Original Article

Beyond (and Alongside) Shameful Attachments: The Lived Experience of Critique Within the Entrepreneurial University

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Abstract

During 2019, we embarked on a fieldwork based on 18 semi-structured interviews with international scholars in the humanities and social sciences in Chilean universities to explore their experiences with knowledge. Drawing on theories of critique and neoliberalism, we analyzed their ambivalent and unsettling conjunction of attachments to neoliberal and critical knowledge formations. By developing the notion of regime of epistemic subjectification, we emphasized the affective intensities these experiences brought to bear amid the differential weight and interplay of neoliberalism and critique as ethico-epistemic modes of engagement. We argued that the dominant focus on neoliberal knowledge and entrepreneurial subjectivity, albeit intense, expansive, and seemingly omnipresent, must be complicated by exposing its ambivalent affective and somatic force, and recognizing the difference between critical academic products and the lived experience of critique. The latter was constituted in the outsides of the inside of the neoliberal knowledge regime.

Keywords

Critique, neoliberalism, regime of subjectification, academics, affects

Introduction

This research began with a strong thesis about the pervasive influence of neoliberalism upon scholars' experiences with knowledge in the humanities and social sciences. This was the case as our own academic lives have been strongly affected and governed by a tendency to accept, promote, and emotionally engage with a neoliberal knowledge regime. We thus envisaged this empirical study, expecting to find both powerful attachments to neoliberal knowledge formation and related experiences of epistemic injustices. Particularly, we were curious about the form that critical attachments to knowledge can take in a context that, as some authors have shown (Maldonado & Guenther, 2019), neoliberal technologies tend to ostracize critique in the contemporary university. The increasing marginalization of reflections around the kind of knowledge we produce as scholars under a neoliberal regime is a topic that bubbles up in everyday conversations, even when we are not (at least formally) performing academic labor. And yet we were and are mindful of the ongoing lack of due attention to the subjectifying effects that knowledge generates, that is to say, of the ways of *being with* knowledge in the university. Similarly, we have felt even more downgraded and extemporaneous engagements with theoretically lively knowledge, critical of contemporary trends of domination in society, and committed to a sociological praxis capable of contributing to emancipatory practices of post-neoliberal democracies.

In Chile, our country of origin, the genealogy of the neoliberal knowledge regime differs significantly from most trajectories in the Global North. Amid a cold war and a totalitarian neoliberal takeover beginning in 1973, higher education underwent a transformation through politics of terror over bodies and knowledge (Moulian, 2002). This paved the way for a full-fledged implementation of neoliberal institutional infrastructure. The dictatorship's capitalist revolution initiated simultaneous processes of privatization, commodification, and depoliticization of universities, which were solidified after the democratic comeback in

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1990. This led to institutional mechanisms promoting consumers, users, and entrepreneurial subjectivities as proper to academic workers, students, and higher education administrators, while universities reconstituted themselves under the knowledge economy imaginary (Simbürger & Donoso, 2020). During the dictatorship, social sciences faced tandem processes of dismantling and reconfiguration, which entailed the elimination of Marxism-related subjects, the expansion of statistical and scientific methodologies, the discouraging of political involvement by harassment and assassination, and the shutdown of careers (Donoso Oyarzún, 2020).

From the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, critical social sciences found refuge in nonuniversity research centers and a few new private institutions, offering spaces to counter the epistemic transformations instilled by the dictatorship (Courard & Frohmann, 1999; Garretón, 2007). However, from the 1990s onward, a progressive reopening of the social sciences took place within universities, a process defined by the new imperatives of the neoliberal democratic state. Such imperatives emphasized social cohesion and the deactivation of resistance, along with a market-oriented culture and the efficacy of social policies, which influenced the concurrent reconfiguration of knowledge and social sciences as expertise (Leiva, 2021). While these critical spaces have left significant traces, the hegemonic practices of social scientists have granted neoliberalism, both in academia and society, almost total social efficacy as a legitimate social order and dominant social imaginary without outside (Puga, 2020).

With this genealogy in mind, during 2019 we conducted 18 semi-structured interviews with male and female international academics working in the humanities and social sciences in Chilean universities. We created a database with the information available on the webpages of local social sciences programs and then proceeded to contact each academic by email. The vast majority were willing to participate in the study and our sample's final composition sought to account for the nuances of being an international scholar. We aimed to include most disciplinary backgrounds, comprising sociology, psychology, anthropology, cultural studies, and history, while maintaining gender parity. Subsequently, we positioned our participants in stratified academic ranks to differentiate their intellectual trajectories and geographies. Eight were from Latin America, six from Southern Europe, and four from Western Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries such as Australia and the United States. Six were professors with more than 15 years experience in Chilean universities. This group of scholars played a significant role in the reconstruction of the social sciences after the dictatorship and, to our knowledge, at least three of them (one male and two female) are recognized as established leaders in their fields both nationally and internationally. The other 12 were early career researchers in lecturer and senior lecturer positions or transitioning from doctoral to postdoctoral ones.

Our focus on foreign scholars was strategic. International academics have been important figures in the construction of the Chilean social sciences before the coup, their preservation during the authoritarian years, and the reconstruction of the field in the post-dictatorship era (Courard & Frohmann, 1999; Donoso Oyarzún, 2020). In this regard, it could be said that they have permanently been "foreigners within." Also, and crucially, this liminality locates them in a privileged epistemic position to perceive the unfolding of the neoliberal knowledge regime and its innovations. Their experiences combine familiarity and strangeness in a way that allows us to grasp the ambivalence of knowledge attachments with particular eloquence. To capture such ambivalence, we designed our interview script to allow ourselves to enter our interviewees' worlds of knowledge and epistemic journeys in an unconstrained fashion. In these interviews, we freely probed our participants' theoretical, epistemological, aesthetic, and normative commitments to the processes of teaching, writing, and research. Although many conversations revolved around the neoliberal experience within academia—including their strategies to cope with productivity, their intellectual and political commitments, and the milestones of their careers—the majority also brought critical epistemic engagements to the fore. Even if haunted by neoliberal technologies, their experiences hinted toward different, more intimate and persistent epistemic discomforts with their disciplinary boundaries.

Importantly, theirs are geographies of knowledge expressing an unequal distribution of what is regarded as a legitimate academic trajectory. The experiences these colleagues shared with us are expressions of their particular power relations with territoriality and their diverse embodiments. They spoke from situated epistemological politics of centers and peripheries, intensities of belonging, and subaltern and hegemonic positionings. Their stories were not so much about the interlocking of given and rigid categories of class, gender, or ethnicity, but rather about the ambivalent intersections of neoliberal and critical affective formations. In this process, we could appreciate the mobilization of embodied experiences with knowledge *infiltrated* in the dynamic configuration of status, class, gender, and race. In line with Todd's (2021) autoethnography of embodied anxiety in research encounters, we saw our interviewees' epistemic positions entangled with, and formed by, affective attachments shaping their ways of being with knowledge. In other words, we could see the capacity of affective formations to "infiltrate. . . positionality, subjectivity, body and situatedness" (p. 479).

To grasp these experiences, we analyzed the interviews through situated and comparative readings, identifying emerging themes and experiences around knowledge. Such readings followed the traces left by insidious *dispositifs* of

epistemic subjectification, such as the publication or the research project and the intensity of affects attached to academic practices percolating down the biographies of our interviewees. As a result, we coined the notion of regime of epistemic subjectification to refer to a field of knowledge that interpellates and affectively attaches academic subjects to historically specific modes of knowledge generation, legitimate claims, and ethical orientations.

Based on our empirical material, we argue that, even in advanced neoliberal academic regimes, the hegemony of the entrepreneurial self is less monolithic than often assumed. The fact that contemporary university is infused with market-like rationalities aiming at producing competitive subjects is not synonymous with the complete demise of critical ways of being with knowledge. By differentiating between critical academic products and the lived experience of critique, we demonstrate that sometimes the entrepreneurial capture of academic life is contingent on a previous ethico-political subjectivation irreducible to the former. This critical subjectivity, rather than linked to the (capitalist) production of knowledge, can be perceived in political struggles to challenge and expand the field of critique itself. As a result, our study helps to complexify the affective and material picture of the entrepreneurial subjectivity within the neoliberal university. To achieve this, we embarked on an exploration of the "inside stories," that is, the micropolitical and passionate experiences of those that make the university (Hey & Morley, 2011). This strategy contributes to a better understanding of the complicities, tensions, displacements, and alternatives produced by multiple regimes that haunt the actuality of the contemporary university and its cognitive workers.

The Entrepreneurial Subjectification of Contemporary University

In diverse geographies, investigations have emphasized experiences of neoliberal modalities of governance over academics by fostering the formation of the entrepreneurial self as the hegemonic—unavoidable and desired—regime of subjectification (Berg et al., 2016; Brunila & Hannukainen, 2017; Fardella et al., 2020; Morley & Leyton, 2023; Saura & Bolívar, 2019). Contemporary universities, fully operative as enterprise units, are governed by a series of capital accumulation and investment *dispositifs*—monetization of research funding and publications, and value-for-money performance evaluation, among others. This is the university as a specialized unit for the modulations of academics as *homo œconomicus* as a figure of optimization by the embodiment of the enterprise form. As an "entrepreneur of himself. . . being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings" (Foucault, 2008, p. 226). Within this grid of intelligibility, critical analysis, narratives, and conceptions of society, as well as individuals themselves, must successfully participate and circulate, paradoxically, in enterprising projects to be heard.

This regime has conducted us to recognize and feel ourselves as enterprising units through specific *dispositifs*, statements, and affects. Such a regime of subjectification operates through the production of desirable and insidious competitive mandates that present themselves as the ultimate anchors where social recognition and value reside. As Bröckling (2016) maintains, these entrepreneurial regimes function as a cultural and affective script with the capacity to mobilize subjects toward quasi-obligatory forms of self-constitution and recognition in relationship with others, knowledge, and power.

According to some critical scholars (Brown, 2015), the neoliberal rationality of life has achieved a systematic and seemingly unescapable formation that disseminates the model of market competition to all domains and activities—even where money is not directly at stake—configuring human beings exhaustively as market actors. Such alleged totality imposes an unavoidable challenge to academic subjectivities, particularly to those aligned with critical engagements. They are interpellated to embody and entertain a competitive, entrepreneurial, marketized, and performative relationship with university in general and with knowledge, research, and teaching in particular. This epistemic subjectification works not only through rationalities *ad hoc* but also by means of multiple affective hooks. Such a notion attempts to capture the different—and often contradictory—modalities in which subjects can experience a calling, a fixation, a certain feeling or disposition that secures their attachment to entrepreneurial rationalities. This can be lived intensely within academic institutions where technologies of productivity and disciplinary conceptions of knowledge are wielded from multiple sites. Expressions of this are the introduction of business interests in research proposals and programs, mandatory contribution to economic growth as a benchmark of knowledge production, workshops to learn how to publish and write for metrics, and qualitative impact assessments, among many other organizational "innovations" mirroring competitive markets designs.

Evidence suggests that the neoliberalization of academic subjectivities unfolds at an international scale. Looking at the relationship between the neoliberal knowledge regime and subjectivity in Finland, Brunila and Hannukainen (2017) underscore how the introduction of competition-based research funding policies has made researchers more precarious, strategic, and flexible entrepreneurial players "eager to embrace new funding opportunities" (p. 908). Researchers, in their analysis, are thus subjects willing and compelled to master marketised forms of knowledge and language. Macfarlane (2021), in turn, relates the United Kingdom's "hyper-performative" neoliberal knowledge

regime to an unethical, competitive, "win-at-all-cost" mentality (p. 466). According to him, this is expressed in a series of fraudulent practices regarding false authorship and instrumental collaboration for productivity purposes, inflation of citation practices, fast publications, and short-term research following prescribed research questions. "As a result," he concludes, "we are witnessing the inculcation of several new ethical norms as neoliberal assumptions migrate from the governmental and institutional level to that of the individual academic" (Macfarlane, 2021, p. 466). In a similar ethical vein, Mahon and Henry (2022, p. 29), critically point out the insidious effects of neoliberal regimes of knowledge over the character and life of academics. They notice a pervasive change in scholarly language graspable in notions, such as "outputs," "targets," "impacts," and "grant capture," in opposition to subjectifications by research and knowledge in terms of wander, open, or nonlinear.

Studies in the Global South, particularly in Chile, have characterized the contemporary academic subjectivity as self-improving, self-managing, and self-disciplining against the backdrop of the knowledge economy (Fardella, 2020; González Ríos et al., 2017; Martínez-Labrín & Bivort-Urrutia, 2014). This subjectivity can be regarded as a local neoliberal instantiation summoned up by a performative regime—encompassing corporate metrics, impact factors, and competitive research funding schemes—that naturalizes an understanding and feeling of knowledge as production, accumulation, and competition. Such a naturalization is enabled in Chile by an ecosystem of mutually reinforcing technologies. Universities have developed an institutional culture of monetary incentives to publish in high-ranked journals—mostly from the Global North—which are the same journals privileged by committees deciding on allocating research grants. These grants are mandatory for the advancement of academic careers. At the same time, in this tournament-like arena (Gu & Levin, 2021), scholars can spin off their bonuses by multiplying their affiliations with diverse research centers publicly funded and forced to become legally independent from universities. This means that, through their research outputs, they can sometimes double their monthly salary. Consequently, a generalized institutional culture of monetary incentives to publish in journals dominant in international indexes is freely deployed by universities and willingly accepted (and even demanded) by academics.

These technologies are an epitomized expression of the translation of neoliberal calculations and abstractions into the conduct of scholarly knowledge and its "producers." Such a translation takes the form of a myriad of economic behaviors and situations defined by the ethical horizon of the *homo œconomicus*. In this sense, the Chilean ecosystem of metrified subjectivities attempts to bind academics to a series of investments and entrepreneurial gestures as our lifelong formation as "abilities-machines" (Foucault, 2008). The interconnectedness of these technologies not only strengthens the grip of the neoliberal knowledge regime at the subjective and institutional levels but also discourages academic engagements with potentially more critical mediums, such as books, local and regional journals, or other forums closer to the cultural lives of minoritised groups.

Such a naturalized sense of academic practice makes possible the thinking and feeling of knowledge in terms of winners and losers, the pulverization of differential craftsmanship and rhythms of knowledge, the reorientation and corruption of cooperation for competitive processes, and a sense of suspiciousness about published knowledge. In our fieldwork, this aspect emerged consistently. Alex, a senior lecturer sociologist from a public university who has been working within sociology departments since the beginning of the 1990s, narrates the following tournament-like experience of academia:

> At my university there are two flagship disciplines: neurosciences and astronomy. And now, every year we give an award to researchers based on productivity. There is a researcher, an astrophysicist, who produces 20 Web of Science papers per year. How are you gonna compete with that!? Moreover, the award privileges better indexation, and this academic publishes 20 papers a year, and, of course, they are papers of just 5 pages with some calculations, a quick theoretical framework, and 15 academics as authors.

The incentive culture is one of the defining features of the Chilean performative regime that operates within social sciences and humanities. Another sociologist, a professor from a public university, Marianne, compared Chile with her experience in Europe:

> [. . .] it's through that [the paying-for-publication system] where neoliberalism is more visible and firmer in Chile. So, well, in the standardisations about what one has to publish . . . I think that academics here don't see that in other countries, you don't receive money for publications.

Following Dix's (2020) work on incentivization, this economizing mode of boosting knowledge as productivity is to be understood as a taken-for-granted technology that positions knowledge as a site of management. As a corollary, this is also a way of wielding power over and through academics' epistemic experiences and agency. This can be linked to a post-Fordist work ethic where achievement, creativity, and passion merge as a pathway promising self-realization, extending the capacity of knowledge as a site of/for subjectification. Academic labor under a neoliberal regime becomes a process of accumulation that "depend(s) increasingly on simultaneously activating and controlling, on releasing and harnessing, the creative, communicative, affective, and emotional capacities of workers" (Weeks, 2011, p. 56). This passion infiltrated all of our interviews,

forming one of the main affective lines of subjectification linked to the intensification of cognitive labor. Alicia, a historian and senior lecturer working at a private university, expressed this situation with affective eloquence:

> Look, I'm telling you, I'm not a manager, I'm a researcher. I arrived [here] as a researcher, and carrying documents from one place to another makes me nervous, [it is] horrific . . . It's just that you don't stop investigating, you can't! You can't, you can't. That is happening to me; I already have an internal conflict. It's that I go to the office, and when I come back home, I say: "today I didn't do anything," and they say "how come I didn't do anything?," because for me, it's the research!

Alicia condenses most of our interviewees' experiences: on one hand, an unavoidable passion for researching and, on the other hand, a growing intensification of academic work. In Chile, in the past 40 years, whereas teaching workload within the humanities and social sciences has increased, research time has remained steady.[1] Albeit indirectly, this reflects the intensification of scholarly work in these fields. Amid this context, passionate attachments to knowledge production and intellectual work are perverse or "cruel" (Berlant, 2011) conditions for sustaining the intensification of academic labor (Fardella, 2020). While we keep on living for our commitments to research, write and publish, those attachments to the promise of knowledge as economy are intensified in the production of a desired lack through the deepening of our conditions of exploitation.

Alongside this passionate intensification, there is the enactment of the "research project" as a particular temporal regime of neoliberal knowledge formation rendered by and in the image of "market forces in order to help shape a more flexible and mobile labour force" (Brunila & Hannukainen, 2017, p. 917). This temporal expression of the neoliberal regime of epistemic subjectification generates an affective relationship marked by a devaluation and weakening of academic identities. Brunila and Hannukainen (2017) refer to the "projectization of knowledge" as a form of discursive practice that produces subjectivities and knowledge "through plural and contingent practices across different sites of project-based research" (p. 909). Rebecca, an anthropologist who recently achieved a tenured-track position after several years working as an independent researcher, embodies this affectively charged process:

> I imagine you're gonna ask me later about my academic experience, but I don't know if it's as long as you need, because I started working in academia here [in Chile] in the year 2000 but more permanently let's say in 2014 . . . and there was a period in which I left academia . . . that is, I only now have a more or less stable job, before I was always working on projects. I suppose that this experience could be useful maybe?

Irrespective of Rebecca's solid reputation within her field and her recent position, she perceives her trajectory as unworthy of attention. We can thus appreciate how, at a subjective level, the projectization of knowledge elicits an affective conditioning that deems certain scholarly experiences illegitimate or nonsensical. When projectization extends itself toward a long-term career—that is, as a temporal norm—it makes the slightest deviation from the linear, upward trajectory a reason to be ashamed. The hesitation regarding how meritorious her experience is derives from the normative nature of projectization, a *dispositif* that, regardless of the material and institutional conditions, imprints an affective mark upon subjects in the form of a haunting self-doubt. Projectization, as part of the managerial assemblage of the university, heralds a deepening of ontological insecurity sustained by intense self-reflexivity and "contradictory and vying emotions, such as anxiety, doubt, guilt, shame, envy, pride and pleasure" (Elizabeth & Grant, 2013, p. 133).

A crucial aspect of the grip of projectization is its structural necessity in today's university. The competitive and comparative nature of scholarly careers through metrification is as dreadful as it is hegemonic and inevitable. In the words of Alex, "But of course, there is a crazy delirium for the metric that is still a delusion, right? But, yeah, I generally agree on the metrics, I agree that productivity is an unavoidable dimension in the life of an academic."

The following quote comes from Iván, a leading figure in the national and global field of sociology. It provides a significant glimpse of the intense ambivalence of the productivist regime of knowledge we have been delineating so far. Particularly interesting are the exclusionary (material) effects *and* (subjective) affects that this mode of subjectification produces by inducing a perverse sense of inevitability and desirability:

> Now there are young people who publish more, and that is wrongly perceived as being better or more cultured [than yesteryear academics]. Sometimes I'm ashamed! Because I see older professors who are very wise, they are old school, they didn't publish as much; some of them know much more about the authors than me. But in terms of the indicators, well, it's an academia that has skyrocketed in the last decade. With all its vices and virtues, it seems to me that it's an academia that, if I say it positively, is much more globalised, it has standards. I think it is undoubtedly an academia . . . that wants to measure itself with international standards. This was the objective when we joined the OECD, right? There really is a high level of self-demanding academics, and I don't think that's bad; it seems positive to me. It's an academia that has gone global.

Themes and narratives around publications were predominant in all of our interviews. Moreover, our interview scripts touched on intellectual commitments, with theories, concepts, epistemic engagements, tensions, and thinking work rather than directly looking for knowledge as a verifiable production line in publications and citational metrics.

However, publications structured, constrained, and enabled narratives about intellectual journeys and commitments. They operated as the dominant *dispositif* of the productivist epistemic subjectification and as a technology of the presentation of the self. Publications positioned academics as global and successful or as marginalized and despondent. Publication, as epitomized in Iván's words, is the optimistic yet ambivalent signifier of a professionalized, standardized, and competitive globalized academia that feels inescapable. You cannot help but become a self-responsible and self-demanding academic in such a totalizing rationality. However, the affective landscape is marked by ambivalence, dejectedness, confusion, and shame by the devaluation of other, nonideal(ized) forms of being a scholar.

Shame is an interesting feeling. As Shahjahan (2020) suggests, shame can be understood as the exposure of being out of place, the expression of losing touch with a place regarded as worthy. Particularly, the loss of touch with a sense of mastery or agency over the sociological field is associated with a dizziness or vertigo related to the uncertain conditions of academia:

> [. . .] all these years I've felt that both the country and academia have experienced a strong transformation; I think that the Chilean academics themselves are a bit overwhelmed . . . It's a country experiencing a very strong transformation. People do not know what they are going to do in 10 more years, the change is very vertiginous. (Iván)

There are, nonetheless, shame-inducers other than the ones springing from the endeavors to bring Chile and its academia to meet the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) standards. Marianne hints at another answer to where this shameful feeling might arise from when she vocalizes her self-adscription: "I position myself from a critical sociology, a reflexive exercise that doesn't stop at the [published] page." The intellectual commitment to social transformation—a process that has to go beyond the confines of writing and publishing—was overtly endorsed by most of our interviewees, yet that is precisely the matter with which scholars seem unavoidably out of touch under the current academic regime of government. Willmott (2011) tries to capture this through the idea of the "fetishization" of journals' rankings infused by the contemporary university. An ever-increasing process that thwarts critique by stifling diversity and constricting innovation. Cederström and Hoedemaekers (2012), expanding on this tendency, conclude that the university is no longer "a seat of knowledge or a hotbed of social critique" but rather a factory of degrees that eventually will help individuals "to capitalize on the human capital they have so greatly invested in" (p. 232). The kind of affectivity we came across in our fieldwork correlates with how the university is broadly perceived these days, namely, a shameful place for critique.

The Lived Production of Critique

The prominence of shame among scholars undergirds the extended perception that the entrepreneurial self exhausts the subjective positions within the contemporary university. In line with the theory, our empirical material shows how the technologies governing academic research and publishing have been so effective at guiding scholars' conducts that competitiveness has become a self-regulatory principle (Ramos, 2021). Furthermore, such self-regulation can be experienced as a totalizing process. Other studies in Chile have pointed out that publishing performance per the ideal of "high productivity" requires a complete implication of both body and mind, thus encompassing the entire affective body (Fardella et al., 2020). From this angle, the epistemic subjectification springing from current academia turns the entrepreneur into a sort of corporeal extension of our given scholarly environment, that is to say, "a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts" (Freeman, 2010, p. 3). They further the chances of encounters between academics' self-regulation, exclusionary affects, and perverse pleasures, given the intensification and extension of "enticements and seductions" that "work us over and come to form an indispensable resource of any identity work project" (Hey, 2004. p. 35). These analyses evince a fundamental change in our intellectual and ethical subjectivities, which are now incapable of identifying themselves outside the neoliberal knowledge regime.

Authors from different theoretical traditions have nonetheless questioned this narrative (Alemán, 2016; Cannizzo, 2021; Hey & Morley, 2011; Morley & Leyton, 2023). The caveat raised by these approaches is that no regime—not even the neoliberal project of universalizing the entrepreneurial self—can successfully conquer human subjectivity. Significantly, they highlight how this rationality is insufficient to grasp the messy, corporeal, and micro-political practices in our engagements with knowledge. If that is the case, the challenge becomes how to account for this insufficiency. So far, the relationship between entrepreneurial self-regulation and shameful feelings can be understood as the embodiment of the well-known thesis by Boltanski and Chiapello (2007), according to which, to be listened to, critique has to witness how its anti-capitalist values are seized by capitalist accumulation. Similarly, Keucheyan (2013) argues that once wholly integrated into the university system, "contemporary critical thinkers in no way form an intellectual 'counter-society'" (p. 22). Consequently, irrespective of how critical it might be intended, contemporary academic knowledge production seems always to be already

a gear in the capitalist mode of production. Hence, its transformative edge has been blunted from the outset.

At first glance, the empirical material of our study seamlessly aligns with these previous descriptions. Jacques, a prominent figure in the political sciences field in Chile, illustrates this. For him, the whole point these days is how to square his "research agenda centred on social progress" with a university that he himself defines, without a pinch of irony, as "the art of winning research projects rather than having knowledge." This palpable contradiction feeds the narrative according to which critique has been internalized and wholly metabolized by capitalist academia. There is, however, a crucial point that this line of reasoning overlooks. When it is assumed that critique is in solidarity with the strengthening of academic capitalism, critique is treated *as a product*, that is to say, as a kind of knowledge that we can access (i.e., consume) because it has taken the form of a finished and calculable outcome. As a result, in a context in which any production is from the beginning *capitalist* production, asking for a noncapitalist end product seems like an unrealistic yardstick for critique (or anything else for what is worth). Put differently, if we want to grasp critique within the academic domain, a good place to start would be broadening the scope of our search to include aspects other than exclusively scholarly written works as products.

The experiences we encountered in our research suggest a significant difference between critique as a product and the *lived production* of critique. Whereas the former can indeed be felt as the "somatic fact" (Freeman, 2010) of the current regime of academic knowledge, the latter resists this completeness in different ways. Employing this distinction, we try to focus on the conditions of possibility of scholarly production in the first place—that is, how production is produced—a dimension often overlooked due to the conspicuousness of the neoliberal capture of academic outcomes. In other words, the cleavage between critique as a product and the lived production of critique highlights that a critical practice is not a given but a space that must be opened up through political struggles. At this level, the entrepreneurial self seems to dwindle and different ethico-political modes of subjectification come to the fore. Consequently, and without positing an imaginary outside to the capitalist mode of production, we can identify modes of subjectivity other than the entrepreneurial *within* the present regime of epistemic subjectification. Critique, in our current times, is immanent to neoliberalism—it has been reconfigured as its constitutive outside.

In our study, the lived production of critique was particularly evident when researchers confronted the disciplinary boundaries of sociology. Esther is a primary example of this. She arrived in Chile in the early 2010s to undertake her doctoral studies in sociology. Her scholarly background was in communications, but, as she mentioned, this always coexisted with her inclination for discourse analysis, linguistics, and semiotics. When facing the decision of what PhD program to choose, she contemplated the two more prominent public universities, which, in her view, "are closer to cultural studies and that kind of stuff," or a prestigious private university that she defines as "sociology at its purest," to the extent that "you already know . . . you look at the program and it's scary cos you know it's sociology for sociology's sake." Despite her fears, she opted for the latter due to the alignment of her research interests with the work of some scholars affiliated with the program. These interests coalesced around the socio-material construction of the pregnant woman and what sorts of technologies and assemblages are at play in this particular subjectification that appears to be almost natural or spontaneous.

Epistemological frictions between her approach and what was deemed "strictly sociology" marked her whole journey. They can be summarized as the clash between her inquisitiveness focused on power relations and the "academicism" prevailing in Chilean universities in general and in her institution in particular. Based on her own description, "I was very much connected to poststructuralism, Foucault, and the like, but I was also very oppositional, which I believe it clashed a bit with the academicism, the overly academic tone of the doctorate." Ironically, although she was inhabiting the space for academic critique, Esther found herself in a situation where her critical research interests lacked critical legitimacy—the critical practice is an unevenly distributed possibility *within* the field of critique itself, and her way of conducting research fell outside these borders. As the proxy for critique, sociology is thus a field of force. "How can they not see power relations!?" the experience that troubled but also amazed Esther was her way of challenging not the critical outputs produced by academia but the lived experience of critique, the very conditions of possibility for a critical practice.

The critical affectivity that Esther refers to is better understood against the backdrop of one of the dominant discourses that defines sociology in her institutional context. This discourse perceives the overriding theoretical weakness of Latin American sociology as an effect of its enduring particularism (against universalism). Consequently, from this perspective, there is a failure to both overcome a vision of Latin America as unfinished modernity and to liberate itself from the demands of subaltern actors (Mascareño & Chernilo, 2005, p. 18). Thus, situated standpoints in this grand narrative are reduced to defective versions of modernity and biased commitments to critical projects of knowledge, namely, the project of connecting knowledge with subjects' grievances against diverse expansions of capitalism. This narrative has been one of the dominant norms authorizing the right way of any sociological engagement. It follows the "consecrated disciplinary narrative" of an ongoing professionalization of the sociological vocation understood as the way to overcome sociologists'

complicities with popular demands during the 1960s and 1970s and its politicization (Donoso Oyarzún, 2020). In this narrative, feminist epistemologies, post- and decolonial projects of sociological knowledge, or Marxist schools of thought triggered by the worker's experiences of exploitation and contradictions have been explicitly located in pejorative terms as "instruments of political modulation", and as obstacles for disciplinary autonomy (Mascareño & Chernilo, 2005, p. 22).

Esther's experience can, therefore, be perceived as part of the ongoing efforts to challenge the hegemonic theory of modernization that has regulated the expansion of the humanities and social sciences in Chile in the aftermath of the dictatorship (Richard, 2001). She embarked on a research journey that took her intellectually and geographically to distant places to defy this disciplinary distribution of critique. By bringing her PhD to completion and becoming a lecturer at a different institution, she managed to expand the field of critique by means of an experience of epistemic subjectification other than the entrepreneurial one. Through her research, she elbowed her way in defiance of canonical takes of sociology that dwarf the field of critique by adopting a universalist and Eurocentric stance that curtails critical innovation. Following Lorenzini (2022), we can say that this represents a critical epistemic subjectification; a rejection of how sociology administrates the possibilities of a critical practice. This is an ethico-political subjectification before any potential capture of the entrepreneurial self (which is likely the case if one is to keep an academic position nowadays).

Similar to Esther, Ángel also embodies this ethico-political subjectification by challenging the disciplinary boundaries of sociology. "In my case," he maintained, "I place myself very much within the paradigm of a critical sociology; a critical analysis of the cultural domain." His critical formulations, however, were at odds with the local delimitations of what critical sociology was. Coming from a country defined by revolution and social peace disputes, his research interests have always revolved around democracy and social movements. Notably, he detected an interesting assumption informing most approaches on the latter: As social movements fight to expand democracy to several domains, they tend to be conceptualized as intrinsically democratic. He tried to assess this presupposition by resorting to the notion of leadership, a concept that, unlike other latitudes, is usually outside of the sociological agendas in Chile. This was a topic that, as his own narration goes, was a permanent concern that took him very long to turn into a scholarly project, "but when I got to mature my research I crashed against that wall; that 'in sociology we don't do things like that,' as they said."

The collision Ángel experienced was twofold. Not only did he try to carry out his critical interests through a notion considered outside the critical boundaries of sociology, but he also had a commitment to popular education that led him to lay stress on pedagogy. In his own words, "I also articulate a lot of [my interests in] the social with the pedagogical, with the educational; which has also brought me difficulties when entering the sociological field." From his perspective, Chilean sociology operates as a closed system, largely incapable of transdisciplinarity. Consequently, when he expressed his intentions, "they told me: 'no, don't get involved with the pedagogical, this is sociology,' you see?" Here, "this is sociology" is coextensive with "this is critical (and that is not)." Against the backdrop of neoliberal productivity, we have come to believe that critique can only take the form of a book or an article, to the point that pedagogy is considered a practice unworthy of any attachment to sociology or critique. This is not an isolated or idiosyncratic belief. Rafael, another sociologist strongly invested in popular education, has a similar take on this. During our interview, he mentioned several times how he felt scoffed at by prestigious sociologists when he insisted on the necessity of paying due attention to sociological training for working-class students. "I'd say," he admitted, "that this has to do with elitism, with people who think that sociology is an intellectual matter, of people who are in palaces advising the prince." This devaluation of pedagogy is yet another way in which the sociological confines of what is critique are underpinned.

Although undoubtedly painful, when insisting on the value of both downgraded concepts (leadership) and practices (popular pedagogy), Ángel embodied a critical epistemic subjectivity. However, this experience would go unnoticed if we remain anchored to the mainstream evaluation of critique in terms of products. Just like Esther, his was a lived production of critique insofar as he challenged the very conditions of what counts as critique in the first place. Furthermore, this is a political struggle:

> So, when I faced all these questions, I started a process of re-evaluation of my research that led me to encounter a topic [leadership] that seemed taken for granted, and that they told me: "No, in sociology this is a mere preamble." This is akin, I think, to when you watch a series; like in Star Wars, that jumped from Episode IV and had to return to [Episode] III, because to understand this you had to understand the origin. So, I feel that my research goes a little along that line, that this is an interesting element in the research.

When we attune ourselves to the frequencies of the lived experience of critique, we can appreciate forms of subjectification that cannot be accounted for from a productivist standpoint. This ethico-political subjectivity does not operate at the level of production—that is, of written and published outcomes—but is perceivable instead in the political configuration of "critiqueness" as such. It does not seem accidental, then, the bellicose metaphor that Ángel deploys

to convey this idea as what is at stake is precisely the political delimitation of what can be done in the name of critique. Furthermore, this reference also illuminates the nonlinear path of this subjectification; the fact that, when it comes to critique, jumping backward can nonetheless be moving forward.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this research, we have advanced the analytical concept of regime of epistemic subjectification to explore the hegemonic ways of being with knowledge in contemporary humanities and social sciences. In these contexts, intellectual labor can be particularly immersive insofar as multiple and contradictory ethical commitments, regulations, and demands inform research, writing, and teaching practices as well as their politics of circulation, often resulting in intense subjective investments. By creatively blending the theoretical and empirical planes, our study provides a powerful overview of some of the affective technologies through which epistemic subjectification is achieved by the neoliberal regime of knowledge and reduced to a particular experience—the entrepreneurial self informed by the anthropological philosophy of human capital. For many, this seems to herald the downturn of critical ways of being with knowledge as the competitive neoliberal rationality instigated by the university has become not only unavoidable but also desired (Brown, 2015; Fassin, 2019). As Fassin (2019) argues, critique is "decidedly not so well"; owing to the transformation of its conditions of production it has "lost much of its leverage in the public sphere and legitimacy in the academic realm. And where it is expressed, it often appears to be normalized or marginalized" (p. 30).

Our empirical material not only corroborates this state of affairs but also provides a nuanced interpretation of the overdetermined affective states elicited by the current regime of epistemic subjectification. Neoliberal norms of knowledge can increasingly commodify the products of critique through the technologies of projectization, incentives, and performativity, while triggering in their producers pervasive feelings of shame, ontological insecurity, despondency, and affective exploitation. However, and importantly, it also defies a representation of total affective identification with the alleged completeness of the entrepreneurial self. Currently, the neoliberal regime of subjectification through knowledge realizes itself neither by consensus or coercion, nor by entrepreneurial automatism or conscious volition. The subjective experience of the neoliberal knowledge regime is far less dichotomic than the opposition between complete endorsement and critical commitment may suggest. Not only neoliberal regime but also critique has ever been accomplished through a direct and monolithic modulation in the microphysical dynamic terrain of Chilean social sciences.

Based on our analysis, it is crucial to distinguish between critical academic products and the lived experience of critique within academia. Whereas the former almost inevitably takes the form of commodified/commodifiable metrics and outcomes—journal articles, books, impact factors, economic incentives systems, and other metricized forms of intellectual labor—the latter can be the terrain of critical epistemic subjectifications. As our material demonstrates, it is possible to grasp an ethico-political way of being with knowledge less concerned with critical scholarly outputs than with the very conditions for critical practice. The lived experiences of critique identified here are in line with a Foucault (1997) understanding of critique as ethical subjectification. This process is characterized by the questioning of docility imposed by various forms of government over individuals' subjectivity, and a relationship between self and knowledge leading academics to assess their implication in intellectual labor and exercise their right to refuse deployments that curtail virtuous relationships between knowledge, society, individuals, and emancipation.

This mode of subjectification shows that the entrepreneurial seizure of critique in terms of products is contingent on the ongoing dispute over the limits of what counts as critical knowledge in the first place. *Critique—the one that is yet to be published*—is a process that requires an experience with knowledge other than the entrepreneurial. Consequently, when addressed not as a product but as a lived experience, the apparent seamless capitalist capture of critical academic subjectivities appears less encompassing. In our study, we identify these ethico-political subjectifications in the ambivalent relationships some of our interviewees have with sociology. This is significant at both conceptual and historical levels. On the one hand, sociology has customarily been considered an intrinsically critical discipline. For someone like Boltanski (2011), it is warranted to maintain that "sociology is already, in its very conception, at least potentially critical." Our analysis shows that such potential depends upon a type of subjectification that broadens the scope of critique from within the hegemonic regime. In other words, sociology is a legitimated site for critical practice, but the latter results from political struggles over sociology's disciplinary boundaries. These struggles require a non-entrepreneurial subjectification to be constituted in the outsides of the inside and through the crevices of the neoliberal knowledge regime. Importantly, the overwhelming experiences of knowledge under the neoliberal manufacture of epistemic practices that transpired in our interviews contrast with the dispersion and relative marginalization of critical subjectifications. This is a testimony of how critique is nowadays part of the immanence of neoliberalism.

On the other hand, it is not accidental that this critical subjectification takes shape as a confrontation with sociology in Chile. Due to the idiosyncrasies of its historical configuration,

this discipline has been significantly influential at both intellectual and political levels while exhibiting an ambivalent relationship toward critique. As several authors have shown (Rodríguez, 2018; Villalobos-Ruminott & Thayer, 2010), canonical modernization theories have left an indelible imprint in this field. Therefore, the emergence of a "local critical sensibility" (Hopenhayn, 1990) or the "new Chilean critical discourse" (Richard, 2004) from the post-dictatorship to the present day has been a tug-of-war between a universalizing techno-operative knowledge, on the hegemonic side, and poststructuralism and cultural studies, on the peripheral side. Epistemic subjectifications through feminism and popular pedagogy, similar to the ones embodied by Esther and Ángel, contribute to reconfiguring and expanding the critical ways of being with knowledge in Chile.

If sociology is inherently critical (Boltanski, 2011; see also Bacevic, 2021), then our distinction between critical academic products and the lived experience of critique shows that this criticality cannot be accounted for in terms of outputs and productivity. Critical products are still important in the current knowledge regime, but they risk turning the agonistic nature of critique into a consolatory struggle (Barnett, 2005; Valenzuela, 2019). The idea of a complete capture of academic subjectivities by the neoliberal knowledge regime may become a practice of self-reassurance by subjects who want to express political resistance and connect with emancipatory necessities. As a result, their critical thinking and writing can be reduced to cynical instrumental rationality. This entails a detachment from subjectivizing experiences of being otherwise in the very exposures of the injuries inflicted by current systems of domination in which universities and academics participate. Furthermore, when this consolatory approach to critique comes to the fore, the lived experience of critique is obfuscated. The fact that critique is part of the immanence of neoliberalism does not mean that consolatory critique is the only destiny. The lived experience of critique interpreted in this article demonstrates that the ethico-political subjectivation of critique lies not so much outside the neoliberal knowledge regime but in its very unfolding.

In the midst of a purportedly "post-critical" stage of the humanities and social sciences (Felski & Anker, 2017; Jensen, 2014; Latour, 2004), we should be particularly self-reflective on the ways in which our own research premises could reinforce the capitalist capture of academic life. For several reasons, these are dire days for wanting to be a scholar. The demanding technologies of government currently in place at the university and the intense affective responses they trigger attest to this. However, to conclude that critical engagements with knowledge are beyond our grasp is misleading. Epistemic experiences, as our research demonstrates, are much muddier than some accounts are willing to accept. This very article is an expression of the situation. As a product, it could be easily shrugged off as yet another case of journal fetishization by two entrepreneurial Latin American researchers trying to improve their credentials or increase their emergent positions in the prestige economy. As a lived experience, it is *also* a vehicle to prove that the entrepreneurial self does not necessarily exhaust contemporary epistemic subjectification in the university. Both logics can unfurl simultaneously, and our analytical devices should be attuned to this. Therefore, rather than an all-encompassing, consistent, and systematic governmentality, the capitalist regime of epistemic subjectification, paraphrasing Trostky (1980), looks more like an *uneven and combined* entrepreneurial grip, a process that ironically requires an ethico-political subjectification as its precondition. Taking this into account, perhaps one of the tasks should be to rehearse a sensibility that allows us to perceive how the possibilities to move beyond the neoliberal subjectivation actually lie alongside it.

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Note

1. In Chile, according to a data set based on a survey conducted by the Ministry of Science, Technology, Knowledge, and Innovation with more than half of researchers who have received a government scholarship and finished their postgraduate studies between the 1980s and 2018, the teaching workload of researchers working within the humanities and social sciences has increased its proportion of the total labor time from 30% to 39%, whereas the workload of research has remained steady at around 36%.

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