You're trouble you are, just like your mother! An intergenerational autobiographical narrative on activism in Higher Education

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Abstract: This paper draws on autobiographical interviews of a mother and daughter concerning their experiences of working in higher education to explore the changes in university teaching and research in the UK and also the possibilities of challenging prevalent normative assumptions about aims and purpose. It uses the qualitative methodology of narrative enquiry, particularly in its focus on temporality, sociality and place, to create a co-constructed account which is able to expose critical events, possibilities and limitations for higher education 'activists' in the recent past and present. It will be shown that the quality of the relationship between the two researcher-participants had a significant impact on the quality of the data generated, and that together the relationship and methodology promoted interpretation and analysis in 'uncommonly accelerated ways' (Carillo & Baguley, 2011). At the same time, it created moments of discomfort and misunderstandings about ideological perceptions. It was found that while there were some similarities at least initially between the experiences of the two interviewees in their capacities both to perform to work expectations and to take an activist position, substantial differences were identified due, in particular, to generational intellectual schisms as well as shifts in higher education from elitist institutions promoting public good to mass, neo-liberal institutions with performative and institutional goals and practices.

> The European dream of becoming 'the most competitive and knowledge-based economy of the world' (European Council, 2000) has marked the transformation and modernisation of social welfare and education systems….
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> When policies and institutional practices based on competence, efficiency and competition are stressed, ideals such as equity and social community tend to become secondary (Arnesan, 2011)[1]

Introduction:

This paper explores the changing historical context of university teaching and research in the UK and how possibilities of challenging dominant assumptions about aims and purpose have shifted over the decades. Changes that we have seen include: the shift from elite to mass higher education, reduction (per capita) in financial resources, increased commodification of knowledge, competition and privatisation, increased accountability and quality assurance measures, increase in mobility of people, knowledge and consumer choice, and speeded up

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[1] Quoted from Anne-Lise Arnesan, Elina Lalhema, Lisbeth Lundahl and Elisabet Öhrn, (2104) Chapter 1: Unfolding the context and the contents: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Nordic Schooling, in Anne-Lise Arnesan, Elina Lalhema, Lisbeth Lundahl and Elisabet Öhrn, eds., *Fair and competitive? Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Nordic Schooling*, (London: Tufnell Press) p. 2

communications and networking. [2] The title of the paper comes from a remark made to Saira after she had challenged her then head of department over a minor point of discussion, and refers to the fact that Saira's mother (Gaby) is a relatively well-known academic in the UK who has a reputation for 'making waves'. It suggests that Saira may be developing a similar reputation and also that her relationship with her mother has become a professional as well as private matter. Moreover the main reason for the reputation for trouble of both is their commitment to activism.

Why research this now?

We use own experiences as university teachers and academics to shed light on what it has been like to work in higher education; for example, the pleasures of teaching and doing research but also the challenges of large cohorts, building personal relationships with students, and pressures to publish or perish. We have noted the changes in universities over years - together we have accumulated 40 years or more of working in education. But our entry into higher education, the possibilities we have had to develop and the limitations placed on what we would like to do, have been different. In particular we want to explore the different forms of activism available in higher education in different eras. We have a shared interest in auto/biography as research method, Gaby has recently co-written a book on the topic [3] and Saira is using collective biography or prosopography in her proposed research on neo-liberalisation of parenthood. We also have a shared interest in the ethics of teaching. For example, Saira is aware of the radical nature of her own political positioning and so takes care to underpin her teaching with research, while Gaby has experimented with different ways of teaching to redistribute power relations in her class- and lecture room.

We perceive the neoliberal higher education agenda to be notionally about efficiency, choice and personal development, and human capital, with a metanarrative of excellence, competition, financial reward or penalty and most of all control. It has been suggested that this agenda remains for the most part ideologically unchallenged or seen as an evil that no-one can do anything about. Thus for Ball [4], the discourse of neoliberalism has seeped into our souls. Ball argues that a new morality has been created by the culture of performativity; if

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[2] Gaby Weiner, (2009) 'More Difficult Times Ahead: The impact of patriarchy and globalisation on gender and inequality in Higher Education'. In D. Stephens (ed.) *Higher Education and International Capacity Building*, (Oxford, Symposium) pp. 139-164

[3] Lucy Townsend, and Gaby Weiner, (2011) *Deconstructing and Reconstructing Lives: Auto/biography in Educational Settings*. (University of Western Ontario: Althouse Press).

[4] Stephen Ball, (2012) Performativity, Commodification and Commitment: and I-Spy Guide to the NeoLiberal University. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 60, 1, 17-28

you do not work longer, harder, and write more and better, you are letting yourself and everyone else down.

The State of Higher Education

There are two predominant perceptions of the state of higher education in the UK. The first is the view that universities have been under pressure to change for a long time. For instance, Sharon Gewirtz and Allan Cribb show, in their study of the *Times Higher*[5] between 1979 and 2010, the development of higher education strategies that emerged in their broadly chronological account: cuts and protests; interventionism and loss of independence; new managerial practices; private sector values, privatisation and institutional competition; marginalisation and incorporation of humanities and the social sciences; widening access; business links and spin-offs; advent of new professionals, marketing for corporate success; and awards and prizes. These, they clustered into three periodised sections: retrenchment and the management of change (1979-mid1980s), new faces and emphases (mid 1980s to end of 1990s) and gloss and spin (1990s –present).

Gewirtz and Cribb suggest that rather than any wholesale transformation of higher education, there has been a gradual shift of gravity and a reconfiguration of norms, away from rationality and ethics of former years to a conspicuous business orientation preoccupied with image management.

> Broadly speaking, the first section traces some of the broad system-level changes that laid the groundwork for and produced the managerialisation and marketization of HE; the second section reviews some of the changes to institutional populations, live and cultures accompanying these system-level changes; and the third focuses in on what could be seen as some of the surface effects of these processes….a growing preoccupation with image and 'image brokering'' which ….has produced a new 'structure of feeling'[6]

Thus for Gewirtz, Cribb and others, this 'business turn' has been long in coming. For others, such as Louise Morley, the crisis in higher education is more recent. For example, Morley [7]

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[5] *The Times Higher Education* Supplement , later the *Times Higher is* the foremost professional weekly newspaper for those in higher education

[6] Sharon Gewirtz and Alan Cribb (2013) Representing 30 years of higher education change: UK universities and the *Times Higher*, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 45, 1, 58-83, pp. 61-2

[7] Louise Morley (2012) Researching Absences and Silences in Higher Education: Data for Democratisation. *Higher Education Research and Development*, Vol.31(3), 353-368

argues that the UK system is currently in a state of shock. Drawing on Klein[8], Morley maintains that in recent times, shock therapy and the resulting disorientation have been used as a change strategy. However rather than encouraging people to change, absorb criticism and improve on the present situation, the response, it is argued, for people in shock is to conserve and maintain,. Shock also implies unpredictability.

> Changes in higher education, as in the social world itself, have been rapid and extreme. Unpredictability has been the only certainty. Counter hegemonic advocates did not necessarily predict the scale of neo-liberalism in the 1980s and 1990s or post-neo-liberal driven change in the first decade of the 2000s. Traditionalists did not foresee the industrialisation, massification and re-scaling of the sector. Higher education today, in many national locations, abounds with a sense of crisis of funding, purpose and fears for its future.

So, one interest we have is to see which perspective our experiences point to and also the rate of change that higher education is undergoing. We see that present universities in the UK are being influenced predominantly by globalism, entrepreneurialism and corporatism with academic staff produced as differentiated and specialised workers, e.g. highly-paid managers, 'speeded up, nomadic, public intellectuals'[9] administrators, dogsbody teachers. And we are told that this recent 'shocking' era has displaced the so-called 'golden age' of the 1980s and before, where university academics were (seen to be) autonomous, student groups were smaller and cleverer, and research was optional. But, we want to ask, is this an accurate representation of higher education, then or now,?

Methodology

The research reported for this paper uses autobiographical interviews to create a co-constructed account exposing critical events, possibilities and limitations for higher education 'activists' in the recent past and present. It is argued that whilst it is unusual to have co-researchers with the closeness of relationship as in this instance, mother and daughter, this was not a hindrance to the research. Rather it had a significant impact on the quality of the

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[8] Naomi Klein (2008) *The Shock Doctrine* (London: Penguin).
[9] Morley, 2012, op cit

data generated, as together the relationship and methodology generated analysis and interpretation in 'uncommonly accelerated ways'. [10]

Narrative inquiry uses story-telling to articulate, through memorisation, reflection and discussion, how and why events occur and the ways in which individuals respond. The data is often co-constructed through negotiated understandings between researcher and participant. This can result in two outcomes: a *readerly* text associated with familiar, linear style and content or a *writerly* text which offers a proliferation of meanings and multiplicity of cultural and other ideological indicators for the reader to uncover.[11]

One way to disrupt the linear sequence is to identify a patchwork of events, termed critical moments or incidents, which mark 'a significant turning-point or change in the life of a person. . . .' [12] The key qualification for an incident to be considered critical is the impact it has had on the person telling the story, for example, experienced as an 'epiphany' which Denzin defines as 'those episodes whose meanings are given in the *reliving* of experience'.[13]

For the study we initially discussed, reflected and recorded autobiographical accounts of our activism and the conditions surrounding it over the years. The accounts located our activism in the past and present (temporality), in the context in which it arose (sociality) and in the space and place in which it occurred (place). We wrote up accounts of each other's interview, questioned and commented on the narratives and write-ups, and then revised theand discussed them again before integrating them into a matrix and then into the paper. Thus the research had a number of stages similar in form to the circular nature of the action research cycle involving read, discuss, analyse, act, reflect, revise etc.

The dependability of the data referred to as reliability in narrative research, for us can be understood in two ways. To create a *readerly* text we need to communicate the trustworthiness of the data collected and interpreted, with characteristics that enable the quality of the research to be judged, e.g. honesty, verisimilitude, authenticity, familiarity, transferability and economy.[14] However the requisites of producing a more open *writerly*

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[10] Carmen Carillo, and Margaret Baguley, (2011) From school teacher to university lecturer: illuminating the journey from classroom to the university for two arts educators. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27, pp. 62-72, p. 65.

[11] Roland Barthes (1970) *S/Z*. (Seuil: Paris)

[12] David Tripp, (1994) *Critical Incidents in Teaching* (London: Routledge), p. 24

[13] Norman Denzin, (1989) *Interpretive Biography*.(Newbury Park: Sage)

[14] Michael Huberman, (1995) Working with life-history narratives. In: H. McEwan & K. Egan (eds.) *Narrative in teaching, learning and research* (New York: Teachers College Press, 127-165)

text are less specific: it is for the reader to deconstruct or uncover the multiplicity of cultural and other meanings that emanate from the text. The stance we have adopted may be understood as approximately midway between to the two polarised positions offered. We want to produce a text which retains some conventions of form and practice associated with narrative enquiry, and, at the same time, we want to avoid the fixedness and didacticism that often accompanies the genre.

So alongside the 'good' characteristics of collaborative research that we aspire to – cooperation, reflection, empathy – we acknowledge that this is perhaps easier because we have a close relationship – we also recognise that other less desirable elements have intruded into our relationship over the years and into the research – antipathy, competitiveness, disagreement and so on. How much we differ and challenge each other's self-positionings is as important as demonstrating consensus and shared interpretation. Generational characteristics of feminism and socialism expose similar schisms and fracturings, as we shall see later.

Conceptual framework

The research draws on certain theoretical frameworks and concepts, in particular, Marxism, critical social constructivism, feminist post-structuralism, activism and generation. Broadly ***Marxism*** attempts to show the complexities of class struggle, capitalist processes, their origins, and the possibilities for their transcendence. For the research therefore, the university is viewed as a bourgeois institution which is in the process of proletarianisation in the sense that previous hierarchies and requirements for professionalism are being replaced by conventional worker-employer contractual and power relations. ***Critical social constructivism*** draws on the work of Vygotsky and others to show that understanding, significance, and meaning are developed not separately within the individual, but in coordination with other human beings, cultures and society. Following this, teaching and learning whether in school or university, are social activities which require critical engagement with the practical and theoretical worlds. ***Feminist post-structuralism*** emphasises that gender power, as other forms of power relations, is everywhere. [15]Deviating from classic Marxist analysis, power is viewed as relational and contextual, fluid, shifting and ever present in on-going production of meaning. Power is seen to operate at different levels and in both positive and contradictory ways. Power may be conceptualised as 'residing in the

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[15] Chris Weedon (1987) *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell)

institution, inscribed in rules, roles and status…conferred by virtue of social and cultural position'. [16]

Activism comes from the German 'Aktivismus', a term used at the end of World War I to signify the principle of active political engagement by intellectuals. More widely it denotes a vigorous attitude towards political action and implies a special role for activists in political parties, revolutionary movements and radical social change. [17] Activism was a specific characteristic of the civil rights and women's liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and has also been a vital requisite for pushing for political change over the decades.

The concept of **generation** is generally applied to a cohort of people born about the same time and sharing similar cultural experiences and interests, and can be applied to historical change of perspective or attitude within a family or more generally, to a specific period in history such as the post-war 'baby-boomers'. The difficulties of intellectual succession have also been identified as generational. For example, successive feminist generations have been expressed as *waves* (first, late nineteenth century-early twentieth century; second, 1960s-1980s; third, 1990s to present; and fourth, present onwards). While first, second and fourth have been determinedly activist, aimed largely at analysing and improving the conditions of girls and women, third-wave feminism has been more focused on the intellectual challenge posed by feminism. Iris van de Tuin[18] argues that feminist generations are inherently rivalrous; academic feminism versus movement feminism for instance. For Van de Tuin, Rosie Braidotti and Sandra Harding[19] are seen to typify second-wave feminist epistemologists who act as non-dutiful daughters to male theorists. In contrast third-wave feminist materialism, Van de Tuin says, has jumped generations in its quest to overcome dualism and 'reconnect life and thought'. However Hemmings [20] castigates Van de Tuin for selectively favouring newer theorisations, and falsely rejecting earlier ones. Whatever is new, Hemmings writes, is characterised by Van de Tuin as' fluid, expressive

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[16] Val Gillies and Helen Lucey, (2007) Introduction. In Val Gillies & Helen Lucey, eds., *Power, Knowledge and the Academy: The Institutional is Political* (Basingstoke: PalgraveMacmillan, pp. 1-15)

[17] Alan Bullock, and Oliver Stallybrass (1977) *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London: Fontana), p. 7

[18] Iris Van de Tuin, (2009) Jumping Generations: On Second- and Third-wave Epistemology. *Australian Feminist Studies*. 24, 59, pp. 17-31

[19] Rosie Braidotti, (1991) *Patterns of Dissonance: a Study of Women and Contemporary Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press); Sandra Harding (1991) *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press)

[20] Clare Hemmings (2009) Generational Dilemmas. A response to Iris van de Tuin's 'Jumping Generations': On Second- and Third-wave Epistemology. *Australian Feminist Studies*. 24, 59, pp. 33-37, p. 36

and surprising' involving 'multiplicity and 'proliferation' while whatever comes from the previous intellectual generation is seen as fixed, dichotomous and restrictive.

The Research

As already noted, the research reported for this paper uses narrative enquiry in the form of autobiographical interviews to create a co-constructed account of the experiences of university life. The interviews took place in 2014 and were conducted round an agreed set of headings: background, experiences of higher education, values, career, accountability and reflections (see appendix). They were further re-read and renegotiated in the writing of the paper.

Our reporting of the data and analysis is framed around emergent themes, mostly but not entirely, reflecting the original interview questions. We provide a brief overview of the main research themes before focusing particularly on the possibilities for and limitations to activism.

Social and educational background

Both of us have a working class and immigrant background. Gaby is the (illegitimate) daughter of refugees from Nazism who, though not well-educated or with much cultural capital, were political, multilingual and ambitious for her. Saira, one generation on, likewise had parents who were young, working-class and also ambitious, and she benefited too from their immigrant background. Both also had late-entry, non-traditional routes into higher education, in particular Saira, who had a range of jobs in and out of education beforehand. Studying for a master's degree was in both cases a key stage: in Gaby's case she came to the notice of a professor who advised her to change her dissertation topic to her particular interest in gender. In Saira's case, gaining a distinction brought her to the attention of a professor who encouraged her to go into research when previously she had no intention of doing so. A critical moment for both of them was achievement of a permanent, full-time post in higher education, Gaby after a decade on short-term contracts, and Saira, after a some years on shorter-term, part-time (and some zero-hours) university teaching and researching.

Working in, and Experiences of Higher Education

Overall Gaby has worked in three universities, two in the UK and one in Sweden in addition to short periods working for research organisations such as the NFER and Schools Council

and shorter attachments to other universities. Saira has likewise worked for three universities, all in the north of England, plus shorter stints for independent research institutes. On entry, Gaby had initial feelings of low status and inferiority – she came into the Open University as an administrator rather than as a researcher as in her previous post - and of straddling social class barriers. But as she moved institutions in a generally expansionist era including the development of new courses and programmes, she grasped opportunities that came her way. In particular her interest in and academic work on feminist and other social justice issues in education, originally politically rather than professionally- oriented, gave her access to academia, but mostly at the margins rather than at the centre. Saira, who entered academia thirty years after Gaby, differentiates between her experience as a *contract worker* (insecure, low paid, erratic research work supplemented by supply teaching, periods of no money and on benefits, treatment as a 'lowly' worker) and as *permanent member of staff* (relatively well-paid, highly pressured, object of surveillance, heavy administrative load, fragmented leadership and constant state of flux – all leading to anxiety).

Institutional Cultures

Cultures of the institutions in which we have worked have differed, but it is not clear whether this is to do with nature of institution (e.g. history, status) setting (country, urban/non-urban) or era. For example, Gaby came into administrative post at the Open University (OU) in the early 1980s, and was initially unhappy but had possibilities of moving across departments, sections and research areas. She benefited from temporary academic positions which in the end became permanent, and she learnt to write academically. From her lowly status and together with others, she felt able to challenge the University *status quo* in particularly over the treatment of women staff whether academic or administrative. She also helped develop innovative (for the time) courses on gender which gave her possibilities for writing and publication. The culture of South Bank University (SBU, now London South Bank) to which she went in 1989 was harsher and with poorer work conditions but at a personal level Gaby had higher status and flourished intellectually and academically. She also benefited from being in London. She left for Umeå University in Sweden in 1998 which enjoyed higher status nationally than either the OU or SBU and provided good working conditions and opportunities for travel. It had a more 'traditional' university culture (hierarchical, academic-led) than those in the UK but eventually there was increasing pressure to gain research grants, both nationally and in the EU, which led eventually to overwork and exhaustion (by 2005).

Saira's experience of institutional cultures is more recent, dating from 2009. The first two universities she worked for was as a part-timer. She first went to Manchester University (MU) employed on an hourly basis with however some opportunities to do research, particularly on policies associated with the New Labour administration e.g. National College for Leadership, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, and research on best practice. She found the institutional research culture 'anti-theory' and dominated by government funding, which however, collapsed when the government changed in 2010. At Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) she taught on the MEd in Inclusive Education and then virtually full time on Education Studies, ITT and Masters supervision. She was paid on an hourly basis (for teaching and marking) but was seen as being 'awkward' for asking payment for additional hours spent in work-related meetings etc. She joined Liverpool John Moore's University (LJM) as a full-timer, and felt lucky to be in post as it had been against strong opposition, and she had had many years of low-paid work. Significantly her varied CV which showed a range of experiences of teaching and research, due to the temporary nature of much of her work, acted in her favour. Initially a teaching-focused rather than research-intensive university, LJM has recently put more emphasis on research and therefore valued her experience of different roles and levels of HE teaching and research, as well as her expertise in inclusion, particularly concerning 'looked-after children', i.e. those in children's homes or in foster care. She also took the positive decision to become the Union representative, and therefore was quickly alerted to institutional problems. These included a culture of fear, competition, and instability that perhaps reflects Morley's institutional 'shock therapy' regime mentioned earlier in the paper. Teaching was seen as over-fragmented – described as 'granule-isation' rather than modularisation - and criticism was made of institutional prioritisation of the outcomes of the National Student Survey (NSS) over academic rigour and scholarship. Both the NSS and the outcomes of the research assessment exercise (REF) contribute to university league tables and are seen as designed to pit university against university in the quest for 'good' students and 'high quality' research.

Activism: possibilities

As already noted, Gaby to some extent benefited from her activism originating outside the university. She had been active in establishing a local women's conscious-raising group, worked on anti-sexist initiatives in schools and then focused on gender projects in her undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Indeed a chapter from her MA dissertation which focused on the impact of the recently passed Sex Discrimination Act (1975) was one of the

first published pieces on gender and education in the UK.[21] She saw her work in higher education as a form of activism as she was able to make her mark on courses in all the universities in which she worked. She also saw *writing* as a form of activism, and following Dale Spender, sought to make her work as accessible as possible, to the widest range of women (and men); her mantra has always been to make complex ideas simple, rather than simple ideas complex

Saira has likewise sought to take her activism outside the university into her work, mainly through her *teaching* and union work. For example, she seeks to teach 'criticality' and present an 'alternative' view to students. A key motivator for her is to get students to engage critically with alternative views and thus challenge their perceptions. In particular she 'pushes on' class, anti-racist, and gender equality as well offering a critique of the current English education system. As a trade union activist, she seeks to collaborate with other colleagues on challenging certain changes in HE, helping to organise collective action against injustices in particular, as well as more recently drawing on the growing body of academic work which challenges the enforcement of New Pubic Management. Saira made a decision when she joined the University to be open about her activism and standpoint which, in some ways, has worked in her favour, as it has made it easier for her to act and organise openly from the beginning (as a probationer).

Activism: limitations

The constraints on activism have changed for Gaby over the years, as have the people seeking to place limitations on what she can do. But possibilities have never gone away completely. In the early days, her lack of status and therefore not having much to lose made her 'braver' in her challenge to what she saw as patriarchal, racist and class-ridden university hierarchies. She stood up (with others) at committee meetings and challenged senior management ('the suits' as she called them) on policies which threatened diversity; she organised women-only conference sessions and with other feminists, danced around handbags at after-conference dinners. The opposition she faced from 'the suits' included patronising public and private 'put-downs', a reputation as a trouble-maker, and opposition to appointment to a permanent post. Later, seniority meant that opposition was more covert, though Gaby found that she could depend on a number of individuals who were prepared to defend her behind the scenes. Competition between academics was always an issue for her and judging (or not) her relative

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[21] Gaby Weiner (1978) Education and the Sex Discrimination Act, *Educational Research*, 20, 3, pp. 163-173

status compared to other (feminist) academics in her field. So competitiveness is clearly not a new phenomenon.

For Saira, working with current university structures and practices, lack of power, institutional restraints, time restraints, heavy workload, and sometimes anti-intellectualism, are all obstacles to what she can achieve as an activist. For example, the institutional climate of fear, competition and instability mentioned earlier means that colleagues often lack the confidence to challenge institutional diktats due to fear of being identified as a troublemaker.

Reflections

Gaby

We have struggled hard with this paper and with finding the time to do the research and collaborate in the writing, perhaps indicative of the 'speeded up' intensive cultures of universities nowadays – although I cannot remember when working full-time when it was not thus. I have found it rewarding to work with my daughter; on the one hand our relationship has made the task easier, more familiar and enjoyable; but on the other, we perhaps have been less polite and less tolerant with each other than if we had been colleagues. My perception is that we have pushed each other to reflect more deeply on the sources of our values and actions.

In terms of what we have found, it is less clear. We are not comparing like with like: I have had a long academic career, mainly now behind me, while Saira is a relative newcomer, particular as a full-timer in higher education. Also we have had different priorities for our activism. Saira focuses mainly on her teaching and her union work in which she tries to develop an activist, confident, and collective base, whereas I have placed greater emphasis inside the university on writing (and perhaps research). The two different perceptions of change in higher education (gradualism and shock) have also emerged in the research: my account suggests that change has occurred over a long period and also that there was no 'golden age' in higher education, especially for women. In fact, like other structures in higher education, patriarchal and other hierarchies have had to change in order to survive. Saira's account of the institutions for which she has worked reflects more the characteristics of a shock culture mentioned by Morley. Perhaps different institutional histories, places and levels of prestige produce different institutional cultures, albeit sharing the effects of globalisation and neoliberalism through accountability procedures such as the Student Satisfaction Survey,

research assessment exercises and league tables. Finally, though Saira and I have in many respects similar values, our theoretical starting points have been different, temporally and conceptually. My values were shaped by my parents' experience of persecution and dislocation and hope for the future as well as the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s around feminism, antiracism and civil rights. Saira's values also have some of the same origins but she has been influenced more by Thatcherism, Marxism and class-based analyses.

Saira

Like Gaby, I have found this to be a challenging yet rewarding process which has led to a greater understanding of our experiences. Deeper understandings have been gained due to the accelerated process of reflection borne by our relationship, I have certainly been able to consider in a more positive light some of the joys of work, which at the start of the research process, was clouded by outside pressures. Time restraints have been the main barrier as workload and prioritisation of 'the day job' have of necessity taken precedent (to some frustration of Gaby).

It should be noted however, that the closeness of our relationship has not always been a positive in the research process. Pre-conceptions of who we are and what we each believe in, and for me, what my mother wants for me now and in the future, have at times clouded the work, such that we occasionally have had to retreat as the mother/daughter relationship threatened to impede data collection processes and analysis.

Gaby's story has shed light on the challenges she faced due to sexism, her working-class background, and the impact of a change in political regime (from Wilsonian Labour to Thatcherite Tory) which seemed to set her back temporarily career-wise. Some similarities are evident as my (paid) research work on New Labour-funded evidence-based work projects, cancelled summarily by the Coalition Government in 2010, left me temporarily unemployed and fearful for my future in higher education.

Gaby's activism was (and still is) in her academic writing and publication in addition to periods of activism outside of the workplace. This has been a successful pursuit and I believe she has had a political impact throughout her academic life which I have some pride in. However, I also want to argue that our activism differs significantly. I have sought to help organise resistance to the neo-liberalisation of higher education through encouraging

collective responses to inequality. For me, addressing gender, ethnicity, sexuality etc. must inevitably be at the heart of everything I do. Perhaps this challenges many concepts of how Marxist activism works. Rather than a diktat, I aim to use Marxism as a tool to understand what is going on and, of course to attempt to change it (which as Marx said, is the whole point).

For me, my values are based on those of my parents. Having grown up in an atmosphere of radicalism, lack of activism has never been an option. Gaby encouraged me to challenge sexism in school (indeed a battle was fought and lost to enable me to play football and cricket at primary school). Hensby[22] shows that a key indicator of whether a person becomes politically active is whether their parents have been. However, growing up under Thatcher, and the resulting shift to the right of Labour, has perhaps led me towards a different ideological perspective which has informed my activism thereafter.

By engaging students and colleagues in debates and suggestions that a different way of organising the world in possible, and by underpinning this in my practice as an activist, I hope to make a difference.

I have found support among many of my colleagues, and also through my *political* trade union activity (as opposed to the ineffective Trade Union leadership's version) – proving in practice that fragmentation of the left is not necessarily inevitable in practice. I also challenge Ball's assertion that neo-liberalism has inhabited the soul of academics. This may be true of some, but for many it is a false narrative assuming acceptance rather than despair and immobility through lack of agency. Where there is a sense of agency (for example in the solidarity displayed in small 'trade' disputes) it has become clear that if the surface of the neo-liberal agenda is scratched an unexpected level of fury spills out. It is this display of anger that, for me, makes the possibilities for resistance in the future, more of a possibility.

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[22] Alexander Hensby (2014) Networks, counter-networks and political socialisation – paths and barriers to high-cost/risk activism in the 2010/11 student protests against fees and cuts, *Contemporary Social Science: Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences*, 9, 1, p. 92-105

Appendix

Interview Questions

- <u>Background</u>:
  - birth, what kind of family, class, siblings, parents and their employment?
  - When, where and why university educated?
  - What field of specialism and why?
  - When and how did you become academic
  - Jobs following university?
  - What influence of family and friends?
- <u>Experiences in HE</u>:
  - How did you feel when first arrived as academic?
  - Colleagues?
  - Departmental/university culture?
  - Relationships with students?
- <u>Values</u>
  - Influences of your standpoint… Did you have it before your academic career?
  - To what extent did it shape your career?
  - Did it create tensions? Opportunities? Discord?
- <u>Career</u>
  - What do you feel now about career, generally and personally?
  - Imposter syndrome
  - Career trajectory (straight or winding)
  - Future?
- <u>Accountability</u>
  - Performance – own expectations
  - Outside/managerial expectations?
  - Internal/external
- <u>Reflections?</u>
  - Why did you do what you did? Academically/politically?
  - Transgressive behaviours
  - Impact of HE changes on individual
  - Strength and scope of activism
  - Pleasures and discontents