'Indentured Autonomy': Academisation Policy in Northern England

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Introduction
In *Powers of Freedom*, Nikolas Rose (1999, p.141) argued that advanced liberal societies are typified by a rethinking of the relations between the social and the economic. According to Rose's interpretation of Foucault's theory of governmentality, this rethinking gives rise to a paradoxical situation where the citizen is governed through their desire for freedom. This shift in the rationality of power, from government to governance (Ball & Junemann, 2012) operates through particular vectors or discourses that "enable people to be governed, and to govern themselves" (Rose, 1999, p.84). Governing themselves, understood as the desire for autonomy, plays out in public policy as giving professionals the freedom they need to do the best work possible. After all, who would argue for less freedom? The academisation of schooling in Northern England, which is the focus of this paper, is a good example of private and third sector actors working with the State to deliver promises of greater autonomy for schools and school leaders (Higham & Early, 2013). While much has been written about new practices of Statecraft with regards to policy, our focus here is on the ways that these reforms are experienced, and understood, by those HTs (HTs) enabled by these vectors.

Our interest in this problem is twofold. First, in an international comparative project[1] regarding what characterises the 'publicness' of a school system, the experiences of participant HTs in Northern England who had decided to convert their schools to academies seemed to offer insights into the interplay between autonomy and responsibilisation for HTs and their school communities. Second, while there appears to be a general political commitment to the morality of autonomisation and responsibilisation, this vector remains a 'problem' for both public systems and HTs. As we will argue, in desiring freedom from LA (LA) control and the professional freedom to be responsive to their local communities, many HTs have found themselves in a double bind where the autonomy they seek has not materialised in the manner they expected or desired. To illustrate this we present interview data gathered from six HTs in Northern England talking about their motivations, and the challenges associated, for choosing to convert to an academy school. In particular, we focus on the ways that their initial, cautious optimism regarding autonomy has been replaced by frustration and disappointment as they have found themselves 'outmanoeuvred' by subsequent policy changes. It is from these accounts that we develop the concept of 'indentured autonomy' to designate the ways that HTs' initial optimism for the academies program has given way to the concern that they are less autonomous now than what they were previously. Paradoxically, these HTs still express a desire for autonomy, even as they reflect that the promised autonomy has made their situations worse.

This paper proceeds in four parts. First, we sketch a brief history of academisation policy in England, then we proceed to suggest that academisation represents something interesting about advanced, liberal economies and polities and the vector of autonomisation/responsibilisation. We then introduce the interviewees and their perspectives on academisation in Northern England, before concluding by thinking through the implications of these Headteacher perspectives, particularly in respect of the concept of indentured autonomy.

A brief history of academisation policy in England
The academies programme, or 'city academies' as they were called at that time, was introduced in March 2000 by David Blunkett (New Labour Secretary of State for Education), in a speech to the

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[1] Give details of ARC project

Social Market Foundation entitled 'Transforming secondary education'. The appeal of autonomy for school communities has been a 'persistent preoccupation' from at least the 1970s (Glatter, 2012). The first projects were announced in September of that year in a programme specifically linked to 'under-performance' and schools in cities working in 'difficult circumstances'. In his speech Blunkett argued:

> Far too many schools are under-performing in terms of the outcomes for their pupils. Many of these schools are working very hard and doing good things in difficult circumstances. But that is not enough if the outcomes for the young people do not fit them for further education and the world of work. No single approach will solve all problems, but radical innovation in the creation of new schools is one option. City academies will provide for this.

Other key New Labour policy themes are represented here: the importance of radical innovative ideas; the need to increase participation post-16; and preparation for the world of work. The DfES Green Paper *Schools: Building on success* (2001a), proposed that the city academy programme would raise standards by innovative approaches to management, governance, teaching and the curriculum with a specialist focus on one area. The programme built on the Conservatives' CTCs initiative, which was in turn informed by the development and experience of charter schools in the USA (PWC, 2005).

[I'm going to work up a timeline here taken from the NAO Report to show the trajectory of academisation policy]

Figure 1: The timeline of academy policy

The first tranche of Academies were run by their sponsors on the basis of a funding agreement with the DfES, negotiated separately in each case. This 'quasi-contractual' model of working has distinct parallels with the creation of 'executive agencies' within the civil service initiated through the Next Steps programme in the 1990s. The academies were 'publicly funded independent schools' (DfES, 2005) outside Local Education Authority (LEA) control. They were to have, as the 2005 White Paper described it, 'freedom to shape their own destiny in the interest of parents and children' (DfES, 2005, p 24).

In many respects the academies programme was a condensate of New Labour education policies, an experiment in and a symbol of education policy beyond the welfare State and an example and indicator of more general shifts taking place in governance and regulatory structures. Innovation, inclusion and regeneration were tied together in the academies rhetoric and, to some extent, at least, realised in practice, and were intended to address local social problems and inequalities and histories of 'underachievement'. Labour's Academies were also supposed to enact a new set of potential relations between education and the economy within which schools would be required to take much more responsibility for fostering 'knowledge cultures' as part of economic regeneration programmes in 'entrepreneurial localities' and in relation to the requirements of the digital workplace. Finally, they were intended to blur welfare State demarcations between State and market, public and private, government and business and introduce and validate new agents and new voices within policy itself and into processes of governance; they are indicative of a 're-agenting' (Jones, 2003) of education policy. However, the academies programme continued to evolve and mutate under New Labour and the Coalition (2010-2016) and Conservative governments. It is a very different beast now from what it was in 2000.

In June 2008 Ed Balls, then Labour Secretary of State, launched the National Challenge and identified the 600 worst performing schools that might be closed and taken over by private companies, universities or merged with other successful schools, and suggested that 70 of these could be re-opened as Academies. In 2010 the Coalition government Secretary of State Michael Gove extended to scheme to primary schools offering them the chance to have 'the freedom and the power to take control of their own destiny' as it was put[i] and become academies[ii]'. The Coalition government also used Academy conversion as a way of 'tackling' under-performing schools 'partnering them with a strong sponsor or outstanding school' (DfE 2010, para. 7.18). The number of Academies grew dramatically under the Coalition government, from 203 in May 2010 to 2,075 (out of 3,381 secondary schools) and 2,440 (of 16,766 primary schools) in February 2016. In 2016 the Conservative government announced that it would bring forward legislation to require all schools to convert to academy status in cases where the LA "can no longer viably support its remaining schools", for instance if a "critical mass" of academy schools already existed. This would have, in effect, ended entirely the link between local authorities and schools that began in 1902. However, in May 2016 in the face of opposition, including from Conservative LAs, the Secretary of State announced that this would not proceed.

As the programme has evolved a set of academy 'chains', or Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) as they are called, run by charitable and social enterprise organisations, have developed. There are currently 738 Multi Academy Trusts in England that manage at least two schools; 13 MATs have 26 or more schools, 27 have between 12-25 schools and 111 have 6-11 schools; the majority of MATs – 587 – have five or fewer schools. However, sponsors have been difficult to find for schools in challenging circumstances and the distribution of sponsored schools across the country is very uneven. This reluctance to take on difficult schools is a concern raised in a National Audit Office (NAO) Report published in February 2018. The Report concludes that there is "substantial variation across the country" (NAO, 2018, p.13). Furthermore, while there are some differences in terms of performance, improvement and inspection gradings between academies and non-academy schools, there are also differences between academies, between MATs and between academies in the same Trust. MATs perform more or less well, but some are performing badly enough to have been "paused' from taking on or opening new schools, although some "paused" Trusts appear to have ignored the ban, others have collapsed entirely.

The politics of education in England has always been marked by an urban and a London bias. English education policies have always primarily addressed urban problems and currently London is the base of virtually all the main 'think-tanks' and policy entrepreneurs that have sought or had influence in education policymaking. This London focus has been exacerbated by the Academies programme itself, focused on the DfE, and the concomitant erosion of LA powers. Furthermore, the paraphernalia of the national curriculum and other policy moves has meant that sources of innovation and fresh thinking outside of London have been cut off – except in the selective use of exemplars from abroad. This concentration of influence in relation to policy reflects a more general literal and metaphorical redrawing of the 'map' of education policy and policy 'spaces' in England. As is evident in data presented later, the HTs of schools in the North we interviewed had a strong sense of being on the margins of policy, as being both neglected and taken for granted, and the feeling that policies from the south often do not address or fail to understand their specific local problems. All of this contributes to the drive for autonomy.

The responsibilising society, autonomisation and the 'dead hand of bureaucracy'

While Rose argues that it is the privileging of "entrepreneurial subjects of choice in their quest for self-realisation" (p.142) that demonstrates a new relation between the State and its citizens, the question always remains how is it that an individual comes to desire the modes and tools of governance being deployed. Rose's response is to suggest that the "key vector" is how "autonomization plus responsibilisation" are internalised by the subject (p.154). This vector is visible in education systems in the introduction of 'autonomous' modes of public schooling that responsibilise families, HTs, teachers and other education workers differently.

The autonomisation/responsibilisation vector that Rose identifies is such a successful tool of governance because it enlists the support of those whose desires are to be governed. While the contours of this vector are always mediated by local vernaculars, it is the optimism that many people seem to feel for autonomy that appears to enable them to commit to policy agendas they would be otherwise opposed to. Converter academies, those schools rated as either 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by OFSTED that decided to take up the option offered by Gove and the DfE for greater autonomy post-2010 offer insight into this phenomena. The simple question is why? How is it that individuals within these systems are encouraged to take up these apparatus of reform. In other words, governance only works to the extent that individual actors take up these opportunities and put them to work in their own lives and in their decision making.

Advanced liberal governance is always vernacular, that is, influenced by the cultural, historical, political and geographic specificities of contexts. Furthermore, if autonomisation and responsibilisation express one defining vector of this economisation of everything, those tools that enlist and recruit support, how does it function as a mechanism for self-governance? In other words, how are we to understand the ways that desire for autonomy functions, even when the promise is rarely delivered, or at least, the promise is never realised, as our data will demonstrate. This simplified formula could be represented as:
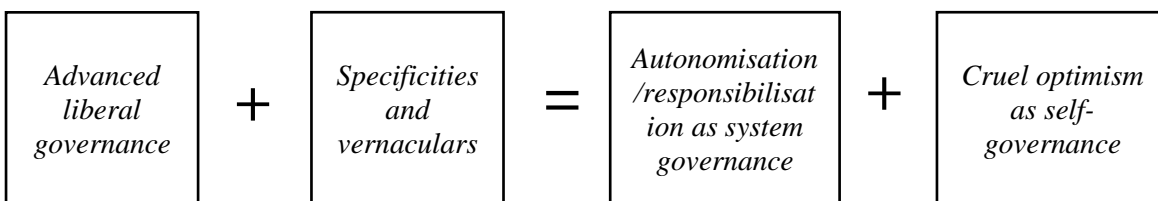

Figure 2: The vector of autonomisation/responsibilisation

Responsibilisation

In advanced liberal nations, policy has always been used to unbind (destabilise) and bind (reconstitute) in that order. The State sets frames within which policy actors come to understand the possibilities for their actions. The foundation of these possibilities is "entrepreneurial subjects" encouraged to make choices "in their quest for self-realisation" (Rose, 1999, p.142) that demonstrates this new relation between the State and its citizens and between each society's social and economic domains. This entrepreneurial subject is the antithesis of the bureaucratic subject. The 'dead hand of bureaucracy' (Clarke & Newman, 1997) is assumed to be responsible for the lack of human flourishing in that it strips individuals of their agency, their autonomy and their responsibility for their flourishing.

Sociologists such as Beck (1992) have used the term 'responsibilisation' to describe how individuals become persuaded that they should be responsive to problems that States once saw as

their remit. Shamir (2008, p.4) argues that responsibilisation "constructs and assumes a moral agency" on the part of subjects, and it this this moral codification which compels certain actions that follow. Responsibilisation connects the ideological commitment to collapsing the social and the economic into the specific practices, or apparatuses, that come to govern actions, behaviours, desires and thinking within a framework of moral choice(s). "In a nutshell, it may be said that, while obedience had been the practical master-key of top-down bureaucracies, responsibility is the practical master-key of governance" (Shamir, 2008, p.4).

Responsibilisation extends to individual, professional and institutional autonomy "so as to mobilize designated actors actively to undertake and perform self-governing tasks" (Shamir, 2008. p.8). Responsibilised people and institutions are not left to their own devices; rather, they are nudged to conduct themselves in the interests of the State. To this end, new metrics, accountabilities and compliance requirements are used to 'nudge' behaviours and dispositions. Policy that shifts the burden of social flourishing from the State to the individual is 'sold' as being in the best interests of the responsible citizen. This "conceptual leap transforms 'individual responsibility' from its traditional liberal understanding as ex post accountability for one's own actions … into an ex ante virtue, which emphasises acting in the present and preventing undesirable situations and events" (Peeters, 2013, p.588).

Autonomisation
The desire for autonomy, as freedom from the dead hand of bureaucracy, is a defining apparatus of our contemporary times. This is particularly evident in the way that contemporary education policy works, with its interests in devolution, steering at a distance, datafied accountability and competition. Autonomy seems to be a polysemic concept whose meaning can only be determined in its use. Taylor and colleagues (1997) argued that these can be thought of as encompassing social-democratic, corporate managerialist and market conceptions of autonomy. This enables its effectiveness as a policy mechanism in that it can appeal to a wide range of actors and ideological positions. For example, there have historically been critiques of bureaucratisation from both left and right perspectives (e.g Williams, 1961; Clarke & Newman, 1997). Cribb and Gewirtz (2007) suggest to understand autonomy in these complex systems, we should investigate the loci and modes of autonomy (whose autonomy), domains of autonomy (autonomy over what), and loci and modes of control (who are the agents of control and how is this exercised).

Beyond these academic considerations, there is also a common-sense appeal at work in the concept of autonomy; after all, who exactly wouldn't desire to have greater freedom? Much policymaking, it seems to us, plays on this multiplicity of meaning to promise schools and their leaders greater autonomy often as the resources to enable this autonomy are withdrawn and "accompanied by new forms of State control" (Higham & Early, 2013, p.703). This removal of resourcing, that Brown (2015, p.132) calls "ghostly autonomy" reminds us that responsibilisation is always intertwined with autonomisation. School autonomy involves a 'shift' in responsibility, while also differentiating forms of responsibility – or who is responsible for what – it is never simply a matter of autonomy alone.

Rose (1999, p.84) makes the point that in advanced liberalism, "Freedom is seen as autonomy, the capacity to realise one's desires in one's secular life, to fulfil one's potential through one's own endeavours, to determine the course of one's own existence through acts of choice". While Rose argues that this capacity to choose emerges from the desire for an individual identity, we think there is also a case that could be made that institutions such as schools, acting as assemblages of desire, equally give voice to this desire for freedom-as-autonomy. This is expressed through the HT

as embodying the institution and its desire for autonomy. As Thomson (2009) suggests, many HTs in their day to day work elide the distinction between themselves and their institutions.

There is another aspect of this – the desire for autonomy/freedom is often expressed as a respect for, and protection of, professionalism. The professional is one who is respected enough to be given autonomy because of their expert knowledge (Goodson, 2003). Where the State has regulated a profession so closely, as it has in regard to teachers and HTs, the desire for autonomy is perhaps more closely held (Hogan & Lingard, 2018). At the same time, as States advocate for more open systems, to responsibilise or 'steer at a distance' the professionals through data, metrics and standards, this becomes a problem of governance (Kickert, 1995). There is something of a double bind here, professionals desire more autonomy, yet the very form of that autonomy requires a certain commitment to the morality of the system itself. What is brought about is a reworking of the meaning and practice of professionalism – a deprofessionalisation and reprofessionalisation. This mirrors Keddie and Mill's (2019) argument that the autonomy delivered through academisation essentially proceeds through a pincer movement of dis-embedding and re-embedding. Under academisation, there is a "dis-embedding of markets with the devolving of governance away from States to schools and the dismantling of the LA" (p.18). This dis-embedding of governance is facilitated by "a proliferation of new and/or re-articulated accountability regimes and compliance mechanisms" that act to re-embed the market "to control this increasingly dispersed system" (p.18).

Cruel Optimism
Lauren Berlant (2011) argued that in situations like the double bind outlined above, there is often a cruel optimism at work. This is derived from that "cluster of promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us" (p.23). Proximity to the ideal of autonomy is assumed to bring an individual closer to the promises that the ideal represents. This is an optimistic stance: "the subject leans toward promises contained within the present moment of the encounter with her object" (p.24).

Cruel optimism is a "relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be *im*possible, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic" (p.24). Berlant reminds us that the attachment to the object, the desire for the cluster of promises that it represents, is an ontological concern, such that even where all the evidence points to the cruelty of the attachment, the subject may not be able to walk away from that attachment. This plays out in relation to the awareness that the desire for autonomy will necessarily require a patchwork of trade-offs, negotiations, and frustrations such that the ultimate resolution means settling for an autonomy that is, paradoxically, less autonomous than what one experienced before. We have called this 'indentured autonomy', the cruel realisation that in the pursuit of more school and professional autonomy, HTs have found themselves locked into a series of policy demands that are exactly what they were trying to escape.

Methods
This research from which this paper derives adopted a qualitative design using a purposeful sample. The purposive sample targeted individuals who worked as CEOs of MATs, Trustees of MATs, HTs of academies or of LA schools, as well as local politicians, union officials and members of the bureaucracy. These individuals were approached because it was most likely that they would have some insight and experience of academisation. Table X shows the breakdown by occupation of the larger study. All participants worked in Northern England in cities/towns such as Manchester, Wakefield, Leeds, Gateshead and York. There were 32 participants who undertook semi-structured interviews that lasted from 45 minutes to 75 minutes. As this paper addresses the justifications and experiences of academisation in Northern England, the data are drawn

exclusively from interviews with HTs (n=6). These semi-structured interviews used a common interview schedule and were conducted in September 2018. All of the participant HTs indicated that their schools were in economically deprived areas when compared with the rest of England. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview transcripts.

Participant	School Info	Gender	School Status
HT1	HT of an 'academy primary school in a village outside of Manchester	Female	Academy since 2012
HT2	HT of a 'lead school' in a MAT in Barnsley	Female	Academy had recently become a MAT
HT3	HT of a primary school in Hartlepool	Male	Recently begun the process to become an academy
HT4	HT of a large secondary school in inner-Leeds	Male	Part of a MAT
HT5	HT of a large secondary school in outer-Leeds	Male	Part of a MAT
HT6	HT of large secondary school in Hartlepool	Male	Standalone academy school

Table 2: HT participants

How people understand their 'system'

An important theme that emerged across the research was the uncertainty, and even suspicion, that many of these HTs expressed regarding the shifting emphasis of the academisation policy in its different iterations. As HT2 described, much of their motivation for choosing to become an academy was the desire to take control of their own future. If they did not do this, there was a fear "*that we'll be taken over by a larger chain, because that seems to be the government agenda.*" When asked what this had meant for them, HT2 responded by saying that they had become a sponsor academy, taking on converter schools whose poor OFSTED results meant that they were being forced to become academies. This was "*To be sustainable. Originally, they [the DFE] were saying five schools, then they went to ten, and they're talking about twenty now, but we think with ten, we should be safe.*" The reason for becoming a sponsor academy was to maintain control of their school and its direction, ironically through becoming responsible for the performance of other schools. The HTs were picking their way through an unstable policy environment.

For HT4, academisation was a political commitment originating in London to challenge the power of Local Authorities. He argued that the 2016 White Paper *Education Excellence Everywhere* which committed to all schools in England becoming academies by 2020, was essentially a re-centralisation of authority.

> *The academisation program, from within the education system, is viewed as an attempt to break the local authorities. It was an attempt to wrest control from the local authorities because it was felt that by and large the local authorities were not necessarily doing a very good job, and I think there's a tenuous difference between that and breaking the LA. It seems the local authorities had too much power.* **HT4**

One effect of the policy of trying to amalgamate individual academies into MATs in the interests of sustainability was the effect of creating MATs that functioned essentially as (privatised) Local Authorities. As HT5 argued; "*In effect, you could describe the LA as a large multi academy trust … so in fact the LA is, was, a big MAT.*"

In real terms there is more than one type of academy, and more than one type of MAT. These participants characterised these in various ways, but what was common was a dichotomy between desirable and less desirable academy trusts. HT4 characterised the less desirable as "*offensive academy trusts*" run by "*people or teams at the helm that are in education for the wrong reasons… to build a profit*", while feeling that he belonged to an "*academy trust that's got values and principles that we all espouse and we hold very dear.*" HT1 characterised these less desirable as "*corporate trusts*" where she saw "*schools being stripped of their individual identities, seeing HTs losing their autonomy, losing their titles, particularly HTs. Amazing, huge titles that people were given across the Multi Academy Trust… the uniforms had to change, the school name had to change, to reflect that they were part of this organisation, and it just left me feeling cold*". According to HT5, much of the negative media reporting that MATs had received was down to "*a number of high profile MAT's who are – I would describe it as absolutely outrageous, their behaviour - in terms of off-rolling[2] and exclusions.*"

Within this policy frame where the aim was complete academisation, where there were good and bad academies trusts that differed both in their philosophies and their (mandated) policies and practices, the justifications given for academising are illustrative. First, a common reason was that there was a possibility, no matter how unlikely, that they would be able to take control of their own destinies as school communities. As HT1 explained: "*I didn't want to be in an organisation where you lost the individual nature of your school, and as a community school it was really important that we reflect the children and families that we serve.*" Despite being opposed in general to the idea of academisation, for HT1 it was her awareness that the policy shifts meant that if they didn't act now, future possibilities looked bleak.

> *I'd had some experience when I did my professional qualification for headship, of what a faceless Multi Academy Trust could look like. A very corporate experience which I did not like, and completely did not want for our school. So, when it was suggested within the local cluster of schools, by the secondary head, that we consider creating our own multi academy trust so we could protect the nature of our schools, that interested me more, and it was a case of, "Let's make this decision while we can have some control," rather than waiting to be told that we have to join an organisation whose values didn't fit with ours.*

Another common justification for becoming an academy concerned the status of the LA. This manifested in two ways, first in a criticism that the LA had been unable to support schools appropriately, particularly to improve their practice. HT4 argued that, when schools desperately needed support to deal with problematic OFSTED ratings they were confronted with Local Authorities that did not have the expertise, or recent experience, that could help a Headteacher keep their job.

> *There was sort of an expectation that the LA would then turn up… I think the quality of the support that was available from people that had been in education for a long time (people who have been in education for a long time failed in the classroom, failed in leadership, and therefore went to work as a consultant for the LA) deliver expert [help] to people at the chalkface, and leaders at the chalk face, about how to improve your maths results, how to narrow the gap between pupil premium[3] and non-pupil premium students, [when they]*

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[2] Off-rolling refers to…
[3] Pupil premium refers to…

couldn't do it themselves… They've brought nothing new to the table because they are bereft of ideas, because they haven't been in the classroom. So the out of touch-ness, the lack of a rapid response.

The second motivation regarded a strategic consideration of the likely impact of academisation and future budget cuts to LA budgets and their ability to give future support. This was outlined by HT2 who stated the "*initial decision to convert to an academy status… we didn't see that there was any real benefit to our children, but we could see what was going to be happening in the future.*" HT1 worried about a "*divided*" LA where less funding as more primary and secondary schools became academies created a "*knock-on effect*" where schools LA schools were left with the more difficult to educate students. HT4 expressed it as:

> *I am not a tub-thumper for the academies' program… The fear, certainly in the LA I was working in when we were a State-funded LA maintained school – was that the number of schools that were becoming academies, either on their own or as part of academy trusts, meant that the impact and the quality of the support and challenge from the local authorities was then inevitably going to be watered down, and we would need to look elsewhere for consultancy support, school improvement support, and we thought that was best served in a partnership of schools that were all academies together.*

For HT3, the decision to convince his parent community to academise was similarly about the financial sustainability of support from the LA. While "*our LA have tried really, really hard, and are continuing to try really hard, to provide a valuable service to its schools and to its communities, and they've done that, I think*", they had now reached a tipping point where because of the schools that had already converted to academies "*the LA, in my opinion, can't offer that support that they have been able to, because fewer and fewer schools are part of the LA, so fewer and fewer schools are then paying in for the services.*"

How HTs experience this system

Being part of a MAT did not much change the fear that HTs had regarding job security. As HT4 remarked: "*So now, I'm part of a multi academy trust and clearly fearful for my job. Ofsted's due any time now. I could get the phone call during this interview. You know. The school's been Requires Improvement for the last two inspections... When LA was involved, LA would be coming in and packing my suitcase for me, and saying, 'Pick up your personal effects, and we'll manage you out of the building.'*" The precariousness of life as a Headteacher continued regardless of whether it was a LA or a MAT nominally in charge of the school.

Relatedly, academising had done little to relieve the workload of HTs, and in fact added to it in various forms. A common reflection was that OFSTED, and the associated expectations, ameliorated any potential that academisation had to alleviate the workloads of teaching staff. HT5 stated:

> *The government's really saying "We don't want to be prescriptive in what you must do there," but actually, if you don't do it and they come in here and don't see books marked, and you get judged to be a 3, it's fatuous what they say in there, really. It's frightening that about forty percent of newly qualified teachers leave the profession within five years. There are not enough teachers coming into the profession in relation to leaving the profession there... I do seventy-plus hour weeks, but teachers who are main scale will comfortably do*

fifty-five, sixty hours a week. I actually think now we're at a tipping point, because if something isn't done soon, then actually my children's children – I'm not sure who'll teach them, it's reached that point where the pressures and the accountability, particularly with Ofsted, it's not worth it, increasingly, for an increasing majority of people.

HT1 supported HT5's perspective, arguing that "*there's a concern about workload, full stop, in schools in England, because the goal posts keep changing, the pressures are enormous, and the threat of Ofsted and league tables – you know, there's the constant fear of shame, public shaming*". Becoming an academy had increased, not lessened that workload. HT1 argued that academisation had resulted in "*Hours and hours of more work! (laughs) With very little change within the school.*" She argued that the "*increase in workload for myself and the business manager is phenomenal. We spent two years without really having a personal life, because we were constantly working, and it didn't impact on the staff and it didn't impact on the children.*" HT6 said "*I think the pressure's always going to be on the Headteacher. You've got to perform, you've got to get the kids to pass the exams, but the high stakes, high achievement agenda that this government has got, and has had for the last ten years, I think makes this job untenable, if I'm honest*".

Another concern that participants expressed was that initial funding available to newly formed academies had given a mistaken impression that academies would be somewhat insulated from funding cuts. Their anxiety regarding how they were going to manage budget cuts was obvious. HT1 outlined this depressing reality: "*We find ourselves in a position where the money that we are getting in, based on our pupil numbers, doesn't meet the staff salary every month…yeah. It's shocking. I could weep.*" For HT1, their success as a school was a double edged-sword as they had become a desired school for parents of children with additional needs, meaning "*we have also had an influx of a number of children with additional needs who require one to one support. We're in the process of applying for education and health care plans that give us additional money, but they're worth £6,000, and we have to find the rest of that staff salary, up to £14,000, from our budget.*" HT4 was grappling with the realisation that "*the staff that I've currently got in the building, even with the same amount of kids next year, we're probably going to lose ten of them, which is probably around 6% [of my staff], because I'll be bankrupt if I try and pay their salaries.*" This necessitated a counterintuitive response: "*So the expensive ones will have to go and be replaced by cheaper, less experienced alternatives… in many cases, you chip experience out of a school, provision becomes weaker, naturally.*" HT6 lived with the implications of the funding formula and how he would have to let teachers go: "*We've got a situation in a year and a half's time, there's going to be 2.5 million taken out of [our local schools], based on the new national funding formula… For us, seven teachers gone*".

One aspect noted was, that with the requirement that converter academies partnered with sponsored academies, the autonomy they were promised became contingent. For example, HT1 found that as they added more schools, particularly those forced to become academies by the DfE due to low ratings by OFSTED, the governance structure required impacted the philosophy that led them to seek to academise in the first place.

> *It was Roger and I, our schools that first took the step to become a Multi Academy Trust, and then a junior school joined us … we've now got two secondary schools that are joining us, and it's shifting, and it is slowly becoming more corporate, which leaves me feeling a bit cold. The organisation is growing, and we have to have systems, and there has to be a level*

of consistency, but what really fascinates me is, can we maintain this moral integrity, the reasons we set up this MAT as it grows? Is that going to be possible? And I don't honestly know… the down side is that as a newly-formed, baby MAT, we're like one step removed from the DfE. We don't have that freedom or autonomy anymore. Everything is monitored, and everything is measured, and we're all having to justify so much more, because Roger has to have it to give to the DfE.

Cruel Optimism

These HTs experiences of academisation suggest that the appealing autonomy promised by the DfE in 2010 had been rolled back by subsequent policy that 're-embedded' external mechanisms of control over their schools. This occurred even as the HTs felt they were the responsibilised actors within the system. This is perhaps best expressed by HT1, who argued that despite her experiences, she still held out hope that if only they could crack the code, a more satisfactory future might be possible.

We still, behind closed doors, we still believe that if we can find a way to give them what they want, and jump through the hoops, we will be able to do what we really believe in underneath, but there are so many hoops to jump through, and keeping the standards high, and keeping everybody happy with diminishing resources. I mean, the finances – don't even get me started. It's really hard.

One common point was that none of these HTs felt that academisation was a systematic intervention capable of improving educational outcomes, and the subsequent societal benefits, across the country. They remained concerned that in acting in what appeared to be the best interests of their students, schools and communities, they could be actually stopping politicians, bureaucrats and governments being held to account for the problems within their systems. HT3 expressed it as a concern that in choosing to become an academy, he was part of a system that left many people out in the cold.

A concern would be that it's almost "I'm alright, Jack." As long as I'm OK, as long as I've got enough money in our trust, or in our community, I don't really care about anyone else, and I think that worries me a lot, and I think the reduction in finances that are going into public services have a knock-on effect … those children don't get the support they need, which then has a knock-on effect in that they become teenagers that don't get the support they need, which then means they become adults that don't get the support they need, who then – well, I don't know where we'll go with that.

For HT4, the loss of community he saw across England troubled him and the concern that young people were not going to have the same opportunities and experiences in their schools as he had when he was young.

I'm glad – it sounds very – it's quite a nihilist view, and it's not me at all; I'm glad I'm 46 and not 16, because I think if I was one of these kids here, or a kid anywhere, I think I'd be pretty scared right now about going into the world… the number of people that are going to get left behind over the next generation is going to be quite scary.

The desire for autonomy can only ever result in cruel optimism. The fact that complete autonomy is an impossibility, as one domain becomes 'freer', others must become more restricted or regulated, means that the subject is always left feeling frustrated. This frustration, as Berlant reminds us, invariably manifests as the feeling that we either haven't got autonomy right, or that autonomy has become hijacked by vested interests, rather than a sense that the problem is the desire for autonomy itself. And this is the professional paradox of autonomisation – professionalism desires forms of autonomy which can never be realised in fragmented systems.

Discussion and Conclusion

The desire for autonomy has always been present in the heavily State mediated profession of teaching. As far back as the 1980s, Grace (1987, p.195) argued that autonomy has effectively been the centre of an "extended war of position" between the State and the profession in Britain. Academisation, and the particular contours and experiences just represent the contemporary, vernacular expression of this war of position. What interests us, and animates this article, is the particular ways that academisation was experienced by those HTs who chose to academise. The promise of increased autonomy, for all of them, was enticing, even if they did not believe that the policy was the solution to the wicked problems facing contemporary schooling in Northern England.

The policy frame around academisation including forced academisation, the brokering of schools into MATs and the reduction in funding/resourcing of Local Authorities forces HTs to encounter the limits of their optimism. This encounter crystallises one aspect of the responsibilisation of the HT as the decision-maker for a school community. What does careful consideration, the need to make the best decision for the community both now and in the future look like? Of course, this encounter is necessarily rendered within a wider frame of professionalism in Northern England. As Thomson (2004; 2010) has shown, one of the effects of responsibilisation is that HTs come to see themselves as embodying their community as much as their school. The history of seeing teachers and HTs as problems (Jones, 1990) means that the promise of being granted autonomy by the State is especially motivating as an imprimatur of their professionalism while concomitantly at the same time, any possibilities of teacher autonomy are displaced.

These HTs shed light on why it is that schools may choose to become academies, particularly those who do not have an ideological commitment to academisation. While policy agendas often evoke strong reactions, the ways that individuals negotiate these policy frames, the justification for their actions, beliefs, values and desires in relation to these decisions remains important. Many of these school leaders, both desiring autonomy and fearing forced academisation, decided to academise because they were frustrated at the quality of service they received from their LA, particularly regarding the LAs ability to prepare them for and protect them from OFSTED inspections. They saw that LAs were unlikely to be able to offer satisfactory support in the future because, as more schools become academies, there will be less LA funding to support schools dealing with complex problems. This included needing support to prepare schools for OFSTED inspections, to provide professional learning experiences for staff, to support students with complex needs and so on. The worry was that LA schools would be 'left behind', and as HTs need to advocate for their communities, this was a risk that could not be justified, even if the HT had an ideological commitment to the LA system.

One emergent consideration is that there is a closed policy frame at work. Whilst we expected HTs who have ideological or political commitments to autonomisation to be supporters of academisation, it is the capture of those who are predisposed towards collective politics, who wanted to remain part of a collective system but became convinced to academise in spite of their convictions that is most interesting. The motivations of those who do not necessarily desire to be part of a large, corporate Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) yet opt to become academies are important. The HTs interviewed express a number of justifications including a fear in light of the government claim that by 2020 all schools would be academies and that they would be forced to academise anyway. In order to protect the integrity of their school, its responsiveness to their local community and their beliefs around education practice, the decision to academise was to make the best of a bad situation. Academisation, then, closes possibilities in that even non-believers choose to academise as a means to prevent being forced to become a sponsored academy or possibly shopped to an MAT whose approach was opposed to theirs.

What characterises the academisation policy is uncertainty by design. Justifying decisions to academise seemed to be made more difficult by subsequent official policy shifts and unofficial rumours about what was to come next. Further policy uncertainty regarding DfE advice as to what constitutes a viable size of an MAT - at first one school was acceptable, then schools were encouraged to partner, then 5 schools was seen as suitable, now 10 schools and perhaps 20, carried with it an implied threat that even converter academies were always at risk of being taken over by larger MATs. This has forced schools that initially wanted to be autonomous, both from LAs and from corporate MATs, to either agree to broker or partner other schools, becoming in effect a more corporate MAT, even where that was the opposite of what was desired.

Indentured autonomy is the name that we give to policy processes that work through promising autonomy to professionals within complex systems as a means of regulating and rearticulating possibilities. The paradox is, in order to be afforded the right to autonomy by the State, HTs have found themselves trapped in a situation that they cannot escape. We use the word 'indentured' to signify both the length of time of an academy contract (7 years) and to indicate the realisation over time that the autonomy on offer cannot resolve the problems of workload, funding, high-stakes accountabilities and wider societal inequalities and individualist fragmentation. The HTs and their schools sign up hoping that they will be better situated to respond to local circumstances but find that macro-policy levers (such as austerity measures applied to school budgets and the impact that this has on things like staffing) make this less possible. In fact, it may be the loss of LAs as advocates for groups of schools makes the funding cuts deeper, and more pernicious, than would have been enabled otherwise. Tellingly, these HTs feel that academisation has resulted in an increase in their workloads and responsibilities at the same time as funding and support have decreased. Changes in academisation policy since 2010 have meant that the autonomy HTs desired when choosing to become converter academies has become the ideological tool that now cruelly constrains and compromises their possibilities (Berlant, 2011).

Indentured autonomy is also a vernacular process. We concede that there is particular history, sets of experiences of economic, social and education policy in regards to Northern England at work here. We also do not claim that indentured autonomy is the only experience of academisation available to HTs and school communities across England. It may be that there are some individuals, groups and communities who have done very well out of academisation. Our concern has been to explain the "effects of policy" (Ball, 1994), to probe how academisation policy has played out in Northern England from the perspective of those most intimately engaged with it.

More broadly, we have been concerned to understand what appear to be new relationships between the State, its institutions and the professionals who work on behalf of the State and what this tells us about governance today. Our analysis seems to us to present a specific case of Rose's (1999) hypothesis that States now govern through freedom.

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[i] A CEP report on primary academies concludes:

While the international literature provides growing evidence on the effects of school autonomy in a variety of contexts, little is known about the effects of autonomy on primary schools (which are typically much smaller than secondary schools) and in contexts where the school is not deemed to be failing or disadvantaged. The key finding is that schools did change their modes of operation after the exogenous policy change, but at the primary phase of schooling, academisation did not lead to improved pupil performance. CEP/LSE.

[ii] As noted, as of May 2017 22% of primary schools had taken up this option.