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FORUM

Obstacles to Career Progression in Archaeology: Precarious Labour and Unemployment

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As Sue Hamilton brought out, a combination of personal and structural forces harm workers and areas of work. Those forces multiply inequity by channelling already disadvantaged workers into disadvantageous areas of work. For example, under a historic 'domestic' division of labour in archaeology, women have disproportionately performed invisible 'dishwashing' duties, which have not only been immediately financially under-rewarding and relatively insecure, but which have also undermined career progression by requiring under-recognised labour such as collection cataloguing (Dommasnes, Kleppe, Mandt and Næss, 1998: 119; see also Bolger, 2003: 207 – tables 8.2–8.3; Webb and Frankel, 1995: 101; Karouzou, 1984: 27, translated and cited by Nikolaidou and Kokkinidou, 1998: 248).

Of the fifty-two months since I left full-time education, I have spent forty-two unemployed (technically, thirty-nine unemployed and three "self-employed" in job-seeking); of the ten months in precarious work, I have spent six in cultural heritage. However, I remain contractually obliged not to discuss the conditions and experience of my brief employment in the cultural heritage sector. So, I want to discuss marginalisation out of work, to consider how the cultural heritage economy exploits some workers and excludes others from work, and how that combination of exploitation and exclusion affects (would-be) archaeologists and archaeology.

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Seeking a job, undermining a career

The experience of unemployment varies. One academic, who had spent three months unemployed, found it 'wonderful to have so much time in which to think and write', and found 'visiting' the job centre to be fuel for 'sociological curiosity' (Anonymous, 2012). I found it debilitating. It drove others to despair (e.g. d'Amore, 2013; Marianna, 2013; Yağar, 2013) and resignation (e.g. d'Amore, 2014).

The job-seeking process itself, embodied by the most highly regulated and securitised meetings and interviews at the job centre, is disruptive, frustrating, insulting and threatening (Hardy, 2013m; 2013n; 2013o). It is managed to push job-seekers into any opportunity, regardless of the long-term consequences (for the jobseeker or the taxpayer). With all of the 'work-for-labour' trying to become employed (and trying not to be punished for remaining unemployed), being unemployed 'can be a full-time job' in itself (Standing, 2011: 48; see also 120–121).

My Jobseeker's Agreement (DWP JCP ES3JP) required that I 'actively seek work' and 'show I have been actively seeking work'. Although I had a 'permitted period' in which I could

'limit myself to accepting work in my usual job or at my usual wages or both', it was limited, and the accompanying grey literature warned me: 'Repeatedly checking websites/papers[/etc.] that do not have vacancies or calling the same employers every week cannot count as sufficient evidence for looking for work.'

Unemployed archaeologists cannot only apply to IfA-advertised (or IfA-registered) employers, or resist exploitative employment practices. If they do, they face sanctions and the suspension of their income for supposedly "voluntarily" becoming unemployed or refusing work; so, they must seek and accept work at unregistered organisations that pay below the archaeological minimum wage (Hardy, 2013c).

Academic work-for-labour

Reading is an immediate problem. The unemployed are practically dependent on what they can beg, borrow or steal (electronically). They do at least have time to think, but their lack of access to information (in publications) is worsened by financially-driven social isolation, which deprives them of much formal or informal discussion of available data.

Naturally, it is also difficult for them to generate new data, but writing on the dole is challenging for other reasons too. Visits to museums and archives and article-writing are not considered job-seeking activity (at the very least, not when you need six or twelve such activities every fortnight), so the regulations designed to force job-seeking activity actually prevent it.

Through the strictures of *academia*, because of the heightened pressure to stand out in academically acceptable ways, unemployment worsens the already perverse incentives for inaccessible writing in inaccessible publications. I have been repeatedly advised to publish in the highest impact journal instead of the most appropriate one, let alone the most accessible one; it has been taken for granted that I know that writing in commercial publications does not advance an academic career.

I am fortunate that I am affiliated with University College London, which pays the article processing charges (APCs) for open access publications, so my (sole-)authored articles are freely available. Naively, last year, I publicly declared that I would not publish work that I could not read. At the time, I observed 'the awkward problem that it [was] theoretically (and I stress[ed] theoretically) possible that I could get a job (when I could afford more expensive publications, but people who had not escaped this position could not, which seem[ed] less than solidaristic)' (Hardy, 2013l). That has not happened.

However, in an equally naive attempt to make myself more employable, I abandoned that principle, so I am in the absurd position of publishing work that I cannot afford myself after all. Now, I have chapters in two forthcoming books, neither of which I will be able to buy. If someone asks me for an academically-usable copy of my work (paginated for citation), I will be forced to choose between violating my author's agreement and copyright law, and actively participating in the perpetuation of their exclusion and disadvantage (and, by extension, my own).

Work for nothing

Institutions including the Natural History Museum (Hardy, 2013f), the National Trust (Hardy, 2013g) and the Victoria and Albert Museum (Hardy, 2013h) cycle through large numbers of futureless unpaid interns, who perform the labour of many would-be paid workers – would-be paid workers who the interns themselves do not and cannot become, as each is replaced by the next. The National Trust, in particular, has offered a number of absurd positions, including inexplicable Visitor Services Assistant Manager Interns (Hardy, 2013g), and indefensible Cider and Apple Juice Interns (Hardy, 2014b).

Such widespread, institutionalised practices might be expected to provoke significant labour activism. However, claiming the

Voluntary Worker Exemption from National Minimum Wage law, cultural charities (and, indefensibly, cultural businesses that present themselves as social enterprises) commonly deny that interns are workers and therefore refuse to recognise any labour rights, from payment of the national minimum wage to protection from constructive dismissal or unfair dismissal (Hardy, 2013d; 2013e). And because those labour laws are not seen to be enforced, generally, those vulnerable 'voluntary' workers do not and cannot defend themselves.

Whether evidenced by volunteering for wellbeing at the Imperial War Museum North and Manchester Museum (Hardy, 2013g), skill-building through volunteering at the Museum of London (Hardy, 2013k), or volunteering for the Big Society at National Museums, Liverpool (Hardy, 2013l), there is a more general process of voluntarisation of entry-level work (Hardy, 2013j). Beyond organisationally-driven voluntarisation, among many other such workfare programmes (where the unemployed work for welfare payments), Help to Work enlists the long-term unemployed in six-month-long contracts to perform work such as 'restoring historical sites and war memorials' (PMO and DWP, 2014; see also Hardy, 2014a).

Caitlin Reilly's experience is instructive. Reilly had a Geology degree, retail experience and museum experience, but fell out of precarious work into unemployment and volunteered at a museum to help her re-enter paid employment. Then, she was tricked and pressed into a workfare programme at a supermarket (Hardy, 2013i; Malik, 2011; Reilly, 2012). In light of heritage budget cuts, unsurprisingly, she has not been able to re-enter the profession.

I asked to volunteer in a regional museum network and in a major museum, but neither could clear its existing backlog of aspiring volunteers, so I was left without even unpaid work (Hardy, 2013a). Yet the precarisation of low-level work and voluntarisation of entry-level work has reached such an extent that it can be practically impossible to apply for paid work without having performed extensive unpaid work first. Despite having a doctorate, archaeological experience, NGO experience, teaching experience, administrative experience and retail experience, I was not eligible to apply for an organisation's lowest paid position, Visitor Experience Assistant, because I did not have experience of friends schemes and working with volunteers (Hardy, 2013b). Naturally, practical expectations or requirements of months of unpaid work experience severely limit poorer people's access to the profession.

Some powerful professionals actively produce and reinforce vulnerable workers' disadvantage and exclusion by making decisions according to their social attitudes. When the founder of a charity for youth employment through cultural labour, the New Deal for the Mind, asked the head of an arts organisation if she would consider any of his would-be workers, she asked back, 'Why should I take one of your people off the dole when I can get a nice Oxbridge girl for six months for free?' (Bright, 2011).

Not working for anything

Political positions influence employment too, and they most visibly affect the production of archaeological knowledge. While blacklisting requires detailed discussion (e.g. Hardy, 2011: 144–150), I can provide three examples of political influence on employment, in three countries across Europe, from my own experience. First, an expected institutional contact withdrew their support for my application hours before the deadline, and thereby prevented me applying, because of the claims in my doctoral thesis, even though my thesis had been passed without correction and the contact had not read it. Second, I collaborated with members of an institution to censor my application in order to avoid being excluded from consideration, and was invited to interview, but the sensitive subjects were raised at interview nonetheless, and my application progressed no

further. Third, I asked if an institution would be interested in my research (which does not involve excavation or other licensed methods), to gauge whether or not to prepare a full application, but they instructed me that I would need the explicit prior permission of the antiquities department of another state to apply.

Conclusion

Structures of archaeological and cultural heritage labour cause under-representation (or does not facilitate equitable representation) of certain practitioners and practices. Unemployed/underemployed academic workers lack any/adequate wages, subsistence expenses and access to research knowledge, which makes it very difficult for them to (re-) enter the profession. Between the strictures of employment and publication, politically-sensitive archaeological research is especially vulnerable to targeting by vested interests and thus to marginalisation or suppression.

More generally, marginal archaeological workers' and projects' under-recognition and under-funding make it difficult for them to produce results that would be rewarded within this structure, which makes it difficult for them to secure greater recognition and further funding. Cultural heritage workers are perhaps most vulnerable to exploitation and exclusion. Precarisation and voluntarisation are imposing significant and increasingly strong class barriers to entry to and progression in the profession.

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