Issues of (in)visibility and compromise in academic work in UK universities

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ABSTRACT

As higher education increasingly aligns with the ideology of the marketplace, we argue that conditions of corporate competition have contributed to the invisibilization of collective work in UK higher education. Drawing on the work of Wa Thiong'o, N. (1986. *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Nairobi, Kenya: East African Publishers) and Giroux, H. A. (2011. *On Critical Pedagogy*. London: Bloomsbury), we theorise the conditions under which tensions between collective and individual work play out and examine the impact on academic work through 207 surveyed UK academics' perceptions of priorities and motivations. These were collected as part of a funded study to critically examine the teaching-research nexus in the humanities and social science. Findings show how systemic tensions reflect individual perceptions of competing demands, resulting in daily compromises to meet priorities that are strongly influenced by individual motivation. We conclude that highly-visible individuals are supported by invisible collective endeavours that contribute to the mystification of knowledge production, inequalities of representation, and research into matters of collective concern.

Introduction

In this paper, we argue that the marketized conditions under which UK universities currently operate means that teaching and research in universities compete for time, putting strain on academic staff who engage in these activities and on the teaching-research nexus

(Elken and Wollscheid 2016). Evidence of academics' perceptions of the relationship between teaching and research was gathered from a survey of 207 practicing academics employed by ten universities in England and Wales. The data in this paper is drawn from the wider study where we critically examined the concept of a nexus in academic work (McKinley et al. 2019), where a nexus of teaching and research describes an ideal in which the two activities are closely connected and complementary. The current paper analyses participants' priorities and motivations relating to teaching and research and suggests that systemic conditions of neo-liberal accountability place collective endeavours, such as teaching, in competition with an individualism that reflects sector-wide tendencies to value research over teaching (Albert, Davia, and Legazpe 2018; Mitten and Ross 2018). Consequently, academics' prioritisation of teaching or research, which is closely related to work-related motivations (Evans and Tress 2009), is shaped by conditions predominant in neoliberal higher education.

Systemic accountability and performance tools, adopted from corporate value for money practices (Molesworth, Scullion, and Nixon 2011), are one such example. In relation to teaching, in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and research, in the Research Excellence Framework (REF), such measures are part of a system that influences the way teaching and research are prioritised and resourced (Burke-Smalley et al. 2017; Hazelkorn 2007; Moodie 1995). Further competition for scarce resources, such as time and money (Giroux 2011) that are needed to undertake the time-consuming activities of teaching and research, creates competing priorities, with incentives for prioritising research activity in order to meet measures of 'excellence' (Butler and Spoelstra 2014). These conditions prompt consideration of aspects of academic work in relation to issues of (in)visibility.

In a sector with a strong tradition of collective knowledge sharing directed to societal advancement (Brown and Carasso 2013), seeking competitive advantage for individual advancement can contribute to the creation of colonial binaries that influence conceptions and enactments of scholarship (Shahjahan 2015). Competition associated with corporate ideology promotes the individual over the collective (Giroux 2011) and can be conceptualised as ideological subordination. We theorise this subordination as the usurpation of one ideology (collective) by another (individualistic) and draw on the work of Wa Thiong'o (1986) to suggest that the invisibilization of collective work enables a small number of individual academics with 'the right stuff' (Stengers 2018) to meet corporate measures of excellence. Neoliberal conditions have been shown to invisibilize women in particular and contribute to systemic conditions that disadvantage those already

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marginalised (Arat-Koç 2012; Arya 2008; Dobrowolsky 2008). Wa Thiong'o helps extend these arguments in relation to the mystification of knowledge production by highly-visible academic 'stars'.

We link invisibilization with the concept of public and corporate time in higher education (Giroux 2011) and examine their impact on academic practice. In doing so, we interrogate the notion of visibility in academic performance in UK universities, building on the contention that 'making visible' (Bazeley 2010) is necessarily a part of research performance, and contributing to debates concerning the neoliberal university by examining how academics' priorities, and the motivations which underpin them, contribute to existing inequalities. We do this through analysing how teaching and research activities are prioritised to reflect the value accorded to each, and how these values can sit in tension with the motivations of academics, raising questions about who in academia is made visible and what is celebrated.

Corporate higher education and time

Teaching and research in UK higher education is enacted within the global rise in managerial culture and the increasingly narrow focus on competing to meet prescribed definitions of excellence (Butler and Spoelstra 2014; Clarke et al. 2000; Hazelkorn 2015). This narrowness characterises the neo-liberal logics that displace the liberal tradition in which higher education is seen as a public good (Olssen 2016). Although a 'golden age' of higher education is disputed (Holden 2015), evidence indicates a trend in academic capitalism (Slaughter and Leslie 1997) and a rapid uptake of neoliberal policies (Marginson 2007) that leave academics vulnerable to corporate evaluation of their success (Cribb and Gewirtz 2013). Such evaluation includes performativity measures and crude commodification of academic work (Ball 2012) reliant, in part on (Eurocentric) time and its role in the colonisation of academic lives (Shahjahan 2015). By this, Shahjahan is alluding to the subjugation of academic work to the strictures of quantities of time. This contributes to the sense of urgency that Giroux (2011) sees as characteristic of the market ideology which is 'aggressively colonizing' (Giroux 2011, 111) universities to the point that they are 'losing [their] civic character and commitment to public life' (Giroux 2011, 111). Giroux (2011) argues that 'long-term analyses, historical reflection, and deliberations over what our collective actions might mean for shaping the future' (Giroux 2011, 114) are projects that work against the interest of corporate power by pointing out its deficiencies. Instead,

competition for scarce resources increases the urgency for 'faculty to engage in research and grants that generate external funding' (Giroux 2011, 113). Although not all choose to do so (Leathwood and Read 2013), there are strong incentives for academics to engage in competition to meet the criteria of excellence established by systemic tools, like the REF and the TEF in the UK, and, in doing so, enact individualistic values inherent in neoliberal ideology.

Subordination of values

We adopt the view of ideological subordination set out in the work of Wa Thiong'o (1986) to conceptualise challenges to the collective from individualism that support the creation of individual stars. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is a Kenyan academic and writer whose work in literary criticism identified processes under British colonialism that undermined the value of traditional Kenyan activities and ways of understanding the world. This colonisation of the mind was particularly evident in Kenyan village theatre after the British introduced Western theatrical practices, including replacing traditional stories reflecting villagers' concerns with alien stories in the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe that reflected European values and cultures. In addition, the practice in traditional village theatre of involving everyone, whether in the storytelling, singing, music or dancing, was replaced by the competitive practice of auditioning to select individuals to perform for an audience. The effect is conceptualised by Wa Thiong'o (1986) as 'weakening' individuals' sense that they can influence the 'conditions governing their lives' (Wa Thiong'o 1986, 56).

We see some parallels between the strictures of corporate time that govern academics and the collective ideology of pre-colonial theatre, as described by Wa Thiong'o (1986). Firstly, in the way a collective orientation prioritises work which achieves collective benefits; in higher education, teaching can be perceived to serve students as well as research that advances knowledge to benefit society at large. Secondly, there are parallels around issues of compliance with the dominant ideology that begin to shape behaviour as well as beliefs about what is valued and thirdly, as Wa Thiong'o emphasises, related issues of visibility. To explain the last two points, consider the arrival of ready-made scripts from Europe, to be learned and recited on stages. These not only brought stories from outside the lived experience of Kenyans but also introduced a new set of theatrical skills that, by a competitive process of audition and rehearsal, taking place 'more or less in secrecy' (Wa Thiong'o 1986, 56), resulted in two separate groups: the actors and their audiences. The colonial play,

performed as a finished product, surprised audiences into 'envious admiration' (Wa Thiong'o 1986, 56) of the special talents which were revealed in its stars. The invisible rehearsal process masked the early stages of production, as well as dividing the individuals on stage from the audiences who applauded them.

Wa Thiong'o gives us ways to conceptualise the invisible work behind highly-visible research stars. He argues that colonial theatre practices arise within a system that mystifies knowledge-making, symptomatic of '[e]ducation as a process of alienation which produces a gallery of active stars and an undifferentiated mass of grateful admirers' (Wa Thiong'o 1986, 57). We find this a helpful way to frame the argument that the creation of academic stars (Kwiek 2018; Smyth 2017) rests on invisible work and the invisibilization of the people doing it.

Issues of (in)visibility

Critical readings of neoliberal policy discourse argue that women are particularly vulnerable to invisibilization arising from systemic disadvantages (Dobrowolsky 2008) and link invisibilization with the individualisation of gender, race, and culture (Arat-Koç 2012). Meanwhile, in higher education, inequalities arise when epistemologies underpinning the production of high-speed science are established by the 'marked' group, those considered to have the 'right stuff', while the concerns of the unmarked, who do not have the right stuff, remain peripheral (Stengers 2018). Similar points have been made in relation to the practices in higher education which sustain the precariat (O'Keefe and Courtois 2019), and disadvantage black and ethnic minorities (Miller 2016; Rollock 2019), women (Guarino and Borden 2017), and mothers (Hallstein and O'Reilly 2014).

Butler and Spoelstra (2014) have argued that the regime of excellence supports the career pathways of those already regarded as successful by the dominant standards (Saunders and Blanco Ramirez 2017). Whilst the prevalence of management-style performance indicators of academic outputs has long been seen as a problematic shorthand for research quality (Moed 2008; Taylor 2011; Wilsdon 2017), Bazeley (2010) argues that a more nuanced alternative would include performing/making visible as an essential characteristic required for high level researchers. However, Bazeley's (2010) model only considers research productivity, ignoring the teaching aspect of academic work which also measures academics against (different) standards of excellence (Gourlay and Stevenson 2017). Meanwhile, Smith (2012) points to agile strategists who, in a high-speed academic

environment, are able to distinguish themselves from their colleagues by exploiting systemic advantages and aligning their priorities with corporate measures of success. Those who follow a corporate trajectory can attain celebrity without exposing the competitive practices that make their stardom possible (Smyth 2017). This mystification of knowledge production makes the most visible producers of research distinct from those engaged in less visible, less-valued, academic work. Therefore, the invisibilization of collective work is behind individual stars. We examine (in)visibility by analysing tensions arising through competing priorities and differences in motivation towards academic work that play out in UK higher education today.

Materials and methods

The data reported in this paper was gathered as part of a larger project funded by the British Academy, with a mixed-methods exploratory survey research design, exploring the teaching-research nexus as perceived by academics working in the Humanities and Social Sciences (McKinley et al. 2019). Although the original project did not initially aim to explore (in)visibility in academic work, the tensions that emerged during the course of survey data analysis prompted further examination. The data used in this paper draws on responses to closed- and open-ended questions from 207 academics.

Sampling

A purposive sample (Lavrakas 2008) of ten universities (three research-strong, three teaching-strong and four with similar strength in both) was identified using the measures in the Complete University Guide 2018 to classify universities' strengths in teaching and research. Although aware of the limitations of these evaluation tools (Forstenzer 2016; McNay 2015), the guide served as a proxy indicator of institutional research and teaching strengths. The survey was completed by academic staff working in the Humanities and Social Sciences at these universities, categorised by gender and career stage. Identifying by gender was optional. Career stage was categorised as early career (0–5 years in post); mid-career (5–10 years) and senior (16+ years in post) with the final option of 'temporary contract'. Of the 207 participants (102 women, 88 men, 17 no specified gender), most participants were mid-career (n = 64), followed by early-career researchers (ECR) (n = 59), then late-career (n = 53) academics, with the remainder (n = 31) on temporary contracts.

These four categories of career-stage are adopted as broad indicators about employment in academia. The vast majority of participants were on standard academic contracts that included teaching and research (n = 171), whilst the remainder had teaching-only (n = 20) or research-only (n = 16) contracts.

Data collection

The questionnaire (based on De Vaus 2013) was conducted online and considered a time-efficient means (Van Selm and Jankowski 2006) for seeking academics' perceptions on how or whether teaching and research are connected. The questionnaire consisted of several parts, including background questions about career stage, discipline, gender, ethnicity, and country of birth. Further sections related to a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended question. This paper focuses on priorities when managing teaching and research, and motivations for work. Individual priorities were identified by establishing how academics perceived time in relation to their teaching and research activities. A content search of all questionnaire responses for the word 'time' returned 191 instances. An open-ended question that followed multiple-choice options about institutional priorities, asked how institutional priorities enabled or hindered individuals' academic work (Question 11). Motivation was gauged in responses to the open-ended question: what are the main motivations for your academic work? (Question 13).

The questionnaire was distributed using 'Google docs' and was only available online. Participation was voluntary, with the option to be entered into a £10 voucher prize draw, and respondents were free to leave the questionnaire at any time without completing it.

Analysis

Different methods were employed for the two data sets. Data identified by content search for instances of the word 'time' and responses to Question 11 were thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage method. This method aims to develop two or three overarching themes that make explicit ideas implicit in the data and which are pertinent to the research issues. This process informed us about two issues related to academics' priorities: quality and compromise.

We hypothesised that participants' responses to Question 13 ('What are the main motivations for your academic work?) would include indications of motivation towards a

collective, individual, or other kind of aim. An initial analysis categorised motivations as collective, individualistic, both, and other, but also laid bare tensions which this categorisation did not explain. To examine these tensions further, we conducted a critical discourse analysis, using Fairclough's (2013) understanding of discourses as semiotic construals of current political and economic discourses intersecting with individuals to shape personal perceptions. Thus, discourses in the UK higher education sector inform the perceptions of academics and their motivations. We suggest that, where there is tension in systemic discourses, such as seen between the REF and the TEF, these macro-level tensions play out on the micro level. Findings are presented under two main themes: priorities, with sub-themes of compromise and the individual and compromise and the collective; and consequences of invisibilization.

Results

Findings from the analysis of priorities are presented, followed by findings under the two sub-themes.

Priorities

Initial thematic analysis of the 'time' data set identified activities which academics considered particularly time-consuming (Table 1). Meeting standards of excellence in both teaching and research make it difficult for academics to fit everything in, creating a need to prioritise. In a system where research is valued more than teaching, there can be a strong incentive to prioritise research. When priority is given to research, the remaining time available to conduct the other aspects of the job decreases with consequences for academics trying to maintain high standards in both. Further, hidden, endeavours are necessary, from individuals and within groups of academics, to meet the requirements of work that, although less valued, nevertheless has to be done. The situation is exacerbated by the time-consuming nature of teaching and research perceived by participants (Table 1).

Table 1. Time-consuming aspects of academic teaching and research.

Teaching	Research
Reading	Reading
Thinking/development of teaching materials/ideas	Thinking/development of research ideas

Marking	Writing/submissions
Pastoral care	Grant applications

Many respondents perceived there to be insufficient time to do either research or teaching well, resulting in competing priorities. Thematic analysis of priorities showed these tensions playing out as compromise.

Compromise and the individual

When time is perceived to be in short supply, individuals managing their work make choices about how to use it:

> high workload problems often mean there is a time trade-off. I don't have enough hours to do both well. (midcareer, woman)

A 'trade-off' suggests that one activity will be prioritised over another and, in the case of this respondent, will have to be done well, perhaps to the detriment of the other. The assumption is that doing both well is a process of getting better at both teaching and research, and one which requires an investment of time. However, a lack of time jeopardises the potential to be successful at both teaching and research:

> I would like to have more time to improve my teaching skills and to develop and try out new teaching methods, and I usually do not have the time (research outputs and writing research grants are more valued) (temporary contract, woman)

Wa Thiong'o's (1986) concept of weakening can be seen in the regret that this respondent conveys when perceiving she is unable to prioritise something which she regards as important (teaching improvement and innovation) because other activities (publications and grant applications) are 'more valued'. With the arrival of the TEF, teaching has recently become an increasing part of the quality discourse in UK Higher Education (Gourlay and Stevenson 2017), along with REF requirements. Separate measures of teaching and research standards are reflected at organisational level (Kivistö, Pekkola, and Lyytinen 2017) with institutional mechanisms, such as the workload model, serving to further underline competing priorities:

The tacit assumption is that teaching should take up as little time as possible (indeed this is an explicit assumption of the university's workload model, which allocates very little time to teaching preparation). This means that staff who care about their students and want to do a good job of teaching are inevitably penalised by having less time to further their own research. And it is the latter which carries the greatest kudos in academia. It's always surprised me that publishing – which is the most egocentric aspect of our jobs, and the activity which probably contains the greatest intrinsic rewards – is also the activity that is most likely to garner external rewards, in terms of honours and promotions. Teaching, by contrast, is a pretty selfless activity. It should be honoured a lot more in my view. (late-career, man)

This respondent describes a set of individual compromises: on teaching time in favour of research time; on care for students in favour of furthering one's research; and on intrinsic rewards in favour of extrinsic honours. Such honours, framed as markers of research success, are available when prioritising egocentric activities over the 'selfless' activity of teaching. A system is perceived where scarcity of time creates the conditions that make some colleagues more visible than others, which has, we argue, serious implications for matters of collective concern.

Compromise and the collective

Where a trade-off between teaching and research is perceived, individuals may prioritise research to the detriment of teaching quality:

To succeed in research quite often you need to compromise on teaching and marking and other colleagues need to pick up the pieces, but this is not valued, so they lose time and nobody appreciates it. For example, when they need to keep contacting second markers because they haven't done the marking, even though it's not their job to ensure that colleagues do this (ECR, woman)

The rather destructive metaphor implies that neglecting teaching aspects of the job has detrimental consequences for those who step in. In this example, if some do not do marking on time, others must, thereby creating the conditions for some to do the necessary behind-the-scenes work whilst simultaneously undermining collegiality.

There are further implications for the ongoing success of the collective:

> ⋯ the clear prioritis[z]ation of research in esteem makes it harder to build a collegiate ethos at the subject level and an ethos that values students and teaching as well as admin (which all need to be done well for a subject area to thrive) (mid-career, woman)

This erosion of collegiality under managerialism has been seen in the humanities and social sciences where there is a tradition of collegiality (Horta and Santos 2019). When institutional and structural priorities are arranged to prioritise research success, the less visible aspects of work, such as teaching or administration, can become burdensome:

> The priorities can sometimes place research and teaching in a hierarchy where teaching and admin responsibilities are lower down the pecking order – this can disadvantage some staff with heavy admin/teaching roles. (ECR, man)

Such a hierarchy is established through organisational and structural conditions that incentivise prioritisation of the dominant activity, as judged by corporate measures of success. Rewarding activities which meet narrow measures of success constructed for the marketized conditions in UK higher education has consequences which some understand to be detrimental to the quality of research.

> Note that 'research' is not the same as 'publication' or 'generating outputs'. (These latter are not even a measure of research – real research must be able to fail, and thus fail to generate outputs! I have a teaching contract precisely because the regimes of RAE/REF have been toxic to genuine research.) (mid-career, man)

However, prioritising research success creates conditions that enable some to capitalise whilst making it difficult for others. Additionally, those whose administrative and managerial duties support the collective work of a university have time taken away from their own research, with heavy teaching loads and/or precarious employment being another barrier to finding time to research. Our data contained examples of academics on teaching contracts undertaking a PhD in their spare time or conducting research in their own time. Early-career researcher respondents with high teaching loads and precarious employment after completing a doctorate, reported difficulties in establishing themselves in research; a reflection of this is that, of the 16 respondents with research-only contracts, 15 were employed on temporary contracts. Furthermore, 69%, or 11 of these 15 temporarily-

employed researchers were women, further suggesting the mechanism of invisibilization is gendered (Dobrowolsky 2008).

For those who continue to try to meet the demands of two competing activities, the results can be daily compromise. When time-consuming and less visible aspects of academic work squeeze out highly prized research activity, there are further implications concerning well-being; as one midcareer woman warned, the declining mental health of academic staff was a 'time-bomb'.

The implications of systemic compromise for the academic collective, then, not only extends division between those who can take advantage of research opportunities and those who cannot, it establishes conditions for increasing the visibility of a select few whilst the remainder carry the burden of the collective endeavours that the 'stars' no longer prioritise.

Consequences of invisibilization

Arguing that academics' prioritisation is closely related to their motivations (Evans and Tress 2009), we worked from the assumption that academics who valued teaching and research equally would indicate both as a motivation, whereas including only research or teaching would reflect a perceived imbalance. We found that invisibilization of collective work supports the creation of highly visible stars.

Question 13 (optional) asked participants what the main motivations were for their work and was completed by 176 (85%) of respondents. When directed towards others, such as students, colleagues, or society more widely, motivations were categorised as collective; individualistic motivation was indicated by a focus on personal success; whilst some responses including both these aspects were categorised as 'both'. Some 'others' did not fit into any of these categories. Table 2 shows examples with illustrative quotes.

Table 2. What are the main motivations for your academic work?

Collective (n=74)	Individualistic (n=70)	Both (n=23)	Other (n=9)
To make a difference to students and equip them to be decent, caring public servants. (mid-career, gender not specified)	I am motivated by personal interest and the desire to build a career in academia (temporary contract, man)	Figuring out how power works in specific contexts, showing that the emperor has no clothes, and providing students with the tools to ask difficult questions of those in positions of authority should	Wanting to progress my career, and doing what I think is meaningful, are rarely mutual. (mid-career, man)

> they choose to do so.
> (midcareer, man)

Table 2 shows that the two largest groups were motivated by either an individual or collective aim. A smaller number of respondents were motivated by both, contrary to expectations, since the vast majority of respondents were employed on the standard academic contract which weights teaching and research equally. This reflects the tensions found in the analysis of priorities, above.

Critical discourse analysis of motivations shed light on tensions when working in a culture of compromise in ways that affected both teaching and research. We found clear instances where academics' motivations were conveyed in relation to institutional expectations framed in terms of measures of teaching success. The requirements of TEF were perceived in relation to the institution (a collective motivation) whilst warning about the possibility of jeopardising some element of quality:

> TEF caused a lot of short term emphasis on student satisfaction – which often seems to translate into making assessments easier and providing more 'guidance' – but now that has been forgotten as we gear up for the REF. (mid-career, woman)

The accountability cycle pulls academics in different directions trying meet the different requirements of the TEF and the REF, although the pull may be stronger towards research:

> … the REF is incredibly important in how the University/Faculty sees my department, and I'm strongly expected to contribute to that. (ECR, woman)

The emphasis shows the affective burden of meeting the REF requirements and, while a feeling of (collective) responsibility can be seen, a conflict is also evident in the way measures of individual success are closely linked to the success of the collective (the department). There is a complex inter-relation between the reliance of the institution on the individual to comply with a measurement agenda that can ultimately have the effect of undermining the work of the collective:

> I think you have to be really careful to ensure research remains central to one's activity, otherwise the REF arrives and you don't have the required number of publications. (mid-career, woman)

Here, the respondent implies a danger in missing institutional (quantitatively measured) requirements for REF which makes her keep research as the central activity. The implication is that teaching becomes less central. So, just as the institution relies on individual compliance with measured output, so too the individual relies on being able to meet those measures. This can create stark choices between undertaking work that benefits either the individual or the collective:

> [I am motivated t]o do interesting research and inspire students to be critical thinkers about the world around them. It is not to be a 'research star'. I am not that egotistical. (ECR, woman)

This respondent's unequivocal association of egoism with research celebrity, and the conscious disassociation from it, positions individualism in opposition to collectivism, and, in trying to manage teaching and research without undervaluing either, illustrates how individual motivations will influence the extent to which highly-visible research-dominated pathways are pursued, or not. If motivation is individualistic, as found for many in this sample, the suggestion is that, as we found above, prioritisation will tend towards activities which support research success.

Trying to balance teaching and research results in a burden of individual accountability that, when time is scarce, jeopardises the collective aims traditionally associated with higher education. When the findings on priorities are reintroduced, it can be seen how pressures of time in daily life, within a discourse of accountability that valorises competitive individualism and celebrates a narrow range of highly visible research outputs, brings daily compromises for academics. Thus, when academic work is positioned within a discourse of competing requirements, individuals' values and motivations that tend to follow an individualist ideology result in, not so much an erosion of collectivism, as an invisibilization of the collective work needed to support highly visible stars.

Discussion

Invisibilization, then, refers to processes in which aspects of academic work are obscured, or erased (Dobrowolsky 2008), whilst others' contributions are raised to prominence by meeting neoliberal definitions of excellence. When excellence is conflated with compliance,

it becomes an encroaching ideology (Butler and Spoelstra 2014; Clarke et al. 2000). Although O'Connor and O'Hagan (2016) contend that academic excellence is an institutional myth, Oravec (2017) argues that individual and institutional gaming constructs excellence through the manipulation of performance metrics. Such 'gaming' accelerates the production of highly visible research stars in the 'opportunistic environment of higher education' (O''Loughlin, MacPhail, and Msetfi 2015, 812) promoting those already regarded as successful (Saunders and Blanco Ramírez 2017). In this way, a relatively small number of individual stars can dominate research and, while their time is spent maintaining their highlyvisible research profile, they are leaving colleagues to 'pick up the pieces' of less-valued, behindthe-scenes work. For such 'colleagues', the extra teaching and administrative duties compete more fiercely for research time and those on temporary contracts inhabit a vulnerable position as long as their precarious work relies on stars generating steady funding streams. Rather than focus on research stars, the remainder of this discussion turns to consider the invisible: who they are and how they are affected. Finally, Wa Thiong'o's (1986) theatrical metaphor is elaborated to discuss how the valorisation of a competitive meritocracy in academia contributes to the mystification of knowledge production.

Research shows that the inequalities that permeate academic labour keep some precariously employed and marginalised (Adsit et al. 2015). It has been shown that women find themselves in 'dead-end' forms of academic work or exploitative relationships have their research contributions obscured (O'Keefe and Courtois 2019) or take on more of the hidden work in service of their department or university (Guarino and Borden 2017). Meanwhile prevailing attitudes can undervalue and keep peripheral the contributions and concerns of black and ethnic minorities (Morley 2016), and, particularly, women in this group (Rollock 2019). The implications, we suggest, are that the invisibilization of collective work becomes part of the structural inequalities that produce and maintain a research elite. When those in the elite are compliant with dominant definitions of excellence, knowledge production endeavours in the Humanities and Social Sciences can be more conservative and less innovative (Horta and Santos 2019) as well as impoverished because of failing to include noncompliant voices.

In universities operating under neoliberalist agendas (Brady and Lippert 2016), generating anxieties is suggested to be a tacit governance strategy of universities that embrace casualisation (Berg, Huijbens, and Larsen 2016; Loveday 2018). In addition, the 'intimacy' (Giroux 2011, 113) between corporate culture and higher education drives the demand for quick results and usurps the time-consuming work that challenges social

inequalities. Although there are energising accelerative moments in academic work, accelerations can also be negative and oppressive (Vostal 2015), with the consequence that academics can feel pulled in different directions (Dugas et al. 2018). However, we disagree with Stengers' (2018) contention that there are just two responses in these circumstances: eager compliance by opportunistic cynics, those who Smith (2012) calls 'flexians'; or deep sadness or depression that contributes to the prevalence of high stress levels (Mark and Smith 2018) that culminate in burn-out and withdrawal from collegial activity (Sproles 2018). Although opportunism and angst were both evident in our data, we saw a third response: academics' daily compromises. Furthermore, the work going on behind the scenes to support the rise of individual stars and that remains obscure to neoliberal measures of excellence, becomes part of a process that mystifies knowledge production (Wa Thiong'o 1986).

The mystification of knowledge production was identified by Wa Thiong'o (1986) as one outcome of the advent of colonial theatre practices. Not only did British plays introduce new ways of thinking in a new (English) language, devaluing African languages and marginalising the traditional stories of Kenyan villagers, but mechanisms such as auditions, and rehearsals carried out in secret, separated the collective from the processes behind the final production (Wa Thiong'o 1986). We see parallels in the way corporate tools that underpin the ideology of marketized higher education result in the invisibilization of collective work and mystify the conditions under which (research) stars achieve excellence.

Although a university is not one organism (Watson 2011) and institutions have different priorities (Shields and Watermeyer 2018), individual perceptions reflect sector-wide tensions resulting from the competing demands of corporate measures of excellence. Under such conditions, a hierarchy is created, of highly-visible academic stars who thrive through compliance with corporate measures, supported by the invisible work directed towards collective concerns of weakened others. While an elite group remains motivated to meet corporate concerns and marginalised voices remain excluded, deliberation over collective concerns will be neglected, and the dominant ideology will be in a stronger position to call the tunes.

> We danced, yes, but somebody else called out the words and the song.
> Wa Thiong'o (1977/2002, 138)

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