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Friends and Favours

Friendship as Care at the 'More-Than-Neoliberal' University

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'Thijs, I have a massive favour to ask', I typed into my phone, frantically, still shaken up by what I would, further into the message, describe as 'a good old cry out' at the Brazilian consulate in Rotterdam. The over-the-top narration was triggered by an unpleasant encounter with bureaucracy, which had ended as many of them do: with the realisation that another trip to the service counter would be needed, that what I had thought to be a morning-long commitment was actually an affair demanding an additional two appointments at least. In the best interest of the reader, I will not delve here into the nitty-gritty of why my 2017 passport renewal – a then pressing matter due to two work-related trips I had committed to outside of the Schengen zone – became more complicated than I had anticipated. Instead, I will turn to the 'massive favour' I asked of Thijs, my co-author in this piece, former colleague and present-day friend, which would entail him covering for me at two undergraduate tutorials during what I then phrased as 'the last possible window to get a passport in time' for the upcoming conferences abroad. 'I'd owe you big time', I noted emphatically, as I concluded my message. To which Thijs answered: 'Haha yeah don't worry about it'. [1]

Underlying Carolina's above autoethnographic account are two related sources of anxiety that we, Carolina and Thijs, the authors of this article, would like to tease out. First, due to unexpected bureaucratic trouble, there was the possibility of having to withdraw from two paper presentations at academic panels. For those lucky enough to have funding to cover the often-prohibitive

participation fees and travel expenses, conferences are spaces where early-career researchers can make their work – and themselves – visible. They are sites where a substantive part of academics' professional networks is forged. Secondly, the 'last possible window' for a new appointment was in conflict with Carolina's teaching schedule. She was not the only person teaching the undergraduate course in question. However, knowing the extent to which her co-lecturers were overworked and understanding the value of non-teaching hours in this context made her decide not to ask them for this particular favour. Instead of handling it as a work-related emergency to be taken on institutionally by those officially tasked with administering teaching activities, she decided to manage the situation herself, and its solution translated into a personal favour. Having worked and co-taught with Thijs at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) for roughly three years at the time of the message, Carolina was aware of the kinds of professional shock that their personal bond could absorb. In a conversation that took place shortly after the message exchange, Thijs downplayed the 'massiveness' of the favour: 'You would do the same for me, if I were in your place', he said to Carolina.

We were part of a larger group of doctoral candidates who started their Ph.D. trajectories on the same day, back in 2014. Shared academic experiences, professional anxieties, and personal affinity fuelled the bonds of friendship that were forged amongst most members of the group in the early years of our Ph.D.s. Our individual academic paths were woven together at different points: we worked on similar themes, peer-reviewed each other's works-in-progress, travelled together to conferences, visited each other during fieldwork abroad, and saw each other through the joyful and difficult path towards becoming a doctor. Having started out as colleagues, during most of our time together at the UvA we were what in this article we refer to as friends/colleagues.

Not every colleague is a friend and, naturally, not every friend is a colleague. However, forging relationships situated at the intersection of the two is key to how we, the authors, and our peers navigate academic work and its pressures. Roughly five years after our initial appointment, we are affiliated to different academic institutions, but still heavily implicated in each other's scholarly lives through shared research, personal and political interests. In our relationship, reciprocal practices of care are at times performed in relation to our personal lives. At others, they involve professional favours, such as the one narrated in this article's opening vignette, aimed at supporting our respective teaching activities, research output, and applications for jobs and grants.

This article draws from our personal experiences while employed as doctoral candidates at the UvA. Through (auto)ethnographic retellings of WhatsApp exchanges, emails, and personal conversations involving friends/colleagues at the university between 2014 and 2018, we show different moments in which friendship was activated and performed as care in order to respond to professional urgencies and anxieties. Focusing on work-related favours – which are framed here as informal care practices – this article discusses ways in which the functioning of the neoliberal university, at the same time as it fosters highly individualised subjectivities and competition between peers, is also dependent on the favour economy that friendship bonds afford.

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As we push this argument forward, we situate this piece in relation to two different sets of debates. The first pertains to how friendship has been dealt with as a theme in relation to anthropological practice. This article contributes to this scholarship by situating the bond within a higher education institution – a seldom explored but key site for the practice of social science. The second set of debates that we engage pertains to the site that shapes the friendship practices which we seek to analyse: the neoliberal university. Engaging debates in critical anthropology, this scholarship calls attention to the university through topics such as funding (Gusterson 2017), gender and care (Ivancheva, Lynch and Keating 2017), precarity, race and gender (Navarro 2017), and work, time and well-being (O'Neill 2014). In an attempt to respond to Gusterson's (2017) call for a 'critical ethnography of the university', our site is composed of university offices, hallways and coffee machines. In contrast with the ordinary events encountered during ethnographic fieldwork, which get thickly described in books and articles, the mundane practices of writing, planning and teaching that take place within and around the rooms and offices of the university are not frequently the objects of scholarly analysis.

This article ties both sets of debates together by engaging friendship amongst academic staff from an autoethnographic perspective. At the same time, it intervenes in debates on the neoliberalisation of the university by discussing moments in which friendship enables performances of academic productivity and the delivery of high-standard academic output in this context. By shedding light on the often-invisible care work performed amongst friends/colleagues at the university, we aim to contribute to, and incentivise,

critical anthropological engagements with contemporary academic environments and practices. Additionally, the foregrounding of friendship is also a performative gesture, inspired by J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006, 2008, 2013) and aimed at expanding shared political imaginaries of the contemporary university beyond processes of neoliberalisation.

Friendship in anthropological practice

Examining the literature that focuses on friendship in relation to the doing of anthropology, we came across numerous examples that describe it as a social bond that is key for ethnographic research. It also appears, at times, in relation to the writing of ethnography. For instance, Owton and Allen-Collinson (2014) discuss friendship as method in ethnography, as does De Regt (2015). In Gay y Blasco and Hernández (2012), the relationship forged between anthropologist and informant is framed in terms of friendship, as the authors coproduce an 'egalitarian' ethnographic account. However, we suggest that the importance of friendships for the work performed at the university – a key site for the discipline – has been overlooked.

Our desire to fill this gap follows scholarly work that argues that friendship, from both a theoretical and epistemological perspective, deserves a larger place in the social sciences in general. Working from queer theory, Sasha Roseneil (2004) suggests that friendship provides a fruitful perspective beyond the heteronormative framework. Using friendship as an analytical concept therefore helps us to think through 'a range of lifestyles and sexualities' that have a central place

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in personal lives. Roseneil claims that 'friendship is a relationship of increasing social significance in the contemporary world' (ibid.: 411), which is primarily due to processes of individualisation in combination with a decrease in marriage, an increase in divorce rates, and an overall increase in geographical mobility.

A focus on friendship as a relationship of care requires us to be sensitive to how care may be given and received, 'without self-sacrifice and subservience' (ibid.: 414). Friendship, as framed by Roseneil, differs significantly from care tropes that revolve around 'mothering', for instance, since it lacks 'controlling institutions and firm cultural expectations and conventions' (ibid.). Furthermore, the notion of friendship adds to what we imagine care work to be and gives us a lens through which to refract ties that are not familial, but professional.

Although Roseneil addresses policies that aim to protect a healthy work-life balance, friendships are not relationships that fit neatly into either 'work' or 'life', and are not unbound by political institutions and market-driven processes of neoliberalism. These categories overlap and are shaped by structural factors and processes in ways that are not exclusively personal or professional. Drawing on feminist scholarship and discussions of care in medical anthropology, we therefore suggest treating practices and relationships of friendship, care and related favours as highly political. This allows us to unpack the complex dialectic of friendship and neoliberalisation, a dialectic that we call a 'double movement' in academia. On one hand, the university and the structures it is embedded in increasingly foster individual subjectivities and personal competition between peers. On the other

hand, academics frequently perform favours for one another, such as giving unpaid guest lectures, providing feedback on research proposals, or otherwise providing support during peak periods of teaching and grading; as we contend here, even as the university and its structures downplay the importance of such relationships.

Anthropologies of the neoliberal university

In his 2017 call for anthropologists to identify higher education institutions as key research sites, Gusterson (2017: 437) frames 'the university' as a 'materially grounded institutional lifeworld', in opposition to the abstract ideal of 'academia' and to the student-dominated character of 'the campus'. Indeed, as the author suggests, it would seem that, outside of these dimensions, 'the anthropological literature on universities is (…) underdeveloped, scattered, and riddled with blind spots' (ibid.). For Gusterson, such an empirical gap is remarkable, since '[t]hese institutions, readily accessible to anthropologists as field sites, are central to contemporary struggles over race, gender, sexuality, class, international migration, and neoliberalism' (ibid.: 435).

The ways in which academic staff members navigate the contemporary university can be a fruitful entry point into the cited struggles. The marketisation of universities has resulted in increased competition, putting a 'high personal and economic price on a successful academic career, pushing many into regular migration within and between countries to secure visibility and permanent employment' (Ivancheva, Lynch and

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Keating 2019: 3). These processes reproduce notions of 'the ideal academic' that are rooted in masculinity and productivity (ibid.). The gendered implications of this overlook women's affective experiences of increasingly 'flex' contracts and workplaces which, according to Ivancheva, Lynch and Keating, may differ considerably from those of their male counterparts.

It seems that processes of neoliberalisation have reconfigured academic citizenship, which is 'based on the idea of the university as an intellectual collectivity sustained by individuals with a commitment to service' (Macfarlane 2011: 71). This involves a broader process of individualisation and the transformation of academic roles, reconfiguring the ways in which academic careers and practices become meaningful. Such processes have direct effects on students, as their relationships and interactions with academic staff are reduced to a minimum, making tutors increasingly less important in everyday student life.

Yet the aforementioned changes in the experiences and acts of academic citizenship can be traced to the larger university and society in general. Not only do academics find themselves under greater pressure to perform 'all elements of academic practice' (Macfarlane 2011: 71), but the work is increasingly centralised around funding and metrics. In other words, the often sought-after financial and 'liberating' capital is the reward of individual achievements, 'with less reference to a wide service ethic' (ibid.). Such developments have reduced the time and importance of other, 'non-core', academic activities that involve student advising and establishing working relationships with colleagues. Not only does this negatively affect the academic profession, built on the premises of collaboration and the exchange of ideas, but it interferes with everyday experiences of friendship and care within the university.

Friendship at the 'more-than-neoliberal' university

Reconfiguring academic roles, and changing the ways in which academic work becomes meaningful, the neoliberalisation of the university affects friendship in light of the aforementioned developments, in particular by inducing and increasing work-related stress and precarity. Staff members, pressed for production and performance, rely on their friends/colleagues for favours in the event that there is no perceived professional or formal alternative readily available. As individual staff members become increasingly responsible for managing and completing a growing amount of work, doing this work requires more than the university provides. Friendship, then, becomes a way of 'solving' the discrepancies between performance expectations and available resources. Calling on friends/colleagues is a way of 'sparing' strictly professional relationships that are less implicated in the exchange of favours fuelled by care, affection and reciprocity.

In the productivity- and efficiency-focused university, highlighting the importance of friendship ties to high standard scholarly production is a political gesture towards the unveiling of a strand of care that is often made invisible. At the same time, this move sheds light on friendship amongst academic peers as a resilient social bond, which endures in spite of the shocks it is prompted to absorb. Much of the anthropological literature on the neoliberal university, we believe,

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would fall under what Ortner (2016) frames as 'dark anthropology', which deals with 'the harsh and brutal dimensions of human experience, and the structural and historical conditions that produce them' (ibid.: 49). Such a grim perspective on everyday life under neoliberalism tends to focus on 'power, exploitation, and chronic pervasive inequality' (ibid.: 50). Amongst what Ortner describes as the 'others' of 'dark anthropologies' are 'anthropologies of the good', in which aspects such as happiness, empathy, hope, time and change become central. Following Ortner's red thread, we believe that anthropologies of friendship would be a fitting addition to this category.

Reflecting on how 'goods' of different sorts are approached through the lenses of contemporary anthropological work, Ortner (ibid.: 60) acquiesces to its importance in the midst of our 'dark' times, 'for what is the point of opposing neoliberalism if we cannot imagine better ways of living and better futures?' Her question takes us back to the influential work of feminist geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham (2014: 82), who call for a framing of 'the economy' that is able to take its diversity into account, allowing us 'to identify multiple subject positions and motivations coexisting in "more-than-capitalist" economies'. Arguing against 'capitalocentrism', the authors show all the non-capitalist coexistances that take place in (and in spite of) our capitalist societies (Gibson-Graham 2006).

In a similar vein, by taking the positionality of friends/colleagues, which itself points to a coexistence that is often framed as contradictory within the 'neoliberal university', we point towards an important expansion of our imaginary, towards a 'more-than-neoliberal' university. This gesture also follows Gibson-Graham (2014: 81) in their call for researchers to consider their responsibilities towards the performativity of their practices: 'that is, what they are making "more real" through their representations of the world'. Here, calling critical attention to what friendship bonds afford in an academic context that is increasingly dictated by market logics is also a performative gesture from our side – one that seeks to solidify friendship as part of our political imagination of academia under neoliberalism.

Autoethnography: From the lived experiences of academic 'natives'

In the relatively few ethnographies in which universities are foregrounded as sites, the everyday routines of academic staff members often recede into the background. In this sense, Gusterson (2017: 436) suggests that the academy resembles a club, an exclusive group in which members are expected to be discrete. In this article, we break away from this supposed 'discretion' by baring some of our own mundane experiences as academic 'natives'. We do so mostly through autoethnographic narration of ordinary conversations and encounters, which have proven fruitful for previous anthropological engagements with higher education institutions (e.g. Meneley and Young 2005).

According to Carolyn Ellis (1999: 669), one of the key proponents of autoethnography as a research methodology, the practice entails the baring of the researchers' 'vulnerable selves', as this 'connects the practices of social science with the living of life'. In their take on autoethnographic narrative, Butz and Besio (2009) unpack the methodology in terms of

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the speaking positions and styles to which it tends to most commonly lend itself. Here, we relate particularly to the positionality of academics and their 'systematic efforts to analyse their own biographies as resources for illuminating larger social or cultural phenomena' (ibid.: 1660). In this case, the phenomenon is friendship as care, in a university context that is being reconfigured by neoliberalising trends and practices.

As Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010: 3) explain, when producing autoethnographic accounts, researchers may 'retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being a part of a culture and/or possessing a particular cultural identity'. In this article, we analyse selected experiences as university 'natives' in a way that seeks to resonate with our peers. In the words of Ellis, Adams and Bochner (ibid.: 4), we 'use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders'. In this article, we speak from our lived experiences while navigating 'university culture' as early-career doctoral researchers and lectures.

The practice, however, is not without its challenges. As Butz and Besio (2009: 1666) discuss, 'a challenge (…) is to craft representations that are meaningful to the text's audience and not just to its author', particularly when the style is evocative rather than analytical – which is the case in this piece. Bearing in mind that our audience is most likely composed of people who, like us, inhabit contemporary university settings, be it as students or as academic staff, we trust that the 'evocative' character of our first-person narratives will transcend our individual experiences and resonate with our readers.

Additionally, it is important to note that some of the autoethnographic retellings included in this article are not merely meditations on our individual selves, but also implicate friends/colleagues with whom we are in conversation. Since a significant part of our data consists of personal communication that took place before this article was proposed, asking our friends/colleagues to grant us permission to reproduce this content for the purposes of this piece was, fittingly, part of the data gathering process. Their enthusiastic responses and supportive acquiescence fuelled our desire to relate some of what we shared while navigating the university and its pressures.

'Can I ask you a quick favour?': Everyday care practices amongst early-career academic researchers

In this section, Carolina narrates and analyses, in the first person, favour exchanges which involved friends/colleagues anonymised here as B. and G. The vignettes aim to show what some of the friendship practices performed amongst colleagues, which we have discussed in this article in terms of care, consist of. Additionally, the vignettes seek to show how such practices fit within a broader favour economy that is invisibly implicated in responding to the pressures exerted on early-career academics in the context of the neoliberal university.

'I don't trust my eyes'
When B. emailed me in mid-2018, she was in the process of finishing her doctoral thesis. Her message started with the usual niceties. After acknowledging

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that she had a favour to ask that was, at once, 'very cheeky' and 'last minute', she graciously offered me a way out: 'You can, of course, say no', she wrote. I, of course, did not.[2]

B. and I had been friends/colleagues for over four years when she sent me the email, which was not an atypical message in the context of our friendship and collegiality. When it came to navigating the joys and anxieties involved at different stages of the Ph.D. process, we had developed a mutual dependency that went beyond professional etiquette. Given our history of reciprocal exchanges of emotional-professional support, this was a request I would only say 'no' to under extenuating circumstances. This almost unconditional form of support was how I experienced and witnessed the favour economy that took place amongst my friends/ colleagues at the university.

> Her request was for an extra pair of attentive eyes on two pages of text – 'a page and a half, really' – that were about to be sent off to the printers. As B. stated at the time: '[T]his needs a proof read – I don't trust my eyes and brains to produce two flawless pages…'. The tone of the questions that followed indicated her insecurity in relation to the last editable stretch of the writing process: 'Tell me if there's a sentence that doesn't make sense, or if you can see any typos. Also, the first two sentences…are they ok?? Or is it just 'too much'?? Any edits, advice, comments welcome'. B. concluded the flurry of self-doubting queries as one does: with a smiling face made of punctuation marks. She then went on to pledge reciprocity, emphasising that I had an open tab with

her when it came to proofreading or editing of any kind: '[I]f I can return the favour (…), I'd be super happy to do so'. I promptly answered her email with the edited document and a supportive message, wishing her luck in the stressful last stretch of her doctorate.[3]

In her message, B. freely performed the insecurity resulting from the pressures and desires to deliver 'flawless' pages. This form of vulnerability is usually edited out of lectures and papers, but is very present in the exchanges amongst friends/colleagues who are at the same level in university hierarchies and share insecurities related to their academic performance. In my prompt response, the editing suggestions were wrapped in reassuring messages of support, which are often a part of granting friendly favours *caringly*.

> Roughly two months after her message, B. had the chance to return the favour, when I resorted to her for feedback in the midst of writing a motivation letter for an academic position that I was, in retrospect, slightly under-qualified for. 'Hey B.!' I wrote. 'If you have 20 min tomorrow (today?), could you take a look at the cover letter for this application? It's due by the end of Wednesday', I asked, while stating that I wouldn't 'have much time to make it kick-ass' but would love her feedback. As one does, I concluded with a hopeful punctuation smiley and a 'TON' of thank you's.
> When B. replied, the harsh underlined red letters of her tracked changes to the original document contrasted with the soft encouragement of the added comments, which incentivised me towards self-

assurance: 'The letter is great!' she said. 'However, my overall sense is that you should boast a little more – be clear about wanting the job AND being the best person for it!' B. signed off with hugs and hopes for the feedback to be helpful. It was.[4]

My request for an academic favour from B. came with a time limit: I did not want her to commit more time than she had available to my application letter. Previously, B. had made a similar choice, sending me a page and a half of text and not more. Running on the assumption that all friends/colleagues have scarce amounts of free time, head space and energy to dedicate to friendly favours, we pre-emptively limited how much we asked of each other – which also stemmed from the assumption that a requested favour was as good as granted.

'Could you check my English?'
In the case of B., the favours asked related, in different ways, to her lack of trust in her own judgement, either due to fatigue or self-doubt. When it came to producing a final-final draft or to performing adequately as the ideal job candidate, she depended on an extra set of eyes, coupled with a friendly boost of confidence. In reciprocity, she generously provided the same academic strand of care towards me, when I felt the need for an extra layer of editing on top of my own, not to mention a 'pep talk'. For G., another friend/colleague with whom I had been working, teaching and drinking, the favours were also triggered by self-doubt, but of a different and more specific nature.

'Do you think I can ask you for a huge favour?' G. asked me in Portuguese, a language we share. 'Could you look at the English in my abstract?' At the time, we were both attending the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting in Washington DC. On top of presenting at a panel, she was juggling another abstract deadline. 'I think it would be good [to have the English checked] before sending, if you don't mind', she messaged, to which I responded 'Claro', which translates to 'of course' in my native Portuguese.[5]

Coming from an academic environment where English was not the *lingua franca*, G. resorted to a friend/colleague at a moment in which she felt called upon to perform the flawless *anglophone* academic. Similarly to B., G. also showed vulnerability and the desire to fulfil a specific set of expectations related to her language skills. Her insecurity was not unwarranted. As universities homogenise their academic cultures in order to compete globally through rankings that are still dominated by British and North American institutions of higher education, the 'good academic' is increasingly the 'anglophone academic'.

The conversations I reproduce in this section relate specifically to an activity that recurs in the lives of professional academics, namely the editing *ad nauseum* that precedes the submission of a text, be it for a peer-reviewed publication or as part of the process of applying for research jobs or funding. These particular affective/professional exchanges that took place between 2017 and 2018 are exemplary of the caring friendship dynamics that are often backstage of the individual iterations of the 'flawless' academic text.

The importance of academic feedback from friends/colleagues, coupled with emotional reassur-

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ance – especially when navigating competitive selection processes – was well articulated in another request from B. Months after the conversation at the start of this section, she sent me a WhatsApp message. 'I have a very quick question/favour to ask', wrote B. After inquiring into what would be the best way to write a follow-up email about one of her first post-Ph.D. job applications, which targeted a coveted permanent position at a renowned North American university, B. stated: 'I think I have grown completely dependent on your opinion'.

Albeit through a hyperbolic statement, B. expressed one of the points that we would like to make with the present article, namely that the care performed towards friends/colleagues or their output – can we even make such a division? – often becomes a central and necessary part of our everyday work, as caregivers and receivers. We relate this perceived need to edit endlessly and perform flawlessly – in academic texts, conference talks or high stakes work correspondence – to the pressures exerted on academic staff in the highly competitive context of the neoliberal university. As we have argued, in spite of fostering highly individualised subjectivities that are not conducive to the nurturing of friendship bonds, the university ends up benefitting from the friendly favour economy hidden under the high quality texts that we save and submit as 'final'.

Acknowledgements: Public performances of academic friendship

Successfully defending a dissertation and obtaining a Ph.D. degree is often an important beginning in an academic career. A career, as we argue, in which friendship is indispensable but often invisible. Even though friendship is central to the workings of the neoliberal university, there are few, if any, cases in which such bonds become visible to a broader audience. We identify two exceptions to this rule.

First, in the Netherlands, it is customary for doctoral candidates to select two 'paranymphs' who assist the candidate in preparing for the public defence of the thesis. Traditionally, paranymphs could support the candidate during the defence in answering the questions posed by members of the doctoral committee. This is no longer a practical reality and the function of paranymphs, as many other aspects of the defence, are primarily symbolic in nature. In spite of this, it is still generally considered that the role of a paranymph is an honourable one. Although it does involve administrative tasks, such as sending invitations and arranging receptions, only two people get to stand next to the doctoral candidate as they 'marry science' on the day of the defence. The audience present that day, including the doctoral committee and the (co-)promoters, see the paranymphs as the two most important persons in relation to the individual academic achievement of the candidate. Although the selection of the paranymphs is in theory unrestricted, practice shows that they are often people close to the candidate, and usually friends/ colleagues. The bond between a Ph.D. candidate and his or her paranymphs is not exclusively *personal* or *professional*, but meaningful in a way that blurs this binary and enters the terrain of friendship.

Second, the actual dissertation often contains a short but emotional and explicit reference that illustrates the importance of friendship in the process of obtaining a

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doctoral degree. Most dissertations include a section in which the candidate 'acknowledges' those who were particularly essential in the research and writing phase, and why. In the spirit of autoethnography, this is probably best illustrated through an analysis of Thijs' Ph.D. thesis acknowledgements, written in 2018, where he states that he wishes to…

> thank my friends and (former) colleagues at the University of Amsterdam and Utrecht University, in particular Rivke, Carolina, Francesco, Alana, Tracian, Lior, Sterre, Julienne, Christien, Erella, Tessa, Francesca, Jan, and other SECURCIT and reading-group members. It was over four years ago that we embarked on this project and it was really special working and spending time together…

This section followed and overlapped with a part in which Thijs thanked his loved ones and relatives first, suggesting that friendship comes second to romantic relationships and bonds with close family members.

In the acknowledgements, candidates also often write up funny anecdotes or refer to particular moments, and generally consider 'personal' stories and interactions that do not have a place in the actual dissertation:

> Rivke's Engelen [Rivke's angels], thank you all for being a collective of amazing researchers and individuals. I have learned much more from you than I did from my own research (but don't tell anyone that). Alana and Tracian, thank you for accommodating me in Kingston and for offering guidance in the midst of our exhausting fieldwork. Francesco and Carolina, thank you for enjoying camp no-sleep

with me, for the hilarious texts during meetings, courses, and conferences.

Although it is by no means a professional exchange, universities do prescribe certain guidelines for the doctoral candidate in formulating his or her acknowledgements. In 2014, a candidate at Leiden University had to reprint his dissertation because he thanked Allah in his acknowledgements.[6] In a second version, he solved the issue by moving his gratification to a separate note. In hindsight, a representative of the university claimed that it was an unnecessary and uncommon request. Although some universities, like Leiden, have formulated official guidelines, which at the time did not explicitly reference the possibility to thank a religious figure, the case illustrates that acknowledgements can still be considered a formal part of the thesis, and are dealt with accordingly by board members and the university dean.

Whether or not the acknowledgements are considered to be a formal part of the dissertation, the human and non-human entities referenced are often essential in the production thereof. In the above section, Thijs clearly states that he 'learned much more' from his friends/colleagues than 'from my own research', acknowledging that the people he thanks in this section were key to his academic development and output. At the same time, the tone in which Thijs expresses his gratitude suggests that these people (or at least some of them) were more than just colleagues. They travelled together, wrote together (as this article also illustrates), and experienced the doctoral programme at the UvA together. Both the doctoral defence and the acknowledgements in dissertations are minor but very

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clear indications of how friendship materialises within an academic's life, and how these bonds configure the experience thereof.

Conclusions: Friendship as care at the 'more-than-neoliberal' university

Through different autoethnographic experiences, we have shown that the work we perform within the neoliberal university often relies on friendly favours. We have touched upon practices of care amongst friends that took place backstage of the public performance of the 'flawless academic'. Carolina's first-person accounts illustrate what the friendship practices that we frame as care often consist of. The vignettes involving B. and G. are evocative of the insecurities and anxieties that are shared freely amongst friends/colleagues striving for 'excellence', which prompt pep talks and emojis of encouragement, alongside dutiful feedback on content. These text editing and confidence-boosting favours may be edited out of the documents we save as 'final', but are nevertheless central to the high standard of output demanded by academic environments driven by metrics.

Finally, we have discussed some of the few moments in which such friendships are acknowledged publicly as integral to the daily work lives of academics and their outputs. Thijs' acknowledgements illustrate the importance of friends in academic careers and the output of written work. Recognising the role of peers, acknowledgements are seemingly an informal part of the dissertation – unless objections are formalised by higher ranking university staff members. Out of reach of the everyday gaze under which academic work is produced and qualified, the importance of friendship and the significance of the broader favour economy is often obscured by processes of neoliberalisation. In particular, it is often suggested that an academic career is primarily, perhaps exclusively, built around individual merit, which, as we hope to have demonstrated, is far from the truth.

In this article, we have drawn from our mundane experiences as early-career academics navigating a university system that increasingly fosters individualised and 'flex' subjectivities. However, gesturing towards 'anthropologies of the good' (Ortner 2016), the bleaker dimensions of neoliberalising processes in higher education have receded into the background, while key moments in which friendship was activated as care in relation to academic work have been foregrounded. As we mentioned earlier, this move is a performative one, which also aims to broaden our political imagination of the university. While highlighting the ways in which the corporate university profits from the favour economy afforded by friendship amongst colleagues, we also gesture to the resilience of these social bonds, which escape market logics and call attention to what makes the contemporary university 'more-than-neoliberal'.

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Acknowledgements

Notes

1   Autoethnographic vignette by Carolina, based on messages exchanged with Thijs, 13 April 2017.
2   Autoethnographic vignette by Carolina, based on personal electronic communication with friend/colleague B.
3   Autoethnographic vignette by Carolina, based on personal electronic communication with friend/colleague B.
4   Autoethnographic vignette by Carolina, based on personal electronic communication with friend/colleague B.
5   Autoethnographic vignette by Carolina, based on personal electronic communication with friend/colleague G. in December 2017.
6   http://www.mareonline.nl/archive/2014/04/10/allah-mag-wel-in-dankwoord-1.

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