Labour pains: Starting a career within the neo-liberal university

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abstract

This paper explores how early career academics (ECAs) come to understand their future and the nature of their academic labour at a time when the profession as a whole faces increasingly uncertain and challenging working conditions. Focusing on a group of 20 ECAs with an allegiance to critical management studies (CMS), we explore how they attempt to find their feet and to practise in ways compatible with their own values within environments and evaluation systems potentially at odds with their CMS agendas. We draw on Bourdieu's theory of practice and his concepts of 'hysteresis' and 'illusio' to understand the various transitions they have to make to practise in this academic field and why they feel the investment is nevertheless worthwhile. In so doing we paint a rich description of the often painful experiences of this group and identify a series of disjunctures between their habitus and the current field. We then explore how they use these disjunctures as springboards for learning how to manoeuver within the field through developing what we term a 'critical' habitus. We argue that their role as outsiders and their experiences of disjuncture might help these ECAs to negotiate the complex field, not only in working out the rules of the game but also in developing a facility to bend them and develop their own personal rules.

Introduction

Changes over the past decade-and-a-half in the way in which the key outputs of academic labour, namely teaching, research and administration, are evaluated and audited throw up many dilemmas and hard choices for academics, especially in terms of negotiating performance management and career development (Anderson, 2008; Hayes and Wynyard, 2002; Strathern, 2000). Some find it possible to adapt skills and habits developed previously to rise to the challenges

and perceived opportunities of the neoliberal university's focus on 'excellence' and audit culture (Butler and Spoelstra, 2012). Others find it difficult to respond to the increasingly narrow way in which their work is judged and valued, and what might be seen as an encroachment on academic freedom and the Weberian notions of vocation (Weber, 2004). This trend, it could be argued, has knock-on effects on concepts of professionalism within academia (Archer, 2008a) and on constructs of academic identity (Tight, 2000; Trowler, 1998).

Managerialist governmentality within UK universities (Deem and Brehomy, 2005; Mingers and Willmott, 2013) is portrayed as being acute, particularly in the years running up to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) review in 2014. Studies of established academics during this period report loss, pain and stress, and bittersweet relations (Knights and Clarke, 2014) with their employers, colleagues, and with their own academic identities as they cope with delivering on the demands on their academic labour from an increasing emphasis on evaluations, accreditation, and research rankings (Butler and Spoelstra, 2014). Examples are also given of members of the professoriate and established academics being seen as either 'selling out' or 'floundering' in the way they respond to the resulting expectations placed on them as they try to reconcile their established professional practices with the changing face of the university (Butler and Spoelstra, 2014; Clarke et al., 2012). Meanwhile academic managers also find it increasingly difficult to encourage or help colleagues to deliver on and balance potentially unrealistic targets from senior management (Bryman and Lilley, 2009; Preston and Price, 2012).

At a time of uncertainty, where the rules of the game are up in the air, even established academics are facing difficulties practising within the complexities of the new academic landscape (Clegg, 2008). So, what is it like for those who have only recently started their academic careers and as such are already transitioning in a variety of ways?

In this paper therefore, and in keeping with the stated aims of this special issue 'to explore questions about how the work of scholars is being shaped, managed and controlled', we focus attention on early career academics (ECAs) as an incoming group trying to work out how to practise in a changing academic environment, one rife with tensions, contradictions and mixed messages coming from both their employers and the wider academic community. We focus on ECAs (early career academics) rather than ECRs (early career researchers) because the latter term excludes teaching – a key part of academic labour in higher education institutions (HEIs) that, as shall be seen, is very important for our interviewees' experiences, teaching being a significant component of the

critical management studies (CMS) project from which we select our sample of ECAs (see Research design).

In order to shed light on ECAs' understandings of the nature of contemporary academic labour and the difficulties they encounter in enacting it, we pose the following questions: 1. What is it like to be an ECA in these transitional and unsettled times, and what disjunctures and transitions do they experience on entering the field? 2. What coping practices do they develop, and how might their disjunctures and outsider positions in some ways facilitate their positioning within the field? 3. What support do they draw on in developing these endeavours and in moving forward? In following this line of enquiry with reference to this specific group, our concern here is firstly, to shed light on the nature of the academic labour of the new generation of scholars, but also to consider how to help, nurture and metaphorically arm ECAs at a time when even more seasoned colleagues are finding it increasingly difficult to manage their own careers and academic trajectories (Knights and Clarke, 2014).

In addressing our research questions, this paper is structured in the following way. Firstly, the context in which this research is situated and existing work on ECA experiences is outlined. Secondly, the key concepts from Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977b; 1990) and the related concepts of 'illusio' and 'hysteresis' as used to construct the theoretical framework of this paper are presented. Then the research design and justifications for choices made are discussed. We then move on to discuss our interview data, painting a picture of what it is like to be an ECA in these unsettled times, focusing on the complex nature of their experiences of engaging with various forms of transition both personal and field-related, while at the same time trying to preserve and develop their ideals, thus developing their specific academic habitus. We then discuss how the application of Bourdieu's theory of practice and his concepts of hysteresis and illusio have helped shed light on the nature of academic labour for this specific group of academic workers. Finally, we consider how these ECAs might be better prepared and supported for the realities of this unsettled workplace.

Context

As previously stated, changes in higher education over the past decade due to the influence of neoliberalism, new public managerialism, performance management, and the culture of excellence (Archer, 2008b; Butler and Spoelstra, 2012; Deem and Brehony, 2005; Willmott, 2003) have made it increasingly difficult for academics at all levels of the hierarchy, from departmental heads right through to ECAs, to manage and keep ownership of their academic careers.

The impact of changes within HEIs on academic work and identity is well documented (Hayes and Wynyard, 2002; Strathern, 2000) and stories abound of the effects of the pressures on academics to perform increasingly well in all aspects of their academic labour: on, for example, well-being, sense of worth and professional identity (Clegg, 2008). Debates about the ability of academics to resist increasing demands, how to collectively ameliorate working conditions, and what forms of resistance might be most effective are still ongoing (Anderson, 2008; Clarke et al., 2012; Willmott, 2013).

Although much of the existing literature focuses on the tribulations of the profession as a whole, there is an emergent literature that focuses on specific groups of academics: for example, academic managers (Bryman and Lilley, 2009; Preston and Price, 2012) and the professoriate (Butler and Spoelstra, 2014). There is also an emergent body of work depicting experiences of ECAs and ECRs, especially those in precarious employment conditions, for example, on short term contracts (see below). However, research in this area is still somewhat dispersed, inconclusive and contradictory.

Laudel and Gläser, in their study of ECRs argue that previous work (around the turn of the century) on junior academic faculty has portrayed them as 'the most vulnerable group in the science system [that] are therefore the first to suffer from the stress that has befallen this system' (Laudel and Gläser, 2008: 388). Their review of existing studies identified the increasing difficulty for ECRs of obtaining permanent positions and also a below average ability to secure funding (one of the key criteria on which academic labour is now judged). However, apart from these two aspects, Laudel and Gläser argue that ECRs' experiences, as portrayed, are not that different from other groups of academics. They imply that it is difficult to generalise as to the specific difficulties of this group and argue that one of the problems with previous studies is that they have not adequately examined specific scientific communities (Laudel and Gläser, 2008). Their own study, set in the Australian context, is a cross-sectional study of 16 ECAs, focusing on the issues of gaining permanent employment and the difficulties of achieving the publications necessary to secure this while working on research contracts. They found that many researchers respond to this need for 'research active time' by taking time out post-PhD to obtain the required number of publications before applying for permanent jobs which adds a worrying layer of unpaid work to our understanding of contemporary academic labour.

Archer's twin articles on the formation of contemporary academic identities (2008a, 2008b), draw on a study of eight ECAs, including contract researchers, from different disciplines within the UK context, and provide a rich description of the everyday life of early career academics. The studies highlight the

difficulties of achieving a work-life balance and of being accepted, taken seriously and socialised into existing academic communities. She suggests that the 'authentic' and 'successful' academic is a desired yet refused identity for many younger academics, who must negotiate on a daily basis not only their attempts at 'becoming' but also the threat of 'unbecoming' (Archer, 2008b: 385). In the sister paper, Archer (2008a) focuses attention on the effect of neoliberalism on the 'Thatcher's children' cadre of academics (those at the time of writing in 2008 at or under the age of 35). She concludes that although 'Neoliberalism infiltrated their bodies and minds', making it difficult to articulate what is happening to them, there were 'small spaces of hopefulness' as ECAs 'invested in producing critiques, resilience and resistances' (Archer, 2008a: 282).

Such research suggests that ECAs and ECRs are potentially quite well-positioned to develop ways of dealing with the competing pressures of contemporary academic life, albeit in some worrying ways. This potential is evident in the extremely reflexive autobiographic accounts by early-career (Bristow, 2012) and doctoral (Prasad, 2013) CMS scholars, of their experiences of the socialisation processes and of balancing dual strategies of compliance and resistance in 'playing the game and trying not to lose myself' (Prasad, 2013: 937) – although this is not to underplay the pain and personal loss experienced that comes through clearly in these accounts. Other articles (Prasad, 2015; Raineri, 2015) speak to this trend of PhD socialisation into the exigencies of the neoliberal audit culture – reflecting the view of the PhD as an academic apprenticeship (Austin, 2002, 2009; Bansel, 2011; Weidman and Stein, 2003), a transition from peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991) to becoming a fully-fledged academic.

Much of the literature discussed above is essentially descriptive, highlighting themes of strong socialisation, dissonance and difficulty, and as such there is little exploration of, firstly, the underlying causes for these reactions and experiences of academic labour, expecially in relation to domination and power relations within the field. Secondly, there is little theoretical discussion of how we might understand the nature of ECAs' agency as that of potentially dominated agents (Bourdieu, 1993). We suggest that Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977b, 1990) and the related concepts of *hysteresis* and *illusio* make a good starting point as a theoretical lens for studying how the work of these scholars is being shaped, managed and controlled, and how at the same time ECAs try to actively manage the tensions of their academic labour in a complex interaction between embedded structures and individual agency.

Theoretical framework

Through his work, Bourdieu developed a theory of action that aims to overcome the traditional dualisms of mind-body, subjective-objective and structure-agency – the latter is of particular interest here. McDonough and Polzer (2012: 361), for example, argue that in studying complex organisational change, there is often a tendency to privilege either structure or agency, thus neglecting consideration of 'the co-constitutive character of change in the workplace'. Bourdieu applied his theory to a wide variety of objects – including sports, leisure, science, fashion, journalism, language, literature, and so on. What unites this wide array of interests theoretically are the interlinking concepts of field, capital and habitus, which we define below. In addition, Bourdieu's concepts of illusio and hysteresis, which we will also make use of, are defined.

Field. Bourdieu defines a field as 'a kind of arena in which people play a game which has certain rules, rules which are different from those of the game that is played in the adjacent space' (1991a: 215).

Fields are characterised by specific stakes and interests that are irreducible to the stakes and interests found in other fields. For a field to exist and to function, 'there have to be stakes and people prepared to play the game' (Bourdieu, 1993: 72). Those who are involved in a field, Bourdieu (1993: 73) argues, 'share a certain number of fundamental interests, namely everything that is linked to the very existence of the field'. Elsewhere, the concept of field has also been defined as 'a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 16). These forms of capital create the parameters that regulate the ways individuals behave and interact within a particular field (Bourdieu, 1991b: 215). The 'rules of the game' are neither explicit nor codified but are learnt through socialisation into the field and the process of acquisition of the right forms of *capital.*

Bourdieu (1996) argues that fields can be either autonomous or heteronomous. Heteronomy is taken as the extent to which its structure and logic is influenced by other fields (Gorski 2013: 3). Autonomous fields have strong entry requirements and clear rules whereas in a more heteronomous field rules are less clear and thus arguably give more room for interpretation. In more autonomous fields established field-specific forms of capital are required, whereas in a more heteronomous field forms of capital valued in other neighbouring fields may become preferred – as Gorski (2013: 340) suggests, 'a bit like a weak currency regime, in which strong foreign currencies are the preferred medium of exchange'. For the purposes of this research we take the

field under study to be the subfield of business schools within the academic field in the UK at the current time.

Capital. Bourdieu (1986) identifies four distinct forms of capital: *economic* (e.g. money, material possessions), *cultural* (e.g. knowledge, skills, educational qualifications) and *social* (e.g. the networks a person can draw on as a resource). *Symbolic capital* is the accumulated prestige or honor one derives from the accumulation of the three primary forms, and is significant in distinguishing one's self within a given field.

Habitus. The habitus is a system of dispositions and a scheme of perception. As a system of dispositions, it accounts for the stability of social practices: 'the principle of the continuity and regularity which objectivism sees in social practices without being able to account for it' (Bourdieu, 1990: 54). It is a product of history and of the past experiences deposited in individuals. As a scheme of perception, thought and action, it tends to guarantee the adequacy of practices and their constancy over time. The habitus is stable but malleable to an extent, bounded by the limits initially set on its invention. It implies a view of human development as a constant dialectic between external determinations and internal representations, rather than as a simple accumulation of experiences (Bronckart and Schurmans, 1999).

Illusio. A field can be compared to a game, in as much as it follows some rules (although neither explicit nor codified), it has stakes that are the product of the competition between players, and those players have an investment in the game – Bourdieu terms this investment illusio (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 98). By playing the game, players tacitly agree that the game is worth playing. Bourdieu points out that agents themselves may or may not experience their activity as a game:

> It is only exceptionally, especially in moments of crisis, that certain agents may develop a conscious and explicit representation of the game as a game, one which destroys the investment in the game, the illusio, by making it appear what it always objectively is (to an observer foreign to the game, indifferent to it) – that is, a historical fiction or, in Durkheim's terms, a 'well-founded illusion'. (1996: 382n19)

The game metaphor and the connected concept of illusio have recently been used by management and organisation scholars in the study of higher education (Taksa and Kalfa, 2015), and of a professional occupation (Lupu and Empson, 2015) and has the potential to inform our understanding of ECAs commitment to (or disengagement from) 'the game'.

Hysteresis. As individuals generally succeed in making sense of the world around them, the habitus is normally protected from crisis and challenges. However, the capacity of the habitus to defend or to adapt itself is not always guaranteed. When a field starts to change, the abilty of a person's habitus to keep up with or adapt to the demands of the changing field is brought into question. Bourdieu's concept of the *hysteresis effect* describes this disjuncture between the field and the habitus – a maladjustment between the practical schemes underpinning action and the new conditions. Developed in Bourdieu (1977a) and (2002), the concept is particularly well illustrated in a study by Bourdieu and Sayad (1977) on the effects of colonial policies in Algeria. It follows the fate of the peasants who were strongly encouraged to move to cities, turning upside-down all the social structures of the peasant society within only a few years. Thus, the authors show how the peasants are maladjusted to their new environment, since their practices are generated by a habitus that has not adjusted itself to the new conditions.

In *Pascalian Meditations* (2000) Bourdieu suggests that the concept of hysteresis could be applied more widely to situations of change, and stresses the importance of reflexivity of social actors when 'the coincidence between structure and habitus is increasingly disrupted' (Bourdieu, 2000: 263). That is, in a changing field, there is a *dissonance* or disjuncture between the demands of the new, emergent rules of the game and the habitus. During a period of hysteresis, social actors may continue to rely on past behaviours, which effectively 'help to plunge them deeper into failure' (Bourdieu 2000: 161). However, some actors in the field are able to survive the hysteresis effect by adopting reflective behaviours to identify and acquire the new forms of capital deemed valuable within the changing field, such as knowledge, qualifications and social networks.

The concept of hysteresis has been used by organisation and management scholars to understand the strategies of 'dominated' actors in a specific period of social and organisational transition (e.g. Kerr and Robinson, 2009) and in understanding public sector workers' reactions to change (e.g. McDonough and Polzer, 2012). We now move on to outline the research design for this study.

Research design

This paper draws on an ongoing study of CMS ECAs. We chose to focus on this group of ECAs for the following reasons: firstly, our starting assumption is that they are in overt (or covert) opposition to the performative, managerialist drive of the 'new higher education' (Jary and Parker, 1998) in that the anti-performative, reflexive ethos of CMS (Fournier and Grey, 2000) to which they subscribe implies the general questioning of the spread of managerialism (Alvesson et al.,

2009). Secondly, this dissonance would suggest that CMS ECAs are often painfully aware of the conflicts and contradictions involved in being a CMS academic in the neoliberal business school and, as organisation scholars, are often finely attuned to issues of power and domination. They are therefore well-positioned to make sense of their environment and to develop and articulate ways of reworking and reshaping the competing pressures (see Bristow, 2012; Prasad, 2013). Our intention therefore is to see what we can learn from this group and the potential agency of its members to develop and practise in ways which help them to establish, maintain and safeguard critical practices crucial to the preservation and development of the integrity of the CMS academic community, rather than to focus on ECAs' marginality, degradation or powerlessness (Laudel and Gläser, 2008).

In crafting this paper we are making use of an ongoing study, and drawing on the experiences of the first 20 ECAs interviewed. We regard this as an exploratory study which will then grow and spread in terms of reach and diversity of participants. For the first 20 participants, however, we limited our sampling to CMS ECA academics who work, or until recently worked, in UK business schools. We have chosen the UK as an historical centre for non-mainstream approaches (Üsdiken, 2010) containing recognised hubs of CMS research (Fournier and Grey, 2000), and thus being a good starting place for this on-going study, especially given the rapid changes in UK universities in the past decade (Butler and Spoelstra, 2012, 2014; Deem and Brehony, 2005). Being ourselves members of this relatively small research community, we identified and recruited our research subjects via a chain-referral sampling strategy, whereby we invited the first participants through personal contacts. These then acted as recruitment 'seeds' for subsequent participants (Heckathron, 2011) and as news of this project spread through the community several participants contacted us directly with a wish to participate.

We defined ECAs, following other writers (e.g. Laudel and Gläser, 2008), as those employed in a full-time lecturer post or equivalent for up to six years. In borderline cases we asked potential participants whether they still self-identified as an ECA and for what reasons, before including them in the study. Our current sample of 20 participants consists of what we feel is a representative mix of ECAs in terms of age, calculated from date of birth (this ranged from mid 20s to mid 40s), career age (up to 6 years) and type and number of universities studied at and worked in. The sample consisted of at least 12 different nationalities, with eleven of our participants being male and nine female – however, we acknowledge that a sampling limitation is that we do not delve further into the intersectionality of our research participants, for example, sexual orientation and class. At the time of the interviews, a significantly higher proportion of

participants was employed in the pre-1992 sector (traditional universities) than in the post-1992 sector (former polytechnics), although many participants had experience of working in both.

As relatively young academics and members of the CMS community ourselves, we have, in order to prevent ourselves being swayed too much by our own assumptions, been through a rigorous process of data analysis going through various cycles of interpretation (see below). In so doing, we follow other management researchers in finding reflexive ways of researching their own contexts (Butler and Spoelstra, 2014; Elliot and Robinson, 2012; Knights and Clarke, 2014).

The interviews were semi-structured, as we drew on an interview guide consisting of eight themes with prompt questions, which were explorative in nature and gave plenty of room for participants to craft their own narratives and give deep description of their own experiences. The interviews ranged between one and two-and-a-half hours in length, were voice-recorded and transcribed. The data analysis was carried out in several stages, involving all three authors of the paper. Firstly, the initial codes were collectively agreed based on research questions and previous literature. Secondly, data were independently coded by the three authors, aided by the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. In addition to the pre-agreed codes, this coding process also yielded new inductive codes emerging from our interpretations of the responses. In the final stage of analysis, we reviewed and renegotiated both the use of the initial codes and the new inductive codes, arriving at a collective interpretation of the data.

Becoming a CMS ECA within in the contemporary Business School

In presentation of the analysis of the interviews, we use concepts from Bourdieu's theory of practice as an underlying analytical framework throughout. The way in which the findings are organised is intended as a mapping of ECA experiences rather than depicting a linear progression towards success (indeed, as will be seen below, many of our participants' experiences were characterised by drawbacks, turning points, loss, failure and other such aspects as to make them far removed from a positivist idea of career progress). Instead, as ECAs are potentially dominated agents within the field they are entering, we consider how successful their efforts are in the light of their relations with the wider power structures or hierarchies within the field.

We focus firstly on the '*labour pains*' of the early stages of an academic career. These labour pains are understood as common (among our participants)

transition experiences set within the context of wider institutional change. By using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field and the wider notion of hysteresis, we identify and discuss different types of disjuncture between the two as types of labour pains ECAs experienced in developing their academic practice.

Secondly, using the concepts forms of capital and illusio, we explore processes of *birth or development* of the (new) CMS academic within the context of the neoliberal business school. We look at how the disjunctures identified prompted ECAs to focus on trying to keep their CMS faith and learning to navigate the field by acquiring appropriate forms of capital so they can practice accordingly, with varying degrees of success.

In this section we use quotes from our participants' interviews as subheadings to demonstrate how the ECAs' experiences can speak to the theoretical framework used.

Labour pains: Personal transitions in times of change

Entering the field:

> when you are doing a PhD, you think this is the hardest time of your life, but you're not even close to what it's like being an ECA (ECA 4)

The first type of labour pain comes from disjunctures between expectations of academic life and ECA experiences in full-time paid employment as lecturers within UK Business Schools. ECAs reported feelings of bewilderment, tiredness, frustration, disappointment and being lost, stemming from disconnects between conceptions of academic work acquired during their PhD studies in the context of CMS and the audit culture of the field:

> [As doctoral students] we had been led to believe that it was all about reading books, about engaging with colleagues about interesting theories, that you would be reading all the time, and talking about ideas and books, rather than merely talking about publications. So the transition [...] was a bit awkward and I felt lost. [...] My identity as an academic was a little bit lost for the first year, maybe even two. It felt like the rug had been pulled from beneath my feet. (ECA 3)

Another disjuncture with expectations for some ECAs was the sheer amount of work given to them by their departments. In the following extract an ECA describes her first batch of marking which also challenged her ideals of fair employment and good teaching practices:

> I was like a robot, I marked them until 2 in the morning and then went to sleep on the sofa, woke up and marked some more all day Sunday. That was just my life for

> a week or two... I got very quick at marking that particular assignment but I thought, this is so unfair on the students and unfair on me. (ECA 12)

Physical and mental exhaustion are common themes: these had a cumulative effect as time went by. Expectations of what the academic job entailed, especially the space to write/publish were compromised:

> *I spent the first year acclimatising and trying to get up to speed. I wrote a conference paper, but then the second year, the Head of School gave me three brand new modules to run in one semester. I was falling asleep at the dinner table and I fell asleep at a gig – how bad is that? I was that tired. The second semester I just could not write. I was so exhausted from marking and writing new lectures. (ECA 8)*

Similarly, disjunctures between expectations of collegiality, support, a duty of care and ECAs' experiences of being treated as the academic precariat surface clearly in descriptions of the probation process.

Adapting to the field:

> 'I guess part of the experience of being on probation is you learn...you are not in a position to challenge anything and I am not sure whether that changes, but my mood continues to be that I adapt to what is happening around me' (ECA 1)

Experiences of probation were varied but seemed to fuel ECAs' sense of vulnerability: in some cases they experienced a culture of micro-managing and strong socialisation, representing a disjuncture from expectations of academic freedom and autonomy:

> Every six months I am asked to write a list of where I am up to on publications and where I am going next. It feels like we are not being trusted to get on with it ourselves. I had a probation thing and all this paperwork and then six months later I had to do something else for my PDR [performance and development review] and then six months later something else to show what I am doing in the next five years. (ECA 7)

In other cases the lack of direction on probation objectives was equally disconcerting:

> I was appointed on probation for three years, I didn't have any probation criteria for completing probation. For that matter, I still don't have any! That was something that worried me continually. (ECA 12)

Many of our interviewees perceived probation as a tool for exerting pressure to publish: this was perhaps not unexpected, but the nature of the demands (to publish in 4* journals) from the outset and the consequences of not doing so were in some cases destabilising and upsetting:

> As a junior academic, I was given six months to get a favourable journal review, which is almost being set up for failure. It made me feel disposable, and that changed my mood about the institution. [...] For me, there was suddenly a shift in the psychological contract. (ECA 1)

Such a combination of pressure and lack of directed guidance could lead to false starts and loss of direction:

> ...over time I think I found my research interests being more realigned, gradually and without really noticing. So by the end of my second year, perhaps as late as my third year... I was reading only [mainstream theory] articles and I would say that was the low point of my academic history so far. Just paper after paper of boring stuff that didn't interest me, didn't inspire me... I tried and importantly failed to publish in 4*journals, [and] realised I had lost my research interests. (ECA 3)

Yet ironically, such socialisation processes often served to highlight another common disjuncture for this group: that between having a CMS orientation (habitus) and working in largely mainstream business schools where the contribution of CMS work was not recognised.

CMS habitus:

> Everything I do my colleagues think is out of the ordinary (ECA 12)

Most of our respondents identified openly with CMS but were surprised to find this was regarded as strange or that it was not understood in their workplaces:

> My CMS identity... as part of my interview process to the department, I didn't even think about it, I just said this is my research, take it on board. It is interesting how I have spoken to some people and they just don't understand what it is about at all. (ECA 15)

Another ECA describes the disjuncture and discomfort between her given job title and her research orientations:

> I would definitely say that I am CMS. I find the label of Organisational Behaviour [...] acceptable in a teaching context but in a research context I think it has taken a more North American, managerialist [connotation]. So I try to steer away from using OB as a research label. (ECA 17)

In addition, ridicule by colleagues was an upsetting experience reflecting a disjuncture between concepts of academic freedom and the disciplinary behaviour of colleagues:

> ...the few people who are aware of it make jokey comments, on more than one occasion. I think I am known, at least locally here as the CMS person. (ECA 15)

The experiences presented here could be interpreted as just part of the learning curve in the transition from PhD student to lecturer. Yet we see the dawning realisation of what we argue as a series of disjunctures between the (PhD/CMS) habitus and the demands of the contemporary academic field – a mismatch between what ECAs expected to find in the field and what they actually found. Examples include: academic exploration versus writing to publish in 4* journals; ideals of giving good constructive feedback versus heavy marking loads; the notion of an academic career versus becoming a member of the academic precariat.

Can such misunderstandings be dismissed as ignorance and naivety or indeed has the field that they had been prepared to work in changed quite rapidly? The field seems to be in transition from an autonomous field where the academic rules of the game are clearer to a more heteronomous field which is difficult for all actors to understand. It could perhaps be argued that what we are seeing here is an example of the hysteresis effect for this group (almost by proxy) in that those advising them and helping to prepare for academic careers, supervisors, PhD directors and so on are not really aware of the effects the changing nature of the field can have on new entrants to the field.

The implicit criticisms of the current state of the field certainly suggest that there are wider transitional processes in play, resulting in some of the disjunctures they experience. These stories also indicate a hard induction into the power relations and politics of the contemporary academic workplace. Here we suggest that what we are seeing are not just the normal pains of socialisation into a new workplace but the potential exploitation of new faculty members who have no yardsticks to go by, a feeling confirmed by one of our research participants: 'I think it could be so easy to be exploited as an ECA because you are not aware of the bigger picture' (ECA 17) – this perhaps points to strains and tensions within the wider field.

We can see the pressures of systemic issues emanating from changes in the field, such as increasing student numbers and the dominance of the REF, impinging on ECAs' transition experiences. There are questions to be asked here about how these incidents were handled by heads of schools and line managers, and what pressures they themselves are under that prompt them to give such workloads and set unrealistic targets for new faculty members. Another possible factor to consider here is that some ECAs (but not all) changed from universities where they did their PhDs (many of these were traditional pre-1992 universities) to post-1992 institutions where teaching loads might be heavier – this might explain some of the dissonance between some of their expectations and what they encounter.

Such experiences of disjuncture perhaps constitute a painful loss of innocence but the experience of hysteresis can lead to a wider reflexivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) due to the need to try to work out both how to survive and to, at least in part, achieve their aims and ideals for their academic careers in spite of the difficulties in their way:

> It is like getting used to a little bit of disappointment and compromise, a good bit of life preparation and that doesn't necessarily turn you into a passive guy but it might deepen your agency in a strong way. (ECA 1)

So rather than totally capitulating to this socialisation process, there is evidence of the habitus fighting back. We now turn to how ECAs try to exercise agency within the demands of the field to try and shape their practice accordingly.

Becoming a CMS academic within a complex field

Roles and rules:

> Trying to find your feet... [F]inding out what the role is, in a sense, it is there on paper but it is not obvious (ECA 15)

The interviews describe iterative processes of working out what is important both to ECAs' employers and to themselves. We could see this as striking a delicate balance between acquiring field-related forms of capital and keeping their illusio.

One challenge for many was how to find time and space to publish, understood as key to keeping their present job and establishing an academic career:

> You find yourself battling to balance your teaching and your research time. [...] You have to work within the constraints to come through. (ECA 14)

A related challenge was to balance what individual ECAs *wanted* to write – often what they had become accustomed to seeing as interesting CMS work – with what was interpreted as institutional demands for more mainstream 4* publications (understood as the dominant form of cultural capital within the field). Some ECAs were able to identify contradictions or loopholes in institutional messages, giving the possibility to follow their own research paths and interests within the constraints of the system: 'they don't bother you about what your research is about, as long as you are publishing in 4* journals' (ECA 2).

We see some disjuncture here with the assumption that research should be challenging, meaningful and making a difference versus the realisation that all

that is valued (as capital) is publication rather than the message of the research itself:

> [A]ll you have to do is what they tell you, you get to keep your job. This also destroys the challenge of the job. (ECA 6)

One strategy was to fight back through a double game of delivering what ECAs thought was wanted but using it as leverage to achieve success on their own terms, which, here, is implicitly seen as *being interesting* and following your own research priorities:

> Don't be led into uninteresting directions because you think it might be good for your career, because ultimately your career is based on what you write, and if it is uninteresting you will be seen as an uninteresting person and be surrounded by uninteresting people who have different priorities. Figure out what your priorities are. (ECA 3)

What is emerging here is the importance of believing in wider outcomes of academic labour rather than (just) the ones deemed to be valued by the neoliberal academic field. What is of note is the time it takes for ECAs to come to such realisations despite the apparently inherent reflexivity of their CMS PhD apprenticeships. We could surmise that the messages to publish (in a specific way) are coming louder from academic mentors and line managers than messages relating to academic freedom and vocation even in CMS contexts.

Thus here emerges a potential disjuncture between what CMS ECAs would want academic labour to achieve and how they think they need to behave in order to achieve the targets placed on them, which can lead to the realisation of the need to focus and prioritise: 'I think one thing you learn through the PhD and early academic life is working out what is important' (ECA 1).

Although times are undoubtedly hard for ECAs, there is also evidence of endurance and tenacity in that they can be very committed to their careers, or the (CMS) imaginary (Taylor, 2002) of what they perceive their career to be:

> I worked for 12 years outside of academia and this is more frustrating and disappointing than any other job I have done but I still wouldn't want to go back to them. It is also more engaging and fun and interesting than any other job I have had. (ECA 7)

So rather than walking away (although several of our respondents have changed universities and in some cases countries quite frequently), there was still a feeling that this was a career worth having. Personal reward and satisfaction as well as working for a greater cause, such as what was understood to be within the

remit of CMS, and wider notions of academic freedom and vocation were highly valued ideals among our interviewees.

The contemporary academic landscape seems to have been perceived by many of our participants as one where workaholism and constant pressure for excellence on all levels loomed large. Therefore, developing agency to carve out a space in such an environment was important:

> I think you have to be very resourceful and resilient and not give up, continue experimenting and innovating new ways that work for you, design new ways of inspiring yourself despite all the challenges. (ECA13)

What we therefore can see in the following stories are attempts to develop the habitus to both comply with and resist the demands of the field in a balance with their own personal agendas.

Balance and negotiations:

> I didn't work for two weekends, and I realised the world doesn't stop (ECA 2)

In order to achieve this balance many ECAs actively reflected on the current nature of the field itself and its effects, giving them some insight into their own (potential) marginality, which we suggest, then acted as a springboard towards rectifying and/or challenging their marginal status:

> It is almost exploitative because you are not aware politically and strategically of what is going on. It is not about just accepting it, it is about negotiating it. (ECA 17)

However on occasions, the situation was made worse by their own habitus (for example, a belief in academic collegiality): 'I did have a bad habit about volunteering for things which I have this year tried to stop doing' (ECA 12).

Many of our participants also critically reflected on their early experiences in terms of lessons learnt or mistakes not to be repeated:

> I'd say to myself: refuse to do three brand new modules. You have the option of saying no. As an ECA [...], you forget that you can say no. There are reasonable expectations, and there are unreasonable expectations. (ECA 8)

Those who may have felt powerless considered the groundwork they could do to make things better for themselves (and others) in the future.

> ...you can't make any difference in the present but what you do is make sure you are in a situation where you might be able to make a difference in the future.

> There are things you can do in the long term which can enhance your ability to shape your environment or to protect things that are important to you. (ECA 1)

Others, unhappy with a current situation, were able to identify the (specific) problem and were prepared to walk away if what was making them unhappy (a disjuncture between the field and the habitus) was not resolved:

> Something will have to change with the teaching, so either I will have to make it mine here or I will have to go somewhere else. I don't want to be teaching this stuff for the next 20 years. It has to be more meaningful, the teaching. (ECA 7)

Such labour is difficult to sustain as an individual project and there was a widespread acknowledgement of the importance of support from various sectors of the academic community.

Social capital:

> You can't easily change the system but you can change your relationship with people (ECA 13)

There was a certain consensus among our interviewees that formal institutional support through line management or formal mentoring was lacking and certainly insufficient to help ECAs establish themselves. This also included a feeling of the dearth of support from senior CMS colleagues, whether formal or informal:

> I think what is needed more is how the senior academics can support young scholars like myself and others get through and get published and find our voices. I think that is important. (ECA 14)

Other ECAs seemed undaunted by this lack of support and told us how when they were working on papers they actively identified and approached more experienced scholars inviting them to become collaborators to 'workup' the paper for publication thus developing social capital in order to acquire cultural capital, for example, good publications: 'my current strategy is, I am working with people who have got more experience, who are either generally readers or senior lecturers, or professors…' (ECA 15).

Many of our interviewees acknowledged that it was of high importance to them to build strong (informal) relationships with colleagues of all levels. For example, informal CMS mentoring and attending CMS conferences was important to many of our participants as part of developing some security, nurturing their academic identity and maintaining the (CMS) illusio: 'I feel so high at conferences surrounded by like-minded people' (ECA 20). Some of our interviewees took on very active roles in the CMS community, whether it is as

editors or even founding editors of critical journals, or as founders of CMS scholarly societies, and told us of the significance the networks developed as a result of such involvement had in their development as CMS academics. For many of our ECAs growing such social capital was part and parcel of resisting demands of the new neoliberal field – for instance, one interviewee told us how she deliberately chose to write with people considered as 'undesirable' by her line manager in order to maintain her sense of critical scholarly identity.

We now move on to discuss our research questions in the light of the data analysis and to consider how our theoretical framework has helped in building an understanding of the nature or academic labour for this specific group of academics.

Concluding discussion: From labour pains to the birth of the new CMS academic?

At the outset we posed three questions: 1. What is it like to be an ECA in these transitional and unsettled times, and what disjunctures and transitions do they experience on entering the field? 2. What coping practices do they develop, and how might their outsider positions in some ways facilitate their positioning within the field? 3. What support do they draw on in developing these endeavours and in moving forward?

ECA experiences: Disjunctures and transitions

The snapshot of academic labour given in this paper depicts pains of transition, becoming, growing and developing within what is already an uncertain and turbulent environment. As previously stated, much of the existing research about this group of academics is primarily descriptive and, although painting vivid pictures of their experiences (see Archer 2008a, 2008b), does not sytematically use theory to shed light on the nature of their marginality, issues of power and exploitation, and their stuggle against it.

What our application of Bourdieu's theory of practice has enabled us to do therefore is to demonstrate the complex relationships within the changing academic field and disjunctures between the expectations of the field and the habitus of the actors within it. In the case of the ECAs in our study, disjunctures between the habitus and the field they are entering and which emerge from the empirical analysis include: a. PhD eclecticism and the consequent expectations of doing interesting research which feeds into teaching, versus rigidity of publication culture and expectations of engaging (solely) with mainstream publication and teaching; b. wider academic ideals of academic freedom versus

controlling probation and appraisal systems; c. expectations of good teaching and learning versus the conveyor belt mentality; d. belief in CMS versus lack of understanding or suspicion of CMS initiatives. Such disjunctures, we could argue, could be seen as different (but interconnected) modes of hysteresis.

These (personal) disjunctures are, we suggest, further aggravated by ECAs' induction into the power relations within the field. This is possibly made worse for them due to senior members of the academic community experiencing forms of hysteresis of their own and reacting in different ways such as defaulting to careerism (Clarke and Knights, 2015). Certainly practices of domination and exploitation, as well as the lack of support were apparent in the stories – for example, probation objectives set were seen by some of our interviewees as, at best ill thought-out and at worst, exploitative.

It could of course be argued that the apparatus of PhD training and induction to an extent prepares PhD students for the neoliberal academic environment, with the emphasis on publishing in the right journals and so on (Prasad, 2013, 2015; Raineri, 2015) and yet, as we can see from the disjunctures identified above, although they might be aware of the nature of the challenge there is still something in the PhD process and possibly in the wider trajectories of the individual ECA – at least in the context of CMS – which inculcates wider academic ideals (see Bristow, 2012). This inculcation may be more intense in the critical hubs where many of the ECAs in our sample were educated. So we suggest that, in terms of a theory of practice, on entering the field they are already developing/have developed a 'critical habitus' which helps them to reconcile and balance these tensions within the field. This further helps them navigate a difficult and changing field relatively effectively by recognising what forms of capital will be of use to them despite their (arguably) dominated and precarious position. On the other hand such disjunctures can also lead to disenchantment and disengagement.

ECA practices and positioning within the field

Due to their newness to the field, it is possible to argue that navigating the neoliberal academic field is more difficult for ECAs than for more established academics. Conversely however, it could also be argued that their role of outsiders puts them in a better position to navigate the conflicting demands of the current heteronomous field and widen their academic ideals. That is, compared to those more used to a more autonomous field where the rules of engagement were possibly clearer (though not without their tensions and contradictions). Processes of figuring out the new rules of the game (new to them as ECAs as well as new in the context of the changing field) and their

(semi) outsider positions perhaps help them to see more clearly than more established academics arguably caught up in a more intense experience of hysteresis.

Certainly we can see from the stories presented above a complex game of compliance and resistance being played vis-à-vis the demands of the field – and this is perhaps seen more vividly than in other studies of ECAs which tend to emphasise one or the other (Archer 2008a, 2008b; Laudel and Gläser, 2008). Such complex and potentially contradictory practices can result in exhaustion and disillusionment but also possibly in creating some space to follow their own agendas. A balance can arguably be created between playing by the rules, bending the rules and starting to play by multiple rules. In so doing some ECAs are able to arrive at a space where they can in part challenge and resist the excesses and homogenisation tendencies of the neoliberal university (Deem and Brehomy, 2005; Mingers and Willmott, 2013).

It is also possible that disjunctures between habitus and field (Bourdieu, 2000) may lead, paradoxically, to the emergence of new practices which are beneficial to the CMS community (or subfield), understood to be under threat from wider societal changes (namely, from neoliberal universities' audit culture and the wider field's acceptance of these). For instance, several of our interviewees were involved in the development of new modes of open-access publishing, which, whilst sustaining the importance of academic publication in general, attempted to cut against the performative culture of '4-star' journals and the dominance of for-profit publishers. On the other hand, it is also of course possible that such disjunctures may result either in capitulation and co-optation or to abandonment of academia altogether, options that, as far as we know, have not as yet been taken by our interviewees, although we are aware that such cases exist.

Adding to our own experiences, our study has made us appreciate in more depth the challenges of becoming a critical scholar in business schools at a time when the critical habitus is arguably dissonant with the dominant logics of managerialism, impact and relevance (Butler and Spoelstra, 2012, 2014; Deem and Brehony, 2005). We might however argue that being in potentially hostile environments can lead to the development of a strong reflexivity in this group as to how they develop their own academic labour through incorporating a very well-developed political sensitivity, possibly similar to that of the corporate dissidents described by Kerr and Robinson (2009), and which could lead, on the one hand, to effective critical scholarship, but also, on the other, to the development of successful practices of resistance and change within their own institutions. Optimistically then we could argue that these labour pains might

give birth to a new type of CMS academic well placed to balance the many challenges and competing demands of the field.

Using Bourdieu's theory of practice helps us to understand the struggles of ECAs to work out the complex rules of the game and to operate well within this changing academic field while at the same time holding values of vocation and personal integrity related to different conceptions of academic labour. Our study also shows that ECAs strive for some security and comfort in their day-to-day lives, perhaps indicating that they believe there will come a time when the field will settle down and return back to business as usual (Bourdieu, 1996). Yet what we also see is a nuanced understanding of the difficulties of the current situation and the power relations this engenders. One thing that struck us in the analysis of these experiences was that there was a widespread view of the lack of and/or ineffectiveness of formal institutional support and mentoring.

Support for CMS ECAs

We would therefore also strongly argue that, although relatively well equipped to support themselves, this group also needs the wider support of the CMS community. This raises questions as to how this group can best be supported and nurtured. We suggest that there is a need to develop more sophisticated and robust – diverse, effective and encompassing – sources and forms of support in order to foster the many (often fragile and uncertain) processes involved nowadays in the birth and growth of CMS academics. Whilst the bases of many potential sources of support are already in existence, in most cases they do not provide sufficient coverage or continuity for ECA experiences. For instance, ECA workshops at the CMS Division of the Academy of Management Meeting and at the CMS conference may be inspiring and uplifting but happen only once a year in the case of the former and biennially in the case of the latter. This is a long time to wait for encouragement, especially for those feeling isolated in mainstream institutions. It is, we would argue, in the interests of the CMS community to look after its ECAs more thoroughly and consider how the wider CMS networks and informal training, institutional mechanisms such as doctoral training and more formal mentoring, and more specialist support networks such as the VIDA network for critical women scholars (see VIDA, 2016) can be built on to create a more nurturing ECA environment.

Suggestions for future research

This research has identified, surfaced and started to explore some key issues in contemporary academic labour relating to how the work of scholars is being shaped, managed and controlled. It also demonstrates how the ECAs we studied

were, at least to an extent, able to manage, shape and control their own career directions and choices. We do, however, feel this area could benefit from more research in the following areas. Firstly, as regards the application of our theoretical framework, we have only explored the experiences of this group of scholars at one moment in time, one to six years into their academic careers. We suggest longitudinal work would be interesting in exploring how the hysteresis effect and its associated disjunctures endure, to what extent a critical habitus can be developed and fine-tuned over a sustained period of time, and, in addition, how a critical illusio can be maintained. A connected research avenue would be to explore further the development over time of social capital (especially informal networks), which has emerged in this study as being significant in supporting junior academics negotiating the tensions and disjunctures inherent in their roles. Such an approach would mirror Bourdieu's 'methodological shift' in his study of academics, from the study of a contextually specific moment of time (Bourdieu, 1988) to the study of a longitudinal case (Bourdieu, 2007). Then, looking beyond the academic context, we wonder how the concepts of hysteresis and illusio could be used to follow early career journeys of other young professionals where the professional field is undergoing considerable change, for example in the very topical case of junior doctors.

Secondly, this research indicates that management appraisal and probation systems for academics, particularly, although not exclusively, for ECAs, is due some critical scrutiny as it is becoming clear that such mechanisms are being increasingly used to achieve REF and other targets. This, as we have seen, can result in unrealistic demands being put on academics, leading to despondency and a decline in well-being. Research which highlights these problems and explores alternative ways of inducting and appraising staff in line with personal as well as institutional objectives would constitute a welcome follow-up to this study. A connected research avenue would be to extend work on how academic middle managers (Bryman and Lilley, 2009; Preston and Price, 2012) can fulfil their roles of mentoring and supporting junior colleagues when they face their own challenges of hysteresis and dilemmas in ensuring performance targets from senior managers are delivered.

To conclude, in this paper we have demonstrated that rather than obediently capitulating to the demands of the emergent heteronomous field with its currency of wider neoliberal values, the ECAs in our study have developed an ability to read, resist and play such demands. Much of the time this does not seem to be done in a cynical way but in an attempt to balance self-preservation and defence of core intellectual principles (or an academic imaginary), that is, the illusio to which they are committed and which guides them. However, this is not to down-play the pain of the labour process. We would therefore like to conclude

with an appeal to the wider CMS community to engage in different forms of action, including further research, as mentioned above, to shed further light on these issues and also in forms of collective and individual support to help to strengthen the agency of new CMS academics to resist the pressures to capitulate to the demands of the neoliberal university or the urge to exit academia altogether.

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