

Gender Effects of New Public Management on Subjectification: A Qualitative Analysis of German and French Academics¹

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1. Introduction

The implementation of New Public Management (NPM) in academia in France and Germany brings about new managerial control mechanisms based on quantitative performance indicators. In our research project we analyze the effects of these new governance forms on female and male academics and in particular on their careers. NPM in academia denotes all reforms and instruments seeking to raise efficiency and intensify competition in science. (Jansen 2007; Boer, Enders, Schimank 2007)

In Germany new mechanisms of public budgeting and management by objectives were introduced to enhance competition not only among universities but also on a micro level, namely among the producers of knowledge – the researchers. Salaries of professors as well as their additional staff and equipment resources have become dependent on quantitative performance indicators like external financial resources and the number of publications in highly ranked journals. New categories of professorships not only with lower basic salaries, but also with worsened contract conditions in terms of fixed-term contracts instead of tenure have been introduced. For predocs and postdocs competition has been intensified by short- and part-time contracts. All this has resulted in an increase of the number of early career academics while the number of professorships remains constant.

To improve the position of Germany on the global market of knowledge, competition in research and among universities has been intensified by the so-called Initiative of Excellence, which is publically - financed with billions of Euros. International peer reviews took place to evaluate research programmes, graduate schools and university restructuring concepts. The top universities got the high quality label of excellence for a limited period of time.

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The discourse of excellence shaped also the agenda of research and higher education in France. Highly competitive international research programmes and financial awards on the individual level of academics were labeled as excellent.

In France there has also been a reorganization of the higher education and research system, involving the establishment of the National Research Agency (ANR) that introduces the need to compete for research funds, the Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education (AERES) and the Law on Freedom and Responsibilities of Universities (LRU). Public research institutions like the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) with researchers in unlimited work contracts lost their predominance to the form of research in projects with staff in short term contracts. The financial resources have become distributed according to highly competitive procedures. All these changes go hand in hand with the rise of quantitative performance indicators in line with the logic of NPM (Gillet and Gillet 2013) – something that serves to intensify competition, control and in particular self-control.

In France and Germany, we argue, these developments have resulted in a deterioration of work contracts and work conditions as well as in a high uncertainty concerning a successful career in academia.

In the light of this, this paper seeks to explore the question: How have these changes resulted from NPM in higher education affected gender? We address this question by drawing on qualitative empirical data, in particular semi-structured interviews with academics in both countries. On the basis of this we show how NPM involves subjectification processes that bring about gender effects.

2. Theoretical Foundations

Adopting a Foucauldian feminist framework, we draw on the concept of subjectification in order to study the specific ways in which these changes affect the researcher's self. Following Foucault (1982, 1995, 2008, 2009), the notion of subjectification refers to social and historical transformations and power structures on the basis of which the subject is constituted. Subjectification is the effect of discourses and social practices, which reflect dominant power relations. Specifically the poststructuralist theorist Judith Butler has brought in Foucault's theory of the subject to feminist theory. She postulates that the meaning and constitution of gender are not given by nature, but are a result of subjectification in a society with a masculine and heterosexual normative hegemony (Butler 1990, 1993, 1997). Bröckling has applied these insights concerning the subjectification processes to the realm of work and careers, which is also our focus here. Bröckling (2007) shows that the new highly competitive work conditions (for example the expansion of short-term contracts) bring about new forms of entrepreneurial subjectification. Building on this, we seek to examine the concept of the homo oeconomicus through a gender lens. The homo oeconomicus "[...] responds systematically to modifications in

the variables of the environment, appears precisely as someone manageable, someone who responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment. *Homo oeconomicus* is someone who is eminently governable. From being the intangible partner of *laissez-faire*, *homo oeconomicus* now becomes the correlate of a governmentality which will act on the environment and systematically modify its variables.” (Foucault 2008, 270f.) Being far from gender neutral the *homo oeconomicus* has properties normally attributed to male subjects (see Deem 2003, p.243 and Barry, Berg, Chandler 2012, p. 64f.). Among these we find high competitiveness, ruthlessness, single-mindedness, self-serving, self-protection, acting less collegiately in pursuing the performance objectives in an academic career (see Thomas, Davies 2002, p. 383, Leeman 2009). These gendered ascriptions do not follow essentialism, but reflect the social and cultural construction of gender. We shall explore how the interpellation (Althusser 1971) of the subject as *homo oeconomicus* and entrepreneurial self (Bröckling 2007, p.19 ff.) implies forms of gendered subjectification.

3. Methodological design of the empirical research

The research is based on a mixed methods approach entailing document analyses, statistical data analysis of the higher education sector and interviews. Semi-structured interviews with female and male academics from the postdoc position upwards at two major universities in France and Germany and at public research institutions have been conducted in 2013/2014. Included are academics in leading positions of university bodies and of gender equality management units. The interviews focused on questions concerning personal experience of the academic career, work conditions, production of knowledge, relations to colleagues, level of competition, the role of performance indicators and the work-life-balance etc.

While doing the interviews we found out that governance of academia by the NPM regime has different impacts on academic disciplines. Although the performance-oriented distribution of financial resources to whole universities and departments is a new form of management by objectives for all disciplines, different cultures of doing research, of publications, of internationality have to be taken into account. Sciences and mathematics including pure research in medicine have long traditions in competing for financial resources to do research in the form of projects as well as in applying quantitative performance indicators, such as the number of papers in international highly ranked journals or the number of successful doctoral students. In so far we do not expect such a deep change of career and work conditions in these disciplines. However, the mentioned performance indicators and objectives were transferred to all academic fields, among them philology, law, cultural studies, social and economic sciences, in which other criteria of academic recognition and success dominated so far. Following this, we tried to reflect the categories of the different academic disciplines in our sample of about 35 interviews in each country.

Our research design does not include a longitudinal study that compares processes of subjectification of academics before the new governance forms had been introduced and after they have been implemented. In order to capture the changes, we instead also selected female and male academics for interviews, who started their academic career during the last 15 to 20 years and whose processes of subjectification were influenced by the NPM regime.

4. Processes of subjectification and gender

Analysing our semi-structured interviews, we develop how new forms of governance in higher education and research produce new possibilities of gendered differentiations in the careers of female and male academics.

4.1. Intensified competition and uncertainty

Let us first look at the intensification of competition and its effects on academic careers. As a result of the introduction of research in externally financed projects (see the French case), the enormous increase of predocs and postdocs in short-term contracts and precarious work conditions (in France and Germany) and the new categories of professorships, some of them without tenure (in Germany), the demand for long-term positions in academia has greatly increased. However, this demand cannot be satisfied so that even academics (both male and female) who perform highly according to the NPM standards have increasingly difficulties to find a position . This mismatch between the demand and supply for academic positions has demotivating effects, as the young male academic Michael T., a junior professor in Philology, expresses (Sept. 6, 2013):

“I cannot call this any longer competition, because there is such a big discrepancy [...between the supply and demand side]. To call this competition is [...] euphemising, because there is the problem, that people, who are good [academics] without doubt won't get a position.”²

Given these prospects, Michael T. is preparing for another career outside of teaching and research in academia.

The intensification of uncertainty and the increase in risks of an academic career has put a lot of strain on the subject. The introduction of lower professorships without tenure, often declared as a

² This quote and the following ones of our interviewees have been translated by the authors of the paper. All names of the interviewees are pseudonyms.

gender equality programme, has enlarged the time of uncertainty and reduces the chances of an alternative career outside of research and higher education, for example in the private industry. In particular female academics have to find a way how to combine their family engagements with career requirements. So at least in Germany female interviewees doubt the feasibility of the present academic career structure, being aware that the probability for women to get a professorship with tenure is lower than 30 %, while for men the chances are more than 70 % (Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskonferenz 2012, p. 27). The troubling sense of uncertainty this gives rise to is captured in the remarks of Laura R., Professor of Mathematics, without tenure, Sept. 19, 2013:

“What I find, you cannot address enough, is really the problematic situation with time-limited positions. [...] Concerning gender equality programmes, there has to be a change in the system. And at once the problem, that many women do not continue after their PhD and prefer to look for an unlimited job somewhere [...] Yes, that is, I think, in my daily life and in my career what strains me the most [...], that *there is a sword hanging over you*, that in fact your job is safe for three years only.” (emphasis added)

Processes of subjectification, in which subjects are formed, have a double meaning (Foucault 1982; Butler, 1997): the subject is not only submitted to rationalities and technologies of governance, but also has the agency to resist, to comply or to opt for other career paths in life. Highly qualified female academics being submitted and aware of the growing risks and uncertainty seem more likely to give up their academic career than their male colleagues.

As Karin S., Prof. of Medicine puts it (Oct. 1, 2013) in response to the question of how she supports and promotes female researchers in her research group:

“Yes the problem is [...] that unfortunately not all women [...] want to follow this path, but I am a very good, a perfect supplier of postdocs to the chemical industry [...] There [...] then they get their children [...], they prefer [this job in industry] being manager of a laboratory to a pure academic career. This means [...] that women drop out of academia, because they see the limited compatibility of family and their professional academic life [...]. I have two [women] there now, who got a permanent contract, they got a maternity leave for one year and then return and work half-time [...]. Unfortunately there are very, very few women, who want to pursue an [academic] career.”

In the following case of Caroline S., a young *maîtresse de conférence* (MCF) in Information and Communications Studies at a French university, strong compliance with the intensification of competition dominates her care of the self. In her successful career path towards getting a position with tenure, she has excelled in teaching and research despite having taken a maternity leave. Her narrative is one of a successful self and implies a strong gender-neutral discourse: Here gender differentiations have become invisible: :

“ [...] I have SEEN (she insists) sometimes people not doing anything, they are paid as academics [with the obligation to research] and they have not published anything for ten years. I find it shameful. So after a while, we are teacher-researcher and at a certain moment, if you want to promote the research, people need some motivation. If you publish ten articles per year and it does not change anything compared to the one who publishes nothing [...]. So no, we are [...], our job is a position of teaching and doing research and at some point there are [...some limits]”. (April 10/11, 2014)

Caroline S. has internalized the importance and the meritocratic character of quantitative indicators of performance and the subsequent mechanisms of distinctions.

4.2. The homo oeconomicus and gender attributions

We will concentrate now on the entrepreneurial self and its agency as homo oeconomicus. How were gendered attributions at play - either of the self or of others - when evaluations of and decisions about careers of young academics took place?

The case of Dora K., Professor of Informatics, without tenure, provides insights on this question. Referring to a talk with a senior male professor, who was her mentor as part of a gender equality coaching programme she participated in, Dora states (Aug. 29, 2013):

”I believe, there was a little bit the hidden agenda, what you may expect from life [...] And [...] how much success and how many things you can expect in life [...] and that, if you have already five children, then you cannot expect, that you may accomplish something else as well [...] Yes, I found it a little bit awkward, and this was the mentor. Him, I didn't find him very suitable [as a mentor]. Really, it doesn't encourage you.”

The attribution of incorporate gendered characteristics (Bourdieu 2001) – in our case female ones - is expressed in this comment by Vera B., Prof. of Philology, Nov. 13, 2013:

“You are always a woman. [...] There is no escape. It happened when I substituted a male professor, that I was perceived as a secretary [...]. I was encountered with this secretary story many times [...]. And also this less confidence [in my person], different behavior and in addition I am small and petite [...]. You undergo this perennially [...]”

The next generation of dominant male gatekeepers has already entered the stage of the gendered power play of competition in academia, when in this case a pregnant candidate for a professorship is audited. Monika R., Prof. of Sciences, Febr. 2, 2014: “I think, we search for a candidate for the next 30 years and if she has in the first five years children, [...] this makes at the start no difference [...] And [...] in this case [...] really the students [in the committee] did the saying: 'Yes, but she then has no time.' “

These quotations from our interviews show, that the intensification of competition, in general and the gendered attributions of the homo oeconomicus, the core of the entrepreneurial self, in particular, opens further possibilities of gendered differentiations, decreasing career chances of women in academia.

4.3. Negotiations about academic performance objectives and its implications

If – in the case of the German university system - candidates were offered a professorship with tenure, then they have to negotiate with the university about an additional sum on top of their salary as well as the personal, material, and financial resources. These offers are bound to performance objectives, such as the number of publications in highly ranked journals, or success in getting external research grants, that need to be fulfilled in a certain period of time. We observe here an example of management by objectives - one of the cores of NPM - in which the compliance and the agency of the academic self seem to be the decisive variable of success. It is self-understood that a failure concerning these objectives will be sanctioned by reducing the financial and other endowments. In these negotiations a win-win-situation can be the outcome, if the rationale of the homo oeconomicus determines actions. However, the young female professors in our sample we interviewed indicated that in these negotiations gender attributions play an important role. For instance, Corinna L., Prof. of Medicine (Oct. 1, 2013) describes this in the negotiating meeting with the university:

“I came to my first negotiation for a professorship, I was pregnant with my second child and he [a male professor negotiating on behalf of the dean][...] knew that I already have one [child]. And [I] want to negotiate for [the supplementary resources] of a [...] professorship. ... When there is a man sitting there, whose wife was at home, who naturally has quite another everyday family life, [...]I can understand, that [...] he thinks: ‘What shall I negotiate with her?’ [...]First, you had to overcome this, [then you have to argue,] that you will as a matter of course extra-pay and that you will this and that [...]”

Similarly, Monika R., Prof. of Sciences, states (Febr. 2, 2014):

“I think of course, yes, that on the average this fact, that you now can and must negotiate your salary, that, to tell the truth, is rather a disadvantage for women...Male colleagues have told me: ‘If you negotiate with Mr. [...]. He is very tough.’ And so on. I did not a bit feel like this. I spoke to him. It was a very normal talking. And we came to an agreement. Then I thought, did they go on further? That he felt driven into a corner? And then it yet happened in quite another way, as I could imagine. That is, of course, a supposition. That is why I think, this point, that you should and must negotiate, is not good for equal opportunity policy [...]”

Negotiations which are less successful for the professor can have a negative impact on the professor's performance level. In particular it can lead to less staff in a research group, less material and financial resources for laboratories, for conferences, international networking, less reduction in teaching etc. and this means that the professor has a less of a competitive position to apply for external research grants.

Thus, primary and secondary effects of management by objectives in a still masculine dominated power structure in academia aggravate each other and through fine mechanisms open new ways in which gender differentiations take place.

4.4. Contradictions

However, the representation and narrative of gender effects of NPM in academia are not always the same, as has been shown by the above mentioned French case of Caroline S. Here we have to take into consideration that in France still 65 % of faculty staff has tenured positions, while in Germany only 25 % (Keller 2012). Up to now there are more positions to compete for with chances to escape a very long period of uncertainty, although competition has been intensified by neoliberal forms of governance. Another difference to Germany is the higher number of female faculty, especially among the *maîtres.ses de conférence* with more than 40 %. (Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur 2012)

Last but not least we observe in Caroline's case intervening variables to gender effects of NPM which might explain the adaptation to the agency of the homo oeconomicus on a more general basis. Her institutional origin was a Grande Ecole, i.e. a very selective and distinguished one in comparison to most of the universities. She participated in an Excellence Initiative. Her laboratory is part of a Labex - Laboratory position within the game of excellence. Thus, she was scientifically socialized with a strong performance culture within a competitive work regime, and a strong stigmatization concerning those who "do not publish" and therefore "do not belong". To write her dissertation with a "highly charismatic male professor" (supportive male professor driven by the NPM regime) might also help to understand the new rules of the academic game. Being strategic about obtaining PhD funding, complimenting her professors, always saying yes to any extra duty, keeping on producing, being always on time, obtaining signs of recognition from masculine leaders, observing sanctions and exclusions, becoming familiar with evaluations early in one's career have become necessary preconditions that can explain how academics may successfully integrate themselves into the NPM regime.

This means that the successful academic subject complying with the masculine norms of competition has to learn from early on how to handle the new rules of the NPM regime and how to present themselves in line with to NPM's competitive criteria.

5. Outlook

The next steps of our current research project study more systematically the patterns and intervening variables of subjectification that can explain adaptation, compliance and resistance. One central question is here, which conditions in academia in France and Germany determine similarities or dissimilarities of the academic self, being interpellated by the new forms of governance. This will allow us to further explore the different kinds of narratives the academics follow in their statements, especially concerning gender.

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