Recalibrating *disability* towards the term *subaltern*. The social work of neoliberal-academic-ableism in Danish higher education

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1 Exploring subalternity, epistemic violence and enclosure

At the onset of this paper, we explore subalternity, epistemic violence and enclosure in various shapes and forms concerning notions of *academic ableism* in Danish higher education. The reverberation felt animates us in the far-reaching emphasis of the silenced epistemological *areas* that saturates Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) seminal postcolonial critique "Can the Subaltern Speak?". Obligated by the profound and vital ways Spivak's criticism has been and continues to be influential, we demand attention to the subaltern's muteness and the voice of the proxy who *speaks* for the subaltern. We thus seek to readdress Spivak's critique concerning different understandings of disability in Danish higher education when approached through scholarship founded in black studies, critical race studies and the affective turn in correspondence with critical disability studies.

Leaning particularly on Jasbir K. Puar's (2017) attention to Spivak's notion of subalternity, the above-mentioned theoretical conglomerate is not deployed to produce a corrective endeavour. Instead, we are interested in probing for alternative and generative ways to engage with and understand subaltern subjectivities concerning what we argue is a *productive ambiguity* in Spivak's (1985, 1988) thinking about the predication of the subject. Thus emphasising the significance of destabilising understandings of the subject by turning towards movements and processes of the body, as opposed to a narrow settling on positionality, stasis and identity of the body (Puar, 2007, 2012, 2017, Massumi, 2002). This focus towards movements and processes of the body does not imply an attempt to obfuscate disability as a social formation, thereby covertly watering down the politics of disability. Neither does it assume any undertaking to establish what disability is. Instead, we are preoccupied with explaining what disability does and "to put the disabled/non-disabled binary in dialogue with assemblages of disability, capacity and debility" (Puar, 2017, p. 20).

The epistemological and ontological underpinnings, as Alexander G. Weheliye (2015) so rightly reminds us, we, as scholars within the field of disability studies, "need to draw attention to how the field contributes to the creation of objects of knowledge" (Weheliye, 2015, p. 24), enabling us to interrogate the general and a priori assumption concerning disability studies which "reflects an already existent series of real objects" (Weheliye, 2015, p. 24). Committed to an interdisciplinary and transnational approach to knowledge production, we are unfortunately far from unfamiliar with Spivak's (1988) lamenting analysis of the epistemological silencing of unmarked whiteness that surrounds much knowledge production and concern in correspondence with the field of disability studies. Palpable of this claim, Puar (2017) writes that "the epistemic whiteness of the field [of disability studies] is no dirty secret" (p. xix). Although Spivak's (1988) work cannot be (directly) preoccupied with subject formations pertaining to disability nor how epistemic whiteness partakes in understandings surrounding disability. Spivak (1988) embraces the broader scope of the

colonial hauntings of unmarked whiteness as *epistemic violence*. Her writing in "Can The Subaltern Speak?" still carries with it attention towards multiple subject formations and perhaps even a looming intersectional analysis that is ambiguous about representation and the various distinctions surrounding what Spivak (1988) describes as "the subaltern woman's consciousness - or, more acceptably, subject" (p. 295).

Perhaps a preemptive or anticipatory indicator of the imminent aspect of what Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) would refer to as intersectionality or an intersectional approach, Spivak (1988) bluntly states: "Clearly, if you are poor, black and female you get it in three ways. […] The necessary stratification of colonial subject-construction in the first phase of capitalist imperialism makes 'color' useless as an emancipatory signifier" (p. 90). Here Spivak (1988) discloses ways in which the colonial subject construction of the subaltern (first phase of capitalist imperialism) is assigned to signifiers of *difference* all positioned marginally, which is to say: classed (poor), raced (black) and gendered (female), and how these tree signifiers necessarily are epistemologically compartmentalised. Thus, obscuring any emancipatory capacity of the two former categories on behalf of amplifying the potential of the latter and hence ensuring the recursive preservation of unmarked whiteness, or as Spivak (1988) describes it, "the ability of the investigating subject (male or female professional) to disguise itself in transparency" p. 90). Spivak's (1988) statement, "if you are poor, black and female, you get it in three ways" (p. 294), indicates that power relations in her understanding of subalternity are not conceived in singular terms. Rather, Spivak's (1988) comprehension compliments Marcus E. Green's (2011) rethinking of Antonio Gramsci's work, whose thinking on subalternity foregrounds that the experience of subordination is functioning in the wake of multiple intersectional identities, which is why subalternity is "functioning within an ensemble of socio-political and economic relations" (Green, 2011, p. 400). Though Spivak herself does not claim any particular subscription to the framework of intersectionality or an intersectional approach as such, her critique is analogous to an intersectional approach in its emphasis on the continued retention of subject formation concerning representation as well as the importance of increased attention towards the analytical imperative to "address the simultaneity of modes of difference" as argued by Roderick A. Ferguson (2012, p. 91) when summarising intersectionality.

Despite the apparent attention to positions of class, race and gender as intersecting subject predictions, Spivak's analysis does not provide liability or accuracy about the borders or jurisdiction surrounding the identity of the subaltern, instead notably highlighted within her acclaimed scheme: "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak, 1988, p. 92), as the colonial projects legitimating narrative and its dependency on a particular patriarchal strategy of power relations in its scheme, where the colonial project "as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as an object of protection from her own kind" (Spivak, 1988, p. 94). To better demonstrate, what we argue to be the productive aspects of ambiguity surrounding Spivak's predication of the subject, and how this ties into the uncertainty and open-ending of the subjectivity of the subaltern in Spivak's scheme, we turn to a different geographical area and colonial trajectory than that of Spivak's analysis, namely that of Israel's settler-colonial occupation of Palestine. Here Spivak's scheme is restated by Puar (2017), illustrating the genealogical modality between colonial projects over time and place and demonstrating the generative practice of rereading Spivak's scheme with particular scrutiny surrounding subjectivity. Puar (2017) describes the inception of what Partha Chatterjee termed *the woman question*: "The capacity for an emerging postcolonial government to protect native women from oppressive patriarchal cultural practices, marked as

tradition became the barometer by which colonizers arbitrated political concessions made by the colonized" (Puar, 2017, p. 98).

As Puar (2017) demonstrates, *the woman question* is absorbed into the discourse of what she characterises as, "present-day liberal feminist scholars who have become the arbiters of other women's modernity or the modernity of the Other Woman" (p. 99), and thus recasting the figuration of *the saviour* away from the patriarchal figure towards the matriarchal figure, while at the same time leaving the racial taxonomy fully intact. Finalising her genealogical deployment of Spivak's scheme, Puar (2017) puts forward what she calls *the homosexual question*, which, in its most galvanised pronouncement, reads, "white queers (queer men?) saving brown homosexuals from brown heterosexuals" (p. 99). Puar's scheme is a stark echo of Spivak's statement that in "the first phase of capitalist imperialism makes 'color' useless as an emancipatory signifier" (Spivak, 1988, p. 90) as a result of the "stratification of colonial subject-construction" (Spivak, 1988, p. 90), imposing a fixating hold around racial ontology. This skilful reuse of Spivak's scheme by Puar puts on display and into a conversation ontological mobility and immobility, capacity and debility, with particular reference to the object of protection and the subject of saviour, demonstrating that bodily subjectivity is either slated as subaltern, i.e. muted, or investigated, i.e. spoken, but requires an analysis attentive towards "representation and its recognized subjects" (Puar, 2012, p. 50). Puar's salient re-articulation of Spivak's scheme invites us to ponder ever more carefully about the mobility of both power relation and subject formations, as one and the other surface bodily with the potential to appear recursively providing both stasis as well as a blurring of borders between subject positioning and subjectivity.

In following Puar (2007, 2012, 2017), we are prompted by Brian Massumi's (2002) awareness of motion as it relates to the body and its multiple predictions of the subject, informing us that "the body's potential to vary belongs to the same reality as the body as variety (positioned thing) but partakes of it in a different mode" (p. 5). According to Puar (2007), the body and the subject "become an identity, yes, but also timelessness works to consolidate the fiction of a seamless stable identity in every space" (p. 212). Here, the key emphasis is placed on *movement* as occurring ahead of *stoppage*, which, as Massumi (2002) argues, further entails that we recognise that "positionality is an emergent quality of movement" (p. 5), and therefore necessitating an approach towards movement, which pushes beyond merely understanding movement concerning leaping from one position to the next, "but from one nature changing entanglement to another. It's always a question of transformation - transformation in relation" (p. 8). This, on the other hand, does not entail that intersectionality is an analysis of representation with reliance on determinations of *position*, *predication*, or *formation* as these pertain to the social construction of the particular and recognisable subject. On the contrary, according to Massumi (2002), "the challenge is to think the process of formation, and for that you need the notion of a taking-form, an inform on the way to being determinately this or that" (p. 9).

Recalibrating *disability* towards understanding the subaltern through Spivak and Puar enables us to demonstrate that the process of disability formation in Danish higher education is configured by a contemporary ableist formation, which we call *neoliberal-academic-ableism*. In this ableist formation, we can paraphrase Spivak and Puar by raising *the disability question*: Non-disabled social workers saving *disabled academic*s from non-disabled academics.

2   Disablism, ableism and neoliberal-ableism

Following Dan Goodley and Rebecca Lawthom (2019), we, as poststructuralists, know that disability relies on its opposite *ability* to exist. When we acknowledge the split term *dis/ability* introduced by Goodley (2014), it requires us to think simultaneously about the processes of *disablism and ableism*. According to Goodley and Lawthom (2019), ableism accounts for the suffocating practices associated with a contemporary society that increasingly seeks to promote the species-typical individual citizen as "a citizen that is ready and able to work, productively contribute, an atomistic phenomenon bounded and cut off from others, capable, malleable and compliant" (Goodley & Lawthom, 2019, p. 235). Ableism breeds paranoia, confusion, fear and inadequacy, and ableism is an ideal that no one ever matches up to, according to Goodley and Lawthom (2019). As Robert McRuer (2006) carefully puts it, compulsory ableism is to disablism what compulsory heteronormativity is to homophobia. Goodley states that "ableism provides just the right amount of temperature and nutrients from which disablism can grow" (p. 78). Hence, disabled people come to occupy a crucial role in reproducing ableism (Goodley & Lawthom, 2019); they elaborate on the statement that "human enhancement, individual progression, cognitive advancement, economic independence and therapeutic growth are just some of the aims of an ableist regime" (Goodley & Lawthom, 2019, p. 235).

Through the concept of *neoliberal–ableism* (Goodley, 2014), we can better understand how contemporary ableism operates on the individual, which brings with it a consideration of the centrality of "ability" to theorise late capitalist neoliberal societies. According to David Mitchell (2014), disabled people must become *able-disabled*, and Goodley (2014) notes that disabled people must embrace ableism to overcome their disabling conditions. In other words, "individuals need to embolden the ability side of the dis/ability complex in order to survive, hopefully thrive, but definitely make do and mend" (Goodley et al., 2014, p. 981). When disabled people are constituted as objects of rehabilitating interventions, they enter the category of able-disa*bled* and automatically refer to the (social) work needed to overcome disability and become *self-sufficient* through ableist social work interventions embedded on the premise of rehabilitation, as "at the very same time, disabled people are cast as those damaged others who sit in stark contrast to the ableist imperative of economic, embodied, cultural and psychological self-sufficiency" (Goodley & Lawthom, 2019, pp. 235-236).

When individual citizens' internalised sovereignty characterises modern societies, they are free to govern themselves (Rabinow & Rose, 2006). This emphasis on *self-governance* fits perfectly with the rise of neoliberal thinking in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Neoliberalism provides the economic conditions for the making of contemporary citizens, as "ableism, because of its isolationism, invites new iterations of homophobia, xenophobia, nationalism, racism, sexism alongside disablism as ideological positions of prejudice that fit the logics of ableism" (Goodley & Lawthom, 2019, p. 237).

3   The logic of neoliberal-ableism in academic ableism

Neoliberal-ableism operates through academic ableism and provides a self-evident understanding of a successful academic as one that is unencumbered by caring, according to Kathleen Lynch (2010). She further states that:

"The idealization of the 'care-free' academic did not emerge with neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberalism exacerbated the demand for care-free workers, but the origins of carelessness in education lie deeper within the Cartesian thinking that underpins the

very organization and scholarship of education itself (Lynch et al., 2007)." (Lynch, 2010, p. 58)

Higher education is about developing the autonomous rational actor encapsulated in the Cartesian dictum cogito ergo sum (Lynch, 2010). According to Fiona K. Campbell (2008a, 2008b, 2009) and Gregor Wolbring (2008, 2009, 2012), ableism maintains the autonomous, rational, reasonable and healthy citizen. Neoliberal capitalism echoes academic capitalism and unfolds as academic ableism through the construction of disability as the inverse or opposite of higher education. Following Jay Timothy Dolmage (2017), ableism is reinforced at universities because they are set up hierarchically, organisationally and architecturally in ways that reflect society. Dolmage (2017) illustrates barriers in the university by visualising steps leading up to the university's entrance, creating a physical barrier to access. This helps us understand how the architect of the university space is exclusionary. The university is often framed as *an ivory tower* (Dolmage, 2017) and built upon ideals and standards. These ideals and standards can be elaborated as academic ableism, where the academy becomes a site of class privilege that excludes certain students, according to bell hooks (2015).

Political interventions in Denmark have changed higher education and created new spaces and formations of what we previously elaborated as *the framework of neodisability* (Fristrup & Odgaard, 2021a). We stand on the shoulders of different disciplines embracing *body politics* as a crucial point of reference. Following Donna J. Haraway (1991), we point to the union of the political and the physiological by underlining that "bodies, then, are not born; they are made" (p. 208). The non-essentialist body politics of Haraway are applied to the framework of neodisability, where bodies are made through contemporary neoliberal-ableism and through the knowledge available to produce *govern-able subjects* that live by the affective formation of what Lauren Berlant (2011) calls *cruel optimism*. Work, for Lauren Berlant (2007, 2010, 2011), is best epitomised as a practice of *slow death*, a concept that refers to the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population. We are, Berlant (2011) suggests, exhausted by *neoliberal capitalism*, and we are all in the process of slow death, but for some, this is more apparent than for others. According to Puar (2012), all this work emphasises processes of debilitation. Neoliberal-ableism operates through academic ableism as exemplified in an outline written by a Danish student named Naja Momberg Christiansen and published in the Danish newspaper "Dagbladet Information" on June 22, 2019:

> "The market has made me mentally ill. It is nourished by the fact that we feel bad about ourselves. Although I think I can see through the neoliberal market logic prevailing throughout society, I am unable to escape from it. It has installed a sense of inferiority in me, which has triggered an eating disorder. […] Unfortunately, I cannot find any answers to this problem. However, I realise that the neoliberal economic mindset has become the answer to the serfdom of ancient times but places Man in the very chains from which it once freed us. […] You cannot be present without constantly being confronted with your inferiority - more or less unspoken: You are not good enough. You cannot cope with the labour market today without focusing on how to be more efficient and productive by moderating and improving your efforts." (Christiansen, 2019 - translated from Danish by the authors)

Just as Christiansen (2019) claims that neoliberal-ableism impacts academic ableism and triggers her eating disorder, other disabled students are triggered by academic ableism on a daily basis. According to Aske Basselbjerg Christensen and Mathias Hulgård Kristiansen

(2020), disabled students are performing what they call *extra work* when dealing with the parallel life in academia as disabled academics. We approach the notion of *extra work* as a form of *social work*, which aligns with the special educational support service (in Danish: specialpædagogiske støtteforanstaltninger (SPS)) offered to students with medical diagnoses at Danish universities.

In the wake of neoliberal reforms and austerity, modalities of time, speed and support changes in higher education, and the academic life of students become radically affected, subjugating and crippling the student as a *precarious corporality* in need of *prosthetic solutions* (Fristrup & Odgaard, 2021a). A new kind of *academic precarity* occurs, where structural debilitation practices incapacitate the student through states of insecurity, leaving the student in a general uncertainty and in constant need of caring prosthetic security arrangements that flourish like an industry in a *neoliberal rehabilitation economy* (Fristrup & Odgaard, 2021a). Academic bodies are made through contemporary academic ableism, which performs a hidden doxa of higher education articulated by Lynch (2010) as *carelessness*. The care status of academics renders disabled students and their situation in academia as subjects in need of caring support. Issues of care and interdependency are confined to the subaltern, and according to Lynch (2010), the new moral status of the new managerialism in higher education (Madsen, 2009) accords to carelessness. When *relationality* is denied (Gilligan, 1995), academic ableism forecloses a denial of the interdependency of human beings as a failure to recognise the vulnerability and neediness of humanity (Nussbaum, 2001). While "neoliberal policies have exacerbated the carelessness of higher education, they did not so much generate it as reshaping it in terms of transnational academic capitalism" (Lynch, 2010, p. 59). There are moral acclaims granted to the autonomous, market-oriented, consuming and self-interested citizen. When academic ableism is based on transnational academic capitalism, evaluating the highly individualised entrepreneurialism at the heart of the new academy (Slaughter & Leslie, 2001), we can follow Lynch's (2010) statement on universities, which seem to "allowed a particular 'care-less' form of competitive individualism to flourish" (p. 57). She continues her statement on *the new individualised academic capitalism*, which "breeds an organizational culture marked by increasing egocentrism, very conditional loyalties (to the university and higher education), and a declining sense of responsibility for others, particularly for students" (Lynch, 2010, p. 57).

The model citizen at the heart of research and liberal classical education is rational and public (Lynch, 2010), and the ideal academic is defined as being capable of working without time limits and without primary care responsibilities (Lynch, 2010). When departing from the framework on neodisability (Fristrup & Odgaard, 2021a), we are able to embark on academic ableism through the lenses of *carelessness* as the hidden doxa of higher education (Lynch, 2010). The educational support system in Danish higher education works through compensating the physical, psychological and neurological diagnoses as deficits or impairments operating on the logic of disorders as pathological and thus as an anti-thesis to normalcy and therefore in need of a *pros-thesis* to rehabilitate the equilibrium from before the deficit through *prosthetic solutions* (Fristrup & Odgaard, 2021a). The solution to the political problem regarding disabled people in Danish higher education is a *special education support service (SPS)* that prevents the social workers from interrogating academic ableism and instead provides prosthetic solutions to the problems of *disabled academics* through compensating efforts, which place disabled academics in the position of making normative practices more desirable. The special educational efforts in the social services in Danish universities are integrating disability by disguising defining differences, just like *inclusionism*,

which "seeks to bring disabled people into mainstream educational practice by effecting an erasure of difference with the help of assistive devices" (Mitchell et al., 2016, p. 40).

4   Educational policies and neoliberal inclusionism

Academic ableism unfolds through educational policies. The latest action on disability in higher education is outlined in a new report from the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science (2022): "The report looks at the support and compensation opportunities that are important for the target group's opportunities to study on an equal level with their fellow students without disabilities - including dispensation practices at the educational institutions" (translated from Danish by the authors). When approaching questions surrounding disability in higher education, we are confronted with conceptions and logics of subjectivity regarding agency and representation obtained through neoliberal discourses of recognition, integration and inclusive education, all of which concern the tandem entanglement of the subject formation of *disability* concerning *education*. Such discourses and integration practice of neoliberal recognition and inclusion have by prominent disability studies scholars David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (2015) been described as *neoliberal inclusionism*: "Newly visible public identities such as those labelled handicapped, cognitively impaired, intersexed, deaf/blind, or queer based on a formerly stigmatized group's ability to approximate historically specific expectations of normalcy" (p. 2).

Corresponding with n*eoliberal inclusionism*, as it ushers in recognition of the disabled subject in proximity to normalcy through the institutional gateways of education, i.e. the subject of education, we find the Danish newspaper *Dagbladet Information* on August 30, 2021, reporting that "there is more than a billion to be gained by educating more people with mental and cognitive disabilities" (Richter, 2021, p. 13 - translated from Danish by the authors).

The report's argument departs from *neoliberal inclusionism* based on neoliberal-ableism and the emphasis on developing *employability competencies* through education. However, at the same time, the report omits the workings of academic ableism, where disabled academics have to deal with all the *extra social work* that the support system triggers when dealing with the provision of therapeutic and prosthetic interventions grounded on the premise of *professionalised caring* (Lynch, 2010) in the social work of SPS.

5   The carelessness in the social work of SPS

The social work of SPS reproduces the transnational neoliberal academia and does not critique its shaping of academics and the exclusion of *disabled academics*. Even though the social work of SPS is professionalised around caring efforts, it works on the premise of the present academic regime, which is embedded in neoliberal-academic-ableism (Fristrup & Odgaard, 2021a). The social work of SPS does not interrogate the available norms that constitute academia because it does not revolve around an ethical refusal of neoliberal academic subjective limits, i.e. it does not go beyond and embrace the caring aspect in academia. The social work of SPS does not create a space in academia for the flourishing of a multiplicity in the arts of living. It does not open a path to a politics of care of the self and care of others by a constant scope for new models of subjectivity. The social work of SPS performs the hidden doxa of higher education embedded in *carelessness* (Lynch, 2010). There is no effort in the social work of SPS to critique the limits of neoliberal academia. On the contrary, SPS becomes a support system that supports neoliberal-academic-ableism and maintains an excluding practice concerning the support of disabled students through care-less interventions.

Regarding the subaltern, the social work of SPS produces subalternity in disabled academics, which aligns with the research done by Vera Dolan (2021), where "the disclosure of any form of disability, within academe's predominantly ableist culture, risks raising concerns about a faculty member's professional competence to achieve expected results" (p. 1). The politics of refusal of a discourse of ableism that inhibits practices of care for ourselves and others in the neoliberal academe has become a professional social work refusal of the discourse of neoliberal-academic-ableism. Instead, the social work of SPS supports the hidden doxa of higher education through a practice of carelessness, with professional social workers that care less about *learning to listen* through *disabled-consciousness* (Ramlackhan, 2021, Brown & Ramlackhan 2021) to challenge how neoliberal-academic-ableism constructs *disabled academics*. The professional social workers organised in delivering SPS practice what we could articulate as *careless whispering* with reference to George Michael's song *Careless Whisper* from 1984. In the secrecy of SPS embedded in the non-disclosures among most disabled academics (Fristrup & Odgaard, 2021a, Dolan, 2021), carelessness is practised through careless whispering that reproduces the neoliberal-ableism as academic ableism in neoliberal times.

In the current practices of the social work of SPS, the professional social worker can only try to be caring when performing *cruel optimistic careless whispering*. For the time being, this effort is embedded in a *normalising approach* to the support offered through SPS (Fristrup & Odgaard, 2021a, Mitchell et al., 2016). The social worker of SPS whispers the careless message carefully to disabled academics: *We are all disabled!* (Fristrup & Odgaard 2021a, 2021b, Mitchell et al., 2016). This means that we all need help and caring efforts (on and off) during our time in the academe and in performing what Berlant calls *cruel optimism* (2011) due to a relation of cruel optimism that exists when something you desire becomes an obstacle to your flourishing, i.e. when desiring normalcy. The social workers of SPS do not whisper what becomes the specific careless effort of the general carelessness in academic ableism because they do not say: *but you, as a disabled academic, are more disabled than other academics who identify as non-disabled*. As a disabled academic, you become *debilitated* through the careless whispers of the social workers of SPS unless you can identify as *able-disabled* and become *capacitated* through the social work of SPS, i.e. through rehabilitating efforts and prosthetic solutions.

What seems to be the case, for the time being, is that disabled academics on the *spectrum* who identify as *neurodivergent* (Brown & Leigh, 2018) are performing academic ableism in favour of exceptionalism and elitism and not just as abled-bodied and through normalcy (Dolmage, 2017). In the work of Jacqueline Stevenson and Sue Clegg (2011) on extracurricular activity in education, students orientate themselves towards the future through extracurricular activities to develop their student identities through a *fast track* that differs from other students' temporalities. The demand to speed up at stay in the fast lane throughout one's academic pathway sets the different temporalities in the neoliberal academia in perspective and differentiates the disabled students in a ranking through the continuum of disability based on the levels of IQ regarding the autistic spectrum. Autistic performances embedded in exceptionalism are highly valued in the neoliberal university and embrace academic ableism virtuously. We could add *disability* to the long list of social categories that Stevenson and Clegg (2011) point in the direction of *feared selves* among academic students.

Feared, vulnerable, self-caring, disabled or affective selves are all socially constructed through *category-politics* according to Carol Bacchi (1996), and the concept incorporates the political uses of both conceptual and identity categories. These bodies are characterised as

controlled by their bodies and constructed through policies as *vulnerable*, which points towards bodies controlled by their biology, i.e. the medical gaze towards disability as a deficit and in the social model as an impairment - in other words, disability as *biology*. According to Bacchi (2022), "this view is contrasted to a preferred default position, in which perceived autonomous rational actors keep their bodies in line or "under control"" (p. 5) and do not surrender to biology. The biological emphasis in constructing *vulnerable citizens* as lesser citizens (Bacchi & Beasley, 2002) aligns with the construction of vulnerable citizens as emotional through the cultural politics of affect, according to Sara Ahmed (2004).

When following Sue Clegg (2013), we can approach academic ableism as *affectless spaces* where the denial of emotion reigns over the affective life of the university. Clegg uses the term *affective structures* (Clegg, 2013, 71) to describe academic-ableist practices as organisational attempts in higher education to organise, control and benefit from the emotional labour and experiences of their members. Clegg (2013) draws on the work of Ahmed (2004) in understanding the erasure of affect in university spaces. According to Ahmed (2004), "feminists who speak out against the established 'truths' are often constructed as emotional, as failing the very standards of reason and impartiality that are assumed to form the basis of 'good' judgment" (p. 170). Careless and affectless spaces privilege academic ableism embedded in rationality, discarding relationality and constructing disabled academics as subalterns through emotionalisations and epistemic violence.

6   Constructed as emotional through epistemic violence

In their article, Jonas Olsen et al. (2020) argues:

> "Although universities have historically been designed for able-bodied academic staff (Stone, Crooks & Owen 2013), the increased adoption of neoliberalist ideals by higher education institutions (HEI) has resulted in the further exclusion of disabled students, researchers and staff (i.e., disabled academics)." (Olsen et al., 2020, p. 265)

The disabled academic Jonas Olsen demonstrates in the article how he was constructed as emotional and failed the standards of reason and impartiality:

> "The head academic and disability 'expert' merely dismissed my feelings and comments, stating that I simply did not understand the important role these centres play, that I didn't separate my personal feelings from what I saw as a good academic should." (Olsen et al., 2020, p. 267)

Olsen et al. (2020) frame the event as *epistemic violence* through Procknow et al. (2017), silencing disabled academics' voices because they speak out against the established truths told by *disability experts* who identify as non-disabled. Jonas Olsen (Olsen et al., 2020) had contemplated whether he should share this deeply held fear but decided to do so for the group to understand how some disabled people "see these facilities as warehouses to store us until our physical death catches up with our social death (Miller & Gwynne 1972)" (p. 267). The experiences of epistemic violence prohibit the circulation of ideas:

> "If epistemic freedom relies on the unrestricted circulation of ideas, then epistemic injustice is the denial of freedom itself (Hinchliffe 2018). What is worse is that we are often told that advocating against this treatment can harm our academic prospects and professional opportunities." (Olsen et al. 2020, p. 267)

7 Uncomfortable reflexivity and the politics of ableism

Writing about experiences of disability in higher education is suggested by Rebecca-Eli M. Long and Albert Stabler (2021) as a way to understand how their own experiences fit into the broader picture of what we here address as *academic ableism*. Looking through the lenses of *dis/ability* allows us to understand what constitutes and constructs the notions of disability through *neoliberal-academic-ableism*. Through the conceptual work of Goodley (2014) on dis/ability studies, we can start to interrogate ableism and ability:

> "Disability provides highly politicised, nuanced, focused and immediate responses to ableism. Rather than sucking the life out of it, dis/ability studies rejuvenates studies of disability: re/connecting disability with other transformative praxes that sit in opposition to the ideals of ableism." (Goodley 2014, p. 154)

Following Goodley (2014), we embrace the idea of *rejuvenating* studies of disability through the forward slash in dis/ability studies (Fristrup et al., 2019, Fristrup & Odgaard, 2021a, 2021b). The stories about academic life, when identifying as both *disabled academics* and *non-disabled academics*, open the door to articulations of how academic ableism produces disability and disablism through processes of debilitation and practices of exclusion and marginalisation (Dolmage, 2017). Dolmage (2017) examines how "academia powerfully mandates able-bodiedness and able-mindedness, as well as other forms of social and communicative hyperability" (p. 7). Academic ableism privileges *ability* while disadvantaging disabled students, faculty, staff members, and disability. It is positioned as the inverse of higher education and incompatible with its logic embedded in the idealisation of the *hyper-able subject* that renders disability undesirable.

What seems to be absent when addressing academic ableism is the notion of what Wanda S. Pillow calls *uncomfortable reflexivity* (2003). A reflexivity that pushes towards the unfamiliar and uncomfortable tracing of the problematics of reflexivity, which calls for positioning reflexivity not as clarity, honesty, or humility but as practices of confounding disruptions. According to Pillow (2003), "uncomfortable reflexivity is a move to use reflexivity in a way that would continue to challenge the representations we come to while at the same time acknowledging the political need to represent and find meaning" (p. 192). We need to address the social work of SPS as a representation of academic ableism embedded in what we call *neoliberal-academic-ableism* in addressing the internalised ableist-normativity in academia through uncomfortable reflexivity about the *disabled* and *disabling* representations of *disability* in Danish higher education.

Today, we embrace a support system (SPS) that supports academic ableism and the exclusion of disabled academics, which discloses the care-less figure in higher education and directs the construction of subalternation towards disabled academics through a support system embedded in the logics of neoliberal-academic-ableism that seems to continue to reproduce the social structuring of academia through neoliberal-inclusionism. Although political efforts are articulated within a *social inclusion* discourse, it is not pointing towards *social justice* but towards *social cohesion* (Fristrup & Odgaard, 2021b).

The new production of *disability* as *neodisability* (Fristrup & Odgaard, 2021a) aligns with the recalibrating of disability towards the term *subaltern*. As a concluding remark, we can reframe Spivak's question and ask: *Can the subaltern in Danish higher education speak?* and answer: *Yes, but nobody cares to listen!*. Nevertheless, the listening efforts can be directed towards "curricular cripistemologies" (Mitchell et al., 2016) and "a serious commitment to the

development of curricular cripistemologies might go some distance toward re-valuing human differences as something other than embodiments that should be disguised, diminished, or hidden away as unwanted accessories" (p. 51).

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