

Confessions of a Neoliberal Scholar

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One of the central claims I have made in my recent work, is that neoliberalism has infiltrated deeply in my scientific discipline, and that a majority of research is profoundly influenced by the beast that is neoliberalism – the rhetoric of freedom that captures anyone in the prison of capitalism - and I have used examples of research by others in which neoliberalism clearly manifests, but without taking into account explicitly, just sometimes only very implicitly, my own very neoliberal assumptions, which have shone through my own research but was never really discussed to the extent that it needed to be discussed, as a matter of self-reflection and openness concerning my position in contemporary science, and in particular the fields of management, organizational behavior and organizational psychology, which thus calls for a critical reflection on my own position, to be used as a matter of openness but more profoundly as an indication of how I myself am also caught up in the system, very much part of it, contributing to maintenance of the system, which makes a step outside of it, outside of ideology, a painful one, as it exposes my own contribution to the system, and even worse, myself profiting from the system, in my rapid rise through my career from PhD student to professor, a career that has only been able to process due to the system, an awareness of mine which calls for a reflection of how I dealt with and succeeded in the system, and now, being critiqued for critiquing the system, if only by myself or by a silent other, I have to face the reality and position my own responsibility vis-à-vis myself, my colleagues, and more generally society, a responsibility that unfolds from the first day as a PhD student, quite frankly naïve, knowing little about the world of academia, willing to work and study and publish to be part of the system, having applied to a position for a PhD-ship on a project that was not mine to come up with, taking it as a project that would very slowly become part of myself, but more fundamentally offering an opportunity of comparison of what has been done in the past in terms of research on psychological contracts of older workers, finding out the gaps in the research, taking it as a project that one has to work on, legitimized by the necessity of the aging population which would allow for any study using comparisons of younger and older workers of their attitudes, responses and behaviors to obtain wider understanding of their relevance for the organizational beast, swallowing the business case as breakfast, calling for more around coffee time, and starved by lunch time, give the beast something to eat, a study showing the moderating role of age in this relationship between X and Y, it does not matter what it really is, as long as it makes sense on paper, feed the machine as that is how you survive and flourish,

pretend the importance of it and ignore that fundamental emptiness that is particularly prominent when presenting these models and results on conferences, or worse for practitioners who bluntly ask what the meaning is of the research that always shows what we already knew, well, that is to confirm our suspicion that the world is exactly how we portray it to be as long as we stick to our world views, not really ever wondering why the term psychological contract was a metaphor, a neoliberal one as well, yes, Harvey in his book on neoliberalism indeed explained contracts as the dominant form of relating to each other, an argument which was already swallowed long ago in the term psychological contract, which I readily adopted, arguing that the contract is a metaphor, nothing is really signed as one does not have to sign to agree to be used in the way a psychological contract theory would argue, taking into account the emotional numbing of older workers to the extent that they do not care anymore, obviously stated in much more scientific terminology, when it is called emotion regulation strategies, showing that betrayal of an employee can be mitigated, show some support, and everyone will pretend nothing happened, or at least invisible at the level of quantitative measurement, as invisible as the underlying neoliberal ideology underpinning the research, my own research moving towards individualization as the primary core of the neoliberal ideology, in the individualized arrangements which employees asked for, corroborated in the meetings with health-care organizations which damned the outdated labor agreements and protective regulation under the rhetoric of personalized choice and tailor-made arrangements, made into Taylor-made arrangements, exploitation by divide-and-conquer, taking away the possibility of collective action to the education and upbringing of a new generation for whom collective is a meaningless word, not to be taught anymore at universities, absent across my work focusing on the individualized work experience, the feeling of being alone in the workplace, self-reliant in direct negotiation with the employer without taking into account the very existence of others – just counting people in isolation, together they can only form a dataset, joined through a shared department number, shared aggregated HRM practices as the ultimate form of collectivity, the averaging of each individual experience as a proxy of shared understanding, limited to the extent that neoliberalism proclaims that there is no such thing as society, fully integrated into the very thinking around psychological contracts, idiosyncratic deals, aging populations and workforces, and flexible work arrangements, neglecting the system that I was caught up myself in, thriving through the system, remembering the cynicism about the publishing game I expressed to a professor which remained unresponded, and which revolved all around knowing the tricks of how to publish, not meant entirely as cynicism but as a first attempt at understanding something around the meaninglessness of publications with no

message beyond contributing to maintenance of the system, as it was indicative of wanting to get out of it, but also realizing that the real pain is in the awareness of being caught in the system and not stepping out of it due to vanity and a deep-felt lack of capabilities in any other domain, slowly processing through the system, being processed by the system, being fed to the beast myself, and now being fully inside, touching upon the walls of its inner void, looking around me in the darkness, the hole that we were swallowed by but which meant nothing more than the emptiness that started it all, only now being lit by a Google Scholar index, a list of publications, and thus visible on a platform of extrinsic success, being seen for what I am not but deeply am, every gesture interpreted in the ways that suit the viewer, notwithstanding the intention of the writer as the dialogue is missing, alienated by being in the system and knocking to get out in the dark, a mea culpa for this, now perceiving an individual responsibility for my own actions, in retrospect towards prospect, a willingness to act upon my felt responsibility and my past as parasitizing upon the system, thriving and now spitting out myself, having become a beast feasting on prey that needs to be restrained, swinging on the end of the pendulum from the inner core of the system till the outer shapes of desolate landscapes, this is my confession as a neoliberal, wishing to step out and looking for dignity.