

## Book Review

Ishmael I. Munene (Ed.)  
*Contextualizing and Organizing Contingent Faculty*  
Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018

Reviewed by Anthony Iacovino

**Key Words:** Casualization, Working Conditions, Faculty Agency, Administration, Shared Governance, Corporatization, Neoliberalism, Democracy

In May 2010, lecturer Jungmin Seo, from Chosun University in South Korea, committed suicide by bringing a “briquette” inside his apartment and letting its poisonous smoke kill him. In a dramatic suicide note he expressed his profound disappointment with the corruption in higher education. He relates how he was asked for “100 million won by a university in Gyeonggi” in exchange for a full-time professorship. He also claimed to have written many articles for his mentor and to have received no credit for his work. He wrote, “My suicide is caused by stress. You can’t just leave [sic] what part-time lecturers are facing now” (Kim and Yu, 2010).

This incident goes to the heart of *Contextualizing and Organizing Contingent Faculty* whose aim is to reveal (somewhat awkwardly stated) how “the transformation of higher education through steering universities into the marketplace has invited adverse consequences for governance, teaching, research, and ultimately, for the nature of academic labor” (Munene 2018, 219). These issues are of pressing concern to administrators in higher education who are responsible for the quality of education, the fairness of governance, the success of their students, and the continuity of their institutions.

The editor of the collection is Ishmael Munene, a tenured professor at Northern Arizona University, USA. His expertise is in higher education with some 82 publications to his credit. Munene divides the collection in three: “Part I looks at the theoretical issues related to university transformation and faculty initiatives to reclaim the narrative. Part II explores the practice side of reclaiming the narrative from the United States, while part III does the same with selected countries across the globe” (Munene 2018:10). By ‘reclaiming the narrative’ Munene seems to mean showing from the point of view of faculty the difficulties they face, the value of the work they do, and the need for improvement.

### A Brief Review of the Literature

This collection is part of the increasing number of articles and books on the plight of contingent faculty. What is new in the collection is the revelation of how extensive the use of

contingent faculty is not only in the US but also in other major countries around the world, including Canada where I live. Its second contribution is that it brings up to date the status of the main problems contingent faculty face, as pointed out by Pankin and Weiss (2011) in the introduction to their extensively annotated bibliography. They state, "most of the discussion is centered on four topics: the status of part-timers, exploitation or the lack of justice for part-time faculty, their morale or job satisfaction, and the educational problems that are created by using part-time faculty" (2). In fact, these problems have not seen much improvement since the time when that bibliography was written in 2011.

However, two of the leading lights in the American struggle on behalf of contingent faculty have, indeed, helped to move matters along. They are Joe Berry and Helena Worthen. Besides "The Metro Strategy," their contribution to the current collection, to be dealt with later in more detail, they have written a book length treatment on unionizing contingent faculty. This book is called *Power Despite Precarity* previously reviewed in *The Innovation Journal (TIJ)*. In fact, the reader could profitably examine this book together with *Contextualizing and Organizing Contingent Faculty*. The latter stresses how treatment of contingent faculty has deteriorated the working conditions of higher education while the former stresses the strategy and tactics for improving the lot of contingent faculty through union activity. A third complementary work, by Henry Giroux, is *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*. Giroux's political emphasis shows how neoliberalism's attack on colleges and universities weakens higher education, and consequently, weakens the quality of democracy.

While scholarly studies often focus on the working conditions of contingent faculty and the effects on the quality of education, few scholars have looked at the psychological effects on contingent faculty. Two researchers (not represented in this collection) who have done so are Reevy and Deason. In "Predictors of depression, stress, and anxiety among non-tenure track faculty," they state, "Demographic characteristics, lower income, inability to find a permanent faculty position, disengagement coping mechanisms (e.g., giving up, denial), and organizational commitment were associated with the potential for negative outcomes, particularly depression, anxiety, and stress" (2014, 1). This aspect of contingent faculty studies should be followed up diligently because depression and anxiety, as we have seen, can lead to something far worse, suicide.

As hurtful and disconcerting as it may be, researchers of contingent faculty issues must also look at the body of works administrators have written justifying their policies. One such work is *Part-Time Faculty in Ohio: A Statewide Study* (Yang and Zak, 1981). It is important to show administrators the weakness of their policies by confronting them on their own terms and in their own journals. In this way, administrators cannot point to published justifications that have not been addressed.

While scholars have contributed to the betterment of contingent faculty, overlooked are the contributions of fiction writers and artists. When it comes to persuasion and inspiration to act, their contributions are more effective than the sparsely read research of scholars. One of the first novels about the struggles between administrators and faculty that caught the attention of the general public was Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952). Another such novel was

Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* (1953) that was translated into many languages and sold millions of copies.

Musicians have had a similar effect. The reader has only to look back to the 1960s and 1970s to see what large impact performers such as Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, and the Beatles had on the outlook and behaviour of the people of the time. These fans signed petitions, went out to demonstrations, and acted on what they believed. Besides their ability to inspire action, these writers and artists helped bring problems to the attention of the larger society and helped in the eventual formation of social movements. Contingent faculty need the help of writers and musicians to further their cause.

## **Evaluation of Chapters**

What has *Contextualizing and Organizing Contingency Faculty* achieved? Perhaps its greatest achievement was to reveal the appalling working conditions of contingent faculty in several major countries around the world. It gives us a fuller prospective on what is happening and how bad it can get. For example, in South Korea, the researchers Sungok Park and Choi Soyoung in "The Beginnings of Resistance Among Part-Time Instructors in South Korea," highlight the suicide of instructor Jungmin Seo. In doing so, they succeeded in bringing to light the working conditions of the part-time instructors in South Korea (2018, 197). Moreover, the general sympathy which his suicide created has resulted in Korean law being changed to make it more favorable to part-time instructors. However, the implementation of this law was yet to be achieved at the time of the writing of this chapter in the collection (2018, 206).

And this is where the ideas of Berry and Worthen, as expressed in "The Metro Strategy," come into play. The purpose of this chapter is to educate and help organize contingent faculty so that they are empowered to do their jobs as educators properly, get paid what they deserve, and achieve their rightful status in society. The chapter begins with a definition of who the contingent faculty are:

This workforce is defined more by geography than by employer, more by working conditions than by status, and more by self-identification as teacher and academic than by the label any employer may have endowed them with. Along with these definitions come a host of concrete realities and psychological characteristics that are essential to an understanding of the consciousness and potential of this workforce (2018, 36).

The difficulty with trying to define contingent faculty is that they have so many different titles, roles, and working conditions. Contingent faculty also work under the daily pressure of having to bear with the inconsistency between the value that they bring to their work and the "extreme disrespect" with which they are treated. The above definition and its elaboration in the text are well worth examining.

Then the chapter provides a deep and perceptive understanding of the historical context

from which the metro strategy developed. One of the crowning achievements of the metro strategy is that along with its companion inside-outside strategy, it enables contingent faculty to have a voice which is separate and distinct from the voice of full-time faculty (2018, 53).

As stated previously, the psychological effects on contingent faculty have not been studied as much. In this collection, the chapter by Nora Timmerman, "Vulnerable, But Not Silent: Unpacking Discourses of Fear Surrounding NTT Faculty," she discusses the concern of tenure-track faculty over the vulnerability and fear of non-tenure-track faculty. The concern is that non-tenure-track faculty might be coerced into working with administrators against the interests of tenure-track faculty. As a result, the two groups are divided and do not work together for their mutual benefit (2018, 63).

It is too bad tenure-track faculty and contingent faculty sometimes work at cross purposes. For all the vaunted benefits of tenure, tenure-track faculty have seen a huge reduction in their members, have less academic freedom, and are overworked. Non-tenure-track faculty are faced with vulnerability, lack of opportunity, discriminatory policies, poor payment, and stress. These two groups have a common cause, the defence of higher education, and they could better achieve this defence by working together.

Wane and Abawi, in "Disposable Academics: Neoliberalism, Anti-Intellectualism and the Rise of Contingent Faculty in Canadian Universities," point out that although Canadian universities have antiracist policies, these policies are ineffective and not implemented. They state, "PSE [Post-Secondary Education] has not kept pace with the increasingly racialized and Indigenous student and general population demographics and has, instead, continued to operate on the premise of White supremacy" (2018, 212). This is a serious charge against Canadian universities. Administrators should pay heed to this issue because it could become extremely problematic as it did during the 1969 riot at Concordia University in Montreal.

In summary, this collection certainly achieves its goal of bringing to light the problems of contingent faculty in several major countries around the world, and in doing so, it performs a valuable service. The collection also brings the reader up to date on some of the major problems that still exist. However, it sometimes covers some of the same ground as has been covered in the past. This is a weakness.

## **Commentary**

By way of concluding remarks, it must be stressed that improvement of working conditions for contingent faculty has a long way to go. When looking at administrators in a critical vein, it is important not to generalize about all of them. Some are to be praised for using their meager finances to best benefit contingent faculty. However, as this collection makes clear, with the excuse of government cutbacks, administrators in higher education are acting in an unethical and unsustainable manner. They must carry out what is best for the public, not what is best for individual corporations. They must re-examine their notion of efficiency in order to deal humanely and fairly with their employees, and they must reform their untenable policies if social

unrest is to be averted. If these administrators were given a grade for their work, they would surely merit only a D—and such a grade would be generous.

As Van Arsdale puts it, too harshly in fact, “Employers who would exercise every skill to deny status to an entire class of employees upon whose services they are unavoidably and increasingly dependent, and who would hide behind the protection of laws designed to prevent just such practices, and who would then further deny the same class of employees even the figment of a fair and equitable wage, are indistinguishable from thieves and criminals (1978, 200).” This judgment must be included for it shows how sharply contingent faculty feel the injustice. Fair-minded administrators can help a great deal by curbing some of their more extreme fellows in higher education.

What is to be done? Some contingent faculty see teaching not as a job but as a calling. At this moment, union activism seems to be the best immediate option for those who want to stay and strive for better conditions. But for those who can be happy in other work, let them find that work. Contingent faculty have a choice of all the options available in new developing fields and in fields where they can still practice some aspect of teaching.

In the long run, the problem of contingency must be solved on four major fronts: the pedagogical (role of education and who provides it), political (how to implement an education system), social (who benefits from education), and economic (how to pay contingent faculty justly).

#### **About the Author:**

**Anthony Iacovino**, M.A., has had a career in both the public and private sectors. For some 20 years, he served on the faculties of Concordia University and later at Seneca College. While at Seneca, he presented papers at the conference of the College Association for Language and Literacy. In the private sector, he did editorial work for CCH, a legal publishing firm. Later, as a private consultant, he was regional managing editor for the *Business Report* and worked with large companies such as IBM. He was a member of the Canadian Editors’ Association (EAC) and the Society for Technical Communication (STC). As a member of the STC, he received the President's Bouquet Award for management of their speakers' program. Upon retiring from Seneca College, he received an award for service to his union, OPSEU, Local 560. He can be reached at [tonyi@mailbox.org](mailto:tonyi@mailbox.org).

#### **References**

Amis, Kingsley. 1953. *Lucky Jim*. London, U.K.: Penguin Books.

Berry, Joe and Worthen, Helena. 2021. *Power Despite Precarity: Strategies for the Contingent Faculty Movement in Higher*. London, UK: Pluto Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2018. The Metro Strategy: A Workforce-appropriate, Geography-based Approach to Organizing Contingent Faculty *Education*. Pp.35-59 in I. I. Menene (Ed.), *Contextualizing and Organizing Contingent Faculty*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

Giroux, Henry A. 2014. *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*. 2nd Ed. Chicago Il.: Haymarket Books.

Kim Mi-ju & Yu Ji-ho, Lecturer's suicide rocks university, *Korea JoonAng Daily*, May 28, 2010, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=2921114>, Viewed Jan. 29, 2023.

McCarthy, Mary. 1952. *The Groves of Academe*. N.Y., N.Y.: Signet Books.

Munene, Ishmael I. (Ed.). 2018. *Contextualizing and Organizing Contingent Faculty*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

Pankin, Robert & Weiss, Carla. Pp. 2011. Part-time Faculty in Higher Education: A Selected Annotated Bibliography. Sociology Department Faculty Publications. [https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/sociology\\_fac/1](https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/sociology_fac/1).

Park, Sungok R. and Choi Soyoung. 2018. The Beginnings of Resistance among Part-time Instructors in South Korea, Pp.195-206 in I. I. Menene (Ed.), *Contextualizing and Organizing Contingent Faculty*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

Reevy, Gretchen M. & Deason, Grace. 2014. July 8. Predictors of depression, stress, and anxiety among non-tenure track faculty. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5: article 701. Doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00701.

Timmerman, Nora. 2018, Vulnerable, But Not Silent: Unpacking Discourses of Fear Surrounding NTT Faculty. Pp. 63-82 in I. I. Menene (Ed.), *Contextualizing and Organizing Contingent Faculty*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

Van Arsdale, George. 1978. De-Professionalizing a Part-Time Teaching Faculty: How Many, Feeling Small, Seeming Few, Getting Less, Dream of More. *American Sociologist*, 13(4): 195-201.

Wane, Njoki and Abawi, Zuhra. 2018. Disposable Academics: Neoliberalism, Anti-Intellectualism and the Rise of Contingent Faculty in Canadian Universities. Pp. 207-218 in I. I. Menene (Ed.). *Contextualizing and Organizing Contingent Faculty*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

Yang, Shu-O Wu, & Zak, Michele W. 1981. Part-Time Faculty in Ohio: A Statewide Study. Kent, OH: Kent State University, Office of Human Resource Utilization.