



Visibiling violence : co-writing differently about violence in academia : an alter-ethnography

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Research question

How can a collective alter-ethnography - co-writing differently - visibilise and deepen the current understanding of violence in academia ?

Context: violence in neoliberal academia

- Neoliberal principles have transformed research and higher education: the large-profit firms have been promoted as the model to follow, and market competition as the most efficient logic to organise the academic field and 'rationalise' processes (Letiche *et al.*, 2017).
- This materializes in cost cutting, increased competition between academics, and between institutions, constant monitoring of individual performances based on metrics and rankings, and commodification of research and education (Alakavuklar *et al.* 2017, Jones *et al.*, 2020). T
- Dramatic rise of multidimensional precarity and pressures (e.g: Loher & Strasser, 2019; Ivancheva *et al.*, 2019; Krysa & Kivijärvi, 2022),
- a destabilization of academic identities, relationships, and solidarity (Lipton, 2019) and increase in workaholism (Clarke and Knights, 2015) and mental health issues (Morrish 2019 ; Smith and Ulus, 2020).
- More than a consequence of the neoliberal university, **violence appears as a structuring organizing principle** (Bristow et al., 2017, Ratle et al., 2020

Context: violence in academia

- Violence is both (omni)present and absent (Costas and Grey, 2019) due to the invisibilisation and normalisation of violence, which cannot be named, heard, and sometimes recognised as such by academics themselves.
- Consequences of neoliberalization are experienced intimately and corporeally by academics in isolation and competition, such as identity threats linked to bullying (Zawadzki & Jensens, 2020; Migliaccio *et al.*, 2024; Sambrook, 2024), dehumanization (Cooper & Majumdar, 2024), discriminations and mental health issues (Haynes, 2024).
- It is difficult to recognize in this series of peculiar individual experiences that cannot be shared, the systemic consequences of the neoliberal university, and when experiences are voiced, they are discredited and silenced (Shymko *et al.*, 2024; Majerski, 2024).
- Second, there is an ambivalence about the position and agency of academics towards violence: academics are not passive victims, they are shaped by experience of violence, reproduce (Zawadzki & Jensens, 2020) and resist it (Bristow *et al.*, 2017).



Method: Collective alter-autoethnographies as a method and a process (emergent)

- 7 colleagues
- Individually wrote our stories and circulated by email
- Then told our stories of violences in academic and beyond (historical and actual)
- Recorded – chat comments often made during the recital
- Discussion and links between stories
- Revision of written accounts
- Discussion of next steps: healing, defense vs. resistance etc.
- Pallesen, E., Resch, B., & Hoyer, P. (2025). Resonant listening: embracing vulnerability as generative in dialogic organizing. *Organization Studies*



Resonant listening

“1) emphasizes vulnerability as generative for listening, 2) moves listening beyond the horizon of a stable human subject, and 3) attends to how different spatial compositions condition listening in particular ways”

“embraces a radically relational and processual notion of the body as disintegrated, ambiguous and fluid, and emphasizes the creative aspect of listening as bodily differentialization, the creation of new sense-abilities - capable of listening other voices and bodies into speech”



Eva Pallesen, Bernhard Resch & Patrizia Hoyer (2025)



Spiral Dance

The spiral echoes Pauliina Jääskeläinen's practice of dance: *"I think it is something that I have learned in my dance therapist's training; to listen to and trust the forms that are born through my body in that safe "state." Thereby, for me, writing embodied generosity has to do with what becomes possible to write, through that generous stance toward oneself, toward others, as well as toward writing itself"* (p. 1408, Jääskeläinen and Helin, 2021).

- Starhawk (Elsa Dorlin)

Data analysis : a greek chorus

- Lucia: June 13th, 2024. Devastated by the evaluations I received from two promotion committees. 10am, a 'visio' call from a parisian hotel room with Céleste, who is also affected on her side by formerly weak signals that are now strengthening: violence, mischief in her work environment. I tremble, but I dare, for the first time. As if Céleste has unlocked my jaw - to speak of the emotions I feel: hate, profound disgust of human nature around me. Listening to me, she coated me with her sweet voice, appeasing. She invites me to realize she will be always there, to envision the afternoon at [Institution] for a second PhD thesis report in 6 months. I was blind because of anger, and she opens my eyes, she gives me a momentum to free the voice(s), to build a collective."



Joining the dance, bringing stories and emotions together

- Athéna: For young people, acknowledging such violence is often challenging as societal pressures compel us to conform and succeed, leading us to bury these painful moments. As older members of the group, we have begun to confront these resurfacing experiences. This reflection prompts me to encourage younger participants, like Zoé, not to bury their stories. It is crucial to speak in safe spaces like this, where older members can emphasize the importance of collective protection for those who share their experiences.
- Zoé: Even though I met Lucia before, we were strangers with the weird feeling of knowing each other through articles, or reputation. When I could finally dedicate time to her, to really meet her in person, I remember holding my breath: can I be brave enough to tell her part of my story? I told her, despite previous disclosure having been used against me in the past. I told her too, that I had no clue on Céleste's point of view on the painful events that happened to me, and slightly paranoid -did she know, did she bystand... did she even... approve-? I even confessed how I actively avoided being formally introduced to her [Céleste] last year at a conference, not to confront her. Through this re-connection, I realized how this situation, where I was actively disconnected from Céleste's experience, led me to stereotype her as "the privileged professor", not a human being who faced simultaneously extreme destabilizing".
- Céleste: Our project has emerged (for me) as a special (enchanted) space of catharsis, collective support, care and activism. It arrived at a time of despair and despondency became an outlet for anger and outrage and is leading to recovery and rebuilding. Most importantly it has turned into an invitation and commitment to put my hard-fought, well-honed academic tools to work to challenge this violence on our own patch!

Result 1 : creating spaces to address the violences of the neoliberal university

- Hybrid community space : an « in between » but not a « no-where »
- Affective solidarities
- Micro-foundations of a heterotopia ?
- Affective collective space of friendship and reciprocity... And its fragility





- Relationnality : how does this collective writing process help us to visibilise violence and to deepen our understanding of violence in academia.
- How do we answer to our research question : we create a space and a method...

Result 2 : our collective writing process

- “Collective care as our defense”.
- we need to defend ourselves collectively and to develop a sense-caring community...
- Also ‘academicising’ conceptualising our experiences as a type of ‘academic care’?
- Robinson, S.K. and Kerr, R. (2009a) 'The symbolic violence of leadership: a critical hermeneutic study of leadership and succession in a British organization in the post-Soviet context' *Human Relations*, vol. 62, no. 6, pp. 875-903.
- Parker, M. (2014). University, Ltd: Changing a business school. *Organization*, 21(2), 281-292.
- Sambrook, S. (2024). An organisational autoethnography of learning to manage academic workplace bullying through micro-resistance and activism. *Management Learning*, 13505076241289174.

Ways forward?



Ways forward : toward a conceptual framework of collective care defense

- Ellsa Dorlin claims that Gilligan essentializes the qualities of Care as feminine
- She argues that when you're alienated from the dominant: you're constantly thinking about them and you take care of them in a negative way to defend yourself from them.
- She demonstrates that people in the Care professions are oppressed people who take care of others. It's a dependent relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor.
- Care is a positive result of a socio-historical negative process about... Colonization, racism, violence against women... Different types of oppression !

Defending oneself...

- Juliette Cermeno (2024), Se défendre, l'autodéfense féministe face à la violence organisationnelle de genre. Féminisme et management – Etat et enjeux de la recherche francophone, sous la direction de Nancy Aumais et Léa Dorion, PUL, 2024, chapitre 15, p.337-365

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- Studies how women can defend themselves from masculine violence in organisations
- Special training for women to defend themselves physically and verbally
- Bisexual defense writing

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