual – also helps to overcome one of the key obstacles to a collective debate about, and reaction to, contemporary changes in academic cultures: the fact that in the "academia without walls" many academics spend most of their time working within closed walls in isolation, rarely engaging with their colleagues outside of meetings or hurried greetings as they pass each other in corridors on their way to teaching. As one of the peer reviewers for this article insightfully noted, "the irony [is] that while we experience intensification and elasticization of our academic work, academics are rarely in their offices. Like many of my colleagues, I do a lot of work at home (on weekends, late evenings, etc.) and when I am on campus, there are few others there. So in a strange way the physical campus has emptied out [while] all the while the workload increases."[11] In the present context of isolated and time-pressured working, where we are

often too distant or too busy to have meaningful conversations with colleagues, scheduling regular meetings can remind us to keep the structural nature of these problems in full view and create the conditions to discuss and develop collective responses to them.

But such conversations cannot be limited to these kinds of "safe" spaces… In our everyday interactions with colleagues, line managers and students, we must make the effort to regularly articulate the unsustainability of the current workloads and working practices, verbalise the unachievability of "normal" expectations of productivity, and voice the importance of creating walls around academia and of nurturing a "care-ful" – as opposed to "care-less", in Lynch's (2010) sense – life beyond it. It is easy to dismiss this sort of talk as ineffective, self-centred whining, or as a potentially risky exposure of one's own weakness and incapacity to "keep up". However, I would argue that naming these issues – in PhD supervision sessions, department meetings, annual reviews, conference papers – can have profoundly transformative effects, because it works to interrupt the normalisation of ludicrous expectations of productivity and to puncture the illusion that this is, and will always inevitably be, the nature of academic work. In so doing, that naming can hopefully "stir something" in people and "mov[e] [them] to some form of action" (Sparkes, 2007, pp. 542).

We must not underestimate the power of academic "small talk" as a site of reproduction, and potentially of disruption, of these toxic academic cultures, particularly the small talk that happens between senior scholars and the more junior colleagues to whom they model academic working life. It is crucial for us to think more reflexively and responsibly about the messages we convey in those apparently inconsequential interactions. I am reminded here, for example, of the chats I had with PhD students whilst working as a junior lecturer on a fixed-term contract in a British university. I would often bump into them on Friday evenings, as I left the office to go home, and they would ask politely about my plans for the weekend. Always feeling stressed about how much I had failed to complete that week and how much work I would have to do at the weekend to catch up, I would invariably list the marking or writing or lecture planning that awaited me during my "time off". It was only much later that I realised that this weekly ritual of highlighting the work I planned to do at the weekend (rather than the leisure activities and activism that I also spent time on and very much looked forward to) misrepresented my life as a lecturer, modelled a "care-less" academic subject to more junior colleagues aspiring to work in a similar position, and normalised the notion that working regularly at the weekends is not only acceptable, but indispensable and unavoidable.

A little less adaptation, a little more (collective) action

All in all, to engage sustainably with contemporary changes in academic cultures we must spend less energy on *adaptation*, i.e. on improving our individual working practices. Instead, we must spend energy on developing collective efforts of *transformation* of the conditions of work, within and beyond academia. We must spend less time trying to not "waste" time and guaranteeing that all moments of our day are as productive as they can possibly be — as many doctoral training sessions and academic self-help books suggest. Instead, we must spend

more time developing collective strategies to resist the framing of productivity as the key goal in academia, to fight the external incitement (and personal compulsion) to produce always more, and to demand the right to stop and not be always productive.[12] There is no doubt that we are all exceptionally tired, constantly anxious and absurdly overloaded, that our email inboxes are overflowing and that we are "behind" on our work (Davis, 2011; Gill, 2010, 2014; Leathwood & Read, 2013; Sparkes, 2007)… but diving even deeper into academic work to "catch up" is not and must not be the answer.

Making these changes is not easy to do, as the experience of producing this article itself shows. I wrote some of the sections late at night, sacrificing sleep, and other sections during a bank holiday, sacrificing time with my friends and partner (who is also an academic, and spent the day marking undergraduate dissertations). I revised the article following peer review whilst on maternity leave, running upstairs to try to get as much writing done as possible before it was time for my baby's next feed. On one particular day during the initial writing period, confronted with the realisation that a section of the article was going to take longer to write than I had hoped, I suddenly found myself seriously considering if I should stay in the office to finish it, instead of attending the monthly meeting of a local feminist organisation I am involved in. The irony of this inconsistency with the principles I defend here is certainly not lost on me, and I would argue that it demonstrates clearly how entrenched these thinking patterns and working practices are.

However, there is no doubt that we must resist them — strenuously and immediately. The changes and challenges facing us are different in each country, institution, discipline or department, and so it is not possible to find one-size-fits-all strategies for transformation of academic cultures. But with public higher education and the welfare state under threat in several countries in Europe and throughout the world, we must urgently work together with colleagues, students and those outside universities not just to reflect critically on our conditions of labour, but also to strengthen the links between academic work and broader collective action for social justice. This is not the time for individual and isolated work within closed walls; it is the time to construct a different kind of "academia without walls", one where we can engage more closely with what happens outside the university and make sustained efforts to link up with old and new social movements. We must cease to try to catch up with work, and instead focus on catching up with the world beyond work, creating stronger and richer articulations of activism and academic practice.

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Endnotes

[1] Views on exactly how feminist activism and feminist scholarship relate to, and should engage with, each other are, nevertheless, extremely varied and contingent (Hemmings, 2006). Indeed, this topic has been the object of particularly intense contestation since the emergence of academic feminism, and is arguably one of the most fraught axes of tension in feminist debates historically and in the present, as several articles published in this journal attest (Ackerly & True, 2010; Bird, 2002; Evans, 1983; Hey, 1983; Lowe, 1984).

[2] Choices about the field's name are contested and play out differently across national contexts (Hemmings, 2006). Whilst I acknowledge the importance of these debates, I do not have the space to engage with them here, and thus use this umbrella term to refer to the field. For a more detailed discussion of this, see Pereira (2011b).

[3] In line with its common usage throughout most of continental Europe and in much of Foucault's work, the term 'scientific' is used here in its broader sense, to refer to *academic* or *scholarly* forms of knowledge production, including those in the social sciences and humanities.

[4] "Senior scholar" refers to scholars who at the time of fieldwork held full-time, paid academic positions and had completed their PhDs more than five years previously. "Junior scholar" designates scholars who did not hold full-time, paid academic positions and/or did not have PhDs or had held a PhD for less than five years.

[5] The first WGFS degree programme, an MA in Women's Studies, was established in 1994 at Universidade Aberta, and the first (and thus far only) WGFS journals – *ex aequo* and *Faces de Eva* – where launched in 1999. The 2000s saw a marked increase in numbers of postgraduate programmes, publications and conferences. For English-language overviews of the history of WGFS' institutionalisation in Portugal, see Ramalho (2009) and Pereira (2011b).

[6] I use this here in Gary Downey's et al. sense of "the unsaid, but frequently said anyway (though not to everyone)" (1997, p. 245).

[7] All quotes are my translations from interview material originally in Portuguese.

[8] In the original REF proposal, "impact" had a weighting of 25%, but this was reduced to 20% following protests from, and consultation with, the academic community. The Higher Education Funding Councils which run this exercise have expressed "the intention of increasing this [weighting] in subsequent exercises" (REF, 2011b, p. 1).

[9] Ball (2003) proposed this concept in the context of analyses of contemporary transformations in the working conditions of teachers in primary and secondary education in the UK. However, the term has been adopted and adapted by other authors to examine the nature of present-day academic labour (Blackmore & Sachs, 2003; Butterwick & Dawson, 2005; Leathwood & Read, 2013; Lynch, 2010).

[10] This phenomenon is, I would argue, especially evident amongst feminist academics, for two reasons. Firstly, many feminist scholars see their academic practice as a vocation and a form of political and ethical intervention in the world (rather than just a "9 to 5" job), and are therefore sometimes more willing to make significant personal sacrifices in order to develop their research, to offer more emancipatory (and frequently more time- and labour-intensive) forms of teaching (Pereira, 2012b), or to provide closer support and pastoral care to students. Secondly, and as I noted above and elsewhere (Pereira, 2015), in contexts where the institutional position of WGFS is relatively marginal and precarious, feminist scholars are always susceptible to being dismissed as inferior academics. Maintaining very high levels of productivity and complying with the norms imposed by contemporary modes of academic governance becomes, in these situations, especially important, because it can increase the chances of these scholars being hired, being taken seriously by their colleagues and institutions, and being allowed to continue their critical research and teaching.

[11] I would like to thank the reviewer for drawing my attention to this point.

[12] As the working group on "Art and Culture" of the anti-austerity Occupation of Largo do Rossio (Rossio Square) in Lisbon (Portugal) proposed in its People's Assembly on May 27, 2011.

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