Academic Labour Process and 'Identity-Work' Construction: Liminal Experience of Academics in the University

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

| Review Article |

ABSTRACT

Academic labour process in the context of neo-liberal Higher Education (HE) management system, specifically the university system, had in recent years evoked multiple and conflicting dimensions for lived-work experiences of academics in the university. Between multiple levels of mundane/routine teaching and learning, and at the extreme of the continuum, i.e. research for knowledge production, and community engagements, occasioned by the dictates of neo-liberal logics, the lived-work experiences and self-identity of academics are constructed. This co-construction illustrates how the work of academics is further embedded in global neo-liberal dynamics, and how this reconstructs the "normalcy" of academic work process, and "self- identity" of academics. Change in normalcy such as the reforms in universities management system, globally , and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, for example, has also deepened challenges facing HE management in terms of funding, governance, and "social mission". This has further compelled universities to initiate alternatives in managerial practices. This is even more demonstrated along the "contours" of neo-liberal reforms of the universities system, globally. Utilizing the concept of "liminality" in organisational research, the paper demonstrates how the emerging dynamics in neo-liberal university system, including the impact of the pandemic shape the "identity-work", "subjectitviy" and "agency" of academics, in context. While the paper draws on conceptual-analytics of liminality, it evaluates and examines the "discursive narratives" of academics, in context, during period of uncertainties, such as academic policy reforms, academic governance; illustrating the implications on their identity-work. The paper shows how liminal

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practices in the academia at a time of reform in the universities' governance could aid the process of construction and co-construction of identity-work of academics. The on-going co-construction of identity-work in the context of neo-liberal academia has produced "liminal personae" in the university system, even at a time of uncertainty.

Keywords: Academic labour process; liminaltity; workplace analysis; identity-work.

1. INTRODUCTION

Amidst several challenges and uncertainties confronting neo-liberal university systems, all over the world, academics are increasingly more exposed to experience being caught in-between what has been described as 'betext' and'in-between' [1]. It is argued in this paper that as a result of several challenges including COVID-19 pandemic, and its implications, academics continue to experience an 'ambiguous' state of work experience, which on one hand, separate the individual academics from what has been described as 'past norm' to a 'new normal', which is also in the process to be firmly established in their identity and agency, as academics. In Van Gennep's [2] seminal work; liminality refers to a process through which an individual experience a transition from one set of social norms and practices to another (cited in Cia; Scott and Bennett, 2021). From work-process perspective, it is a process of work experience from an established norms and practices to a new one in which the individual experiences "ambiguous" state; detached, or separated from the past. As noted by Cai et al. [3], ambiguity; in the "agentic-dimension" and "identity" being experienced by the individuals reflects a combination, where individuals are anchored into a new social norms and practices. While utilizing the concept of liminality [4], it is argued in this paper, that in moments of uncertainties such as work re-organisation and work-place reforms, academics experience new normative behaviours and practices, typified by management's rules and regulations in the university system, which shape their 'identity-work' [5,6].

In moments of uncertainty, academics experience what is referred to as "liminal personae" (Turner 1970), with an "anthropological understanding". This explains how individuals of liminal personae "transit from temporary ambiguity to anticipated aggregation of new norms" defined by "unusual dimensions" of work experience. However, in the absence of "normative anchorage" that could have fulfilled

the expectations of the academics, "void" could be created (Turner, 1970), thereby further creating ambiguities to work experience and expectations of academics.

In periods of workplace re-organisation, when management suspends or amends its policies and practices [7], individuals in the workplace become liminal personae, with "disoriented identity" as he navigates the "uncertain contours" between normal and extremity at work. Thus, as observed by Beech [8], the concept of liminality is also tied with process of identity construction in explaining work experience of academics. It refers to a state of "in-betweeness" and "ambiguity", shaping identity construction in the workplace.

The ambiguous and "changeful" dimensions of university system in the context of neo-liberalism has therefore been characterised by attendant multiple dimensions that, on the one hand, enhances decent-work for academics, and on the other hand, engendered a workplace characterised by conflict and intensity; thereby reproducing academics' identity-work.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This paper, which is essentially, a theory-led analytical and contextual review of literature on liminality, provides sociological understanding of identity-work construction and its "dialogical relationship" in contemporary work organisation. The section will be followed by empirical illustrations of dimensions and manifestations of liminal personae in selected work organisations. Contextual analysis of the concept in particular contexts of neo-liberal universities' management systems and the dimensions of academic work processes further demonstrate the liminal experiences of academics. This is tied with the conclusion to provide broader understanding and implication of the concept of identity-work construction in contemporary workplace.

In utilizing the conceptual remit of Alternative Systemic Model (ASM) [9], this paper explores organisations complex human activity systems. It provides an understanding of perceptions, narratives and sense-making of individuals within the context of emerging dynamics of workplace. Contextual analysis provides an understanding of collective and individual sense-making and their identity-work construction, as shaped by organisational dynamics. Liminality as a conceptual thresh-hold also provides an understanding of 'individual-emergence' in the context of organisational system [9].

The resilience of contextual analysis in research work of this nature lies in importance of paying distinct attentions to individual uniqueness, and imperatives of 'contextual dependency' in analysing the impact of organisational dynamics in shaping 'liminal persona'. Utility of contextual framework as analytical tool allows researchers to be reflexive in 'owning and controlling' their research agenda and setting; allowing for 'multiple levels' and 'fluidity' in understanding individual liminality in the workplace.

3. "LIMINALITY" AND "IDENTITY-WORK" IN CONTEMPORARY WORKPLACE: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMING

Identity-work, and its construction in contemporary workplace has been shown to be a mutually co-constructive interaction between individual worker [10], and the social context of the workplace. Also, as shown by Watson [11], the co-construction of identity-work is enacted in the interplay between an individual self-identity i.e. his notion of "Who he is", and the social-identity, the notion of "Who he is, from external dialogue and discourse of institution and culture" (cited in Beech [8]). In exploring the utility of the concept, Alvesson and Willmott [12], examine how workplace managerial practices contribute to "manufacture" of subjectitvies in individuals, and the embedded resistance [13], by the workers; the transit of workers from "current self" to an "aspirational" or "resistance" identity [14]. Through liminal processes, "workers work" on self to dis-identify from work-imposed identity so as to become their "authentic self" in the workplace [15]. Thus, the dynamics of "self before" and "self-after" [16] remain largely in the literature of identity-work and identity construction.

The concept of liminal personae and its processural, therefore, remains strong as theoretical/analytical device to understand the "changeful" and "fluid" nature of identity in the context of contemporary managerial practices and processes. Its resilience in workplace analysis provides an understanding of the interactions between an individual and his interactions "in-context" [8], thereby co-constructing his identity-work.

Turner [17] had earlier developed the concept of "liminality" in social anthropological analysis of "individual's transitions", and the embedded ambiguity experienced by the individual. This is further elaborated, and extended into organisational research (Tempest and Starky, 2004; Study et. al. 2006). Sueningsson and Alvesson (2003) have also utilized the concept in identity construction and workers lived-work experience in the workplace. The potential of utility and resilience of the concept also resonate in the study of academic labour process of neo-liberal university system [18]. The focus is on "dialogical process" between self-identity/inner self of academics, and how this is shaped and reshaped by "existentiality" and "externality"; leading to his liminal practices in the context of his academic work process [11]. Academic liminal practices are demonstrated in his academic work processes, reshaping his identity-work in the neo-liberal setting of the university.

Collison's, (2003), Alvesson and Willmotts' [12] work focus on it, as being co-constructed through a dynamic interaction in which an individual is "cast" in an identity by others in-context [19]. In this process of identity construction and co-construction, the individual is projected through the prism of identity by outside world, and he also enacts behaviours, symbols around stories of an identity [20]. This is done in a dialogical interaction of his inner-self, as influenced by the "otherness" Watson [11]. The social-identity co-constructed by the inner-self and otherness becomes a site; being worked upon by these two-way dynamics. In Ybenna et al. [10] dialectical interpretations, this is a version of agency-structure dialectics in action; a process through which "individual agent constitutes, and is reconstituted" (cited in Beech [8]), by the social context the individual finds himself. This is also mediated by the "discursive interactions" available in the context. It is at the intersection of this agency and structure that liminal practices and work process

of the organisation are conducted by the individual. This conceptual framing therefore further expands our understanding of identity-work/social identity as co-constructed in the context of workplace.

The conceptual value of liminaltity in workplace analysis, in particular, in the context of work-restructuring and re-organisation resonates in several identity-work literature such as Thornborrow and Brown [21]; Alvesson and Robertson [22]; and Watson [11]. However, as noted by Beech [8], such identity-work and as it is co-constructed can be partial or incomplete. This "incompleteness" manifests when individual is caught "in-between" and "liminal". Thus, to Noble and Walker [23] liminality disrupts individual internal sense of self or place within the social context of a workplace (in Beech [8]).

More specifically, as management practice in neo-liberal universities, globally, continue to grapple with the challenges ofre-organisation of work process, and reforms in the systems, occasioned by neo-liberal policy-framing, identity-work of academics is co-constructed, and in which the sense of self and work processes are significantly altered; a new identity thus become reality and meaningful to the individual academics [8]. Teasing this out more conceptually, Chrein (2002) argues that liminality may indicate a position of ambiguity, alteration and uncertainty; being "betwixt" and "between". As further noted by Mazza (2003), Ellis and Ybenna (2010), liminal workers oscillate in-between self, and the discourse of the organisation; pointing out the changeful nature of individuals, arising from work process reforms. Multiple dimensions of identity and meaning co-exist in identity-work shaping, in which worker becomes "liminar" [23]

When applied to the study of contemporary workplace, liminality exemplifies "instabilities" in the self within the social context; illustrating on-going ambiguities and "multiplicity of meanings" [8]. Tracing its utility back, while the concept could be understood in the social-anthropological sense (Van Gennep, 1960; [17], "explaining a transition to 'liminar experience', its utility and resilience in the study of contemporary neo-liberal work organisation remains instructive.

In the next section (section 4) of this paper, the conceptual-analytical model of liminality is

further explicated and reviewed to provide empirical illustrations of its utility and resilience. This further provides understanding of "identity-work" and dynamics of its construction and co-construction for academics, in the context of neo-liberal university management systems, generally. In this expanded empirical illustrations, liminality of academics is provided to demonstrate academics' "sense-making" and identity-work in their "academic performativity"

4 "IDENTITY-WORK" CONSTRUCTION: CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR ANALYSIS

In the context of identity regulation and shaping, such as influenced by liminal practices in the workplace, the "micro-social" processes provide the context through which individuals enact "identity-form co-created through the discursive managerial practices" [24]. Utilized as an analytical tool, Collinson [13], had earlier elaborated on the concept to show how employees enact their repertoire of selves, that is, "conformist, dramaturgical and resistance selves", in securing their identities in the workplace. As observed by Gagnon [24], workplace or "management's discourse mechanisms produce identity-work as responses to dynamics of power relations in the organisations, in shaping workers' sense of self and in relations to management's practices." Drawing on Collinson's [13] analytical tools, Gagnon [24] proposes a Webberian type of identity regulation through management's practices. According to him workers' self-identity in the context of workplace social process grows from "constant testing and competition within conditions of relative insecurity in the organisation, where survival depends on the outcome of the identity-testing." There is also the "benevolent" context of workplace in shaping workers' self-identity, "wherein monitoring and surveillance could remain important" [24], but in which prevailing workplace conditions assure identity security for the workers.

Grounded in Collinson's model of "selves", Gagnon's [24] theoretical and empirical analysis is based on categories of conforming practices that emerge in the shaping of workers' identity in the context of managerial discursive practices. According to Gagnon, workers "work on self" through "confessional and introspective" identity-shaping, and also through engaging in enacting "required self", as a way of coping and conforming to the discursive expectations [24].

The concern of post-structural-analysts, in the framing of "liminality", as this echoes in the work of Collinson [13], Fleming and Sewell [25], Hodgson [26], Gagnon [24], Alvesson and Willmott [12] has been the process of identity-formation and its regulation within the discursive framework of workplace practices. In their respective analyses, they are concerned with the issues of how identities, subjectivities, or "selves" are co-constructed, monitored, regulated and resisted in the workplace, in the context of discursive practices such as culture change programmes, training and professionalism in "management projects" [24].

As something different from mainstream normative understanding of workplace practices and processes, the congruence of "self-identity" and "liminality" as conceptual understanding has therefore provided critical and alternative lines of analysis for the interpretations of what workers' identity and selves are, under workplace discourses. In its utility, the emphases is on "ambivalence" and "contradictions" located in the self-constructions and experiences of individual worker. As workers are simultaneously being "pulled" and "pushed" by workplace rhetoric and discourse, on offer, their "selves at work" are formed within the ambivalences and contradictions thrown at them by the organisation. In Alvesson and Dertezs' (2000 cited in Gagnon [24]) "selves at work or employee subjectivities are defined as feelings, values, self-perception and cognition" shaped by the social processes of the workplace. In workplace context, self-identity is constructed by the micro-social process of workplace discursive practices in which the workers are situated.

Conceptualised as both "objects" and "subjects" in the workplace, workers' self-identity formation is not, therefore, something determined passively through "external forces or structures, nor fully a self-controlling type, shaping the world around him" (Collinson [13], cited in Gagnon [24]). It is something shaped by the "interface" in which the worker finds himself. Self-identity formations, therefore, like other strands within the over-all understanding of liminality, form part of "contested terrain" in contemporary workplaces. As a terrain for contest between the organisation and the worker himself, identity at workplace remains the "habitus" through which the management has been able to induce the dialogical processes (rhetoric) for the construction of "acceptable selves" as a form of regulation. Such identity-regulation and subjectivity is worked on by the management through "discourse mechanisms aimed at enjoining employees to construct certain self-images, aligned with management-defined objectives" [24].

Also, as noted by Alvesson and Willmott [12], identity-regulation in the workplace is achieved through the "self-positioning of employees within the managerially inspired discourse about work and, to which they are expected to be more committed" (cited in Gagnon [24]). Explaining this further, Deetz [27] adds, "modern work organisation is increasingly being pre-occupied with managing the insides – the hopes, fears and aspirations of workers, rather than their behaviours directly" (cited in Gagnon [24]). Other contributors, following Foucault's work, within the post-structuralists' tradition, stress the power dimension of identity construction in the workplace. Prasad (2005), Kondo [28], Lorbiecki (2007), and Gabriel [29], have all put emphasis on the impact of power in shaping the multiple forms of workers' identity in the workplace, (cited by Gagnon [24]. However, Lorbiecki (2007) in his own rejection of Foucault's "deterministic" reading of resistance as "being co-produced and therefore contiguous with, and immanent within power-relations", aligns his arguments with Gabriel [29], that in "the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in the process of identity construction, there are still unmanaged spaces, in which subjects (workers) counteract and shape the managerial image of self" (cited in Gagnon [24]).

Central to identity-work and its dimension in the workplace, therefore, are its "multiple" and "shifting character" engaged by the workers and influenced by the management's regulations in "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that produce a sense of coherence and contradictions along line of continuum in the work organisation" (Alvesson and Willmott [12] in Gagnon [24]. Thus, the process of identity-work, its regulation and manifestation are "mutually reinforcing" and shaped by the dialogical discourses. Indeed as pointed out by Alvesson and Willmott [12]; through "self-positioning" of employees within managerially inspired discourses about work and organisation, managerial regulatory mechanisms are achieved. Such managerial regulatory devices as noted by Alvesson and Willmott are "less obtrusive" yet more potent

and "effective" in constructing and reconstructing workers' identities in the workplace. And they manifest in diverse "cultural media" put in place by the management.

However, while sounding a note of caution in assuming that such corporate cultural media designed to shape the orientation and identity of workers are "all-consuming" and "totally dominating", Ezzamel and Willmott [30] (cited in Alvesson and Willmott [12]), urge analysts to be attentive to the consideration of expression of employee "resistance" and "subversive tendencies". In other words, workers through their own agentic and active "identity–work" make the process of managerial regulation on them "precarious", unpredictable and contested. Workers, therefore "are not passive consumers of managerially designed and designated identities" [12]. While this is so regarding employees' agentic-role, analysts still maintain that the role of liminal practices in identity regulation is significant. Indeed, it remains one of the most important "modalities of organisational control" [12].

Conceptualised as a new cultural mechanism, liminality in identity-construction is to produce employees who find meaning in corporate values. While they are expected to exhibit and maintain their "autonomy", they are equally expected to be "committed" to the process of continuous improvement in the organisation. For example, as demonstrated from the study of an oil refinery in Nigeria (Oladeinde, O. 2011), the professionals and "competent managers", in the corporation, trained and "inducted" in the management's development programmes are expected to be "competent", to take "responsibility" towards achieving the objectives of the corporation. Within the mainstream normative understanding of management practices, the concern for managerial practices and its normative objectives in the corporation, with strong emphasis on competence development for these categories of workers reflects managerial regulatory mechanism as a legitimated form of management. In this normative understanding, it is assumed that "resistance" and agentic opposition is a manifestation of poorly designed training structure and processes that can be modified through refinement of the structure and processes.

While rejecting this "positivist" line of understanding, and the essentialist interpretations of various managerial practices in the corporation, the study shows how analysts within interpretive and critical tradition of liminal-labour process analysis urge researchers to pay attention to the "agentic dimensions" that explain the "negotiated and often problematic status of the assumed shared meanings, values, beliefs, ideas and symbolic discourses" associated with management's practices (Barley and Kunda [31]; Mumby [32]; Ray [33]; and Kunda 1992; cited in Alvesson and Wilmott [12]). Their theoretical and empirical analysis demonstrate how managements, through discourses and practices may have succeeded in promoting, by design and norms, "organisational experience for consumption by employees" [12].

Researchers are, therefore, urged to focus more on the "discursive and reflexive process of identity construction" [12] and reconstruction through dialogical workplace interventions, and on which the identity-work of individual employees rests. This is because, as noted by Alvesson and Willmott [12], the "mechanisms of control, and outcomes such as rewards, leadership, task specialization and competency do not work "outside" the individual's quest for self-definition, coherence, and meaning as corporate citizen." The mechanisms, "reflexively" and "processurally" interact in the interface to produce the identity-work of the worker [12]. Identity-work is the medium through which worker's self-construction and workplace social context, work through" [12].

Strongly connected with the process of identity-work, through processural and reflexive interpretative process, is how "subjectivity is manufactured" (Deetz [34]; 1994; and Knights and Willmott [35]). However, as Alvesson and Willmott [12] caution, researchers should avoid the "heavy-hand" interpretations of influence of managerial discourse in shaping identity-work project. "Identity construction should be understood as a process in which the role of discourse in moulding the human subject is "balanced" with other elements of life-history, forged by a capacity, reflexively, to accomplish life projects out of various sources of influence and inspiration [12].

In other words, while identity-formation or construction has an outcome of "intentional modality" of liminal practices, its total influence is not to be seen or interpreted as

unproblematic since there are other mediating factors or elements that influence employees' commitment or loyalty to the organisation [12]. While there could be "instrumental valence" to compliance to managerial discourse, its "buy-in" is equally "conditional upon" other intervening variables in the organization. Thus, Alvesson and Willmott's [12] contribution conceptualizes and analyses identity-project in the context of contemporary workplace as a distinct influence of managerial practices, transmitted in the discourse of training and development, for example. It also provides illustrative empirical evidence to understanding how "greater flexibility" and "self-reflexivity are" brought into the interplay, in producing subjectivity and identity-work.

5. NEO-LIBERAL UNIVERSITY, 'LIMINALITY' AND IDENTITY-WORK OF ACADEMICS

In the context of emerging neo-liberal framing of public policy, globally, Higher Education (HE) management, in particular the university systems are not immune to the emerging dynamics. In response to the challenges, university management system, generally, have had to be innovative in devising means to improve university performance, more broadly. Various initiatives, collectively described in its generic and conceptual terms as Quality Assurance, Research Assessment, have signalled the "progress-move" expected of contemporary university managements. The global concern for quality performance and improvement in diverse remits of university system has also led to extensive and broad reforms of routine/daily academic activities.

Conceptualised through various discourse-mix of terms and the embedded normative assumptions, concepts such "quality", "innovation", "students advisory roles", and "entrepreneurship", seem to privilege emerging managerial imperatives in the university [18]. As these various "artefacts" and control imperatives in the university are characterised with accompany template for "performance measurement", panoptic surveillance are also implicated. Such performance indicatives are normatively expected to progress the university system. As observed by Keenoy [18], universities worldwide have introduced all forms of target performance, and indicators such as "best practice", and "varieties of league tables", as normative indicators of organisational and

individual academics "infinite progress". However, the emerging trends, as observed by Ferlie et al. [36]; Power, [37]; [38]; Reed [39], collectively demonstrate how, through the discourse of performance measures, social actions of actors, in particular, the academics are both constructed and co-constructed by the discourse and practice of "audit system" in the university.

More specifically, as regards the academics, the most visible manifestation of the audit culture are through two major mechanisms; routine survey and monitor, and second, their performance as teachers and researchers [18]. In the normative understanding, those two sides of the discourse practices are also referred to as "Quality Assurance" and "Research Evaluation", which according to Morley [40], are encapsulated in bureaucratic exercise, designed as quality control process, and to monitor/measure teaching and research preferences of academics. Such discourses and practices of "academic performativity" often embody and illustrate uncertainties and anxieties as universities' management routinely introduce new initiatives and directives as "ideo-culture governance" of academia. This is more so as the "iconic" perception of universities as "locus" of public research institution has altered. Diverse and numerous changes and reforms which academics have had to adjust are said to be making academic work more alienated, less collegial; with constant new performance measures, putting academics under pressure to write and publish [18]. The embodied "ideo-culture" has also been noted to have the capacity to mediate the socially transformative mode of organising academic work (Power, [37], [38]), with more temporal dimensions on academic labour process and identity.

The broad conceptual-theoretic analysis of audit regimes as normative culture in the university system has also been well analysed in the works of Berger and Luckman's (1967); Gergon's (2000); social constructionism; Law and Hassard,s (1997); actor-network, and Weick's [41]; sense-making. These conceptual frameworks, resonate with concept of liminality, have been well grounded as analytical tool to make sense of diverse and multiple levels of discourse construction confronting academics in their daily live-work experiences, thereby shaping their identity–work in the university. Empirically, the analytical tool further underscores how liminal process frame the

lived-work experiences of academics, and how this is "mutually implicated" by contexts of ideo-culture of university system [18]. Indeed, as observed by Potter [42], the "reality-construction", and the sociational process of "text-production", coupled with the discursive turns (Fairclough, [43]; [44]) account for "semiotic expressions" that frame academic life-world.

The omnipresent of new regimes of performance auditing regimes in the university system has been described as management macro-scripts [18], discursively enacted to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. For the academic production worker, therefore, the potency of these discursive scripts is exemplified by Quality Assurance and research output measurement in form of journal publications metrics. For the sustainability of quality process at the level of managerial practices, the legitimacy of Quality Assurance system as performance metrics has become "wallpaper", potentially framed with less contestations by the academics. Discursively constructed to herald the universities as "Centres of Excellence", in teaching and research, Quality Assurance exemplified the institutionalization of audit regimes. While traditional "production-work" of academics is privilege around teaching and research, and attending conferences, the discursive turn of Quality Assurance has co-constructed the reality of academic work, and the embedded identity-work. The discursive regimes have led to the emergence of academic managers [39], who, through the instrumentality of "carrots and sticks", introduced via the audit system, provide institutional rewards mechanism for academics [45-47].

The regulatory agency of the university governance; National University Commission (NUC), for example in Nigeria, traditionally has the responsibility to introduce "benchmark mechanisms"; a panoptic service, with periodic visitations to the universities in the country. The aim of the visitation panel is to scrutinize every aspect of managerial policy, procedures and performance of the universities, (NUC 2021). Elaborate machinery and preparedness are expected to be put in place by the respective universities, in line with "the discursive and material processes" [18] of the visitation, and thereby able to engender new "managerial values", in terms of programs and academic quality. Such managerial values are embedded

in the academic lifeworld; co constructing their identity-work.

6. DISCUSSION

The discursive expectations of universities' managements for excellence in academic activities broadly, often privilege "ritualized behaviour", routinely measured into comparative performance outcome [18]. Core academic activities, such as teaching, research and community engagements, commonly enacted as "primary assignments" have all become embodied into "macro-context" of scrutiny and evaluation through audit assessment. In the context, self-discipline justifications for conformity, or "not resisting" [18], reproduce the identity-work of academics. Individual academic adaptations replicated the discursive ingredients of "self-discipline". Managerially defined scripts that guide organised strategic plans, decision-making and daily procedural work activities are also embodied in "ideo-culture" of the university. It is in this embodiment that behavioural compliance is also scripted for academic conduct or misconduct, and in which new work-norms are legitimated [18]. Thus, the ideo-text of contemporary, neoliberal university, with enacted audit-architecture and procedures detail for academics a wide range of localized performativity measures and acceptable conduct in the university. Accordingly, the once espoused academic identities of autonomy, flexibility and professionalism have been reconfigured with "new" expectations and normalcy.

In order to continuously assure their "visible performity", individual universities and their academic managers are compelled to design and adopt acceptable local discursive participation, in form of institutional arrangements [48]. It is from the broad "universal" ideo-text, enacted by the regulatory agencies that specific teaching and research strategies, academic planning and programs must be developed and "localised". For performativity of this policy strategies and programs, appropriate committee structures, collegiality, monitoring procedures and practices to elicit appropriate conducts in the implementation must be put in place. Expectedly therefore, policies, executive-orders, and "operational artefacts" must be well-nuanced for legitimacy and desired "structural change" in over-all universities activities. This structural change is also expected to reflect new

work patterns, work-loads, rewards system and incentives, criteria for recruitment and promotion of academic staff [18]; all expected to resonate with neo-liberal governance of university system. These linguistic artefacts [18] symbolize the ideo-culture and re-prioritized content and value of academic work in the university.

However, as academics identity-work is being reshaped and co-constructed in the context of emerging dynamics of "performative regimes", they do also exhibit what is referred to as "discursive distancing" and "resistance" [18], even as they could be overwhelmed by the demands of new expectations of audit- culture. As the organisational artefacts permeate through the university system, framing the work experience and life-world of academics, enhancing capabilities and capacities, but also constrains and engender resistance. Nevertheless, re-acculturation of cultural-ideology of performativity regimes remains immanent and palpable; illustrating liminal temporal dimensions [18] of academic life-world. This is more so as academics have to cope with complex array of tasks, routinely controlled in the performativity of "new normal". In the life-world of academics, pressure and anxiety to write and get published have become a "number-game"; a selection approach to building C.V. The discursive practices have therefore approximated social practice of work process; co-constructing identity-work, in a well-structured panoptic environment [18]. The once highly "iconic" spatio-temporal "occupational habituation" of academic life-world seemed to have been circumscribed.

7. CONCLUSION

Attempts have been made in this paper to provide an analysis of mutual implications of generic discourse and dimensions of audit culture, and how this has co-constructed the identity-work of academics in contemporary universities. The identity-work co-constructed in their response to new managerial narratives in the universities has also implicated the liminal personae of academics that emerged from the social context of neo-liberal universities. It has been demonstrated in the paper that the ensuing diverse forms of managerial discourse have re-produced a new normalcy, with new discursive narratives.

However, it is also clear from the analysis that these are not without "discursive distance" and "resistance" from the knowledge-production workers. The analysis shows that while "audit control" remains emblematic of neo-liberal universities, academics inhabit domains that are still "unmanaged" and "unmanageable" where "distance" and "resistance" reside. Without a conceptual and empirical interrogation that show liminality of academic life-world, evidence of normative and mutual benefits of "discursive-texts" in the universities will produce "agency" that obscure their covert opposition and resistance [49-51]. Academics could "collude" with the "hubris" of 'managerial practices' to enact their identity-work in the new normalcy. Through theoretical reconceptualization, the paper demonstrates the specific dimensions of this identity-work. The paper therefore seeks to re-conceptualize academics' 'identity-work' and 'agency, in the context of dynamics of neo-liberal universities; agency that is not overtly under the absolute grip of audit-control, but with a multiplicity of identities and multilevel manifestations.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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