

RESEARCHING PROFESSIONAL BIOGRAPHIES OF EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS IN NEW DARK TIMES

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Researching professional biographies of educational professionals in new dark times

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Researching professional biographies of educational professionals in *new* dark times

Abstract

Education reform under the modernisation agenda both in England and internationally has signified the restoration of the ‘private’ and the decline of ‘public’ education. Deploying Arendtian thinking on assimilation and identity, we argue that these ongoing reforms are indeed dark times for education professionals. We examine what ‘new dark times’ mean for those in leader roles in schools and organisations that are contracted to deliver, such as a multi-academy trust (MAT). Based on a year-long research project which focussed on a multi academy trust in England, the article reports on the position and practice of the CEO, KT Edwards in these new dark times. We conclude that the emerging CEO position is being defined through individual positioning, a repudiation of the past and the assimilation into the private realm of non-education dark times.

Key words: Arendt, multi-academy trusts, CEO, privatisation, school leadership

Introduction

The modernisation of public services education in western-style democracies is premised on the restoration of the private as the legitimate and liberating site for decision-making and choice (Gunter, 2018a). Private consortia provide school places in the form of charters in the USA, free schools in Sweden, and academies in England, and determine the curriculum, and the composition of the workforce. Contemporary histories of such modernisation in England display potential along with a vitality and optimism for professional practices (e.g. Astle and Ryan, 2008), where it seems that such reforms have ‘switched on’ the light for innovation. We examine such claims by examining the professional biography and practices of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) in England where we report on data from the *Leadership of the Lawrence Trust Project* (LLTP). Specifically, we argue that reforms have ‘dimmed’ and are on a trajectory to actually ‘switching off’ the light of public services education. Following Newman and Clarke (2009) we are concerned with how within such a trend

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3 “publicness is constituted” (p 2) through the emerging advantages of private decisions,
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5 locations and exchange networks.
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10 Like Hannah Arendt (1993), we use the motif of ‘dark times’ from Brecht’s poem *To*
11
12 *Those Born After* where he describes the rupture with the past:
13

14 Truly I live in dark times!

15 ...What times are these, in which

16 A conversation about trees is almost a crime

17 For in so doing we maintain our silence about so much wrongdoing? (Brecht,
18
19
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21
22 2019, p. 734).
23
24

25 Whilst acknowledging that ‘history knows many periods of dark times’ (Arendt, 1993, p.
26
27 11) and researchers are mapping this emerging obscurity in education (e.g. Au and
28
29 Ferrare, 2015; Gunter, 2018b; Ravitch, 2014), we illuminate *new* dark times through a
30
31 case analysis from the LLTP. A CEO of a MAT is an emerging new role, where MATs
32
33 operate independently of local authorities and are centrally funded by the government
34
35 using public resources. Our data show that what is distinctively new about current dark
36
37 times is how decision-making in the name of the public has been rendered ‘darkly’
38
39 private. Following Newman and Clarke (2009, p2) regarding how and why public
40
41 services education was politicised within public institutions, staffed by professionals with
42
43 a “public service ethos”, and hence “served” and was “accountable” to the public, the
44
45 notion and reality of publicness is now being depoliticised in order to legitimise private
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47 interests, arenas and advantages. Depoliticisation in the provision of school places is
48
49 premised on a return to the privileged privacy of individualised beliefs, decisions and
50
51 activity within a concealed world of the family enabled by philanthropy, corporatisation,
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53 and faith groups. Educational professionals who are already working in the system are
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55 required to forget, and hence adopt the espoused values, purposes and practices from the
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3 modernised system or render themselves disposable (Courtney and Gunter 2015; Gunter
4
5 2018b). We recognise that little independent research explores the emerging phenomenon
6
7 of the CEO as a dynamic lived experience, where those who take up such a post may have
8
9 a professional biography that is located in the public politicised system that predates the
10
11 reforms. The data from the LLTP gives us the opportunity to examine ethnographically
12
13 the professional biography of such a CEO, how he entered a public system and is now
14
15 working hard as a moderniser. Our approach is novel because for the first time we
16
17 examine the CEO role and the actual role incumbent through utilising Arendtian
18
19 scholarship of the ‘parvenu’ as yearning for assimilation juxtaposed with the ‘pariah’ as
20
21 outsider. Our contribution is to provide new evidence and conceptualisations of
22
23 professional practice that identify how and why the case of KT Edwards illustrates a
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25 parvenu in waiting while in the public system, and how his current adaptation as a CEO
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27 uses his assumed public services pariah experience to enable the modernisation process.
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35 **Educational professionals in new dark times**

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37 Educational professionals who work in public-services education in England are
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39 informed they are now working in the ‘light’ where neoliberal and neoconservative ‘light
40
41 shiners’ have not only exposed the ‘red tape’ of bureaucracy and the ‘provider capture’
42
43 of professionals but have enabled opportunities afforded by the domination of private
44
45 interests and the privatisation of educational services (e.g. Guggenheim, 2010).
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49 In reality, darkness has descended. **Such darkness is both structural and cultural**
50
51 where reforms have been introduced across nation states that disassemble and halt
52
53 universal access to a free-at-the-point-of-delivery school education based on a broad and
54
55 balanced curriculum, with teaching and learning provided by graduate professionals.
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57 Those who entered the education profession before waves of intensive reforms are
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3 required *to forget*: they have been re-professionalised through new branded identities (as
4 a business, philanthropic charity or faith community) and are trained as leaders, who lead
5 the vision and exercise leadership through securing compliance to the head-office 'there-
6 is-no-alternative' vision. Forgetting public professional histories and research is premised
7 on the logic of evidence-informed policy and practice, but it constitutes a form of
8 darkness because much policy is premised on lies (Gorski and Zenkov, 2014). **Normative
9 and ideological claims are made about the purposes of the school and the school as an
10 organisation, whereby modernising narratives of leadership, performance and
11 responsiveness to consumer needs are seductive, and render alternative ideas, language
12 and practice as oppositional to effectively meeting children's 'needs'**. This darkness can
13 be understood through what Appadurai (2017) identifies as 'democracy fatigue' (p.1),
14 whereby the 'will of the people' is espoused to fabricate economic control, promote
15 hostile environments, and pursue and/or condone criminality, and is based on 'the
16 fabricated world of political truth created by mass media' (Benhabib 1996, p. 14). It
17 seems that people are 'fed up with democracy itself' (Appadurai 2017, p. 7) and in voting
18 for anti-democratic leaders, they are in effect voting for 'exit' (p. 7) and consenting to
19 policies that threaten their interests.

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Darkness generates performative isolation. In Arendtian (1958) terms, teachers labour over data production, work to evaluate that data, but rarely take action in the public realm to consider and understand the purposes of this individualised calculation. Decision-making has shifted from publicly accountable institutions and elected officials to depoliticised private arenas, and those involved use privacy to operate in an espoused public interest. Such decision-making is focused on the policy-enabled disposability of children, families and staff who do not fit. In England, for example, a catastrophe is unfolding: reports of corruption (e.g. Beckett, 2007); taxpayer-funded corporate-level

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3 salaries (e.g. Mansell, 2018); school closures leaving children and parents without a
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5 school place (e.g. McInerney, 2018); children being removed from the roll due to their
6
7 predicted negative impact on school-performance data (e.g. Weale, 2018); and
8
9 educational professionals facing non-renewal of their contracts owing to non-compliance
10
11 (e.g. Courtney and Gunter, 2015). Evidence shows that over time, education professionals
12
13 in England have taken a range of positions:
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17 ▪ **Accepting:** headteachers may be ambivalent but they are prepared to work
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19 within the new system (Goddard, 2014);
- 20
21 ▪ **Leading:** headteachers who are fully compliant and who seek to lead and
22
23 develop the reforms (Astle and Ryan, 2008);
- 24
25 ▪ **Complaining:** headteachers have questioned vociferously the logic and
26
27 challenges of certain reforms (Arrowsmith, 2001);
- 28
29 ▪ **Resisting:** headteachers have sought to re-interpret reforms and be non-
30
31 compliant with certain changes (Winkley, 2002);
- 32
33 ▪ **Refusing:** educational professionals who may seek promotion but not to
34
35 the top role of headteacher (Stanford, 2007);
- 36
37 ▪ **Leaving:** headteachers have left rather than enact the new changes
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39 (Turner, 2018).
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45 Historical evidence shows that headteachers can and do position differently from each
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47 other in regard to proposed and unfolding reforms, and in ways that can be contradictory
48
49 but survivable (see Grace, 1995; Gunter and Forrester, 2010; Gunter and Hall, 2013).
50
51 However, in new dark times, those who head up education services such as MATs and
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53 schools in England, are required to reject democratic oversight, and to demonstrate
54
55 enthusiasm for leading and leadership that is [less about the curriculum, pedagogy and](#)
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57 [assessment for all children as educable and is more about protecting and enabling the](#)
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3 private interests that underpin brand integrity by excluding children from taking up a
4 school place (e.g. faith observance; IQ testing; boy-girl identification). In reality, this
5 means that major social ruptures such as gun and knife crime are responded to through
6 securitisation of the school (e.g. scanners, expulsions); major economic ruptures such as
7 the closure of a local employer is responded to through aspirational social mobility (e.g.
8 segregated schools where the non-achieving poor are kept away from talented, achieving
9 children); and major cultural ruptures such as population movements are responded to
10 through assimilation (e.g. segregated schools that embrace children who benefit the
11 league-table position) (see Gunter 2018b; Saltman and Gabbard 2003). This unfolds in
12 the everydayness of school life through approved-of behaviour discourse for children
13 (e.g. silent corridors, eyes forward in classrooms and mobile-phone bans) and teachers
14 (e.g. compliant performance followers); the removal of sites of dissent from meetings
15 through to schools built without staffrooms; combined with the ‘celebritisation’ of
16 headteachers as chief executives who are feted by government. While there are emerging
17 accounts of new forms of educational provision and professional positioning as ‘school
18 leaders’ (e.g. Kulz, 2017; Salokangas and Ainscow, 2018), there has been little
19 examination of position-taking by those inhabiting the CEO role in MATs in these new
20 dark times. Our position is that the field of educational leadership does not currently
21 access the intellectual resources necessary to bring meaning and explanation to this new
22 role in new dark times, and so we argue that Arendtian scholarship provides the required
23 thinking tools.

24 **Researching educational professionals in new dark times**

25 Accounts by professionals about doing the headteacher role in England are replete with
26 events, reflections and legacy assessments about what the job actually is and what it
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3 means for the person doing the job (e.g. Clark, 1998; Daniels, 2011; Thomson, 2009).
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5 While there are some ethnographic-style projects and reflexive discussions (e.g. Gewirtz,
6
7 2002; Ribbins and Sherratt, 1999; Southworth, 1995), the main approach to researching
8
9 into professional practice has tended to focus on researcher-practitioner interviews. This
10
11 form of data generation enables educational professionals as respondents to compose and
12
13 emplot *post hoc* narratives about their professional biographies through independently
14
15 designed projects (e.g. Ribbins, 1997) with a range of theorising about practice (e.g.
16
17 Sugrue, 2005). These approaches provide understandings about purposes and practices in
18
19 changing times, but the underlying assumption is that the settlement regarding the
20
21 legitimacy of public-services education is intact. New dark times are dismantling public-
22
23 services education based on the disposability of people, and so there is a need to think
24
25 about methodologies and methods that capture the realities of positioning by those who
26
27 entered a predominantly public system, but who are now working in a privatised system.
28
29 We intend following up on Arendt's contention that 'even in the darkest of times we have
30
31 the right to expect some illumination' (Arendt, 1993, p. ix), and we intend doing this
32
33 through innovative empirical and conceptual analysis.
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40 Our empirical approach is based on a year-long ethnographic study of one MAT
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42 CEO in England, KT Edwards. A headteacher for over ten years, [the Lawrence Trust was](#)
43
44 [formed in 2012 with](#) Edwards becoming its CEO in 2014 [comprising eight schools](#)
45
46 covering a wide geographical region [encompassing three LAs](#). [The Trust employs over](#)
47
48 [1000 staff and educates over 6000 pupils](#). The study followed established ethnographic
49
50 traditions of case studies of single schools (e.g. Kulz, 2017) and those of individual head
51
52 teachers (or Principals) (e.g. Southworth, 1995; Wolcott, 1973). We sought to investigate
53
54 the 'complex specificness' (Geertz, 1973, p. 26) [of KT Edwards as a single case](#), where
55
56 the 'effective story should be specific and circumstantial,' (Wolcott, 1995, p. 174). The
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2
3 single case enables a particular telling of Edwards' story as an instantiation of the
4 emerging CEO position for both the individual and for the system. [Adopting a micro-](#)
5 [ethnographic approach](#), we were concerned with 'the local and situated ecology' of
6 Edwards' operations, (Garcez, 2017, p. 435). Four hour long semi-structured interviews
7 took place, each with a key theme. The first centred on Edwards' career history (CHI),
8 the second on values and beliefs (BPI), the third on MAT structure (STR), and the fourth
9 on Edwards' localised networks (NWI). All interviews were recorded, transcribed and
10 subjected to member checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Informal unscripted
11 discussions took place providing a rich source of data. Ten shadowing episodes
12 comprising [trailing Edwards on visits to schools and lessons, during duties, school tours,](#)
13 [car journeys](#) and seventeen more formal [observations including open evenings, a staff](#)
14 [recruitment morning and formal meetings \(for example meetings with the executive](#)
15 [team, business meetings, line management meetings\)](#) totalling over forty hours. These
16 were recorded as fieldwork notes (FWN) either written in situ or immediately after.

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Arendtian scholarship is helpful to support contemporary and historical thinking about the devastation of public-sector education, and so in reading Edwards' professional biography, we investigate how educational professionals position themselves through Arendt's (1997) characterisation of the *parvenu* and *pariah*. This is important because, for those living and working in new dark times, there is an imperative for people to assimilate, to conform, to 'continue to chatter and talk that drown[s] the reality of life in incomprehensible triviality,' (Berkowitz, 2010 p. 4), and in so doing the light is obscured.

For Arendt, seeking to understand the collapse of the public and private realms, there can be both hope and despair. For example, in her essay *We Refugees*, she writes of the rupture in refugees' lives and how, in attempting to forget, one denies oneself: 'the less we are free to decide who we are or to live as we like, the more we try to put up a

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3 front, to hide the facts and to play roles.’ (Arendt, 2007, p. 270). In dark times, private
4
5 optimism becomes despair as all boundaries between the public and private are destroyed,
6
7 where the sense of loss is profound as, in attempting to assimilate, [we lose what Arendt](#)
8
9 [\(1958\) identifies as plurality in the sense of how we are each unique, and natality in how](#)
10
11 [the fact of being born means we have the capacity to do new things](#). In explaining her
12
13 thinking on loss and isolation, Arendt introduces and develops the concepts of pariah and
14
15 parvenu. Originally, the idea emerged in *Rahel Varhagen, Life of a Jewess*, (1953) and in
16
17 her essays, *We Refugees* (1943), and *The Jew as Pariah* (1947). In *Rahel Varnhagen*,
18
19 Arendt sees Rahel’s life as a larger history of Jewish assimilation and alienation. Arendt
20
21 writes of Rahel’s ‘inner life’ and her yearning for acceptance, not least through
22
23 establishing her salons in the late 18th and early 19th century – scenes of social neutrality
24
25 where ‘nothing really mattered but personality, and the uniqueness of character, talent,
26
27 and expression’ (Arendt, 2017, p. 76). Arendt’s account explains Rahel’s lifelong project
28
29 in persuading society ‘to accept her career as a parvenu,’ (Arendt, 1997, p. 237). In her
30
31 desire to assimilate, which Arendt saw as an ‘aggressively active process,’ (Bernstein,
32
33 1996, p.20), Rahel has to lie, ‘erase’ her friends, change her name, marry, and renounce
34
35 her citizenship, in essence she lives a fraudulent life. Rahel’s life is illusory as a parvenu
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37 – *one who has recently arrived*. The parvenu conforms to society through a life of
38
39 obedience, ‘vulgar banality’, simulation and ‘the abandonment of truth’ (Arendt, 1997,
40
41 p. 242). Conversely, the life of the pariah is the affirming of one’s individual self yet is
42
43 isolating because one’s ability to act with others ‘in the pursuit of common concern is
44
45 destroyed.’ (Arendt, 2017, p. 623). The pariah, then, embodies isolation and rupture from
46
47 the public realm, labouring without action. [Arendt rejects any form of historical](#)
48
49 [determinism \(Bernstein, 1996, p. 38\): rather, the pariah and parvenu are separated out as](#)
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3 'ideal human types,' (Arendt, 1997, p.276), but discussed relationally within a lived life
4 rather than as a binary categorisation. We present a summary of each in Tables 1 and 2.
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10 INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

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12 **Table 1: Arendt and the pariah (based on Arendt, 1997, 2007a; b)**
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17 Table 1 outlines five positions for the Pariah ideal type: this enables the researcher to read
18 data in ways that focus on the individual's agency to determine identity and practice (e.g.
19 conscious, poet), and that focus on the structuring of that agency through legal and social
20 rules and conventions.
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26 This interplay of agency and structure is also evident in the four positions of the
27 Parvenu ideal type in Table 2, whereby the structuring of agency is a process of waiting,
28 surrender and career, with the potential for regret and return through a form of realisation
29 and judgement.
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38 INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

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40 **Table 2: Arendt and the parvenu (based on Arendt, 1997, 2007a; b)**
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45 Tables 1 and 2 provide simplifications that veil the realities in which Arendt developed
46 her insights into a lived life. Our data analysis follows our positioning as conscious
47 pariahs, and so we attribute to Edwards the status of a former pariah who became a
48 parvenu. His pariah identity is located in his original outsider-ness to the corporate world:
49 his professional biography demonstrates that his career began and continued for a
50 considerable time within and for public-services education. While accounts of
51 educational professionals have demonstrated aspects of exclusionary pariah ideal types
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3 through their practice (e.g. Winkley, 2002) and through rendering themselves ‘stateless’
4
5 by leaving the profession (e.g. Thomson, 2009), our reading of the LLTP data is that
6
7 Edwards was actually *a parvenu in waiting*. As an educational professional in a public
8
9 system, he demonstrated and enacted corporate dispositions, and through the emerging
10
11 MAT system he positioned as a parvenu *abandonneur* in surrendering his values and
12
13 beliefs situated in public education, ultimately becoming a parvenu *par excellence*.
14
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17 The parvenu *abandonneur* is a lived experience, where the person ‘has to adapt
18
19 his tastes, his life, his desires to attain these things’ (Arendt, 1997, p. 241). As ‘upstarts’
20
21 (Arendt, 2007a, p. 274), parvenus are the pariah’s counterparts. The parvenu has chosen
22
23 freely, and by ‘using his elbows’ (Arendt, 2007b, p. 296) he ‘is called to play the cast
24
25 meticulously and exactly’ (Arendt, 2007b, p. 279). The parvenu *par excellence* reaches
26
27 beyond ‘seeking’ towards a fully self-deceptive life, abandoning his past, erasing
28
29 connections, and so is characterised by an ‘over-estimation of himself’. He creates and
30
31 attains opportunities through visible social climbing – the Varnhagens were the creators
32
33 of the Goethe cult in Berlin, with Goethe ‘the friend of kings’ (Arendt, 1997, p. 240) and
34
35 the private rewards where ‘being innocently liked is triumph for the parvenu’ (Arendt,
36
37 1997, p. 241). It seems that for the parvenu *par excellence*, ‘the smallest successes dazzle
38
39 him with an illusory: everything is possible’ (Arendt, 1997, p. 239), and this strengthens
40
41 the sense of agency where he ‘dare not be grateful because he owes everything to his own
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43 powers, he must not be considerate to others because he must esteem himself a kind of
44
45 superman of efficiency, an especially good and strong and intelligent specimen of
46
47 humanity a model to follow’ (Arendt, 1997, p. 248). Our reading of the data recognises
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49 Edwards as a parvenu *par excellence* at a time when anyone who thinks or does things
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51 differently is a policy enemy (Hyman, 2005) through first, the presentation of the self in
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53 relation to elite private demands and processes; second, the negotiation of the self in ways
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3 that generate acceptance; third, the development of the self through networked social
4 climbing; and fourth, the achievement by the self through acclaimed outcomes.
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8 The parvenu positioning is precarious because the cost of attaining it is ‘the
9 abandonment of truth’ (Arendt, 1997, p. 242), whereby denying the human condition of
10 action, much remains in the dark. For Rahel, whilst annihilating her whole existence, she
11 decides ultimately to rebel ‘against such a condition’ (Arendt, 1997, p. 245) and lives
12 ‘altogether inwardly’ as a pariah. Whilst she achieved the ‘virtuoso capacity for self-
13 deception’ as a parvenu (Arendt, 1997, p. 246), she questioned if she could ever get away
14 from ‘what one truly is’ thus as a parvenu she recognised the folly of her project. Indeed,
15 in her later years, Rahel retains ‘a passionate protest’ to her *parvenu-hood*, since her
16 previous life as pariah was freer. Ultimately, Rahel accepts her Jewishness, resisting her
17 parvenu-hood, becoming a *parvenu recogniser*, and finally accepts her pariah status,
18 concluding that her exercises in assimilation were merely ‘cosmetic’ (Arendt, 1997, p.
19 258). Our analysis considers the juxtaposition of first, Edwards’ positioning as a parvenu
20 *par excellence*, and second, how his practices suggest he is handling the conflicting
21 identities as educational professional interplayed with corporate entrepreneur.
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42 **Edwards as pariah in emergent new dark times**

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44 Edwards entered a public education system as a school teacher with pro-private
45 dispositions. Edwards’ distinctive background is rooted in his family’s business, where
46 he worked hard and seized entrepreneurial opportunities:
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51 *Edwards:* I came from a business family. When I was 12, I started working
52 in my uncle’s company, and worked for my dad on the markets. We used
53 to buy women’s clothes. We bought bootlace skirts, took them to [name of
54 town] my brother and I, £3.99 they were. We didn’t give any pennies back
55 in change and at the end of the day I did not know where to put the money.
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60 I think we came home with about two and half thousand pounds.

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5 *Interviewer:* How old were you then?
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7 *Edwards:* Eighteen. We went the next week, the first ten people wanted
8 their money back. We took about £20 because it was raining, we came
9 home, But that's how it is... I worked for my uncle's stationery company.
10 Every holiday he gave me a little van and in the summer, he went to Spain,
11 I ran the company. (NWI, 17/4/18).
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18 These private dispositions in a public profession suggest Edwards as an *unconscious*
19 *pariah* in a public system. He established himself 'under existent conditions' (Arendt,
20 2007b, p. 294), playing the role of market trader, standing on the outside, excluded from
21 the 'world of political realities,' (Arendt, 2007b, p. 276) whilst relishing the freedoms,
22 'comfortable protection' and independence of the family business. A teacher in the early
23 1980's, Edwards enthusiastically undertook varied roles:
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32 'I wasn't ambitious; I just did everything ... I ran the community venture we
33 took over about £100,000. I wrote a bid for £4million for the new tennis
34 centre, so I was author of that, and I raised, I think about... £2million,' (CI,
35 26/9/17).
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41 He used his business acumen to develop the school commercially through running the
42 'community venture'. He became deputy head 'in charge of the community,' head teacher
43 in 1997 and executive head in 2007. The period saw the decline of the welfare state under
44 Thatcherism with neoliberal practices encouraged in schools where business efficiency
45 and effectiveness were key. The dismantling of local authorities in England was
46 accelerated by the 1988 Education Reform Act, which increased the powers of the UK
47 Secretary of State; devolved school resources from local authorities to head teachers; and
48 increased competition through parental choice and the publication of school league tables.
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60 Rapid structural change continued with New Labour governments (1997-2010), which

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3 introduced the academies programme, where businesses and philanthropists sponsored
4 poorly performing urban schools, rendering schools independent and but non-fee paying.
5
6 This modernisation policy was based on New Public Management (NPM), drawn from
7
8 private-sector management focusing on customer, enterprise, and outcomes (Gunter et al.
9
10 2016). The ‘turbocharged’ reforms (Gunter, 2012, p. 99) that defined the period saw the
11
12 corporatisation of schools (Courtney, 2015a), with corporate practices, such as
13
14 outsourcing and the use of consultants (Gunter and Mills, 2017), corporate language and
15
16 the commodification of leadership training penetrating public education in the UK and
17
18 internationally (Saltman, 2010). Against this backdrop, educational professionals,
19
20 including Edwards, saw opportunities for advancement through the negotiation of self;
21
22 ‘adapting his life and desire’ in undergoing nationally accredited leadership-training
23
24 programmes; accepting government invitations to act in advisory roles; and seeking
25
26 opportunities to extend reputations through school-to-school support (Gunter, 2016).
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33 The new school structures created under New Labour accelerated after 2010 with
34
35 the Coalition (2010-2015) and then Conservative governments (2015 onwards) where
36
37 there now exist over seventy school types in England (Courtney, 2015b). Outside of local
38
39 democratic control, centrally funded by the government, many are run by a plethora of
40
41 businesses, faith organisations and private individuals, with many forming MATs. For
42
43 Edwards as head of an ‘outstanding’ school, further opportunities to collaborate and
44
45 federate continued: ‘we then became in demand’ culminating in the formation of the
46
47 Lawrence Trust in 2012 with Edwards, [adapting to his new circumstances](#) became CEO
48
49 in 2014. Edwards’ yearning for assimilation into the corporate world of education
50
51 services progressed with his labouring – developing his contacts: ‘I spend a lot of time
52
53 working with local councillors, key community leaders, people who make a difference.’
54
55 Through his school-support work, he has ‘improved the education standards across the
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3 region'. In so doing, Edwards enhanced his agency through successful take-overs and
4 professional accreditation: he is a National Leader of Education, and using 'all his forces
5 and talents' (Arendt, 1997, p. 239), has gained acceptance within privileged groups such
6 as civil servants and ministers, 'I have presented to Number 10' and 'I had dinner with
7 [name] the Secretary of State...' He has 'pedalled' (his term) the LT online resource at
8 the House of Lords for example. Furthermore, Edwards has developed his connections
9 with private sector business owners who sit on the LT board of trustees, enabling access
10 to and the gradual assimilation into the corporatised world of non-education dark times.
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21 As a conscious pariah in a public system, his biography shows that he was a
22 parvenu in waiting adapting his early entrepreneurial career and applying it to his
23 circumstances as a career professional. This reconceptualisation of his professional
24 identity and his work in securing compliance to the vision as a CEO of a MAT has enabled
25 him to assimilate as a parvenu *par excellence*.
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35 **Edwards as parvenu in new dark times**

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37 In becoming a parvenu *par excellence*, Edwards presents himself as a corporate leader
38 fulfilling the corporate demands of his position as CEO. He has adapted his 'tastes,' 'life,'
39 'desires' (Arendt, 1997, p. 241) through his professional life as he is a non-executive
40 director of a national charity - an offshoot of a PLC, chair of the board of a national
41 funding foundation and a non-executive director in the public health sector. He also sits
42 on the board of a regional business hub. He charges out his services as a consultant which
43 now includes work internationally. As a parvenu *par excellence* he promulgates his
44 methods for successful school take-overs at DfE networking events: 'we have a three-
45 stage plan - we think it takes 18 months, to get it into a [good] place...' Edwards secures
46 the Trust vision and ultimately compliance to it, structuring the MAT as the corporation,
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3 with a back office, brand ambassador, operations director, an executive leadership team,
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5 designing and selling learning products for profit, adopting the rhetoric and language of
6
7 the corporate parvenu. Part of his integration is assimilating ‘to dominant trends’
8
9 (Benhabid, 1996, p. 10) such as government policy on school take-overs:

12 We’ve got a really tight back office function; we have a growth strategy...we
13
14 are fairly ruthless in saying “well if it doesn’t benefit the trust why would
15
16 we do it?” We need to gather assets. Assets mean people. We go into a
17
18 place, often you’ve got some assets that then become the next school
19
20 improvement people. Our best school improvement team are the ones who
21
22 have been through the mill in a school that has not been very good, (BPI
23
24 5/12/17).

25 Moreover, the development of self is consolidated through networked social climbing:
26
27 Edwards has used his isolation from professional associations by cultivating membership
28
29 of non-educational networks. As ‘socially neutral spaces’ (Arendt, 1997, p. 112),
30
31 Edwards’ networks, fostered over time, offer important opportunities for resource
32
33 exchanges; dialogue with the membership enhances his agency as a successful CEO.
34
35 These spaces, like Rahel’s salons of Berlin, have enabled Edwards’ full assimilation into
36
37 the corporate world, enabling the achievement by the self through acclaimed outcomes:
38
39 these comprise increased agency, executive status through executive board membership,
40
41 chairing a charitable foundation and recognition as an education expert and consultant: ‘I
42
43 am often called upon to speak to the media as the go-to person in education’ (CI 26/9/17).
44
45 As a parvenu *par excellence*, he is the ‘model...to follow,’ (Arendt, 1997, p. 248) and is
46
47 expected to lead others to become parvenus to forget what used to be in order ‘to
48
49 acquiesce to everything’ (Arendt, 1997, p. 245). This is partially achieved through his
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51 leadership of the MAT, where ‘everything is scripted’ and where ‘there is no alternative
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53 but obedience,’ (Arendt, 1997, p. 237), and where those who do not conform are disposed
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55 of:
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3 ...we've instigated a dashboard which at a glance we can see where people
4 are at any one time... we have the same standards across the Trust that's my
5 job and the Executive Team's job to keep the standards. (BPI 5/12/17).
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8 Edwards as a careerist has progressed to become a parvenu *par excellence*, an
9
10 'upstart'; his arrival 'fools everyone'; he performs as his own master, identifying with
11 those he is mixing with: however, 'the parvenu can achieve no stable realistic sense of
12 his own power' (Pitkin, 1998, p. 25). The position is volatile: 'the smallest successes are
13 hard won,' (Arendt, 1997, p. 239). Such dynamics are fast moving, instinctive even, and
14 certainly open to new possibilities, and following Arendt (1997), we need to consider
15 what the trends suggest about the security of his embodied incorporation.
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26 **Edwards as parvenu *par excellence***

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28 As a parvenu, Edwards' pariah-hood of being biographically located in a public-sector
29 job has become regularised and recognised as advantageous to how his current privatised
30 job is legitimised. Claims to be in public education while making private gains can be
31 convincing when spoken and enacted by someone from a public-education background.
32
33 He demonstrates the advantages secured from isolated forgetting but is also a role model
34 for those who remember and need savvy advice from someone with expertise located in
35 parvenu-hood. As CEO, he has cemented his parvenu status with his full assimilation to
36 the corporate non-education dark times. Much of Edwards' activities remain in the dark:
37 he enjoys great discretion; accountability is imprecise; membership of his networks is
38 opaque and fluid; and he is politically astute (Hughes, 2019, p. 8). His pariah status has
39 been reworked through his parvenu activities as a modern and modernising headteacher.
40
41 With the corporate interventions in public services, Edwards seized the opportunities such
42 reforms offered. However, 'parvenu-hood' is precarious because: '...you forget because
43 part of why people want you sometimes is because of who you are' (NWI, 17/4/18). He
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3 admits he changes his identity depending on where he is, wearing a different name badge
4 depicting his changed role - a symbol of his 'parvenu-hood' when: '...identity is changed
5 so frequently that nobody can find out who we actually are' (Arendt, 2007a, p. 270). Does
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9
10 Edwards think about what he is doing? He is certainly providing some business
11 illumination as a CEO. Whilst Edwards is constructing his agency through his 'parvenu-
12 hood', being structured by government policy to be a parvenu, he is mindful of this
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17 position: 'well I might not agree with policy, so I have to be careful,' (NWI, 17/4/18).
18
19 There are glimpses when reading the data that he disagrees with increased government
20 centralisation where remnants of the previous public system remains in modernised
21 public bureaucracies (e.g. the role of the Local Headteacher Board and the Regional
22 School Commissioner who decide on school takeovers) '...they are not great for us...'
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28 (STI, 11/9/18) he says owing to slow decision-making. The state is investing in MATs
29 as the preferred organisational arrangement for school-place provision, but to achieve
30 this, CEOs must accept schools into their MAT. However, such a move reminds Edwards
31 of what he is seeking to forget, and his position is a reminder of the frustrations of
32 bureaucratic interference that heads invoked to support the first wave of school-autonomy
33 reforms from 1988 (see Downes, 1988). Consequently, he is resigned to sometimes being
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43 powerless:

44 I said to Ofsted last week, that basically do what you want because the
45 types of schools we've got, we are going to get battered anyway so we'll
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48 just accept it... (STR 11/9/18).
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52 However, he uses the validity of isolation from the state by recognising that localised
53 market forces play out to his advantage as 'our parents aren't bothered: they will still
54 rock up as the kids do' (STR 11/9/18). These tensions matter, where Edwards is
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60 mindful that the constant spotlight on the MAT performance by regulatory bodies,

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3 increased consumerism, and public accountability, ‘the DfE wants results, results will
4 always win,’ (STR 11/9/18). and so the parvenu is imperilled.
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8 Edwards is recognising that his parvenu-hood is threatened by the continued
9
10 involvement of government in the provision and regulation of public-services
11 education, not least because he has to address issues (e.g. provision of school places
12 for all children) that he thought he had left behind. To this end, he has led reforms as
13 a National Leader of Education by visiting, talking and enacting the success of
14 isolated leadership. However, he has also left his head teacher role to pursue non-
15 educational interests such as being a board member of a local charity and chair of a
16 national foundation. He has extended his entrepreneurial activities in undertaking a
17 lucrative overseas commission. He has ‘pulled back’ from government-sponsored
18 initiatives to survive as a parvenu *par excellence*. It seems that the remaining tensions
19 mean that Edwards is an embedded but precarious parvenu (Arendt, 1997, p. 258)
20 finding that parvenu-hood ‘did not guarantee reality’; his labouring as CEO could be
21 a superficial, decorative activity. In Arendtian terms, ‘freedom and equality are not
22 going to be conjured into existence by individuals’ capturing them by fraud as
23 privileges for themselves’ (Arendt, 1997, p. 258). Consequently, the self-deception is
24 incomplete; the past is remembered through how ‘public provision’ or ‘a public
25 system’ requires a relational form of freedom that jeopardises the security of
26 Edward’s parvenu-hood. However, the resilience of his economised-self from his
27 early years means that he continues to ‘forge’ public education through integrating
28 the market trader with the school-place provider. Convinced of his status as parvenu
29 *par excellence* as CEO, he has assimilated fully: ‘I’m not going to stop, it’s just great
30 now.’ (NWI, 17/4/18). Edwards has constructed his own darkness as part of the
31 system and ultimately escaped into dark times.
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Discussion

We argue that the constructed interplay of the pariah and parvenu to understand leader, leading and leadership are useful to help the field think in new ways about how professionals in the top job in and across schools have exercised their agency to break with a welfarist past and to persist in enacting paradigm-shifting changes, where these reforms have been shown not only to fail in their objectives of raising standards for all, but to constitute newly dark times in how they enable segregation, hierarchisation and human disposability. Where a pariah leader desires parvenu status, we suggest that the collateral damage to public education, professional lives and identities is particularly extensive. This insight offers an alternative perspective to previous analyses, where education reforms have been understood as a teleological project in themselves or as the result of key actors' capital accumulation, rather than as a by-product of their identity work.

In other words, Courtney's (2017b) account of the consequences of MAT CEO dominance depicted it as motivated by an arbitrary susceptibility to the desire for power mediated by high original status. Here, however, we account more fully for the singular, blinkered and determined ways in which MAT CEOs' agency may dismantle public provision while aiming primarily to identify more convincingly with the discursively privileged construction of the corporatised CEO. This is revealed in the quotidian, government-promoted collocations of MAT leadership with business: the launch event of the academy-focused Confederation of School Trusts, for example, featured a keynote speech by the then Education Secretary Damian Hinds and the announcement of a new partnership with the Confederation of British Industry, whose head of education and skills noted that 'A lot of issues that multi

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3 academy trusts are dealing with are issues businesses have dealt with for decades'
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5 (Cope, in Robertson, 2018, para. 15). The message is clear that business should
6
7 provide the template for MAT leaders' activities and identities.
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10 In making these arguments, we note that not all will feel the pull of parvenu-
11 hood, and so the concept helps explain differences in approach to the MAT CEO role.
12
13 The literatures are replete with examples of pariah leaders who did not seek parvenu-
14 hood, including 'Dave' and 'John' in Thomson (2009) and 'Les' in Courtney (2017a);
15 as well as examples of what we retrospectively identify as parvenus, who have
16 renounced their roots in a public, welfarist system to perform a particularly intense
17 form of corporatism (see e.g. Courtney and Gunter, 2015; Gunter and McGinity,
18 2014), often born of a desire to belong and a concomitant recognition that they do
19 not. In this sense, being parvenu is homologous to being lower-middle class, in that
20 one may try rather *too hard* in one's efforts to 'pass' as authentic, whether it be as
21 middle class or edu-preneur. The trappings of authenticity, like items of luxury, are
22 taken for and read as substantive rather than understood as proxies, or even as mere
23 distracting baubles (Gunter et al. 2017).
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40 However, the stakes are considerably higher than simply being a question for
41 the individual leader of 'passing' or not: parvenus unthinkingly destroy human bonds
42 and identities as well as notions of public education, through their parvenu striving
43 and, in their justifications to assimilate. The border between the '*parvenu par*
44 *excellence*' and that of the '*recogniser*' signifies the moment for the parvenu
45 recogniser to 'think about what [they] are doing' (Arendt, 1958 p. 5). What is it that
46 prevents this emergence from dark times? In Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963),
47 Eichmann justifies his role in arranging the mass deportation of Jews to extermination
48 camps as straightforward: he was thoughtlessly following orders without question.
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3 As a careerist, he was dependable and diligent in seeking personal advancement,
4 remaining remote from reality through a failure of judgement. Eichmann ‘had done
5 nothing...since when has it been a crime to carry out orders? Since when it has been
6 a virtue to rebel?’ (Arendt, 1994, p. 127). The conditions in which Edwards operates
7 as *parvenu par excellence* appear ordinary; he advances his career through
8 cooperation and assimilation ‘as an agent of change: playing a key role in the
9 modernising of schooling’ (Gunter, 2014, p. 94). However, the modernisation project
10 results in ‘integrated isolationism’ (Gunter, 2014, p. 52) of the *parvenu par excellence*
11 in thinking that they belong but in reality, remain isolated.
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26 **Conclusion**

27
28 In examining the distinctive nature of the current darkness in non-educational times we
29 have used Edwards’ story to illuminate Edwards’ *parvenu-hood*, where as a pariah located
30 in a public-education system, he yearned to become a *parvenu* in ways that are now
31 corporatised. The collapse of the public into the private has pitched us into darkness and
32 normalised non-educational times. Edwards’ assimilation into the private world of
33 *parvenu-hood* has entailed him presenting, negotiating, developing the self through self-
34 exposure. He has done this through integrating a corporate identity and praxis. The
35 proactive, but jumbled collapse of the public-education system has forced the creation of
36 depoliticised private arenas where Edwards (along with others) resides, and ‘where there
37 is only injustice only and no indignation’ (Brecht, 2019, p.736). Arendt calls on those in
38 the public realm to think about what we are doing and to shed light onto these new dark
39 times: instead of ‘walking calmly across the street’ (Brecht, 2019, p. 734), we have sought
40 to illuminate the challenges we face as thinkers and researchers. [We recognise the
41 challenges faced by social scientists in using conceptual tools to ‘think with data’ about](#)
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3 professional practice as leadership (e.g. Courtney et al. 2018), where in Arendtian terms
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5 we are in effect ‘conscious pariahs’, where we seek not to ‘put our confidence into old
6
7 verities or even new truths’ (Arendt 1993, p. 111) but to draw education in non-education
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9 dark times into the light of the political realm. In addition, we are mindful that using
10
11 Arendtian scholarship developed in distinctive mid-to-late twentieth century dark times
12
13 we are following her methodology of seeking to understand the world as it is now through
14
15 our data and as such make a contribution to the utility of such thinking (Gunter 2014,
16
17 2018b). We are hopeful that ‘the presence of others who see what we are seeing and hear
18
19 what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves’ (Arendt, 1958, p.50).
20
21 In examining Edwards’ story as ‘conscious pariahs’, we recognise the CEO role as a
22
23 symbol of new dark times and reject others’ actions in dark times who ‘accept the calm
24
25 freedoms of the pariah... [and] retreat into quiet corners...preserving the illusion of
26
27 liberty and unchallenged humanity’ (Arendt, 2007b, p. 296). Through the data we
28
29 understand the realities of the stories where in truth, CEOs like Edwards repudiate their
30
31 past, forgetting who they once were, instead they are superordinated, embodying aloof
32
33 and isolated success. In forgetting, they break from their history and professional
34
35 knowledge. Edwards remembers public education, for he participates in government
36
37 policy through his school collaborations and take-overs, and he is required to remember
38
39 his trader background to do his job as CEO. This enhances his agency, but he resists
40
41 becoming fully involved and thus retreats to parvenu-hood *par excellence*. The CEO role
42
43 is not a fixed blueprint; rather, those inhabiting it are creating a role where they are
44
45 making active choices about what to remember and what to forget.
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TABLE 1

Table 1: Arendt and the pariah (based on Arendt 1997, 2007a; b)

Pariah as...	Distinctive positioning
Conscious	A rebel who actively rejects assimilation and takes action.
Unconscious	A social outcast with no desire to be embraced within society.
Poet	Withdraws into the private realms of art, imagination.
Refugee	A stateless nonentity, always under suspicion and detached.
Nobody	A superfluous nobody working to become the same as others but is always dismissed.

TABLE 2

Table 2: Arendt and the parvenu (based on Arendt 1997, 2007a; b)

Parvenu as...	Distinctive positioning
Waiting	Seeing “parvenu-hood” through grateful acquiescence

Abandonneur	Surrenders identity and seeks full assimilation
Par Excellence	Career parvenu who uses all talents to live a self-deceptive life
Recogniser	Rejects self-deception, and struggles to relocate as pariah

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