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In/citing affect in the global higher education market: the emotionality of research policy texts (0049)

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This paper is concerned with the circulation and generation of affect in the higher education research policy field. In particular, I draw on Ahmed's (2004) notion of the 'emotionality of texts' to explore the ways in which emotions are incited and invoked in/through key research policy texts, including those of government and other significant players in this field. I consider the ways in which this differentially impacts upon and is taken up by academics, drawing on the research literature which has explored the impact of research policy developments on academics' work and experiences (Henkel 1999; Acker and Armenti 2004; Lucas 2006; Leathwood and Read 2012). A particular concern is with the way in which the affective economy of the academy works to re/inscribe and/or challenge inequalities.

The context is an increasingly competitive global higher education market, with research key to university positionality in national, regional and global hierarchies of prestige. It is, therefore, a high stakes endeavour for universities, departments and individual academics. Science and research have also been prioritised by national and cross-national policy-makers, seen as crucial to innovation and economic growth, particularly following the 2008 financial crisis. Yet both science and higher education constitute paradigmatic examples of emotion-free zones – constructed as arenas of pure rationality objectivity concerned only with the search for, and dissemination of, new knowledge and 'truth'. Affect, it is commonly assumed, has no place in this.

Yet both the field of higher education (Clegg and David 2006; Leathwood and Hey 2009; Hey 2011) and policy (Ahmed 2003; Ahmed 2004; Hey and Leathwood 2009) are replete with emotion. As Leathwood and Hey (2009, p. 438) argue, it is necessary 'to work with an imagination that is attuned to, rather than turned from, emotion' if we are to understand the inequalities and power relations of the academy. My focus here is on the ways in which research policy texts do emotion. Ahmed explores how texts name or perform emotion - 'how words for feeling, and objects of feeling, circulate and generate effects' (2004, p. 14). She argues, however, that 'we need to avoid assuming that emotions are "in" the materials we assemble', nor need words for emotions be in the text. Nevertheless, the examples Ahmed uses are highly emotive - they very clearly signify and produce emotional responses. Ahmed's focus is on racist discourses of othering, particularly in relation to the construction of immigrants as a threat, and she begins her analysis with an extract from a British National Front poster that includes the claim that 'swarms of illegal immigrants and bogus asylum seekers invade Britain' (ibid. p.1.). The emotionality of this text is plain to see. In contrast, science and research policy texts tend to present as neutral, technical and as apparently emotionless. It is these that form the basis of this paper.

An initial examination of a selection of policy texts from the UK has been conducted. This included UK government policy statements about science and research which, though notably

less evocative of the affective than Ahmed's examples, nevertheless do emotion work. This can be seen in the production of binaries and exclusions, in 'feel good' words and in the silences in these texts through which the production of denigrated 'others' takes place. Other texts from this policy community have also been examined, including those of university 'mission groups' in the UK. Discourses of 'excellence', of 'top', 'best', 'good' and 'world class' universities infuse texts across this policy field. Discourses of fear and threat are also evident, particularly in relation to higher levels of public funding of science and research in other countries. 'The East' is constituted as a specific threat, with the affective economy of the market - of risk, threat, fear and danger – working through these texts.

In this paper, I extend this initial analysis to include key science and research policy texts of regional (European) and global (e.g. OECD) policy bodies. Utilising a Foucauldian-informed feminist post-structuralist approach to policy analysis (Allan, Iverson et al. 2010), along with data from a qualitative study of academics' experiences of the impact of research policy developments, my concern is to explore the circulation and production of affect through these policy texts. Specifically I consider the ways in which this works both to produce individual and collective subjectivities, and to re/constitute hierarchies and inequalities in the academy.

References