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Troubling intra-actions: gender, neo-liberalism and research in the global academy

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This article raises questions about gender in the neo-liberalised research economy. Theoretically, it includes Barad's concept of intra-action to analyse how discursive-material differences between research winners and losers are created and sustained. Empirically, it draws on international research conducted at British Council seminars on *Absent Talent: Women in Research and Academic Leadership*. I examine how neo-liberal policy cultures of financialisation and market values are entangled in research processes, management, and academic identities. I discuss the intra-actions or mingling of knowledge capitalism, research as a vehicle for surveillance and performance management, the affective economy, gendered maldistributions of opportunity structures and academic identities. I argue that research is increasingly instrumentalised as a major relay of power in the construction and destruction of academic identities, with material and affective consequences. The paper poses questions about how disqualifications are constituted and reproduced via a range of intra-actions including research financialisation and its impact on academic identities and the under-representation of women as research leaders in the global academy.

Keywords: neo-liberalism; intra-action; gender; research economy; financialisation policy

The neo-liberal research economy: the intra-actions of finance, impact and epistemic injustice

In this article, a goal is to trouble the alignment of academic research with the political economy of neo-liberalism and gendered opportunity structures. I draw upon Barad's (2007) theory of intra-action to examine how differences between academic winners and losers are made and unmade, with a focus on gender in the global research economy. I do this by discussing how neo-liberalism has been installed, via the discursive-material effects of the financialisation and marketisation of research and consider its effects on academic identities. I examine how research financialisation and the on-going misrecognition of women as research leaders intra-act to produce a highly gendered and exclusionary neo-liberal research economy.

Knowledge is represented as an increasingly valuable form of capital and as a global commodity (OECD 2013), and as such, it is a site of contestation, inclusions, exclusions and maldistributions. Neo-liberalism's policy agenda in higher education is based on economic and social transformation under the sign of the free market,

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with institutional arrangements installed to implement this project (Connell 2013). A central aim is to reduce the amount of public investment in higher education. In the neo-liberal theory of knowledge production, the value of research is increasingly being financialised and technologised, producing a chain of effects that can be metricized, audited and used for performance management in the global academy (Holmwood 2014; Power 2014). New spaces of calculation and new visibilities are emerging (Ball 2012). Financialisation attempts to reduce all value that is exchanged either into a financial instrument or a derivative of a financial instrument (Peters, Paraskeva, and Besley 2014). It uses accounting conventions and pricing to place higher education within a system of accounts (McGettigan 2013). The concept applies to diverse aspects of higher education including student fees, privatisation of services, and the research economy. Altbach (2014) suggests, however, that research productivity is easier to measure than other kinds of academic work. Measurement takes the form of income from research grants, for example, as an indicator of excellence, as well as publications and research impact (Watermeyer 2014). This neo-liberally influenced financialisation has set off a series of intertextual chains that are visible in research funding, knowledge mobilisation and the construction and destruction of academic identities. The impact agenda incorporates neo-liberalism's double injunction of market rationality and social responsibility (D'Aoust 2014). Knowledge production, through academic research, is now part of the neo-liberal project that values income generation, commercialisation, mobilisation and performance management over creativity, criticality, discovery or scholarly independence. Ball and Olmedo (2012, 91) observe:

Results are prioritised over processes, numbers over experiences, procedures over ideas, productivity over creativity.

Market-rational behaviour or 'economics imperialism' (Allais 2012) is privileged, suggesting that knowledge needs to demonstrate its quantifiable use value.

The installation of the neo-liberal gaze on research quality requires a series of re-significations and endless repetitions – often through the regulatory mode of audit (Butler 1997; Hey 2014; Morley 2003). Academics, it seems, are increasingly governed by numbers (Ozga 2008). Research management in the neo-liberalised global academy requires a range of truth telling including the governance of self and the confessional and aspirational mode of academics' individual research plans and appraisal. It also involves telling truth about others via peer review and technologies of audit in which every organisational member is made calculable (Ball 2014). The researcher is produced through multiple metrics that have a market value, for example in the prestige economy of global league tables (Amsler and Bolsmann 2012; Lynch 2014). Metrics imply norms. Butler (2006) observed that the multiplicity and continual changes in academic norms require us to ask which norms are evoked in judging any piece of work, and how they are interpreted. The recently introduced impact policy agenda in the UK is producing new norms that require research to produce demonstrable social, economic or cultural impact and benefit beyond academia (HEFCE 2011). Research impact in the UK has been financialised and is now firmly linked to institutional funding via the Research Excellence Framework, with Research Impact Case Studies graded and contributing to 20% of the overall score for research excellence. It is predicted that this will rise to 25% in 2020 (Watermeyer 2014). The value indicator of research impact involves an accounting form with effects that can be audited including solicited and causal testimonies from users or

‘impactees’ (Power 2014), and rectilinear accounts of cause and effect. The policy understanding of change is caught up in the notion of continuity and causality. The speech acts of impactees, referenced in Impact Case Studies produced by researchers are expected to attribute auditable social, economic or policy change to particular research findings. Holmwood (2014) argues that this is an attempt to turn research into a contract model, as stakeholders’ views now shape research purposes, value and design. The emphasis is on the technicisation of knowledge – research that can be applied to policies and practices, with a major emphasis on what works. This expository tactic is an attempt at social transparency, that is, reassuring taxpayers that they are getting a return on their investment in publically funded social research. Collini (2012) suggests that these are attitudes to which politicians find it expedient to appeal. The impact agenda is a form of idealised abstraction that aims to clear discursive debris from social research by focusing on the knowledge that matters to policy, society and the economy. However, the impact agenda requires certain dispositions, visibilities and forms of self-promotion that can have gendered implications (Phipps 2014). It is also a major form of performance management, with questions about whose work has impact on what (Colley 2013)?

Knowledge capitalism generates arbitrary and unsustainable inequalities, and the neo-liberal project in the research economy is surfacing a range of differences. I believe that Barad’s (2007) theory of ‘intra-action’ is relevant to discussions on the politics of difference in relation to knowledge construction. Barad’s neologism ‘intra-action’ signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. Agency is the ability to act. Intra-action is the mingling of people, objects and other materialities’ abilities to act. In contrast to ‘interaction’ which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognises that distinct agencies do not precede or exist independently, but rather emerge, or are co-constituted, through their intra-action (Barad 1996, 33). The concept of intra-action addresses the question of the making of differences, of ‘individuals’ rather than assuming their independent or prior existence. It is not that there are no separations or differentiations, but that they only exist within relations, in co-production. For example, research quality emerges or recedes depending on how it intra-acts with a range of constituents including dominant policy discourses, its financial value, methodological paradigms, the status of the researcher/ higher education institution and the key performance indicators in audit cultures. Subject and object, matter and meaning are formed and transformed through intra-action (Holmes 2015). Barad (2007) notes that the ‘distinct’ agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they do not exist as individual elements, but rather emerge from/ through their intra-action. For Barad (2003, 818) agency itself is not an attribute but the on-going reconfigurings of the world. It is a relationship and not something that one ‘has’. Barad (2007) believes that both discourse and materiality are mutually constitutive agencies in a performative ontology of being. The optic or apparatus for observation can determine what is seen. Simply stated, Barad (2007) asks what is it that people don’t see and why don’t they see it and what do current optics, practices, and specifications reveal and obscure? These insights seem highly applicable to the way in which academic identities and research priorities and paradigms are frequently formed and evaluated in relation to mutable and constructed differences that are accompanied by material and symbolic rewards. Intra-action challenges the notion of a fixed, knowable form of quality in research and suggests that evaluations

are complex entanglements of epistemologies, ontologies and beliefs systems. Research – especially for funding purposes – is increasingly viewed via the optic of neo-liberalism, that is, its market value. In the neo-liberal economy, research is frequently initiated in response to funding flows and by responses to policy concerns that are determined outside epistemic communities, a trend troubled by Butler (2006):

... If governmental authorities stipulate what topics may be funded, they contribute to a public discourse that shifts the common understanding of the line that divides legitimate from illegitimate academic inquiry ... The point here is not just that a person may not get funding for a project if he or she adheres to certain views or engages in certain activities, but also that certain views are no longer considered ‘fundable’ and so are regarded as socially illegitimate. This can only have a deleterious effect on freedom of speech in the academy ... (129–131).

It is questionable whether non-economics, counter-hegemonic or critical scholarship is becoming unfundable or unknowable, and hence socially illegitimate (Butler 2006). The assemblage of rewards for those servile to the priorities of the market and exclusions for refusers and resisters to dominant ideologies could be further contributing to epistemic injustice – the notion that someone can be wronged specifically in their capacity as a knower (Fricker 2007). This means that in addition to social or political injustices faced by social groups, there can be *epistemic* injustices in two forms: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice consists of prejudices that cause one to ‘give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word’ (Fricker 2007, 1). Hermeneutical injustice describes the kind of injustice experienced by groups who lack the shared social resources to make sense of their experience. Neo-liberal research regimes could be contributing to epistemic injustice as they create their own loops that do not always allow entry for alternative or disqualified knowledges. Barad (1996, 187) argues that while boundaries are necessary for making meanings, this does not make them innocent. In this analysis, the boundaries that mark the difference between a research active and a research inactive identity, a knower and non-knower or a winning or losing research bid, are often unstable and transitory (Barad 2003, 822).

The affective economy of neo-liberal research regimes: co-constituting winner and loser academic identities

It would be erroneous to suggest that neo-liberalism is an external, material entity or a seamless monolithic apparatus that can be easily identified and resisted (Ball 2012; Lerner 2000). It may be inhumane, but it is far from being non-human. The neo-liberal project is not just about injury or subjectification, but also about how the academic profession is complicit in promoting, or intra-acting with the indices and indicators that regulate the profession (Gill 2010; Leathwood and Read 2013; Lucas 2006). It is a relationship of entanglement, with affect lubricating financialisation, marketisation and audit policy processes. Income generation, as an indicator of research success, has been absorbed into and intra-acts with academic identities to reconfigure professional goals in performance management. Neo-liberalism has extended the economic form of the market to the wider social body (Lazzarato 2009). In her high-profile resignation from academia, the novelist Marina Warner compared UK higher education to Chinese communist corporatism:

where enforcers rush to carry out the latest orders from their chiefs in an ecstasy of obedience to ideological principles which they do not seem to have examined, let alone discussed with the people they order to follow them, whom they cashier when they won't knuckle under. (Brown 2014b)

As Sandel (2012) observes, it is not so much that we have a market economy, but we have become a market society. Social and psychic processes have intra-acted with dominant policy discourses to facilitate the introduction and maintenance of market values in academia. Davies et al. (2013, 681) suggest that:

Individuals' power rests in taking up social categories as their own, shaping themselves in relation to them, and at the same time disavowing their dependence for continuing existence on that subjection.

In an academic culture of self-governance and self-maximisation, values circulate and offer up new opportunities for competition, exhibitionism and self-promotion. The financialisation of research becomes a truth about its quality. The granting of competitive awards is one of the favoured mechanisms for recognising individuals who have excelled, or performed in excess of the norm (Davies et al. 2013). Rewards also confirm compliance with norms and are regulatory forms of recognition. Targets for achieving research income are now a part of performance management, or indeed tenure in diverse national locations. In a recent critique of a management paper that proposed to make over 120 scientists redundant at King's College, London, the *Guardian* journalist, Chakraborty (2014) noted:

A professor at the Institute of Psychiatry is expected to be making his (sic) college £200,000 in grant funding. Every year. The paper makes no mention of the quality of the research, nor of its independence from commercial interests. Going by these criteria, a psychiatry professor taking 200 grand from Nando's to prove that grilled chicken engenders wellbeing would be golden; his colleague looking into schizophrenia in the prison system on half that amount would be for the chop.

Neo-liberal reforms can be experienced as intolerable amounts of surveillance and performance management creating increasingly toxic and unhealthy workplace cultures (Thornton 2014). As Zabrodska et al. (2011) argue the intra-action of the twin rhetorics of economic responsibility and fear of non-survival are mobilised to make academics more governable. This can lead to bullying, exit and in extreme cases, self-destruction. The neo-liberal academy, while not essentially male, can reinforce particular masculinities, producing a virility culture which values people in relation to how much money they make – the *homo economicus*. Accounts of the suicide of Professor Stefan Grimm who worked at Imperial College, London reveal the pressure that he was under to meet financialised research targets (Parr 2014). Shame was mobilised, via a calculus of his research grant capture success or management by numbers (Cooke 2013). There is a powerful relationship between shame and indebtedness (Mantyla 2000; Probyn 2005). The failed academic entrepreneur is treated with the same contempt as recipients of welfare benefits. That is, as a retainer and burden on more 'productive' colleagues. An email to Stefan Grimm from his head of department six months before his death suggested that his failed attempts at academic capitalism in the enterprise culture meant that he was no longer the ideal citizen:

Despite submitting many grants, you have been unsuccessful in persuading peer-review panels that you have a competitive application. (cited in Parr 2014)

In intra-actions, responsibility is distributed among the constitutive entities. The intra-action between the discursive-material forces of the institutional research policy and Professor's Grimm's 'failure' to achieve the required annual research income co-constructed a negative academic identity sufficient to threaten expulsion from his profession. In the precarity of research funding, this is akin to blaming someone for not winning the lottery. His agency, or ability to act, had no value outside the outcomes of his research bids. Professor Grimm documented the bullying he had experienced:

On May 30th '13 my boss ... came into my office together with his PA and ask me what grants I had. After I enumerated them I was told that this was not enough and that I had to leave the College within one year – 'max' as he said ... and told me that I would have a meeting with him soon to be sacked. Without any further comment he left my office. It was only then that I realized that he did not even have the courtesy to close the door of my office when he delivered this message. (cited in Parr 2014)

The materiality of the open door intra-acted with this abusive encounter and clash of masculinities to ensure that it was overheard by one of Professor Grimm's students – thus amplifying the shame and humiliation. The distilled message was that Professor Grimm, as an object of disgust and example of under-performance, had no right to exist.

Examples of how the corporate research-supported business model abuses employees and strips them of their dignity are not unique to the UK. In 2014, Carole Vance and Kim Hopper, longtime professors in Columbia University, USA learned that they were losing their jobs because they had failed to generate enough research grant money (Goldberg 2014). Barad's (2007) concept of intra-action focuses attention on the entanglement of individual and institutional practices. Research matters and 'mattering is simultaneously a matter of substance and significance' (Barad 2007, 3). Exit, or quitting, is a common resistance strategy for victims of bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006), raising questions about inclusion, exclusion and abjection (Kristeva 1982). Thinking intra-actively, this relates to 'How different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter' (Barad 2007, 30). If neo-liberal resisters or 'failures' quit, then what or who remains, and does this signal the end of critical scholarship in academia (Eagleton 2015)?

As the above examples illustrate, academic identities and indeed survival, increasingly depend on success in gaining research funding. Boundaries between winning and losing become determinate, and there is an inseparability of object and agencies of observation. However, the logic of research funding as institutional income has been troubled by Newfield's studies (2014) that have demonstrated how universities, in fact, lose millions on research costs from grants. Newfield is particularly critical of how humanities and social sciences are represented as loser fields in research (Dingwall 2013), whereas in actuality, the STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) fields are the areas that lose the most money and traditionally need to be supported from fee incomes from humanities and social sciences. Hence, the financialisation of research is itself ideological and about symbolic production rather than an actual value in today's global academy – used largely to render individuals and institutions more governmentable. Governmentality means that power is exercised through people being responsabilised to govern themselves. Neo-liberalism, as a dominant political rationality, moves between state policy and the interior worlds of the subject, normatively constructing and demanding that

individuals are entrepreneurial actors, or units of resource (Brown 2005, 40; Rottenberg 2014). Financial goals for research become embodied and internalised as academics libidinally refashion their desires, resources and priorities to align with dominant performance indicators. Neo-liberalism is a discourse that works on and through desire, making individuals want to win on its terms (Zabrodska et al. 2011). The intra-action between policy, desire and ‘success’ or ‘failure’ materialises academic identities.

Knowing women: what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts in the neo-liberalised research economy?

The virility culture is not just about individual research performance, but also extends to the priorities and accounting systems of the global academy. The global prestige economy, enacted through rankings such as league tables, privileges research as an indicator of quality and the proxy measure of organisational success (Collyer 2013; Holmwood 2014). League tables brand and stratify institutions and are a major influence in the definition of the field of higher education, offering positional advantage, esteem and material rewards in the form of student recruitment and research funding. As an aspirational framework, they seem to drive a global knowledge race and meet a collective desire for hierarchy and aristocracy (Marginson 2014). They also represent index values for investment and are mechanisms by which neo-liberal principles are inserted into organisations (Brown 2014a; Gane 2014). As an installation of power and an aspirational framework, league tables intra-act and co-create academic entrepreneurs and reinforce the move from exchange to competition in the global academy. A notable silence, for example in university league tables that document quality, is any data about gender equality (Matthews 2012). However, what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts in the neo-liberalised research economy are critical questions. Some social identities intra-act with expectations of excellence and have become understood as the rightful occupants of research spaces. Those people who might offer different accounts of the world are in danger of being illegible and inaudible to the quality apparatus of the global academy. I do not advocate a liberal feminist approach of counting more women into knowledge production systems and organisations monopolised and dominated by the elite, but rather suggest an examination of how ‘the gentleman’s club works’ (Lather 2013, 638). The concept of a gentleman’s club suggests a hybridity of corporatisation and feudalism – neither of which are particularly advantageous to women. Nor do I wish to essentialise neo-liberalism by gendering it as male. There are multiple networks of difference and women can be effective neo-liberal subjects and actors too. Neo-liberal feminism is also flourishing with its emphasis on cognitively re-structuring women to make them more aspirational, suggesting that they simply need to learn to play the corporate game more effectively (McRobbie 2013; Rottenberg 2014). Despite the advice to women to ‘lean in’ (Sandberg 2013), there continue to be some disturbing reproductions of how gendered privilege intra-acts with the global research economy to ensure that women remain firmly shut out.

Markets, in neo-liberal theory, are said to disrupt monopolies and producer interests (Holmwood 2014). However, the gendered monopoly of the research economy seems to be intact, with epistemological hierarchies frequently reflecting social hierarchies (Rees 2011; Wickramasinghe 2009). It seems that precarious academics

who have neither a sense of entitlement nor belonging in today's neo-liberalised global academy are finding their academic capital misrecognised and marginalised. While gender has gained some research policy attention, for example, in the European Union (European Commission 2008, 2011), researchers have repeatedly questioned and exposed how women's capital, particularly feminist capital, has little value (Code 1991; Morley 2014; Walby 2011). Women, it seems, suffer a credibility deficit in the research economy.

It is pertinent to ask what happens when neo-liberal apparatus 'intra-acts' with women's research capital (Barad 2007). An immediate response is that it is rendered unintelligible. Globally, men have the edge as researchers by an enormous ratio of 71 to 29% women (UNESCO 2012). Currently, four of five professors in Europe and nine of ten of the heads of European universities are men (Husu 2014). Beyond Europe, some of the organisations and regions with the lowest number of women university leaders are rising powers in the global league tables including Hong Kong and Japan (Morley 2014). Neither has a good record on gender equality in academia (Cheung 2013; Shirahase 2013). The prestigious European Research Council endowed with €13.1 billion between 2014 and 2020 offers grants for different career stages. In the period 2007–2013, the starting grant level men's success rate was 30% and women's 25%; for advanced grants 15% for men and 13% for women (Husu 2014). Husu (2014) reported that the knowledge-intensive Nordic countries with globally some of the most progressive policy frameworks for gender equality had only 12% female leaders in their research centres of excellence in 2011. Misrecognition of women's research capital was also noteworthy in the UK 2008 RAE in which male academics were almost 40% more likely than their female colleagues to be entered (Schucan Bird 2011). Recently, only two of the seven UK research councils reported an equal proportion of female applicants and academics (Else 2015). The European Science Foundation 2009 Report also noted:

Although the number of women entering universities and achieving academic degrees has exceeded the number of men in many European countries during recent years, there is still a significant gender gap as far as career advancement and the higher level of the research career ladder are concerned. (7)

Globally, the highest proportion of women researchers is found in countries with the lowest Research and Development expenditure e.g. the Philippines and Thailand have more than 45% female researchers (UNESCO 2012). The lowest proportion of women researchers is in countries with the highest Research and Development expenditure countries e.g. Austria (European Commission 2008, 2011). Hada (2013) found that the lowest percentage of female researchers in her 18-country study was to be found in Japan (11.6%). To evoke Spender (1980), women seem to be present where power is not!

Feminist scholarship has explored how women have been traditionally cast as unreliable knowers (Code 1991). Walkerdine's (1998) early work emphasised how femaleness is invariably positioned on the devalued side of the archaic Cartesian binaries. Women's lack of authority as knowers could also account for the catalogue of absences and exclusions from the research-based prestige economy. Women are less likely to be journal editors or cited in top-rated academic journals (Tight 2008; Wilson 2012), principal investigators, and are under-represented on research boards and peer review structures that allocate funding (European Commission 2008, 2011). They are also awarded fewer research prizes (Nikiforova 2011) and are less

likely to be keynote speakers at prestigious academic conferences (Schroeder et al. 2013). There is a circular relationship between the exclusion of certain groups from prestigious relay points in the knowledge economy and the reproduction of the norms that define the field. For example, women's research authority is often insufficiently recognised to allow them to be peer reviewers and gatekeepers in influential positions and peer reviewers continue to misrecognise women's research. A classical study of the peer review system of the Swedish Medical Research Council revealed that female applicants for postdoctoral fellowships had to be 2.5 times more productive than their male colleagues to get the same peer-reviewed rating for scientific competence (Wennerås and Wold 1997). The situation is continuing today, with questions about who acts as gatekeepers of precious research resources. Husu's (2014) research found how the excellence-marked initiatives that have been established across Europe have been more beneficial for male than female researchers and that women researchers are losing out in excellence funding even in the systems formally are in favour of gender equality. She reports an:

unspoken antagonism between gender equality, as defined in funding bodies' policy aspirations, and the outcomes of their decisions on what they defined as excellence. In short, excellence, at least as it is currently operationalised, is creating new gendered stratifications in our research landscapes. (Husu 2014, 2)

These observations articulate with my research conducted in British Council seminars in Hong Kong, Japan and Dubai (Morley 2013a, 2013b, 2014). The findings suggest that the research economy intra-acts with gender and the appointment of leaders. A strong track record in research leads to esteem and is often a pre-requisite for senior leadership, including the position of vice chancellor. Herein lies the circularity of the argument. If certain groups are excluded and/or misrecognised in the research economy, this implies a reproduction of particular leadership identities in the global academy, with implications for organisational hierarchies and related resource allocation, agenda setting, gatekeeping and peer review. Exclusions raise questions about who is defining the field of social research, who are the standard makers, and what are the performance indicators? A related question is whether the intra-action of the exclusion of certain social groups, ideologies and methodologies produces epistemic exclusions, normative reproduction, and intellectual closures in a global economy?

To address some of the above challenges, the British Council organised seminars in Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Dubai on *Absent Talent: Women in Research and Academic Leadership* (2012–2013). The seminars brought together women at diverse career stages to discuss women's participation in higher education leadership and research. Participants from South and East Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, Australasia and Europe were invited to share experiences and knowledge of gender-related issues in higher education, including: enablers and obstacles to women's progression; policies and initiatives that make a difference; data available at institution/national levels on participation in leadership in academia by gender and grade, and future initiatives. In advance of the seminars, forty questionnaires were circulated to academic women working in Australia, China, Egypt, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Turkey and twenty were returned. The sample was constructed to include current and previous vice chancellors, deputy vice chancellors, deans, research directors and mid- and early career academic women located in social

sciences, humanities and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines. They were asked for their views on what enables and supports women, what interventions exist to encourage women and their personal experiences of being enabled or impeded from entering research and leadership positions, and what makes leadership attractive/unattractive to women. In the following sections, this group is referred to as *respondents*. Panel and group discussions and presentations were recorded, transcribed and analysed and coded in order to capture formal and informal narratives about how gendered power is relayed in the global academy, and to identify key themes, patterns and discontinuities across the national boundaries. In Hong Kong, the panel included six senior women academics from Australia, China, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Thailand. In Japan, the panel comprised three senior academic women from Japan, Thailand and the UK. Additionally, in Tokyo, four papers were presented from the Philippines and Malaysia and two from Japan. In Dubai, the seminar preceded the 2013 *Going Global* Conference and provided the opportunity for papers to be presented from Egypt, Hong Kong, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine and Turkey. In the following sections, this group is referred to as *discussants*. The twenty-two seminar participants in Hong Kong, the 25 participants in Tokyo and 25 in Dubai are referred to as *participants*. All seminars were organised and funded by the British Council as part of their Women in Higher Education Leadership initiative (Forestier 2013). A total of 72 *respondents*, *discussants* and *participants* in three seminars contributed to these data. From this relatively small sample, policy, statistical and often visceral knowledge was shared and co-created.

The gendered global research economy

Neo-liberalism has travelled (Mok and Wang 2014). Ong (2006) suggests that East and Southeast Asian states are adopting neo-liberal governance practices in order to position themselves to compete in the global economy. The import of western neo-liberal discourses and material practices is resulting in the narrowing of intellectual space according to Lin (2009) writing about Hong Kong. Research is a large-scale global industry. Research partnerships between the Global South and the Global North are highly desirable forms of value added capital in internationalisation discourses (Grant 2013). The intra-action between research and global partnerships produce desired academic identities. While I am aware of the debates on post-qualitative representational logic that problematise the trap of representation as a stable real (Jackson 2013), I was struck by how so many women in my research narrated stories of precarity and unbelonging in the global research economy. A barrier that was reported by all respondents was the intra-action between horizontal and vertical segregation and the gendered division of labour in the globalised neo-liberal academy, with many women (and some men) invariably tasked with inward-facing domestic labour. This positioning materialised academic identities that were not conducive to success in the global research economy. Whatever optic or apparatus that was used to identify research leadership potential was not seeing women. A respondent from China suggested that women are found in:

Low professional titles, low-level management and administrative positions, most of them are responsible for student affairs.

The speeded up neo-liberalised global academy is achieved on top of vast amounts of invisible academic labour (Gill 2014). Women, it seems are often the ‘good girls’ of the academy (Evans 2005). Like the construction workers from the Global South building glamorous metropolises in the Global North, many of the women in the seminars were employed to erect the platforms on which other, more privileged colleagues were able to shine internationally. A Malaysian respondent noted how academic housework prevented her from developing international networks and research:

A rather bitter memory of a line manager (of the opposite sex) beating me out of an opportunity for funding assistance. The line manager was constantly travelling and on leave and having taken on studies was constantly away on study leave too. This gave me no space to focus on expanding my career and when opportunities arose, I was talked out of applying and no importance was placed on professional development for fear that there will be a gap and no one to man the fort so to speak.

A discussant from the Philippines in Hong Kong exemplified Devine, Grummell, and Lynch’s (2011, 632) observation that academic leaders are expected to have ‘an elastic self’ that can contain any amount of work without boundaries in time, space energy or emotion’. She discussed how the intra-action of care responsibilities, gendered temporalities and esteem produced a negative academic identity for her, thus locating her outside the research economy:

It is a lack of time because of our activities like homemaking are full time jobs ... on research boards we are not present because you have ... to have previous recorded jobs to get there. Why are we not awarded large grants? There is lack of access to grants. Lack of involvement in the research groups that can apply for grants. You have documents and other institutional requirements of the grants. Last month I had to prepare, I got from the department of education an invitation for a proposal to review most of the education in the Philippines and I got an 87–page instruction book!

Research authority does not stick to women, it appears. A Malaysian respondent also believed that differential values are culturally assigned to women and men:

It is the mindset of the organisation that senior positions should only be held by male colleagues and the perception that conducting research is a ‘masculine’ job which can be carried out better by male researchers.

The intra-action of masculinity and research authority was noted by an Australian respondent:

Being female, in itself, communicates a lack of authority and legitimacy meaning that women have to demonstrate leadership capacity rather than it being assumed. Similarly, the concept of merit, as defined in higher education, operates to reinforce male advantage by rewarding those characteristics that men do well – i.e. Having a single minded focus on research and publication over an extended period of time to the exclusion of other responsibilities such as care work and diverse career experiences.

Women described how their deployment in high-volume, less prestigious areas of academic life intra-acted with lack of opportunities to apply for research grants to produce research inactive academic identities. The failure in grant capture in today’s financialised global academy means that they are more likely to be deployed in high-volume, less prestigious areas of academic life and so it continues. A question is how to interrupt this vicious circle of gendered intra-actions. Women, in this study, frequently framed solutions to this problem in financial terms calling for more investment in them and the need for re-distribution of academic capital via

mentoring, sponsorship, coaching and professional development programmes. A respondent from China emphasised the need for ‘encouragement from the master advisor’, particularly in relation to ‘encouraging female teachers to apply for research funding’. Citing the privileging of disciplines and academic status she believed that:

It is difficult for female teachers to secure research funding, especially for those who are young, with low title, and in art disciplines ... the biggest problem they are facing in their career development is that they do not have the opportunity to improve their professional skills.

The intra-action of age, gender, humanities, lack of professional development and lack of seniority impeded her ability to materialise a researcher identity. An Australian respondent emphasised the need to develop social and intellectual capital and decode the rules of the game (Morley 2013a):

It also requires the capacity to play politics, be aligned with the right people, get publications in the right journals and win research grants.

This advice could also imply a linear rationality that is untainted by social identity or power relations. A winning academic identity seemed to materialise out of the intra-action between locating gatekeepers, checking the journals’ citation indexes and meritocratically securing research funding. The problem is posed in relational terms. In the competitive and financialised neo-liberal academy, where knowledge has monetary value, it is questionable how much knowledge is altruistically re-distributed via mentoring. A UK participant identified how the intra-action of informal relays of power in the form of gendered networks, opportunity structures and norms disrupt the logic of progression:

The discourse that’s used, the language that’s used, is about the narrative of progression. The narrative of progression is predominantly infiltrated by masculine terminology. It relates to when you talk about what impedes women getting on to editorial boards ... Quite often editing roles aren’t advertised, you are tapped on the shoulder ... there are many other things: the narrative, the discourse, that impede women.

A dominant theme in the three seminars was that women’s research leadership potential was being misrecognised or not identified at key stages in their academic careers. Women were not seen to matter in the research economy. Applying Barad’s (2007) theory of intra-agency, it could be argued that their research capacity does not already exist, as an object to be talent-spotted, but is co-created by contingency and context. It is the gaze of the observer, loaded with socio-cultural meanings and power relations that identifies who is to be developed as a potential research leader. The optics of the non-accountable and non-transparent and highly gendered networks described above suggest that some people are rendered invisible and inaudible in the neo-liberalised knowledge economy. If certain groups are persistently and structurally excluded, this represents a form of distributive and epistemic injustice. A question remains as to how to produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently (Lather 2013).

Conclusion

I have argued that research and researcher identities are being constructed and reinforced via the optics and apparatus of neo-liberalism. Research capital is a key

performance indicator and co-constitutes reputation, power, status, rewards, and continued employment. Individual academic identities materialise through interactions between research policy discourses, performance and productivity within the confines of key performance indicators. Insecurity, inequality and individualisation are fostered as part of ensuring the conditions for power to exercise a hold over conduct (Lazzarato 2009). In the neo-liberalised research economy, risk is redistributed, as academics are made to feel indebted to their organisations and responsabilised for generating income in financial systems over which they have little or no control. What is valued in research and scholarship is increasingly being shaped by market demands. Income generation, enterprise, impact, innovation for the market and the exchange value in the global prestige economy are dominant indicators of the value of research. Productivity and quality are connected and classified according to financial returns and the predictability of research utility. Knowledge production, custody and dissemination processes purport to be neutral and objective, but overlap with social and policy hierarchies. The knowledge economy is invested, situated, exclusionary and embodied, and as such, infused with power and control. The empty signifier of excellence is frequently invoked, yet value indicators can be unstable, transitory, contingent, contextualised and highly gendered. The knowledge economy is driven by the materialities of financialisation, but also by a powerful psychic and affective economy of shame, pride, humiliation, anger, disappointment, despair and anxiety. This represents a type of emotional geography (Kenway and Youdell 2011), with academic identities formed and evaluated in relation to mutable and constructed differences and boundaries. Affect, as Barad might say, is a phenomenon. It is not a stand-alone thing in the world as such things do not exist. It is a term called forth through a relationship with an apparatus (Rutherford 2013). The evaluative gaze of the neo-liberal research economy is the apparatus that can provoke such a powerful affective range.

Research makes the world intelligible in specific ways and contributes to the foreclosure of other patterns of intelligibility (Rouse 2004). Additionally, the logic of relationality suggests that for every winner there are many losers. From the evidence presented in my study and from larger studies (European Commission 2008, 2011; European Science Foundation 2009; UNESCO 2010), it seems that, globally, women are the losers and are participating unequally in the research economy through which social meanings and knowledge are generated. This raises questions about whose research is having impact on policy, society and the economy. It is also highly precarious as to if and when women receive sponsorship from the neo-liberal winners. However, many women in my study maintain a rational and humanistic attachment to notions of mentoring and altruistic re-distributions of research knowledge in a competitive economy that rewards differentiation. A question is how to materialise women's academic identities in a global research economy that urgently needs to renew itself. Research has been too readily ceded to neo-liberal forces and practices. There are questions about what the future holds for critical scholarship and whether there is an alternative to the neo-liberal corporate logic that fosters competition, convergence and compliance (Leathwood and Read 2013). A role of the social scientist is to render the world problematic by formulating and elaborating questions. To offer simplistic and reductive solutions of 'what works' formulae is not enough (Thrift 2007). Academic creativity should incorporate transgression and re-signification, and not just compliance and mechanistic productivity. This necessitates a troubling of the neo-liberal realisms and a re-invigoration of knowledge production as a site of

transformation and change. Colley (2013) entreats counter-hegemonic scholars to act as Socratic ‘gadflies’. This includes defending the autonomy of the field of the production of research against heteronomy and control practices that masquerade as democratisation. One task for social research could be to resist co-option by narrow research policy agendas. This involves the prerequisite to identify new optics for viewing the social world, and to re-work tired, stale categories and vocabularies that produce tedious social reproductions. Enterprise cannot be used alone to solve social problems (Ball and Olmedo 2012). Most importantly, there is a need to imagine and research desired futures. Barad (2010, 257) suggests that ‘We inherit the future, not just the past’. What foundations are current practices, exclusions and disqualifications laying for future knowledge?

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