Being an Early-Career CMS Academic in the Context of Insecurity and 'Excellence': The dialectics of resistance and compliance.

Organization Studies (forthcoming)

Alexandra Bristow

University of Surrey, UK

Sarah Robinson

University of Glasgow, UK

Olivier Ratle

University of the West of England, UK

Corresponding author:

Alexandra Bristow, University of Surrey Business School, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey GU2 7XH, UK.

Email: a.bristow@surrey.ac.uk

Abstract

Drawing on a dialectical approach to resistance, we conceptualise the latter as a multifaceted, pervasive and contradictory phenomenon. This enables us to examine the predicament in which early-career Critical Management Studies (CMS) academics find themselves in the current times of academic insecurity and 'excellence', as gleaned through this group's understandings of themselves as resisters and participants in the complex and contradictory forces constituting their field. We draw on 24 semi-structured interviews to map our participants' accounts of themselves as resisters in terms of different approaches to tensions

and contradictions between, on the one hand, the interviewees' CMS alignment and, on the other, the ethos of business school neoliberalism. Emerging from this analysis are three contingent and interlinked narratives of resistance and identity – diplomatic, combative and idealistic – each of which encapsulates a particular mode (negotiation, struggle, and laying one's own path) of engaging with the relationship between CMS and the business school ethos. The three narratives show how early-career CMS academics not only use existing tensions, contradictions, overlaps and alliances between these positions to resist and comply with selected forces within each, but also contribute to the (re-)making of such overlaps, alliances, tensions and contradictions. Through this reworking of what it means to be both CMS scholars and business school academics, we argue, early-career CMS academics can be seen as active resisters and re-constituters of their complex field.

Keywords:

resistance dialectics, early-career academics, academic insecurity, critical management studies, tensions and contradictions, identity work

Introduction

From the outset, we must acknowledge the personal interest that underlies this paper. The research on which this paper is based was triggered by our own experiences as early-career Critical Management Studies (CMS) academics, and by our own questioning of the ways in which this group is often portrayed. The literature on early-career academics (ECAs) is quite mixed. On the one hand, we have been troubled by depictions of this group as having limited capacity to resist the growing neoliberalism of higher education (and deal with its associated problems), being seen as the most vulnerable academic group and the first to succumb to the

pressures of the system (Laudel & Gläser, 2008, p. 388). On the other hand, early career in academia is also presented as a time of liminality (Smith, 2010), which for many ECAs in the current Higher Education (HE) context implies an active process of identity construction that while fraught with challenges, anxiety, and sometimes a sense of disillusionment (Heckathron, 2004; Smith, 2010; Trowler & Knight, 2000), also presents opportunities to make some difference in their working lives (e.g. Archer, 2008; Bristow, 2012; Harris, 2005; Smith, 2010). In addition, our interest in early-career CMS academics is driven by what could be seen as their position of double insecurity in terms of becoming what typically counts today as an 'excellent' academic (Butler & Spoelstra, 2012). The first of these insecurities is constituted by the status of CMS as an alternative (peripheral) approach in relation to the positivist/functionalist mainstream in the management field – albeit one that has been gaining its own measure of institutionalization over the last few decades (Koss Hartmann, 2014). The second insecurity refers to the precarious status of early-career academics in relation to the core of their profession, with the movement from periphery to the core constituting the ideal expected trajectory for those who would make the successful transition to fully-fledged academics (Laudel & Gläser, 2008).

Outside the limited existing literature on ECAs, we have experienced this marginality as part of our daily academic lives, especially in interactions with more senior members of the profession. Here, it would often be suggested, in a well-meaning way, that resisting the upheavals of the HE system or a particular academic institution is best left to those who are closer to retirement and have less to lose, suggesting ECAs have no or little choice in the matter and recommending they stick to playing the game, at least until 'well-established'.

Whereas such sentiments have touching elements of heroism, self-sacrifice and protection of the vulnerable, they also arguably construct ECA identities as weak, passive and excluded from spheres of resistance. If such identities, we contend, were internalised and enacted by

ECAs, then the future of academia would seem bleak indeed, especially so perhaps for CMS in terms of the erosion of an ethos (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014) that has a convoluted relationship with neoliberal business schools (see Fournier & Smith, 2012; Tatli, 2012) within which many CMS-ers are located. However, despite the issue of vulnerability to pressure having much resonance, this assumption of limited resistance does not fit well with how we have seen ourselves, nor, as we will show in this paper, reflects the identity narratives of our research participants.

In this paper, therefore, we critically examine the predicament in which early-career CMS academics find themselves in the current HE context, as gleaned through their own understandings of themselves as resisters and participants in the complex and contradictory forces constituting their field. In particular, in analysing narratives of their own efforts in relation to tensions, contradictions, overlaps and alliances between their commitments to CMS ethos and the pressures of an increasingly market-driven, neoliberal institutional environment, we argue that being a CMS ECA – constructing CMS ECA identity – today necessitates perennial, contingent and highly nuanced work of resistance and compliance that continuously calls for creativity, inventiveness, courage, political astuteness and reflexivity as an integral part of the role of this group of academics within the management studies field.

To this aim, we draw on the subset of resistance literature that examines the identity-resistance dynamic with a broad, multifaceted view of resistance. The latter is necessary because the concept of resistance suffers from a legacy that is deeply-engrained with connotations of reactivity and responsiveness, a kind of lesser binary opposite of power (Fleming & Spicer, 2007, p. 45). Instead, we draw on a dialectical understanding of resistance-power dynamics (Mumby, 2005) that, we suggest, better reflects diverse ECA experiences. Such an understanding views resistance as power that operates in relation to other forces in a variety of ways, opposing, subverting, and reconfiguring them (Fleming &

Spicer, 2007). From this perspective, resistance can be not just a disruptive, but also a generative (Thomas & Davies, 2005), transformative (Thomas & Hardy, 2011), creative and productive (Courpasson et al., 2012) force. Crucially, a dialectical view facilitates the exploration of 'complex and often contradictory dynamics of control and resistance' (Mumby, 2005, p. 21), produced through the coexistence of a multiplicity of multi-faceted, and likely self-contradictory practices encompassing both subversive and reproductive elements (Collinson, 2000; Kondo, 1990; Nentwich & Hoyer, 2013).

Such capacity to account theoretically for richness and contradiction is, we believe, fundamental to making sense of academic resistance in the cauldron of forces that are constitutive of, in particular, the UK 'new higher education' (Jary & Parker, 1998) that is the empirical context of our study. Whereas the onset of the neoliberal audit culture in academia and its clash with the older values of academic freedom and vocation is a global phenomenon (Strathern, 2000), in the UK it has become further strengthened by sustained state intervention in HE governance. Government initiatives such as the replacement of equity-based with competition-based university funding now distributed through the nation-wide Research Excellence Framework (REF)[i], and the more recent introduction of tuition fees, have generated a quasi-market environment maintained by a punishing regime of academic performance management. This is underpinned by extensive use of league tables and journal rankings that exerts considerable pressure on academic agendas and identities (Butler & Spoelstra, 2012; Mingers & Willmott, 2013; Willmott, 2003).

In examining the resistance-identity dynamics in this context, we draw on the view of identity as reflexive self-narrative (Giddens, 1991) that is fluid, multiple, contingent and contextual, and always embedded within the wider context of power/resistance relations (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Thomas, 2009). From this perspective, identity construction is both an instrument and a product of power/resistance, and is conceptualised as the combination of, a)

identity regulation – a pervasive but 'precarious and often contested' modality of normative control (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 621) – and b) active identity work – a reflexive process through which individuals form, reproduce, maintain, contest and transform their sense of self (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). In this paper, we focus in particular on CMS ECAs' identity work situated within the conflicting and contradictory forces of identity regulation. We thus examine identity and power relations as always in a process of mutual constitution, within which identity work is, inextricably, both medium and outcome of resistance and compliance processes.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we outline our conceptual approach to identity work as resistance and compliance and situate it in the resistance-power literature. Then we operationalise this approach in relation to the case of CMS ECAs. Following a discussion of methods, we proceed to the analysis of our interviewees' narratives of themselves as resisters through our conceptual lens of resistance-power dialectics.

A dialectical approach to identity work as resistance and compliance

The body of research into the relationship between resistance and identity owes its impetus to the 'pendulum swing' in the emphasis of scholarship from control to resistance (Mumby, 2005), and away from its collective, overt, radical, organised forms towards more 'everyday', individual, subtle, and creative manifestations (Courpasson et al., 2012; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Nentwich & Hoyer, 2013).

Historically, both neo-Marxist and Foucauldian work has tended to privilege power, control and compliance over resistance, which was 'constructed within a negative paradigm, a worker corps kicking back against management control' (Thomas & Davies, 2005, p. 685).

This led to 'a pessimistic and nihilistic view of resistance and a highly deterministic and unidirectional view of worker identity' (Thomas & Davies, 2005, p. 686), because, researchers have tended to focus on identity construction as primarily the sphere of identity regulation and thus of managerial control (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) through which passive and docile worker-bodies are inscribed with and within dominant managerial discourses (Thomas & Davies, 2005).

Largely in response to the above weaknesses, the more 'agentic' research on organisational resistance has tended to conceptualise resisters as active, creative and autonomous subjects that are often able to subvert the dominant managerial ideologies through mundane, covert practices that often fly below the radar of formal control mechanisms (Mumby, 2005). Within this view, spaces for resistant agency are created through the opening of marginalised discourses, which are always seen as inevitably contained within their dominant counterparts, and through the fashioning of alternative selves (Nentwich & Hoyer, 2013). Thus within some strands of resistance literature, the postmodern identity uncertainty and insecurity – the context in which life roles no longer come ready-made and prescribed at birth but are up to individuals to be actively achieved – are interpreted as producing opportunities for 'micro-emancipation' through creativity, innovation and the removal of oppressive elements (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), and enabling new subject positions (Collinson, 2003). From this perspective, resistance can be seen as a means of protecting autonomy over identity construction (Ezzamel et al., 2001) and creating spaces for 'self-determined action and alternative subject positions' (Nentwich & Hoyer, 2013, p. 559; see also Meriläinen et al., 2004). Overall within the more agentic resistance-identity literature, the focus is often on identity work as a major site of resistance (Nentwich, 2009; Nentwich & Hoyer, 2013; Thomas & Davies, 2005), and, conversely, on resistance as identity work, whereby 'self-formation becomes the primary impetus for resistance' (Mumby, 2005, p. 35).

Given that our aim in this paper is to examine the role of CMS ECAs as active resisters and reflexive (re)constituters of their field, we draw on the insights of the more 'agentic' resistance literature above. We do this in terms of recognising that ECAs may see themselves as resisting in many different ways, that is, in ways that are everyday, covert and subtle as well as extraordinary, overt and radical (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004); creative and productive as well as disruptive and destructive (Courpasson et al., 2012; Thomas & Davies, 2005); operating as change and transformation as well as resistance to change (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). We also do this by recognising that, however dominant the prevailing discourses, in the context of insecurity – where identities are not fixed and pre-given, and, in the case of CMS ECAs, we contend, further complicated by multiple and conflicting pressures – there are always opportunities for the creative construction of resisting selves (Collinson, 2003; Nentwich & Hoyer, 2013). On the other hand, in focusing on ECA identity work we also seek to avoid the uncompromising swing towards the view of resistance as inhabiting some sort of 'authentic, pristine space' (Kondo, 1990, p. 224) untouched by wider forces of identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Ours is therefore a dialectical form of enquiry, an alternative to more binary approaches to power-resistance dynamics (Carroll & Nicholson, 2014), which attempts to shift the focus of research from 'either-or' to 'both-and' conceptualisation of dualisms, exploring their 'dynamic tension' and 'interplay' (Collinson, 2005, p. 1420). Key to such an enquiry is an interest in the complex, contradictory and impure nature of resistance (e.g. Carroll and Nicholson, 2014; Collinson, 2000, 2005; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Kondo, 1990). From this perspective, every action and practice of resisting may be simultaneously reproducing or even reinforcing aspects of the regimes and discourses that it sets out to challenge, and individuals may simultaneously act as resisters and compliers in relation to different elements of power (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996).

The exploration of tensions and contradictions is therefore a central issue in our study of ECAs as resisters. We seek to neither romanticise their roles nor view them as 'unwitting dupes', but rather as actively engaging in a tension-filled process of self-formation, which draws on broader available discourses in ways that are both coherent and contradictory. This work feeds on ambiguity inherent in the contradictions and gaps between alternative discourses and subject positions (Meriläinen et al., 2004; Nentwich & Hoyer, 2013) and leads to potentially contradictory outcomes (Collinson, 2003; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996). Importantly, the aim of focusing on the tensions and contradictions here is not to resolve the dialectic that feeds on them and co-produces them, but rather to explore how the tensions and contradictions 'create possibilities for organizational change and transformation' (Mumby, 2005, p. 38).

In the next section, we consider the specific context of academic insecurity that shapes the matrix of forces within which CMS ECAs are located.

Early-career CMS academics in the context of academic insecurity and 'excellence'

Over the last few decades, Higher Education (HE) has been undergoing dramatic changes, which have attracted not only a sustained critique in terms of their significant impact on academic work and identity (e.g. Hayes & Wynyard, 2002; Mingers & Willmott, 2013; Strathern, 2000), but also debates over the opportunities for academic resistance within this context (e.g. Anderson, 2008; Harris, 2005; Trowler, 2001; Willmott, 2013). Studies of academic working lives have emphasised the extent to which uncertainty, insecurity, stress and anxiety have been exacerbated by the new academic environment (Clarke & Knights, 2015; Knights & Clarke, 2014).

Broadly, academia has become characterised by the neoliberal manifestations of new managerialism and new public management – modes of governance based on the belief in the

unrivalled supremacy of markets as mechanisms for optimising performance and productivity (Shore & Wight, 2000; Willmott, 1995). In the UK specifically, where the state has been highly instrumental in simulating market mechanisms, this has led to an extensive use of proxies such as journal rankings and student evaluations of teaching for measuring performance of individual academics, and league table positions and REF scores for evaluating performance of departments and universities (Grey, 2010; Mingers & Willmott, 2013; Shore & Wight, 2000; Willmott, 1995). Academics now work under immense pressures to perform and are continuously subjected to the judgements of others (Knights & Clarke, 2014). This means that being what typically counts as 'a successful academic' is increasingly linked to discourses of narrowly- and managerially-defined 'academic excellence' (Butler & Spoelstra, 2012, 2014), which is contingent on continuing achievement of the latest, often highly demanding, targets, and is only ever achievable as at best a tenuous, uncertain and temporary state. This makes academic identity fundamentally insecure – arguably more so than in most other occupations (Grey, 2010). Nonetheless, career success is often highly desirable for those who wish to pursue academic working lives, resulting in ongoing and precarious identity work in pursuit of an ideal academic persona that is 'forever illusive if not entirely illusory' (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p. 352). Furthermore, this allegedly ceaseless and fruitless chasing of academic identity leads academics to experience 'an increasing tension between fulfilling their (career) aspirations and finding meaning from their work' (Knights & Clarke, 2014, p. 345).

Focusing on CMS ECAs provides unique opportunities for empirically examining identity work as both resistance and compliance in the light of such pressures. On the one hand, to identify with CMS, ECAs may need to align themselves with the CMS ethos of reflexivity, denaturalisation and non- or anti-performativity (Fournier & Grey, 2000). This ethos is directed at questioning managerialism (Alvesson et al., 2009), particularly the highly

performative 'new managerialism' of the neoliberal business school, dominated by US-modelled, positivist/functionalist scholarship as the single best approach to research (Grey 2010; Mingers & Willmott, 2013; Üsdiken, 2010). So making themselves into resisters of non-reflexive, managerialist, performance-centric values and practices endemic in the contemporary business school can be seen as a key part of ECA's work to become self-identified CMS scholars. On the other hand, positioning themselves as conforming to some business school norms – such as, for example, those of publication excellence – may enable ECAs to craft themselves as more legitimate resisters of other norms (e.g. managerialism). Ironically, this could make them potentially complicit in the co-production of the discourses of managerialism and excellence that they set out to challenge (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014). Moreover, their identity work may be further complicated by the proliferation of the breadth of approaches within CMS itself, and correspondingly a range of proposed modes of CMS engagement with mainstream managerialism and performativity, including 'critical performativity' that posits a pragmatic engagement with management (Spicer et al., 2009), and the imperative to be 'for' rather than 'against' management at the same time as being critical (Clegg et al., 2006). These added tensions and contradictions suggest that a secure and uncompromised identity as a successful CMS academic may be particularly hard to attain for this group, that what gets posited and counted as compliance or resistance may be especially contradictory, and that the relationship between the prevailing academic regime and CMS, which has received comparably little attention (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014) is in need of further empirical investigation.

In the extant literature on academic resistance, few systematic efforts have been made to account for the different roles, experiences and practices of academics in different stages of their careers (one exception being Butler & Spoelstra's (2014) research on the CMS Professoriate). Little has been done to make sense of resistance and identity of early-career

academics, who constitute both the current underbelly and the future of the academic profession. Here, we feel, a dialectical approach to resistance acknowledging that the latter is not easily separated from compliance, and that it both feeds on and co-constructs tensions and contradictions has much to offer.

Methods of data collection and analysis

In addressing our research goals, we draw on 24 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with early-career CMS academics either working or having recently worked in business schools across the UK. The UK was chosen as a primary site because it has been seen historically as a centre for alternative approaches (Üsdiken, 2010) and contains several recognised 'hubs' of CMS scholarship. As explained earlier, the rapid changes in UK universities in the past decades have also turned them into sites of a particularly insidious enactment of neoliberalism within academia where the state and market come together in a specific manner (Butler & Spoelstra 2012; Deem & Brehony, 2005; Willmott, 2003), thus making the UK a good starting place in this exploratory study.

In selecting participants for our study, we adopted the broad definition of ECAs (Laudel & Gläser, 2008) as those employed in a full-time lecturer post (or equivalent) for up to six years. As individuals belonging to both ECA and CMS groups are often not easily identifiable, we recruited our participants via a chain-referral-sampling strategy, in which the first few interviewees approached through personal networks acted as 'seeds' for the subsequent waves of participant recruitment (Heckathron, 2011). Throughout the recruitment we aimed to ensure diversity of ECAs' demographics and experiences. Our final sample consists of a mix of ECAs in terms of ages, universities, career trajectories and early-career stages. We interviewed marginally more male than female participants. For their first

permanent positions, our interviewees were employed in the pre-1992 sector (traditional universities) and in the post-1992 sector (e.g. former polytechnics) in almost equal numbers. At the time of the interviews, however, a significantly higher proportion was employed in pre-1992, and a few participants had subsequently found employment outside the UK.

Our considerations affecting research design included, firstly, giving voice to CMS ECAs' own understandings of themselves as resisters. Therefore, we needed an approach that would allow us to hear our participants' views and let themes and issues emerge inductively in juxtaposition to our pre-defined research problem developed through review of literature and our own experiences as CMS academics. Secondly and relatedly, like other researchers studying their own context (Clarke & Knights 2015; Ilijoki, 2005) we were from the outset deeply personally implicated in the project, so we needed to ensure that our active role as researchers was both useful and explicitly acknowledged. Our interviews acted as sites of identity work (Alvesson, 2003; Cassell, 2005) on many levels: as spaces that enabled self-reflection for our participants (Ilijoki, 2005), allowing them to 'express, elaborate, strengthen, defend, and/or repair a favored self-identity' (Alvesson, 2003, p. 20); as spaces that enabled us as researchers to facilitate this process and in doing so shape our own identities; and as spaces that, in co-constructing the argument of this paper, have been instrumental in what can be seen as our own project of CMS ECA identity work as resistance and compliance.

In the interviews, we used a set of pre-prepared questions as a guide to prompt our interviewees' stories and ensure that research aims were addressed. This loose guide included questions about background and identification with CMS, becoming an academic and being an ECA within the neoliberal context, and critical incidents (see below) in which ECAs saw themselves acting as resisters and attempting to make a difference in their institutions and the broader field. We were particularly interested in how our participants approached tensions, contradictions, overlaps and alliances between the business school environment and ECAs'

commitments as CMS academics. To draw these out more through particular instances and examples, we made use of the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954). We took the lead from our interviewees and adopted a broad view of critical incidents to include seemingly more mundane (but nevertheless deemed significant by ECAs) incidents (e.g. decisions, moments of inspiration, realisations) alongside more dramatic events (e.g. major confrontations, turning points, rites of passage), which overall captured narratives of the broad spectrum of resistance-compliance dialectics. As our interviews were semi-structured, we did not necessarily follow the interview guide in the pre-specified order, or ask questions exactly as planned. Instead, we encouraged our participants to talk at length around the subject (Cassell, 2009, p. 503).

Most of the interviews took place face-to-face at participants' universities or at conferences, with the rest carried out via Skype. The interviews ranged between one and two hours in length, and were digitally recorded and fully transcribed. Collaborative analysis of the transcripts was carried out in several stages. Firstly, after initial explorative individual readings of the transcripts, we collectively negotiated and agreed the initial codes that emerged inductively from the data. The codes represented ECAs' narratives of themselves as resisters and compliers, which we used to probe and categorise their identity work. We then coded individually, aided by the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Following this, we reviewed and renegotiated codes, arriving at a collective interpretation of the data. As a result, nine first-order narratives of resistance and compliance emerged, which we then grouped into three broader second-order narratives by identifying their primary mode of engagement with tensions, contradictions, overlaps and alliances between CMS and the neoliberal business school. These overarching second-order narratives we termed *diplomatic, combative* and *idealistic* (see Table 1 below). The next stage involved the mapping of the data onto our emergent framework and probing the resistance-power dialectics in terms of

tensions, contractions, overlaps and alliances both exploited and produced. In line with the dialectical approach adopted in this paper, the aim in interpreting the data was not to resolve the tensions and contradictions inherent in this context but rather to examine how they were both a source and a product of identity work as resistance and compliance.

[Add Table 1 about here]

It is important to emphasise that, applying our view of identity as fluid, multiple, contingent and contextual, and always embedded within the wider context of power/resistance relations (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Thomas, 2009), the narratives we analyse in the next section are not posited as fixed identities permanently attached to individual ECAs. Rather, we see them as contingent, contextual, interlinked and multiple self-reflections embodying nuanced micropolitics of resistance and compliance invoked in relation to specific aspects of power, that can and do get operated simultaneously or sequentially by the same individuals (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996). We now turn to the detailed analysis of our findings.

Main findings

Our data shows our interviewees to be highly aware of the multiple and often contradicting pressures impacting upon them, and highly reflexive of their predicament, as CMS ECAs, of living in constant tension between the demands to conform to business school conventions and ideals of 'excellence', and their commitments to a CMS ethos. In this section, we analyse our interviewees' understandings of themselves as both active resisters and knowing

compliers, as they seek to rework tensions, contradictions, overlaps and alliances between the forces that constitute their field, and as they fashion themselves as CMS academics.

Most of our interviewees see it as part of their roles as CMS scholars to challenge business school conventions, such as the unquestioning adoption of managerialism and the accompanying blind performativity of journal rankings and the REF that often results in pressures to do more mainstream research. However, this role to challenge is often manifested in convoluted ways even in the accounts of the same person. In the analysis below, we map nine different self-interpretations of our interviewees as resisters and compliers into three overarching, contingent and interlinked narratives – diplomatic, combative and idealistic – each of which encapsulates a particular mode (negotiation, struggle, and laying one's own path, respectively) of engaging with the relationship between CMS and the business school ethos (see Table 1). Each of the three overarching narratives thus represents a distinct way of making use of tensions, contradictions, overlaps and alliances within the system to operationalise both resistance and compliance and in so doing creating new tensions and contradictions, which have potential for being exploited to bring about further change. These dialectics of CMS ECAs' identity work as resistance and compliance are now presented, illustrated and discussed.

Diplomatic narrative. This narrative is the most elaborate and nuanced out of the three emerging from our interviews, being an aggregate of five first-order narratives of ECAs as resisters and compliers (see Table 1). The diplomatic narrative features accounts of ECAs striving to establish themselves as successful CMS academics by manoeuvring around and negotiating over tensions and contradictions, and by actively seeking common ground between business school pressures and CMS commitments. This narrative underscores feigning, compromise, secret politics and networking by featuring resistance as covert, hidden, deferred, and intended resistance disguised as unintended resistance, masked by

elements of outward, surface, (allegedly) temporary compliance. The primary mode of engaging with tensions, contradictions, overlaps and alliances here is negotiation and deception (soft and more serious) of others and sometimes arguably of the self. The diplomatic narrative is commonly invoked by ECAs in response to recognition of their own marginality and insecurity in the context of the broader power relations, and calls on political astuteness and inventiveness as a way of working around these limitations, or even using them as an advantage.

The latter identity work strategy is particularly emphasised as part of the first-order narrative we called '*playing a newbie*', which exploits ECAs' newness (to both the institution and profession) by deliberately using or feigning naivety as a pretext for doing things that are not meant to be done. Many of our interviewees gave examples of situations where they were able to make use of their newness to raise objections and do things others would not judge expedient. One interviewee described how she playfully asked colleagues how long she could count as 'new' so that she could continue asking questions and challenge conventions in small ways:

> I have the luxury of asking the naive question, which I think I do a lot. You can't after eight months turn around to an institution and say: 'how you do this sucks, how you do *this* sucks, and this *really* sucks', right? Because… there is a history behind how it has been fixed, but the beauty of it is that I can turn around and say: 'why is it like this?' (Interviewee 4)

Others deliberately made use of the ECA label itself to make space for themselves to do unconventional things:

I actually use that [label] quite a lot, early-career researcher. I think that it gives you a bit of licence to do interesting things and a bit more leeway than you might otherwise have as a senior member of staff. (Interviewee 3)

Whereas *playing a newbie* thus uses newness as an excuse to be (openly) unconventional, the second first-order narrative in the diplomatic category involves looking compliant on the surface (e.g. by dressing business-like) whilst actually doing critical things:

I carry the CMS identity for good or ill. Some people look more radical; I try to look presentable. I look conventional but do unconventional things. (Interviewee 15)

We called this narrative '*acting as a CMS marketer*'. This narrative involves deception of the powerful by producing 'packaging' tricks, or not being 'what it says on the tin'. This markets the CMS ECA as compliant and harmless and legitimises being different by making the difference appear conventional and familiar. ECAs invoking the marketer narrative spoke of critical incidents where they were able to make use of the 'excellence' culture to this effect, for example by blending in during the early stage of recruitment processes and thus successfully landing a job:

When you look for a job, if you fulfil [publication] criteria, it's fine. Your publications, how they have been achieved or how they relate doesn't matter for those criteria…that makes it easy to convince the admin side that yes, this person is employable. (Interviewee 11)

The marketer narrative thus involves elements of compliance in terms adhering to surface conventions that may have deep-reaching consequences (e.g. publishing outlet choices), but it is often coupled with what we called '*being a silent resister*'. Quiet, deeply hidden resistance is the main feature of this third first-order narrative in the diplomatic category. It involves

ECAs' accounts of themselves as not speaking out but being 'active in a quiet way', which might include activities not immediately apparent within their intuitions such as union involvement and signing of petitions. ECAs invoking this narrative told us of situations where they kept quiet about activities that might be disapproved of whilst deliberately going against the advice of line managers or strong steers, for example, to prioritise publication in high ranked journals. Examples include incidents where ECAs chose to quietly work with 'undesirable' CMS colleagues:

> I am working now with [X], he has just finished his PhD…, his stuff is in a similar area to my PhD… I am not going to tell [my head of department] I am working on this because I shouldn't be working with [X] because he is a junior member, I should be working with big people. (Interviewee 7)

The silent resister narrative thus deals with tensions and contradictions between ECAs CMS commitments and business school pressures by operationalising deception of the powerful through concealment of resistance and outward lack of questioning. 'Being active in a quiet way' is, of course, itself a contradiction that is created as part of this narrative, and one that potentially coproduces not only ECAs but also CMS as at least outwardly compliant with business school neoliberalism. This raises the issue of the extent to which ECAs feel empowered to speak up in public and thus outwardly identify as critical:

> I object internally to those things and I guess it is like taking stock, you keep your eyes open… Just because you are not involved in an act of resistance, it doesn't mean that you are not using your resistance. (Interviewee 1)

At its subtlest, the silent resister narrative takes the shape of 'active silence' (interviewee 14), justified with reference to 'dignity in silence' (interviewee 1) or fostering quiet scepticism: for example, being present but disengaged in meetings. Even though it is easy to dismiss

resistance at this level as 'decaf' (Contu, 2008), it is significant to our interviewees who identify with it. Our participants told us they sought to develop finely-honed political skills and sensitivity through such work, which could carry resistance forward. Thus being presented by ECAs as an act of learning, perhaps the question to ask is how persistently and how long this narrative of quiet observation is embraced in preference to those of becoming more overt resisters? Some feel it is best to leave it to senior colleagues who are outwardly branded as 'critical' to speak out. This kind of identity work strategy links to the fourth first-order narrative in the diplomatic category, which we term '*being careerist*'.

This fourth narrative involves ECAs describing themselves as 'resisters in waiting' – as those who need to comply and establish themselves first in order to earn the right to be critical. Resistance is presented here as 'deferred' until such time as certain milestones are passed (e.g. 'get REF-able', 'become a Prof', 'get a reputation') before resistance can begin. The careerist narrative operationalises deception of the powerful by temporary compliance, but also potential deception of the self by deferring resistance – a postponement that may go on indefinitely.

Some of our interviewees justified the careerist narrative by claiming that by being patient and playing the waiting game, which means making more compromises either in the short or medium term, they could become more effective resisters in the longer term:

> It is ok resisting it but fundamentally, if you are going to get on and… get to a position where you can start to shape your agenda, you need to have played the game, to be critical of it. You can't be somebody without any 4-star publications and then slagging the 4 star publications off! For me, I want to get to a position where I can make significant and real change as opposed to resisting on the margins and actually just beating yourself up as opposed to making a difference. (Interviewee 17)

Waiting to become more effective also had to do with the recognition that resistance necessitates increasing mastery in the juggling of positions and political skills which some ECAs felt matures with time:

> I think even though the game gets tougher, you get more skilled at playing the game and that is where the autonomy comes from… you learn how to balance things. (Interviewee 6)

This position is rooted in the reflexive acknowledgement of the (current) bounds of ECA power. As one ECA put it, 'sometimes our agency is extremely limited' (interviewee 16), while another commented, 'I do not see much room for me to change the system and I am too young to be able to do that' (interviewee 13), which could be seen as the flipside to playing the 'newbie' card. Whilst becoming a successful academic first and resister second is thus one strategy to work around this problem, another is to actively enlist the help of others, leading to the first-order narrative we have termed '*becoming a networker*'. This fifth and final narrative in the diplomatic category features ECAs' understandings of themselves as accumulators of social capital that can be used to facilitate resistance but also justify elements of compliance, for example, when used in combination with the careerist narrative above to 'delegate' resistance out to networks:

> I did my PhD here so had more access for resources and people …I wouldn't say that I get hugely involved in any substantial decisions, I have expressed my opinion of particular things to the relevant people, trying to contribute into situations and avoiding stress. (Interviewee 16)

The networker narrative involves accounts of ECAs seeking out others, either internally or externally and often secretly or quietly, for one-to-one peer or mentoring support. This can then be used to buffer themselves from sources of pressures, enable resistance through

mediators to minimise risks, and make themselves more manoeuvrable in the internal
politics:

> Senior colleagues may exercise power and say: I don't think this really counts as a
> good publication. But those things haven't really affected me too much, because of
> my networks within the institution, or my understanding of the process…I have never
> been subjected to that. I think you can escape it when you build networks with people
> who you think are wise, and friendly, and have better understanding. They can put
> lights on these issues and help you bypass them. (Interviewee 11)

The networker narrative thus seeks to outmanoeuvre tensions and contradictions involved in
being a CMS academic by operationalising deception of the powerful through avoidance,
secrecy and not sharing information with those who may use it to exert pressure. It construes
ECAs as compliant with legitimate notions of social capital and 'establishing' themselves, for
example, by developing research collaboration networks. At the same time, it presents
resistance as embedded in networks (and thus less easily traceable to individuals), which act
as development and testing grounds for both resisters and resistance, for example, when
ECAs feed their opinions to trusted colleagues and draw on them for advice as to how much
resistance they might be able to get away with:

> I use small groups of peers to test ideas that may be subversive. I can gauge how they
> would go down. (Interviewee 6)

To sum up the above analysis, the diplomatic narrative is focused on actively creating
overlaps and alliances in seeking compromises and circumvention of tensions and
contradictions between business school pressures and a CMS ethos. Conforming to resist by
presenting a conventional, non-threatening façade is a recurring theme. The diplomatic

narrative arguably contributes to the legitimisation of both individual ECAs and CMS through elements of compliance, for example, by publishing CMS work in high-ranking journals. It is rife with contradictions and creates new tensions, not least those that arise from the possibility of leading inauthentic working lives. We now turn to a very different approach to the conflicted CMS experience.

Combative narrative*.* This second-order narrative is an aggregate of two first-order narratives of ECAs as resisters and compliers (see Table 1). The combative narrative features accounts of ECAs striving to establish themselves as CMS academics by fighting against specific neoliberal sources of tensions and contradictions that problematize CMS ethos. This narrative emphasises heroism, combat, risk, radicalism and sacrifice by featuring resistance as often overt, risky, radical, and precision-targeted, and relegating compliance to the domain of pressures and forces that are not the immediate focus of opposition. In contrast to the diplomatic narrative that works with and around tensions and contradictions and actively seeks alliances, here the primary mode is a head-on struggle to address and resolve tensions and contradictions. Overlaps and alliances are seen as suspect compromises in the struggle, but may nevertheless be used as smaller concessions in bigger battle plans. The combative narrative is often invoked by ECAs in response to the recognition of the power differentials implicit in the CMS ECA status, and calls on courage and perseverance, often fuelled by anger, as a way of facing the associated risks and fears:

> The head of undergraduate [studies] has been there forever and is very well respected and knows the system inside out and I sat in that room and basically had an argument with him… I came out of that meeting, I couldn't sleep because I thought have I gone too far being a new member of staff? And I had really got angry at that meeting

because there was, for me, no real justification for being told I couldn't do something.
(Interviewee 17)

Within the combative category, the first-order narrative we called '*being an academic freedom fighter*' involves ECAs' understandings of themselves as guardians and protectors of scholarly freedom that can be used to legitimise CMS. The freedom fighter narrative tends to feature accounts of concerted and pervasive struggle against what is seen as constraining and normalising forces, and is typically focused on resisting the REF pressures and maintaining freedom to publish and teach in a critical way. ECAs invoking this narrative gave examples of situations where they openly asserted their right to work with 'undesirables', overtly challenged the status quo in meetings, speaking up where others dared not. ECAs told us about critical incidents involving group guerrilla tactics, for example, where two ECA colleagues decided to concertedly provoke corridor conversations around the supremacy of 4-star journals and what makes a 'good publication' (interviewee 3). The freedom fighter narrative also featured in teaching-related incidents, such as challenging constraining assessment regulations and timetabling, tackling restrictive curriculum and maintaining the freedom to develop innovative modules and programmes. In asserting the right to freedom and openness, these could then be used to promote critical agendas. This clearing the way for CMS through openness leads on to the first-order narrative we called '*being a CMS hero*'.

In subtle contrast to the freedom fighter narrative that emphasises academic freedom first and CMS second, the CMS hero narrative involves ECAs' understandings of themselves as protectors and guardians of CMS itself. Featuring accounts of fighting valiantly against forces and pressures that most threaten its existence, this narrative may controversially be seen as heroically compliant with ECAs' interpretations of the CMS ethos. ECAs invoking the CMS hero narrative often emphasised the either-or relationship between CMS and

neoliberalism and the necessity to take sides. Similarly, to the freedom fighter narrative, being a CMS hero presents resistance as overt, risky, often radical opposition, involving career and working relationship risks by speaking out and overt challenge, and acknowledging the possibility of personal sacrifice as a very real consequence of struggle. Critical incidents here include situations where ECAs openly boycotted journals that were seen as prestigious but too mainstream, supported lower-ranking but explicitly CMS journals, daringly delivered CMS content in mainstream management courses, for example, teaching post-colonial theories and 'shocking students' with examples of worker exploitation, and openly defended CMS to senior colleagues, as in the following example of a spontaneous reaction to an attack on critical scholarship, where an ECA risked sacrificing good relations and reputation with an immediate superior:

> [The head of centre] was saying this is a management school, it is about applied teaching, applied research and all the other stuff is for philosophers and sociologists. …I got involved and [he] was furious and he couldn't believe that we were disagreeing with him… I was trying to tell him that sociologists also get involved in applied work…you can be critical as well and engage in a wider range of literature but they weren't having it. He was getting furious and I was getting furious… he was saying I am really disappointed that you guys have this attitude. (Interviewee 7)

Despite the emphasis within this narrative on avoiding compromises, elements of compliance with business school pressures persist, especially in terms of complying with aspects that are not the immediate focus of a specific opposition, for example, ECAs may see it as their role to fight against journal rankings and the publish or perish culture in general, but not refuse to publish in journals per se. Overall, the combative narrative brings out the existing conflicts between CMS and the neoliberal business school, and produces tensions between what is the focus of struggle and what is not. There is limited co-construction of overlaps between

opposing forces as alliances are seen as suspect, but the combative narrative may nevertheless reinforce some existing common ground by drawing on potentially shared academic values of scholarship and instilling critical thinking in students. Consideration of values and ideals takes centre stage in the final second-order narrative we called *idealistic*.

Idealistic narrative. Like combative narrative, this is an aggregate of two first-order narratives of ECAs as resisters and compliers (see Table 1). The idealistic narrative features accounts of CMS ECAs striving to establish themselves as academics according to their own ideals and principles, and by upholding their own values in dealing with both CMS and business school pressures. This narrative underscores authenticity, reflexivity and laying one's own path through the tangle of forces, where the key issue is staying faithful to oneself rather than to the notions of 'a successful academic' or 'a CMS scholar' per se. Here the primary mode of engaging with tensions, contradictions, overlaps and alliances is the careful, deliberate, reflexive sifting through individual issues to decide what is to be complied with and what is to be resisted, why and how. The idealistic narrative tends to be invoked by ECAs in response to the recognition of the complexity of their conflicted context, and calls on reflexive creativity in thoughtfully and actively shaping that context to reflect their values as a way of overcoming the associated ambiguity and insecurity. ECAs' accounts drawing on this narrative often include critical incidents involving reflexive realisations and turning points:

> At some point I realised I had lost my research interests. I didn't know anymore what I was interested in. I was a little bit lost intellectually. I looked at and envied my friends in different university systems, who were doing cool projects on whatever they felt like. And me, I was reading this boring stuff, just to try to get into 4-star

journals. I realised this was a ridiculous position to find myself in, and I needed to do something about it. (Interviewee 3)

The first-order narrative we called 'being a stickler' features ECAs' understandings of themselves as careful evaluators of what constitutes their core, non-negotiable values, how the various forces and pressures affect them, and therefore how these forces and pressures should be treated. This involves finding personal balance by deciding what fundamentally matters and what does not and using this as the acid test for choosing what to resist – something that is often presented as an outcome of the Doctorate and ECA journeys: 'I think one thing you learn through the PhD and early academic life is working out what is important' (Interviewee 1).

Far from relating this as a dispassionate process, the stickler narrative often features realisations of a desperate loss and disappointment where ECAs find, on reflection, that the very core of their values are deeply at odds with the pressures that impact upon them:

I always wanted to become a teacher, and I enjoyed reading and researching. Being an academic meant being able to do both at the same time. (...) I am doing teaching because we are raising the new generation; we are giving them something. And we are doing research to create something new; to give that to our students (...) But a year ago, I realised we are doing teaching to get money… and we are doing research because of the stupid REF which in the end means nothing… My imagination of what this job would be was completely destroyed. (Interviewee 2)

Within the stickler narrative, such sharp disjunctions often serve as starting points for conceptualising the future shape of resistance and compliance, the key theme being not

compromising on the essentials. Thus things that are seen as not essential may be given up in response to pressures in order to protect the core. So an ECA may decide that the CMS label matters less to them than CMS practice and act accordingly. For example, interviewee 17 told us about sacrificing the critical label in the title of her Masters programme in order to get her school's senior leadership approval and ensure that the uncompromised critical contents reached the intended corporate audiences. The stickler narrative therefore incorporates compliance where the pressures overlap with ECAs' own values and with elements that may be conflicting but seen as not essential. At the same time, this narrative incorporates resistance to forces that contradict ECAs' core values.

Overlaps and alliances therefore are co-constructed at the level of the non-essential. For example, ECAs talked about situations where they made decisions to publish CMS work in order to legitimise non-mainstream approaches both in the wider management field and within their departments. This translated for some into trying to publish critical work in 4-star journals, yet for others, into supporting non- or lower-ranked journals or even boycotting some higher-ranked journals: 'Some of the stuff that I want to write about is not going to get published in 4-star journals, but it doesn't mean I will not write it' (Interviewee 17).

 By contrast to the stickler narrative, the first-order narrative we called '*being a free spirit*' makes no distinction between core and non-core values. The free spirit narrative features ECAs' understandings of themselves as free agents in a broader sense that being defenders of academic freedom discussed as part of the combative narrative. Here the ideal of freedom relates to ECAs' view of themselves as being able to carve out their own identities and space, working out how to do what they want to do and walking away in search of authenticity if necessary. Not being bound by the values and norms of one's institution is thus an important part of the free spirit narrative:

The particular and interesting thing about academia is that you are not bound by your employment organisation, if you want to make an impact on the discipline and the wider community. (Interviewee 3)

As part of the free spirit narrative, all aspects that conflict with personal ideals are rejected. Sometimes, this takes a similar shape to the CMS hero narrative, that is, steering a course very close to what is interpreted as CMS ethos and resisting neoliberalism. This comes from, on the one hand, a very strong identification with CMS values – the sentiment, in the words of one interviewee, of CMS being 'how I see the world' (interviewee 15). On the other hand, it comes with the realisation that this places them at odds with neoliberal institutions and thus comes at a personal cost: 'I can't stand to sit around and see nothing happen. In selfish moments I wonder if I am helping other people to my own detriment' (interviewee 12)**.**

Alternatively, this may take the shape of rejecting and resisting aspects of CMS (for example the perceived more masculine behaviours and practices) as well as neoliberalism. Then the free spirit narrative involves active and often highly creative co-construction of overlaps and alliances between forces as an outcome of ECAs laying their own trajectory by creatively utilising different spaces to practice criticality and develop a sense of belonging:

Being on the board of [Journal X] has been the most important aspect of my early-career life. It's what I am most proud to be associated with, and most excited about outside of my writing. That has always been a parallel organisation to which I belong. It gives me a sense of belonging to something wider. (Interviewee 3)

This carving out one's own unique path may seem contradictory to others, when for example, an ECA refuses to publish mainstream work yet engages in executive education thus arguably contributing to the reproduction of managerialism (but actually does this pursuing their own ideals of changing managers' mindsets). Or, as in the previous example,

when the development of an executive education programme becomes both a critical project and a prestigious (and potentially lucrative) business school revenue generator.

To sum up the discussion of the idealist narrative, ECAs may actively co-construct overlaps and alliances between business school neoliberalism and different elements of CMS while seeking to stay true to their own ideals, which may contain elements of both. This mode of engagement is led through the quest for authenticity by addressing tensions and contradictions on the principle of being true to oneself. Alliances and overlaps are used where they are seen to reflect the individual's inner values. Compliant behaviour is tolerated where this corresponds with their own values and is deemed expedient, especially if it opens up space for resistance.

Discussion and Conclusions

Spurred on by our own experiences and drawing on a dialectical approach to resistance, we have set out in this paper to examine the predicament in which CMS ECAs find themselves in the current times of academic insecurity (Clarke & Knights, 2015), as captured through this group's understandings of themselves as resisters and participants in the complex and contradictory forces constituting their field. From 24 semi-structured interviews, we have mapped ECAs' accounts of themselves as resisters and compliers in terms of different ways of dealing with the tensions, contradictions, overlaps and alliances that make up the conflicted and ambivalent relationship between CMS and the business schools context (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014).

Coming to the fore from this analysis is the sense of ECAs' critical awareness of the conflicting pressures and their consequences, and the convoluted ways in which ECAs strive

to establish themselves as both CMS and business school academics by reworking the associated tensions, contradictions, overlaps and alliances. The three contingent and interlinked narratives that emerge from the analysis help to trace some of that complexity – each narrative embodying a distinct mode of reworking tensions and contradictions (manoeuvring and negotiating around them (diplomatic), seeking to resolve them through head-on struggle (combat), and attempting to lay one's own path through them (idealistic)), and overlaps and alliances (actively seeking common ground (diplomatic), treating them as suspect but sometimes necessary concessions (combative), and using them when this reflects an ECA's own inner values (idealistic)). Each narrative contains elements of resistance and compliance.

This complexity is further exacerbated by the contingent, multiple and intermeshed character of the narratives, which embodies the view of identity as fluid, multiple, contingent and contextual (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Thomas, 2009). Our participants typically invoke several, in some ways overlapping, but in others contradictory narratives simultaneously and sequentially, for example, seeing themselves as combative towards some pressures whilst being diplomatic about dealing with others, all perhaps in the name of being faithful to their own ideals; or invoking the diplomatic narrative in a bid to keep the embers of idealism glowing until they are allowed to burst into flames later on. Narratives often supersede one another abruptly through more dramatic critical incidents such as radical turning points, when a realisation dawns that, for example, too much diplomacy has led to a loss of authenticity that can no longer be tolerated.

Below, we consider the implications of our findings and key contributions of our paper – first in terms of making sense of the empirical context of our study, and secondly in terms of theorising resistance through a dialectical approach.

Our study contributes to the debates about the impact of neoliberalism, the culture of 'excellence' (Butler & Spoelstra, 2012, 2014), and insecurity (Clarke & Knights, 2015; Collinson, 2003; Knights & Clarke, 2014) on academic work and identity (Hayes & Wynyard, 2002; Mingers & Willmott, 2013; Strathern, 2000), and the opportunities for academic resistance within this context (Anderson, 2008; Harris, 2005; Trowler, 2001; Willmott, 2013). As academic working lives have become saturated with uncertainty, insecurity, stress and anxiety, it is tempting to succumb to the 'pessimistic and nihilistic view of resistance and a highly deterministic and unidirectional view' of [academic] identity (Thomas & Davies, 2005, p. 686). Clarke & Knights (2015), for example, seem to arrive at a view of academia as a space of mainly identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), where resistance is limited because careerism – essentially a form of conformist identity work – 'tends to deflect or render opaque any sense of a nascent ethical and embodied engagement that could be a response to ambiguity and tension around new managerialism' (Clarke & Knights, 2015, p. 3). For Clarke & Knights, careerism is a form of compliance with managerialism and constitutes a binary opposite to resistance as an 'either-or' choice, with the former implying the lack of the latter, so that the conditions of neoliberalism 'drive academics to pursue their careers… rather than reflect more critically on the tension and ambiguities that they often feel' (Clarke & Knights, 2015, p. 2). Applied to the CMS community at large, this restricts academics' ability to 'make critique personal' and to engage with the 'risk and danger and threat' necessary to speak truth to power (Fournier & Smith, 2012, p. 467). By contrast, our study of CMS ECAs leads us to question such pessimistic

views of academics' critical engagement with tensions and ambiguities, and of critical engagement constituting an 'either-or' choice in relation to careerism.

More broadly, the dialectical approach to resistance and compliance enables us to see CMS ECAs as at once freer and more constrained than binary approaches to power and resistance would allow envisaging. Our study elaborates on the ways in which CMS and the business schools in which so much of CMS is located are neither fully commensurable nor separable from each other (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014), and shows them to be inextricably linked in deeply flawed and incompatible and yet mutually constituting and sustaining ways. We argue that CMS ECAs are thus so situated as to make it inconceivable – unless they give up on identifying with CMS – for them to position themselves as not resisting at least some aspects of power in at least some ways, and as not complying in others. Whichever narrative they weave, whichever path they take, each step they make constitutes an act of both resistance and compliance in relation to particular vectors in the conflicted tangle of forces that impact upon them. They can avoid neither resistance nor compliance as part of their CMS identity.

This, we believe, makes ECAs neither powerless victims of the system (Laudel & Gläser, 2008), nor careerists capitulating to it (Clarke & Knights, 2015). Rather, this tension-filled complexity and ambiguity is precisely what enables them to make their own choices and carve out their own unique understandings of themselves, their field, and their roles within it (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Meriläinen et al., 2004; Nentwich & Hoyer, 2013). This work of being a CMS ECA – constructing CMS ECA identity, we argue, necessitates perennial, contingent and highly nuanced operationalisation of resistance and compliance that continuously calls for creativity, inventiveness, courage, political astuteness and reflexivity as an integral part of the role of this important group of academics. It is in the minute detail of this ongoing reworking by ECAs of what it means to be both a CMS scholar and a business school academic – the work necessitating both 'micro-emancipation' (Alvesson & Willmott,

2002) and micro-compliance – that CMS unfolds in relation to the broader management field and academia at large.

What our study contributes, then, about the present and the future of CMS and its under-researched relationship with business school regime of excellence is an image that is much more ambivalent than the straightforward erosion of CMS ethos conveyed by Butler and Spoelstra (2014) in relation to the CMS Professoriate. The metaphor of erosion, we would argue, attributes to CMS the solidity, unity, rigidity and immutability of a physical landmark that can only be destroyed if it changes. Yet CMS cannot be claimed to have ever possessed such features. Rather, it has long incorporated a breadth of approaches and, we would contend, healthy discord amongst its members, even in relation to its more institutionalised versions (e.g. disagreements over 'anti-performativity' versus 'critical performativity', and 'against management' versus 'for management' (Clegg et al., 2006; Fournier & Grey, 2000). Whilst debates about the institutionalised versions (which are effectively means of CMS-based identity regulation – a pervasive but 'precarious and often contested' modality of normative control (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 621) of those who would claim CMS membership) are important, of equal value, we believe, is considering CMS ethos as something that emerges through continuous identity work – a reflexive process through which those who self-identify as CMS academics form, reproduce, maintain, contest and transform their sense of self (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). By taking the latter approach, our study offers a view of CMS-in-the-making – of CMS as a continuously shifting and changing collective total of ECAs' reworking of what it means to be a CMS academic and thus of what counts as CMS.

We would argue, then, that what we are witnessing is better understood as (re)constitution rather than erosion of CMS. To say this is not to detract from the severity of neoliberal pressures and how they can work to subvert and weaken CMS agendas, nor from the stresses,

discontents, fears and sacrifices of academics subjected to such pressures. Nor is it to discount the compromises and compliances embedded in the different modes of engagement with the tensions and contradictions that characterise the CMS-business school relationship (for example, the suspension or concealment of resistance, and the self-deception implied in the diplomatic narrative). Such damaging elements are an integral and profoundly-felt part of our participants' predicament, and critical scrutiny needs to continue to be applied to how they shape the development of CMS (e.g. domesticating critique through its legitimation (Bristow, 2012)) and impacting academic labour (e.g. in terms of subjecting it to near-impossible, alienating demands (Clarke & Knights, 2015; Knights & Clarke, 2014)). Yet, to choose the term '(re)constitution' over 'erosion' of CMS is to acknowledge, alongside the damaging elements, the productive side of working upon this cauldron of conflicting forces – of resisting and reshaping aspects of institutionalised versions of CMS ethos at the same time as resisting and reshaping aspects of institutionalised business school norms and values. It is to recognise that such reworking also potentially gives a new strength and liberty to CMS agendas, for example by making them more outward facing (working with practitioners and so on), embedding them more deeply within business schools, and infusing them with the wider ideals of academic freedom, inclusivity, equality and social inclusion.

Beyond the immediate empirical context of our study, our findings speak to early-career knowledge workers facing neo-liberal pressures more generally. In times when lowest-ranked employees shoulder similar stress levels to highest-ranked executives as 'avatars of uncertainty bruised by the rough passage of market forces' (Ross, 2003, p. 20), our study shows that ambiguity and insecurity do not necessarily imply passivity and helplessness, but instead can act as a source of critical, creative and passionate engagement with conflicting forces, through which junior employees contribute to the remaking of their profession. Our study is especially relevant to debates about employee resistance in the public sector, where

other occupations (e.g. teachers, medics, social workers) have been subject to similarly relentless managerialist colonisation under the new public management (e.g. Hall & McGinity, 2015; Harlow et al., 2012; Numerato et al., 2012). In particular, the dialectical approach contributes to the questioning of the straightforward erosion of older subject positions and values associated with professionalism and vocation with the rise of managerialism and careerism.

On the other hand, the specifics of the resistance-compliance dialectics we describe can be understood as at least partially enabled by what distinguishes academia from other public sector professions. For instance, the relatively high autonomy from the employment organisation mentioned by some of our interviewees and relatively low regulation (vis-a-vis, for example, the health services), are instrumental in providing the 'wriggle room' sustaining CMS ECAs' diplomatic and idealistic narratives. Conversely then, our study can also speak to knowledge workers in the less regulated private sector, where neoliberalism has similarly brought about a clash of working cultures and identities (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Ross, 2003). Here we contribute to the understanding of the role of resistance and compliance in 'the process by which individual professionals make sense of their new roles and integrate the conflicting demands of professional and managerial logics' (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016, p. 17).

Implications for the concept of resistance and the dialectical approach to resistance

We have argued that the empirical focus on CMS ECAs provides unique opportunities for researching resistance dialectically. Our interviewees' painstaking identity work to fashion themselves as both CMS and business school academics through both resistance and compliance is a prime case of the complex and contradictory nature of resistance (Carroll &

Nicholson, 2014; Collinson, 2000, 2005; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Mumby, 2005), and of individuals acting simultaneously as resisters and compliers in relation to different elements of power (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996). Moreover, the case of CMS ECAs contributes an understanding of how the complexity of resistance-compliance dialectics may be exacerbated in a context that is characterised by conflicting and intermeshing power relations. Within such context, resistance and compliance need to be understood in relation to not just one but multiple forces that co-align with and contradict each other in many different ways. This ambiguity is disorienting but at the same time, we argue, provides both opportunities and impetus for the carving of individuals' own roles and trajectories through these networks of power by means of critical reflection and political action that contribute to the micro-emancipation of individuals (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and to the micro-reconstitution of their field.

Within this, our study both emphasises and further elaborates the role of tensions and contradictions as both a source and an outcome in resistance-power dialectics and in the associated change and transformation (Collinson, 2003; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Mumby, 2005). Methodologically, we offer a way of focusing analysis directly on tensions and contradictions (and overlaps and alliances – see below). Our choice to sort our data into narratives of different modes of dealing with tensions, contradictions, overlaps and alliances that constitute the relationship between CMS and business school neoliberalism has enabled us, we feel, to probe deeper into the conflicted dialectics embodied in ECAs' accounts of themselves as resisters and compliers. Thus, substantively and conceptually, our study offers a multifaceted, multi-layered view of tensions and contradictions that feed and are shaped by resistance and compliance. Within this view, our participants' understandings of existing tensions and contradictions (representing the conflicting side of the CMS-business school relationship) act as a source layer that feeds ECAs' interpretations of themselves as resisters

and compliers. This response generates new, multiple layers of tensions and contradictions - firstly, between the resistance and compliance elements within each narrative (diplomatic, combative, idealistic), and, secondly, between different narratives invoked simultaneously or sequentially by the same individuals, and by ECAs as a group. These new, outcome layers represent a reworked version of the tensions and contradictions within the CMS-business school relationship, which can then act as a new source for further cycles of critical reflection and political action. This multi-layered view, we propose, helps to trace some of the richness of tensions and contradictions as a source and outcome of resistance-compliance dialectics (Mumby, 2005) in a highly conflicted context, where complexity breeds more complexity, but also where the field is reworked into new versions through this process.

In addition to emphasising and elaborating tensions and contradictions, our study also contributes an understanding of overlaps and alliances between conflicting forces as key to making sense of resistance-compliance and resistance-power dialectics. In fashioning themselves as resisters, our participants are able to leverage ambiguity inherent in the contradictions and gaps between alternative discourses and subject positions (Meriläinen et al., 2004; Nentwich & Hoyer, 2013) associated with CMS and business school neoliberalism precisely because there are also points of intersection, affinity and mutual dependency that forge the CMS-business school relationship (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014). We propose that overlaps and alliances act as both a source and an outcome in the resistance-compliance dialectics alongside tensions and contradictions – that overlaps and alliances are the other side of the coin in the multi-layered view of tensions and contradictions discussed above, for example, in the source layer, they are formed of ECAs' interpretations of the overlapping side of the CMS-business school relationship, which is just as important in ECAs' understanding of themselves as resisters and compliers as the conflicting side. Furthermore, overlaps and alliances, we contend, are as essential a precondition for dialectics as tensions

and contradictions. Without them, the ambiguity of conflicting pressures would be reduced to

a straightforward binary opposition, leading to either radical resistance or full compliance as

the logical responses, and being more suited to be studied through an 'either-or' rather than a

dialectical approach to resistance. We suggest that there is an opportunity for further

dialectical studies of resistance to explore in more depth the role of overlaps and alliances,

alongside tensions and contradictions, in complex contexts.

References:

Alvesson, M., Bridgman, T., & Willmott, H. (2009). Introduction. In M. Alvesson, T. Bridgman & H. Willmott (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of critical management studies* (pp. 1-26). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, *39*, 619-644.

Anderson, G. (2008). Mapping academic resistance in the managerial university. *Organization*, *15*, 251-270.

Archer, L. (2008). The new neoliberal subjects? Young/er academics' constructions of professional identity. *Journal of Education Policy*, *23*, 265-285.

Bévort, F. & Suddaby, R. (2016) Scripting professional identities: how individuals make sense of contradictory institutional logics. *Journal of Professions and Organization*, *3*, 17-38.

Bristow, A. (2012). On life, death and radical critique: A non-survival guide to the Brave New Higher Education for the intellectually pregnant. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *28*, 234-241.

Butler, N., & Spoelstra, S. (2012). Your excellency. *Organization*, *19*, 891-903.

Butler, N., & Spoelstra, S. (2014). The regime of excellence and the erosion of ethos in Critical Management Studies. *British Journal of Management*, *25*, 538-550.

Carroll, B., & Nicholson, H. (2014). Resistance and struggle in leadership development. *Human Relations*, *67*, 1413-1436.

Clarke, C.A. & Knights, D. (2015). Careering through academia: Securing identities or engaging ethical subjectivities? *Human Relations*, *68,* 1865-1888.

Clegg, S.R., Kornberger, C., Carter, C. & Rhodes, C. (2006). For management? *Management Learning*, *37*, 7-27.

Contu, A. (2008). Decaf resistance: On Misbeavior, Cynicism, and Desire in Liberal Workplaces. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *21*, 364-370.

Collinson, D. L. (2000). Strategies of resistance: Power, knowledge and subjectivity in the workplace. In Grint, K. (Ed.), *Work and society: A reader* (pp. 163-198). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Collinson, D. L. (2003) Identities and insecurities: selves at work. *Organization*, *10*, 527-547.

Collinson, D. L. (2005). Dialectics of leadership. *Human Relations*, *58*, 1419-1442.

Courpasson, D., Dany, F., & Clegg, S. (2012). Resisters at work: Generating productive resistance in the workplace. *Organization Science, 23*, 801-819.

Deem, R., & Brehony, K. J. (2005). Management as ideology: The case of 'new managerialism' in higher education. *Oxford Review of Education, 31*, 217-235.

Ezzamel, M., Willmott, H., & Worthington, F. (2001). Power, control and resistance in the factory that time forgot. *Journal of Management Studies, 38*, 1053-1078.

Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, *51*(4), 327-358.

Fleming, P., & Spicer, A. (2007). *Contesting the corporation: Struggle, power and resistance in organizations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fournier, V., & Grey, C. (2000). At the critical moment: Conditions and prospects for critical management studies. *Human Relations*, *53*, 7-32.

Fournier V., & Smith W (2012). Making choice, taking risk: On the coming out of CMS. Ephemera, *12*, 463-474.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Grey, C. (2010). Organizing studies: Publications, politics and polemic. *Organization Studies, 31*, 677-694.

Hall, D. & McGinity, R. (2015). Conceptualizing Teacher Professional Identity in Neoliberal Times: Resistance, Compliance and Reform. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *23*, 1-17.

Harlow, E., Berg, E., Barry, J. & Chandler, J. (2013). Neoliberalism, managerialism and the reconfiguring of social work in Sweden and the United Kingdom. *Organization*, *20*, 534-550.

Harris, S. (2005). Rethinking academic identities in neo-liberal times. *Teaching in Higher Education, 10*, 421-433.

Hayes, D., & Wynyard, R. (Eds.). (2002). *The McDonaldization of higher education*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Heckathron, D. (2011). Comment: Snowball versus respondent-driven sampling. *Sociological Methodology*, *41*, 355-366.

Henkel, M. (2004). Current science policies and their implications for the formation and maintenance of academic identity. *Higher Education Policy*, *17*, 167-182.

Hollander, J., & Einwohner, R. (2004). Conceptualizing resistance. *Sociological Forum*, *19*, 533-554.

Holmer-Nadesan, M. (1996). Organizational Identity and Space of Action. *Organization Studies*, *17*, 49-81.

Jary, D., & Parker, M. (1998). Introduction. In D. Jary & M. Parker (Eds.) *The new Higher Education: Dilemas and directions for the post-Dearing university* (pp. 3-26). Stoke-on-Trent: Staffordshire University Press.

Knights, D., & Clarke, C.A. (2014). It's a bittersweet symphony, this life: Fragile academic selves and insecure identities at work. *Organization Studies*, *35*, 335-357.

Kondo, D. K. (1990). *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

Koss Hartmann, R. (2014). Subversive functionalism: For a less canonical critique in critical management studies. *Human Relations, 67*, 611-632.

Laudel, G., & Gläser, J. (2008). From apprentice to colleague: The metamorphosis of early career researchers. *Higher Education, 55*, 387-406.

Meriläinen, S., Tienari, J., Thomas, R. & Davies, A. (2004). Management consultant talk: A cross-cultural comparison of normalizing discourse and resistance. *Organization*, *11*, 539-564.

Mingers, J., & Willmott, H. (2013). Taylorizing business school research: On the 'one best way' performative effects of journal ranking lists. *Human Relations, 66*, 1051-1073.

Mumby, D. K. (2005). Theorizing resistance in organization studies: A dialectical approach. *Management Communication Quarterly, 19*, 19-44.

Nentwich, J., & Hoyer, P. (2013). Part-time work as practising resistance: The power of counter-arguments. *British Journal of Management, 24*, 557-570.

Numerato, D., Salvatore, D., & Fattore, G. (2012). The Impact of Management on Medical Professionalism: A review. *Sociology of Health and Illness, 34*, 626-644.

Ross, A. (2003) *No-Collar: The humane workplace and its hidden costs.* New York: Basic Books.

Shore, C. & Wright, S. (2000). Coercive accountability: The rise of audit culture in higher education. In M. Strathern (Ed.), *Audit cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics and the academy*, European Association of Social Anthropologists series, London and New York: Routledge.

Smith, J. (2010). Forging identities: the experiences of probationary lecturers in the UK. *Studies in Higher Education, 35*, 577-591.

Spicer, A., Alvesson, M. & Kärreman, D. (2009). Critical performativity: The unfinished business of critical management studies. *Human Relations, 62*, 537-560.

Strathern, M. (Ed.). (2000). *Audit cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics and the academy*. London and New York: Routledge.

Tatli, A. (2012). On the power and poverty of critical (self) reflection in critical management studies: A comment on Ford, Harding and Learmonth. *British Journal of Management, 23*, 22-30.

Thomas, R. (2009). Critical management studies on identity: Mapping the terrain. In M. Alvesson, T. Bridgman & H. Willmott (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of critical management studies* (pp. 166-185). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thomas, R. & Davies, A. (2005), Theorizing the micro-politics of resistance: New public management and managerial identities in the UK public services. *Organization Studies, 26*, 683-706.

Thomas, R., & Hardy, C. (2011). Reframing resistance to organizational change. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 27*, 322-331.

Trowler, P. (2001). Captured by the discourse? The socially constitutive power of new higher education discourse in the UK. *Organization, 8*, 183-201.

Trowler, P. & Knight, P. T. (2000). Coming to know in higher education: Theorising faculty entry to new work contexts. *Higher Education Research & Development, 19*, 27-42.

Üsdiken, B. (2010). Between contending perspectives and logics: Organizational studies in Europe. *Organization Studies, 31*, 715-735.

Willmott, H. (1995). Managing the academics: Commodification and control in the development of university education in the UK. *Human Relations, 48*, 993-1027.

Willmott, H. (2003). Commercialising higher education in the UK: The state, industry and peer review. *Studies in Higher Education, 28*, 129-141.

Willmott, H. (2013). 'The substitution of one piece of nonsense for another': Reflections on resistance, gaming, and subjugation. *Journal of Management Studies, 50*, 443-473.

---

[i] REF is the acronym of the Research Excellence Framework on which Higher Education research Funding is based. For REF 2014, see: http://www.ref.ac.uk/about/guidance/citationdata/contextualdata/