# Teaching Feminism:
# Between Marginalisation and Feminist Persistence

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## Introduction

Feminism[1] in the academy (researching, teaching, publishing) has a relatively short history. The first institutionalised women's studies course was held in the late 1950s in Australia: Dawson's course *Women in a Changing World* (Becchio, 2020). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, courses which placed women's lives and experiences at the centre of researching and teaching (i.e. women's studies) were introduced in the academic institutions in the United States of America, originally more as "an ensemble of courses listed on bulletin boards and often taught for free by faculty and community leaders", and later as an organised entity (Wiegman, 2002, p. 18): the first accredited women's studies course in the USA was established in 1969, with the number of courses in universities rising steeply over the next couple of years. In the early 1970s, soon after the institutionalisation of women's studies in the USA, the first *extramural* courses[2] were developed in Britain (see Bird, 2003, p. 265),[3] and in 1974 courses called "Women in Society" were introduced in the sociology department (Bird, 2003). In France, where feminist publicist activity was extremely fruitful, the first institutionalised women's studies course also

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1   In this article, the term *women's* signifies the field of study while *feminist* represents the approach to the field.

2   Courses, connected with the "normal" courses/programmes of a college or university, but outside it (Bird, 2003).

3   According to Humm, the first women's studies course in Britain was Juliet Mitchell's short course entitled "The Role of Women in Society" at the "Anti University" (Humm & Bird, 2003, pp. 265, 284).

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began in the early 1970s (Ezekiel, 1992, p. 81). In Italy, "Women's Issues" have been taught since the mid-1970s (Pravadelli, 2010, p. 63). Since the 1980s and 1990s, the number of university programmes and courses has steadily increased all over the world.

Before the institutionalisation of feminist knowledge about sexism, women's oppression, political theory and political mobilisation against patriarchy was created and circulated in feminist groups (e.g. Ezekiel, 1992; hooks, 2000). In fact, all over the world, early women's studies were closely tied with feminist movements, springing up at almost at the same time in a similar political climate. In the USA, women's studies, i.e. "the studies by, about and belonging to women" (Boxer, 2001, p. 13), were founded in left-wing political activism (the Civil Rights Movement, the women's liberation movement, the gay and lesbian movement, the movement against the Vietnam War) and the counterculture of the time. The first women's studies courses in Britain were linked to the British Women's Liberation Movement (Bird, 2003); in France, informal women's study groups came out "in the aftermath of the events in May 1968" (Ezekiel, 1992, p. 76). It could be said that women's studies themselves arose as a worldwide movement of feminist writers, journalists, scholars, groups of politically engaged women creating and transmitting feminist ideas through publications, protests and speak-outs (e.g. Ezekiel, 1992): "In the heyday of 'the personal is the political', feminists working in academia were also active in feminist groups and engaged in the battles for women's rights. The convergence between theory and practice can also be tested at another level: feminist academics worked alongside non-academics in different social contexts and cultural practices" (Pravadelli, 2010, p. 62). The circumstances of their birth were reflected in distinct features of the early women's studies programmes: the equal focus on curriculum and political activity in close cooperation with women's organisations (Buhle, 2000), i.e. "the alliance between theory and practice, institutional and non-institutional contexts" (Pravadelli, 2010, p. 63). As Pravadelli (ibid.) points out, feminists believed that feminist thought could develop only by "moving in and out of academia".

The institutionalisation of women's studies undoubtedly helped spread feminist knowledge, encouraged critical thinking and challenged patriarchal norms; it also provided a space for sophisticated feminist thinking and the careers of many feminists. Yet, from the very beginning the institutionalisation of women's studies also evoked suspicion as well as numerous questions and dilemmas on the feminist and anti-feminist side. In this article, we are interested in the state of feminist teaching and related practices in Slovenian higher education: how are feminist approaches

integrated at the level of curriculum throughout higher education and how are these feminist practices perceived at the level of "intra-institutional" everyday life, that is, how do they cope with and within the institutions of higher education that are marked and burdened by gendered power relations. To answer this, a brief sketch of the social conditions that shape feminist practices and movements is needed.

## Teaching Feminism: A Brief Introduction to Uneasiness, Dilemmas, Obstacles

Feminists often criticise academic feminism as if it has lost sight of actual human relations; that theory is no longer tied to the feminist movement and that it "even undermines the feminist movement via depoliticization" (hooks, 2000, p. 22). bell hooks, for example, claims that by the late 1980s in the feminist thinking:

> /p/ractice received less attention than theory that was metalinguistic, creating exclusive jargon; it was written solely for an academic audience. /…/ It was as if a large body of feminist thinkers banded together to form an elite group writing theory that could be understood only by an "in" crowd. Women and men outside the academic domain were no longer considered an important audience (hooks, 2000, p. 22).

In short, academic feminism is often seen as a betrayal of the feminist movement.

However, differences, discrepancies, divergences and splits exist not simply between institutionalised feminism and feminist movements, but also within academic feminism and within feminist movements. They concern conceptualisations of sex, gender and gender identity and its constitution; understanding of the subject, i.e. *a woman*; understanding the relationship between equality and differences, inequality and sameness, between different axes of subordination (e.g. class/race/ethnicity/sexual orientation/gender); epistemology and research methods; strategies and tactics to realise gender equity. These differences/discrepancies/divergences/splits are also reflected in the field's naming: *sociology of gender, anthropology of gender, psychology of gender; women's studies, gender studies, feminist theory.* Changing the field's name to *Gender Studies*, for example, reflects "the expansion of the field's objects of study," but also represents "a loss of its founding feminist ideals" (Wiegman, 2016, p. 86). Namely, Gender Studies, as Wiegman points out, is often considered (even in academic discussions) as "an alternative to Women's Studies, undermining the primacy of women as the field's proper object of study" (Wiegman,

2002, p. 19).[4] Yet, although they evoke uneasiness, all of these differences/discrepancies/divergences/splits and conflicts prove the field's virility – as long as the field keeps the basic feature and goals of feminist epistemology and the feminist movement, e.g. challenging the assumptions of neutrality of knowledge and scientific objectivity (i.e. the assumption of knowledge unmarked by power relations, and demands for gender equity). This is exactly what is threatened by the changing power relations in the Academy in neoliberal times, when the governing neoliberal ideology is making deals with (extreme) right-wing political movements.

Teaching and learning about feminism can be difficult for all of these reasons. First, feminist theory claims, as Stopford (2020) notes, often challenge familiar norms, the very foundations of students' understanding of themselves, and the world around them. Namely, as Stopford analyses, feminist theory operates with critical norms that destabilise not only *common-sense knowledge*, but also the norms that govern the descriptive theory claims that are much more familiar to students – for many students, the clash between critical norms on one hand and common-sense "facts" and descriptive norms on the other is inevitable, not to mention the effects of this clash such as scepticism and different forms of resistance (see our discussion).

Neoliberal ideology (including neoliberal feminism), policies, common-sense representations and descriptions of the world and the identifications they impose are a constant source of these types of clashes. Neoliberal ideology interprets individual women as those who *can do it* by themselves, as autonomous individuals; it compels them to focus on themselves and their own aspirations. By interpreting women as those who *can do* everything (in *the brave new world* where we can all win), it is seemingly speaking from a feminist position. This (neo)liberal interpretation is fully problematic because it ignores the cultural, economic and political obstacles to do or to achieve *everything*. Unfortunately, some feminist movements and politics are much closer to this view than they might be willing to admit. Gender mainstreaming policies, for example, create the impression that nation states and supranational institutions have assumed responsibility for realising gender equity: the EU, for example, encourages national legislatives to take gender perspective into account, although the criteria of effectiveness – gender balance statistics – are highly

4      One of the most pressing tensions is present between so called trans-exclusionary feminism and (trans) feminism: the first attempts to draw the boundaries of who counts as women and as a minority oppressed on the grounds of gender, and thus repeats already-known struggles, stemming from the lack of an intersectional approach towards feminist issues (e.g. race, class, sexual identity …) (Ahmed, 2016a; see also Bettcher, 2017).

problematic. Namely, gender balance statistics cover numerable inequities, such as conditions to get and keep a job, gaps between the poor and the rich etc. Further, gender mainstreaming politics primarily reinforce the positions and opportunities of middle-class women to enter the spheres of power and occupy hierarchical positions formerly held by men. It appears as though the EU's aims are principally focused on a set of narrow economic goals – gender equity seems more a means than a goal in itself. [5] This suspicion is further strengthened when we consider the EU's neutral stance on women's reproductive rights and abortion. All of these factors form the impression that feminist politics and, consequently (if feminist teaching is considered a practice that fosters feminist politics/movement), feminist teaching and learning about feminism are superfluous: as if they were needless and irrelevant because feminist aims have been realised or even exceeded, or – if they are not yet achieved – the nation state and supranational institutions will provide them.

The dark side of this neoliberal image of *the new brave world* where people are equal or can be equal if only they wish and work hard enough is the *ascent* of extreme right-wing political movements and parties. Their nationalistic ideology and stance on the biological reproduction of the nation is closely linked to gender, sex dichotomies and hierarchies. They overtly oppose gender equality referring to biology and naturalness of gender constitution, gender differences, patriarchy and heterosexuality, while strengthening common-sense beliefs in the naturalness of the social order based on gender inequality. Meanwhile, optimistic and well-intentioned neoliberals act as if they do not care about it or do not even notice it.

All of these difficulties that affect power relations in the academy and evoke resistance against feminist knowledge occur in Slovenia as well and we discuss them in the following two sections.

## Gender and/in Higher Education (HE) in Slovenia

Courses and programmes based on feminist social epistemology (gender sociology, gender anthropology, women's studies, gender studies (WGS), gay and lesbian studies, feminist theory etc.) were introduced at Slovenian universities in the early 1990s, somewhat later than in Anglo-Saxon and the Nordic countries. Nevertheless, Slovenia was the first of the former Yugoslav republics to make WGS part of its institutionalised university studies. They were officially introduced in the form of a programme and/or a course in the mentioned period but, even before that, individual female professors – mainly from the social sciences and humanities – gave lectures on feminist issues (Antić Gaber, 2017). Those courses and programmes

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5    E.g. see the European Commission's *Strategy for Equality Between Women and Men* 2010–2015.

emerged from the women's movement and challenged traditional notions of knowledge and knowing. Early feminist critiques of the academic field "focused specially on the dominance of 'male' experience and the systemic exclusion of women as both subjects and objects of knowledge" (Kohli & Burbules, 2013, p. 4). Yet in Slovenia an important parallel structural change was in course: 1) in the process of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Slovenia had decided on independence; 2) it changed its political system from a socialist-self-management one to a liberal democracy and 3) decided on a market economy. It must be stressed that women, as Gaber puts it, "in time following independence, shared the common belief that with democracy, with political pluralism, with the competition of ideologies and political parties, the time had arrived to understand the struggle for new rights" (Gaber, 2015, p. 27). We witnessed important shifts and changes in our society, our social space was filled with "numerous opportunities, while on the other hand, brought an equal number of traps" (ibid.).

All of these shifts led to important changes in the positioning of women in society generally and in academia too. Women's initiatives were influential enough to push through entities such as *Parlamentarna komisija za žensko politiko* (Parliamentary Commission for Women's Policy, 1991) and *Urad za žensko politiko* (Office for Women's Policy, 1992) and to implement new laws and policies. The *White Paper on Education* (*Bela knjiga o vzgoji in izobraževanju*) (Krek, 1995) highlighted gender equality as one of the main objectives of education; the amount of gender-related research (gender inequalities, gender stereotypes) has increased. When we consider higher education and gender equality today, we must mention two documents that frame gender equality issues in higher education and research: *The Higher Education Act* (ZVis), which covers organisational and financial aspects of higher education in Slovenia, and the *Resolution on the National Programme for Higher Education* (2011–2020) (NPVŠ11-20). The latter is a strategic document that defines the development of higher education and emphasises the quality, excellence, diversity, accessibility, internationalisation and funding of higher education as key objectives. Yet, it does not explicitly address gender issues, and objectives and measures relating to gender equality are not specified. It is right to say that this is document which is coming to an end and has yet to find a successor.

While one can assert that some progress has been made in the last decades, we can agree with Antić Gaber (2017, p. 12) that "overall, no fundamental changes have taken place". Gender question is still largely off the radar for policymakers and even more worrying for academia leadership in the country.

**Gender in HE Curricula**

For many years, experts (Acker, 1994; Arnot & Weiner, 1987; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Weiner, 1995) have stressed that effective gender equality in school and in society at large, as well as a diminishing of gender stereotypes, can only be achieved if we thoroughly (and on all levels) address gender issues and gender equality in school curricula. To determine the coverage of gender content in the curricula of the faculties of education, we analysed the curriculum of selected study programmes.[6] There are three public faculties of education in Slovenia (in Maribor, Ljubljana and Koper). For the purpose of this paper, we focus only on faculties of education, but these are not the only educational institutions that train future teachers. In reviewing selected content in the curricula of the listed faculties, we looked for those programmes and subjects that address the issues of gender, femininity, masculinity and feminism or gender equality. We therefore searched for keywords, phrases and concepts in publicly available documents that could be related to gender issues in educational institutions. To this end, we used the method of analysing publicly accessible documents such as curricula, study programmes description documents etc.[7]

## Results of the Curriculum Analysis of Selected Faculties

### Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana

At the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, in the programmes for Classroom Teaching, Subject Teacher in science and Art Pedagogy in the Bologna 1st cycle, we were unable to find a compulsory course with

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6    The results used in this paper are part of the final report of the project entitled *Gender equality in the field of education* (V5-1705; 2018–2020) (Tašner et al., 2020), financed by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) and Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. One topics covered by the research group was the analysis of study programmes, which form future teachers in Slovenia, from the point of view of inclusion of the theme of gender equality in selected study programmes on the tertiary education level. The method used in this part of the project was document analysis.

7    Acknowledging several advantages of the method used (e.g. availability, cost-effectiveness, and lack of obtrusiveness and reactivity that is particularly important while addressing potentially sensitive topics that may lead to biased answers, i.e. presenting oneself as a person, sensitive to gender issues), we also acknowledge its limitations. One of the most pressing limitations was the lack of opportunity for identifying and further analysing potential discrepancies between formalised and officialised documents (curricula) and teaching practices. The first may not necessarily and always reflect teaching practices and/or the course content that is actually being taught (Bowen, 2009). Nonetheless, what is officialised and formalised by the educational institution is by itself of significance as it marks the boundaries of what is and can be "collectively accredited" and verified (as worthy of its place in higher education) by the institution itself (see, for example, Bourdieu, 2018, p. 116).

the required keywords in the title. There is one optional course, namely Education and Gender offered in all of the above-mentioned programmes (except Art Pedagogy) in the first and second Bologna cycles. We found another optional subject, Gender studies, but the professor in charge for this subject told us "they implemented [the course] years ago, but not anymore", and could not give us a specific reason for that, except that it is not really offered to students. Some of the key (gender-related) phrases and contents can be found in the compulsory general subject Sociology of Education (in all of the above-mentioned programmes), Pedagogical Psychology, Youth Literature, EPTE, Reaction to Difference and Psychology for Teachers, and Sociology of Family for the science subject teacher programme. In the second cycle, the story repeats itself. There are no compulsory subjects that systematically deal with gender, gender equality and general gender questions.

*Faculty of Education, University of Maribor*
The Faculty implements three first-cycle university study programmes (Music Pedagogy, Art Pedagogy, and Classroom Teaching), and several second-cycle study programmes: Classroom Teaching (1 year), Art Pedagogy (1 year), Music Pedagogy (1 year), Inclusion in Education (2 years) and Pre-school Education (2 years).

The mentioned first-cycle programmes do not have a compulsory subject addressing the content we were looking for. Gender differences are addressed in the optional subject Child in a Group of Peers. In Classroom Teaching, some gender-related content can be found in the following subjects: Ethical and Sociological Aspects of Education, Differentiation in Mathematics Lessons (Gender and Mathematics), Developmental Psychology (with an emphasis on middle childhood). In the second cycle, the story is repeated. There is no special course dedicated to gender or gender equality. Moreover, gender is also absent from the programmes Art Pedagogy, Classroom Teaching and Music Pedagogy. In the programme Inclusion in Education, one can find the optional subject Peer Interaction in Classroom, which deals with the role of gender in children's relationships with peers.

*Faculty of Education, University of Primorska*
At the mentioned faculty, the focus has been on the following first-cycle study programmes: the university study programme Pedagogy, the university study programme Classroom Teaching. There is no compulsory subject in the Pedagogy programme that includes the required words in its name. There are certain topics related to gender and education in

the subjects: Sociology of Education, Learning Processes, Anatomy and Physiology in Education, Psychology of Personality, and Sociology of the Family. We were also unable to find a compulsory subject that deals with gender in the Classroom Teaching programme. However, some gender contents are covered in the following subjects: Basics of Pedagogy, Language in Society, Psychology of Personality, and Sociology of Family.

Among the 2nd-level programmes, we found a subject entirely dedicated to gender only in the Classroom Teaching programme, namely the course Dynamics of Relationships and Gender.

From the perspective of gender mainstreaming, the analysis of selected study programmes at all three faculties allows the conclusion that some content on the topic of gender and gender equality can be found in study programmes and that few optional courses exist after Bologna (Antić Gaber, 2017, p. 23). But the situation is still far from satisfactory, mostly due to the: a) optional character of the gender-related courses on offer, meaning they do not reach the majority, let alone all students; and b) gender being only one of the many topics in the specific context of an individual course. The review demonstrates that the mentioned field of knowledge remains quite marginalised.

## Turning the Tables

After discussing the wider position of gender studies in higher education, we continue with practical realisations of feminist teaching and wider feminist practices within the academic field. For that, we first make an excursion with an anecdote in order to reveal the institutional settings in which feminist teaching is being implemented – or discouraged from doing so – and the relations formed between attempts to perform feminist teaching and the student population, as well as the positioning of feminist practices within the academic field in order to discuss the possibilities of feminist practices of resistance and institutional barriers, the bricks and walls that feminist practices are encountering.

In 2015, one of the faculties of the University of Ljubljana prepared a poster aimed at encouraging student enrolment. As the faculty chiefly has women students, the poster primarily addressed potential male students in order to reach a "gender balance". To achieve this, the poster displayed one male student in a group of female students who were kneeling before him, stating "blissful among women". According to the faculty's leaders, the poster was student-made. Yet, a minority of students protested against the poster and thus a "public" debate was to be held to shed light on the pressing question of what was informally labelled "*the poster affair*": was the poster an innocent joke (misunderstood by feminist students and

teachers) or a sexist incident? The answer to the question was to be provided through a debate between the protesting group, the faculty's leadership and the student group that had made the poster. Answering the question is not of our main concern here as we are more interested in the conditions and settings in which the public debate was held, especially the positionality of the table around which the debate was held. In the words of S. Ahmed, we approach the table as an institution's "orientation device that keeps things in place" (Ahmed, 2006a, p. 134). It does so by providing the ways in which the seats are taken up, thus the ways in which the positions of speaking up and the potential of being (un)heard were distributed and written into the institutional space even before the debate had taken place. Put differently, in the public debate, the seats were distributed as an extension of institutional orientation (towards sexisms and feminisms). The leadership – representing institution by delegation, incorporating institutional signs that act as "calls to order" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 123) – was placed in a frontal-lecturing way alongside the general student group, while the protesting group was placed in front of them, facing the institution, its walls, barriers and its representative actors as if in in a hearing, in defence.

It was a feminist stance, the protest against sexism – rather than masculine domination and sexism – that needed to defend itself. Thus, the question mentioned before was silently answered before any speaking took place: the poster is a joke, misunderstood as sexism by lesbians. Despite the table being round-shaped, the way the actors gathered around it – the positionality of the table and agents' orientation towards the table – revealed the sharp edges of institutional power relations. It made visible "the surface of institutional space" (Ahmed, 2006a, p. 113) alongside its hidden depth, usually covered up by lip servicing to gender equality at the level of speeches and recommendations[8] that do not (necessarily) translate into concrete institutional practices (see also Murray, 2018) and as such primarily serve as "institutional success stories" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 10) that hide the "permanence in and through change" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 91).

The anecdote of the poster affair makes visible the following: 1) the "chilly climate" of the institutional setting[9] (David, 2014, p. 174) in which feminist practices take roots; and 2) reservations towards feminism by the

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8      S. Ahmed (2006b) calls such institutional speech acts that do not do what they say, name and commit to (i.e. gender equality, antiracism) nonperformatives. Not only they fail to enact what they say, these speech acts also hinder or disable the recognition of still-persisting problems (i.e. gender inequality, racism).

9      Despite academic field enjoying a relative autonomy, it is still significantly shaped by "external forces expressing themselves according to the specific logic effective inside this space" (Bourdieu, 2020, p. 237).

student population, whose attitudes to gender and feminism are blurred and distorted by countless social processes of negative stereotyping and stigmatising feminisms as movements and feminists as agents (for example, see Charter, 2015; Dyer & Hurd, 2018; Houvouras & Carter, 2008, on students' reluctance to identify as feminists despite generally supporting gender equality). It is this double-bind institutional setting – influenced by the wider antifeminist backlash, including the construct of "gender ideology" and of "gender as an ideology" (for a detailed discussion, see Kuhar & Patternote, 2017) that has turned feminisms into "the unspeakable F-word" (Moi, 2006, p. 1739) and at the same time seeks to make gender studies irrelevant by constructing them as supposedly ideological, political[10] and subjective,[11] that feminist topics, principles and practices take place. Yet, it is also this setting in which feminist principles and practices persist and resist.

Murray (2018, p. 180), while working on S. Ahmed's concept of feminist killjoys, of feminists "killing joy" by not being willing to participate in the reproduction of masculine domination (2017), distinguishes three types of "killjoy tactics" or feminist responses to being constituted as a "challenging presence" in academia: managing, challenging, and refusal/exit (Murray, 2018). The first refers to the collective work of support and solidarity among killjoys as well as self-silencing when the "institutional wall" is deemed too high or the institutional bricks too thick (Ahmed, 2014, p. 146), and is especially important when rethinking feminist practices of resistance in intersection with precarious positions: with a precarious position, there usually comes a precarious toolbox of feminist manoeuvres. The second type of response contains directly challenges to the institutional barriers and their patriarchal, unequal and sexist settings which, as Murray (ibid., p. 182) emphasises, should also be addressed alongside an agent's position within academia: "those with more security and higher up the academic ladder have a greater power to shape the academic culture". The same holds true for the third one – refusal and exit from academia due to unbearable patriarchal burdens – which, as S. Ahmed who herself resigned from her post at Goldsmith due to the institution's incapability to address sexual harassment claims warns, is far

10   To the reproach of science being political, we reply using Bourdieu's words: "I myself fell victim to that moralism of neutrality, of the non-involvement of the scientist /.../ As if one could talk of the social world without being involved in politics!" (Lahire, 1999, p. 15; Lane, 2006, p. 1).

11   Recent consequences of those antifeminist backlashes, resulting in science being banned or simply erased from academia, are the removal of Gender Studies from the list of accredited Master Programmes in Hungary in 2018 (see the European Communication Research and Education Association's public statement, 2018), and the proposed ban on the teaching of gender studies in schools and universities in Romania in June 2020 (Tidey, 2020).

from accessible to everyone within academia: "other feminists in the same situation might stay because they cannot afford to leave" (Ahmed, 2016b).

However, the first two responses as discussed by Murray (2018) can be approached as two sides of the same coin as feminist resistance *to* and *in* the educational setting and its baggage of masculine domination involves both managing the challenging as well as challenging the managing. Namely, as another similar study shows (Perger, 2016), it is important to recognise the toll that challenging and resistance takes and the strategic,[12] almost instant adjustments of resistant practices to situational circumstances, such as particular power relations (i.e. challenging the faculty's dean or a colleague) in a given situation and the nature of the obviousness of the problem at stake which may make it easier or harder for a killjoy to pinpoint a problem. Thus, managing the challenging refers to shielding oneself from being constituted as a problem due to the naming and exposing of a problem (Ahmed, 2015) that happens within a "stuck place" (Lipton & Mackinlay, 2017, p. 86), in a moment of hesitation, not only in relation to institutional agents but also in relation to the student population, where (feminist) lecturers may take into account the "spectre of bad student feedback" that is hanging over the classroom (Murray, 2018, p. 168), the threat of students' "dissatisfaction", which may discourage killjoys from (fully) challenging students' taken-for-granted attitudes to gender. It contains a situationally-adjusted feminist toolbox, ranging from raised eyebrows and a cynical smile through to direct confrontation. Despite functioning as a shielding strategy aimed at providing conditions that enable feminist resistance without risking too much, managing the challenging may at the same time constitute feelings of guilt, of constant self-surveillance, feelings of not being (vocal, resistant, persistent) enough and/or feelings of being too much (self-managed, self-disciplined and self-silenced) (see also Lipton & Mackinlay, 2017, pp. 85–113). Thus, managing the challenging may prove to be an issue due to the "after-effects of silencing": "I should have stood up, I should have said more, I should have opened my mouth" (ibid., p. 71). Stated differently, it may lead to a particular kind of an (activist) imposter syndrome (Murray, 2018, p. 173).

The conditions which make it practically reasonable for feminist killjoys to manage one's feminist practices of resistance in order to avoid various kinds of sanctions, that is, the conditions "making unbearable /of/ the consequences of not willing what someone wills you to will" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 55) are those that need to be challenged. It is these conditions that

12    We refer to the "strategic" element of one's practices in a Bourdieusian sense, meaning a practical reason, a feel for the game rather than a conscious calculation (Bourdieu, 2008, p. 159).

predetermine and prearrange the "seating order" at a supposedly round-shaped table; they predetermine who gets to be recognised as authorised to sit at the table and speak or, more specifically, who gets to speak with authority grounded in the "symbolic profit of normality" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 23) and with an institutional backup, provided to those whose speaking up is integrated into the institutional life-as-usual, and whose speaking up is distorted through the predominant attitudes and perceptions of feminists being "lonely and unhappy, angry, man-hating, lesbian[s]" (Dyer & Hurd, 2018, p. 443) and who are thus left unheard. Hence, the tables need to be turned and antifeminism, masculine domination and the accompanying sexism – rather than feminist practices and principles – need to be questioned and seated on the other side of the table.

**Conclusion**

Feminism in the higher education of today is faced with numerous challenges. Recognising the embeddedness of higher education in the wider social environment, and thus its susceptibility to social processes and "happenings", it is important to acknowledge the dangers represented by neoliberal ideology alongside the strengthening of nationalistic ideologies and extreme right-wing movements and parties in relation to feminist practices. Namely, through the lenses of neoliberal ideology, feminism is perceived as a redundant and irrelevant part of the present, a remainder of the past, of the "old times", that was supposedly successfully addressed through and with the individual's wish to work hard enough – supported by national and international frameworks of gender equality – in order to overcome (gendered and gendering) obstacles on their career paths. While these neoliberal "post-feminist" times with their easy-to-sell exceptional successful stories – seen more as the rule than the exception – constitute feminism as needless, right-wing movements alongside anti-feminist backlashes in the form of "gender ideology" perceive feminism as a threat, or better said, as an obstacle that disables and makes it harder for the past of the unquestioned patriarchy and masculine domination to return.

Due to higher education's social embeddedness, these social processes undoubtedly touch on the state and life of feminist principles and within higher education's institutions. Thus, at the level of curricula, women's studies and feminist approaches are rarely explicitly mentioned and stressed, let alone obligatory for all students. Rather, it seems like higher education in Slovenia continues to shy away from recognising the importance of feminist teaching and knowledge production. As such, gender is put on the bench when it comes to institutionalised and officialised

curricula and forced to creep into the teaching practices: feminism – that creepy thing. It is mostly left up to the willingness of teachers to do feminism in the classrooms; conversely, their unwillingness to unquestionably accept the patriarchal ordering of higher education. Thus, feminism, its principles and practices (still) hold a marginal position in higher education. Nonetheless, feminism resists and, despite the backlashes that aim to extort a price for not being willing to support institutional walls as they exist, including their gendered power relations, it persists.

What our article has attempted to show and hopefully achieved is that rather than accommodating feminism to fit higher education, its institutional walls and accompanying silences and silencing – mostly through and by allowing its neoliberal variant to enter in the companionship of post-feminism narratives that are ill equipped to face the challenges coming from right-wing movements, that is, by the "complicities of institutionalizations" (Wiegman, 2002, p. 89), it is higher education that must be adjusted – remade and reshaped – according to feminist principles (and other social justice principles). After all, feminist knowledge is indeed, as bell hooks (2000, p. 24) emphasises, for everybody.

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