

PALGRAVE CRITICAL UNIVERSITY STUDIES

# **ACADEMIC LABOUR, UNEMPLOYMENT AND GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION**

Neoliberal Policies of Funding  
and Management

*Edited by*

Suman Gupta, Jernej Habjan *and* Hrvoje Tutek



Palgrave Critical University Studies

Universities everywhere are experiencing unprecedented changes and most of the changes being inflicted upon universities are being imposed by political and policy elites without any debate or discussion, and little understanding of what is being lost, jettisoned, damaged or destroyed. The over-arching intent of this series is to foster, encourage, and publish scholarship relating to academia that is troubled by the direction of these reforms occurring around the world. The series provides a much-needed forum for the intensive and extensive discussion of the consequences of ill-conceived and inappropriate university reforms and will do this with particular emphasis on those perspectives and groups whose views have hitherto been ignored, disparaged or silenced. The series explores the effects of these changes across a number of domains including: the nature of academic work, the process of knowledge production for social and public good, along with students' experiences of learning, leadership and institutional politics research. The defining hallmark of this series, and what makes it markedly different from any other series with a focus on universities and higher education, is its 'criticalist agenda'.

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Suman Gupta • Jernej Habjan • Hrvoje Tutek

Editors

# Academic Labour, Unemployment and Global Higher Education

Neoliberal Policies of Funding and Management

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## SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

The *Critical University Studies Series* has a distinct and clear agenda. The overarching intent is to foster, encourage and publish scholarship relating to universities that is troubled by the direction of reforms occurring around the world.

It is clear that universities everywhere are experiencing unprecedented changes. What is much less clear – and there are reasons for the lack of transparency – are the effects of these changes within and across a number of domains, including

- the nature of academic work
- students' experiences of learning
- leadership and institutional politics
- research and the process of knowledge production
- the social and public good.

Most of the changes being inflicted upon universities globally are being imposed by political and policy elites without any debate or discussion, and with little understanding of what is being lost, jettisoned, damaged or destroyed. Benefits, where they are articulated at all, are framed exclusively in terms of short-term political gains. This is not a recipe for a robust and vibrant university system.

What this series seeks to do is provide a much-needed forum for the intensive and extensive discussion of the consequences of ill-conceived and inappropriate university reforms. It does this with particular emphasis on

those perspectives and groups whose views have hitherto been ignored, disparaged or silenced.

The defining hallmark of the series, and what makes it markedly different from any other series with a focus on universities and higher education, is its 'criticalist agenda'. This means that it directly addresses questions such as:

- Whose interests are being served?
- How is power being exercised and upon whom?
- What means are being promulgated to ensure subjugation?
- What might a more transformational approach look like?
- What are the impediments to this happening?
- What, then, needs be done about it?

The series intends to foster the following kind of contributions:

- Critical studies of university contexts, that while they might be local in nature, are shown to be global in their reach;
- Insightful and authoritative accounts that are courageous and that 'speak back' to dominant reforms being inflicted on universities;
- Critical accounts of research relating to universities that use innovative methodologies;
- Looking at what is happening to universities across disciplinary fields, and internationally;
- Examining trends, patterns and themes, and presenting them in a way that re-theorises and re-energises knowledge around the status and purposes of universities; and
- Above all, advancing the publication of accounts that re-position the study of universities in a way that makes clear what alternative robust policy directions for universities might look like.

The series aims to encourage discussion of issues such as academic work, academic freedom and marketisation in universities. One of the shortcomings of many extant texts in the field of university studies is that they attempt too much, and as a consequence, their focus becomes diluted. There is an urgent need for studies in a number of aspects with quite a sharp focus, for example:

1. There is a conspicuous absence of studies that give existential accounts of what life is like for *students* in the contemporary university. We need to know more about the nature of the stresses and

strains, and the consequences these market-driven distortions have for the learning experiences of students, their lives and futures.

2. We know very little about the nature and form of how *institutional politics* are engineered and played out, by whom, in what ways and with what consequences in the neoliberal university. We need 'insider' studies that unmask the forces that sustain and maintain and enable current reform trajectories in universities.
3. The *actions of policy elites* transnationally are crucial to what is happening in universities worldwide. But we have yet to become privy to the thinking that is going on, and how it is legitimated and transmitted, and the means by which it is made opaque. We need studies that puncture this veil of silence.
4. None of what is happening that is converting universities into annexes of the economy would be possible without a particular version of *leadership* having been allowed to become dominant. We need to know how this is occurring, what forms of resistance there have been to it, how these have been suppressed and the forms of solidarity necessary to unsettle and supplant this dominant paradigm.
5. Finally, and taking the lead from critical geographers, there is a pressing need for studies with a focus on universities as unique *spaces and places* – possibly in concert with sociologists and anthropologists.

We look forward to this series advancing these important agenda and to the reclamation and restitution of universities as crucial intellectual democratic institutions.

*John Smyth*  
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# Introduction: Academia and the Production of Unemployment

*Suman Gupta, Jernej Habjan, and Hrvoje Tutek*

In communism, Marx and Engels wrote in 1845–1846, everyone is able ‘to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, [...] without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic’ (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 47). Now, is this not how everyday life of today’s academics looks like? Are they not also teaching in the morning, serving coffee in the afternoon, proofreading in the evening, and grading after dinner, without ever becoming

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teachers, waiters, proofreaders, or PhD supervisors? Indeed, the world of academic workers appears as what Marx and Engels described as communism. But then again, the wealth of nations also ‘appears as an “immense collection of commodities”’, to quote a later Marx book (1976, p. 125), the one devoted, according to Fredric Jameson at least, to the question of unemployment (see Jameson 2011, pp. 2–3). And this is precisely the difference between the prefigured communism of the ‘early’ Marx and the criticised capitalism of the ‘mature’ Marx, namely, the difference between the undoing of employment and, quite simply, unemployment. Academics today appear as communists insofar as they are in effect unemployed.

The central hypothesis of this edited volume is that the kinds of restructurings of academic work that are underway today not only have increased employment insecurity in academia but also may actually be producing unemployment both within and outside academia. The idea is that recent and current reorganisations of higher education and research work, and reorientations of academic life (as students, researchers, and teachers) generally, which are taking place around the world, achieve exactly the opposite of what they claim: though ostensibly undertaken to facilitate employment, these moves actually produce unemployment both for those within academia and for graduate job seekers in other sectors.

To flesh out the hypothesis further, the kinds of restructurings involved are (1) moving away from public funding of higher education towards self-funding and loans, which effectively blur the boundaries between public and private interests; (2) aligning policy for higher education pedagogy and research with the putative expectations of employers and ‘users’ in different sectors, which entails pushing for ever-greater application-based (rather than critical and epistemological) study; (3) increasing emphasis on academic hierarchies (academic ‘leadership’ and line management) and ad hoc or casual appointments (keeping a large stratum of academic workers underpaid and insecure) in the institutional structuring of research and pedagogy; (4) effectively delinking academic management from academic production and engagement, so that academic management often works like corporate management or management consultancies with ‘skills’ that are indifferent to academic values; (5) reducing funding for research which is not ostentatiously applied, and making funding conditional to being ‘busy’ (organising conferences, exhibitions, networks, events, etc.) at the expense of time for reading, writing, and productive discussion; (6) introducing measures of public standing (publicity) that

are often at the expense of the integrity of research; and (7) systemically reducing, therefore, academic freedom—in the undertaking of teaching and research—and the social and economic freedom of students, teachers, and researchers (down to the increasing dependency on managers and within families).

These kinds of moves are premised on two principal assumptions. First, that higher academic work is a privilege, and those engaged in it are apt to waste public resources and ‘skive off’ unless they are heavily controlled. And second, that employment is a matter of application and is simply ‘created’ (almost altruistically) by non-academic ‘industry’, and such employment simply exists out there and is available only to graduates who are ‘fitted’ to the purpose. The hypothesis on which this book is based takes the opposite view. For the first, academic work is not a privilege but a public necessity, and cautions about ‘waste’ are premised on the misguided attribution of ‘privilege’. For the second, employment in every sector of productive industry is to a significant extent created by diverse and often unpredictable and apparently theoretical research (without an immediate investment in application) and pedagogic enterprise, and academic freedom and the social freedom of academics are crucial for this input not to become stultified. Moreover, academic freedom is at the basis of every area of social equity and progress.

Further, the hypothesis that this book opens to question could also lead to exploring the determinants of the seven prevailing moves outlined above. It is possible that the designing of academia now to effectively produce unemployment has a deliberate ideological agenda. This edited volume does not speculate on what that agenda may be, but it does not accept an easy assumption that the current moves are simply thoughtless or misguidedly well meant.

With this hypothesis in view, the manner in which academia is being restructured, and the lives of academic workers and students configured, is opened to exploration here under four broad headings (proceeding from the material conditions of academic work, through their impact on both institutional and personal practices of academic workers themselves, to the ways in which these workers might in turn collectively take charge of their material conditions): the political economy of higher education policy initiatives and institutional functioning now, in relation to teaching and research; management and leadership against academic freedom; generation gaps and economic dependency in academic life; and the scope of collective action in academia.

The making of this collection of essays was overdetermined by a basic performative contradiction: those who are willing to engage in a sustained critique of academia tend to be those who often cannot find the material conditions for such a critique within academia. Now, the cause and effect can be a matter of discussion: critics may be systematically marginalised in academia by their targets; or else those academics who find themselves on the margins of academia often develop a critical stance towards it. For both groups, however, the very situation that gives them motivation for critique is also what makes that critique difficult to execute. And indeed, not unlike the illusory yet necessary appearance of communism in the opening example of precarious academic workers, this volume may appear as a product of unalienated labour, due, for example, to the extraordinarily high proportion of collective authorship and open-access online resources. Yet this only appears as communism: if contributors wrote their chapters in pairs, this is not because they live in a post-capitalist commune but often because they were not able to find the time to write their chapters on their own; in those chapters they tended to quote open-access online sites (rather than, say, monographs published by university presses), but this is not because the struggle for the commons has been won globally but because critical and empirical material on academia is often limited to blogs (rather than being published, say, by American university presses).

So, the very fact that you are holding this book in your hands is the result of a practical overcoming of a contradiction that puts an epistemological obstacle on the way of any critique of the very material conditions of critical thinking. Indeed, a distinctive feature of this book is that it does not call only upon experts who are ensconced in their careers to pronounce on the issues raised. Contributors here are from different generations and societies (from Australia and the USA to Slovenia and Croatia, from the UK and Germany to India and Cyprus), and at different points in their academic careers (from full professors to doctoral candidates), yet they are all concerned about the changing contours of the profession, and they have all been engaged in recent student struggles. This book is premised on the notion that experiencing or having experienced employment insecurity and engaging with academic thinking and research need not be unrelated activities, and that life experience and empirical research and reasoning (in a generalising or universal direction) need not be alienated from each other. On the contrary, they may feed productively into each other, insofar as a reflection on the singular precarious conditions of one's own academic engagement offers the clearest view on the increasingly

universal condition of the academic production of unemployment. In other words, the increasingly unproductive impact of employment insecurity on academic research is not the only way life experience and academic thinking can be interrelated. As academics, we can also do the opposite and use our research skills to analyse precisely the employment insecurity that we are experiencing. Moreover, such a reflection on the social conditions of our academic work is indispensable if we want to conduct this work as proper scholarly (as opposed to unreflexive, ideological) practice.

This is perhaps why the post-2007 Great Recession has brought not only a deepening of the crisis in academia but also a new wave of critical studies on this accelerated commodification of knowledge. For example, Andrew McGettigan's *The Great University Gamble* (2013)—a book intended to do for the UK what Chris Newfield's 2008 book *Unmaking the Public University* did for the USA, and to explain in the process the author's encounter with precarisation amid the notorious dissolution of continental philosophy at Middlesex University—offers a detailed political and economic analysis of the current UK government's higher education policies, warning that British universities are now open to commercial pressures that effectively transform education from a public good into a private financial investment. Contributors to *Academic Labour, Unemployment and Global Higher Education* follow McGettigan's argument while widening his historical and geographical scope beyond UK government policies. By doing this, they also follow the argument, put forward by Jeffrey R. Di Leo in his 2014 book *Corporate Humanities in Higher Education*, that the neoliberal commodification of higher education requires humanists to be even better at what they do best, namely, valuing contributions for the ways they advance critical dialogue within academy. *Academic Labour, Unemployment and Global Higher Education* can also be viewed as an attempt to update the argument Marc Bousquet developed in 2008 in *How the University Works*, namely that the very concept of the job market works to mask the ways in which the dominant labourers in the university classrooms are underpaid adjunct instructors. Last but not least, by following the Edu-Factory Collective in its rejection, in *Toward a Global Autonomous University* (2009), of any nostalgia for the privileged place of scholarship and national culture that used to be guaranteed by the university, this book sketches ways of broadening the perspective of critical pedagogy as assumed, for example, in Sheila Macrine's edited volume *Critical Pedagogy in Uncertain Times* (2009).

In this volume, the examination of the relationship between knowledge production and the production of unemployment begins with a series of insights into the political economy of recent higher education policy initiatives. Danijela Dolenec opens the collection by focusing on the Western Balkans. Within the broader process of European integration, the Bologna process and the Lisbon Strategy introduced a new and spectacular dynamic into the affairs of higher education in Europe, carrying the potential of transforming higher education as fundamentally as the nation-state changed the medieval universities. Bologna and Lisbon are taken to further the same four basic objectives: mobility, employability, attractiveness, and competitiveness. While Bologna aims to reorganise higher education systems through three-cycle structures, comparable degrees, and qualification frameworks, the revamped 2005 Lisbon Agenda focuses on making Europe a more attractive place to invest and work in, making knowledge and innovation the heart of growth, and creating more and better jobs. In the Western Balkans, these processes are perceived as more binding than they actually are, argues Dolenec in her chapter, as they importantly shape national strategic plans and legislative agendas. Importing the rhetoric of these initiatives, countries of the region vow to create ‘knowledge societies’ and ‘knowledge triangles’ that will supposedly advance their economies. Usually without appreciating the irony, these rhetorical figures are adopted as official policy goals in the poorest regions of the European Union, where gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is at 30–40 % of the EU27 average, where registered unemployment rates are as high as 30 %, and where the service economy stands for waiters, cooks, and care workers instead of IT and high-tech industries. Dolenec analyses this unhappy policy transfer by grounding it in the political economy of EU peripheral states, on the one hand, and in the context of austerity politics, on the other. As dependent market economies, peripheral states of the Western Balkans are highly reliant on foreign investment, which has meant that they suffered contraction since the onset of the global economic crisis in 2008. The imperative of balanced public budgets demands austerity measures, which has been reflected in cuts to public spending on higher education and research. Gross investments in research and development in the region have declined dramatically in the past two decades, and today the region invests below its level of development. The whole region invests approximately €495 million in research and development per year, which is the equivalent to one US research university. On the basis of this evidence, Dolenec questions the appropriateness of the wholesale transfer

of these European objectives to countries of the Western Balkans. While many researchers argue that Bologna and Lisbon processes helped advance an instrumental concept of higher education in these countries, Dolenc pursues a less researched problem, that of charting the problematic impacts of adopting the rhetoric of policy change designed for advanced knowledge economies of the core in dramatically different socio-economic contexts of the European periphery.

Building on his experience as a radical theorist and activist in Slovenia and other ex-Yugoslav parts of the Western Balkans, Primož Krašovec refutes the theory of human capital from the standpoint of the critique of political economy. In the first part of his chapter, he sketches the intellectual history and sociopolitical context of the development of theories of human capital. He then moves on to criticise the neoliberal equalisation of labour with capital as well as the theory according to which investment in human capital brings profits to individual workers. In the final section, Krašovec shows how current educational reforms impact the learning process and the working conditions at public universities in Slovenia and, by extension, comparable countries. Human-capital theory was conceived as early as the 1960s in the circle of American neoliberal economists, with its prehistory going back to the neoliberal epistemology as it was conceived in Vienna in the early 1930s. Yet it needed almost 20 years to gain recognition in both academic and policy-making circles. For it was only in the 1980s that human-capital theory was able to be broadened by new growth theory and its macroeconomic dimension. And as for the general social and economic conditions that allowed for the growing importance of human-capital theory, the key ones, for Krašovec, were the rise of neoliberalism in general and neoliberal reforms of higher education in particular. Human-capital theory served as an ideological backbone of these reforms, which tightened the integration of the university with the economy, introduced (or increased) tuition fees, and standardised testing, constant evaluations, and audit procedures, increasing workload of both students and professors. In the 1990s, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) launched its ideological campaign for the ‘knowledge-based economy’, and the EU started to prepare the Lisbon Strategy and the Bologna reform. During that time, human-capital theory underwent a silent mutation and began to creep into academic pedagogy. Another 20 years later, a review of Slovenian academic pedagogy literature shows that there is hardly an article that does not list either ‘human capital’ or ‘knowledge society’ among its keywords. Yet,



as Krašovec concludes, in a stark contradistinction with the promises of increased general social welfare in the knowledge-based society, methods of its implementation hurt first and foremost those who are supposed to be its cutting edge, namely intellectual workers. The general notion of the knowledge-based society and the particular theory of human capital are as flawed as they are ubiquitous, according to Krašovec.

P.K. Vijayan closes the section on the political economy of recent higher education policy initiatives by discussing new educational policies in India. The publication of the 'Report on a Policy Framework for Reforms in Education' in 2000 saw the initiation of a major shift in policy formulation for higher education in India, according to Vijayan, a shift that has been sustained independently of the ideology or political programme of the government in power. The report was co-authored by Mukesh Ambani and Kumaramangalam Birla, respective heads of two of the most powerful business houses in India, with rapidly growing global presence and influence. That it was commissioned by the Prime Minister's Council on Trade and Industry is a telling indicator of the direction the state was already looking in regarding policy changes in higher education. The report set the agenda for the series of further reports, policy initiatives, and legislative measures that followed, some produced by the government but others, for example, by the multinational consultancy Ernst & Young Pvt. Ltd (in collaboration with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Planning Commission of the Government of India). As Vijayan demonstrates in his chapter, all of these documents and initiatives are focused on opening the educational sector to foster greater private initiatives and encourage more local and international investors; tailoring curricula and syllabi, as well as educational schedules, to meet the expectations and requirements of commerce and industry; synchronising the Indian higher education system with its global (i.e., European and American) counterparts to allow for easy movement of personnel and students between the systems; encouraging the use of information and communication technology in all educational spheres; introducing systems of calibration and evaluation of teaching based on various criteria of 'productivity'; introducing systems of regulation and accountability of time spent 'on the job' aimed essentially at actively depoliticising campus spaces, but ostensibly at enforcing discipline and encouraging research and publication; shifting increasingly towards contract-based employment, and away from permanent tenures; and, finally, introducing measures that will bypass or otherwise render redundant the various provisions

of affirmative action for socially and economically weaker sections. Vijayan examines these documents and legislations with the aim of identifying and exposing the politics of the various provisions and prohibitions espoused in them; he outlines the possible ramifications and implications, for higher education, in their implementation; and he comments on their relations to larger economic, social, and policy changes that are underway in India currently. Vijayan also briefly discusses the (in)effectiveness of judicial review of such processes, by way of discussing courses of action through reference to a specific case to which he was party.

For those concerned with teaching and scholarly work in higher education now, talk of ‘academic leadership’ is everywhere, Richard Allen and Suman Gupta note in their chapter, which opens the section of the book devoted to management and leadership against academic freedom. Scanning academic jobs pages, looking at Research Councils’ funding schemes, examining government policy documents on higher education, consulting university promotions and appraisals procedures, mulling academic workload calculations, and listening to deliberations in university committees—all these suggest that the phrase *academic leadership* has, so to speak, gone viral. There are more scholarly sounding publications on the subject than specialists can keep up with; numerous well-endowed firms offer academic leadership training and guidance; think tanks constantly urge the need to nurture more academic leaders and corporations that can cultivate them; and newspapers inform of the privileges of top-level academic leaders with grudging admiration. In their chapter, Allen and Gupta attempt to contextualise the shifting connotations of *academic leadership* in order to understand the current circumstances of academic life. In the first part of the chapter, they do so in a broad manner, by considering the conceptual nuances of academic leadership amid phases in rationalising the conditions of academic work. In the second part, they offer a more contextually grounded view from the UK. According to Allen and Gupta, a historical perspective on conceptualising academic leadership reveals a shift, starting in the 1970s, from regarding academic leadership as leadership by academics for academic work in the public interest towards leadership by professional leaders (managers) over academics to mould academic work for public and private, profit-generating, interests. Allen and Gupta call for a historical examination of this shift towards managerialism in academia. They contribute to it indirectly by outlining consecutive conceptual reorientations of the relationship between academic leadership and the conditions of academic work—from the consideration

of academic work as a public good whose material conditions should largely be self-determined; through the exposure of this public good to administrative measurements of its public benefits (first of its exteriorised products, and then, retroactively, also of its internal working process), the introduction of professional managers and representatives of private capital, respectively, responsible for producing and reviewing these measurements, and the use of these descriptive measurements as proscriptive guidelines; to the final fragmentation of the public university on behalf of the interests of private ‘stakeholders’. In the second half of the chapter, the UK academia in general and academic leadership and internship in particular are examined from the perspective of this shift from ‘*academic leadership*’ to ‘*academic leadership*’.

Moving on from the European to the global leader in academic managerialism, Kim Emery examines the USA, specifically the University of Florida’s move to a shared-services model of staffing for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The basic goal of shared services is to remove routine administrative tasks (accounting, human resources management, payroll, purchasing, etc.) from the diverse departments, institutes, and offices in which they traditionally reside, and to consolidate them in a single centralised operation. The utility of shared services relies mostly on the assumption that because the work done by support staff is not in itself explicitly ‘academic’, the organisation of that work is irrelevant to the properly intellectual purpose of the university. Like incentive-based budgeting, responsibility-centre management, and other techniques of the corporate university, shared services have emerged in the broader context of planned deprivation and precarious employment. In Florida, such context has been set up by neoliberal politics throughout the 2000s. By 2012, shared services were introduced at the University of Florida as a cost-saving measure predicated on the assumption that members of the office staff, having lost the protections of unionisation, would also lose their jobs. The initial plan of 35 lay-offs due to the introduction of shared services targeted mostly women, a multiracial group and mostly middle-aged and older, most making less than \$35,000 a year. In response, a coalition of faculty, staff, students, and local residents emerged that categorically refused division among staff, faculty, and graduate employees. As a result, the departments of the College were given the choice to opt out of shared services, and lateral reassignment replaced lay-off as the first option for affected staff. Nevertheless, another structural change has been effected at the University of Florida: the shared-services centre has been

established. Over the course of a decade, a series of interrelated administrative manoeuvres—shared services, departmental reorganisation, the shift to a revenue-based budgeting system, and a dramatic, statewide union decertification drive—has produced an increase in unemployment. On this basis, Emery notes that the very notion of the production of unemployment invites two distinct readings: Emery asks not only what produces this unemployment but also what this unemployment produces. Her answer to the second question is a loss of departmental autonomy, increased anxiety and precarity, and decreased academic freedom. So, the immediate emergency of impending lay-offs may have worked, at the University of Florida, as a decoy to distract the coalition from the structural acceptance of the shared-services model. If so, one lesson learned, concludes Emery, is that premising structural change on pernicious distinctions among employees is at least not automatically a winning strategy. This is a critical accomplishment, in her view, as the divisions encouraged by shared services appeal not only to faculty's traditional vanity, but also to the particular vulnerability of our current circumstances.

Opening the section on generation gaps and economic dependency in academic life, Mike Hajimichael examines the state of higher education in Cyprus and especially the predicament of students after they finish their studies in the context of the current economic crisis. Hajimichael outlines the evolution of higher education in Cyprus, with its postcolonial belatedness and its strong emphasis on the dichotomy between the private and the state sector. On this basis, he presents the results of ethnographic interviews that he conducted with five communications graduates whom he had taught at the University of Nicosia. Because of the economic crisis in Cyprus, many of these graduates now face the prospects of unemployment, employment insecurity, and low-income, highly exploitative jobs. Uncertain future, the stigmatisation of the unemployed, and the desperate support of family and friends were themes common to all five interviews. The biggest problem may be the way the society has changed in relation to unemployment, according to Hajimichael. In 2003, when Cyprus joined the EU, the island had the lowest unemployment rate among the ten new member states, namely 4.1 %, which is in stark contrast to the more recent figure of 16.1 %. This means that Cyprus is now faced with high and long-term levels of unemployment, especially since official statistics are constructed in a way that hides the real numbers because they only account for people on the unemployment benefit, which, however, only lasts for 6 months in Cyprus. This, of course, also means that people who

are out of work for more than 6 months are left to fend for themselves, as is the case with Hajimichael's interviewees, who increasingly rely on their families as sources of alternative income and support. A similar phenomenon is also noticeable in Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland, all economies that are undergoing different forms of austerity, Hajimichael adds. In his view, there is a need today for a more critical awareness in education, one that addresses precariousness, exploitation, and social inequality. The current austerity measures have struck graduates just as much as Thatcherite *laissez-faire* policies had hit Hajimichael himself as a graduate in Great Britain back in the 1980s. After experiencing a similar situation than his five interviewees, only in the Thatcherite Britain rather than the post-haircut Cyprus, Hajimichael repatriated to Cyprus around 1994, where there was far less unemployment than in Britain. Today, however, youth unemployment in Cyprus is one of the highest in Europe. It peaked at around 40 % just after the Cypriot 'haircut', the bailout crisis of March 2013, and it now stands at 31.7 %. This could be seen as an improvement, but it remains unacceptable, Hajimichael concludes, that one in three young people in Cyprus still has 'no future', as Johnny Rotten used to sing on the eve of those Thatcherite 1980s.

Ivana Perica's chapter is devoted to the New Public Management in the global academia, specifically to the ways in which it manifests itself in its pedagogic effects as it institutionalises the academic field's new pedagogy. Focusing on examples from academic experience in Austria, Perica makes a twofold point: first, the structure of the 'old', multilevel academic hierarchies has been translated into a structure based on the ossified poles of 'professors' and 'mid-level academic positions'. The inequality between these poles manifests itself not only as a wage difference but also as a difference in participatory rights and employment duration. While professors—who, due to their management position, are constantly short of time for research—have long-term appointments, mid-level academic staff must deal with short-term contracts, frequent employment applications, exposure to greater peer pressure, and expectations of conformist behaviour, in order to avoid conflicts that might jeopardise their already precarious position. However, Perica is careful to point out, the distinction between the 'old' and the 'new' academia is easily blurred, and one cannot avoid the impression that the 'old' pedagogical hierarchies are in some way re-established in the horizontal structures of the 'new' academia. Therefore, in order to determine the specificities of the 'new' academia, she argues that while in the 'old' academia the relations between assistants

and professors were structured as pedagogical relations of ‘teachers’ and ‘students’ (or even ‘fathers’ and ‘sons’, as in the German *Doktorvater* and *wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs*), in the ‘new’ academia the ‘students’ have not gained more autonomy but have—and this is her second point—been repositioned into relations of dependency to their ‘managers’, ‘employers’, and ‘project leaders’. As precarious workers, all non-professors face the pedagogy that is hidden in the paradoxical ‘horizontal hierarchies’ of *anonymous* opinions of their peers, as well as in diverse (career) training programmes offered by the universities themselves (courses on ‘academic small talk and networking’, ‘lifelong learning’, etc.). The anonymity of the evaluators and of those who determine the quality standards results in an empirically observable reduction of the researcher’s scientific autonomy. While the process of the pedagogical normalisation of the academic community is nothing new as such, its contemporary innovation lies in the fact that its subjects are not expected to ever overcome their existence as subjects of pedagogical subjectivation. On top of that, Perica concludes, their future work, career prospects, and their sheer employability depend on the willingness to become subjects of academia’s new pedagogy.

So, the rise of corporate management styles in higher education has led to the growing exploitation of academic workers, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, through insecure employment. In his chapter, George Morgan argues that this process has diminished the political influence of the very scholars who should be best placed and most inclined to defend academic freedom, collegiality, and critical thinking against the depredations of neoliberalism. As public funding diminishes, universities are becoming less inclined to cross-subsidise vulnerable curricula in the humanities, social sciences, and pure sciences, especially in specialised fields of low student demand and fields in which pedagogical requirements are most intensive. In order to make the funding dollar go further, managers have resorted to employing members of the cognitariat—sessional, casual, or short contract staff—to perform a growing proportion of academic work. According to Morgan, this is part of a larger economic programme that has imposed Taylorist bureaucratic regulation of much academic work. In his chapter, Morgan charts the rise of the mass university in Australia, in particular the growth in undergraduate student numbers over the last 20 years. He argues that the management of this growth—the rounds of organisational change and course rationalisation—has demoralised academic communities and eroded scholarly bonds. For Australia spends a smaller proportion of its GDP on universities than all

but one of the OECD countries, universities respond to this squeeze by undermining the conditions of teaching and learning, that is, by cutting teaching time and staffing levels, and increasing class sizes. As a result, between 1990 and 2008, casual academic staff numbers, on a full-time equivalent basis, grew by 180 %, compared with a 41 % growth in non-casual academic staff numbers during the same period. And between 2004 and 2010, the percentage of casual employees in Australian universities rose from approximately 40 to 60. Most scholars, however, shrink from the prospect of openly challenging the invidious effects of managerialism. Members of the academic precariat, or cognitariat, are unable to make plans, purchase property, or start a family. Their dependence on the continued patronage of tenured mentors in offering them work undermines their ability to become politically active in challenging the system of creeping casualisation that maintains them in poverty and powerlessness. As for the tenured mentors, they either jump through the managerial hoops or engage in passive resistance, but rarely offer an open challenge to the discourses and processes that trammel them. However, in a post-Fordist world in which Taylorist bureaucratic organisations are becoming increasingly obsolete, the managerial university appears something of an anachronism, and hence vulnerable to challenge, concludes Morgan.

In recent years, debates have emerged about rising corporate influence and control over higher education. In their chapter, Mariya Ivancheva and Micheal O’Flynn relate these issues to the role of tenure in academic life. They explore the traditions of tenured employment, which many see as a weapon or asset in the struggle against the relentless commercialisation and casualisation of higher education. Far from pleading for a return to an imagined golden age, Ivancheva and O’Flynn argue for the kind of transformation that is required to make the best of the present as well as to secure the future. They suggest that the capacity of universities to act for (and on behalf of) civil society cannot be maintained without a corresponding collective demand for occupational integrity and security, especially in a time when even tenured employment is becoming subject to precarisation. With a focus on Ireland, they examine the so-called contract of indefinite duration, a peculiar form of tenure that permits interpretations that downgrade those employed under its premise. With reference to a number of cases, they examine the struggles that academics face in obtaining these contracts of indefinite duration, as well as the ways in which university administrations increasingly use the contract of indefinite duration as a mechanism to divide and rule. Ivancheva and O’Flynn

consider how the absence of security and stability affects people's lives and their capacity to develop as researchers and teachers. They address deteriorating working conditions and consider how they prevent a growing number of academics from engaging productively with their colleagues, caring for their students, or even caring adequately for themselves. The authors suggest that by outsourcing work previously carried out under permanent contracts of employment, universities demonstrate a stubborn refusal to contribute to the formation of secure occupational identities among those hoping to live and work as academics. Contracts of indefinite duration, although indeed offering the best approximation to job security amid increasingly destructive commercial forces, are a half-hearted solution that can also be used as a tool for antagonising further the ever more stratified academic community, warn Ivancheva and O'Flynn in their conclusion. Because of the legal procedures that it triggers, claiming a contract of indefinite duration deepens the individualisation and the isolation to which universities subject their casual staff, curtailing the possibilities of collective solutions to a shared predicament. Ironically, then, contracts of indefinite duration are a precarious mechanism, but increasingly the only one that precarious academics have in order to obtain permanent position while employed by Irish universities.

The collection closes with a section on the possibilities, and the urgency, of collective action in academia. Reflecting on his empirical study of a university struggle in Slovenia that managed to align itself with an industrial strike, Branko Bembič examines, in the section's first chapter, the usefulness of university knowledge production from the perspectives of capital and the working class. From the viewpoint of capital, the university is useful primarily as a locus of permanent primitive accumulation in the scientific sphere, which the state institutionalises in order to enhance the competitiveness of the capitals that are operating within its borders. As university knowledge production becomes production for the capitalist market, scholarly production becomes commodified. Certain segments of the university knowledge production are, however, useless from the viewpoint of individual capitals, since they are of little interest to capitalist production. These segments are found mainly in the fields of the humanities. Bembič distinguishes between two forms of uselessness of the humanities. The first relates to the production of theory. Insofar as the principal contradiction of societies with the capitalist mode of production is the one between labour and capital, no social theory can assume a neutral position with regard to class struggle. Thus, theory can become a weapon of the



working class in this struggle and is therefore useless, if not dangerous, from the point of view of capital. There is, however, another form of uselessness, one that is complementary to commodified knowledge. While in a commodified universe, activities have no end in themselves but are carried out for the sake of endless accumulation, the very uselessness of the humanities from the standpoint of individual capitals excludes them from the commodified universe and structurally places them in a position of luxury. Two consequences follow from this, for Bembič. First, the two forms of uselessness exclude each other. If the working class is strong enough to successfully demand access to higher education in the field of one's choice, no part of university knowledge production can be regarded as luxury. Second, those segments of the humanities that are useless from the viewpoint of individual capitals become useful if viewed from the perspective of the working class, insofar as they enter the workers' consumption and are capable of becoming weapons of the working class in class struggle. However, from the vantage point of the bourgeoisie, they still pertain to the vapid commodified universe. The humanities become luxury only if capital completely subordinates the university knowledge production to its needs, expelling the humanities as a useless endeavour. The neoliberal restructuring of higher education is thus in perfect harmony with the dignified status of the humanities, concludes Bembič. To his view, the struggle against this restructuring cannot be confined to the university alone, as the university is an ideological state apparatus governed by a class struggle that the contemporary working class can only win if it enters the class struggle at the level of the entire society.

In the next chapter, in which Johnny Rotten's message of 'no future' is evoked for a second time, Mark Bergfeld asks what precarity, unemployment, and underemployment bring to young university graduates and to contemporary activism. He starts by drawing out the different theorisations of precarity and the associated phenomena of precarisation and the precariat. He discards the notion of the precariat as an emerging class, as it was influentially proposed by Guy Standing. For Bergfeld, one's class position is defined not by one's position in the structure of social income, as Standing seems to think, but by one's relation to one's means of production, as classically conceptualised by Karl Marx. Hence, Bergfeld advances the idea that, as members of the precariat, university graduates form a class fraction in the making: unlike previous generations of students, they are from the outset part of a broader working class that facilitates new forms of activism. Instead of Standing, he follows Mario Candeias and

Eva Völpe! as they argue that the young people in question constitute a class fraction that constitutes the remaking of the working class both politically and culturally. From this perspective, Bergfeld looks back at the London student movement of 2010 and the Quebec student strike of 2012. Characterised by student strikes, economic blockades, mass general assemblies, permanent organisations that resemble trade unions, and a high degree of mobilisation by high school students and urban youth, these and other student movements have placed themselves squarely into the struggle of labour against capital, thus reconfiguring precarity as a form of activism. In the UK, the movement did so insofar as it placed itself at the helm of the anti-austerity movement as a whole, while students in Quebec used proletarianised forms of action as they picketed university buildings and led student strikes. In general, the proletarianisation of students has meant that students have not only proclaimed solidarity with labour struggles, as in the case of the UK, but also adopted proletarianised forms of struggle, as in Quebec. As Bergfeld highlights, the theoretical debates featured in his chapter informed the UK student movement in 2010 not only at the ideological level but also in terms of political strategies. The works of Guy Standing and Paul Mason were continuous reference points in analysing the struggle. Despite the passing of this moment, it is worth revisiting these debates, Bergfeld argues, if we want to conceptualise the situation that the political and economic elites have not been able to resolve, and address some questions that need to be addressed in political praxis in a new round of university struggles. And such struggles are never too far off: as Bergfeld was writing his chapter, he was able to see students at the University of Amsterdam and students of the London School of Economics occupy university buildings.

In the face of the aggressive neoliberal restructuring of the institutions of higher education—manifest, in the UK, in the raising of student tuition fees, budget cuts, commercialisation of career paths and research ‘products’, and so on—there has been little notable resistance, especially among critical scholars and theorists. Critical scholarship has proven itself to be collectively apathetic or actively disinterested in pragmatically deploying the resource of critical theory against the identified neoliberalisation of higher education. Why is this the case? In their chapter, Cerelia Athanassiou and Jamie Melrose discuss the reasons for this inactivity, as well as the critical tools at our disposal that they see as unused or misused. With the so-called student rebellions of 2010—to date, the most significant display of discontent and resistance to the neoliberalisation of UK higher education,

and unfolding in precedent and parallel with wider Occupy-style protest—adopting and reflecting on so much of what can be described as counter-hegemonic practices, Athanassiou and Melrose enquire about the lack of comprehensive follow-up to this. To their view, the student movement was notable because of its figurative medium as much as its anti-neoliberal message, style, and content were fused. Horizontal and participatory in spirit, it was well versed in non-hierarchical and institutional admonitions. Yet, the fundamentally unhindered continuity of contemporary managerialism, economism, and depoliticisation suggests that this student resistance (supported by fellow producers of and participants in institutions of higher education at the time) was a flash in the pan, a chapter in an existing narrative, not the beginning of a new one. The wave of anti-cuts and austerity protests did not transform into a more counter-hegemonic presence. One reason for this, according to Athanassiou and Melrose, is the crucial lack of meaningful political collaboration from what they see as an institutionally entrenched, self-identifying anti-liberal grouping within academia. Athanassiou and Melrose ask: Can this inactivity be seen as characteristic of the critical scholarly constituency and its compliance with the reproduction of the social status quo? Could it be a prelude to more serious engagement with the terms of contemporary critical scholarship and thus praxis? Through their collaborative account of their own institutional experience over the course of the last 3 academic years, Athanassiou and Melrose set out to contribute to the volume's rethinking of critical scholarship with the aim of reimagining what a radical and critical subjectivity could look like and how it should be key to democratic participation within the university and beyond.

The volume closes with Hrvoje Tutek's attempt to explain how systems of tertiary education, hailed prior to the global recession as fundamental pillars of development and as driving motors of emerging 'knowledge societies', quickly became just another uncomfortable figure in state-budget tables during austerity implemented after the last financial crash. With the crisis, the 'knowledge-society bubble', characterised in the European periphery by the implementation of the Bologna reform, investment in the construction of academic facilities as well as the rampant commercialisation of the public university system, burst and a halt was put to expansive policies prevalent earlier (merely nominally expansive, that is, as the logic of austerity has existed and been implemented since before the crash). However, the ideology of knowledge society is still firmly in place, as is the simplistic concept of the entrepreneurial university, where the production

of intellectual property equals the production of knowledge, and research funding is considered to be in a proportional relationship to ‘results’. This gives rise to the following contradiction: the practice of fiscal austerity aimed at public universities adversely affects the production of ‘innovation’ seen as the *raison d’être* of academic work (i.e., science) in the age of the entrepreneurial university. This practice also directly contributes to the intensification of the (semi)periphery-core emigration of academic workers. In the peripheral European countries, where systems of tertiary education are overwhelmingly public, this loss has often been observed with spontaneous outrage: ‘our best and brightest are going to leave for other countries’. However, as anyone familiar with the globally dismal state of academic labour markets knows, the flight of academic workers is not quite a flight to safety—the precarious conditions of labour and neoliberal institutional discipline are dominant across the world system. These problems, Tutek argues, cannot simply be solved by subtler local policies targeted at universities and other research institutions. However, many still consider the unenviable position of contemporary academic workers in terms such as ‘staffing crises’, as Tutek’s example from the University of Zagreb demonstrates, or conceive it as a problem of a dismal academic ‘job market’, as can be witnessed from the recent rise of ‘post-ac’ or ‘alt-ac’ initiatives and support networks for jobless academics in the USA. However, echoing most of the contributions to this edited volume and certainly the main wagger of the volume’s final section, Tutek claims that these problems need to be addressed at the structural level and that the struggle for better conditions of academic work and regulation of knowledge production must necessarily be fought as part of an internationalised struggle of organised labour.

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PART I

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The Political Economy of Higher  
Education Policy Initiatives Now

## The Implausible Knowledge Triangle of the Western Balkans

*Danijela Dolenec*

### THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY AS A NEOLIBERAL SCRIPT

Within the broader process of European integration, which is the pre-eminent political project in the Western Balkans, the Bologna process and the Lisbon Strategy ‘introduced a new and spectacular dynamic into the affairs of higher education in Europe’ (Neave 2002, p. 186), carrying the potential of transforming higher education ‘as fundamentally as the nation state changed the medieval universities’ (Corbett 2005, p. 192). In this analysis, Bologna and Lisbon are taken to further the same four basic objectives—mobility, employability, attractiveness, and competitiveness (see Neave 2002). While Bologna aims to reorganise higher education systems through three-cycle structures, comparable degrees, and qualification frameworks, Lisbon focuses on making Europe a more attractive place to invest and work in, making knowledge and innovation the heart of growth, and creating more and better jobs.

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With the Lisbon Agenda, higher education is supposed to be transformed into a strategic factor of European integration and a fundamental ingredient of competitiveness as a key priority in discourse of the European Union (see Capano and Piattoni 2011). As a result, with the launching of the Lisbon Strategy the university became the core institution of the ‘Europe of Knowledge’ (Gornitzka 2010). The 2000 Lisbon Agenda and its successor policies have proven to be highly consequential for changes in higher education and research policy in Europe, for at least three reasons: they reasserted the role of research and development for economic competitiveness and growth; they underlined the role of education as a core labour market factor as well as a factor of social cohesion; and they shifted the focus of objectives and priorities from the national level to the European one (ibid.). These reform demands were raised in an atmosphere of perceived performance crisis (see Olsen and Maassen 2007), in which something allegedly needed to be done immediately in order for Europe to ‘stay in the game’ of global competition.

If we conceptualise the Lisbon Agenda as a script, that is, ‘a set of generally stated policy principles and ideas that policy actors employ in order to give structure to their interaction and to channel their policy discourse’ (Capano and Piattoni 2011, p. 589), then its corresponding political buzzword is the ‘knowledge-based economy’, while its main components are science-based innovation as the engine of economic development and education as a necessary investment in human capital (see Gornitzka 2010). In a knowledge-based economy, knowledge replaces capital, labour, and natural resources as the central value- and wealth-creating factor. Reforms use the language of modernisation, economic functions of the university, and necessary adaptation to economic and technological change, while the university is envisioned as dynamic and adaptive to consumers, giving priority to innovation, entrepreneurship, and market orientation (see Olsen and Maassen 2007). Advancing such a functionalist conception, research becomes a cornerstone of economic competitiveness, while education is perceived through its impact on labour markets, social policy, and overall economic policy. Along the same lines, the university is required to ‘step up its interaction with industry, and as an institution of lifelong learning’ (Gornitzka 2010, p. 178).

In other words, the solution to Europe’s competitiveness problem is sought in neoliberal public sector reforms, ‘celebrating private enterprise and competitive markets’ (Olsen and Maassen 2007, p. 4), whereby the university is reduced to one of the sites in a general rebalancing of power in



Europe's political and economic order. Several interpretations understand the Lisbon Strategy as embedded in neoliberal ideology (e.g., Radaelli 2003; Chalmers and Lodge 2003), whereby the panacea of the market serves as a “‘solution looking for problems” [...], and usually finding them, in all sectors of society’ (Olsen and Maassen 2007, p. 4). Other possible roles of the university, such as developing democratic citizens, social cohesion, or addressing the EU's democratic deficit, are not addressed within the EU's programme for higher education and research. Likewise, within the spirit of New Public Management reforms, democratic internal organisation of the university and individual academic freedom are understood as obstacles to good performance.

This being so, researchers have exposed certain important weaknesses in the EU's grand project of ‘market building’ (Gornitzka et al. 2007). As Johan P. Olsen and Peter Maassen (2007) show, the worry about global competitiveness is centred on the European research-intensive university, which is a minority among several thousands of universities in Europe. If the Lisbon Agenda is a project inclusive of all universities, this opens up the question of the reform arguments that apply to them—are they also underperforming, in what ways, and for what reason? To this we may add the dynamic of core and peripheral states of the EU, as well as its neighbourhood, with respect to the same question. As a more careful analysis shows, instead of being based on evidence and rigorous research, the solutions currently being forwarded are to a large extent based on ‘belief systems’ (Olsen and Maassen 2007, p. 10) derived from the neoliberal script and embodied in the ideal of the US Ivy League University. Proponents of the European university reform ‘usually refer to an imagined US business model, as carried around the world by a multitude of consulting firms and international organisations’ (Olsen and Maassen 2007, p. 13).

To this end, the European Commission promotes the development of knowledge triangles: ‘close, effective links between education, research, and innovation’ through ‘new types of cooperation between education institutions, research organisations and business’ (European Commission n.d.). In order to further this policy, the European Commission established specialised institutions such as the European Institute for Innovation and Technology or the University-Business Forum, and interlaced cooperation between the higher education sector and the business community within all its major funding programmes for higher education and research. In this vision of ‘science based’ economic and social development, technology

transfer offices, science parks, incubators, and spin-offs emerge as the new institutional infrastructure enabling universities to commercialise and capitalise knowledge (see Etzkowitz 2008).

Though, on the one hand, the introduction of the ‘knowledge triangle’ should not pose a threat to the university, as the latter has always had education, research, and innovation as its basic functions, the current rhetoric makes two assumptions that reflect negatively on universities. First, an essentially functionalist reduction of the mission of university to furthering economic growth is recast as the university’s civic role in social and economic development (see, e.g., Etzkowitz 2008). Second, the ‘knowledge triangle’ frame plays ‘panic football’, claiming that the university must be drastically reformed in order to stay in the game (Maassen and Stensaker 2011). The knowledge triangle and its framework discourse of the knowledge-based economy have become a ‘powerful imaginary’ (Jessop 2008), influencing strategies and policy recipes as well as shaping the policy paradigm that guides institutional design and reform objectives in higher education and research. Furthermore, this script reconceptualises the academic as a technoscientist, presuming ‘a much narrower subjectivity that combines scientific rationality with instrumental and opportunistic sensibility’ (Kenway et al. 2007, p. 125). The privileging of the technoscientist encourages academics across disciplines to restyle themselves according to this image in order not to be perceived as redundant in the new order of things (*ibid.*).

Assuming that we agree that this functionalist liberal script for university reform is currently the dominant discourse, two important questions arise. First, how does this set of ideas get transferred into policy proposals and reform agendas implemented by national bureaucracies, university management, and academic staff? And second, what happens when this script travels further than its initial logic intends? In order to answer the first question, I will employ the concept of epistemic communities and analyse how it helps us understand the wholesale transfer of the Lisbon Agenda objectives to peripheral European economies of the Western Balkans. In an attempt to reveal the severity of the mismatch between the Lisbon Agenda objectives and the political economies of the Western Balkans, I will analyse, in the second part of the chapter, comparative data on investment in higher education and research as well as state capacity. I will conclude by sketching an argument that attempts to relate this unhappy policy transfer to the elite-driven character of European integration.

## EPISTEMIC COMMUNITIES AS KNOWLEDGE-ECONOMY SCRIPTERS

Recently, scholars have come to analyse the Bologna process and the Lisbon Strategy together, as the two main pillars of European integration in higher education (see, e.g., Maassen and Musselin 2009). And indeed, the two have become increasingly interconnected over time (see Gornitzka 2010; Vukasović 2014). However, the two initiatives differ in some important aspects. Unlike the Bologna process, the Lisbon Strategy is largely a supranational process, with a number of instruments developed to support its development (see Vukasović 2014). These include legally binding directives in the areas of recognition of qualifications, joint recommendations as well as numerous funding schemes designed to support its objectives (*ibid.*). Though the principle of subsidiarity in areas of education and research are still in force, the open method of coordination (OMC), introduced at the 2000 Lisbon Summit, was designed in order to enable setting common objectives and translating them to national and regional policies (see Gornitzka 2007). As Åse Gornitzka has argued, the OMC is ‘a mode of governance that assumes that coordination can happen across levels of governance without transferring legal competencies and budgetary means to the European level’ (Gornitzka 2010, p. 155). Through the OMC, experts from member states evaluate national performance according to commonly agreed objectives and indicators (see Tamtik and Sá 2011).

The main instruments of the OMC are benchmarks, indicators, peer review of policy, and iterated procedures (*ibid.*), which ties in with the broader neoliberal script of reform based on imitation of successful peers (see Olsen and Maassen 2007). Wolfgang Kerber and Martina Eckardt (Kerber and Eckardt 2007) argue that the OMC is a tool for spreading new knowledge concerning appropriate public policies. In addition, the OMC is an approach to policy development that affords experts a central role (see Tamtik and Sá 2011). In 2007, the European Commission initiated 1237 actively operating expert groups composed of representatives from the member states (see Gornitzka and Sverdrup 2011). As an overarching governance structure that can create opportunities for networking and sharing of experience (see Vukasović 2014), the OMC contributes to Europeanisation by endorsing collective norms and ideas (see Tamtik and Sá 2011).

In this respect, EU and national policy experts who regularly interact and co-develop policy through the OMC form so-called epistemic communities (see Haas 1992), that is, communities that share specific

understandings, values, and beliefs although members might come from different disciplinary or professional settings. The sharing of experience establishes connections with others who share the same values, and enables the development of core belief systems that are then incorporated into practical policy advice. The difference between any group sharing common beliefs and an epistemic community is that the members of an epistemic community have ‘the power of validating knowledge in the domain of their expertise’ (Tamtik and Sá 2011).

Epistemic communities persuade others of their shared beliefs by virtue of their professional knowledge; hence, their ‘policy goals must derive from their expert knowledge, not some other motivation, otherwise they lose authority with their target audience, usually elite governmental decision-makers’ (Davis Cross 2013, p. 142). This also distinguishes them from so-called advocacy coalitions: while advocacy coalitions involve politicians, lobbyists, and journalists, epistemic communities are dominated by experts motivated by technocratic considerations, whereby ‘basing the solution on authoritative scientific content is more important than the solution’s content’ (Zito 2001, p. 589). One of the implications of this, however, is the ‘truth status’ of policy recipes emerging from epistemic communities, which tend to travel to new policy contexts as authoritative knowledge.

Along these lines, the central organising concept for the dominant policy paradigm in higher education and research—the ‘knowledge economy’—has a respectable pedigree in the social sciences, all the way from economics to sociology. Starting in the 1960s, on the one hand, Peter Drucker (1969) developed the concept of knowledge worker with a view to the service economy, emphasising the role of knowledge and formal qualifications as key resources. On the other hand, in 1973, Daniel Bell elaborated the idea of a post-industrial society, in which knowledge and the availability of human resources were conceptualised as key for economic progress, while the university became the central social institution. When, by the 1980s, this was combined with Paul Romer’s new growth theory (see Romer 1986) and the concept of human capital, all the main components of a new explanatory framework coincided, creating a powerful influence on social theory through the work of Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, or Manuel Castells as leading thinkers of globalisation. By the late 1990s, when the European Commission began to formulate socio-economic policy more actively, the idea that knowledge forms the basis of global competitiveness was already considered common sense (see Dolenc 2008).

The importance of epistemic communities in explaining policy change has grown with the recognised trend of transnational governance (see Davis Cross 2013), of which the Lisbon Agenda is a telling example. This is because knowledge creation is embedded in globally configured professional knowledge communities (see Moodysson 2008). Communities here designate an intermediate level between individuals and organisations, that is, groups of people who work on mutually recognised sets of knowledge issues and share the same social norms (*ibid.*). By employing the concept of epistemic communities, the analysis moves away from an interest-based explanation to the terrain of ideas. In addition, this concept has the added value of focusing the analysis on the ‘carriers’ of ideas, that is, experts as actors with the professional and social stature to make authoritative claims on a given topic (see Dunlop 2013). Though the concept is not without its challenges when it comes to operationalisation, in the context of higher education and research policy, the OMC provides an empirical setting in which it is possible to identify and establish the emergence of new epistemic communities and their belief systems (*ibid.*). Already in Peter Haas’s original analysis (1992), epistemic communities were conceptualised as catalysts in international policy coordination. With respect to their impact, they have been analysed at two levels. The micro-level analysis is concerned with learning processes that occur between epistemic communities and decision-makers, advocacy coalitions, interests groups, and so on. And the macro-level analysis, which I will employ here, analyses the policy outcomes at the national and the regional level that result from policy prescriptions of epistemic communities.

The first study to apply the concept of an epistemic community to the issue of EU integration was published by Amy Verdun (1999), who argued that the Delors Committee, which elaborated the project of the European Monetary Union, was an epistemic community. The Committee, which consisted of the Commission President, 12 central bank presidents from the European Community, 3 independent experts, and another European Community Commissioner, easily reached unanimous agreement with respect to drafting their conclusions, which, in a second step, were integrated into the Treaty of the European Union virtually without amendments (*ibid.*).

In the policy domain of higher education and research, several recent studies analyse the importance of epistemic communities and norm diffusion as explanations of national reform trajectories. Merli Tamtik and Creso M. Sá (2011) analyse how the OMC, as a mechanism for generating

epistemic communities, was first used for internationalising the science and technology policy. Activities in this policy domain intensified after the 2005 review of Lisbon objectives, while after the launch of the Seventh Framework Programme in January 2007, transnational cooperation came to the forefront of European research policy (*ibid.*). Similarly, Alexander Kleibrink (2011) studies how the notion of lifelong learning was developed within the purview of the Lisbon Agenda. He shows that the notion of lifelong learning originated not from policy communities or academia, but from the business world (*ibid.*). Lifelong learning envisaged the state as strategic planner in developing human capital, with reforms driven by demand from employers and the labour market. Following the revamped Lisbon Strategy in 2005, the Portuguese Presidency launched the European Qualification Framework in November 2007, followed by the process of designing complementary National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) in EU member and candidate states. The European Commission and its network of agencies were vital for the internalisation of the norm by the members of the EU community as well as for spreading the norm beyond the borders of the community. This process was guided by a certain logic of appropriateness where international organisations are the principal promoters of the lifelong learning norm. After almost all member states had committed to follow the Lisbon version of lifelong learning (notably after the Eastern enlargement), the European Commission diffused the norm to other countries, primarily through capacity-building measures that aimed at persuading governments to adopt the EU model of lifelong learning.

In all these cases, expert groups developed an ‘episteme’, a shared worldview that was derived from their mutual socialisation and shared knowledge (Davis Cross 2013).

As Janine Goetschy notes (2005), the fact that the OMC is a mechanism that is highly conducive to creating epistemic communities has several important downsides. First of all, the multiplicity of actors involved and the complexity of the process of coordination further exacerbate the already existing problem of democratic control over EU governance. Furthermore, they exacerbate the democratic deficit by further marginalising the European Parliament’s role in policymaking while strengthening the role of the European Commission—with all that this entails for a mode of governance that is already elitist and nontransparent. Finally, and most pertinent for this analysis, the OMC’s reliance on expert networks contributes to the exclusion of important policy debates in the respective national

public arenas, further strengthening the technocratic nature of EU policy-making by systematically depoliticising social and economic issues that are crucial to the livelihood of European citizens.

### LISBON'S BUMPY TRAVELS TO THE WESTERN BALKANS

In his analysis, Kleibrink wonders why EU neighbouring countries were initiating NQFs despite the absence of convincing empirical evidence of their success. At the time when they began implementing NQFs, 'governments could not rely on clear empirical evidence that convincingly associated their adoption with higher quality of educational standards, greater labour mobility and higher labour participation rates' (Kleibrink 2011, p. 70). Instead, the explanation is sought in the domain of 'logic of appropriateness', adopting a policy because it has become a norm of socially acceptable behaviour. In the context of EU integration, aspiring candidates for EU membership initiated NQFs to indicate their membership in the EU club (*ibid.*). Kleibrink argues that the European Commission and its relevant bodies in the field of education play a central role in designing a norm, fixing its meaning, and then persuading states to internalise it. Hence, the rationale for embracing the EU's lifelong learning norm has more to do with gaining legitimacy on the way to EU membership than with learning about new policy development; this can explain why governments in these countries burden themselves with overly ambitious reforms that overstrain their administrations and budgets (see Kleibrink 2012, p. 124).

Building on the asymmetrical relationship between old and new member states, Tanja Börzel (2003) distinguishes between two strategies with respect to the development of European-level norms and associated policy recommendations. The so-called uploading strategy refers to a bottom-up dynamic in which countries advance policies at the European level that satisfy domestic preferences. For example, and as Tamtik and Sá (2011) show, the leading role in the development of the European Internationalization Strategy in Science and Technology was taken by Germany, a member state that had a lot to gain from this Strategy. Moreover, it was repeatedly the representatives of powerful Western countries—Germany, France, Italy, Austria, and Norway—that shaped the agenda and direction of the work of the group.

This builds on Börzel's (2003) claim that the success of the uploading strategy depends on the country's position with regard to the relevant structures. For example, countries that participate in the process

as candidate or pre-accession countries have almost no opportunity to shape EU-level policy in the area of higher education and research (see Vukasović 2014). In addition, even when they gain the right of access, other obstacles remain, such as administrative capacity and available resources or financial means and staff power for lobbying within EU structures (ibid.). Along these lines, Tamtik and Sá (2011) demonstrate that participants that recently joined the EU noted that the meetings were a truly useful learning experience, but they expressed their regret for not being able to fully embrace all ideas because of their limited resources. Given that OMC and other EU coordinating mechanisms boil down to voluntary recommendations, national experts on occasion agreed to conclusions that they knew ‘would not work well in their countries’ (Tamtik and Sá 2011, p. 461).

With the help of epistemic communities and through the socialisation of administrative and academic elites into EU’s discourse on the knowledge economies, the policy paradigm was transferred to the countries of the Western Balkans. Since the reform of higher education and research is part of the broader process of European integration, which has the status of a pre-eminent political project in the Western Balkans, Bologna, and Lisbon, processes were perceived in the region as more binding than they actually are (see Keeling 2006; Vukasović and Elken 2013), importantly shaping national strategic plans and legislative agendas.

Transferring the policy paradigm wholesale, countries of the region vowed to create ‘knowledge economies’ and ‘knowledge triangles’ that would supposedly lead to economic and social development. Without undertaking the necessary but labourious work of localising and reshaping the policy recipe of the Lisbon Agenda in order for them to provide a better fit with regional needs, they were adopted as official policy goals in the poorest region of Europe, where GDP per capita is at 30–40 % of the EU 27 average, where registered unemployment rates reach as high as 46 %, and where the service economy stands for waiters, cooks, and care workers instead of IT and high-tech industries.

Furthermore, as Table 2.1 shows, governance capacity, which is supposed to exist at a high level in order to implement the knowledge triangle, remains a substantial challenge in the region of the Western Balkans. The World Bank government effectiveness indicator attempts to capture, among other things, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government’s commitment to such policies. Higher percentiles indicate a more effective and responsible public



**Table 2.1** Socio-economic data on countries of the Western Balkans<sup>a</sup>

	<i>Population 2010 (in millions)</i>	<i>GDP per capita 2010 (US\$)</i>	<i>Unemployment rate 2012 (%)</i>	<i>World Bank government effectiveness index 2013</i>
Albania	3.19	8580	12.9	43.5
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.94	7636	45.9	39.2
Kosovo	1.81	2650	35.1	40.7
Macedonia	2.05	11,528	31	53.1
Montenegro	0.62	12,877	19.7	59.8
Serbia	7.32	10,933	23	50.2

<sup>a</sup>Source for the first two columns: United Nations Statistics Division (2015), third column: Marini (2014), and fourth column: Kaufmann et al. (2014)

sector and a higher quality of policy implementation. Such high levels are to be found in the Nordic region (with Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden as core countries), where governments score 90–100 percentiles. Among the Western Balkan countries the range is 40–60 percentiles, which may be read to suggest that governments in the region have substantially lower capacity for strategic planning and policy implementation than is implied in implementing Bologna and Lisbon objectives. According to Dolenc et al. (2014), weak governance capacity helps explain the discrepancy between the level of formal adoption of Bologna objectives, which has been high, and the much lower success regarding implementation. This has inspired other researchers to view elements of the Bologna process as ‘Potemkin’ institutions aimed at signalling commitment to EU institutions but failing to fulfil their purpose (see, e.g., Noutcheva 2009). Discussing the implementation of NQFs in particular, Borhene Chakroun (2010) and Kleibrink (2012) doubt its success in the Western Balkans, given how different their socio-economic context and labour markets are from those of the EU.

A further empirical illustration of the problems of transferring policy paradigms designed in the core EU countries to the EU periphery can be drawn from the comparison between levels of public investment in higher education (Table 2.2) and research and development (Table 2.3) in EU 27 vs. Western Balkan countries.

Among Western Balkan countries, only Serbia has a level of investment in higher education that is comparable to EU 27, while none of the other

**Table 2.2** Public investments in higher education for selected Western Balkan countries compared to EU 27 (2011–2013)<sup>a</sup>

	<i>% of GDP</i>
Albania	0.7
Macedonia	1.17
Montenegro	0.42
Serbia	1.26
EU 27	1.14

<sup>a</sup>*Source:* Dolenc et al. (2014)

**Table 2.3** Public investments in research and development, as % of GDP (2011–2013)<sup>a</sup>

	<i>% of GDP</i>
Albania	0.15
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.02
Kosovo	0.1
Macedonia	0.19
Montenegro	1.15
Serbia	0.76
EU 27	2

<sup>a</sup>*Source:* Dolenc et al. (2014)

Western Balkan countries come close to the average EU level of public investment in research. Montenegro is closest, at 60 % of the European average. Serbia is around 35 % of the EU average, while Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Macedonia may be said to have public research investments of negligible size.

Looking at these figures from a more distant perspective, it may be surprising that overall investment in research and development in the Western Balkans has declined dramatically since the breakdown of state socialist regimes in the region (see World Bank 2013). The whole region invests approximately €495 million in research and development per year, which is the equivalent of one (second-largest) US research university (ibid.). Current levels of investment cannot have a meaningful impact on the current model of economic development (see Dolenc et al. 2014), which is a further confirmation of the poor fit between the commitment of Western Balkan countries to building knowledge economies and their actual capacity to strengthen higher education and research sectors as the key pillars of the system.

In other words, the policy paradigm of knowledge economies is travelling from the advanced European core countries to the European peripheral economies, which do not exhibit properties of knowledge-based economies. Even though the process of European integration is premised on the idea that everyone will converge towards the liberal democratic model of development, a growing body of literature has shown that we have instead witnessed a clustering of European economies into distinctive varieties of capitalism (see, e.g., King 2007; Nölke and Vliegenthart 2009; Bohle and Greskovits 2013). The East–West division of Europe during the democratic transformations of the 1990s has taken second place to the core-periphery divide. Post-communist countries have developed into liberal dependent economies characterised by the unhappy marriage of declining welfare standards and liberalised economies that depend on foreign investment (see King 2007; Nölke and Vliegenthart 2009).

The EU is the main trading partner of all Western Balkan countries, accounting for 60–75 % of imports, with the largest proportion of direct foreign investment in the region coming from the EU; for example, 75–95 % of banking assets in the Western Balkans is owned by EU banks (see Uvalić 2014). The high level of exposure to investment flows from the EU has meant that the Western Balkan countries have been negatively impacted since the economic crisis in 2008, which brought reduced exports, reduced inflow of credit, reduced foreign direct investment, as well as migrant worker remittances (see Bartlett and Uvalić 2013). The imperative of balanced public budgets demanded austerity measures, which was reflected in cuts to public spending on higher education and research which were not high to begin with. Gross investments in research and development in the region have declined dramatically in the past two decades, and today the region invests below its level of development (see World Bank 2013).

## CONCLUSION

Putting together the two strands of this analysis together, it could be argued that the neoliberal script of knowledge economies and its embodiment in the Lisbon Agenda provide an excellent illustration of the elite-driven, technocratic, and nondemocratic character of European integration. Through the process of European integration, academic and administrative elites from Western Balkan countries are integrated into coordination mechanisms such as the OMC and other Brussels-

based policy fora, whereby they are exposed to, and become members of, epistemic communities that shape the official EU discourse and policy on economic and social development. Having acquired a shared worldview on the role of knowledge in furthering European competitiveness, they serve as transmission belts for embedding these ideas into their home societies.

The problem arises, however, due to the circumstance that the European periphery is characterised by economies that could hardly be qualified as post-industrial, and which hence do not have either the infrastructure nor the capacity to implement such reforms (setting aside for the moment the equally important question of whether that would be a good idea at all). In their attempt to become ‘licensed’ in the halls of Brussels, the liberal elites of Western Balkan countries therefore commit at least two consequential mistakes. First, they fail to engage with their domestic constituencies in deliberating, localising, and transforming official EU policy into workable and viable development programmes that would take account of country specificities and developmental trajectories. Instead, they are content in styling themselves as the enlightened elite bringing progress to a backward nation, setting aside the deeply undemocratic character of the process. As a result, the wholesale policy transfer results in all kinds of failure in implementation, ranging all the way from bureaucratic incompetence across window dressing to deliberate sabotage. Second, enthralled by joining the ‘most prestigious world club’, as the EU is sometimes referred to, they toe the official line of the European Commission, failing to engage critically with its ideas and to acknowledge that inside the EU there is a constant plurality of voices when it comes to designing development policies—let alone to consider that the institutional and cultural practices engendered in their own societies may ever provide templates worth distilling into policy proposals for Europe.

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## Human and Inhuman Capital, and Schooling: The Case of Slovenia

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In Slovenia, where I have done most of my theoretical interventions and activist work, theories of human capital are becoming an increasingly common reference in pedagogical works<sup>1</sup> as well as in political documents outlining the plans for reforms of science and education.<sup>2</sup> As part of a broader ideology of knowledge society, human-capital theories provide the ideological legitimisation of neoliberal trends in research and education policies. According to their main argument, which I will try to refute below, increased investment in human capital at both the social and the individual level increases the competitiveness of the economy as a whole as well as the employability and welfare of individuals.

In the first part of this chapter, I will sketch the intellectual history and sociopolitical context of the development of theories of human capital.

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<sup>1</sup>For a detailed critical overview of recent Slovenian pedagogical literature on human capital and knowledge society, see Krašovec (2014, pp. 80–2).

<sup>2</sup>See Žagar and Korsika (2012) for a detailed critique of the current plan for reforms of education and science policy in Slovenia.

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In the second part, I will propose a critique of the characteristically neo-liberal equalisation of labour with capital; additionally, I will criticise the theory according to which investment in human capital brings profits to individual workers. In the third and final part, I will examine how current educational reforms impact the learning process and the working conditions at public universities in Slovenia and, by extension, comparable countries.

### THE HISTORY AND POLITICAL EFFECTS OF HUMAN-CAPITAL THEORY

While theories of knowledge society publicly present themselves as the cornerstone of current education policy proposals in Slovenia,<sup>3</sup> human capital appears as a somewhat reserved and mysterious but nevertheless persistent companion to ‘lady knowledge society’. Although they possess a rich intellectual and political history, theories of human capital are, at least in recent political documents and statements regarding the development of higher education in Slovenia, rarely explicated and appear as a ‘goes-without-saying’ background of various blueprints and strategies related to the coming of the innovation- and/or knowledge-based society. Such documents somehow presuppose that everyone knows what human capital or an increase in its stock or quality is and, furthermore, that it is a good thing.

The basic argument of human-capital theory goes as follows: human capital is a sum of knowledge and practical skills of individuals, and every increase in their quantity and/or quality will make these individuals more employable and prone to earn more money while employed, and the society as a whole will become more innovative and thus more competitive on the global market. By accumulating our human capital, we thus, without side effects, gain at the individual as well as the social level. The key to this gain is the education system, especially higher education. Its main goals are said to be, first, to equip individuals with as large amount of human capital as possible and, second, to teach them how to learn so as to be able to enlarge this initial stock of human capital by themselves later, when they have already left the formal schooling process. In their political

<sup>3</sup>In 2011, a comprehensive national plan for reforms of science and education policy in Slovenia was subtitled *Na poti v družbo znanja* (The Road to Knowledge Society): see Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology 2011.

application, human-capital theories are thus mostly part of school or education reform programmes.

Theories of human capital as such, regardless of their current local political application, are, however, theoretically as well as politically much more ambitious—and problematic. Their historical emergence can be traced to the USA of the 1950s and early 1960s, which was a time of massive expansion of access to university education, which until then had been relatively limited to individuals with access to sufficient funds and/or social status. This expansion and ‘massification’ of higher education were both related and an attempt to influence wider socio-economic changes, such as high economic growth rates, the expansion of mass consumption and social welfare, as well as an increasing technological sophistication of economic processes. With the exemption of two Central European authors, Fritz Machlup (1984) and Peter Drucker (2009), human-capital theories are part of a specifically American version of the neoliberal intellectual project, whose goal was (and remains) to counter social-democratic and socialist visions of society with a comprehensive social and moral philosophy of individual liberty and political norms and institutions conducive to free enterprise economy and consumer sovereignty.

Taken within this wider intellectual context, human-capital theory falls in between the early neoliberal epistemology, which was conceived in Vienna in the early 1930s, and new growth theory, which emerged in the 1980s in the USA. Neoliberal epistemology, whose first and foremost representative was Friedrich von Hayek, originates in the so-called socialist calculation debate between early neoliberal and socialist economists. When socialist economist Oscar Lange managed to prove that central planning is more rational and efficient than free-market economy by using neoclassical concepts and methods, Hayek had to switch the terrain of the debate from economic to epistemological theory. Hayek’s main counterargument was that human knowledge is by definition subjective, fragmented and dispersed, and therefore no governmental planning agency, however well meaning, can possess all the knowledge necessary for the management of complex contemporary economies. According to Hayek, only a spontaneous market interaction of free entrepreneurs and consumers can achieve a level of sophisticated coordination necessary for the smooth functioning of complex economic systems. In the subsequent development of neoliberal thought, the social production and distribution of knowledge became central themes of a general neoliberal social and moral philosophy (see Krašovec 2013a).

However, it is only through theories of human capital that the neoliberal theory of knowledge begins to approach a concrete analysis of late capitalist societies and economies. In the 1980s, theories of human capital, which are based on a microeconomic perspective and more or less limited to studying the role of education, health and social skills in the increases of the productivity of labour, are joined by new growth theory, which adds a macroeconomic dimension and is able to account for the effects of the development of science and technology not only on fixed capital but also on growth rates and the competitiveness of national economies (see Smith 2009).

If we bring all the above-mentioned theoretical strands together, we get a complete neoliberal theory of knowledge with a Hayekian epistemology serving as the general philosophical background, human-capital theory applying this general theory to the studies of education and its correlation with qualifications and incomes within the working population, and new growth theory providing studies on the ways changes in the education system effect the inhuman part of capital as well as a given national economy as a whole. All three strands—sometimes together, sometimes separately—exert a large influence on contemporary education policies in both the USA and the EU. As for reforms of the public universities in Slovenia in recent years, human-capital theories may not be their most visible ideological force, but are certainly their most powerful one. In the 1990s, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) launched its ideological campaign for the ‘knowledge-based economy’, and the EU started to prepare the Lisbon Strategy and the Bologna reform. During that time, human-capital theory underwent a silent mutation and began to creep into academic pedagogy. Another 20 years later, it would only take a quick survey of Slovenian academic pedagogy literature to show that there is hardly an article that does not list either human capital or knowledge society among its keywords.

By mid-twentieth century, the neoliberal project switched its institutional and intellectual focus from Europe to the USA, and neoliberal theory became limited to strictly economic issues, which hampered its ability to provide a basis for a comprehensive worldview. It was precisely the development of human-capital theory that granted neoliberalism access to domains that previously had been the domain of other scientific disciplines and thus out of reach of strictly economic analyses (see Foucault 2008, p. 219). The empirical research that laid the foundations for what would later become human-capital theory started from a social process that was,

at least in the 1960s USA, quite evident, namely the fact that higher education leads to higher personal income (see Becker 1993, p. 12). This social fact focused the attention of neoliberal researchers on three basic elements that could potentially explain this positive correlation: the process of education and the mode of organisation of educational institutions in relation to increases in productivity and qualifications of the workforce; qualitative modifications of workers' abilities originating from increased qualifications; and the relation between increases in qualifications and productivity, on the one hand, and in personal income, on the other.

Although the interrelations of these three elements seem quite obvious today, their investigation triggered a mini-revolution within economics. Work was no longer seen as a purely quantitative factor of production (measured in hours), but rather as a qualitative variable dependent on the qualification of the workforce. These empirically ascertained qualitative variations of work, with corresponding variations in personal income, allowed neoliberal economists to begin to perceive work as a specific kind of capital with variable returns. Wage itself was no longer seen as payment for work but as a return on capital—a special kind of capital, henceforth called *human capital*. If one takes into account that it is non-economic factors that determine the qualification of the workforce (primarily education, but also personal work ethics and diligence, health, social skills, etc.), one has to expand economic analysis to previously inaccessible fields. Economics thus became increasingly interested in pedagogy, psychology, sociology, and other social sciences. Human-capital theory allowed neoliberalism to shed the limitations of a strictly economic theory and start becoming a much wider social theory and political ideology.

Since work is no longer seen as an aggregate, quantitative production factor, the theoretical perspective changes from the social to the individual. Human-capital theory is no longer concerned with economical processes, focusing rather on individual strategic rationality (see Foucault 2008, p. 223): that is, on the individual choice regarding which university to study at, what to study there and how long, which occupation to choose, and so on. The central theoretical perspective becomes that of the individual worker seeking best ways to gain human capital (i.e., choices in education) and to invest this capital with highest possible returns (i.e., choices in employment).

Such change in perspective is not only theoretical but also political. The future worker is presented as an individual consumer in the marketplace of education services. The dimension of education as a production,

involving its own manner of (pedagogical) work, work relations and relative autonomy, drops completely out of sight. In human-capital theory, education is reduced to a supply of services that are supposed to give individual future workers access to human capital. The logic of the marketplace is thus smuggled into education through the back door, that is, not as explicit declarations that education should bend its knee to the dictate of the economy, but through a quite subtle switch in perspective that introduces the viewpoint of the freedom of consumer's choice in being provided a starting stock of human capital. Interests of (autonomous or semi-autonomous) public universities are thus no longer counterposed to capital- or profit-seeking corporations, but to the free choice of common people (consumers) who, due to caprices of allegedly backward thinking and inert public university management, are being denied the opportunity to increase their human capital and become more employable.

Milton Friedman's take on education policy is a case in point (see Friedman 1982, pp. 85–107). In Friedman's view, the main principle of education policy should be strategic calculation of individual consumers of education services. There is no mention of the autonomous logic of the development of education and educational institutions, non-economic dimensions of education or, say, interests of teachers. Friedman is interested exclusively in organising educational institutions in a way that would allow efficient and unobstructed consumer choice. Teachers' trade unions, rigid public employee collective wage contracts, traditional professional autonomy, guaranteed public financing of educational institutions and autonomous rules and regulations governing the functioning of the education field—all of this is little more than so many obstacles in the way of market-like relations and hence a completely free consumer choice.

Another political dimension of human-capital theory is the presentation of the worker as an entrepreneur. If the future worker is seen as an individual consumer of education services, the practicing worker is no longer a wage-worker in a classical sense but an entrepreneur making strategic choices between different possibilities of investment of his or her individual human capital. Such an economic analysis no longer distinguishes between individual workers and heads of individual enterprises—they both manage certain quantities of capital and try to invest them in the best (i.e., most profitable) way possible. The only remaining difference is that of the kind of capital invested. Ordinary entrepreneurs invest money and control the means of production, while worker-entrepreneurs invest their knowledge and skills. What quite remarkably drops out of sight in this perspective is

any kind of collective (economic) social relation—there is no asymmetry in social power between workers and entrepreneurs, just differences in skills, knowledge, cunning and corresponding returns. Those who invest smartly, earn a lot; those who do not, earn little or drop out of the game. There is no class relation here, only individual entrepreneurs and their capital.

Human-capital theory hence reinterprets not only work as a kind of capital but also class relations as a kind of competition. If there is no real difference between workers and entrepreneurs, one can present the capitalist economy as a mere interplay of enterprises (ranging from individual workers to the largest multinational companies) that manage their capital in mutual competition. In human-capital theory, class relations are not only mystified, they completely vanish (see Bowles and Gintis 1975, p. 74).

### CAPITAL, PROFIT, WAGE

From the ordinary, everyday perspective of both the entrepreneur and the worker, wage appears as payment for work, not for the hire of labour force as a commodity whose unique use value is that it can create new value. If one disregards this specificity of labour force and fails to distinguish between labour and labour force, wage appears as a just payment for the work done (see Heinrich 2012, pp. 97–98). This appearance is the basis of all other mystifications of the capitalist production process. If we see wage as the compensation for labour's contribution to production process, the source of all new value can only be capital.

Human-capital theory takes this mystification, which is already present in most economic theories, a step further. If one neglects the fact that surplus value is made possible by the unique use value of labour power as a commodity, hence seeing in capital the source of surplus value, then any 'thing' that produces any sort of financial 'gain' can be seen as capital. This is, in neoliberal theory, precisely the starting definition of capital, which is then subsequently expanded to accommodate the newly discovered human capital: capital is everything and anything that brings profits, that is, returns that exceed the costs of original investments (see Becker 1993, p. 15). According to this definition, any positive return already constitutes profit.

When early human-capital theorists discovered that higher education is usually positively correlated with higher personal income, they were

just one step away from including work qualifications in such a broad definition of capital—and if above-average wages are the return (profit), what remains to be done is to locate the original investment. This original investment was discovered in the (monetary) investment in education: first, we pay for the tuition fees, and then, once we graduate, our qualifications and productivity are above average, and so are our wages. When this surplus pays off the original investment (the cost of tuition fees), what remains are profits, returns on our human capital. If we do not pay tuition fees (e.g., in countries where all university education is public and free of charge), we, according to human-capital theory, get something for nothing, profits without investment, which is an unnatural and unfair state of affairs. Most neoliberal arguments for the introduction of tuition fees start from this argument.

This theoretical procedure also equates human and fixed capital (see Friedman 1982, pp. 100–101): both are seen as ‘things’ able to ‘produce’ positive returns (profits). But what is capital? Is it really ‘thingly’ means of production (‘fixed capital’) as such? Indeed, a special kind of use of machines can bring profits, but the key is this special use, not the machines themselves. Machines by themselves, when they are turned off or used outside of capitalist economic relations (like, say, domestic kitchen appliances), do not bring profits. Therefore, capital is not a thing but a social relation, a special way of organising production. Positive returns are a characteristic of capital relations, but not its defining characteristic. For example, if I walk down the street and find €5, this is indeed a positive return, my costs being a negligible wear of shoe soles and my gain a whole €5, but one nevertheless cannot define *flânering* as capital. What makes capital is the fact that in capital relation, returns take the form of profits, a form that depends on the production of surplus value. Profit is a systematic and (more or less) guaranteed form of positive return that depends not on coincidence, like walking down the street, but on the way the production process is organised, on generalised market exchange and the state of the market, and so on. Only a company organised in a capitalist way—that is, taking care of the efficiency of its production process and competitiveness of its products, frequently scanning the market and taking note of consumer demand, and so on—can systematically realise profits. Not every return is a profit, and profits are possible only for (successful) capitalist enterprises.

Hence, profit cannot be defined simply as a positive return, a return exceeding the original investment. That also means that capital is not

every ‘thing’ that can bring about a financial yield, but a social relation that allows for profits (see Krašovec 2013b). *Allows* is the key word here: capital does not produce profit, but appears as its source due to the above-mentioned mystification of the wage form. What then does produce profits? If one, to simplify matters, disregards the distinction between surplus value and profit, the answer is—surplus labour contributed by workers, the time workers work above what is needed to cover their wage, that is, to produce the value equivalent of their wage, which is itself, on average, equivalent to the value of their labour power.

In capitalism, workers of course do not work so as to produce surplus value. Their value contribution is not only hidden, or mystified, but also irrelevant for their daily-life considerations. Workers work primarily in order to pay the bills, buy food and clothes, and put their children through school. The cost of all the commodities necessary for such a reproduction of the worker represents the value of the worker’s labour power—and the wage covers that, not the worker’s value contribution to the production process. The value of the labour power and therefore the socially average expected wage is thus reliant on (the activity of the individual worker’s) consumption, not on (his or her individual role in) production. And the success (measured in profits) of capitalist enterprises relies precisely on their ability to keep the difference between the value of their workers’ labour power and the value of their final products positive. The basic social condition for this is that a certain group of people, namely managers, is able to freely seek ways to implement such a difference (and to maximise profits), and that, on the other hand, those who work have no say in the organisation of the production. In other words, for capitalism to be possible, there has to be a class relation (see Lebowitz 2009, p. 13).

Therefore, capitalism can only work if workers are precisely not capitalists and if their wages, although certainly representing a certain gain (an employed worker certainly has more money than an unemployed one), exhaust themselves in simple consumption and therefore do not have the characteristics of capital (which tends to expand itself through productive consumption). Thus, if we want to have capital and profits, workers must precisely remain workers; they should not become capitalists. Also, a wage remains a wage even if it is above average. Human-capital theory can thus be disproven on account of its weak definitions of capital and profit, and its disregard of collective, systemic features of the capitalist economy. But even if human-capital theory is false by strict theoretical standards, it still



has important political and ideological effects and still remains both an expression and ideological legitimisation of important reforms of higher education in Slovenia (and worldwide). It is to the politics and the ideology of human capital that I will turn now.

## HUMAN CAPITAL AND EDUCATION

The main principle and motivation for capitalist production is maximisation of profit. Each individual capital reproduces itself by reinvesting a part of their profits so as to expand its productive capacity, introduce new and improved machines, hire new workers, and so on. There are, however, certain activities that are necessary for the (expanded) reproduction of individual capitals and at the same time difficult or impossible to carry out in a profitable way. Large infrastructural investments are the prime example: roads, railways, airports, electrical, water, and telecommunications infrastructure are rarely built by private companies, since they require enormous initial investments and a lot of time before they can be run in a profitable way. At the same time, infrastructure is an absolutely necessary condition for the functioning of each individual capital. However, competition between individual capitals prevents any coordinated development of common social infrastructure; also, such development is (at least at first) not profitable and therefore not in the interest of individual capitals. Hence, the responsibility of developing common social infrastructure is usually taken on by the state.

Furthermore, individual capitals have the tendency to pay their workers as little as possible as well as to expand the working day and increase the intensity of work as much as possible. Such a tendency would, if left unchecked, destroy or at least damage the workforce to the point that it would be unable to continue working. So, again, in most developed capitalist countries it is the state that steps in and limits the working day to 8 h, prescribes minimum health and safety conditions for workers, and organises their reproduction outside the workplace (via public health and education). This means that the state works against the short-term immediate interests of individual capitals (which is why these tend to dislike both taxes and labour legislation), but only in order to be able to procure the necessary conditions for the reproduction of the social capital as a whole. Such 'state management' of the total social capital is of course not without tensions, frictions and crises, and depends on the power of trade unions and the relationships between various fractions of capital; yet

without such state management, capital would probably self-destruct (see Hirsch 1978).

To come back to the topic of education: university as an institution stands at the crossroads of social infrastructure (as it provides research) and the reproduction of workforce (as it educates future workers). As such, it is to a large extent a state affair in many countries, and certainly in Slovenia. The development of science requires huge investments not only in the material infrastructure but also in highly qualified researchers. Additionally, the results of scientific research are unpredictable (we cannot exactly plan for a discovery or a scientific breakthrough to happen), and even when they do occur, they are not necessarily or at least not immediately economically viable. The development of science is thus economically necessary (individual enterprises need science in order to be able to improve their machines and products, thus gaining a competitive edge) as well as expensive and unpredictable. Also, the education of researchers is a long and expensive process, which means that the existence of public universities and public research institutes actually lowers the costs of individual capitals, which would otherwise have to educate and train the researchers themselves (and the more technologically advanced the company, the higher those costs).

When scientific discoveries do happen, and when they over time become widely accepted, they also enter the school curriculum, and their transfer to new generations becomes relatively cheap and massive (today's high-school students learn as a matter of fact things that a couple decades ago were cutting-edge science). This means that the general development of science in countries with a developed mass public-education system at the same raises the qualification and lowers the value of the workforce as a whole. When scientific discoveries of yesterday become part of school curricula and can be easily transmitted to masses of students, the costs of training highly qualified workforce drop dramatically.

So, some scientific discoveries can be immediately economically useful or commercially applicable; and most of scientific findings can over time be transmitted to generations of future workers who can understand (at least the basics of) science as well as handle high-tech equipment and (at least in part) contribute to its further development. There is nothing particularly 'neoliberal' about such a state of affairs, which is characteristic for developed capitalist countries at least since the end of World War II. Such a connection between the development of science, the massification of education systems and the economy already existed and was prevalent in times of Keynesian social compromise. What then makes recent education

reforms (or proposals of reforms), in Slovenia and elsewhere, specifically neoliberal, and what does human-capital theory have to do with it?

Neoliberal education policy is a reaction to two socio-economic processes that vary in their intensity from country to country, but have been, at least in Europe, present for the last 30 years or so. The first one is the growing complexity and technological sophistication of capitalist production in connection with increased competitive pressure of the global market. And the second one is an effect of wider neoliberal macroeconomic policies, namely the liberalisation of both national markets and international trade in connection to financialisation as a process that allows for tighter control over efficiency and productivity not only of individual firms but also of individual component parts of the production process (see Bryan et al. 2009). The Keynesian compromise presupposed, at least in Europe, autonomous public universities, which were not (or at least not exclusively) oriented towards economic goals, but nevertheless shared their discoveries with private companies, which would then take and utilise whatever they would find useful, but would also maintain their in-house research and development teams and departments, thus translating general scientific discoveries into commercial technological innovations. Nowadays, intensified competition requires an ever-faster tempo of technological innovations, which themselves involve an ever-increasing level of sophistication. Hence, even the translation of general scientific discoveries achieved at public universities into commercial technological innovations is becoming too costly for individual companies, especially in the technologically most advanced sectors of the economy such as pharmaceuticals, telecommunications or computers.

Neoliberal education reforms, in Slovenia as well as in other European countries, include attempts to ‘unburden’ the economy by transferring even the work of the technological application of scientific discoveries to public universities, whose work, moreover, is supposed to be aligned directly with the interests of the private economy (with universities even being pressured to include representatives of the economy in their management boards).<sup>4</sup> This means that not only the general development of science but also the process of its concrete technological application are becoming too costly and demanding for individual capitals and are hence being transferred to public institutions (universities and public research institutes) as part of the

<sup>4</sup>To quote a proposal for a new law, regulating higher education in Slovenia: ‘There is a need to ensure lasting cooperation with potential users of the [university’s] knowledge, especially with the economy’ (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2015, p. 20).

general public infrastructure (see Hirsch 1978, p. 80). For these institutions, such a process brings about the beginning of an end of their traditionally conceived autonomy, which was partly based of premodern status distinctions and hierarchies but partly also on the independent development of modern science beyond immediate economic concerns. In this context, human-capital theory appears in its ‘macro’ version: as a critique of ‘pure science’, which does nothing to enrich the nation’s human capital, and as an argument for applied science and the development of human capital at the level of the national workforce as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

While the reforms and reform proposals described above deal mainly with research, a second characteristic strand of neoliberal reforms involves the reforms of the pedagogical component of academic work. By analogy with lean production or the lean state, the form of these reforms could be called *the lean university*. Concretely, this means calls to increase the effectiveness of university education and to shorten the amount of time students spend at the university—both being essentially cost-cutting measures. Parallel to cost-cutting, this also involves attempts to increase the control over and the discipline of both teachers and students (see Roberts 2012). The most visible effect of the increasing pressure on the university to perform more effectively is the uncontrolled growth of administrative rules and regulations, mostly involving constant evaluations and self-evaluations, and quantitative measurements of productivity of students (ECTS points) and teachers (academic point-scoring).

The content of the neoliberal reforms of the public university’s pedagogical component is condensed in the notion of employability. This is where the individualist part of theories of human capital comes into effect, together with a characteristically neoliberal consumer perspective—university education has to align itself with the needs and demands of the labour market and make sure that future workers (human capitalists) are as productive and efficient as possible.<sup>6</sup> However, since those who will ‘invest’ in correct knowledge and skills, thus accumulating their human capital during

<sup>5</sup>Without excellence in science there can be no successful applicative [scholarly] work and no transfer [of knowledge] into the economy. The production of purely academic knowledge, without either potential or actual economic implementation, is not enough’ (Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology 2011, p. 16).

<sup>6</sup>A proposal for a new higher education law in Slovenia calls for a two-pronged alignment of university education with the labour market: people from the economy should take part both in the planning of university courses and in teaching these courses (see Ministry for Education, Science and Sport 2015).

their time at the university, will later be rewarded with higher earnings, there is no reason for the costs of investment in individual human capital to be socialised: it would only be fair, according to human-capital theory, for these costs to be paid by the very individual who will benefit. So, from the point of view of human-capital theory, education is no longer seen as a universal social right, but as a combination of consumer choice and individual investment in human capital. Something like human-capital theory is then indispensable for any ideological campaign for the introduction of tuition fees.

It needs to be noted that, in this regard, human-capital theory is much stricter when it deals with students than when it deals with private companies. As students might earn above-average wages due to their education, it is supposedly right that they cover the costs of their studies themselves; this would also help universities lower the cost of their pedagogical component, which means that funds would be freed to increase the financing of their economically useful activities, that is, applied research. On the other hand, the fact that successful high-tech companies already gain surplus-profits due to their technological competitive edge does not prevent this same ideology from demanding further socialisation of the costs of economically useful research.

A joint effect of neoliberal reforms of the university is the devaluation of highly qualified workforce. On paper, increased control over and discipline of students and teachers lowers the costs of university education and increases its effectiveness; in reality, however, this lowers the professional autonomy of teachers and the quality of the learning process (which takes, among other things, time). In a stark contradistinction with the promises of increased general social welfare in the knowledge-based society, methods of its implementation hurt first and foremost those who are supposed to be its cutting edge, namely intellectual workers. As Ranka Ivelja (2010) shows for the Slovenian case, the working conditions of intellectual workers are rapidly deteriorating and becoming more and more precarious, incomes of intellectual workers are decreasing rather than increasing, and unemployment among teachers and researchers is rising due to the 'leaning' of universities and research institutes.

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# Privatising Minds: New Educational Policies in India

*P. K. Vijayan*

## INTRODUCTION

The publication of the *Report on a Policy Framework for Reforms in Education* in 2000 saw the initiation of a major shift in policy formulation for higher education in India, a shift that has sustained, albeit with varying pace, independent of the ideology or political programme of the government in power. The report, also known as the Birla–Ambani report, was co-authored by Mukesh Ambani and Kumaramangalam Birla, each the respective head of two of the most powerful business houses in India, with rapidly growing global presence and influence.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, it was commissioned not by the Department of Education of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, or the University Grants Commission—which would have been the expected bodies to undertake such an enquiry—but by the Prime Minister’s Council on Trade and Industry. This is a telling indicator of the direction the state

<sup>1</sup>For example, the Ambanis own most of the major production houses in Hollywood today.

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was already looking in, regarding policy changes in higher education. The report set the agenda for a series of further reports, policy initiatives, and legislative measures that followed, including the government's own National Knowledge Commission's *Report to the Nation, 2006–2009* (see National Knowledge Commission 2009); the University Grants Commission's *Higher Education in India: Strategies and Schemes during Eleventh Plan Period [2007–2012] for Universities and Colleges* (see University Grants Commission 2011); the planning paper titled *Higher Education in India: Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017) and Beyond* (see Ernst and Young-FICCI 2012), collaboratively produced by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Ernst & Young Pvt. Ltd (a multinational consultancy) and the Planning Commission of the Government of India; the same combine's reports of 2011 and 2013 (see Ernst and Young-FICCI 2011; 2013); *ASHE 2014: Annual Status of Higher Education of States and UTs in India* (see Deloitte and the Confederation of Indian Industries 2014), brought out by the Confederation of Indian Industries, the Ministry of Human Resource Development and Deloitte (an international consultancy firm); and the Ministry's own *Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan—National Higher Education Mission* (see Ministry of Human Resource Development 2013). Apart from that, six bills on higher education, collectively referred to as the New Education Bills, are currently awaiting passage in the Indian Parliament.

All of these documents and initiatives are focused, to varying degrees, on opening the educational sector to foster greater private initiatives and encourage more local and international investors; tailoring curricula and syllabi, as well as educational schedules, to meet the expectations and requirements of commerce and industry—that is, purportedly to improve 'employability'; synchronising the Indian higher education system with its global (read European and American) counterparts, to allow for easy movement of personnel and students between the systems; encouraging the use of (especially but not only) information and communication technology in all educational spheres; introducing systems of calibration and evaluation of teaching based on various criteria of 'productivity'; introducing systems of regulation and accountability of time spent 'on the job' aimed essentially at actively depoliticising campus spaces, but ostensibly to enforce discipline and encourage research and publication; shifting increasingly towards contract-based employment, and away from permanent tenures; and introducing measures that will either roll back, bypass,



or otherwise render redundant the various provisions of affirmative action for socially and economically weaker sections.

In this chapter, I hope to engage with some of these issues, as they influence specifically the relation between employment and knowledge production.<sup>2</sup> I will examine some of the salient features of the reports and documents noted above in order to give a general sense of the directions in higher education policy that they espouse, as well as of the motives and intents driving their arguments. I will then explore some of the recent developments in the Indian context pertaining to higher education, as well as to the relations between employment and higher education, thereby offering an outline of the forces and dynamics at work in the shaping of higher education in India today. I will attempt to show that the need for higher education to cater to livelihood requirements gets harnessed to the neoliberal agenda of profit generation through privatisation; the steady decreasing of the financial, political, and administrative role of the state; and the steady exacerbation of class contradictions.

### STATE CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

One would imagine that a useful starting point here would be the conceptualisation of ‘higher education’ itself. Given that the Indian state has been and remains the primary and largest provider of education, higher or otherwise, in India, it would be even more appropriate to first lay out the state’s own conceptualisation of ‘higher education’. It is therefore of some significance that such a conceptualisation—in terms of an explicit definition—is hard to come by, in any of the numerous government documents and policy papers on the matter. The *Report of the Education Commission, 1964–66*, popularly known as the Kothari Commission Report (see Ministry of Education 1970), was one of the earliest and more influential of such reports, and it remains frequently quoted by later documents—such as the ‘National Policy on Education’ (see Ministry of Human Resource Development 1992)—down to those of the last decade or so—such as the National Knowledge Commission’s *Report to the Nation, 2006–2009*, or any of the other documents noted above. None of these policy documents makes any attempt to explicitly spell out how exactly they conceive of

<sup>2</sup>The chapter is much the better for some crucial feedback from Suman Gupta; its inevitable flaws, though, are mine alone.

higher education.<sup>3</sup> From their various articulations of the phrase, though, it is clear that '[t]he state universities and colleges make for the core of our higher education system where almost all of our undergraduate students and bulk of postgraduate students pursue education' (University Grants Commission 2011, p. iv). The focus is predominantly on issues of logistics and administration, questions of state versus private funding, and issues of autonomy, vocationalisation, and professionalisation—but there is no evidence of any attempt to explicitly articulate the underlying conception of education that guides these discussions.

However, *Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan*—*National Higher Education Mission*—does make approving reference to an earlier articulation on education, enunciated in the 1970 Kothari Commission Report but mistakenly attributed by *Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan* to the first of such documents in post-independence India, namely the 1950 *Report of the University Education Commission, 1948–1949*, also known as the Radhakrishnan Commission Report (see Ministry of Education 1962). The passage *Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan* cites is:

The most important and urgent reform needed in education is to transform it, to endeavor to relate it to the life, needs and aspirations of the people and thereby make it the powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of the national goals. For this purpose, education should be developed so as to increase productivity, achieve social and national integration, accelerate the process of modernization and cultivate social, moral and spiritual values. (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2013, p. 3)

This passage appears in the Kothari Commission Report (see Ministry of Education 1970, p. 33) and suggests, quite misleadingly, that the Radhakrishnan Commission Report had a generally functionalist and instrumentalist conception of higher education, with its emphasis on

<sup>3</sup>The lone exception is perhaps the 2009 *Report of 'The Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education'*, also known as the Yash Pal Committee Report. The report's first chapter, titled 'The Idea of a University', emphasises the importance of research, knowledge production as much as dissemination, and the need for universities to be autonomous, to pursue the production and dissemination of knowledge freely (The Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education 2009, p. 9). It also refers to the need for universities to cater to the demands of the job market (pp. 9–10) and for inter-disciplinarity (p. 10). But all of these are couched in such clouds of platitudes as to render them inane, if not meaningless, as conceptions of higher education.

increasing productivity, promoting national integration, and so on. The dominant tenor of the Radhakrishnan Commission Report, though, is captured in the following passage:

Higher education is, undoubtedly, an obligation of the State but State aid is not to be confused with State control over academic policies and practices. Intellectual progress demands the maintenance of the spirit of free inquiry. The pursuit and practice of truth regardless of consequences has been the ambition of universities. (Ministry of Education 1962, p. 47)

It goes on to note that higher education

should not be looked upon as the acquiring of certain conventional accomplishments which mark one as a member of the educated class. It should be a well-proportioned preparation for effective living in varied circumstances and relationships. The interests and opportunities and demands of life are not limited to any few subjects one may elect to study. They cover the entire range of nature and of society. That is the best liberal education which best enables one to live a full life, usually including an experience of mastery in Some [sic] specialized field. (Ministry of Education 1962, p. 103)

The Radhakrishnan Commission Report's conception of education evidently prioritises the untrammelled pursuit of knowledge, as well as a 'well-proportioned preparation for effective living'. This may well be considered a somewhat general and idealistic understanding; nevertheless, it is of some significance that it explicitly considers education to be 'an obligation of the State', and that this obligation is unconditional, insofar as it does not give the 'State' any *quid pro quo* rights of 'control over academic policies and practices'.

The Radhakrishnan Commission Report thus explicitly abjures a functionalist or instrumentalist approach to education. The Kothari Commission Report, however, evidently moves more in this direction, emphasising education as a means to 'increase productivity, achieve social and national integration, accelerate the process of modernization', and so on. This could be read as evidence of the transition from the vaunted 'socialism' of the Nehruvian era to the increasingly populist and jingoistic sentiments of the Indira Gandhi era (e.g., education should relate to 'the life, needs and aspirations of the people', and aim to realise 'national goals'). Indeed, one may even track this as marking a steady but discernible change from a generally universalist, even altruistic, conception of

education (see Ministry of Education 1962), through a more instrumental approach that nevertheless still sees education as serving a larger cause, namely the development of the nation as a whole (see Ministry of Education 1970), to the most recent documents that, under the guise of enhancing employability, essentially conceive of education as preparation to serve the needs of commerce and industry (see, e.g., the ‘National Policy on Education’; the *Report to the Nation, 2006–2009*; *Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan—National Higher Education Mission*; and *Higher Education in India: Strategies and Schemes during Eleventh Plan Period [2007–2012] for Universities and Colleges*).

### HIGHER EDUCATION: FROM GOOD TO GOODS

I will return to this point: for now, what is pertinent to note is that *Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan* invokes the passage from the Kothari Commission Report quoted above and attributes it to the Radhakrishnan Commission Report, in order to authorise and legitimise the conceptions of education it sets out, which in fact mark a radical departure from the Radhakrishnan Commission Report. It then goes on to note that the ‘National Policy on Education’ of 1986, as well as the amendments to it in 1992, translated the articulations of the Radhakrishnan Commission Report and the Kothari Commission Report into ‘an actionable policy’, with five main goals: ‘Access’, or ‘enhancement of the education institutional capacity of the higher education sector’; ‘Equity’, or ‘fair access of the poor and the socially disadvantaged groups to higher education’; ‘Quality and Excellence’, or the ‘provision of education [...] of the highest standard [...] to enhance their human resource capabilities’; ‘Relevance’, or the ‘promotion of education’ that keeps pace ‘with the changing economic, social and cultural development of the country’; and ‘Value Based Education’, or the inculcation of ‘basic moral values among the youth’. These goals were to be implemented through ‘schemes/programs [...] designed to improve quality by strengthening academic and physical infrastructure’ (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2013, p. 4). Barely two pages later, however, this lofty vision begins to morph, and the document begins to emphasise the need for a ‘strategic shift in thinking’, especially in the following aspects of higher education: more private funding; more outcome-dependent funding; institutional autonomy and ‘accountability through competitiveness’; targeted social-equity schemes; more vocational educational institutions; integration of teaching and research;

a more learner-centric pedagogy; more internationalisation; consolidation of existing institutions rather than expansion; and alliances and networks between universities and industry devoted to setting up a ‘self-governing system’ (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2013, pp. 6–7). That is, the five generalised sets of platitudes about the goals of higher education, purportedly distilled from the Radhakrishnan Commission Report and the Kothari Commission Report, undergo a ‘strategic shift’ in order to morph into an ‘actionable policy’ shaped by ten priorities, all of which are explicitly instrumentalist and functionalist in orientation. The emphasis is now on criteria such as competitiveness, cost-effectiveness, financial and administrative autonomy from the state but increased subjection to commercial and industrial pressures, and, significantly, on increased ‘internationalization’. This last has effectively meant not just the revamping of academic aspects such as curricula, syllabi, and evaluation to ‘international’ standards, or bringing in more international students and faculty or even remodelling the financial and administrative structure to match ‘international’ practices, but also the allowing of foreign direct and institutional investments in the educational sector on an unprecedented scale—all of which, though, simply refers us back to the primary impulse underlying these changes, namely intensive and intensifying privatisation and commercialisation.<sup>4</sup>

This change in fact, as the document notes, is in keeping with the stipulations of the *Twelfth Five-Year Plan* of the Planning Commission of India (2013). As the *Twelfth Five-Year Plan* notes,

[h]igher education is critical for developing a modern economy, a just society and a vibrant polity. It equips young people with skills relevant for the labour market and the opportunity for social mobility. It provides people already in employment with skills to negotiate rapidly evolving career requirements [...]. Indeed, higher education is the principal site at which our national goals, developmental priorities and civic values can be examined and refined. (Planning Commission of India 2013, p. 89)

<sup>4</sup>This is not to suggest that all institutional attention to and connection with academic work in other countries (including Europe and the USA) is necessarily coterminous with privatisation and commercialisation; it is the simpler point that the entry of foreign educational institutions—even those that are funded by foreign governments—is automatically treated as private, precisely because they are foreign, and therefore not funded or administered by the Indian state or its educational policies. As such, their entry on a large scale can only happen when the policy environment becomes more favourable to privatisation.

The shift from the conception of higher education in the Radhakrishnan Commission Report to that in the *Twelfth Five-Year Plan*, *Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan*, or the University Grants Commission's *Higher Education in India* is matched by the emergence of a corresponding conception of higher education in various non-governmental and quasi-governmental documents, such as the *Report on a Policy Framework for Reforms in Education* (see Birla and Ambani 2000); the Ernst & Young-FICCI reports (see Ernst and Young-FICCI 2011,<sup>5</sup> 2012, 2013); *ASHE 2014* (see Deloitte and the Confederation of Indian Industries 2014); and 'India—Higher Education Sector: Opportunities for Private Participation' (see PricewaterhouseCoopers Private Limited, 2012). Like, for example, *Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan*, *Higher Education in India*, or the *Twelfth Five-Year Plan*, all of these non-governmental documents, too, emphasise an overall instrumentalist and functionalist approach to higher education, as much as specific 'reforms' such as internationalisation, autonomisation, or increased private participation.

#### PRIVATISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE CORPORATE CORPUS

Significantly, the main justification touted by the first set of documents for this shift is also the reason for the spate of interest in higher education from the private sector, as evinced in the second set. Noting the rather low gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education institutions in India, Gayatri Loomba summarises the argument of this justification as follows:

Improving the GER would mean providing higher education to a major proportion of the population in an attempt to reap the fruits of India's favorable demographic dividend, expected to last for the next thirty to forty years. The demographic dividend, which is expected to see more than 546 million people under the age of 25 at a time when the developed world would be facing an ageing population of 37, implies that India would see a higher proportion of workers in comparison to dependents, thereby providing an opportunity to increase the annual growth of per capita income. Unless capitalised upon, this demographic dividend would turn into a demographic liability and India would lose out on the chance to become a globally dominating economy that is capable of exporting knowledge based

<sup>5</sup>This is the first report brought out by the Ernst & Young–FICCI combine and did not have the blessings of the Ministry of Human Resource Development; governmental support and endorsement came with the reports of the following years.

goods and services with surplus graduates and skilled workers [...]. The private sector is thus looked upon to make investments over and above the estimated 50,000 crores<sup>6</sup> per year in order to ensure the desired expansion of the sector. (Loomba 2014, pp. 233–4)

These sentiments are echoed by Amitabh Jhingan, in his ‘Foreword’ to the Ernst & Young–FICCI report of 2012:

Today, a key concern for India is the creation of an employable workforce to harness its demographic dividend to the maximum extent. To achieve this, the country needs an education system that can deliver quality in terms of a skilled and industry-ready workforce [...]. The private sector can be expected to play an instrumental role in achieving these outcomes through the creation of knowledge networks, research and innovation centres, corporate-backed institutions, and providing support for faculty development. (Ernst and Young-FICCI 2012, p. 5)

Besides the striking term ‘demographic dividend’—which, incidentally, is now widely used to also indicate a burgeoning market of potential consumers<sup>7</sup>—two points of some significance are discernible in these articulations.

First, the impulse towards privatisation is represented as being in the national interest, and in at least three ways: in terms of supplementing ‘scarce’ government finances with private investments; in exploiting the ‘demographic dividend to the maximum extent’, towards establishing India as a ‘globally dominating economy’ by crafting a ‘skilled and industry-ready workforce’ that can export ‘knowledge based goods and services’; and in maximising the ‘opportunity to increase the annual growth of per capita income’. The guising of corporate interests as the interests of the nation, however, slips up in referring to the need for ‘surplus graduates and skilled workers’: the aim here is the creation not so much of employment

<sup>6</sup>In Indian Rupees; 1 crore = 10,000,000. This estimate is confirmed by the Ernst & Young-FICCI report of 2011, which states that by 2020, ‘[a]ssuming that the private sector would continue to account for 52 % of total enrollment (as in 2006), investment required by private players works out to INR 0.52 million crore i.e. an average of INR 50,000 crore per year’ (Ernst and Young-FICCI 2011, p. 22).

<sup>7</sup>For example, Sunil Devmurari, country manager for India at Euromonitor, is reported to have said the following: ‘Two hundred and fifty million people are set to join India’s workforce by 2030. As a big chunk of the population shifts into the working age group, the offshoot of that is an increase in disposable incomes and conspicuous consumption. This is the most exciting aspect of India’s demographic dividend’ (Devmurari, quoted in Harjani 2012).

and the professed interest in the ‘growth of per capita income’, but of a readily available workforce at the service of commerce and industry, on a scale that ensures the uninterrupted supply of labour. Such a situation inevitably favours employers over employees, serving to make and maintain the workforce as docile, internally divided by competitiveness over employment, and willing to be subjected to whatever passes for ‘education’ and ‘skill-training’ in the name of enhancing employability. As such, it is not national interest but that of the corporates that is aimed to be served here.

The second point of significance in these articulations is that there are three kinds of corporate interests evident at work here. First, the investments that the private sector is expected to make, as well as the ‘instrumental role’ it is expected to play, both confirm my argument that higher education is understood here not as a public good but as a commodity produced and marketed for profit, as a commercial enterprise. The government’s own *Twelfth Five-Year Plan* document states that ‘the “not-for-profit” status in higher education should, perhaps, be re-examined for pragmatic considerations so as to allow the entry of for-profit institutions in select areas where acute shortages persist’ (Planning Commission of India 2013, p. 100)—a perception shared by the private sector, which has increasingly been exploring and availing of the ‘opportunities for private participation’ in higher education, to quote the subtitle of ‘India—Higher Education Sector’: the report of PricewaterhouseCoopers Private Limited. For example, the Ernst & Young-FICCI report of 2012 notes that the ‘unaided private sector accounted for around 60 % of total enrollment in 2012’ and that ‘[e]nrollment in private institutions has increased at a CAGR of 11 % over the last five years, as compared to 7 % in government institutions’ (Ernst and Young-FICCI 2012, p. 14). Assuming that the estimate given in the Ernst & Young-FICCI report of 2011 is accurate—that private investment to the tune of INR 50,000 crores per year is required—the argument (significantly, not explicitly stated in any of the reports) is implicitly that there is a quantum of profit to be made that justifies investments of this magnitude. The PricewaterhouseCoopers Private Limited report (and several others like it from the private sector) indicates where these profits are to be made from:

Indian society puts a premium on knowledge and its acquisition – spending on education has figured as the single largest outlay for a middle class household after food and groceries. With its rapidly expanding middle class, India’s pri-



vate expenditure on education is set to increase manifold [...]. [Because of the] glaring mismatch between supply and demand [...] 450,000 Indian students spend over USD 13 billion each year in acquiring higher education overseas. (PricewaterhouseCoopers Private Limited, 2012, p. 3)

Read along with the excitement over the ‘demographic dividend’, the real interest in higher education in the private sector is clearly not to meet the goals of ‘Access’, ‘Equity’, and perhaps not even ‘Relevance’, but to capitalise on the paying power of the upper strata of this ‘demographic dividend’, which can afford to pay out ‘USD 13 billion each year in acquiring higher education overseas’. One estimate of the kind of returns expected by the private sector from investment in higher education in India is stated as follows: ‘the overall market for higher education is projected to be worth USD 115 billion in the next ten years’<sup>8</sup>—or, in Indian terms, at current conversion rates, approximately INR 708,906 crores, or approximately 70,000 crores per year—which is, roughly, an annual profit of about INR 20,000 crores. Even if this estimate is scaled down to one-hundredth of this figure, the anticipated stakes for the private sector in higher education are enormous.

A crucial point that is carefully papered over here is the fact that although there may well be a large youth population emerging over the next decade or so, nationwide, the overwhelming majority of it will in fact continue to be from outside the paying middle classes—they will not have access to this bounty that the private sector proposes to offer in higher education. The total population of India is likely to be 1400 million by 2026, as per the Census of India projection of 2006. The projected population for 2026 of the age group 15–24—which is approximately the cohort for higher education—is about 224 million, or 16 % of the population (see Technical Group on Population Projections 2006, p. 264). Even if the government’s target of 30 % GER (i.e., 30 % of this cohort, or 67 million) is met, it still means that higher education remains confined to just below 5 % of the total populace. Further, the optimistic (from a business point of view) projected size of the middle class—which will be the class that will be purchasing higher education—for 2030 is 475 million (see

<sup>8</sup>See ‘Education Sector in India’ (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2012, p. 16). Significantly, this was the only document I could find that explicitly stated an estimate of the expected returns on investment in higher education—suggesting an unwillingness that is perhaps a tacit awareness of the possible political fallout of reconceptualising higher education as a marketable product rather than as a public good.

Rediff 2013). That is, since private investment in higher education will cater almost solely to this purchasing class, we may safely argue that the 5 % that will gain higher education by 2026 will in fact be almost entirely from this middle class. In other words, the ‘demographic dividend’ arising out of India having a young population will not go to the nation at large, but will go to benefit just 5 % of the population, in terms of acquiring higher education, and probably the entirety of the private sector investors in higher education—on an enormous scale—in terms of financial returns. Additionally, there is a strong argument that private investors will also have to be ‘incentivized’ through grants from the state, especially for research at the higher education levels (see Deloitte and the Confederation of Indian Industries 2014, pp. 37–8). The real interest in investment in higher education, then, is to market it as a consumable commodity, and garner the disposable income of the putative ‘growing middle class’ in doing so, under the guise of supplementing the government’s initiatives and investments and thereby ostensibly serving the nation’s interests.

Second, a persistent theme in all these documents, whether governmental or non-governmental, is that higher education needs to be tailored to meet the requirements of industry and commerce because the existing higher education system is producing ‘unemployable’ graduates (see, e.g., Planning Commission of India 2013, p.78; PricewaterhouseCoopers Private Limited, 2012, p.12; Ernst and Young-FICCI 2011, p. 33; Ernst and Young-FICCI 2012, p. 50). At the same time, almost all the documents indicate the need to deal with what two of them refer to as an emerging ‘labor surplus’ (see Ernst and Young-FICCI 2013, p. 17; Planning Commission of India 2013, pp. 89, 139): this surplus, in 2020, is variously estimated to be 56 million (see Planning Commission of India 2013, p. 139) and 47 million (see Ernst and Young-FICCI 2013, p. 17). Considering that this is just short of the government’s targeted GER for 2020, one may safely argue that, in gross terms, either a quantum of graduates roughly equal to the targeted GER number will continue to remain unemployable despite achieving the targeted GER (opening the higher education sector to private investment and tailoring higher education to meet the demands of industry and commerce), and/or this surplus will consist largely of those social sections that will not be able to acquire higher education as part of the targeted GER (whether because it will become unaffordable, or because the process of higher education expansion simply will not reach them, or because they will not be academi-

cally equipped enough to be granted admission into any segment of the higher education sector). Besides these, there are other considerations—such as the likely perpetuation of what Jeemol Unni refers to as the three types of ‘skill-gaps’, namely ‘over-education’, ‘skill mismatch in technical education’, and ‘quality skill gap’ (Unni 2013, p. 2)—that are stated as the reasons for unemployability persisting despite acquiring higher education. I cannot, however, explore these due to the paucity and fragility of the data on this. It is true that one of the arguments for the privatisation of higher education is in fact that it will address the problem of the ‘skill-gap’. However, no convincing argument appears, in any of the documents discussed, that privatisation can in fact address the problem of the ‘skill-gap’, especially since the projected unemployment (or what is referred to as ‘surplus labour’) remains extremely high even after the privatisation of higher education and the attendant restructuring of pedagogy to provide the necessary skills.

A crucial but hidden dimension of this problem is the fact that, although the entire model of privatisation of higher education is geared towards the needs of industry and commerce—that is, for skilled employment—a major cause and source of unemployment is the attenuation of the agricultural sector, leading to the increasing unemployment of unskilled labour migrating out from agriculture, but with few prospects in the industrial sector:

Although the service sector would continue to be India’s growth engine, it would, given its relatively low labour-intensity of production, nevertheless be unable to generate sufficient employment to reduce the disguised unemployment in agriculture. India will need to create jobs in labour-intensive industries to absorb the sizeable workforce from agriculture in industry. In order to reduce the share of employment in agriculture from about 50 per cent to 25 per cent by 2030, industry would have to double its labour demand from 119 million in 2010 to 274 million in 2030. (CRISIL Centre for Economic Research 2010, p. 12)

However, ‘the net incremental workforce required in the industry and services sectors is ~145 million’ (Ernst and Young-FICCI 2013, p. 17), which leaves a surplus (of unemployed) of more than 100 million. In other words, at least one major reason for the persisting unemployment is not the ‘unemployability’ of the workforce but the failure to promote

labour-intensive industrial and commercial policies<sup>9</sup> more appropriate to the Indian context and capable of absorbing this vast and growing force of unskilled labour. It is true that the Ernst & Young-FICCI report of 2013 (see Ernst and Young-FICCI 2013, p. 20) as well as *Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan—National Higher Education Mission* (see Ministry of Human Resource Development 2013, pp. 6–7)—do argue for the restructuring of higher education under privatisation, into a three-tier pyramidal system consisting of ‘research-focused institutions’ at the top, ‘career-focused institutions’ (‘with a focus on producing industry-ready graduates’) in the middle, and ‘foundation institutions’ (that provide ‘skills that are relevant to the local industry/community’) at the bottom (Ernst and Young-FICCI 2013, p. 20). This structure is intended, presumably, to address the need for ‘skill-development’ on a mass scale, thereby rendering the unskilled part of the labour force—by far the largest chunk of it—‘industry-ready’. But if there is no employment likely in the industry for which they are being readied, even a highly successful skill-development programme will prove pointless, and the entire argument of privatisation of higher education as the panacea for the problem of unemployment will fall flat.

Third, and arising out of the previous two points, it seems clear that privatisation is going to benefit no one but the private investors. However, if this were the case, there would be no need for the elaborate restructuring of the entire system that all these documents argue for: it would be sufficient to push privatisation as simply a fiscal requirement, supplementing governmental investments in return for profit. But privatisation is being vigorously promoted as a necessary and inherent condition for the overhauling of the entire higher education system, towards enhancing employability—that is, for the benefit of the students. As noted above, a central focus of this overhaul is on ‘internationalization’: besides ‘enhancing capacity and efficiency’, and ‘improving standards and quality’, ‘[i]nternationalization can in fact allow India to realise its Demographic Dividend and turn its educated (but frequently not skilled) workforce into one that is highly skilled, efficient and integrated into the global

<sup>9</sup> Arguably, the recent growth in the Indian economy has seen poor corresponding growth in employment, primarily because the former has been driven mainly by the less labour-intensive services sector rather than industry. Increasing automation in the latter, along with a lack of encouragement for labour-intensive industries such as textiles, handicrafts and food processing, has also contributed to poor employment growth rates in the industrial sector. (See Mahambare and Saraf, 2014.)

marketplace’ (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2013, p. 131). The Ernst & Young-FICCI report of 2013 optimistically notes that ‘India could [...] become a large supplier of skilled manpower to labor deficient markets around the world’ (Ernst and Young-FICCI 2013, p. 17), where the cumulative labour deficit is projected to be 56.5 million. However, as observed above, barely 5 % of the ‘surplus’ is likely to benefit from the ‘skill development’ that will be unleashed through privatisation and therefore able to take advantage of the international labour shortfall—quite apart from other crucial considerations, such as the fact that employment opportunities and access to international travel are themselves restricted to a minute percentage of even that 5 %.<sup>10</sup> The professed benefits—such as they may be—of facilitating the entry of foreign universities, in order to raise (through measures such as the 2010 Foreign Educational Institutions [Regulation of Entry and Operations] Bill)<sup>11</sup> the quality of pedagogy and research to international standards, not only remain confined to the tiny social segment that may be able to afford that education but also have the additional ramifications of importing academic labour from abroad, from the home universities, rather than creating employment for local academic labour; ‘capital flight’, through outward remittances to the home universities, of income generated through fees in India; and perpetuating a new disconnect—between the Indian student consuming curricula designed in and for a different social and economic milieu, and the demands of the Indian social and economic context. That is, ‘internationalization’ will benefit the universities that come in, perhaps more than the students they cater to.

Another measure that is part of the process of privatisation and which similarly belies its ostensible purpose of generating employment is the ‘learner-centric’ pedagogy. The intensive use of information technology,

<sup>10</sup>A rough estimate can be made from the fact that, as per government data, as of June 2012, there were about 10 million non-resident Indians scattered globally—approximately 0.8 % of the then population (see the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs 2012). There is scarce data on the quantum of skilled labour migrating out of India, but the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs’ *Annual Report, 2010–11* states that ‘there are about five million overseas Indian workers all over the world’ (Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs 2011, p. 28)—which is about half of the total. Even assuming a dramatic growth in the population of skilled labour migrating out by 2030, clearly this will remain a minute percentage of the projected beneficiaries of privatisation.

<sup>11</sup>Because of the controversial nature of the issue, this and five other bills on higher education are still pending in Parliament.

and the reduction of the role of the professor to that of a facilitator, effectively means an enforced reduction in pedagogic workload, and a consequent reduction in teaching posts—that is, in academic employment. In the envisioned three-tier structure, the largest component of students will be in the bottom two layers, being trained to meet the demands of industry through curricula set by the industry and trained by personnel from the industry:<sup>12</sup> in other words, the overhaul results in a dramatic attenuation of academic labour and employment, with the system of higher education actually returning personnel into itself—or creating employment within itself—only at the highest tier: the lower, and vastly bigger, two tiers will be staffed by industry personnel already employed within industry. A moot point here is whether the industry-set curricula are in fact of any added value in terms of employability:

The possibilities of tailoring higher education systems to putative labor market requirements are limited, except in specific sectors. Even if it were possible to match a higher education system with labor market outcomes, it would still not be enough to get at the counterfactual, namely what difference would a change in the education system make to economic outcomes? Industry groups project labor requirement in certain sectors and then assess whether the education system is producing the volume of human capital for their needs. These standard ‘manpower planning’ exercises assume certain elasticity of demand of specific types of human capital with the overall growth of the economy and of particular sector. There may be something useful about this exercise, but it often raises more questions than it answers. (Kapur and Mehta, 2007, p. 50)

The point is that the entire gargantuan exercise of overhauling the system of higher education with a view to catering to the touted requirements of industry and commerce is being undertaken with no clear evidence that this will in fact enhance the students’ employability (in terms either of job availability or of the students’ own capabilities) but on that very pretext.

<sup>12</sup>For example, the Ernst & Young-FICCI report of 2013 proposes that the middle tier will have 80 % faculty with average industry experience of 7–10 years, as well as a ‘higher proportion of visiting/contractual faculty’ that will mentor the students ‘on their careers in the industry’ (Ernst and Young-FICCI 2013, p. 24). The bottom tier is almost of incidental interest but will have ‘partnerships with leading Indian institutions for distance learning programs and content [...] with industry for industry visits, conferences, and guest lectures [...] [and] with ITIs [Industrial Training Institutes], polytechnics and other vocational training providers for skills training’ (p. 26).

From the above arguments, it seems clear that the entire exercise is aimed rather at justifying the conversion of higher education from a public good to a marketable commodity; at opening opportunities for the industry and commerce to invest in this commodity and make profits on an unimaginable scale; at permitting the influx of foreign universities, and thereby gaining a veneer of ‘international standards and quality’; and at expanding the employment opportunities, into academic employment, of those already employed in the industry.

It is worth noting here that some of the results sought to be achieved by these policies are already taking shape, even before the policies themselves have been formally legislated on and implemented. The several volumes of governmental, quasi-governmental, and private-sector reports have—perhaps through the sheer dint of repetition—come to constitute an authoritative canon of thinking on higher education, invoking and alluding to older such reports (if necessary, erroneously, as we saw) so as to legitimise change as, in fact, continuity. This in turn becomes the basis for policy formulation and implementation that, however, can run into legal hurdles, because the existing legislation has not yet caught up to the new thinking on higher education. The six bills on higher education pending in the Parliament for the last several years is testimony to both, the pressure to change and the resistance to it. For example, as part of the drive towards internationalisation, in 2013, Delhi University, following on the recommendations of the National Knowledge Commission, *Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan* and the University Grants Commission’s *Higher Education in India*, restructured the undergraduate programme from a 3-year, honours-based annual system to a 4-year, choice-based credit system in semester mode, despite enormous resistance and controversy. But because higher education law in India specifies that non-technical undergraduate degrees should be of 3 years, the change eventually had to be reversed. However, even that reversal took place, not in a court of law (where in fact the matter was dismissed),<sup>13</sup> but as a result of sustained political pressure on the new government at the centre, in 2014. An insidious, creeping methodology of these policies, as they slouch towards New Delhi to be born in the form of the six bills, is that changes that can be made without legal hurdles are being made

<sup>13</sup>I was one of the petitioners challenging this change. Currently, the credit-based choice system is being brought back, with effect from the next academic year, but without changing to a 4-year format.

inexorably. One such crucial change is the increasing contractualisation of academic employment: in the case of Delhi University, for example, a white paper produced by the Delhi University Teachers' Association (the teachers' trade union organisation) states that, as of August 2014, 'more than 4500 teaching positions (50 % or more of existing posts) continue to be vacant and teachers appointed against these posts work on ad hoc or guest lecturer basis' (Delhi University Teachers' Association, 2014, p. 19). One very important fallout of this has been the increasing quiescence of the teaching community, and the steady political weakening of the trade union, since, inevitably, contractual employees grow more vulnerable<sup>14</sup> to pressure and therefore increasingly reluctant (for fear of repercussions on their job prospects) to participate in any resistance (either to the sweeping changes that they are themselves victims of, or to the rather cavalier manner in which these changes are enforced).

But the resistance to these changes has the disadvantage of being perceived as conservative, archaic, lazy, anti-progress, and so on,<sup>15</sup> and, more gravely, of not having a viable alternative discourse on higher education that can move beyond critique to a full-fledged discourse in its own right.

### IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

So, what then should higher education in India look like? In the face of the many extensive and intensive reports and documents that have engaged with that question, it would be nothing short of insouciant to even attempt an answer to that question in a paragraph or two at the tail end of a chapter not focusing exclusively on that question. Nevertheless, it would not be out of place to remind ourselves that higher education, as it is being conceptualised now, is not just about the imbibing of specialisations and technical sophistications in various fields—regardless of whether that imbibing is towards further research, or towards gaining employment in industry or commerce. As the University Grants Commission report notes, it has

<sup>14</sup>A typical news report on this, among others, was by Heena Kausar (see Kausar 2014).

<sup>15</sup>Here is a sample of a widely held prejudice: 'Fifty years ago, India opted for the socialist pattern of development and decisively rejected market economics. As a result, advocates of socialism gained ideological control in academia. The more their ideology proved to be wanting, the more they resisted change. Thus, resistance to change has become a contagion at Indian universities' (Inderesan 2007, pp. 99–100).



three aspects. It involve [sic] imparting of scientific knowledge to the students on the subject so that we create knowledge society [sic] with scientific approach and mind. Beside knowledge [sic] it also involve [sic] imparting of skill and working knowledge, and thereby develop [sic] human resource necessary for economic development. And finally relevant education also involve [sic] providing value education so that education serve [sic] as an instrument of creating citizens who cherish value [sic] of democracy, secularism, fraternity, and equality. (University Grants Commission 2011, p. 17)

This gem of profundity is particularly illuminating (despite—or perhaps because of—its grammatical exceptionalism) in the importance it gives to the third element, ‘value education’. It is not unique in this; even the private-sector documents such as the Ernst & Young-FICCI report of 2013 emphasise this aspect: curiously though, its role in the three-tier system is most in the bottom-most tier, where it will help ‘to produce well-balanced individuals who are morally and socially conscious’, resulting in an ‘improved social order to ensure favorable environment for industrial growth’ (Ernst and Young-FICCI 2013, p. 25). This is part of a more pervasive tendency in governance that tends to see higher education as a subtle means of policing and maintaining law and order. In 2011, the University Grants Commission had issued a directive to all science and technology institutes (such as the Indian Institutes of Technology), to give their students courses in the humanities and social sciences, in order to ‘deradicalize’ them. This was apparently in response to a statement by the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh:

[L]ack of productive employment opportunities for our young men and women is one factor, which aids [...] radicalization. Education and skill development opportunities have a major role to play in addressing this problem. We have made efforts at providing more opportunities with greater inclusion in higher education. (Singh, quoted in Danish 2013)

It is important to note the convergence of the tendencies towards privatisation, the marketing of illusory employment opportunities, and ‘deradicalization’, in the reconceptualisation of higher education that is underway. It indicates the clear perception of higher education as the site where such a convergence can in fact be perceived, analysed, understood, and perhaps even challenged, thereby making the control of the higher education sector all the more vital for the facilitation of profiteering

(both inside and outside higher education) to be carried out unchallenged. It is this attempt to take control of the higher education system that has to be publicised, challenged, and resisted—and it is an understanding of higher education that makes such a resistance possible that needs to be elaborated, promoted, and sustained. For what it is worth, this is a small contribution in that direction.

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PART II

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Management and Leadership Against  
Academic Freedom

## ‘Academic Leadership’ and the Conditions of Academic Work

*Richard Allen and Suman Gupta*

For those concerned with teaching and scholarly work in higher education now, talk of ‘academic leadership’ is everywhere.<sup>1</sup> In the UK, at any rate, it seems so: scanning academic jobs pages, looking at Research Councils’ funding schemes, examining government policy documents on higher education, consulting university promotions and appraisals procedures, mulling academic workload calculations, and listening to deliberations in university committees—all these suggest that the phrase *academic leadership* has, so to speak, gone viral in a contained way. There are more scholarly sounding publications on the subject than specialists can keep up with; numerous well-endowed firms offer academic-leadership training and guidance; think tanks constantly urge the need to nurture more academic leaders and corporations that can cultivate them; newspapers inform of the privileges of top-level academic leaders with grudging admiration.

<sup>1</sup> Some of the research for this chapter was undertaken in the context of the collaborative project ‘Framing Financial Crisis and Protest: North-West and South-East Europe’, which is administered by the Faculty of Arts at The Open University, and funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

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In this chapter, we attempt to contextualise the shifting connotations of *academic leadership* so as to understand the current circumstances of academic life. In the first section, we do so sketchily and in a broad way, by considering the conceptual nuances of such leadership amid phases in rationalising the conditions of academic work. In the second section, we offer a more contextually grounded view from UK academia.

## THE BIG PICTURE

The first point to register is that *academic leadership* is now not what it seems to mean or used to mean: the phrase has little to do with ‘*academic leadership*’, or leadership informed by and therefore bearing upon engagement with teaching and research; it is taken as ‘management of academic workers and institutions from above’. The going wisdom is that such leaders do not need to have (or even have had) any investment in academic work themselves, much as management consultants need no involvement in the work of business firms they give advice on. If some would-be leaders happen to have such investments, the sooner they disinvest the better their prospects. The second point to register speedily is that ‘academic leaders’, thus understood, are now consensually regarded as being worth more than academics of any sort. It seems thoroughly understandable that the relative symbolic capital of ‘upper-level academic leaders’ and of academic workers at the top of their pecking orders (‘senior academics’) in universities is signified by differentiations in material capital investments: crudely put, the former get paid a lot more than the latter, often several times more. It is clear where aspirations in academia are likely to be pinned.

That a shift has gradually taken place from ‘*academic leadership*’ to ‘managing academic workers and institutions from above’ in the use of the phrase *academic leadership* is evident to all whose careers in academia stretch back to the 1970s, or who have informed themselves of the matter. Yet the stickiness of the phrase itself, so that it has constantly increased its misleading traction, especially since the 1990s, is possibly encouraged to disguise this shift—to confer on managers with thin academic credentials a veil of academic respectability. The process and step-by-step implications of that shift are fairly difficult to pin down in historicist terms, partly because many academics have been persuaded into it unthinkingly, and partly because texts on the subject are overwhelmingly in the nature of technical guidebooks and fact collocations to help academic leaders do their jobs. Most such texts are produced by such leaders themselves, with

the spin that suits them (it is considered that no one can be an 'expert' in academic leadership without having been a leader).

Nevertheless, a historicist approach to this shift in understanding what 'academic leadership' consists in is much to be desired, because it clarifies a broader shift—an incremental and comprehensive reorientation of the condition of academic work itself, of the very understanding of what scholarship and pedagogy consists in and why these should be undertaken in higher education. The shift in conceiving 'academic leadership' is a locus around which this broader change can be apprehended, and it is of especial interest because it has rather sneaked up on us. Of course, the shift does have something to do with the ever-growing grip of managerialism—aligning state bureaucratic and corporate business functioning—which, since World War II, has been periodically rediscovered with some surprise as operating through and as academia to the detriment of academic work. In the early 1970s, for example, growing managerialism in academia was regarded with dismay as both an impetus to radicalising 1960s university students (see, e.g., Chap. 7 in Otten 1970 and Chap. 3 in Westby 1976) and as emerging dominant after the student movement (even by those very far from friendly to the ideological thrust of that movement, such as Robert A. Nisbet [1971]). In the more temperate and globally coherent higher education environment after four decades, the prevalence of 'new managerialism' is found at large in global academia with similar misgivings—in the USA (see Martínez-Aléman 2012), in the UK (see Deem et al. 2007), in Ireland (see Lynch et al. 2012), and so on. A synthesis of such investigations from the 1970s to the 2010s, tracking the passage of managerialism in higher education, which is the same as tracking the shifting relationship between academic leadership and the conditions of academic work, would undoubtedly illuminate the shift mentioned above. Or, perhaps, a historicist approach could trace a path of changing regimes of funding higher education and accountability practices therein (e.g., from Chester E. Finn's 1978 book to John C. Knapp and David J. Siegel's monumental three volumes from 2009), tracking the relationship of leadership and academic work accordingly. Or yet again, possibly a historicist approach could begin with early anticipations of that shift, and determine how those anticipations became realities or came to be modified in reality. What we have in mind here are anticipations such as Edward H. Litchfield's (from 1959, when he was chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh) in envisaging university 'administration' (it was not quite 'management' then) as drawn from principles 'in the business corporation,



in the public service, in military organizations, in the church, and in other large-scale, non-educational settings' (Litchfield 1959, p. 490); or anticipations found in Daniel Bell's sociological forecasting of the university's place in 'post-industrial society' as he took his neoconservative turn: when, having been struck by the proliferating functions of American universities (see 1966), he raised a set of questions about the future of the university (see Bell 1973, pp. 263–265). Answering those questions, in many ways, has been the stuff of the shift in question. Such anticipations offer a way of retrospective clarification of what happened, a kind of meeting of future gazing and looking back.

Such careful historicist research is what we call for. In this chapter, however, which does not quite offer the space for it, we go in a different direction, also historicist in temper: we try to articulate, in as bald and straightforward a mode as possible, the unfolding of consecutive steps in the conceptual rationalising of the relationship between academic work and conditions for that work in the context of liberal economies. These are given below as phases in rationalising academia in cost–benefit accounting terms, and are informed to some extent by the details offered in such researches as those cited above (a kind of crystallisation of broad patterns discerned therein), and to some degree by the experience of being academics exposed to such phases. The phases outlined below have a conceptual or logical order, and, at the same time, they resonate also, but loosely and fuzzily, with a chronological order of academic initiatives and experiences. Broader social factors undoubtedly explain the rationalisations in and through these phases: it is arguable, for example, that democratisation and expansion of the higher education sector, the changing character of elite class interests embedded in academia, or the changing features of post-World War II liberal economic systems (towards globalisation) are determinative. The outlined phases below do not reflect explicitly on such factors; we are content to leave it to readers to decide how these have worked in a context-by-context fashion. Readers may also, and accordingly, gauge what normative considerations attach to these phases, whether they were desirable or not. The point here is to articulate the rationale briefly and clearly, so that their broader social and ethical implications can be contemplated.

It seems to us that such phases are being—and have been—unrolled in some such order widely in different countries, increasingly globally. That the citations above are predominantly with reference to academia in the USA is not fortuitous: arguably, the conceptual direction charted below

emanated from the USA before being embraced in Western European countries (especially wholeheartedly in the UK), Australia, Canada, and further afield. Though some countries are perhaps further along the line of such phases than others, almost all are converging on their direction.

Tracking the seven phases of consecutive conceptual reorientations of the relationship between academic leadership and the conditions of academic work entails registering three general initial propositions about what academic work and the accounting thereof in liberal contexts consist in. First, a significant part of academic work is by nature *introspective* and relatively intractable in terms of time, resources, and outlay: such as preparing for teaching, consulting research sources and conducting experiments, reading and writing, engaging in conversations, and so on. Second, easy tractability typically attaches to what is *externalised* after the introspective process: lectures and tutorials, turning out qualified persons, conference presentations and seminars, publications, data sets, experiment results, patents, and so on. Third, setting the conditions of academic work involves making some calculations of tractability, which in turn depend on various ideological subscriptions within the liberal fold. Other kinds of ideological subscriptions may have actuated different calculations (sometimes intrusions) in various contexts, especially in the past, but shifting liberal subscriptions along the line of the phases below are now globally discernible.

With these very general propositions, the following phases in engineering the relationship between academic work and conditions thereof can be outlined.

Phase 1. Academic work as a whole—both introspective process and externalised product—in all its dimensions is regarded as a public good, as conducted in all academic institutions (however funded, but thereby particularly justifying state or public funding). It is held that the precise character of the public benefit cannot necessarily be accounted strictly in terms of specific externalised products at any given time: it is impossible to predict when and where the benefit of some product will become apparent (if it exists, it may come to be useful in expected and unexpected ways). But the evidence from a long view of the contribution of academic work to social development shows a salutary, indeed inextricable, relationship. Furthermore, it is considered that an intractable (i.e., free and open) introspective process is necessary for the realisation of the externalised product, and those engaging with academic work are therefore best placed to understand and manage the conditions for such work—so a high degree of

academic self-determination in managing the conditions of academic work (what is called ‘*academic leadership*’ above) is desirable. Typically, this means that the intractable introspective process is allowed reasonable free play and kept outside strict accounting; this accounting is confined mainly to even-handed distribution of the more tractable externalised production among workers (especially, teaching contact and administration). By way of regulating productivity, systems for informing academic workers of expectations, incentives to encourage effort and productivity (promotions, increments, etc.), peer reviewing and external peer assessing at every stage, and disincentives for poor work (appeals procedures, disciplinary procedures, etc.) suffice.

Phase 2. It is soon argued—to begin with by those administering government budgets—that academic work should not be considered a public good without accountable evidence thereof: that is, every investment made by a putative public (whether through states or other entities, including private) in academic work should be tractably accounted in terms of benefits to the public. Academic self-determination of the conditions of academic work is not questioned; but academia is now required to make itself ‘professional’ and tractable in ways that can be recorded by, for example, auditors, bureaucrats, and ministers. In the first instance, this means creating more disaggregated and stable measurements of the relatively tractable exteriorised products, that is, measurements that comply with existing, albeit so far loose and unsystematised, academic values and norms. Thus, specific exteriorised products begin to be subjected regularly to certain strict evaluative measurements—effectively withdrawing the notion that their public benefits are impossible to affix firmly at any given point of time. So, measurements of ‘quality’, that is, of scholarly importance, influence, esteem, and impact for activities such as teaching and research, are instituted—which can ostensibly be immediately gauged through some regular bureaucratic procedure. The principle of academic self-determination is maintained by keeping such disaggregated measuring and accounting of exteriorised products at the behest of ‘peer reviewing’, which is given the character of a bureaucratic accounting procedure.

Phase 3. Once the value of the exteriorised product is thus disaggregated according to firm ‘quality’ measures, the introspective process preceding it becomes open to tracking, too. The introspective process is then broken down into parts, and each part is given a value in accordance with the value attributed to the exteriorised products that putatively derive from it. So, the cost of time for teaching preparation is considered as measurable

against the measured quality of the tractable teaching done (affixed by consulting peers and students, recruitment figures, etc.); the cost of time for reading, writing, experimenting, discussing is considered as measurable against the measured quality of publications produced (affixed by consulting peers, checking 'bibliometrics', creating indexes of 'prestige', etc.); and so on. Gradually, therefore, the conditions for academic work are revised. Now, instead of allowing free play for introspection and even-handed distribution of tractable exteriorised products, the apparently disaggregated parts of the introspective process are themselves made subject to accounting. This in turn allows for calculations and trade-offs in terms of the 'quality' of the exteriorised product that is likely to follow from the introspective process at any given time. That what's 'likely to follow' is itself an intractable variant is too obvious a weakness in this accounting process: so measurements of the probability of performance according to each worker's record are generated and factored in to make this shaky variant appear measurable. It makes for a more atomised academic sector as workers and institutions bargain with and calculate against each other to obtain the most advantageous performance records and trade-offs as part of their condition of work.

Phase 4. The disaggregation of both the exteriorised product and the introspective process of academic work, and the generation of performance records, are then brought to bear upon the further fashioning of conditions for academic work through two crucial steps. Step one: it is deemed that the accounting practices invented through Phases 2 and 3 are an area of specialisation that demands too much time and effort, interferes too deeply into the core of academic work (teaching and research), to be left in the hands of academics as self-managers of their working conditions. So, a professional management stratum is inserted into academia, partly by co-optation from within and partly by recruitment from without. It comes under the guise of 'academic leadership' as a specialised and discrete role. The job of this management stratum is no longer justified by its understanding of the relation between introspection and exteriorisation in academic work. Instead, its role consists in taking charge of the accounting practices invented through Phases 2 and 3, and it is soon given (or wrests) the power to engineer all aspects of academic work so that such bookkeeping can be conducted to optimise the use of investments (costs of time, resources, outlay, etc.). The measurements of performance put in place for this stratum itself have no relation to academic work. These managerial performance measures derive from comparisons (typically between

institutions and sectors) of success in optimising the use of investments, and in ensuring the compliance of academic workers and the manipulation of academic work for that purpose. The obvious way of ensuring this compliance is by upping the pressure of atomisation and competitiveness mentioned at the end of Phase 3; that is, by introducing targets for exteriorised production and accordingly rationalising the distribution of parts of the introspective process in order to influence the record of predictable performance (which easily translates into behaviour profiles for workers).

Phase 5. Step two, which follows on the heels of step one in Phase 4, involves taking the measurements of 'value' put in place in Phases 2 and 3 largely out of the hands of academic self-assessment (peer assessment) and passing it on to external representatives of the so-called 'public', which is often now the same as agents of private interests ('stakeholders' such as employers, industrialists, community leaders, political bosses, and bureaucrats). This is aided, indeed motivated, by step one: the management stratum, isolated from academic workers and with license to act upon them, often has aligned interests (in cost-benefit accounting terms) with such non-academic stakeholders and finds them useful for pressuring and extracting compliance from academic workers. The management stratum is able to argue that the public benefits of academic work can only be attested disinterestedly from outside academia by such 'stakeholders': for example, employers can testify whether the teaching done is useful in producing a workforce outside academia; community leaders can testify whether teaching and research is producing social stability and development; and corporations can bear witness to the contribution of teaching and research to business development. Academic workers come to be regarded as a part of the 'human resources' (a small part of the gross resources) and as 'service-providers' of institutions, and students, along with other 'stakeholders', become 'clients' or 'consumers'.

Phase 6. The next move is inevitable: the disaggregated measurements invented to render exteriorised product and introspective process tractable in Phases 2 and 3, initially in keeping with academic values and norms, are modified to align with these 'stakeholder' interests. So, incremental adjustments in those measurements can now be used to not merely keep track of the exteriorised product and the introspective process, but to change and direct those. For example, now teaching has to be designed to produce skilled workers for particular sectors of employment, research has to be undertaken to produce innovation in industry or encourage political harmony, and so on. Academic work is now considered not as

a public good in the broad sense, but as an instrument of dominant and self-reproductive alignments that claim to represent and dictate the public good (and, incidentally, that they are able to do so makes them dominant). Typically, this phase involves a culling of academic workers who continue to adhere to what they consider key to an academic identity (freedom of introspection followed by exteriorisation), and increased recruitment of workers who are able to accommodate their academic instrumentality with those dominant and self-reproductive alignments. These moves are managed under the guise of 'strategic management', 'forward planning', 'restructuring', 'efficiency measures', and so on. At the rawest, the introspective process that is the starting point of academic work and the academic worker's *raison d'être* is itself taken over and directed from without; a kind of thought control seems to be exercised that annuls the impetus of what was understood as academic work in Phase 1.

Phase 7. The identity of academia—academic workers' understanding of academic life—begins to fragment; so that 'What is a university?' and 'What is an academic?' appear increasingly rhetorical and old-fashioned questions. Academic institutions and workers are gradually replaced by large or small organisations peopled with service providers, under the control of various split management strata, sometimes as a federation under a super-management stratum for a large so-called university. All these organisations and service providers that constitute the so-called university are now geared up for training personnel and utility-based knowledge production to serve different dominant interest groups of society (not really the 'public' in general any longer, but social alignments such as corporations, state-policing-and-publicity units, community groups, and consumer associations). Some elite parts of this so-called university (which still appear to bear a resemblance to academic institutions of Phase 1) also generate knowledge and instruction for scholarly hobbyists who can pay for their intellectual pleasures. At this point, any pretence of academic work being regarded as a public good can gradually be withdrawn, and former commitments to public investment (especially direct state funding) reduced to a mite. Academic institutions are now fragmented bodies, parts of which are outsourced, and parts of which remain as self-funding and profit-making components of a range of establishment interest groups and organisations (government, non-government, corporate, represented by 'stakeholders' in academic boardrooms) that finance these fragmented academic institutions according to their own needs. The ultimate aim of such loose federations, each controlled by a complex management stratum

in synch with ‘stakeholders’, is to offer a flexible and obedient means for generating economic growth and social stability for the perpetuation of dominant interests.

In the UK, it seems to us, we are somewhere between Phases 6 and 7; in a few so-called modernising contexts that we are aware of, academia is still at Phases 2 or 3, or leaping ahead eagerly to Phase 4.

The rationale sketched above resonates with the broad outlines of contemporary liberal cost–benefit accounting laid out, with unusual precision, in Michel Foucault’s 1979 Collège de France course on *The Birth of Biopolitics* (see Foucault 2008). Foucault’s lectures referred to a much broader field, which he dubbed ‘biopolitics’, wherein such cost–benefit accounting practices have become a naturalised and pervasive grounding for liberal ‘governmentality’—within conjugal partnerships, conceiving and raising children, property and employment relations, the penal system, and so on. Under the sway of liberal governmentality, Foucault observed, individuals become ‘entrepreneurs of the self’, constantly realising themselves and advancing their interests and confirming their existence through cost–benefit accounting. As the above rationale of ‘academic leadership’ and the conditions of academic work unfold, the pressure for academic workers to account themselves as ‘entrepreneurs of the academic self’ increases. But this pressure is particularly fraught in this instance. Such self-accounting is riven with anxiety because the academic self that academic workers seek to realise, promote, sustain, and confirm is slipping away—is ceasing to be recognised, seems to be falling unnoticed into a black hole. The core of the academic self—the freedom of introspection and consequent exteriorisation—is slipping away; or rather, introspection is gripped by extrinsic thought control and exteriorisation squeezed by constraints of permissibility. Even on the superficial surface of academic life, markers of value and integrity in thinking and practice, communal rites of mutual recognition and acknowledgement, and gauges of effort and aspiration have been redefined out of existence. All these have been redefined into something with which the academic worker is unable to identify.

So, while the worth and prevalence of what passes as ‘academic leadership’ is ever on the rise, there is growing evidence of anxiety and stress among academic workers. In the UK (and no doubt elsewhere, too), this has spurred some public discussion. A March 2014 *Guardian* piece on rising mental health problems among academics led to an energetic and revealing debate (see Anonymous Academic 2014). The University

and College Union's 'Survey of Work-Related Stress 2014' found: 'The proportion of Respondents [numbering 6439] from HE [higher education] who agreed or strongly agreed that they find their job stressful has increased from 72 % in the 2012 survey to 79 % in 2014' (University and College Union 2014). And there are also numerous scholarly papers on the matter. Instead of dwelling on those, let us move on to a more contextually grounded view of 'academic leadership' and academic work in the UK.

### OBSERVATIONS FROM THE UK

The history and development of higher education in the UK over the last hundred years or so can be seen as working within a series of discourses: social equality and political policy and expediency, social and intellectual status, commercial technology and intellectual enquiry, supply and demand, and autonomy and government regulation. Taking these in turn, the most striking aspect of UK higher education since 1800 has been the growth in size. This is evident in the number of both students and institutions. Over more or less a half century since 1950, participation has increased from rather less than 15 to more than 40 %. In terms of institutions, over the 800 years to 1960 thirty-eight universities were created, and then between 1960 and 1970 alone another twenty-four. In 2015, the boundaries to higher education are less clearly defined, but a reliable count shows that there are 166 institutions called universities or with an equivalent special title (judging from the membership of the two bodies that formally represent higher education in the UK, Universities UK and GuildHE). This suggests a major achievement in the struggle for equality, and that achievement should indeed not be denied. However, the achievement needs to be qualified in a number of ways. First, the higher participation figure conceals continuing differences depending on social class, age, and status of the university. Thus, the Office For Fair Access found that 'one in 50 of the most disadvantaged young people would enter a higher tariff institution compared to just less than one in five of the most advantaged young people' (Office for Fair Access 2014; see also Lupton and Stephanie Thomson 2015). Second, as this finding reveals, the expansion of institutions has not meant an increase in what was the typical university of the 1950s. Rather, many students study subjects that would not have been taught then, and many more live at home rather than leaving to attend a residential university.



Over the period following the 2007–8 financial crisis, moreover, the pressure on young people to be in education or employment has strongly increased. Government policy and political expediency encourage keeping people in education. A new category has been invented: NEET, ‘not in education, employment or training’. The UK welfare system treats NEETs harshly. Proposals discussed in 2015, for example, include:

18 to 21-year-olds who have been ‘Neet’ [...] for half a year before claiming welfare will have to start doing community work before getting benefits.

The scheme will involve around 30 hours a week of community work from day one of their claim, which can involve making meals for older people or working for local charities alongside 10 hours of job hunting. (Channel 4 2015)

The threat of this kind of pressure—coupled with the difficulty young people face in getting a job, and the availability of newer local universities and a range of newer vocational courses—must surely be a factor in decision-making in this social group.

The issue of status runs like a thread through this history of expansion, with each phase being driven by different kinds of specialist institutions of higher education aspiring to the title of ‘university’. The monopoly of Oxford and Cambridge in England was broken in the early nineteenth century by the founding of the University of London and Durham University. Scotland had three old universities (St Andrews, Glasgow, and Edinburgh), and other universities were founded in Scotland and Wales in the later part of the nineteenth century. Notwithstanding the growth in size and self-confidence of the major industrial cities, such as Birmingham and Manchester, higher education therein saw the development of technical and commercial institutes, such as Mason College in Birmingham and Owens College in Manchester. These received royal charters establishing them as universities from the early twentieth century. Thus, a pattern is apparent whereby new universities appearing from the mid-nineteenth century onwards were almost never before the 1960s created from nothing, but were built on the basis of specialist local colleges. After World War II, the British government sought to modernise the British economy, and this led to another phase of establishing higher education institutions. New colleges of advanced technology were established alongside new polytechnics in major cities across England as part of a thrust for innovation in manufacturing, the ‘white heat of the technological revolution’

that the then Prime Minister Harold Wilson had advocated in 1963. Again, however, formal gradations between institutions in the higher education sector were removed, and the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 allowed all higher education institutions to come together under one umbrella, almost all now with the title of 'university'. Other higher education institutions have either independently or through mergers applied successfully to be recognised as universities since. Embedded in these developments are changes in the nature of professions. The expansion of the university sector has been driven by, for example, the decisions taken at different times that schoolteacher training and nursing should become graduate professions.

A desire for status presses institutions to seek to be part of the unitary 'university' sector, but it is evident that there are divisions within the system predicated often on research or teaching reputation and resources. Thus, alongside membership of the formal representative bodies, vice chancellors and their universities may belong to the Russell Group, the Million+ Group, the University Alliance, and the GuildHE. Somewhat more directly, the Office for Fair Access uses three categories based on entry grades required: High Entry Tariff, Medium Entry Tariff, and Low Entry Tariff. Membership of one or the other of these bodies and the categories of the Office for Fair Access are as self-defining as the social classes of British society.

As new institutions have joined the university sector, existing universities have grown in size. Whereas around 1970, a university of perhaps 3000 students would have been considered average and viable, now universities of more than 20,000 students are quite common. The result is a very substantial increase in the supply of graduates. Arguably, as the manufacturing sector in the UK has shrunk and the white-collar sector expanded, there is greater demand for graduates; but it is evident, especially with the 2007–2008 recession, that supply outstrips demand from the sectors typically employing graduates. Jobs are defined as 'graduate' now not so much by the skills they require as by the more simple fact that graduates apply for them. Non-graduates are in turn squeezed from sectors of the employment market, prompting an increase in application to university and a further step change in employment patterns. Typically, graduates from higher-status universities do best, continuing to dominate in well-paid governments and private industry, though choice of subject also has a bearing on prospects. Various UK governments have accepted the logic of casting higher education into this discourse of supply and demand not only through an emphasis on vocational aspects of education

but also through publishing data, university by university, and subject by subject, on whether graduates are in employment (or studying for a higher degree) 6 months after graduating.

These instances of regulatory intervention are a small example of what has been introduced since 1992. In principle, universities are autonomous, that is, subject to the control of their boards of governors, and then, a further step away, to government controls. In practice, governments exert considerable influence through the Higher Education Funding Council, even though, in regular steps since 1998, universities have grown increasingly dependent on fees paid directly by students. The Council was established in 1992 by the Act of Parliament; the Act also established the Quality Assurance Agency. In essence, the effect of the Agency is to exert a strong influence on the curriculum, methods of teaching and assessment, and the academic and support environment ('the student experience') in which students and teachers work. Add to this the system of inspection governing academic research organised by the Council (the Research Assessment Exercises since 1986, replaced by the Research Excellence Framework in 2014), and it will be clear that the supposed autonomy of universities is highly qualified now. Why is this? One vice chancellor evoked the responsibility that came along with spending public money. Others evoke the need to protect the international educational brand of the UK. It is tempting to allow some credence to these claims, but also to suggest that the scale of universities is a factor. When universities were smaller, more elite and more tightly linked to the establishment, they could be allowed to act as a source of innovation while also tolerating their critical ideological drifts and inclinations—as licensed fools. The scale of operation renders those radical and critical currents of academia threatening, particularly given the new order into which universities have been thrust. In an echo of this national situation, universities themselves have become less tolerant of 'rogue' ideas.

Tuning to the focus of this chapter within the UK, we look at two aspects of academic employment: leadership and internship. The nature of 'academic leadership' in UK universities has changed, along the lines broadly outlined in the previous section, over the last 40 years or so. The structural levels at which this change has occurred are worth registering. At the beginning of that period, governance and management of universities were defined in terms that shadowed the political structure. That is to, they were bicameral, with a leader based in the lower house (the Academic Board and the vice chancellor) overseen by a kind of revising chamber (a Council); support was provided by a structure akin to the Civil Service,

to the extent that titles (secretary, deputy secretary, etc.) were widely used. By the end of the period, this was more or less entirely swept away, and governance and management were defined almost entirely in terms of business. Thus, the senior chamber was now defined in terms of the board of a company, with a chairman who exercised considerable influence and a group of non-executive directors; the vice chancellor was seen more in terms of a CEO; and the academic board (lower house) consigned to a specialist or advisory function that at best may resemble a German-style Works Council or Economic Committee. A plausible quasi-neutral narrative can be built around this change, hinging on the expansion of universities. When a university typically had a stable population of between 2000 and 6000 students with more or less stable income, it might be said, the scale of operations required only limited professional support. It is almost normal for a university today to have more than 20,000 students with income and expenditure flows to match and to feel that it is operating in a world where market forces may cause an ebb and flow in student numbers from year to year. Another narrative might be built on the coincidence of this change in university governance and management, on the one hand, and the rise of professionalised management generally, on the other. University structures changed, that is, over a period when business schools teaching the MBA programme became more regularly a feature of universities. One account finds that 'there were no business schools in British universities before 1965, but by the beginning of the twenty-first century there were approximately 120' (Ivory et al. 2006, p. 6).

Here, however, we are less interested in explaining why there was this shift in governance and management than in discussing the implications of the increased focus on 'academic leadership'. It is commonplace in considering leadership to think in terms of two sets of characteristics, which can be crystallised in the supposed contrast of the US World War II Generals Patton and Bradley, especially as depicted in the film *Patton* (1970, directed by Franklin J. Schaffner, screenplay written by Francis Ford Coppola and Edmund H. North). A website devoted to Patton quotes General Eisenhower as saying 'George, you are a great leader, but a poor planner', by inference unlike Bradley (see Province 2015). Staff in universities and colleges may identify their vice chancellor with the freewheeling and impulsive mode of leadership of Patton, but the ideology created by professionals in the sector is much more in the Bradley. Two examples illustrate this. In 2000, The Ernst and Young Foundation published *Academic Leadership: Turning Vision into Reality* by Michael

R. Moore (a retired partner at Ernst and Young) and Michael A. Diamond (Vice President, University of Southern California). The text's focus is on US universities and colleges, and though leadership figures prominently in the title, most of the work focuses on what the authors call 'strategic planning'. The introduction, however, indicates how important a particular leadership style is in their view. They write that '[l]eadership is purposeful', that it 'empowers people to act', and that it 'is not high individual performance', before giving the following gloss:

Leadership, effectively exercised, will result in a team of people who enjoy clear purpose, shared values, who are empowered by knowing that their initiatives are aligned with and supported by team members, and who believe that there is mutual benefit deriving from their individual commitments in turning their common vision into reality. Those who occupy positions of leadership cannot get the whole job done by working alone. The alternative to leadership and teamwork is that the people in leadership positions will get to own, exclusively, all the problems and all the answers. (Moore and Diamond 2000, p. 2)

The descriptions of 'strategic planning' that follow indicate that the authors see these same characteristics as important aspects of the role of staff lower in the managerial hierarchy, complying with the guardianship of upper-level leaders.

Our second example is more diffuse: the work of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education established in 2004 by universities (Universities UK and GuildHE). The work of the Leadership Foundation focuses on providing courses for staff at a range of levels from governors to programme leaders who are identified by their role, or self-identify themselves, as 'leaders'. The brochure of their *Transition to Leadership* programme says the following:

You have identified yourself as a leader with a role in shaping change within your organisation, whether this is small change or big change. Transition to Leadership will enhance your leadership skills and enable you to become an authentic leader. [...]

Transition to Leadership will explore your personal leadership, your team leadership and your change leadership style. By understanding your own resilience and how you can influence and inspire others you will learn new approaches to manage difficult situations and enable institutional change to happen. (Leadership Foundation for Higher Education 2015)

In understanding the ethos here, one might focus on the use of ‘authentic’, ‘personal’, ‘team’, and ‘change’. These elements are echoed in the more detailed listing of the outcomes of the course:

Transition to Leadership will allow you to develop:

- Your role in supporting and delivering organisational change
- Capabilities as a team leader and builder, to optimise your team or project group’s performance
- Emotional intelligence and influencing behaviours as a positive leadership role model
- An understanding of leadership styles and skills, and apply this learning to your own context and sense of identity as a leader
- Self-awareness and reflective practice
- Personal skills in coaching including peer and team coaching to support achievement through others that you work with.

(Leadership Foundation for Higher Education 2015)

Leadership-led structures in these two examples, which are typical of many, create an apparently benign culture in which individuals at all levels of an organisation exercise formal and/or informal leadership engendering teamwork and shared objectives. There are, however, two not entirely silent elements here. First, if leaders ‘down’ through the organisation are optimising their teams, they are creating or depending on what in the leadership culture is called ‘followship’. Leaders must develop and/or depend on willing followers. Second, there is an assumed or required adherence to corporate objectives. This may take us back to the earlier discussion of the shift to commercial and industrial models in thinking of the management of universities, implicit in the seven phases outlined in the previous section. Universities regard their staff and activities less within a government- and civil-service model and more as if the institution were a company. In the UK, the erratic and almost mystificatory patterns of government funding and income flows generally lend an aura of inevitability in the representation of university processes. The mystification stems, to take an example, from the way the government channels its payment of student fees through the Student Loan Company; students thus appear to become the agents in demanding ‘value for money’ rather than the Government. (The current system of higher education funding has been critically analysed by Andrew McGettigan in his 2013 book *The Great University Gamble* and on his *Critical Education* website.) Universities

and colleges then ‘sell’ courses, pitching those perceived as ‘high value’ at high fees and those aimed at ‘widening participation’ at lower fees. Academics more or less inevitably become caught up in these processes, pitching their courses within the market and aiming for an appropriate price that will fit the university’s ‘strategic plan’ and the perceptions of prospective students.

Corporate identity can then easily become compelled identity. This can be experienced in a relatively benign way, especially at the highest levels. Being a university or college governor in the UK is an unpaid role, perceived as perhaps a social duty. Yet a scan of governing boards shows that governors typically have held senior posts in industry, commerce and governmental organisations and NGOs, and are now often paid members of boards of companies or unpaid trustees of boards of charities, and so on. For all their variety, governors bring shared understandings and shared ways of approaching issues to the questions they encounter in universities or colleges. Vice chancellors must at least to a significant degree sign up to these ways of thinking. They may also be said to be bound by the institutions’ ‘strategic plan’, though they are likely to have more agency here than most. Agency comes more now, however, from the need to react, particularly to changing income streams or other sudden occurrences. In their discussion of leadership and strategic planning, Moore and Diamond refer to ‘empowerment’:

Empowerment is essential to enable effective leadership throughout the organization. Without alignment and commitment to a shared purpose, however, empowerment only magnifies the lack of focus, and actually creates chaos and hostility to an organization’s success. Why would an institution empower people who espouse agendas and priorities that are in conflict with the institution’s purpose? Yet, this dysfunctional form of empowerment is operational in more than a few academic and business organizations. (Moore and Diamond 2000, p. 7)

One might think that the most senior leadership in a university or college would be so identified with the defining of ‘shared purpose’ as to escape the charge of dysfunctionality. Yet, behind all the structures referred to so far in the UK system, there are the Higher Education Funding Council’s regulatory systems, which monitor and judge the annual financial performance of individual universities. ‘Dysfunctional empowerment’ has indeed been at the root of more than one vice chancellor leaving his post in recent years (see, e.g., Newman 2009). Universities and colleges are likely to

seek more openly to remove dysfunctional empowerment at lower levels of organisation and management. This goes with another change in university structures and ethos over recent years. Many universities had what was effectively a cellular structure with a considerable degree of autonomy within individual cells, corresponding to the overall autonomy of universities and the autonomy held by tenured members of staff. Now such structures (which, particularly in new media companies, are regarded as thoroughly effective) are much less common than more conventional pyramid structures in which the 'strategic plan' trickles down through the levels. Executive Deans, Heads of Departments, and other 'academic leaders' are required to devise plans and are given targets to meet that feed upwards to sustain a single plan.

The preceding account risks seeming a caricature given the diversity of universities and colleges, and yet—like any good caricature—it will be recognisable to many as within their own experience and as highlighting general trends across the sector. Universities and colleges renew themselves in various ways. Intellectual innovation is still considered significant, but alongside—and, increasingly, subject to—corporate values. Change is wrapped around with the notion of 'change leadership', and techniques from the commercial and industrial sector such as 'target setting' and the '360 degree process' are regularly embedded within what is likely now to be referred to as 'performance review'. The criteria that universities and colleges use for promotions are often confidential within the institution, but those that are publicly available, and anecdotal evidence, indicate that 'leadership' is increasingly a separately defined criterion. It is hardly necessary to add that the criterion is likely to be written in terms that involve allegiance to the corporate identity rather than the leadership demonstrated by General Patton or by others with eccentric (in the literal sense of the word) drives. Ideas of leadership here work alongside another idea that has been imported into the discourse of universities and colleges in the UK, namely 'impact'. The most prominent use of the notion of impact is in the domain of research and research funding. Ideas derived from industrial product-focused research, and scientific research generally, have become hegemonic—to serve the interests of a grand narrative whereby universities have a beneficial impact on economic development. And individual projects are required to demonstrate the same kind of notional utilitarian value.

Universities and colleges also renew themselves by appointing new staff, and this brings us to the role of something that we want to argue is very akin to internship. Benevolently, internships offer a solution, particularly



at a time when candidates outnumber jobs available, to the paradox that employers require candidates to have experience of work before they can be considered for appointment to a first job (see the *Graduate Advantage* website). Often, however, internship schemes have side effects. It can be argued that when a small media company wants to expand, its most reliable method will be to recruit someone from the same background as those already employed, risking effectively cloning new staff rather than introducing challenge and some degree of unpredictability. Since demand exceeds supply in this sector, and particularly in start-up situations, a company will perhaps also aim to appoint someone as an intern on low pay or no pay. The common nature of this practice can be seen by the efforts to counter it (see *Creative and Cultural Skills* 2011).

Before the expansion of higher education in the mid-twentieth century, networks of patronage were a common feature of appointments in its key areas. Subsequently, appointment processes were generally regulated and codified, ensuring greater equality in access to opportunities. But these regulated processes have not always covered the earliest stages of an academic's career. For all the processes that institutions may start, here opportunities usually arise within a small area and have a very instrumental purpose—typically taking over the teaching of a more senior member of staff who has been granted leave. It is as natural here as in the above example of the small media company to look for someone who can fit in easily and whom the department can trust. Typically, an academic will be paid for this work, but will suffer the disadvantages of casualised or 'supply' work in any sector, in that he or she will be paid for contact hours but not for training or preparation; and yet, he or she is likely to see this work as necessary for providing him or her with the experience that can significantly boost his or her career prospects. Demonstrating a commitment to the corporate identity of the institution is likely to play a significant part here. An academic career now in the UK is likely to begin with a series of such quasi-internships succeeded perhaps by a series of fixed-term contracts linked to teaching or research fellowships.

In its section on academic careers, Graduate Prospects Ltd, a website-based careers advisory service owned by universities and colleges, states:

Research assistant roles are not famed for job security and it is a competitive environment. Short-term contracts are usually offered, which can be anything from three months to three years in length. It is not uncommon for a research assistant or fellow to spend years working on temporary contracts before being offered a permanent role. (*Graduate Prospects* 2014)

The website also cites five key skills that the University of Manchester, the largest UK university, believes academics need to possess in addition to their subject expertise, namely:

- [L]eadership and management;
- networking;
- presentation skills;
- resilience;
- time management.

(Graduate Prospects 2014)

Here and elsewhere, one must be wary of implying that deterministic processes are at work, but it seems very likely that an academic will realise the advantage of conforming to that corporate identity, whether he or she is intent on early success in his or her career or becoming anxious after a string of short-term contracts. He or she will do well to take in the rationales of 'leadership and management' even while seeking a foothold on the first rungs of 'followship'.

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## Not Working: Shared Services and the Production of Unemployment

*Kim Emery*

*You're not going to cut the budget without somebody losing their job.*

*Paul D'Anieri, 2012 (quoted in Crabbe 2012a)*

Currently, even management literature warns that transitioning to a shared-services model is 'not for the faint of heart' (Schulman et al. 1999, p. xv).<sup>1</sup> Implementation 'can be a challenge', admits Georgia Regent President Ricardo Azziz, 'especially when the change may lead to redefining work responsibilities or the loss of a job' (Azziz 2014). Nevertheless,

<sup>1</sup>For insights important to the development of this essay, I am indebted to the staff, students, and faculty who united in the spring of 2012 to 'Stop the Layoffs!' proposed for the University of Florida's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, especially John Biro, Erin Cass, Candi Churchill, Susan Hegeman, Aida Hozic, John P. Leavey, Patrick McHenry, Diana Moreno, Paul Ortiz, Joe Richards, Leah Rosenberg, Rob Short, and Jose 'Beto' Soto.

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university administrators across the USA are rushing to implement this latest idea in a spate of largely bad ideas adapted for use in higher education from the dubious example of private, for-profit corporations. Versions of the efficiency-oriented organisational structure have recently been introduced at the University of California–Berkeley, Yale University, University of Kansas, University of Texas, University of Michigan, and, in 2012, my own workplace—the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) at the University of Florida (UF).

Advocates promise improved performance, better working conditions, and enhanced attention to higher education’s true mission, core activities, and defining objectives (see Azziz 2014; Proenza and Church, 2011). On many campuses, however, the move has been met with significant scepticism—and at others, with organised resistance. Here at UF, it was the announcement that thirty-five staffers would be issued lay-off notices that galvanised the opposition to shared services. The immediate objective of saving people’s jobs informed our efforts and—at least arguably—precluded full consideration of the broader implications of the proposed structural change. Three years out, this essay affords me the opportunity to revisit the issue with the luxury of time for reflection. In it, I examine our local experience both in relation to the theory of shared services and the broader management perspective of which it is a part, and also in connection to the specific historical and material contexts in which the model was introduced on this campus. The example offers evidence that, both conceptually and materially, the shared-services model is inexorably entangled with the threat, idea, and actuality of unemployment. By parsing out some particulars of the model’s emergence in this time and place, however, it also documents the tactical flexibility of shared services and its several elements, suggesting a potential for shifting strategic significance and indicating the necessity of mobile and attentive engagement with its various manifestations.

## WHAT IS SHARED SERVICES? MANAGEMENT THEORY AND ACADEMIC APPLICATIONS

The basic idea of shared services seems quite straightforward: remove routine administrative tasks (accounting, human resources management, payroll, purchasing, etc.) from the diverse departments, institutes, and offices in which they traditionally reside, and consolidate them in a single centralised operation. Admittedly, to many faculty the whole topic ‘sounds zzzzzzzzzzz’,

as a friend who prefers to remain anonymous observes: the concerns of support staff, details of organisational structure and dispensation of which forms get filled out how and where are not of obvious interest to many academics. However, the utility of shared services relies on several assumptions that merit closer scrutiny. The first and most obvious is one widely shared: that because the work done by support staff is not in itself explicitly ‘academic’, the organisation of that work is irrelevant to the properly intellectual purpose of the university. In this view—one shared by management proponents of shared services and many of their faculty critics—it is faculty and students who do the work *of* the university, while so-called support staff (as is implicit in the name) only work *for* the institution. This division has proved an easy sell, perhaps because it is shot through with class stereotypes and cultural assumptions: faculty are members of a profession, engaged in serving the greater good, even knowledge itself; support staff are wage slaves paid for their time (not their unique contributions) by a particular employer; and so on.

In any case, this distinction is presumed by the shared-services model and formalised in its structure. The shared-services centre is a ‘support unit’ not directly engaged in whatever activities define the larger organisation, but intended instead to ‘service’ other units that *do* directly ‘add value’ to the larger enterprise. Indeed, the division is so absolute as to exclude the activities consolidated in shared services from the organisation’s self-concept, an understanding reflected in the idea that ‘shared services and outsourced services are flip sides of the same coin’—and in the reality that the former frequently serves as first step towards the latter (Schulman et al. 1999, p. 99). *Adding value*, moreover, is a somewhat amorphous idea, borrowed (of course) from management theory. It refers generally to those activities that distinguish the enterprise (company, university, etc.) from its competitors—as opposed to such lower-level administrative activities as can be captured by shared services, which are assumed to be fundamentally homogenous. The functions performed by shared services may well be ‘valuable and important’, but ‘by themselves, these activities provide no unique differentiation, no specific advantage or distinction’ (Proenza and Church 2011). In the case of higher education, *adding value* means performing the research, teaching and service that universities are meant to do. In the case of for-profit business, from which the concept is adapted, it mainly means ‘make money’. Although the fit, obviously, is imperfect, management strategies currently popular in higher education effect an illusion of alignment, mainly by subordinating intellectual motivations to financial ones (see Emery 2010).

Arguments in favour of shared services also assume that standardisation and extreme specialisation improve efficiency and quality, that physical and administrative segregation support specialisation, and that efficiency itself is a *prima facie* good. By their logic, an employee assigned only travel vouchers will get really good at processing travel vouchers, ensuring quality, and improving speed. Standardisation ensures that the specialised employee never encounters a novel or unpractised task that might disrupt the arrangement. In all, this set of assumptions recalls an assembly-line Taylorism of centuries past, a telling twist on this twenty-first century management fad. As ever, the unexamined value of efficiency and the structures and practices that serve it (specialisation, standardisation, and segregation) work to separate and isolate employees from each other, from the larger project of the enterprise and its implications, and from their own creative agency. By impeding employees' vision of connections among the organisation's many moving parts, this strategy assures that only top administrators occupy a standpoint appropriate to 'decision-makers'. Only this managerial viewpoint allows for the exercise of real agency within a system that simultaneously segregates and circumscribes employees' individual capacities for insight and action (see Bousquet 2008, p. 73). It is not clear, moreover, that specialisation in standardised tasks improves quality and speed of performance so much as it bores and numbs those who are assigned these; without variety, novelty, and challenge, even the most complex labour may be experienced as drudge work. Why rush to complete a rote task when all that lies after it is more of the same? Similarly, standardisation of support does not improve quality or efficiency when offered in response to diverse specific needs. One assumption of the theory of shared services is that the distinct disciplinary objectives, modes and priorities of different departments matter only in their officially intellectual endeavours, and not in the presumably fungible, 'necessary but redundant' (see Proenza and Church 2011) activities of support staff. A purchase order is a purchase order, this thinking holds, whether it comes from the medical school or the philosophy department. Again, the logic underlying the move to shared services relies on the pernicious distinction that work performed by faculty is special, significant, and specific, whereas work done by staff is of a substantively different kind, performed by a qualitatively different type of worker<sup>2</sup>—one appropriately subjected to

<sup>2</sup>The vaunted value of efficiency, interestingly, increasingly shapes the work environment of both faculty and support staff, as budget models and management strategies increasingly incentivise faculty productivity as a ratio of output to invested resources.

the rudimentary schemas of scientific management, perhaps, as opposed to those faculty who are encouraged to imagine themselves as not only professional but also thoroughly modern, and certainly advanced beyond age-old distinctions between management and labour.

### SHARED SERVICES IN CONTEXT

Like incentives-based budgeting, responsibility centre management (RCM), and other techniques of the corporate university, shared services have emerged in the broader context of planned deprivation and precarious employment. The withdrawal of state support from putatively public institutions has authorised the privatisation of core functions and activities along with casualisation and outsourcing within many categories of employment, from food service and policing to teaching and research. At UF, the introduction of shared services occurred at a very specific moment along this trajectory, one not replicated precisely on other campuses (because conditioned by local circumstances), but instructive nevertheless.

Between 2001 and 2003, Florida's university system underwent significant restructuring orchestrated by then-Governor Jeb Bush. Historically governed by a single, statewide Board of Regents, the eleven universities were reorganised under separate Boards of Trustees. Even though Florida is a 'Right-to-Work' state with weak labour laws, many staff, faculty, and campus police were protected by collective bargaining agreements and strong union representation. The reorganisation provided political cover and ostensible legal grounds for pulling the rug out from under all that. The argument of the state of Florida was specious, but simple: laws ensuring union recognition bound the Board of Regents, but that Board had been abolished; hence, the law was no longer applied and the state bore no responsibility to its formerly protected employees. Under the new arrangement, workers were forced to fight back campus and group by group. Of course, the state's position was untenable: even in Florida, management cannot escape its obligations simply by shuffling an organisational chart. Nevertheless, the ensuing legal battles were long and costly. The struggle ultimately strengthened some unions, including most chapters of the United Faculty of Florida (UFF) and Graduate Assistants United, whose constituents had been galvanised by the attack on basic rights; but it weakened others, including Florida's branch of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSME), which represented most staff. When the dust cleared, most physical plant employees had



regained their collective bargaining rights, but most of the office staff were shut out.

In 2006, 3 years after the reorganisation had been accomplished, UF's CLAS experienced severe retrenchment; programs were cut and consolidated, operating budgets were slashed, and faculty (term-appointed, tenure track, and ultimately tenured) were served notice of lay-off. However, the faculty union (UFF) had survived Bush's union busting and summarily filed grievances on behalf of fired faculty members who requested representation. The union prevailed, and the laid-off faculty who brought grievances kept their jobs. In July 2008, then-UF President J. Bernard Machen convened a committee to explore the adoption of a revenue (later responsibility)-based budgeting system: RCM. Implemented in the autumn of 2011, the model formalises the principles underlying shared services, distinguishing dedicated 'support units' from 'responsibility centers', and requiring that the latter both pay their own way and fund 'non-value-added units' with a portion of the proceeds. RCM explicitly claims the objective of encouraging an 'entrepreneurial' mindset among academic units, pitting them in direct competition over resources and subordinating academic decisions to financial considerations at every level (see Emery 2010). CLAS shared services is a natural outgrowth of this setup, further rationalised by the College's dire financial straits. As then-Dean Paul D'Anieri made clear, 'You're not going to cut the budget without somebody losing their job' (quoted in Crabbe 2012a): at UF, shared services were introduced as a cost-saving measure predicated on the assumption that members of the office staff—having lost the protections of unionisation—would also lose their jobs.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, even the vaunted savings relentlessly associated with shared services appear exaggerated, as early adopters routinely report savings realised even without taking into account new expenses incurred in making the move. Interviewed by the *Gainesville Sun* in 2012, UF Chief Financial Officer Matt Fajack reportedly 'pointed to tens of millions of dollars in saving at other universities, such as Michigan, that have established such centers' and suggested that Florida might see similar savings (Crabbe 2012a). However, *Inside Higher Ed*, among other sources, reports the 'backlash' that ensued when Michigan tried to implement shared services—in 2013 (see Rivard 2013). Reporter Nathan Crabbe recalls, in a personal email from 26 March 2015, that Fajack 'had an article [...] that he cited', but acknowledges that 'perhaps it was about the projected savings rather than actual savings' at Michigan. By 2013, even estimates of those projected savings had been adjusted downwards, with *Inside Higher Ed* reporting that 'the plan is no longer expected to save nearly as much as once hoped' and that even those revised projections do not factor in millions of dollars in new costs (see Rivard 2013).

The initial plan called for thirty-five lay-offs. Under the cruelly constrained but ostensibly ‘decentralised’ mandates of RCM, the news arrived in the English Department accompanied by an order to fire three (of six)<sup>4</sup> front-office staffers. As was the case across the College, the targeted staff members were overwhelmingly women, a multiracial group and mostly middle-aged and older, most making less than \$35,000 a year. Many had decades of service, and some were only a year or two from retirement. Although the department proposed several plans to make up the money elsewhere, the new ‘flexible’ system was not that flexible: the English Department had the authority to determine *which* staffers to let go, but not to decide *whether* to lay off employees. This sort of sharply constricted ‘autonomy’ is a familiar feature of the ostensibly ‘decentralised’ decision-making characteristic of the RCM-organised corporate university, often branded as ‘empowerment’ for the local units and lower-level administrators left scrambling to cover costs under systems that grant them little real control. A web of incentives, restrictions, and potentially punitive allocation schemas force departments into ‘alignment’ with institutional objectives over which they have no say. Because the system itself creates the context in which cost-cutting, shared services, and lay-offs appear desirable or even necessary, solutions refusing one or more of these elements are unlikely to be found within the system. Hence, while Department Chair Kenneth Kidd stalled and kept trying to bargain,<sup>5</sup> faculty and others organised outside official administrative channels. UFF immediately emailed the bargaining unit, upper administration, and the press, ‘categorically and emphatically’ opposing the lay-offs. ‘We find this attempt to exact some small savings by targeting some of UF’s longest-serving, most vulnerable, and least well-compensated employees to be both unethical

<sup>4</sup>Exactly which jobs and how many were in peril emerged as a point of discussion as the Department dragged out deliberations. At one stage, staff positions not in the front office but associated with journals housed in the Department were added to the list of potential lay-offs, but these positions were ultimately maintained, as well.

<sup>5</sup>As I have learned through union negotiations, stalling and bargaining are complementary tactics: stalling is a technique of bargaining, and bargaining can be used as a means of stalling. Although Kidd modestly avers that he is still not entirely sure how it happened that the English Department escaped this crisis largely unscathed, he deftly dragged the process out as the context changed, avoiding action until conditions had improved. Despite the initial mandate that savings had to be realised through lay-offs, he eventually convinced the Dean to accept the Department’s sacrifice of a graduate research assistantship in exchange for the preservation of one of the staff lines. He then managed to direct support from a different funding stream to continue offering the assistantship, as well.

and unwise’, the email read. ‘Such action would have a deleterious effect on the local economy and a disastrous effect on many individual lives’. Sounding a note that would inform the continuing campaign, the letter concluded with a call to solidarity: ‘These staff members are our friends, relatives, neighbours, and co-workers. We support them absolutely and encourage you to do the same.’<sup>6</sup>

From this rushed call to arms, there emerged a larger coalition of faculty, staff, students, and local residents, first under the banner of ‘Stop the Lay-Offs’ and later rebranded as ‘Save UF! Spend the Reserves’, which linked opposition to the lay-offs in CLAS with resistance to other damaging cuts and restructuring proposed outside the College and refused the arbitrary assignment of debt to CLAS by the university’s recently adopted budget model.<sup>7</sup> Tellingly, the upper administration answered UFF’s opposition with the threat that if staff were not laid off, faculty would be. This response solidified the place of solidarity as the opposition’s central theme. A petition on Change.org quickly garnered almost 500 signatures, calling on ‘supporters, fans, friends, faculty, students, alumni, and concerned fellow citizens [...] [to] recognize that the heart and soul of this University’ is ‘the people’—and appealing to the central administration as follows: ‘Please, as we work through this difficult economic time, try to pull us together instead of tearing us apart. Preserve the integrity and character of the University of Florida by taking actions that are responsible, not destructive and divisive’ (Save UF Coalition 2012).

Flatly rejecting the administration’s each-against-all perspective, the coalition categorically refused division among staff, faculty (term contract and tenure stream) and graduate employees. ‘No layoffs, no non-renewals, no GA cuts’, the petition demanded. ‘Keep all the people that make UF great.’ To underscore our point that the university *is* its people, as opposed to its Board or brand, the campaign claimed the university brand, calling more than once on ‘the Gator Nation’ and signing off ‘Go, Gators!’ In keeping with these initial interventions, the coalition hewed close to the theme of solidarity throughout ensuing rallies, protests, on-campus petitions, letter-writing campaigns, media interviews, and a ‘General Assembly

<sup>6</sup>I drafted this email on behalf of UFF at the UF, and co-signed it with Paul Ortiz.

<sup>7</sup>For documentation and discussion of these activities and more, please see the ‘Save UF! Spend the Reserves’ Facebook page, administered by Erin Cass, Susan Hegeman, Mathew Loving, Paul Ortiz, Joe Richard, Leah Rosenberg and myself. *Gainesville Sun* reporter Nathan Crabbe confirms that the distribution of cuts was ‘determined through UF’s responsibility-centered management budgeting system’ (Crabbe 2012c).

to Save UF'. In the end, the worst cuts were rescinded, and the Dean was forced to adopt 'a less ambitious, more streamlined and more voluntary plan' for shared services (quoted in Crabbe 2012b). Ultimately, a shared-service centre was established in CLAS, but departments were given the choice to opt out, lateral reassignment replaced lay-off as the first option for affected staff, and the English Department lost only one staff line (when the youngest employee and most recent hire left the next year for a better job, and was not replaced), avoiding lay-offs entirely.

### LESSONS AND REFLECTIONS

For a long time, I felt like we had won, more or less. Almost daily, I see staffers slated for lay-off still safely at work. In our office alone, there is a woman who is shy of retirement and suffers from chronic illness; she has health insurance and an income, and will soon collect her well-earned pension. There is a middle-aged woman with 20 years of experience, with a new mortgage and a kid approaching college age. There is a woman caring alone for her dying mother and barely scraping by.<sup>8</sup> The preservation of these jobs and continued presence of these colleagues in our department are indisputable goods. Nevertheless, another structural change has been effected at UF: the shared-services centre has been established. Over the course of a decade, a series of interrelated administrative manoeuvres—shared services, departmental reorganisation, the shift to an RCM budgeting system, and a dramatic, statewide union decertification drive—has produced an increase in unemployment, either directly through lay-offs or slowly and indirectly through weakened worker rights, imposed austerity and attrition. Clearly, corporate management is playing the long game, and this makes me question any easy interpretation of tactics, including facile assumptions about cause and effect. Even the phrase 'the production of unemployment', as proposed by this collective volume, invites two distinct readings, and our experience in Florida suggests that both are critical: *what produces unemployment?* And also, *what does unemployment produce?* The answer from here, so far, is a loss of departmental autonomy, increased anxiety and precarity, and decreased academic freedom. These human and institutional costs are clear. The administrative upside, however, includes a

<sup>8</sup> In an effort to protect privacy, these actual circumstances are assigned here to composites instead of the real people experiencing them.

workforce more easily controlled, deteriorating working conditions for those still employed, and a large ‘flexible’ labour pool comprising the downsized and laid off. One question that haunts is whether the immediate emergency of impending lay-offs worked as a decoy to distract us from the structural acceptance of the shared-services model. Perhaps, it was a ‘stress test’ of sorts, one designed to see just how much management could get away with. Although they would probably have been happy to encounter no resistance to the lay-offs, perhaps they win either way, accomplishing the shift either slowly or quickly and learning much about forces of resistance in the process. If so, I am encouraged that one lesson learned is that premising structural change on pernicious distinctions among employees is at least not automatically a winning strategy. This is a critical accomplishment, in my view, as the divisions encouraged by the logic underlying shared services appeal not only to faculty’s traditional vanity but also to the particular vulnerability of our current circumstances. In the context of a nearly monolithic ‘neoliberal rationality’ that threatens the mission and foundation of higher education, there is comfort in an approach that seems to recognise that there is something distinct about the academic enterprise, a different set of values that set it apart from your average for-profit business (see Brown 2015, p. 181). By associating this value only with the faculty, however, and by simultaneously subjecting their work as well to systems of management designed to ‘align’ academic objectives to financial directives, the corporate university reveals its commitment to a conception of employees as human capital, as opposed to simply human. Shared services comprises a ‘management model’ that ‘strives to maximally leverage people’ (along with ‘knowledge’ and ‘resources’), ‘regardless of which cost center they are assigned to’ (Azziz 2014). Under this logic, faculty may be assigned to a different category of employee than are office staff, and may indeed require different techniques of management, but the goals and prerogatives of neoliberal management remain unchanged. Proponents like to pretend that shared services is simply a tool, non-ideological: ‘[s]hared services by itself is not strategic’, but merely ‘tactical’ (Schulman et al. 1999, p. 35). However, the move to shared services does not occur ‘by itself’ in a vacuum. Instead, as events at UF illustrate, it is a tactic undertaken in the context of a broader neoliberal ‘conversion in the purpose, organization, and content of public higher education’ (Brown 2015, p. 184), which it supplements and supports. In this context, clearly, the precarity of any threatens the well-being of all.

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PART III

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Generation Gaps and Economic  
Dependency in Academic Life

## Graduate Unemployment in Post-Haircut Cyprus: Where Have All the Students Gone?

*Mike Hajimichael*

In this chapter, I would like to discuss the state of higher education in Cyprus and especially the prospects of students after they finish their studies in the context of the current economic crisis.<sup>1</sup> The chapter is partly a collection of stories based on experiences of graduate students themselves. It is also partly about the distinctive character of the evolution of higher education in Cyprus, with its strong emphasis on the dichotomy between the private and the state sector, and the manner in which education is valued and stigmatised in Cypriot society. Research for this chapter was conducted through ethnographic interviews with communications graduates (both bachelor's and master's) whom I had taught at the University of Nicosia. Because of the economic crisis in the Republic of Cyprus, many of these former students now face the prospects of unemployment, employment insecurity, and low-income, highly exploitative jobs. These

<sup>1</sup>Some of the research for this chapter was undertaken in the context of the collaborative project 'Framing Financial Crisis and Protest: North-West and South-East Europe', which is administered by the Faculty of Arts at The Open University, and funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

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interviews, which are a collection of insights and stories, will lead to some inferences and generalisations from my qualitative sample.

I must confess that my own interest in this subject is multifaceted. As a student myself, who once studied for a BA in Government and Sociology (University of Essex, 1979–82), I faced upon graduation the prospect of either seeking employment or continuing with my studies under the first term of Margaret Thatcher's premiership. For infrequent periods of time I was unemployed, between studying and taking on a variety of seasonal and part-time jobs, a member of what the band UB40 called 'the one in ten'. When I repatriated to Cyprus around 1994, the political climate I had left, namely Britain under John Major, was completely different from the environment in Cyprus under the presidency of George Vassiliou. For one thing, there was far less unemployment, and the unemployment that was there was more or less seasonal due to the dependency of the economy on tourism and the building trades.

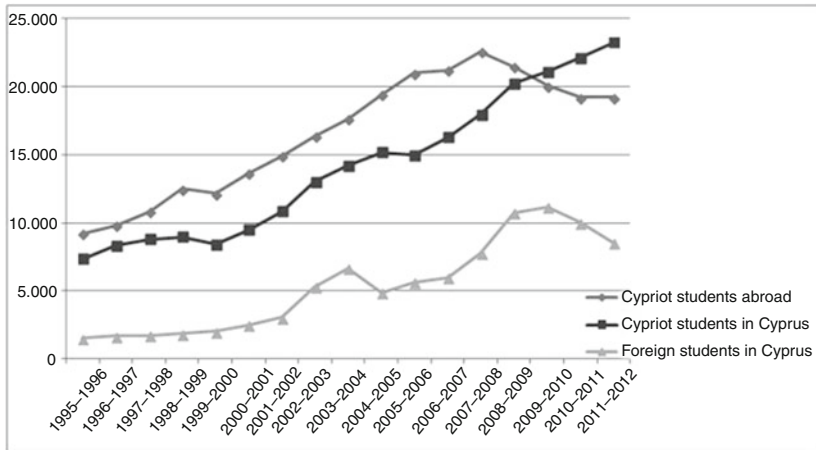
### THE EVOLUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN CYPRUS

Some years ago, I heard a story that runs something like this. A PhD graduate, fresh from a prestigious UK university, had landed in Cyprus looking for his first teaching job back in the homeland. He was not very optimistic. At the time, the tertiary education sector was dominated by a variety of private colleges, and his specialisation in sociology could not be accommodated that easily, so he settled for a few hours in a regional college (that shall remain nameless) to teach English. It was not quite what he expected, but he tried to stay optimistic; it was a start. This story happened in the late 1990s. Anyway, he walked into his first class, a rowdy bunch of people, one of whom was renowned for testing any new teacher's patience during the first lesson. As the teacher started the lecture, it was clear that the student was about to intimidate him. Instead of doing the usual lily-livered thing, which many previous first-time teachers did, the teacher decided to block the student's hand, quite decisively, that had been raised to his face. He also politely and sternly asked the student to sit down, to which the student agreed. Apparently, nobody had ever challenged him like this before, and the class just hushed in a shocked sense of unison. At the end of the week, the owner of the college, who also acted as the principal, summoned the teacher to his office where he was given his marching orders, a fine way to start an academic career. He was also told to note that 'the customer is always right'.

This opening anecdote introduces a trait in Cypriot society, namely clientelism, something that has been explored thoroughly, for example, by writers such as Caesar Mavratsas (2003) and Hubert Faustmann (2010). While it is often referred to in politics with regard to corruption and abusing regulations, clientelism is also prevalent in many aspects of everyday life, such as the job market, education, and social activities. Being connected to someone who ‘can’ (do something that needs to be done) is part and parcel of what is commonly known as *meson*. This translates loosely as ‘connection’, a link to get things done in return for a favour. This could be securing a job in return for voting for a particular party or, as is the case with the above anecdote, a rowdy student getting a part-time lecturer fired.

At the same time, the development of tertiary education in Cyprus is something much more recent, a postcolonial or post-independence phenomenon (1960). The University of Cyprus, for example, the first state university in Cyprus, was established in 1989, after much deliberation by a number of successive governments (see Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture 2015). The idea of a university in Cyprus goes back to the 1930s, when the British administration aimed to create ‘the most important and effective channel through which the propagandist ideas could be disseminated in the local intellectual elite’ (Xypolia 2013). This did not materialise, however, due to World War II, after which mounting tensions between the colonial administration and local populations in Cyprus, as well as an increasing sense of separatist violence and conflict in the years 1955–1960, made this project even more unfeasible. However, the first teacher-training colleges for Greek Cypriots were established in 1937 (for men) and 1946 (for women). By 1958, both of these merged to become the Pedagogical Academy of Cyprus. After 1960, a Turkish Cypriot teacher-training college was also established (see Koyzis 1997). Private colleges were also emerging in the 1960s, starting with the Cyprus College (1961), Frederick Institute of Technology (1975), Philips College (1978), and Intercollege (1980). All of this led to the development of a large private ‘college’ sector that existed long before the creation of a state university.

Figure 7.1 shows recent numbers of Cypriots studying abroad, Cypriots studying locally, and international students studying in the Republic of Cyprus. It is worth noting the rise in all three variables after 2004, when the Republic of Cyprus joined the European Union (EU). Also significant is the constant rise in the number of students studying in Cyprus, which can also be linked to the ‘universitisation’ of private colleges that was finalised in 2007 (see Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture 2015). Currently,



**Fig. 7.1** Cypriot and international students in Cyprus and Cypriot students studying abroad (*Source*: Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture 2012)

there are five private universities: the University of Nicosia, European University Cyprus, Frederick University, Neapolis University (Paphos), and the University of Central Lancashire—UCLAN Cyprus (Pyla). The state sector has also expanded significantly through the creation of The Open University (2002) and the Cyprus University of Technology (2003).

Of course, the development of colleges and universities in Cyprus, both private and public ones, has not always been an easy route, particularly in the private sector. Colleges in this sector, such as Intercollege and Cyprus College, challenged government rulings against them in 1998, following a decision by the state not to accredit degrees granted by these establishments (see *Times Higher Education* 1998). I can recall the frustration of a student at that time who had spent 5 years working part-time and studying at one of these private institutions. This of course also has to be seen against the background of preferential treatment for the newly founded University of Cyprus, which officially opened its doors in 1992, and the manner in which the accreditation of private college degrees was assessed in the first place, largely by Greek- or Athens-based academics who abhorred private higher education (see *Times Higher Education* 1998).

Parallel to this, the value of a university education needs to be considered in a wider historical and social context. As a society that developed very rapidly after 1945 from a largely peasant-based rural society to a

more urban one (see Attalides 1981), education, even in rural areas, was always highly valued. Many people with largely rural backgrounds did not have access to good education, so they tended to see education as a tool for social mobility and economic betterment. These ideas spread across generations as well as in the diaspora. I can recall how my late father, who left school at the age of fourteen to become a tailor's assistant in the village of Marathovouno, shared with all three of his children a very simple saying, 'Mathe grammata, na spoudasis, na men minis arkatis san emena', which loosely translates as: 'Study, educate yourself so you won't be a worker like me' (Hajimichael 2014). This is one reason why I value university education, which I have been privileged to have. This thirst for higher education has also contributed to the fact that Cyprus has one of the highest levels of tertiary education graduates in the EU. According to Eurostat, in 2012, 49.9 % of residents in the Republic of Cyprus aged 30–34 had completed tertiary education; this was second only to Ireland and its 51.1 % (see Nuthall 2013). Having outlined the evolution of higher education in Cyprus, I would now like to turn to the time when everything started to go dramatically wrong, and examine the way in which Cypriot society has changed following the tumultuous 'haircut' or 'bail-out-bail-in' of March 2013.

### THE HAIRCUT AND ITS AFTERMATH

I will not go into the Cypriot bailout crisis of March 2013—the 'haircut'—in detail, as this has been documented widely in many academic works, media outlets, political comments, and a vast array of economic accounts (see Papaioannou and Hajimichael 2015). My main concern here is how the haircut has affected tertiary education, and particularly the institutions in this sector and students themselves.

One of the deepest and most depressing elements of the post-haircut climate in Cyprus is unemployment, and particularly how this has impacted youth, and graduates in particular. Before expanding on this, I would like to briefly discuss how notions such as those of unemployment, poverty, and homelessness have been employed in the political discourse in times when Cyprus was a more affluent and economically better-off society.

The epitome of this discourse was captivated perfectly by Ioannis Kasoulides, currently Foreign Minister, who in 2008 stood for the Presidency of the Republic of Cyprus. Kasoulides, a conservative, was beaten by communist Demetris Christofias. One of the causes of Kasoulides's defeat was

an unfortunate statement he made on a live TV show on the state broadcaster (CyBC TV) in which he advocated that there were no homeless people in Europe, and therefore by implication in Cyprus. This kind of carelessness also cuts across other issues such as unemployment, which for a substantial amount of time in Cyprus was seen as something seasonal due to the impact of tourism and the construction industries on the economy. Following the effects of the ‘haircut’ in March 2013, many things changed. Sure enough, unemployment had been rising steadily before this, from 3.8 % in 2003 to 8.7 % in 2012 and 11.9 % in 2013, before reaching 14.6 % in 2014. Figures for long-term unemployment among people aged 17–74 had also been rising dramatically, namely from 1 % in 2003 to 3.6 % in 2012, and 6.1 % in 2013 rising up to 7.7 % in 2014. Youth unemployment has also more than quadrupled, jumping from 8.8 % in 2003 to 36 % in 2014, with figures on graduates rising up to 40–50 % (see Kambas 2014). It is this final group, young graduates, who face the most challenging situations and prospects, on which I will focus in the remainder of this chapter.

### GRADUATE STORIES

Most of the information in this section was obtained from five interviews with mostly former BA students whom I had taught in the Department of Communications at the University of Nicosia. Three of these students also went on to complete or are in the process of completing a master’s in digital communications. One of the students did not do a first degree at the University of Nicosia. For reasons agreed with the students, partial anonymity was used in that they are referred to through first names only in the interview process. This made people more comfortable to express themselves. So, the five people interviewed are Adonis, Andonia, Andreas, Christiana, and Evie. Also, names of companies and employers have been anonymised. Knowing the students personally made it easier for me to conduct the interviews online. This is perhaps the first time such research is being conducted with graduates, and although the research does have a limited sample, I would like to extend it in the future into a wider research project with a bigger sample. It is important to understand from the outset that although the students tell different stories, there are a number of commonalities in terms of facing unemployment, finding a suitable job for their degree qualifications, and living with the uncertainty of the future. One of the students, Evie, has a different experience in that after her first degree she

decided to study a master's via the Erasmus programme in Spain. Before analysing these interviews, however, I would like to draw the reader's attention to Carmen Fishwick's article 'Europe's Young Jobless' (2013). This piece was inspirational in the formation of my chapter, and I being by quoting from it a long commentary given by Panayiotis Christodoulou, also a former Communications graduate from the University of Nicosia.

### PANAYIOTIS CHRISTODOULOU, 26, NICOSIA, CYPRUS

I'm worried that my degree will soon have no value. When the economy recovers I'll be 35 years old and unable to find work as a junior and without the experience for a more senior position.

I knew things weren't going to be ideal and getting a job was going to be a hard task – I graduated from the University of Nicosia with a communications degree. During my studies I worked as a DIY sales adviser but had to leave after one-and-a-half years as my course demanded a practical exam of a month's work in a newspaper and I was unable to take the time off work.

Since graduating I've sent on average about 25–30 applications a month, and I'd welcome any position related to my degree, such as a journalist, presenter, writer or PR adviser. During the past two to three years a lot of media organisations have been shrinking with news websites finding it difficult to attract adverts to survive.

Finding work has now become a matter of survival and I'm looking for almost anything. But it's been hard to convince employers that my dream is to become a storekeeper, or a sales person for a spare parts car company, after spending four years and 40,000 Euro on tuition fees. They tell me they will spend time and money to train me and cannot risk losing me when there are so many other candidates available. Despite months of going to the department of labour for job advice and seeking assistance I, along with many other people, have not been offered even a single job.

I've been receiving 600 Euro a month from the government for the past six months – which is the maximum time – until a couple of weeks ago. Now that I don't have any income besides limited help from my family it is very hard. I feel uncertainty. It has affected me psychologically and given me feelings of depression. Lately I am not able to enjoy simple things, such as a drink with friends, exercise, or concentrate on watching a movie or reading a book. I've also put on a lot of weight. I was supposed to start building my life and moving forward after graduation. I am at the age considered the most productive yet I cannot even earn enough for the basics.

I'd prefer to stay in Cyprus, but am thinking about moving abroad despite the fact that a lot of countries in the EU and the world are in a similar situation. It will be easier to go to the UK given that the only language I know besides Greek is English. Still, I'd prefer to stay here. (Christodoulou, quoted in Fishwick 2013)

The key themes in Panayiotis's story, echoed in most of the interviews I conducted, are the value of a degree versus doing jobs that are irrelevant to it; the difficulties of finding a satisfying and appropriate job; unemployment; and, finally, the future—living in or leaving Cyprus.

### THE VALUE OF A DEGREE VERSUS DOING JOBS THAT ARE IRRELEVANT TO IT

Of course, this question is one that many people ask when they decide to study at the university. Most recipients answer positively in terms of the usefulness of a degree in Communications; but for some of those who have had to take on a lot of jobs outside of the domains of media and public relations, having a degree was not so relevant. Perhaps the most relevant point, however, concerns the question how the media has developed through web portals, where the predominant practice of plagiarism is in clear contradiction with what media students are generally taught. This is what Andreas said in the interview:

Many of these jobs in web portals have a common characteristic: people are constantly forced to copy-paste, and that's something anyone can do even without having a degree. Essentially, a degree is like a passport to get work. It's up to you if you want to stay a simple 'copy-paster' earning 500–750.

The other former students indicated the importance of studying 'no matter what the job is', as Adonis said in his interview, and having a degree in Communications enabled at least two of them to enter into a government-sponsored scheme for unemployed graduates. This is how the Department of Labour outlines the scheme:

This scheme is about providing incentives for hiring unemployed individuals in the private sector. Financial aid of 60 per cent of the yearly wage cost with maximum amount of €7,200 per person per semester is provided. The subsidy is granted only for the first 6 months of employment. (Department of Labour 2013)

## THE DIFFICULTIES OF FINDING A SATISFYING AND APPROPRIATE JOB

Job satisfaction is always a difficult subject to research because it can mean radically different things to different people, things that are closely tied to what we think and feel about the work we are engaged in (see Saari and Judge 2004). Out of the five students interviewed, only one, Evie, was completely satisfied with the job she had found on a radio station in Spain, mainly because it was exactly the kind of work she had studied for and wanted to work in. The interviewees' feelings and thoughts on job satisfaction ranged from dissatisfaction to discontent with low salaries and dismissive treatment. Adonis's experience is worth considering at length here:

I was very dissatisfied with all the jobs that I had done because in each case it felt wrong. For example, in 'Z' [a bakery chain] I felt I was exploited for my swiftness and my relations with the customers, and so they didn't promote my application for a managerial position that required my academic background, and for that I quit. At my next job we were used like telephone operators and were forced to lie that we were calling from a courier company in order to obtain personal information of the subject that we had targeted in order to bombard people with invitations for business summits. I only lasted 4 months lying on the phone. I couldn't do it anymore. At 'N', all was good until they showed their true face. For their job to be done, they wanted unpaid 'workers', and they used the intimidation tactic that if you don't like it the door is open. So I left and took the door with me. It was the saddest experience I have had in the field, as I was so eager to work and we were treated very badly.

Three students had mixed feelings on job satisfaction. Andonia, for example, said the following:

I was satisfied because I had the opportunity to learn something new in the field of public relations, but also dissatisfied because my supervisor treated me as a trainee and didn't encourage me to learn new things. Also, the salary was very low for someone who has some experience – just 500 Euro a month.

It is important to note that the minimum wage was 870 Euro for a new employee, and 924 for someone who has worked for the same employer for more than 6 months (see Department of Labour Relations 2012).



This means that Andonia's salary was around 40 % less than the minimum wage. Stressing the issue of plagiarism (copy-pasting) for a second time, Andreas was more pleased with his last job, since it 'made me learn more about video editing'. And Christiana's job satisfaction was closely linked to the kind of work she wanted to do in the future; as she said, 'the second job I had, although under the umbrella of media, was not satisfying because I do not want to pursue a career in sales and advertising'.

So, generally, job satisfaction is a tricky subject to conclude on. One thing is clear from most of the interviews: the workers were mostly paid low wages, and in Adonis's case not paid at all. This made many of them feel a sense of disappointment in terms of studying for a degree and then having to do jobs that are paid so badly.

## UNEMPLOYMENT

The issue of unemployment affected all five participants in the research sample. It is a multifaceted issue that relates to how long and how often people were unemployed, what kind of stigmas they encountered in their everyday life, and what happened when the unemployment benefit ran out; in other words, how they survived. It is important to note that two participants did not qualify for the unemployment benefit, as they had not been employed before and hence had not paid social insurance contributions for the minimal period of twenty-six consecutive weeks. However, it is clear that all five graduates had experiences of being out of work for different periods of time, from a couple of months (on two or three occasions for one person) to periods longer than a year (three people), while one person was unemployed for 6 months but did not declare herself as such because she was not eligible. In at least four cases, unemployment and employment went hand in hand: a person would, say, work for a couple of months before being out of work for a few more and then getting another job. Evidence on unemployment given by the interviewees can be grouped into two main areas: feelings about being unemployed and reports on what happened when the unemployment benefit ceased.

Adonis described the situation as one of exclusions:

I felt unproductive, trapped; I can't be part of my friends' plans because they talk about vacations, and the only vacation I can dream of is camping in my backyard. If I manage to get 20 Euro, I break the 10 into petrol for the car and 10 maybe for a social exit.

This position of an outsider was expressed by all the graduates via feelings of disappointment, depression, and worthlessness: 'I was feeling very disappointed sometimes. I was outside of the system and I had to look for other jobs in order to store some money for my future', Andonia said. Three of the five participants elaborated on this in the following ways: 'I felt very disappointed. I also went through a long period of depression. Nevertheless, I told myself that if I am unemployed again I would not be disappointed, I would be more optimistic and more active as a citizen' (Andreas). 'Psychologically, being unemployed felt like I was fading as a person, and my creativity and urge to work and use my skills were unimportant' (Christiana). 'Being unemployed made me feel useless, like I had nothing to offer to society, to the world' (Evie).

The feeling of worthlessness, of becoming wasted, operates as a stigma, and being unemployed denies people a sense of dignity in a number of ways. Adonis described this in reverse by turning the tables slightly:

There is a stigma from those who got the jobs – yeah ... they say everyone has to lower their standards and do whatever job – you asshole I've been searching for whatever job for a long time. So yeah, there is this, and also I get the feeling that when they ask me and I tell them I am unemployed they have the look of 'he's too lazy to do a job'.

Another theme that came up in relation to reactions from other people was the family and social networks as sources of support as well as frustration. All five respondents said that family support played a vital role in their life once the unemployment benefit ceased. Evie even went as far as saying that families have become conditioned to accept unemployment as a given: 'In this crisis, I think people are used to people being unemployed, so my social circles and family so far have been understanding and very helpful.' Yet family can also be a source of friction, as Andonia stated:

My family supported me, but I was not happy with that. Some of my social circles tried to encourage me and give me some hope. My family was supporting me financially but not psychologically. They were not accepting me regardless of the kind of job I had, and they thought I wasn't trying hard enough to get a job.

Adonis's family offered their unemployed son 'chores' to do for cash. And in two cases, families offered positive moral support as well (something

that Adonis missed): Andreas said, ‘They were positive and urged me not to get frustrated and not to stop looking for work, but also to enrich my knowledge’; and Christiana reported that her parents believed in her—‘They always said that when the time was right the right job would be out there for me.’

Survival on the unemployment benefit or family support requires a different mindset, even a different perspective on subsistence. Adonis probably described this best when he talked about his own personal austerity plan, indicating how the politics of austerity translates into everyday life:

I made an extremely hard savings plan, harder than that of Greece. I cut car rides and replaced them with the bicycle (but now the wheel needs fixing, and it’s 6 Euro that I need to pay). If I go for a coffee, I get the smallest and cheapest coffee as long as it does the job. I don’t ask for support, but, on the other hand, I do chores for members of my family like typing things they need, painting their houses, fixing items; or I go for one-day jobs in order to get a Merokamoto [a day’s pay].

### THE FUTURE: LIVING IN OR LEAVING CYPRUS

This final area is one to which all five graduates responded. Since the ‘hair-cut’ of March 2013, more people have again been leaving the island of Cyprus in search of better opportunities. It is difficult to quantify this through official statistics, as these are not available at present, but generally Cyprus has recently shifted from being a source for mass immigration to a society with significant levels of emigration due to the economic situation (see Hajimichael 2015). It comes as no surprise, then, that all five respondents expressed a degree of anxiety and concern regarding their future in Cyprus. Evie summed this up by saying the following:

In the times we live in, the words *for good* mean absolutely nothing. With the economic crisis, I have seen families relocating to other countries just to survive. So, since I can’t say *for good*, I can say that *for now*, yes, I could see myself living in Cyprus. If, of course, I find a good job and can support myself financially. Cyprus is where my family is, my friends, it’s my home; I would like to start building a life here. The future ... is unknown. I am prepared for anything, because anything can happen. If I have to relocate again, in order to be happy and support myself financially, I will do it. If I have to take on different jobs that have no relevance to my degree, I will do it. I will just try to find the positive side of things.

Andonia, however, was less optimistic about staying in Cyprus:

There is not any future in Cyprus in the field of artistic journalism, or in any other kind of jobs I'd enjoy. I don't like how the system works. I believe that there are much more opportunities outside Cyprus. My future will be outside Cyprus, exploring new horizons, doing a master's degree, or simply working abroad; and starting to study music.

And Andreas was more of a positive realist:

It is certainly more difficult ever since the crisis has affected us all as a kind of economic depression. I will stay here, though, because I have my family here and I have my own place to stay. As long as I have my job, it's difficult to think of emigrating. I don't know yet if this is my final choice. You never know what life brings.

This sense of pragmatism was also reflected by Christiana:

If there are opportunities to stay in Cyprus and making a respectable career in the media, there's no reason for me to seek a job abroad. If this is not the case, I would consider moving abroad if I found a job that would be beneficial to my career.

Finally, Adonis was uncertain about the future; for him, the way the post-haircut society was being regulated and controlled, leaving Cyprus could become inevitable:

As I stated in the beginning, I am a people's person, and as such I want to get to know the world. So no, I don't see myself staying in Cyprus. I want to use my skills and gain experience in different situations, not just here. The future is what we make of today, so today, in Cyprus, these worthless regulators are doing a lousy job, and we can only guess what the future will bring. I am optimistic about my own future because I control my life and the way things work out. My motto and advice for everyone is to keep it simple, since simple means happy.

What is most disturbing about this last theme is that no person actually said that they would definitely stay in Cyprus. Even if people tried to stay upbeat about staying in Cyprus, they at the same time did not rule out the option of leaving to work abroad. This does provide a kind of answer to a key question of my chapter: yes, the students are (thinking of) going abroad to live and work.

## CONCLUSION

Uncertain future, the stigmatisation of the unemployed, and the support of family and friends were themes common to all five interviews. A sample of five can never be viewed as representative. At the same time, the qualitative data and insights shared by these interviews do offer a glimpse into the kinds of problems that students face in contemporary post-haircut Cyprus. The biggest problem may be the way the society has changed in relation to unemployment. In 2003, when Cyprus joined the EU, the island had the lowest unemployment rate among the ten new member states, namely 4.1 %, which is in stark contrast to the more recent figure of 16.1 % (see Eurostat 2015). This means that Cyprus is now faced with high and long-term levels of unemployment, especially since official statistics are constructed in a way that hides the real numbers because they only account for people on the unemployment benefit, which, however, only lasts for 6 months in Cyprus. Which, of course, also means that people who are out of work for more than 6 months are left to fend for themselves, as is the case with those interviewees who increasingly rely on their family as a source of alternative income and support. A similar phenomenon is also noticeable in Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland, all economies that are undergoing different forms of austerity. As shown through some of the accounts shared in this chapter, people often depend for their survival on supportive families and social networks as well as on their determination as they try to remain positive in the most difficult of times. Andreas summed it up best perhaps when he says the following: ‘The future is difficult but we must not stop fighting for the development of body, mind and soul, every day. For me that is my goal, whether I have work or I’m unemployed.’

Finally, what conclusions can we draw as academics, and what role can we play in this current recession climate? I had a discussion a couple of years ago with a colleague of mine, Nikolas Defteras, about how we could try to be more sensitive to what was going on in our post-haircut society, and how this affected our students, the media, and employment opportunities. While it was tricky to incorporate all this into teaching practice, as time went by, I started to observe that things were happening, and autonomously. I was intrigued, for example, by what certain artists were saying about the crisis through their music; by the way media and individual politicians framed the crisis; or by the manner in which the media itself have been impacted in terms of revenue, through decreased advertising income, which resulted in reductions in their workforce. There is a

need today for a more critical awareness in education, one that addresses precariousness, exploitation, and social inequality. The ‘common sense’ of current austerity measures has struck graduates just as much as Thatcherite laissez-faire monetarist policies in Britain had hit many of us as graduates back in the 1980s. There is a need for counterhegemonic movements to challenge this ‘common sense’. Youth unemployment in Cyprus is one of the highest in Europe. It peaked at around 40 % just after the haircut of March 2013, and has by now fallen to 31.7 % (see YCharts 2015). This could be seen as an improvement, but it remains unacceptable that one in three young people in Cyprus still has ‘no future’, as Johnny Rotten used to sing on the eve of those Thatcherite 1980s.

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## ‘Dare to Dare’: Academic Pedagogy in Times of Flattened Hierarchies

*Ivana Perica*

In late capitalism, as it is often emphasised, knowledge, science and communication play a decisive role. Whereas the previous stages of capitalist development were organised around ‘material’ production, late capitalism—be it ‘cognitive’, ‘post-Fordist’ or ‘emotional’—subsumes the last remnants of previously untouched social spheres. Due to the extensiveness of capitalism as we live it today, even ‘knowledge and communication, cooperation and feelings, smiles of service agents are “tools” and thus they represent an inextricable part of the workforce’ (Birkner and Foltin 2006, p. 93). ‘The commandship and the factory discipline’ (Birkner and Foltin 2006, p. 33) take over even those residual spaces that have been preserved so far, commodifying, for instance, previously untouched aesthetic practices, or using philosophy as a discipline appropriate to practise ‘communication skills’, although it was traditionally construed as ‘activity-without-finished-work’ (Virno 2006, p. 207). Undoubtedly, one of the residual, unsubsumed, spheres of society has for a long time been academia. The acclaimed Humboldtian university, with its two ideals (association of research and teaching; freedom from any kind of educational pragmatism), achieved its

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fullness only after World War II, as university teachers for the first time gained the right to full academic employment. However, the trend of universities being dominated by the logic of management that started in the 1980s announced the bitter end of academia's privilege and its right to freely ponder without outside interference. The glorious and, from a broader historical perspective, rather short period of academic freedom has found its end in the Europe-wide (or even worldwide) legislative changes that exhibit only small divergences from country to country. After the public sector was exposed to commercialisation, merged into the 'service sector', as a 'branch of production', and delivered in the 1990s and 2000s to the invisible hand of the market, the European universities have also been declared 'service providers'. National academic fields have, through the Lisbon Strategy, been integrated into the European Research Area with the stated aims of enhancing competitiveness and workforce mobility in order to foster research quality and innovations. Since much of the critical work on contemporary academia focuses precisely on the structural, legislative changes, I shall focus on the substantial impact these changes have had on the intellectual and social identity of the members of the academic community.

Let me start off by saying that the hierarchies typical of traditional academia (and typical of more 'authoritarian' organisational structures) have been replaced by somewhat flattened hierarchies between researchers, teachers and students. Notwithstanding this flattening of hierarchies, there is something *pedagogic* about the expectations faced by all community members, when they are supposed to engage in a series of courses in skills improvement, management prowess or learning-to-learn seminars. And there is also something *pedagogic* about the expectations to prove researchers' professional innovativeness and uniqueness, while conforming to the unifying quality standards and numerous technocratic criteria the scientific 'excellence' is rigorously judged by. Within the scope of this new pedagogy all agents in the academic field are expected to be 'highly qualified, solution oriented, individualistic and exposed to a permanent competition over promising ideas and concepts developed by them and their "peers"' (Pernicka 2010, p. 20). This orientation towards swift problem-solving and the dependence on peers (i.e., not exclusively on the hierarchically superior deans and supervisors), who are—often anonymously—entitled to judge the extent of one's excellence and thus decide one's academic future, may be one of the main differences between what is called

'neoliberal academia' and its (admittedly often idealised) predecessor, the 'Humboldtian university'.

In *Institution and Interpretation*, an eminent study of the institutional conditions of possibility and impossibility of theoretical systems and academic thought, Samuel Weber draws an implicit distinction between the 'old' and the 'new' academia. Whereas Jean-François Lyotard was still able to see post-modernity from the standpoint of language games theory, to assert that 'to speak is to struggle, in the sense of playing' and that 'speech acts are part of a general agonistics' (Weber 2001, p. 9), today we find ourselves *beyond language games*: beyond the *agon* of speech acts and amidst an *antagonism* that is effected by the institutional conditions of possibility of academic work. It is in this place of 'beyond' that questions on the *future of the university* are posed (see Kimmich and Thumfart 2003; Derrida 2002). At the present time, the antagonism takes place between the entrepreneurial vision of the university and the 'outdated' Humboldtian, liberal or social-democratic education models. The traditional university model, as analysed by Weber, is not assessed according to the standards set by the Humboldtian 'ideals' but according to the independence the 'old' academia enjoys in relation to the 'outside world'. Weber identifies this systematic independence as a *liberal* one, thus referring to the original meaning of the term 'liberal' (liberty, liberation). As opposed to the liberal academia, where science is occupied by the struggle over meanings and interpretations, in the neoliberal setting it is not the content and aim of the research that occupy the academic worker but the institutional, financial and social conditions that effect the limitations—de-liberalisations—of his or her work. Thus, when referring to the neoliberal academia, the term 'liberal' can be employed only in the meaning of *de-liberalisation* as 'deprivation'. With this in mind, the *free* university cannot at present be taken for granted any longer. And Weber concludes that '[w]hen the most important things can no longer be taken for granted, the process of *granting* imposes itself as a problem that becomes increasingly difficult to avoid' (Weber 2001, p. 33). Living and working on those shattered foundations and within new boundaries, academic workers are compelled to reflect on the unstable conditions of possibility of their own intellectual praxis and, furthermore, their own material existence. Even research and teaching, which have been declared 'independent of all political authority and economic power' (Observatory Magna Charta Universitatum 1988, p. 1), are activities contributing to class struggle, meaning the struggle over both the means of production (in this case financial and institutional capital

needed for research and publishing) and the means of reproduction (institutional continuity, teaching activities, transfer of knowledge). So Weber speaks of a university that finds itself in a ‘process of dislodging’ (Weber 2001, p. 37). Free, ‘disinterested’ (in the sense of ‘not market-driven’, ‘not short-term-interest-driven’) research is marginalised and pushed out to the peripheries of academic work. Discussing the economic limitations that afflict research and teaching and thus ‘take over the overturning role’, Weber points to ‘liberalism’ as that classic ‘form of exclusion which, wherever possible, denies its own exclusivity’. In the past, liberalism has often been opposed by Marxism, which was ‘bound to emerge as one of the most significant alternative models’ (Weber 2001, p. 45). Considering the contemporary de-liberalisation (i.e., neoliberalisation) of academia, where not language games but institutional conditions of academic existence are at stake, what kind of alternative action could precipitate the intended independence of political authority and economic power?

### THE ANTINOMIES OF THE ‘SOCIAL’

Successive part-time employment and the certainty of imminent unemployment make academic workers more dependent, more precarious and more disposable. Due to the radical privatisation of social problems—according to which ‘any extant and prospective *social* issue’ is interpreted ‘as *private* concern’ (Bauman 1993, p. 261)—the responsibility for their future unemployment will be exclusively theirs. That is one of the reasons why researchers, teachers and students are constrained to continuously ‘justify’ their academic existence, with regard to both their existing achievements and their future academic activities. They have to demonstrate continuous forward movement, make promises of ‘great results to come’ and thus prove unwavering commitment to the academic community. Expectedly, as academia loses content over which language games might struggle (e.g., humanistic concepts such as ‘reason’, ‘consensus’ or ‘art’ and ‘emancipation’), in the academic work of ‘being busy’ communication itself becomes pivotal: it is not the quality of the product (research results) but the promises of ‘excellence’ (research plans) that provide new professional opportunities. As the latter are not necessarily connected to concrete workplaces (‘jobs’), this process of ‘making promises’ (developing project proposals, submitting applications, building networks) pushes academic activity away from competition over privileged access to truth(s) towards a competition for grants. This competition, demanding full-time

commitment, replaces research time with job-seeking time and actually generates unemployment as much as it generates research. Academic work indeed consists in the continuous search for awards for good plans (see Kühl 2014).

Being an outspoken critic of communication-based economy, Paolo Virno can lead us, at least partially, to a clarification of the quagmire the European higher education and research have found themselves in. But before I come to his critique of cognitive capitalism, I shall try to give an outline of his predecessor Hannah Arendt's critique of the 'social'. In her seminal *Human Condition* (1958), in *On Revolution* (1963) and in the posthumous *The Promise of Politics* (2005), Hannah Arendt criticised conformist and anti-political attitudes of the 'social'. Her understanding of the 'social' was unmistakably different from the post-modern belief in 'society' as the realm and bearer of emancipation from the atrocious modern 'state' (see Foucault 2003; Giddens 1992). The concept of the 'social', admittedly somewhat idiosyncratic in Arendt, refers to economic constrictions leading to social pressure to adapt as it was typical of both the totalitarian regimes and the bureaucratised post-World War II societies. According to Arendt, bureaucratic systems produce forms of social anonymity that renders people not only apolitical (i.e., politically disinterested) individuals but even anti-political, self-interest-driven subjects. Their anti-political behaviour is not a result of their 'nature' (what they really are) but of the social pressure they are subjected to:

[T]he realm of the social has finally, after several centuries of development, reached the point where it embraces and controls all members of a given community equally and with equal strength. But society equalizes under all circumstances, and the victory of equality in the modern world is only the political and legal recognition of the fact that society has conquered the public realm, and that distinction and difference have become private matters of the individual. (Arendt 1998, p. 41)

In Arendt's view, most people do have a 'need to think' but this need can be erased by 'more urgent needs of living' (May 1996, p. 85). When discussing the institutional networks often analysed as frameworks within which the bureaucratised, anonymous individual is produced, Larry May similarly points out that 'institutional socialization in bureaucracies transforms individuals into cogs; that is, individuals come to think of themselves as anonymous' (May 1996, p. 85).

Adapting Arendt's criticism to today's circumstances, Paolo Virno points to a similar 'dehumanisation' of man. His critique of the bio-politics of cognitive capitalism, which reduces the particular human 'monde' (social dimension) to the state of 'ambiente' (Virno 2003, p. 33), recalls Arendt's, in its time highly controversial, distinction between the 'social' and the 'political'. *Ambiente* indicates space characteristic of animals: animals become specialised in certain activities (hunting, collecting, building of nests) and repeat them numerous times during their lifetime. (In Arendt's thought, these activities were ascribed to labour of the so-called *animal laborans*.) In contrast, *monde* is a space typical of humans who—as citizens—are never content, always searching for the newness in their occupations. The human, as a citizen, is a learning and accommodating animal that, in Rousseau's words, is 'always moving, sweating, toiling and racking his brains to find still more laborious occupations' (Rousseau 2005, p. 98). This need to learn and adapt to eternally new circumstances, when carried to extremes, precipitates a quasi-ambiental state. Time for repose and reflection disappears and the 'existential experience of life as exposure and intimidation' (Neundlinger and Raunig 2005, p. 16) prevails. Having Virno's observations in mind, one cannot ignore the paradox that the 'liberating' changes of post-Fordist professional cultures (flattening of traditional hierarchies and the dissolution of strict factory discipline, flexibilisation of working time, dislocation of work from factory and office to home, personalised approach to professional duties) actually only made workers more dependent on work. In the neoliberal academia, the once liberating demands such as 'freedom', 'mobility', 'creativity' and 'initiative', as soon as they were deployed as parts of productivity- and competitiveness-enhancing measures (and not as intrinsic motivation of gifted and committed researchers), became professional dictates that draw on that residue of social life that is considered to be *private*. This results in both psychical and physical disposability of workers, willingness to perform much more than one is paid for and to abandon familiar spaces and people to satisfy demands arising from the circumstances of the workplace. In German there is a wonderful word for it, *Sachzwänge*, meaning practical constraints: in Arendtian terms, social *Sachzwänge* condition a lack of political responsibility, the result of which is an academia of intellectual void, leaving no space for utopia, adversarial thinking or, ultimately, thinking as such. Although Arendt is sometimes regarded as an elitist espousing a scornful view of the 'social', in this context I want to point out her specific understanding of the 'social' as conformism. The 'social' thus primarily

refers to social dependencies shaped by the market. In this interpretation, misunderstood by some of her critics (see, e.g., Pitkin 1998, 11, 17), Arendt returns to the critique of 'society' as it existed before Fourier and Saint-Simon's concept of 'association' was introduced into German philosophical discussions. Back then the 'social' meant the 'zone of unimpeded commerce'; only after the French 'association' was appropriated had the 'social' taken on the emancipatory dimension of a 'fermenting, stirring, floating content' (Marchart 2013, p. 24). Arendt's much disputed critique of the 'social' actually advocates rescuing the *sociability* that goes beyond or is undisturbed by the *social* exigencies of the market.

Arendt's critique of bureaucratic socialisation certainly offers some apt observations. But when transferred to contemporary academia, it does not seem to fit the logic of the aforementioned dictate to act as highly qualified, solution-oriented, both individualistic *and*—in a bureaucratic sense—highly responsible academic agents. Nevertheless, and having this discrepancy between 'cogs' and a profound individualisation of work in mind, I would like to show how the promotion of scientific uniqueness, audacity and responsibility, paradoxically, goes hand in hand with the compulsion to conformist and economically driven, that is, 'socialised' behaviour.

### 'DARE TO DARE'

In what follows I shall try to depict the ideological impact of the urge to adapt to economic standards prescribed from without academia, or from the position of its 'enabling limits' (Weber 2001, p. x). What I am interested in specifically is the rhetoric coaching academic workers in corporate stylisation of their own career and of the institution they work in. Special attention will be given to social sciences and humanities, which currently experience a twofold development: whereas traditional research is still dominated by the structure of national departments, the possibilities of innovative research undertaken in newly established interdisciplinary platforms and research centres are heavily connected to the dictates that come from without academia, that is, from 'political authorities' and 'economic powers' (contrary to standards set by the Magna Charta Universitatum). To illustrate this intrusion, I would like to give an example of one particular interdisciplinary platform brought to life thanks to 'successful' and 'competitive' university management and third-party funds. The platform is aimed at connecting young and experienced researchers from diverse disciplines. Interestingly, the focus does not lie on particular disciplines

but on the area-studies-premise, according to which scholars from different disciplines dealing with the same geographical or political area (in this case homogenised and generalised area of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe) intersect more in their work than scholars from geographically or politically distant areas who cooperate *intradisciplinary* (e.g., in philology or philosophy). As is often the case, after several years of the platform's activity the funding institution undertook a regular evaluation and approval process. The results were positive and the platform was extended. Nevertheless, the evaluation partly remodelled the platform: the first public presentation of the newly approved platform showed its new economic awareness, exemplified by the motto 'University meets economy, economy meets university', and promoted the feasibility of cooperation between university and market ('society'). The presentation outlined a re-imagined concept of research focused on its economic chances and duties and career opportunities for researchers.

The main endeavour of the platform coordinator, a young doctoral candidate, was to empower the entrepreneurial spirit of the platform members. They were told to 'Dare to dare' ('Trauen Sie sich was') and the advice was rationalised by a profit logic, crystallised in the sentence 'so that it gets profitable and that you profit from it' ('Damit es sich lohnt und damit sich das auch für Sie lohnt'). The maxim 'Dare to dare', in fact, implied that at that point the researchers were obviously not equipped with the right kind of interest. While their true scientific interests were not questioned, the lack of 'market consciousness' certainly was. The market, it was suggested, was what was important for their academic career and what offered them opportunities for the future. After the sentence 'Dare to dare' more advice followed; in order to prove scientific audacity and public competence, young researchers were told to invite 'experts' from the following professionally pertinent ('berufsrelevant') fields: economics, politics and society. More precisely, the participants (current or future PhDs in social sciences and humanities) were encouraged to reach out to oil and gas companies (OMV Group), international organisations (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], UN), construction companies (STRABAG) or banks (Erste Bank) for cooperation possibilities.

Besides the economically minded 'empowerment speech', one of the symptoms of the platform presentation was a discursive gap between the young coordinator and the platform senior leader (i.e., one of the leaders). Whereas the young, conscientious colleague was putting his effort into empowering the participants, encouraging them to 'act' and 'undertake

something', assuring them that inviting experts from the abovementioned fields should not be understood only as a job opportunity but as an intellectual exchange, the older colleague was switching between enthusiasm, perplexity and irony. In his speech one could notice a certain dissatisfaction with the rules of the game. The platform should be seen as an opportunity to connect the 'outer world' with the 'faculty'. (Here he used the English word for 'Fakultät' and paused, saying 'I don't know why all of a sudden everything must be in English.')

Contrary to his older colleague, it is in this kind of newspeak that the young colleague saw the future. This newspeak is not simply a superficial linkage of English and German the conservative linguists are dismayed by. It is lip service paid to the 'new public management', which originated in the UK under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher and was implemented in numerous countries worldwide. This new public management, which opens up academia towards the economic sector, replaces the traditional hierarchies of 'professors' and 'students' by a two-level structure of 'managers' and 'associates'. Thus, one cannot avoid the impression that the 'old' pedagogic hierarchies are in some way re-established in the binary stratified field of academics on the one side and the officials on the other. It could even be said that nothing new is happening. So, if we agree with Antonio Gramsci, according to whom the *pedagogical relation* is marked by an irreconcilable hierarchical difference between the 'teacher' and the 'pupil', we could conclude that 'academic pedagogy' sensu stricto has been abolished with the onset of the neoliberal (fluid, mobile, flexible and flattened) university. At the same time, in the expectations formulated by management, grant providers and politics, we discern attempts to exert hegemonic influence on research and teaching and design them after the dynamics of the market. So, if 'every relationship of "hegemony" is necessarily an educational relationship' (Gramsci 2007, p. 350), then one should consider in what way can even the flattened hierarchies be observed in terms of a *new academic pedagogy*. In the given example, a certain pedagogic effect can be discerned in the earnest obedience the (especially young) researchers show not as much towards their professors as towards the advice received from managers and coordinators, as if they were given 'from above'.

### ACADEMIA'S NEW PEDAGOGY

Realistically speaking, the advice given by the platform coordinator was a well-intentioned one. As young researchers do not have a chance to follow the previously common professional trajectory and climb up the



traditional academic ladder (from student to assistant, from assistant to associate professor, from associate professor to full professor), they have to rely on advice and tips given by university staff responsible for career management and research funding. As is the case with political structures, the important decisions in the academia are not made by ‘representatives elected by the people’ (i.e., faculty) but by experts in management and controlling, who govern the university as a corporate enterprise (Pernicka 2010, p. 20). As Lueger elaborates, no university with a degree of awareness of the contemporary situation can afford to dispense with defining its research focuses, establishing centres for quality management, syllabus evaluation centres, or—last but not least—courses in higher education didactics. ‘Those who want to be a part of the elite must subject oneself to such requirements and document them on the university homepage. The important stakeholders see thus how intensively committed the management is about the quality development of the teaching process.’ (Lueger 2010, p. 46) On this basis it can be demonstrated that there are two important layers of today’s academic pedagogy.

First, the ‘classical’ type of academic pedagogy, as we know it from the traditional university seminar, is nowadays remodelled by the ‘quality standards’ defined by specialised centres or departments. The creative, individually designed and often unforeseeable process of teaching is evaluated according to universal measures that vary little from discipline to discipline and from classroom to classroom. The overall evaluations of classes are predominantly based on notes awarded by the students who are taught to act as consumers and who receive study materials prepared by their teachers. This form of student evaluations of their teachers’ work represents a culmination of management and controlling mentality. We find ourselves in the situation described a long time ago by Max Weber, where the teacher ‘sells me his knowledge and his methods for my father’s money, just as the greengrocer sells my mother cabbage’ (Weber 1991, p. 149). Here, the important thing is not the results of evaluation, but the students’ impression that they participate in the grading of their teacher, as well as the increased attention that is now dedicated to the teacher, putting him or her under additional pressure because his or her work is rated and observed from every corner (see Lueger 2010, p. 46).

Second, officials such as coordinators, management and administrative assistants, and project consultants serve academia as multipliers of new academic ethos. They advise the former students, today’s young researchers, to think economically and not to hesitate to reach out for possibilities

beyond the university (in the economic sector, or 'society'). From the very first entry into the academic field they are trained (even pedagogised) to become acclimated to the new rules and to the fact that these rules will always be changing. The only thing the new academic pedagogy is encouraging is their enduring adaptability. As both the new institutional initiatives (such as research centres, platforms and excellence initiatives) and the tradition-laden 'core' of the university (professors and 'their' assistants) are evaluated according to corporate standards of 'excellence', 'competitiveness' and 'productivity', the secret of success lies in the capability to present the existing and future work as congruous with these highly competitive quality standards.

My argumentation here adjoins not only Gramsci's critique of pedagogic hegemonies but also Althusser's general assumption that it is not possible to observe social dynamics '*except from the point of view of reproduction*' (Althusser 2014, p. 238). One has to keep in mind that universities are not only institutions of research and allegedly disinterested transmission of objective knowledge. Universities are also undoubtedly institutions of social (re)production, where knowledge transfer is just one means of this reproduction. Here, several important studies have already been undertaken: Pierre Bourdieu's extensive study on 'homo academicus' immediately comes to mind (see Bourdieu 1988), as well as Jacques Rancière's critique of the 'teacher Althusser' (see Rancière 2011). Both Bourdieu and Rancière discuss traditional academic structures made of professors and (doctoral) students, which can sometimes be categorised as authoritative, or even authoritarian. Among important traits of these structures are, at their best, the process of formation of philosophical schools (see Münch 2009, p. 2), and, at their worst, the (re-)production of clique-like behaviour (see Adorno 1973; Bourdieu 1988; Rancière 2011). As opposed to that, 'the long march through the institutions', structural 'deterritorialisations' (to allusively refer to Deleuze and Guattari) and softening of old academic hierarchies, as advocated by the 1968 generation, have in the meantime been caught up by and integrated into the advancing force of capitalism. As it was argued here, the reforms introduced by the market-oriented university management have actually helped in dissolving the 'old' hierarchies only to erect new ones. If the social reproduction in the field of research and teaching was earlier conducted in a hierarchically stratified field, today it has only changed its *modus operandi*. While the relations among professors, their assistants and students, and among peers and collaborators have become de-hierarchised, it is now the management

that has seized indisputable authority. So, after more than two decades of neoliberal ‘reterritorialisation’, one cannot help but get the impression that the expectations that the ‘new’ academia could triumph over the ‘form of exclusion’ (Weber 2001, p. 45) of the ‘old’ one were misleading, if not politically thoroughly naïve. Although the old hierarchies, as criticised by Bourdieu and Rancière, have thus been widely flattened (in the German and Austrian academia, e.g., it became common to address each other informally with ‘du’ instead of ‘Sie’), one should take another close look at today’s academic stratification before concluding that reproduction of hierarchies and their respective scientific pedagogies have been overcome.

In this respect, the reform of Austrian universities, although somewhat belated in comparison with the German or British academic sector, presents no exception from overall European and global trends. The structural changes that were introduced by the ‘University Organisation Act’ in 1993, ‘University Act 2002’ and the latter’s amendment in 2009 are multiple and serious. The ‘University Act 2002’ especially has become famous for its ‘chain-contract regulation’ (‘Kettenvertragsregelung’ [Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur 2002, § 109]), an article that makes long-term employment at the same university practically impossible (According to Austrian laws, a contract with an institution running longer than 6 years requires a tenure. Except in the cases when the contract with the university is followed by a contract on a research project, the academic workers are expected to change their university affiliation every two or three years. Other possibilities are, of course, part-time project employment or, more often, proverbially underpaid teaching assignments. [See Betriebsrat der Universität Wien 2009]). Together with this process, the structure of the ‘old’, multi-layered and gradually organised academic hierarchies (as typical for the nineteenth century *Bildung* as it was for the welfare state university after World War II) has been translated into a structure that is based on the ossified poles of tenured professorial staff and precarious mid-level academic positions (‘Mittelbau’). The inequality between these poles manifests itself not only as a wage difference but also as a difference in participation rights and employment duration (Pernicka 2010, p. 21). While professors have long-term appointments (but are due to their management duties constantly short of time for research), mid-level academic staff must deal with short-term contracts, numerous employment applications, an exposure to greater peer pressure and expectations of conformist behaviour in order to avoid conflicts which

might jeopardise their vulnerable position in the future. The result is, as Koschorke claims in his confessional paper, an 'aggregate state of bustling conformity' (Koschorke 2003, p. 151).

The reterritorialisation of the European university obviously establishes academic structures that do move beyond previously exclusive and self-contained 'philosophical schools', but these structures, boosting competition in order to foster productivity, impair the quality of the research itself: as the old departmental structures have been weakened due to the reorganisation of funding models, professors nowadays have to act as managers, seeking third-party funds necessary to sustain regular activities of their institutional unit. In the given context, professors have less and less time to devote to students and academic junior staff, their potential successors, who, in any case, due to short-term appointments and high probability of career continuation at distant universities, are only conditionally to be considered for 'succession'. So, whereas in the 'old' academia the relations between professors and their assistants were structured as pedagogic relations of 'teachers' and 'pupils' (or even 'fathers' and 'sons', as suggested by the connotations of the German word for 'thesis supervisor'—'Doktorvater'—and the one for 'junior scientific staff'—'wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs'), in the 'new' academia the relations of dependence have been re-established in the competition among colleagues who are all uniformly reduced to precarious workforce dependent on managers, project leaders (who could help them, if even for a short period of time, to replace their precarious state of *outsiders* for the one of *insiders*) or anonymous peers (who evaluate their projects and performance). And as the analyses show, the number of academic outsiders who are trying to enter academia (again) in order to become insiders by far exceeds that of existing jobs (Münch 2009, p. 5; Pernicka 2010, p. 23). The illusion of highly qualified and individualistic researchers disappears as soon as one is aware of their precarious dependence on fellow researchers. As nobody can sustain the illusion of independence from his or her social and scientific environment, this dependence on academic networks that could provide new working opportunities eradicates alternatives. Those who still search for autonomy or see academia as a place for civil disobedience are considered to be 'irrational' (Lyotard 1991, p. 71).

The hidden pedagogy that governs the network is consistent with the 'apoliticism' of neoliberal education policies in general. In a paper that deals with the hidden politics of neoliberal education, Matthew Clarke points out two important traits that can easily be applied to academia

as well: the allegedly de-hierarchised, anti-authoritarian academia is non-ideological only to the point that its hierarchies and its pedagogy are hidden (see Clarke 2012, p. 305). Thus, academia's new pedagogy is not to be found in classical hierarchies of 'professors' and 'students' because this would imply the existence of decisive scientific criteria according to which the stratification takes place (i.e., idea, interpretation, theory, ideology). Contrary to that, the new, 'post-ideological' pedagogy functions without any idea of university, research or even emancipation (traditionally gained through the emancipation *from* some authority, some *manceps* [see Lyotard 1990, p. 16]). In other words, it implements only the idea of corporate enterprise and strong competition connected to it. In the absence of any proclaimed pedagogy the academia adheres to an invisible market pedagogy where there are no hierarchies and all are equal. What makes everyone 'equal' is actually the never-ending struggle for survival. But where the interests are survival oriented and not genuinely scientific, not 'intrinsic' (Koschorke 2003, p. 155), one can easily conclude that it is not intellectuals that the system 'produces', but only disposable academic subjects, whose sociability rests 'not on equality but on sameness' (Arendt 1998, p. 213). 'Sameness' is here synonymous with substitutability. As the workers are aware of their own low exchange value, they accept precarious work conditions more easily.

Notwithstanding the differences that exist between them, both Arendt and Virno share a passion for the transformative potential of human action, the passion of producing something new (hence the centrality of *beginning*—*Neubeginn*—in Arendt's thought). But contrary to Arendt, who despite her passion for revolutions has often proved to be a revolutionary pessimist, Virno makes efforts in revolutionary optimism, discussing possibilities of a bio-political contra-productivity. As several chapters in this volume show, the commodification of research has advanced to such an extent that it probably would be misleading to expect, as Virno does, that revolution could *spontaneously* emerge from neoliberal cognitive production, where rampant activity renders Action impossible. When we, faced with the impossibilities of 'resistance', take a retrospective look at the much criticised position of some 'authoritative teachers' against whom the anti-authoritarian youth at the end of the 1960s was rebelling against—for example, Adorno and Horkheimer—with the benefit of hindsight, we might change our perspective. Faced with the utterly administered world and confronted with the fact that there seems to be no possible form of academic resistance left, Adorno and Horkheimer employed the

'performative paradox': according to Adorno, the 'performative paradox' means that 'one is committed to refute the role of the intellectual and his privileges' and at the same time, working as an academic teacher and 'for the sake of freedom, [one] cannot but to make use of these privileges' (Demirović 1999, p. 536). Adorno's and Horkheimer's immense institutional 'care for the offspring' (see the eponymous chapter in Demirović 1999, pp. 194–263), finally, did offer a chance: it was their students who precipitated the first major subversion of academic structures, which at that time were still very authoritarian. Notwithstanding the fact that the privileges of contemporary academic teachers are only conditionally to be seen as such, their advantage surely is their pedagogic praxis. Pedagogy—understood not as subjecting pedagogisation but as empowering action—may be one of the last privileges the fragmented, dependent and allegedly politically impotent academic workforce still has at its command. Politically responsible teaching, oriented not towards obedience but towards action, surely could encourage the students and scholars to demand alternatives.

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## Cannibalising the Collegium: The Plight of the Humanities and Social Sciences in the Managerial University

*George Morgan*

The rise of corporate management styles and values in higher education has led to growing exploitation of academic workers, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, through insecure employment. This has diminished the political influence of the very scholars who should be best placed and most inclined to defend the cherished values of academic freedom, collegiality and critical thinking from the depredations of neoliberalism. As public funding diminishes, so universities are becoming less inclined to cross-subsidise vulnerable curricula in the humanities, social sciences and pure sciences, especially in specialised fields of low student demand or fields in which pedagogical requirements are most intensive. In order to make the funding dollar go further, managers have resorted to employing members of the ‘cognitariat’—sessional, casual or short contract staff—to perform a growing proportion of academic work. This is part of a larger economic programme that has imposed Taylorist bureaucratic

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regulation of much academic work. In this chapter, I will chart the rise of the mass university in Australia, in particular the growth in undergraduate student numbers over the last 20 years. I will argue that the management of this growth—the rounds of organisational change and course rationalisation—has demoralised academic communities and eroded scholarly bonds. Most scholars, however, shrink from the prospect of openly challenging managerialism’s invidious effects. However, in a world in which centralised bureaucratic organisations are becoming increasingly obsolete, the managerial university appears something of an anachronism, and hence vulnerable to challenge.

### THE EXPANDING ACADEMY: AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SINCE WORLD WAR II

Prior to World War II, the Australian university was the domain of a tiny privileged elite, but this changed in the post-war era. Between 1946 and 1963, university enrolments of 17- to 22-year-olds increased from 2.3 % to 7.1 %. A further expansion occurred after 1974, when the Whitlam Labor government abolished fees and introduced tertiary assistance; but this did not produce any significant increase in the numbers of those from poor backgrounds undertaking tertiary study, and universities continued to be the preserve of the upper and middle class (see Centre for the Study of Higher Education 2008). The most rapid expansion occurred in the 1990s after the restructuring of the tertiary education by Labor Minister for Education John Dawkins. While this saw the reintroduction of fees, in the form of income-contingent Higher Education Contribution Scheme, the Dawkins reforms also dramatically increased the number of university places by granting university status to the former Colleges of Advanced Education. From this point on, university enrolments grew at an unprecedented rate, particularly in the newer universities.

In recent times, the idea of the mass university has come to challenge the elite feudal vision of higher education (see Marginson 2000), largely because a rapid rise in youth unemployment has produced a situation where most young people without a degree have dismal job prospects. Youth unemployment rose from around 8 % in 2007 to 14.1 % in 2014, and many of the available jobs are low-paid, precarious and dead-end ‘McJobs’ (Brotherhood of St Laurence 2014). So there has been a de facto extension of the period of compulsory education—which in the mid-twentieth century lasted only until the age of fourteen—into early

adulthood, especially for those from underprivileged backgrounds. The ability of universities to play their part in absorbing this overspill—keeping young people off the dole queues—was limited by the system of enrolment caps that restricted the numbers of students that universities could accept with full public funding. By the mid-2000s, the technocratic argument, according to which an expansion of university places is needed to overcome the ‘skills deficit’ and compete in the so-called knowledge economy, was gaining public support.

Such an expansion became more likely with the election of Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2007, which unseated the conservative administration of John Howard. The 2008 Bradley Review into higher education, ordered by the Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard, recommended a dramatic expansion of the university system. It set two key targets: first, that by 2025, 40 % of 25- to 34-year-olds should hold a bachelor’s degree, and second, that by 2020, 20 % of university enrolments should be comprised of those from low socio-economic backgrounds. In 2009, the federal government announced that after 2012 there would be a removal of restrictions on the number of students that universities were permitted to enrol, and that from 2012 public funding would follow student demand. In the period between 2009 and 2012, when, under interim arrangements, universities received part funding for those enrolled above the caps, commencing student numbers increased by 21.3 % (see Edwards and Radloff 2013). This trend continued after caps were lifted. In 2012, the numbers of domestic undergraduates (excluding overseas students) rose by 5.1 % from the previous year, and in 2013, the numbers increased a further 5.5 % (see Department of Education and Training 2012; 2013). But in this environment of increased competition, universities aggressively sought to attract more students and increase enrolments. Between 2009 and 2014, there was a 10.3 % increase in the number of applications for degree places, while the number of accepted offers increased by 20 %. This produced pedagogical challenges especially as increasing numbers of students who performed relatively poorly at school enrolled in university degrees (see Edwards and Radloff 2013) just as per capita resources for teaching and learning were diminishing.

Despite the lofty public rhetoric about the importance of universities to national prosperity, and the prodigious growth in undergraduate enrolments, state investment has declined in real terms. In the decade after 1995, public expenditure on higher education fell by 4 % as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP)—mostly the years of Howard’s Prime

Ministerial term—as student numbers increased by 45 % (see May et al. 2011). Over this period, Australia was the only Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country in which real public spending did not increase (see Tiffen 2015). By 2011, only 54 % of funding for universities came from private sources (see OECD 2014) in comparison with 87 % in 1986 (see May et al. 2011, p. 34). Private funding included the Higher Education Contribution Scheme paid by domestic students and full fees paid by the rapidly increasing numbers of overseas students. Today, Australia spends less on universities as a proportion of GDP than all but one of the OECD countries. As Tiffen wrote:

In 2011, the last year for which full international data is available, Australia’s public funding of universities ranked thirty-third out of the thirty-four OECD member countries. Governments across the OECD spent an average of 1.1 per cent of GDP on universities; Australia devoted just 0.7 per cent. Six countries – including Canada, at 1.6 per cent – spent at least double Australia’s proportion of national income. Finland, at 1.9 per cent, tops the list. (Tiffen 2015)

Universities responded to this squeeze by undermining the conditions of teaching and learning: by cutting teaching time and staffing levels, and by increasing class sizes. The common management refrain in industrial negotiations over academic salary increases was the demand for improved ‘productivity’, which effectively meant embracing the challenge of teaching larger numbers of students, especially through the use of digital technologies. In the early 1960s, the average student–staff ratio across Australian universities was around 8:1 (see Bebbington 2012); by 2010, it was over 20:1, even taking casual staff into consideration (see Larkins 2012).

Universities have also used conservative staffing strategies to sandbag against the effects of declining marginal funding. Since the early 1990s, they have been systematically casualising academic work—employing seasonal or casual staff—in order to cover teaching and research assistance at much lower cost than they would have to pay full-time staff. Between 1990 and 2008, casual academic staff numbers, on a full-time equivalent basis, grew by 180 %, compared with a 41 % growth in non-casual academic staff numbers during the same period (see May et al. 2011, p. 191). This effectively meant that the number of low-paid casual staff now probably exceeds the number of those on full time and fractional positions. In 2004, Anne Junor estimated that, by head count, 40 % of academic staff

were casual employees (see Junor 2004, p. 276). However, by 2010, this figure had reached 60 % with 67,000 academic staff employed on a casual basis in the Australian university system (see May et al. 2011, p. 194).<sup>1</sup> The ostensible rationale for casualisation is to give universities the ability to maximise workforce flexibility. University bureaucrats—notably human resources managers and financial officers—frequently recite the narrative of market risk, of increased competition for students and volatile enrolments, in seeking to justify employing more and more workers on precarious contracts. This has profoundly undermined academic job security and has brought to academia the levels of precariousness characteristic of careers in, for example, the creative industries (see Morgan et al. 2013), where the number of core workers is shrinking with a rapid growth in the peripheral labour force (see Kimber 2003). Indeed, over the last decade only 20 % of all jobs created in Australian universities have been continuing, relatively secure positions (see Department of Education and Training 2014a). Discussing the rapidly ageing profile of the academic workforce, Graeme Hugo wrote of the ‘lost generation’ of academics (Hugo 2005). When tenured staff resign or retire, universities will invariably replace them with casual or short-contract appointees.

Casual staff experience is the condition of the enervated precarity that has become a structural feature of contemporary universities, and which mirrors the wider social and economic relations of late modernity, when new capitalism is restless, competitive and turbulent, undermining job security and the possibility that durable skills can be slowly accrued in fixed communities of practice. Members of the academic precariat, or cognitariat, are unable to make plans, purchase property or start a family. Their dependence on the continued patronage of tenured mentors in offering them work undermines their ability to become politically active in challenging the system of creeping casualisation that maintains them in poverty and powerlessness.

Despite clear evidence of the declining investment in universities, Tony Abbott’s conservative Liberal National Coalition government, elected in 2013, announced that it would be fiscally unsustainable to maintain the growth of the university sector under the existing arrangement. In its first budget, in May 2014, it announced a plan to let universities set their own

<sup>1</sup>These are informed estimates only. Researchers have struggled to obtain adequate data on casual staffing in universities.

fees, despite having made no mention of such a plan in the lead-up to the election. The government introduced the deregulation legislation in 2014, but was not able to pass it.<sup>2</sup> This precipitated a public debate, not only on the weight of student debt that the changes would generate, but also on the social, economic and cultural roles that universities should properly perform and on the very principles that should inform their operation. The debate illustrated the extent to which Australian higher education had become an issue of mass public concern, probably for the first time. It also brought to light the corporate character of universities, many of which have annual turnovers of more than one billion dollars, and often appear to be fixated on revenues and competition more than on their traditional role as centres of independent learning and research.

The fee-setting debate also laid bare the political rifts within the universities: the growing divide between, on the one hand, the vice chancellors and their governing bodies (made up largely of business and political appointees) and, on the other hand, the wider university communities. The Education minister who introduced the fee deregulation legislation, Christopher Pyne, claimed that his government's proposed reforms had the support of the universities. This was based on the fact that Universities Australia, peak body of Australian vice chancellors, expressed conditional approval for deregulation of fees.<sup>3</sup> Pyne thus constructed the vice chancellors as the sole legitimate channel through which university opinion could be represented. This was based on a narrowly corporatist view of the university. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore the contradictions inherent in the neoliberal university, and the tensions between scholarly communities and university managers.

## THE RISE OF THE REMOTE TECHNOCRATS

Historically, universities were comprised of guilds of scholars, self-governing communities, both clannish and inscrutable, who fiercely resisted external control. Even at their foundation, Australian universities varied considerably from this model provided by the ancient European universities.

<sup>2</sup>As at July 2015. The government did not control the Senate, where a group of cross-bench and Greens Senators held the balance of power. The government was not able to persuade enough of them to support the legislation.

<sup>3</sup>But not, it should be pointed out, for the 20 % cut in government funding that came along with the proposed power to set fees.

In the colonies, the first universities were established in the mid-nineteenth century and were bound to the modern mission of educating the colonial mandarin class rather than simply reproducing the Oxbridge model of cloistered dons pursuing the study of classics, law, philosophy, science and religion. Nevertheless, the sense of scholarly independence and academic freedom ran very deep, and academic communities resisted external political and ecclesiastical interference.

Over the last 25 years, however, there has been an erosion of the traditional idea of the university as a loose federation of scholarly communities, in favour of the corporate line-management model. University managerialism began to emerge in the 1980s and developed unevenly across the sector. Peter Karmel, the vice chancellor of the Australian National University from 1982 to 1987, a respected, though quite conservative public administrator, wrote cautiously in 1990 about the complex relationship between managers and scholars:

[A]uthority within the university is intellectual authority. This is necessarily dispersed among the senior academic staff. The Vice-Chancellor and senior administrators may administer the resources and may, subject to the governing body, determine the broad policies, but intellectual authority does not reside in them. Moreover, the quality of a university comes from the work of many autonomous academics or groups of them. It follows from this that a university cannot be run like a business enterprise with a chief executive in command, seeking to maximise relatively simple variables. Consultative processes are essential and, while leadership is of great importance, such leadership must be consensual. Notwithstanding this, the modern university is usually a large complex organisation. As such it needs to be 'managed'. Thus tension between collegial and managerial styles is bound to be chronic. (Karmel 1990, p. 332)

As funding declined, however, the tensions identified by Karmel were exacerbated. This was particularly the case in the newer universities. While the prestige of the older institutions generated more student demand, research grants and alumni endowments, the institutions formed under the Dawkins reforms were generally more financially tenuous. In general terms, they have increased student-staff ratios, class sizes and the level of casualisation in their workforces more quickly than their more established counterparts.

The newer universities were also the first places where scholarly communities came most directly under threat, and where the traditional

disciplines were most vulnerable. If business studies attracted more students and research funding than anthropology, then the anthropologists were more quickly called on to justify their continued tenure. Those who had traditionally served as collegial representatives, heads of department, found themselves increasingly compromised. They were caught between their colleagues, frustrated at the erosion of their working conditions, and senior managers who demanded that they perceive themselves not as scholarly representatives, the collegial voice issuing upwards, but as line managers charged with implementing the policies devised by increasingly remote oligarchs, operating like corporate CEOs. The established practice of the scholarly groups and departments electing their heads from among their number has been widely replaced by managerial selection of external people for these roles. Managers have used the technique of institutional restructuring, and increasing the scale of academic units, to break down the power of disciplinary and scholarly ties, often using the progressive pretext that they are seeking to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, rather than to create economies of scale. The resultant structural upheaval allowed university managers to leave their institutional mark and enhance their career prospects.

Over the last 20 years, there has been a noticeable narrowing of the disciplinary base from which senior university managers are drawn. While, for example, in 1996 Australian vice chancellors included people with backgrounds in human geography, history, English literature and linguistics, by 2015 none of these disciplines was represented, nor was any other discipline in the humanities.<sup>4</sup> Most university heads were drawn from science, law, business or engineering. Those from the social sciences come from a narrow range of backgrounds, ones that could be seen as peculiarly suited careers in university management: economics, education, educational psychology and public policy.<sup>5</sup> While nearly a quarter of undergraduate students are enrolled in courses defined as ‘society and culture’ (excluding education) and ‘creative arts’ (Department of Education and Training 2014b), these fields are conspicuously underrepresented among the vice chancellors.

There are four reasons for this. First, due to the professionalisation of university management, selection committees favour those whose

<sup>4</sup>Warren Bebbington of the University of Adelaide, however, is from a music education background.

<sup>5</sup>Sandra Harding of James Cook University in Queensland is an economic sociologist by training.



backgrounds seem appropriate to the idea of a university as a business rather than as a cultural institution. Second, the fading of the notion that university leaders should perform the function of collegial representatives works against the participation of those in the humanities and social sciences among whom the idea of democratic university has strong support. Third, labour markets in the humanities and social sciences are much tighter than those in most professional or vocational training disciplines, such as law and medicine, where there are viable career options outside of academia; it is easier for accountants and engineers to find non-academic work than for philosophers and sociologists. This is why those in the humanities and social sciences can be enslaved to years of casual labour, while those who can find work outside academia will be more inclined to walk away if they are unable to obtain secure work. Additionally, having obtained tenure, it is much more difficult to achieve promotion in the humanities or social sciences, where higher standards of achievement are often expected; Australian historians get nowhere on research achievements that would qualify them for a professorial position in a law or accounting faculty. So it stands to reason that those in the humanities and social sciences are usually much older by the time they reach the level of seniority required to progress to management ranks and have less time to ascend the hierarchy. Finally, and fourth, the more corporate values become embedded in university bureaucracy, the more repugnant the managerial career path appears to those who have trained in disciplines that encourage critical reflection on social institutions and ideologies. The result of this narrowing of the managerial caste to people from outside the humanities and social sciences means that there is less chance that some kind of sociological imagination will be brought to bear on the running of universities than was the case in the past. While familiarity with the ideas of Michel Foucault and Max Weber might not equip you to read a balance sheet or draw up a plausible flow chart, it will certainly give you a keen understanding of the social and intellectual consequences of introducing a new set of key performance indicators.

### TAMING MANAGERIALISM: BEYOND THE TAYLORIST UNIVERSITY

When a culture contents itself with Transparency and Information as insipidly neutral and impoverished surrogates for truth-seeking and knowledge-making, then we start to lose sight of what the university is actually for,

and to lose sight of its proper commitments. The Official University – the transparent one, replete with information – has not only eviscerated but also threatened with extinction the institution where serious work goes on. That institution, if it is to survive, has had to become clandestine. (Docherty 2011)

The suffocating consequences of the line-management system and the corporate model of the university are well known to academics: the undermining of independent scholarship and critical thought; the growth of official regulation and surveillance of various aspects of academic work; the obsession with metrics and key performance indicators of dubious value; the proliferation of administrative demands that diminish the time available for real scholarship; the subordination of intellectual work to financial imperatives; and the Orwellian paradox that the marketing rhetoric of ‘excellence’ and ‘quality’ intensifies, just as the conditions of learning and teaching are undermined. Academics frequently experience these processes as inexorable and difficult to resist. Many simply try to do good work in the shadows—staffing what Thomas Docherty calls the ‘unseen academy’. They either jump through the managerial hoops or engage in passive resistance and non-compliance, but rarely offer an open challenge to the discourses and processes that trammel them. The task of challenging managerialism is formidable and generally left to a shrinking pool of activists.

Ironically, however, at the very moment that the cherished values of intellectual freedom, liberal humanism and critical theory appear most stifled by bureaucrats and technocrats, managerialism itself is suffering a crisis of legitimacy. Not only is it ineffective in its own terms, it is also anachronistic, out of step with contemporary management orthodoxy. In order to understand this, it is important to situate the contemporary university in relation to the development of capitalism over the last 100 years.

Taylorism emerged in the early-twentieth century as a scientific management creed in the service of Fordist mass production (see Braverman 1974). It sought to achieve greatest efficiency by breaking down the production process to its smallest components, instituting a highly refined division of labour where workers perform specialised but alienating and repetitive tasks. But Taylorism was also a political project geared towards undermining the skills and solidarity of blue-collar trades and locating the scientific manager at the centre of the productive universe. In Fordist enterprises, white-collar workers grew in number and power at the expense

of those on the production line. However, the enterprises of the Fordist era were brittle and inflexible. They were good for producing standardised outputs based on the uniformity of production, but not suitable for the agile, fluid and creative processes of new capitalism.

With the decline of funding over the last 25 years, managers in higher education have used Taylorist strategies to break down the intellectual guilds and engage in more direct bureaucratic surveillance and regulation of academic work, especially associated with undergraduate teaching. The constant round of institutional restructuring has eroded collegial bonds, while the quantification of performance (through, e.g., student satisfaction surveys) and the proliferation of policies and paperwork intrude profoundly on academic work. The cost-saving changes rolled out across the university sector—increasing class sizes, casualisation, standardising course structures and diminishing student choice—are symptoms of Taylorism and the increasing power of the managerial class. Only three of Australia's thirty-six public universities—Monash, Sydney and Queensland—today employ more academic than non-academic staff, and in several of the newer universities the latter outnumber the former by nearly two to one (see Department of Education and Training 2014a).

Yet in the Western world the time of the scientifically managed corporate behemoth has passed. In the post-Fordist era, the line-managed, bureaucratically rigid university is a profound anachronism. It contrasts starkly with the 'Montessori' styles of management typical of new capitalism. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005) argued that capitalism has great capacity for renewal in the face of critique. They saw the emergence of what they called 'the new spirit of capitalism' in response to the post-1968 creative dissent. This was typified by a popular rejection of standardised consumption, moral conformity and, in particular, Taylorised alienated labour. So innovation and creativity became the leitmotifs of new capitalism, which sought to conscript ludic pursuits and intellectual free play and generate the 'new oil' of intellectual property. Old management techniques with their modernist social engineering ambitions simply crush the spontaneity required for the creative juices to flow. Indeed, some new technology corporations, such as Apple and Google, have constructed new workplaces that they are calling campuses, in order to encourage a sort of Ivy League student creativity (guided no doubt by the legend of Mark Zuckerberg's development of Facebook while at Harvard). Ironically, this is occurring just as campus life in Australia is becoming increasingly bereft of vitality, with students rushing off after lectures to work in shops or

restaurants to cover living expenses and student debt, and casual staff, who do much of the teaching, leaving when their classes finish.

So there is a need for a creative renewal of the university. The justification for it, however, is not (I hasten to add) in the production of the next generation of tech entrepreneurs, but rather in the recognition of the need to rescue intellectual life from bureaucratic and technocratic suffocation. This project involves challenging the idea that education is simply a credentialing process, and striving to renew liberal humanist values. This is a formidable task. As youth unemployment increases throughout the Western world, and the labour market advantages that a university education can confer become less and less apparent, so popular anxieties about the vocational prospects of young people intensify. Disciplines and degrees that appear to provide little vocational leverage are often the first to have their value questioned. This is of course not new. In Australia, the humanities and liberal arts were called to account around the Dawkins restructuring of higher education in the late 1980s. Around that time, Ian Hunter wrote that the transcendental justification for the humanities—that they promote individual cultural growth—is insufficient. He argued that they play a ‘quite calculable and interested role’ in forming the ethical citizens and that it is necessary to engage in public debates to advocate that role: ‘Drawn irresistibly towards transcendental conceptions of culture and reason, the humanities academy has itself failed to develop a public rationale outlining the pragmatic ethical and social function that it supports’ (Hunter 1989, p. 447).

The humanities and social sciences should play a central role in this project, but for this to happen the practitioners in these fields ought to overcome the embattled, cloistered and introspective disposition within the university and to deny university managers the prerogative of representing the views of university communities. It is important to recall the scholarly radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, when the campuses were centres of political ferment and when many academics were powerful public intellectuals. In recent times, there has been an attenuation of political engagement in general. Precariousness has also limited scholarly horizons and ambitions: a gentle nudge to public policy here, an incremental contribution to some scholarly sub-specialism there. But this quietism, and in particular the evasion of thorny questions of the politics of the university, can make critical thinkers vulnerable to the predations of neoliberalism by failing to engage in the debates about the social and cultural roles played by universities.

The prospects of advocating the virtues of a general education are perhaps enhanced by the failure of the managerial university to secure successful employment outcomes for graduates. Regarding the humanities and their lack of vocational utility, Hunter claimed that the link between the vocational training and national economic performance is by no means clear. Recent reports on graduate outcomes found that nearly 30 % had no job 4 months after graduating (see Dodd and Tadros 2014). As career paths erode, even established professions—law, architecture, journalism—have seen a rapid drop off in demand for graduates. While in 2012 83 % of law graduates found employment within 4 months, the next year the percentage fell to 78.5 (see Dodd and Tadros 2014). If these trends continue, they will belie the arguments of those who seek to justify higher student fees on the basis that degrees confer private individual gain. They also betoken the failure of university technocrats to deliver on their promises—in particular of shoehorning students into the vocational niches for which the Taylorist ‘mass production’ university prepared them.

## CONCLUSION

The creation of the mass university in Australia was accompanied by the rise of the technocratic oligarchs, imbued with the ideas of new public management, who profoundly changed the character of universities. They have imposed systems of line management and regular rounds of structural change on disciplinary communities, the effect of which was to undermine the collegial voice in university decision-making. This has narrowed the disciplinary base from which university managers are drawn. Many from the humanities and social sciences who in an earlier era might have been prepared to perform the role of collegial representatives are reluctant to be line managers in the contemporary neoliberal university. In dealing with the rapid growth in undergraduate enrolments and the relative decline in the funding base, university managers sought to adopt Taylorist solutions, tightly managing the conditions under which pedagogy and research were practised, and effecting economies of scale that have diminished many of the freedoms and qualities of academic life. Unlike many of their mid-twentieth century predecessors, staff in fields that are best placed to extol the values of critical and liberal scholarship have in recent times been reluctant to critically engage with the contemporary neoliberal university. Crusading researchers and public intellectuals, who fight for social justice and good causes outside academia, will often remain mute on university

politics and the capricious exercise of managerial power. They are guilty of petrified silence, glum defeatism or the blind acceptance of the ‘there is no alternative’ injunctions of neoliberal dogma. Either way, they evacuate the terrain of the politics of higher education at a time when the foundations of critical thinking and scholarship are most under threat. Contemporary economic conditions have undermined the idea that the university is a conveyor belt to a vocation, and thus rendered problematic the Taylorist and technocratic vision of higher education. At such a moment it is important to hear the expression of a broader vision of universities, voices capable of describing the value of education in terms other than individual and instrumental ones.

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## Between Career Progression and Career Stagnation: Casualisation, Tenure, and the Contract of Indefinite Duration in Ireland

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In recent years, debates about rising corporate influence and control over higher education have emerged.<sup>1</sup> Considerable attention has been given to developments in the USA, where the process is, arguably, most advanced (see Apple 2005; Hill 2005). In this chapter, we relate these issues to the role of tenure in academic life. We explore the traditions of tenured employment, which many see as a weapon or asset in the struggle against the relentless commercialisation and casualisation of higher education. We do not proceed with a view to returning to an imagined golden age (see Clarke 2010), but with a view to transformation, as is

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required to make the best of the present and to secure the future. With a focus on Ireland, we examine the contract of indefinite duration (CID) as a peculiar form of tenure that permits interpretations that downgrade those employed under its premise. With reference to a number of cases, we examine the struggles that academics face in obtaining these permanent contracts. We consider how the absence of security and stability impacts on people's lives and their capacity to develop as researchers and teachers. We address deteriorating working conditions and consider how they prevent a growing number of academics from engaging productively with their colleagues, caring for their students, or even caring adequately for themselves (see Lynch 2010). We suggest that by outsourcing work previously carried out under permanent contracts of employment, universities demonstrate a stubborn refusal to contribute to the formation of secure occupational identities among those hoping to live and work as academics. We argue that though CIDs do offer the closest thing to job security amid increasingly destructive commercial forces, such half-hearted solutions can also be used as a tool for antagonising further the ever more stratified academic community.

### CONTEXT: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

The Irish university is best considered in the light of transformations over the last half a century. Higher education became less exclusive in the post-war period. In Western social democracies and Eastern state socialist societies, working class people, mature students, women, and members of ethnic and sexual minorities who came from social groups effectively excluded from third-level education began to enter universities in significant numbers. However, though student and faculty numbers have since continued to increase, there has been a simultaneous erosion of the public character of universities. Neoliberal reforms—introduced as a solution to the global crisis in the 1980s—recast universities as competing enterprises (see Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Clarke 2010). In Thatcher's England, for instance, the government abolished tenure and made universities compete in a quasi-market for students, while the funding paid per student decreased (see Clarke 2010, p. 95). Through the 1990s, public funding for universities has continued to drop, increasing the reliance on private funding. Towards the end of the decade, Philip G. Altbach was able to observe that '[w]hile most academics are only dimly aware of it, the thrust

toward accountability has begun to affect their professional lives. This trend will intensify not only due to fiscal constraints but because all public institutions have come under greater scrutiny' (Altbach, 1997, p. 14).

In order to turn education into a profitable commodity, senior management increasingly interferes with academic production. On top of this, the continued erosion of the public good aspect of higher education is evidenced in the tightening of budgets, the curtailing of salaries, and the reduction of permanent faculty and administrative staff through retirement and firing (see Leik 1998; Honan and Teferra 2001). The austerity agenda imposed internationally following the global financial crisis beginning in 2008 did not initiate this process, but it certainly intensified it. The rationalisations that emerged (for cuts in public spending generally) were remarkably similar in different countries (see Glassner 2010; Murphy 2010; Tyler 2013). The demonisation of public-sector workers as being inefficient, privileged, and protected was easily applied to higher education (see O'Flynn et al. 2014), with the perceived (and real) luxuries that have characterised higher education historically (see Mountz et al. 2015).

University bureaucracies have initiated a self-auditing of academic production with an eye on its calculable outputs, applicability to industry, and profitability (see Wright and Rabo 2010; Apple 2005; Gill 2009). While research in many countries is predominantly state sponsored, the revenues and patents in which public funds have been invested most often become property of private enterprise (see Allen 2007; Lynch 2014). Government policies on higher education dovetail with the commercialisation of the sector. With the decline in public funding, academic institutions must compete for investors, search for means of measuring their 'product' so as to place themselves favourably among competitors, and increase their productivity and 'customer' base (see The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010). 'Academic capitalism' has become the dominant model of university development: the university has been organised as a business enterprise dedicated to profit, growth, investment, and reinvestment (see Slaughter and Leslie 1997). Universities around the globe worry about their placing in 'global' university rankings, which rest on criteria of 'excellence' established by elite Anglo-American research-intensive universities (see Marginson 2008; Lynch 2014). In consequence, the nominally free and independent academics face ever greater pressures to respond to the needs of private funders, rather than to society. Exposed to market conditions, the main privilege of academics—the time to think,

inquire, write, discuss, and engage—is increasingly regarded as unaffordable (see Mountz et al. 2015). Similarly, humanities and social sciences as well as ‘blue sky research’ become ineligible for funding unless they can demonstrate marketable outputs (see Clarke 2010, p. 95; Lynch and Ivancheva 2015).

Though the post-war era was a Golden Age of academia for many, to mourn over the demise of a cherished ‘academic community’ is little more than an expression of what John Clarke (2010) has called ‘professional nostalgia’. It is also clear that the zenith of the public university was only short lived, and that the benefits were generally limited to the developed world (see Clarke 2010). In concrete terms, the increasingly casualised contractual arrangements bring about a reduced access to benefits and resources, and a cruel system of competition among colleagues and friends that breaks all collegiality and solidarity (see Ivancheva 2015). Precariously employed academic staff with ever-increasing teaching and publishing loads and vanishing benefits (see Courtois and O’Keefe 2015) cannot afford to spend time on community projects, social justice campaigns, or any relationship or activity that does not count in the final audit. Choosing to do so might well become the dividing line between a permanent and non-permanent post, or, for those with a CID, the difference between career progression and career stagnation.

### THE DECLINE OF ACADEMIC TENURE

The destructive character of the ‘reforms’ is perhaps most obvious among early-stage academics. A growing number of faculty members are contracted on lower-scale fixed and short-term contracts of teaching and research, with ever lowering salaries and contractual security (see Honan and Teferra 2001; Courtois and O’Keefe 2015). Trapped in the logic of the market, early-career academics must live up to contradictory expectations. On the one hand, they need to prove the marketability of their teaching and research. On the other hand, they are expected to remain excellent educators and scholars, working to preserve higher education as a public good and facilitating the reproduction of an informed, active citizenry capable of making and remaking stable communities, enhancing working, learning, and caring lives into the future (see Lynch 2010). As if to undermine this process of social rejuvenation, the competitive productivity of higher education rewards those that are most ready to abandon all care responsibilities and all commitment to the communities to which they belong.

Two competing career tracks have emerged, both facing precarity. Under the growing ‘internationalisation’ of academic work, the traditional space-tied academic must compete with transient academics that exist apart from space-tied communities (as is necessary to develop international networks and to exploit opportunities wherever they arise). The mobile transnational academic is seen as relatively ‘careless’ and able to rise to the top academic positions (see Lynch 2010). At the same time, to stay in the academic game, such a hypermobile subject is usually required to put up with flexibility and recurrent migration, curtailing previous social and professional networks. Many such academics suffer loneliness and depression, while others move their whole families or commute across regional or national borders to make ends meet (see Zanou 2013; Ivancheva 2015). The others, who—out of choice, or often out of necessity—opt out of the game of transnational mobility, fall easily in the trap of zero-hour teaching and precarious research arrangements in order to stay afloat (see Walters 2010). Hence, both groups remain dependent on local or international clan-like loyalties and hierarchies (see Afonso 2013).

The normalisation of these conditions and the steep decline of tenure, which is considered ‘one of the most coveted perks in higher education’ (Rotherham 2011), are both part of the same process. The word *tenure* itself carries a different meaning in different countries. In France, for example, it is associated with particular categories of civil servant employment and the procedures of recruitment, promotion, and security that these involve; in Germany, tenure indicates permanent appointment and status of civil servant as a professor-chair (*Lehrstuhl*) only after a long competitive career in an extraordinary (paid) or a private (unpaid) position; the American tenure-track model involves a period of academic probation during which the individual academic is expected to establish excellent research publications and a fundraising and teaching portfolio, as well as provide proof of administrative or community service—and only after this time is over the institution decides to grant tenure or terminate the contract.

According to data from the American Association of University Professors, the number of tenured faculty with permanent contracts in American universities had dropped from 75 % in 1970 to 30 % in 2007 (see Kaplan 2010). In North-Western Europe, trends are more divergent, with most new research and teaching staff hired on well-paid fixed-term contracts, with South-Eastern members of the European Union tending towards lower-paid open-ended contracts (see European Science Foundation 2009). In Greece, prior to the global financial crisis of 2008,

there was a constitutional employment protection for permanent academic staff. However, in 2010, this was curtailed with the severe public-sector freeze (see Glassner 2010). In Austria, with the University Act from 2002, university rectors were permitted to appoint academics on temporary contracts of up to 6 years (see Lynch and Ivancheva 2015). In Lithuania, academics now compete for employment in three 5-year employment cycles, before they become eligible to hold permanent positions (see Karran 2007). In the UK, where tenure was abolished in the 1980s, the proportion of faculty on fixed-term contracts has reached 50 % in 2014 (see Higher Education Statistics Agency 2014). In Germany, where the number of students and non-professorial staff has increased dramatically, the number of permanent staff members has stayed the same (see Enders 2001, p. 5); temporary faculty numbers have increased over 45 % from 2000 to 2012, and 80 % of the research and 66 % of the teaching is now covered by the non-permanent academic staff (see Wissenschaftsrat 2014).

On both sides of the Atlantic, the disjunction between good pay, job security, and mobility has made the pursuit of a research career increasingly difficult for a new generation of scholars (see European Science Foundation 2009; Kaplan 2010). Non-tenured faculty are paid less, have less job security, feel isolated from the academic community, are highly dependent on individualised connection with department chairs, and have little to no chances for professional growth (see Center for the Education of Women 2010). This is particularly evident among women. In Europe, women are increasingly dropping out of academic careers before they get permanent positions: the requirement of geographic mobility and job flexibility make it difficult for them to dedicate time to family building ‘in the rush hour of life’ (European Science Foundation 2009). Gender differences among tenured and non-tenured staff are also significant: in the USA, a countrywide survey of 343 academics in all fields showed that 75 % non-tenured faculty in the humanities, 60 % in the social sciences, and 46 % of those in the natural sciences were women (see Center for the Education of Women 2010).

Tenure has been criticised, and proposals have been made for its abolition (see Schaefer Riley 2012; Wetherbe 2012). US politicians, policy-makers, trustees, and students have used terms such as *performance* and *efficiency* to oppose ‘the socialistic monopoly’ of tenure that allegedly costs millions of taxpayer dollars (see Wetherbe 2012; Elkins 1998, pp. 763–764; Honan and Teferra 2001, p. 196). Critics of tenure have said that it undermines competition, innovation and dissent, and facilitates complacency, uniformity of scholarship and opinion, neglect

of teaching, and rigid academic hierarchies (see Kaplan 2010; Schaefer Riley 2012). Economists have solicited the abolition of tenure as ‘detrimental to institutional flexibility’, a ‘dead-end street for junior faculty’ within an oversaturated labour market and a mechanism to keep academic salaries and employment stagnant (Breneman 1997, pp. 3–4). Proponents of tenure, on the other hand, have insisted that tenured faculty remain competitive, as they are subjected to a highly competitive process of professional peer review by highly specialised tenured colleagues (see Brown and Kurland 1990; Nelson 2012). They have claimed that tenure secures a level of stability that allows for long-term engagement with their institution and fosters institutional memory and community (see Karran 2007; Kaplan 2010; Center for the Education of Women 2010; Nelson 2012). They have considered tenure to be a prerequisite for academic autonomy, allowing faculty to challenge students, powerful interest groups, and university bureaucracies without fears of economic reprisal (see McPherson and Schapiro 1999, p. 81; De George 2003, p. 18). It has also been argued that tenure facilitates the progress of women in male-dominated fields, shields representatives of ethnic minorities within the academy, provides necessary protection for risk-intensive research, and creates a viable non-commercial path for engineers whose labour is better paid in private companies (see Flores Niemann and Dovidio 1998; Varma 2001).

Thus, tenure has become a key battleground between the university as an employer that tries to make all spending cost-efficient and academics as employees who are compelled to struggle for a secure working experience. Yet, while tenure has been discussed as a constant, a survey of 280 colleges and universities carried out as early as 1996 has revealed numerous discrete modifications of tenure practices throughout the USA: the development of post-tenure review processes, the creation of multi-year non-tenure-track positions and stop-the-tenure-clock options for tenured faculty, and also the increased flexibility and length of the tenure-track employment, a tenure quota as well as early-retirement and firing policies (see Honan and Teferra 2001, p. 195).

#### BETWEEN PROGRESSION AND STAGNATION: THE CASE OF IRELAND

The decline of tenure is well underway in Ireland—accelerated by the freeze on public-sector employment, which has ensured that the protection of a permanent contract is to be experienced by a dwindling number of academics (see Courtois and O’Keefe 2015). Following the

global financial crisis, public-sector salaries in Ireland (encompassing most third-level institutions) were cut by 14 % (see IMPACT 2014). To reduce public spending, from 2011 onwards the government introduced and implemented the Employment Control Framework, which involved strict controls on recruitment, along with performance management and merit-based promotion (see Hardiman and MacCarthaigh 2013). The Employment Control Framework obliged public-sector staff to work additional hours for a reduced salary. In order to impose a particular form of efficiency in the higher education sector, the Employment Control Framework introduced a division of academic staff into three categories: core-funded posts (paid from undergraduate and other student fees); non-core-funded posts (paid from means fundraised from exchequer and external resources); and other research and/or specialist project-based posts (paid from non-exchequer sources such as the EU and the private sector) (see Higher Education Authority 2011).

The Employment Control Framework aimed to reduce the dependency on public sources and enhance a new ethos of competition among academic staff. To live up to the new standards, Irish universities have cut and outsourced spending on permanent staff salaries (see Courtois and O'Keefe 2015, p. 47). Given the increasing numbers of students enrolling in higher education in Ireland year after year, there is actually an increased demand for academic employees. However, the Employment Control Framework is used as a justification by universities to hire staff on a temporary basis or even via government (un)employment programmes, such as JobBridge. Accurate figures are very difficult to obtain, as evidence of precarious academic employment is often absent from official reports, with no attention paid to the working or living conditions of the employees (see Courtois and O'Keefe 2015, p. 48). These difficulties in collecting reliable data are exacerbated by the vast array of contract types: multiple-year fixed-term full-time, rolling yearly, monthly, or even weekly contracts compete with different part-time arrangements, zero-hour contracts, and hourly paid work with no standardised pay rate within and across institutions (see Courtois and O'Keefe 2015, pp. 49–50). Still, a survey with 227 respondents conducted by Third Level Workplace Watch found that casualisation was an issue in every university in Ireland and revealed growing divisions and inequalities between staff (see Courtois and O'Keefe 2015).

Amid such rapid decline of tenure catalysed by the public-sector freeze, CIDs are seen by many as a way of overcoming precarity and staying in

employment with benefits and protections. Under Irish labour law, an employee that has worked fixed-term contracts for 3 years (carrying out similar work without a break in service) is entitled to a CID. The Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act 2003 states that an employer ‘shall not penalise an employee [...] by dismissing the employee from his or her employment if the dismissal is wholly or partly for or connected with the purpose of the avoidance of a fixed-term contract being deemed to be a contract of indefinite duration under section 9(3)’. In order to be entitled to CIDs, employees must be offered fixed-term contracts within these legal limits. And even if the Employment Control Framework stipulated that ‘[t]he Moratorium must not be used as a means of avoiding Contracts of Indefinite Duration (CIDs)’ (Higher Education Authority 2011), the reality was rather different. While CIDs have been considered permanent contracts by Labour Court rulings and employment guidelines offered by government bodies (see Burtenshaw 2012), the practice of granting and interpreting CIDs has also changed since the Moratorium. In 2011, the Croke Park Agreement, a non-legally binding deal between the Irish government and public-sector unions, was signed, facilitating the implementation of austerity measures along with increased productivity and flexibility as well as a reduction of the numbers of public-service employees. Since then, there have been a growing number of contestations of the right to CID.

University administrations have increasingly employed the CID as a mechanism to divide and rule. Over the last years, universities in Ireland have been spending on average 2.7 million Euro per year on legal costs, including on cases in which CIDs have been claimed and appealed against (see Murray 2013). By signing the Croke Park Agreement, the unions were also subjected to this logic. Though there were no plans in the agreement for redundancies for public servants, or for further pay cuts, the unions did sign an agreement that provided no replacements when staff retired, or when contracts came to an end (see Burtenshaw 2012). The individualising procedures around fixed-term contracts and CIDs have become central to many of the disputes between employers, employees, and trade unions. All this amounted to a freeze in public-sector employment, with emerging gaps to be filled with staff on precarious contracts. It also put unions in an awkward position and shifted their work from organising collective bargaining and industrial action to a focus on legal proceedings. Since so few volunteers work for trade unions, when individual cases arise, section representatives feel pressed to attempt to resolve each



issue at the appropriate level and, where necessary, contact a union official to bring the case to the labour court. This focus on legal entitlements has produced a dependence on individual professional representation. This contrasts with workers' struggles of the past, which compensated for individual weaknesses through the power of numbers. Where trade unions limit themselves to representing, rather than organising, members, the potential of collective action remains underdeveloped. The issue of increasing collective insecurity vanishes amid the individualised struggles (see Gill 2009, p. 259), as does the necessary task of restructuring the university in the public interest.

Since 2011, a growing number of cases of college employees (among other public-sector workers) claiming CIDs have become known to the public, with universities appealing against the granting of such contracts or withdrawing them post-factum (see Burtenshaw 2012; Madden 2012). In 2012, Trinity College Dublin's branch of IFUT—the Irish Federation of University Teachers, which signed the Croke Park Agreement—contested the redundancy of three faculty members who already had CIDs. In Labour Relations Commission proceedings, the IFUT insisted that the college had to secure an alternative job placement to the staff members as they were paid by 'non-core funding'. According to the report on the case (see Burtenshaw 2012), the college ran the risk of setting a precedent that would draw a distinction between permanent contracts inside the university: between those more recently given CIDs but without 'core' funding and most permanent 'core' faculty whose contracts stipulated a guaranteed income and employment until a specified retirement date. Thus, 'non-core funding' termination makes staff hired with this funding un-fundable and thus undesired despite contractual arrangements.

Colleges have also interpreted the durations, types, and wording of contracts in order to contest the right to a CID. A faculty member from University College Dublin was denied permanent contract despite having replaced permanent faculty members on three contracts during 4 years. As two of her contracts were of different nature (maternity leave and sabbatical cover), University College Dublin treated this as different contracts altogether. On appeal, the Labour Court ruled in favour of the employee: the nature of the work she did—designing and teaching full modules—was 'core work', rather than replacement work, which means that she had been deprived of a CID 'on financial grounds, rather than on any objectively justifiable grounds' (Madden 2012).

Yet not all decisions of the labour court have been so positive. In a more recent case, University College Dublin appealed a decision for granting a CID to a scientist who had been employed by the university as a postdoctoral fellow in three consequent fixed-term contracts for over 4 years with insignificant gaps between them and as part of the same research group (see Labour Court 2015). When the third contract expired, it was not renewed, and the claimant was paid a redundancy payment. The claimant was part of the so-called Research Career Framework, which allows individual researchers to be hired by the university twice as postdoctoral researchers (Level 1 and then Level 2) within a period between 4 and 6 years in total (see University College Dublin 2015). Yet, the corporate solicitors hired by University College Dublin claimed that within the Research Career Framework postdoctoral fellows were ‘trainees’ and as such cannot be considered as fully employed by the university and thus eligible for CIDs. They insisted that after completing their postgraduate and postdoctoral training, academics became ‘highly marketable’ for ‘enduring roles both in the career of academia, and in the commercial arena’ (Labour Court 2015). If CIDs were given to ‘post-doctoral students’, the rubric under which the solicitors subsumed the advanced researcher, the university ‘would not be able to process successive cohorts through the available research roles’ (Labour Court 2015). The IFUT challenged the premise that work experience after PhD can be considered ‘training’ and claimed that it was not ‘a legitimate objective of the employer to provide world class research by means of temporary, insecure employment’. The court found the claim ‘not well founded’ and the researcher did not receive a CID (Labour Court 2015).

These cases show that while CIDs are increasingly contested by universities, they are overwhelmingly seen as a kind of privilege. The overt default position for the last several years has been to offer fixed-term or low-hours contracts, and to prevent employees from entitlement to a CID. As Andrew Loxley has shown, in 2011 only 20 % of all the 5202 researchers in Irish third-level institutions were on permanent contracts (see Loxley 2014, p. 128). This data is even more difficult to trace for temporary teaching staff who are usually grouped and reported as ‘full time equivalents’, and hourly paid work stays invisible (Courtois and O’Keefe 2015). At the same time, the contracts offered in Irish colleges and universities are ever more precarious. The number of years that an academic must exist on precarious contracts has steadily increased. In the arts, humanities, and social sciences, upon completion of a PhD the average number of years

worked before getting a permanent job is 7.2. Those paid on an hourly basis, earning less than 10,000 Euro per year, often work in more than one college, with 62 % of the hourly paid work being performed by women (see Courtois and O'Keefe 2015). This creates what Aline Courtois and Theresa O'Keefe call 'the "hamster wheel" of precarity' (Courtois and O'Keefe 2015): since hourly paid teachers are paid for face-to-face hours only, they very often take on heavier teaching loads than permanent staff members in order to make ends meet, which means little or no time to gain any research experience. Administrative work, answering emails, assessments, preparation work, answering emails talking to students—all this usually remains unpaid. These academics also remain invisible to their colleagues in permanent positions, not eligible for conference or research funding. Due to the regular breaks in service and contractual shifts, these academics are also precluded from claiming CIDs. In this, they are pitted against the similarly precarious short-term full-time employed staff, who are increasingly considered part of the more privileged academic work force: they are at least eligible to engage in research and publication and to compete on the job market. Also, after a number of consequent contracts they can claim CIDs; or so it was until the case quoted above (see Labour Court 2015), which might become a sad reference in future to come.

At the same time, there are a number of both practical and political problems with CIDs. On the one hand, having a CID does not mean equal with other permanent employees—it rather provides a catch-22 in which you have a permanent contract but with no secure funding and very little benefits attached. In cases when the CID claimant is not employed within a payment scale and on an established position as a lecturer, it also does not equate to permanent position in terms of the possibility to garner research funding. This precarious arrangement also leaves to the individual department the decision to what extent the person given a CID can participate in the decision-making processes within the school and the college. Thus, a CID means permanent employment but does not mean permanent income when classes to teach or participation in research projects become subject to the market logic due to programmes' disappearance, department mergers, or the ending of project-based funding. On the other hand, as obtaining a CID rarely happens automatically and requires personal efforts and activation of trade-union membership and court procedures, claimants enter a vicious circle. Always having one eye on their next contract, they are also practically much less likely to bring up issues or insist on their rights. Furthermore, those who claim contracts may end up

pitted against their colleagues and direct line manager within their department, considered a troublemaker, alienated, and stigmatised, regardless of any positive human resources or Labour Court decisions. As the Third Level Workplace Watch stated, ‘one respondent reported that her employment was terminated after she sought a contract of indefinite duration (CID) in the institution where she had been employed for a number of years, which illustrates the legal vulnerability of casual workers, unmitigated by their experience, performance and commitment’ (Courtois and O’Keefe 2015, p. 59). Thus, claiming a CID deepens the individualisation and the isolation to which universities subject their casual staff, curtailing the possibilities of collective solutions to a shared predicament. Ironically, then, CIDs are a precarious mechanism, but increasingly the only one that precarious academics have in order to obtain permanent position while employed by Irish universities.

#### CODA

The neoliberal attack on tenure has been destructive to the internal life of universities around the world. Tenure is a prerequisite to the formation of secure occupational identities among those hoping to live and work as academics. What we are witnessing, in Ireland as well as elsewhere, is an isolation of the official ‘academic community’ from a growing precarious faculty, a growing asymmetry of power between the protected and the unprotected, and a recasting of academic autonomy as a minority privilege (see Brown and Kurlad 1990, p. 349). Taken together, these transformations inhibit the development of an environment of free and open dialogue upon which the public character of higher education has always rested. The erosion of tenure amounts to the erosion of possibilities for academic knowledge and freedom to be used to the benefit of society. The activist-academic is likewise caught up in an all-consuming competitive system, which presents itself as a logical excuse for neglecting activist work or, worse still, for building careers by researching the oppressed but not joining them in their struggles (see The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010).

At the same time, though many academics are critical of neoliberalism, we should not regard ourselves as passive recipients of these regressive changes. The commercial and bureaucratic interferences outlined above all require support and mediation by academic staff. Whether we are tenured or precariously employed staff, we are all complicit in supplying the

meat and fat to the academic 'sausage factory', especially when we fail to use our freedoms, ignore our public role, or stop questioning how the world 'out there' is shaped by what goes on 'in here'. Just as academics play a key role in the production of ruling ideas at each stage of modern history, in the reproduction and/or restructuring of capitalism and class society, they likewise play a key role in the neoliberal transformation of university life (see *The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010*). Despite the apparent academic interest in reflexivity (see *Gill 2009*), academics rarely focus on the world 'in here', on class exploitation in their own institutions, on their own academic working lives, or on particular roles, individual or collective, in the neoliberalisation of higher education. Universities are still very often viewed as 'better' than other kinds of employer, given the freedoms, supports, and various privileges enjoyed by tenured academics—though these are enjoyed by a shrinking percentage of academic workers (see *The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010*). However, the conditions of early-stage academic reveal the university that will emerge if it is permitted.

Those taking part in the 2015 wave of protests that took place in universities across the world are only too aware of the issues outlined above. The early months of the year saw strikes in universities across Canada, an occupation in the University of Amsterdam, an occupation in the London School of Economics, a student occupation in the Dublin College of Art and Design, and a nationwide walkout of precariously employed lecturers across the USA. These developments are positive insofar as they represent a necessary rejection of the false distinction between academia and wider society, when it comes to conceiving valid sites for struggle (see *The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010*). Undeniably, the decreasing work opportunities, the increasing indebtedness, job insecurity, exploitation, and geographical hypermobility of many workers in third-level education are turning many of them into working poor.

Though there may never have been a golden age of academia, the post-war period was a time of exceptional potential to at least to hold power to account. Yet, it is less useful to consider university life against a real or imagined past, as it is to examine the struggles emerging in the present, and what will be required of the university as an institution by the society in the future. We suggest that the capacity of universities to act for (and on behalf of) civil society cannot be maintained without a corresponding collective demand for occupational integrity and security. With respect to Ireland, the 'academic community' cannot adequately defend itself on the basis of

individualised struggles. The public function of universities now hangs in the balance. The individualised legal struggles depoliticise a very real attack on the very idea of the university, the preservation of which, we suggest, must involve organised struggle to maintain public funding and control over higher education free and open to all, and concurrent demands for adequate permanent placements for research, teaching, and support staff.

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PART IV

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The Scope of Collective Action in  
Academia

## Are University Struggles Worth Fighting?

*Branko Bembič*

There is a deep-seated anxiety about exposing the university to the imperatives of capitalist accumulation. Theory, it is said, is valuable for its own sake and should remain independent from the business considerations reigning in the capitalist economy. The concern that something priceless will be lost with the corporatisation of the university applies especially in the case of the humanities, as this segment of scholarly production is of relatively little value for capitalist accumulation and thus risks being left out of funding. What, then, is this invaluable something that might disappear? And is it worth fighting for?

In this chapter, having in mind the neoliberal restructuring of the university, I look at the status of the humanities and some other parts of scholarly production from the standpoint of their uselessness for capital accumulation. The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, my aim is to develop a simple conceptual framework for examining the uselessness of scholarly production from the standpoint of capital, from which scholarly production is evaluated as useless in those segments that can be resorted to neither as inputs to individual capitals nor as providers of expertise for supporting the general conditions of reproduction of

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the total social capital (e.g., research in public administration). In the second section, I try to provide some illustration of and support to the conceptual framework by presenting a case study that I conducted recently.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

From the point of view of capital, every segment of scholarly production that takes place in the academy is useful in the same way, that is, to the extent that it is useful for the purpose of extraction and appropriation of surplus value either in the form of supply of labour power equipped with the skills required by capital (the so-called employability) or in the form of technological and organisational innovations. There are, however, at least two ways in which a part of scholarly production can be useless as an input required by capital.

Let me first address the role of knowledge in the contemporary, neoliberal form of capitalism. As David Harvey (2010, p. vi) suggested, capital is the lifeblood of capitalist societies, that is, a flow that provides us with goods and services we consume. Furthermore, our jobs depend on this continuous flow of capital, be it in the private or the public sector, as capital enables the states that tax it to perform their functions, including the construction of infrastructure and provision of services necessary for the well-being of their citizens. Now, in the decades following World War II, the main policy tools on which national governments relied for sustaining this flow of capital were Keynesian macroeconomic policies. However, faced by the crisis of the post-war regime and a neoliberal restoration that entails an intensification of competition between capitals on the global plane, the states are trying to sustain the flow of capital by securing competitive advantages for capitals based in their respective territories. Hence, from the standpoint of both individual and social capitals, scholarly production is of paramount importance as it enables individual capitals to capture the technological rents that in turn allow national social capitals to move upwards in the technological hierarchy. University and other research organisations thus become crucial institutions for the bourgeois competitiveness policy.

This does not hold from the viewpoint of the working class. As '[c]ompetition is the mode generally in which capital secures the victory of its mode of production' (Marx 1973, p. 730), scholarly production, as a weapon in the competitive struggle between capitals (be they individual or social),

becomes a powerful tool in the process that ensures the reproduction of capitalist mode of production (see Milios and Sotiropoulos 2009, p. 199). Furthermore, as climbing the technological hierarchy keeps the promise of improving the competitiveness of national economy without squeezing the value of labour power, and insofar as jobs, wages, and welfare provision (in short, the material situation of workers) depend on competitive success of national social capitals (i.e., national interest), scholarly production becomes a tool in the process that is constantly eroding the unity of the working class at the global level, fragmenting the working class along the national borders.

A case in point are frequent claims that the competitiveness of the national economy cannot be built on reductions of wages and precarious employment arrangements and that the solution is to be sought in changing the structure of export towards a larger share of hi-tech exports. Such claims are put forward, for example, by trade unions in Slovenia in their attempt to resist wage cuts and measures for enhancing flexibility of the labour market. The problem with this position is that it presupposes that someone else on the globe will be making cheap goods based on low wages and exchanging them for hi-tech exports that command high prices on the global market, which will in turn make possible for high wages of the highly qualified workers who produce them.

Not all segments of scholarly production are, however, easily adjusted to directly serve the needs of capital. It is quite obvious that large parts of the humanities and many segments of social sciences cannot be. Nevertheless, one can discern at least two different aspects of the uselessness of certain parts of scholarly production according to their place in the process of social reproduction. The first aspect of the uselessness of scholarly production from the point of view of capital, which pertains to most parts of the humanities, is complementary to the commodified scholarly production useful to capital. For major parts of the humanities produce neither technological innovations nor skills applicable to the capitalist process of production. But precisely because of their futility from the point of view of capital, these parts of the humanities appear as the last piece of scholarly production that enjoys the privilege of being unburdened with having to be useful.

Observed from this perspective, these parts of scholarly production come close to Aristotle's ideal of contemplation, an activity that has an end in itself and is therefore 'liked for its own sake' (Aristotle 2004, p. 195). This should, however, not blind us for their structural position in

the process of social reproduction or mislead us into attempts to defend them as a last stand against overwhelming pressures for the commodification of scholarly production. For this uselessness is in no way a sign of theoretical autonomy, as the appearance of redemption from commodification is only an effect of the relations in the framework of the capitalist universe in which every activity is a means to an end outside of itself and takes place only insofar as it furthers the process of accumulation of capital, a process guided by an impersonal compulsion of self-expanding value. In this setting, the very uselessness of large parts of the humanities, on the one hand, puts them into a privileged field that is apparently excluded from this endless and futile movement and, on the other hand, turns them into a supplement that gives meaning to the senseless commodified universe—a place of contemplation as an end in itself in which bourgeois humanists find enjoyment.

The situation in which those parts of scholarly production that are useless from capital's viewpoint offer a privileged place reserved for the enjoyment of bourgeoisie follows directly from their position in the process of social reproduction, which is in turn implied by the very fact that they are an end in itself. Thus, as an item that represents a blind alley, an appendix in the process of social reproduction, these useless parts of scholarly production cannot enter consumption of the workers, which means that they must be a luxury, insofar as luxury consumption is 'all production that is not required by the reproduction of labour-power' (Marx 1981, p. 201).

As I am writing this chapter, an attempt to ratify a differentiation of university study programmes along these lines is being made at one of the public universities in Slovenia. In January 2015, the chancellor's office at the University of Ljubljana tried to push through the university senate a document titled *Navodila za uravnavanje programske strukture Univerze v Ljubljani* (Directives for the Regulation of the Structure of Study Programmes at the University of Ljubljana). The Directives (see University of Ljubljana 2015) determine the conditions for the introduction of new study programmes, renewal of accreditations for the existing study programmes, and criteria for increasing and decreasing the number of enrolment places. An essential part of the conditions and criteria advanced in the Directives is the employability of graduate students of respective disciplinary fields measured in terms of their unemployment rates and ascertained by surveys of graduate students. Hence, the programmes pertaining to the academic fields in which the unemployment rate among graduate students is above average would be abolished but

could, nevertheless, be reintroduced if financial sources for carrying them out were provided for by private means such as tuition fees and private donations. A differentiation of this kind would cut off working-class students from those segments of scholarly production that do not provide input capital, and in two ways. First, regardless of how the provision of education in these fields of knowledge is financed, students from working-class households who feel the pressure of the dictate of labour market already find it increasingly difficult to choose a subject of study that does not increase their employability, that is to say, the usefulness of their skills for their exploitation by capital. Second, if enacted, the Directives would fortify barriers that would prevent potential working-class students from accessing these subjects and elevating them to the status of luxury, as only those from wealthier households would be able to afford such a costly study.

The totality of scholarly production could therefore be divided into two complementary parts: on the one hand, there is a large segment consisting mainly of parts of natural and social sciences that are at least potentially useful from the perspective of capital; on the other hand, there is a segment of luxury scholarly production that appears as more or less wasteful from capital's perspective but nevertheless serves as an indispensable ideological supplement conferring meaning to the commodified universe. Insofar as this division really exhausts the whole field of scholarly production, there seems to be little in the humanities (or, for that matter, in any other field of scholarly production) that is worth fighting for, nor would such a fight be needed. But this division is truly exhaustive only from the point of view of capital. For there is another segment of scholarly production that is completely useless from the capital's point of view. As this segment can offer neither utility to capital nor enjoyment to bourgeoisie, it tends to be spontaneously crowded out in the process of subjecting major parts of scholarly production to the needs of capital and depositing the rest into the sphere of luxury production. It is because of this crowding out that it does not appear in the division mentioned above.

One can approach this segment by making explicit the role of theory in class struggle. As any theory produces its own problem field, it has to theorise its own theoretical practice and to position itself in relation to other social practices. Hence, insofar as capitalist society is fundamentally split by class struggle, theory has to conceptualise its place relative to this struggle (see Močnik 2009, pp. 404–405, 434–437). But if a theory is to conceptualise its place in class struggle, if it is to take a stand with regard

to class struggle, it is a potential weapon in the hands of the working class. In *What Is To Be Done?*, the famous text written at the very beginning of the twentieth century, Lenin argued that workers could never acquire the socialist consciousness by themselves and that this consciousness has to be brought to them by educated bourgeois intellectuals; that is, the socialist consciousness has to be instilled from without (see Lenin 1961). Winning access to higher education for all members of society was therefore a great accomplishment, for it provided the working class with institutional capacities to form its own ‘organic intellectuals’, as Gramsci would call them (1971, pp. 6–20). Subordinating scholarly production to the requirements of the accumulation of capital, on the other hand, is part of capital’s spontaneous drive to deprive the working class of capabilities to form intellectuals who could invent powerful conceptual tools usable in class struggle, organise workers, and help them integrate into a social force capable of fighting capitalist oppression.

A case of intellectuals working in the midst of the masses that immediately springs to mind is, of course, the Italian workerist movement. One of its basic concepts, the concept of the composition of the working class, dealt precisely with the problem of historically specific ways in which capital (e.g., by means of technology, which, for workerists, is always moulded by capital) divides the working class in order to fracture it and control it politically (as the technical composition of the working class), with the working class struggling, in an autonomous movement, against this fragmentation to recompose itself and achieve political unity that, given the technical composition imposed by capital, is also historically specific (for a succinct explanation of class composition, see Bologna 1991, p. 23; Močnik 2009, pp. 394–399; Mohandesi 2013, pp. 84–88). In a similar vein, the method of *conricerca* (co-research) developed and practised by workerism never aimed at science conceived as an end in itself, but was always concerned with constructing and providing workers with conceptual tools designed to be used in class struggle (see Bologna 2014). To be sure, *conricerca* was not only about transmitting the tools of knowledge to workers, but instead involved them throughout in the process of their development:

This relation and exchange were also reciprocally formative. They made explicit political hypotheses about the struggle and tied them to a theory that was in this way put to the test in a manner that this mobilising knowledge also transformed the worker in a particular militant (not only ideological ...)



and made the militant and sometimes the struggle reach new heights, until the militant him- or herself started to work as co-researcher, dragging others along as we, after all, were dragging along young apprentices. (Alquati 2000)

It is difficult to ascertain the extent of the impact of workerism on the struggles of Italian workers in the 1960s and 1970s, struggles that shifted the balance of forces between capital and labour in favour of the latter for more than a decade (see Franzosi 1995, pp. 338–339). It is of little doubt, however, that workerists themselves took part in these struggles and that, moreover, the so-called extra-parliamentary leftist groups that grew out of the student movement and which had a substantial influence on the course of workers' struggles drew extensively on theoretical foundations built by the workerist movement (see Bobbio 1988, pp. 16–17). Last but not least, it seems that the bourgeois state was quite aware of the danger posed by militant workerist intellectuals, as many of them were either imprisoned or at least expelled from the university (see Bologna 2014).

#### CASE STUDY: A SPILLOVER OF UNIVERSITY STRUGGLE

In the rest of this chapter, I want to provide a brief analysis of the role of a group of organic intellectuals in Slovenia consolidated in the struggle at one of the Slovenian universities; subsequently, these organic intellectuals were actively engaged in a workers' struggle raging in a major Slovenian company and its outsourced suppliers of workforce. The analysis is part of a larger case study of the class culture of workers in a Slovenian company based on eight in-depth interviews that I conducted in the course of 2014 and in the first months of 2015. The aim of my study was to analyse the process of precarisation and fragmentation of the workforce in a particular firm as well as workers' attempts to overcome the fragmentation imposed by capital and merge into a collective on a class basis that extends beyond the borders of a particular company. I defined the central concept of my study—the class culture of workers—as follows: insofar as a class is a concrete historical relation, the class culture of workers (i.e., a set of material practices and institutions formed by workers within this concrete historical relation) is situated in a position that traditional Marxist approaches reserve for class consciousness.

At the outset I based my study on the two groups of workers involved in a strike. However, as soon as I began assessing the material concerning the strike other than newspaper articles and the interviews I have conducted,

I stumbled upon activities performed by organic intellectuals as they were documented in web pages containing reports on the development of the strike, letters addressed to public authorities on behalf of the workers involved, interviews conducted with workers on the spot, and so on. Most of these militant intellectuals were young; many of them were students, some of them associated with study groups working on Marxist theory outside the established research institutions, while others were academics involved in various social struggles including those within the academy. Hence, I decided to do some additional interviews in order to find out more about one of these groups, a group that was very close to one of the unions involved in an industrial dispute and which was also involved in the university struggle a year before that dispute.

In what follows, I want to provide a brief account of the formative experience of the struggle at the university and a constitutive role of the group of militant intellectuals in the process of construction of the class culture of workers that was elaborated during the subsequent strike, as reconstructed through interviews and materials available in blogs and newspaper articles.

A few years ago, the Faculty of Humanities at one of public universities in Slovenia announced a layoff or, as the management put it, a non-renewal of employment contracts with some 40 academics holding precarious jobs. The great majority of those laid off either accepted the argumentation provided by the management, which claimed that a reduction of the workforce is necessary due to the reorganisation as the old study programmes were replaced by new, so-called Bologna study programmes and, moreover, that rationalisation is imperative due to the diminishing amount of public financing, which was in turn dependent on the number of enrolled students. A small group of some half dozen, however, decided to put up a fight, claiming that the criteria for layoff selection were not clear and that layoffs were a purge of those most critical of the management as well as an act of disciplinarian rather than rationalisation of faculty's business activity. Indeed, in the year prior to the layoffs, many of those who had to leave had supported the students' struggle against the 'neoliberalisation of the university' and backed up a professor who was fired, which set them on a collision course with the faculty management.

It is, however, quite irrelevant whether the management targeted the layoffs in such a way as to get rid of the critics among the academic staff or the rationalisation was carried out strictly on 'economic' grounds. The important point that should not escape one's attention (as it did not escape one of my interviewees) is that a spontaneous effect of such 'production

of unemployment' is to discipline members of the faculty regardless of its 'true' motives. Nor should we lose from sight the fact that never-ending rationalisations demanded by cuts in public financing erode the potential for solidarity among members of the academic collective as they try to keep afloat their own courses or departments whatever it takes. This might just be the reason why a group of permanent staff and some precarious academic workers at the Faculty who managed to preserve their jobs wrote an open letter in which they expressed loyal support to the management and the Faculty (which the authors of the letter, perfectly in line with the framework presented above, referred to as the 'jewel of the humanities'), while denouncing the fired niggers.

As mentioned above, a small collective determined to counter the decision of the management stepped forward. They publicly accused the management of conducting a purge. They engaged their employer in direct talks, requesting clarification of the layoff criteria. Also, a court injunction was sought to reinstate them back on their previously held positions. Finally, students rallied in their support, demonstrating in front of the faculty building, sending emails to the management with requests to reconsider its decision, and so on.

From the point of view of their 'economic' results, one must certainly acknowledge the insignificance of the rebellion of the 'rationalised' academics and their supporters. However, their 'moral and political consequences', to paraphrase Marx (1979, p. 169), were more far-reaching.

First, although a small group of militants (with strong ties to a local anarchist group) was already formed before the layoffs by collaborating in extra-curricular activities, sharing similar theoretical and ideological positions, and reflecting on the relation between theory and practice, their active engagement considerably strengthened the bonds within the collective. In the words of one of my interviewees:

We should not forget [...] that the consolidation [of the collective] was based on the fact that we knew each other, that we collaborated in organisational work, and that our direct engagement revealed to us who is who. Many people also fell out of the group, in a way, and for different reasons. Because, say, they did not have the courage to combine and engage, [although] we were very close in terms of theory, but when it came to practice they backed off. [...] A dividing line formed there, very spontaneously, in a way, and some got scared and backed off.

Second, as the faculty-level union aligned with the management (although the national confederation supported the fired members of the staff and

demanded a resignation of the dean of the Faculty), a trade union that organises a core workforce in a major Slovenian company located in the same town as the university strongly supported the rebels. Although the union and the local anarchist group had already established connections before the struggle at the university took place, this support immensely strengthened the ties between academics and students, on the one hand, and workers, on the other. Since then, they always supported each other's actions by being present on the spot. What is more significant is that theory itself began to function as a bond between workers and intellectuals. Elaborating their political position, workers often turned to intellectuals with requests for advice and materials such as academic books and articles, which they usually debated and interpreted together. Granted, it was workers who made the first step when they demanded theoretical explanations of the struggles in which they were involved, but it is of no less importance that the intellectuals were there for them, providing them with conceptual tools that could be productively applied in their struggle and, even more importantly, which interpreted the conflicts in terms of class struggle.

It is, of course, impossible to determine precisely to what degree the intellectuals radicalised the workers, but the fact is that both groups soon became protagonists in a major class confrontation. This time it was up to intellectuals to back workers in their struggle. What made that clash even more important from the class point of view was, nevertheless, the involvement of another group, composed mostly of highly precarious low-paid immigrant workers working on visas (which means that they were bound to their particular employers) and employed with 'peripheral' firms that formally provided services to the 'core' firms while in fact lending them the workforce. Or, more precisely, what elevated this particular case of industrial strike to the status of a political conflict with far-reaching implications was the very unity of the two groups of workers, the core company workers and the workers working on visas.

The industrial strike was about improving the disastrous working conditions of the precarious workers, on the one hand, and, on the other, the prerogative of the management of the core firm to bring workforce from the so-called services providers to take up the strategic working places on particular machines that were previously reserved for high-skilled workers of the core company. Needless to say, competition from low-paid precarious workers would be detrimental for the bargaining positions of the core company workers. Hence, from the perspective of simple cost-benefit analysis it would probably make sense for the core company workers to try

to exclude precarious workers from their working places. This is, however, not what happened. As can be seen from their demands, the workers of the core company requested the exclusion of the firms supplying workforce to the core company from their workplaces, while at the same time pressing for a step-up in hiring from the pool of precarious workforce employed with peripheral firms. In addition, the core workforce supported both organisationally and financially the establishment of a trade union of workers employed with peripheral firms. As for the precarious workers who demanded a collective agreement backed by the core company as an agent with economic power, they contributed the numbers and a fighting spirit—they persisted on the company's courtyard under the hot August sun during the whole strike in defiance of the core company's management and their own bosses. Moreover, without their presence the dispute would be one of strongly organised and relatively well-paid workers demanding specific concessions from a state-owned company, a demand that would find little public support in a time of crisis.

Perhaps the most interesting role was the one played by organic intellectuals. Of course, the academics and students involved in the above-mentioned struggle at the university were not the only group involved in strike activities. Nevertheless, most of the collectives present on the spot were formed in activities linked in one way or another to theoretical production. The most important function of these intellectuals was to provide a liaison with the local community. First and foremost, the cause for mobilisation had to be presented to the public; also, the media spin directed from the central company management and the bosses of the peripheral firms had to be countered. Thus, a special magazine was printed and disseminated to the local community, alerting it to the super-exploitation of the precarious workers and to their demands; flyers were distributed to households in certain districts of the city; and a website containing information related to the strike as well as short interviews with the strikers was created. In addition, intellectuals helped workers in formulating their public statements and demands. Finally, traffic blockades were organised to get the additional attention from the public. This task had begun some time before the strike itself and was carried out with formidable success, as one of the involved organic intellectuals testified:

*Organic intellectual:* When it came to it, community was there for us. You had restaurants, you know, people bringing pots full of food to the workers. And no one asked them to do that, they came by themselves. People came

by to bring them water or just to join them in the traffic blockade. [...] They came by car to bring water or something to eat ... They just came by, simply to support us.

*Interviewer:* Would you say that the local community in general supported you?

*Organic intellectual:* Yes, very much.

Another task was to constantly press the authorities. Thus, workers and intellectuals wrote letters to the president of the Republic of Slovenia and the Labour Inspectorate, among others, forcing them to take a stand on the dispute. This task was also successfully accomplished, as some addressees of these letters publicly supported the cause of the workers. Finally, during public assemblies, which took place in the courtyard of the core company or in the nearby office of the union organising the core workforce, the intellectuals debated with workers about the developments of the strike and provided support and consultation if and when needed.

As regards its economic results, it cannot be claimed that the strike was a success for the precarious workers from peripheral firms. It is not my aim here to inquire into the reasons for such an outcome. Suffice it to say that efforts of the workers were fiercely opposed by capital, which launched a counteroffensive in which it employed all the means available, from threats and cajolery to laying off the striking workers and importing strike-breakers to the company. Nonetheless, the management of the core company was able to break the unity of the two groups of workers only after it stepped back and met the demands of its own employees while stubbornly refusing any direct negotiations with the employees of the peripheral firms. Still, some minor economic gains were realised on the part of precarious workers, such as stricter control of the legal constraints on the working hours as well as a step-up in hiring by the core firm from the pool of precarious workers.

One should, nevertheless, not overlook the fact that in the process of their struggle, precarious workers become visible; that they spoke out and fought back after years of being anonymously exploited; that they have shown us how even a workforce in position of extreme dependency in relation to their employers can break free from the oppression by joining forces, if only for a brief moment; and that they proved that a working collective fragmented along the national and confessional divides, employed with several dozens of different companies, which are in turn dependent on the whims of the core firm, can organise and bring the accumulation of capital in the core firm itself to a halt. These were the real achievements

of the clash that took place in those hot summer days. And it is of little doubt that the participation of the militant intellectuals who had been formed in the social struggles and theoretical confrontations either within or outside the walls of the university was an essential part of these achievements. It is, furthermore, up to such organic intellectuals to reflect upon and provide interpretation of the failures and accomplishments of this as well as other struggles against capitalist oppression and exploitation.

What is being put in jeopardy by subordinating the university to the requirements of capital are the very material conditions for the kind of theoretical production that is capable of reflecting on and positioning itself in class struggle, as well as the potential for the formation of working class organic intellectuals (be they students, teachers, or researchers) who can make these theoretical insights work in social struggles. To be sure, university is not necessarily the only and may even not be the most appropriate place for such theoretical and political undertakings. What university is and what use can be made of it will nevertheless be determined in the struggle.

To conclude, if there is indeed anything invaluable that may be lost to the corporatisation of the university, it is invaluable only from the perspective of the working class. For those parts of scholarly production that, from the point of view of capital, are either useful for accumulation or useless and assume the role of luxury production do not risk anything at all. Struggles against the neoliberal corporatisation of university are thus basically working-class struggles. Hence, one final observation has to be added to the above analysis. What makes militant intellectuals in my case study so remarkable is not only their pluckiness in resisting the 'production of unemployment' at the university that happened to be their own workplace or, for that matter, their own place of study, but also their ability to intervene in other social struggles as well. Conversely, if graduates can find jobs only insofar as they are able to directly serve the requirements of capital accumulation, it is impossible to counter the effects of the neoliberalisation of the university only by participating in university struggles. University struggles simply have to be part and parcel of class struggle as a whole if they are to be successful. And as such they are indeed worth fighting.

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# You're Either a Flower in the Dustbin or the Spark That Lights a Fire: On Precarity and Student Protests

*Mark Bergfeld*

*But who has ever seen a riot whose front ranks were made up of the elderly?*

*Alain Badiou, The Rebirth of History (2012, p. 22)*

## INTRODUCTION

If you were to ask a call centre worker in Glasgow, a cab driver in Berlin, and a bar worker in London what Johnny Rotten and Bruce Springsteen have in common, they would probably give some half-hearted, half-guessed answer containing the words *punk* and *no future*. Then all of them would rant about how shit *The Boss* is, and how they do not understand what Springsteen finds so great about New Jersey.

If you were to ask the same question to a vegetable vendor in Tunis and a computer programming student in Alexandria, they would probably light a cigarette, shrug their shoulders, and continue to make ends meet.

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To be fair, the common ground connecting Johnny Rotten and Bruce Springsteen is probably not the most pressing question in the life of (unemployed) graduates. With their university degree in their pockets they drive cabs, serve pints, sell vegetables, and sit at a phone 12 h a day, 6 days a week. The rent doesn't pay itself, the food on the table is not free, and their university degrees probably cost as much as *The Boss's* car, but are worth as much as Johnny Rotten's piss in a beer bottle.

Johnny Rotten's despair and hopelessness of being young and on the dole, and Bruce Springsteen's reason to rebel, are two sides of the same coin. And it is years after its release that Johnny's one-liner 'God Save the Queen' still expresses a new lost generation's anger with unemployment, and a system with booms and slumps: 'We're the flowers in the dustbin.' It is in the same vein that Bruce's *Dancing in the Dark* hints at the role recently played by graduates and young people in despair and on the dole: 'You can't start a fire, you can't start a fire without a spark.' In this chapter, I will try to demonstrate what precarity, unemployment, and underemployment bring to young university graduates and to contemporary activism.

In the first section, I draw out the different theorisations of precarity and the associated phenomena of precarisation and the precariat. While I dismiss the notion of the precariat as an emerging class, I advance the view that university graduates form a growing class fraction in the making. Unlike previous generations of students, they are from the outset part of a broader working class that facilitates new forms of activism.

In the second section, I look at the student movements in London in 2010 and the Quebec student strike to show how contemporary student movements place themselves squarely into the struggle of labour against capital, and thus reconfigure precarity as a form of activism. The UK movement did so insofar as it placed itself at the helm of the anti-austerity movement as a whole, while students in Quebec used proletarianised forms of action as they picketed university buildings and led student strikes.

The theoretical debates featured in this chapter informed the UK student movement in 2010 not only at the ideological level but also in terms of political strategies. The works of Guy Standing and Paul Mason, for example, were continuous reference points in analysing the struggle. Despite the passing of this moment, it is worth revisiting these debates, to my view, if we want to conceptualise the situation that the political and economic elites have not been able to resolve, and address some questions that need to be addressed in political praxis in a new round of university

struggles—which are never too far off: as I write these lines, students at the University of Amsterdam and students of the London School of Economics are occupying university buildings.

### A NEW CLASS IN THE MAKING?

Precarity is a concept widely associated with the generation that has graduated from university since the outbreak of the economic and financial crisis in 2007–2008. However, the terms *precarity*, *precariousness*, and *precarisation* have come to mean an array of things across different countries and industries, often depending on one's social and class position (see Raunig 2007; Mattoni 2012). Thus, they represent a contested discursive field in the social sciences and beyond.

With its origins in the Italian autonomist-Marxist and post-autonomist movements, this set of terms has been given widely diverse meanings, in today's media, political parties, and various communities of academics and activists, depending on whether it supports or contradicts their ideological predispositions or theoretical frameworks.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Great British Class Survey (see Savage and Devine 2013) highlights the relevance of these concepts, as it not only makes use of precarity but even features the *precariat* to designate one of the classes. Similarly, Guy Standing argues that we are dealing with a new 'class in the making' (Standing 2011, p. vii). According to Standing, the precariat is to be distinguished from the well-positioned salariat, professional, and technical workers—so-called proficians—and the ever-shrinking traditional working class made up of manual workers (Standing 2011, p. 7, 8). In fact, the precariat finds itself below all of these social classes, yet is neither what Marxists have labelled *lumpenproletariat* nor a type of underclass.

Yet this 'emergent class'-thesis has serious theoretical flaws. It is doubtful that the vast numbers of university graduates who cannot find jobs, let alone jobs corresponding to their qualifications, constitute an emerging social class, an alternative to the receding working class. In order to reject Standing, one only needs to be reminded of Marx's finding that class is a social relation between those who own the means of production—the bourgeoisie—and those who do not—the proletariat (see Seymour 2014, p. 36). One's class position then, according to Marx, is ultimately determined by one's relation to the means of production. Standing, on the other hand, argues that one's class position is defined

by one's position in the post-1945 welfare regime and by one's access to social, welfare, and civil rights—the social income structure. With the commodification of higher education and the replacement of grants with debt, students hence constitute a new class with a particular interest, according to Standing.

As a matter of fact, this raises the question whether Standing does not conflate class with citizenship rights. It is undeniable that citizenship rights mediate one's class position in society and have to be accounted for in any investigation into social structures and the mediations of class. However, one's inclusion or exclusion does not alter one's relation to the means of production.

Moreover, when analysing social classes, Marx makes the distinction between the class for itself and the class in itself. Objectively, workers constitute a class due to their relation to the means of production and to the fact that they have no control over how the surplus is managed in capitalist societies. Thus, the working class, or any other subaltern class, also needs to constitute itself as a political and cultural agent in order to become a class in itself. In making the distinction, Marx acknowledges that a unified working or subaltern class is not the norm but the exception, as it requires an act of collective consciousness. Hence, divisions, fragmentation, and stratification persist and create sectionalism within the workers' movement, making it difficult for workers to become a class in itself.

Simply put, Standing and the BBC survey re-label a growing section of the working class as 'the precariat'. Standing's empirical work shows that in the advanced capitalist nations of the Global North the manual working class is shrinking due to lean production techniques, new workplace organisation, and production methods, while the section of workers who are no longer employed on full-time contracts, enjoy less employment security, and have no trade union representation is steadily rising since the 1990s. While this acknowledges the fact that the working class—just as capitalism itself—continuously transforms itself, it does not mean that we are dealing with a new emerging class.

Mario Candeias and Eva Völpele provide a more modest starting point, one that possibly offers a more productive way to interpret the current transformations in the economic, political, and social sphere. For them, the young people in question constitute a class fraction in the making, one that constitutes the remaking of the working class both politically and culturally (see Candeias and Völpele 2014).

## GRADUATES WITH NO FUTURE

The rapid rise of zero-hour contracts under the Conservative–Liberal Coalition, the unprecedented growth of low-paid or unpaid internships among university graduates, and the highest rates of youth unemployment since the Thatcher years exemplify how precarity affects Great Britain’s students and young people.

The widespread use of unpaid and low-paid internship across different industries is a means of replacing full-time employees. According to Ross Perlin, internships transform the nature of education and work. On the one hand, education is shaped to the needs of the divisions of labour in society and of the dominant regime of accumulation (see Perlin 2011, p. xi). On the other hand, for ever greater numbers of university graduates saddled with debt (or, ‘indebted men’, to evoke Maurizio Lazzarato’s category (2012)), internships constitute the ‘main entry point into white-collar work’ (see Perlin 2011, p. xvi). This is paralleled by the increased casualisation of the higher education sector itself (see University and College Union 2015; Haiven 2014, p. 15; Giroux 2014), which makes postgraduate students and university researchers one of the most precarious sections of the working class in Britain. This reconfigures education and work into an individualising experience where the triad of education, internships, and work is seen as an investment into oneself, thus undermining the possibilities for collective action and organisation of these groups of workers.

Paul Mason’s concept of the graduate without a future mirrors some of these arguments, yet is far more optimistic. Mason’s argument is informed by the view that the traditional working class no longer takes the same form as it did under Thatcher, and that orthodox Marxist theories of class do not suffice to explain what is happening. Unlike previous generations of students, ‘[t]he graduates without a future’ who participated in the student protests of 2010 ‘were thoroughly embedded both in workforce and in low-income communities’, Mason observes (2011, p. 70). This is echoed in Giulio Calella’s argument that students are already precarious workers insofar as capitalism has ‘managed to lower the expectations of graduates regarding the use of their acquired competences in the labour market, their career paths and their income’. Moreover, ‘they are exploited as zero-cost labour in compulsory internships and in precarious jobs with no rights that they are forced to accept as a result of cuts in higher education funding. But above all they are a

commodity in the making' (Calella 2011, p. 95). Alex Callinicos writes in a similar vein:

[S]tudents merge into the much larger population of precarious workers doing part-time, low-paid, casual jobs. [...] One thing university expansion on a neoliberal basis has done, however, is to force increasingly large numbers of students to become casual wage labourers while they are studying. The precarity they experience then is a good preparation for the neoliberal world of work that awaits them when they graduate. (Callinicos 2006, p. 33)

The enormous expansion of education in the UK over the last quarter of the twentieth century meant that in 1971 there were 1.7 million students in further education and 621,000 in higher education. In 2009 this had grown to 3.5 million and 2.5 million, respectively. The massive expansion has undone higher education as a preserve of the elite in society. This transformation reflected the system's need for an increasingly educated workforce.

Undeniably it is still difficult for working-class children to go to university, but hundreds of thousands of working-class children do it. Over 30 % of students in higher education come from the lowest socio-economic classes, and nearly 90 % were educated at state schools. While in 1971 there were twice as many men in university as women, in 2006 there were more women than men in both further and higher education.

However, qualifications no longer meet what is out there. In 2011, one in five students left university without a job, and 200,000 successful school leavers did not get a university place. With the current economic crisis, the introduction of tuition fees of no less than £9000 and the government's austerity agenda, the treadmill of low-paid administration or call centre work has and will become the future of millions of young people. In Britain alone students entering university in 2012 could leave university with up to £53,000 of debt. Just over a quarter of workers in Scottish call centres have degree-level or higher qualifications. Working in largely low-paid, inflexible, and stressful jobs, the system turns these graduates and young adults into flowers in the dustbin, as Jonny Rotten so aptly describes in his song.

As a consequence, today's university students are part of yet unlike the traditional working class, as they are marked by a new set of contradictions.

First, they are more skilled than previous generations. Yet due to their over-abundance, capitalism renders them superfluous in the labour market. In other words, they find themselves in a structurally weak position in the

labour market despite their high skills. This is a particularly pessimistic insight if one believes that this form of ‘immaterial labour is hegemonic in the sense in which Marx proclaimed that, in nineteenth century capitalism, large industrial production was hegemonic’ (Žižek 2012). Hence, this ‘creative class’ (Florida 2002), ‘the cognitariat’ (Berardi 2003), or ‘cyber-tariat’ (Huws and Leys 2003) renders itself obsolete through its very own labour, its difficulty to organise, and the lack of representation by traditional labour parties and trade unions.

Second, these graduates grew up knowing the political and social benefits and promises of the post-World War II regimes, yet find themselves excluded from these perks which their parents’ generation still enjoys, creating one of Max Haiven’s ‘crises of imagination’ (Haiven 2014). Here, one should bear in mind that the relatively stable situation of the working classes in the advanced capitalist nations post-World War II has been the exception in the history of the working class and capitalism, rather than the norm.

Third, the ever greater degree of empowerment and autonomy achieved through the use of new information and communication technologies conflicts with their constant state of alienation and insecurity in work, education, and life itself (see Standing 2011, p. 16; Mason 2011, pp. 65–87). Unlike David Harvey, who would like us to believe that neoliberalism has eroded most social and place-based bonds and ties (see Harvey 2005), Mason points out that ‘the graduates without a future’ reconfigure old bonds and come to form new ones through the use of new information and communications technologies. For Mason, this ‘networked sociality’ is something to laud (2011, p. 81). It challenges trade unions, political parties, and other institutions that rely on older forms of sociality. To an extent, this offers a possible explanation as to why these ‘graduates without a future’ favour alternative forms of political engagement or worker representation, and why their relation to trade unions appears to be conflictual at times.

At another level, Perlin’s and Mason’s accounts disclose the extent to which young people’s transitory phase is no longer confined to their time at the university. With internships, underemployment, bogus self-employment, contractual work, and multiple jobs becoming the norm, young people’s phase of transition stretches beyond the confines of the university as they continue to be dependent on their parents’ financial assistance or state subsidies to be able to reproduce their labour power. Drawing on the work of Zygmunt Bauman, Henry A. Giroux argues that

today's youth have become 'outcasts and outlaws of a novel kind, cast in a condition of a liminal drift, with no way of knowing whether it is transitory or permanent' (Giroux 2014, p. 158).

By placing this in the context of a changing work regime, one starts to understand why this generation of university graduates has no future. Precarity is becoming synonymous to neoliberal employment relations with 'casual contracts' (University and College Union, 2015), insecure work (see Heery and Salmon 2000), vulnerability at work (see Pollert and Charwood 2009), precarious employment (see Wolfreys 2012), and the individualisation of the professional condition (see Sennett 1998). The change in employment relations has gone hand in hand with the reorganisation of work: lean production, outsourcing, just-in-time scheduling, and extended supply chains (see Moody 1997).

Precarity manifests itself through the growth of part-time work, zero-hour contracts, underemployment, and agency work. In the UK, more than 700,000 workers in the labour force are employed on zero-hour contracts (see Office for National Statistics 2015), while approximately 4.82 million—or one in five—workers are paid less than the living wage (see Markit 2012). Women, youths, migrants, and ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected by the precarisation of work (see Trades Union Congress, 2014b). A gendered and racialised division of labour and labour market with temporary, part-time, or zero-hour contracts and agency work concentrated in the retail, hospitality, and the care sector contribute to the vulnerable and precarious social status of women (see Trades Union Congress, 2014a). Youth unemployment stands above 22 %, while for Black British males it is 50 % (see Trades Union Congress 2012). The reason that unemployment is not higher can be explained with the extortionate growth of self-employment. In fact, self-employment is higher than at any point in the last 40 years, with income from self-employment having fallen by 22 % since 2008–2009 (see Office for National Statistics 2014).

### NEW FORMS OF PRECARIOUS PROTEST

Today's students and young people are already workers or will be tomorrow's workers. This is a different situation from the student revolt in Paris in May 1968, which detonated and inspired the Communist-led General Confederation of Labour to call its 10 million members into a general strike, bringing France to the brink of revolution (see Birchall 1987; Cohn-Bendit and Cohn-Bendit 2000; Harman 1998). In the nearly 50 years since



the events of May 1968, such a scenario has remained the exception rather than the norm. Instead, we have witnessed how student movements place themselves squarely in the struggle of labour versus capital, both symbolically and in their forms of action.

Moreover, the proletarianisation of students has meant that students have not only proclaimed solidarity with labour struggles, as in the case of the UK, Italy, and California, but also adopted proletarianised forms of struggle, as in Quebec. Characterised by student strikes, economic blockades, mass general assemblies, permanent organisations that resemble trade unions, and a high degree of mobilisation by high school students and urban youth, these movements have placed themselves squarely inside of labour struggles.

The anti-First Employment Contract protests are a key to understanding this. During the successful movement in France in 2006, which forced the conservative Chirac government to retreat over the flexibilisation of young employees' contracts, urban youths from the *banlieues* as well as the *lycée* students (A Level students) played a massive role inside of the protests. Instead of occupying buildings like university students, they forced their schools to shut down by blocking them with furniture, large objects, traffic cones, and picket lines.

Stathis Kouvelakis writes:

This time the school and university youth has acted as part of the world of labour. This [...] has, of course (in comparison with 1968) not only made easier the link with workers but, above all, has given this an 'organic' character, the character of the *building of a common struggle*, and not of an alliance or solidarity between separate movements.

It also explains the main form taken by the student movement itself, which brings it closer [...] to working class struggle: the 'blockade' (and not 'occupation', an interesting semantic distinction despite aspects that are often comparable) of *lycées* and universities that are seen as being a place and tool of labour (and being intended for it) whose production flow (lectures, examinations) is to be interrupted. (Kouvelakis 2006)

As the 2012 student strike in Quebec illuminates, when proletarian tactics such as a strike are adopted by a majority of students, they can be a powerful weapon. Students and their supporters ousted Liberal Premier Jean Charest, forced the withdrawal of Bill 78 and, most importantly, froze tuition fees. This victory came after 6 months of student strike involving more than 190,000 students. During the 6-month-long strike, many of

the demonstrations held on the 22 of each month reached up to 500,000 protesters. However, it was the roughly 180 local student unions organised in the student organisation CLASSE that carried the fight from day to day, shutting down the Port of Montreal, ministerial meetings, and nearly all classes in post-secondary education across the province. The high point of the ‘Quebec Spring’ has been the 350,000-strong demonstration in Montreal on 22 May. Following the biggest student demonstration ever, students called for a week of economic disruptions, bringing inner cities’ traffic to a standstill while also mobilising 30,000 parents in support of the students’ demands. The two largest public sector unions also called their membership on to the streets for the mobilisation. The looming summer break did not succeed in breaking the strike either. Instead, students continued to carry their message into the streets and to the election rallies.

With full privatisation looming, students didn’t want to see a repeat of their 2005 strike, which saw them go back to class empty-handed. Students have learnt some important lessons. They are organising on a departmental or faculty basis, which has strengthened the overall organisation of the strike.

When word spread, in 2011, that the Liberal government would raise university tuition fees by 75 % over the next 5 years, a coalition of roughly 44,000 students was already in place. After several days of action, meetings, and a host of other events, CLASSE decided to ballot its 44,000 members—roughly 2 % of all Quebec students—for an indefinite student strike. Soon, a required majority was won and students started to picket their departments, faculties, and universities.

In 2015, CLASSE had approximately 180,000 members; it has grown to be the largest Student Union in the federal state of Canada. This particular model of collective organising through a trade union-like body has meant that the strike has been enforced successfully and won a majority of students. Student demonstrations attended by 250,000–300,000 people, with an estimated student population of 450,000, have rocked Quebec on 22 March, 22 April, and 22 May.

In the face of state repression, the use of tear gas, shock grenades, the arrest of thousands of protesters, and riot police in college corridors, students didn’t buckle. Instead, they called upon workers and the neighbourhoods to join in nightly pots and pans protests, the casseroles. Charest’s unpopular Bill 78 acted as a catalyst for the student movement to turn into a popular movement. But student protesters weren’t campaigning only against tuition fees. Time and again, they argued that Finance Minister

Raymond Bachand's provincial budget of 2011–2012 would cut public and accessible healthcare, hydroelectricity, and education. In doing so, they placed themselves squarely inside of the labour movement and on the side of the oppressed. This only strengthened the determination of student strikers, leading them to forge new alliances. Students organised solidarity with locked-out Rio Tinto Alcan workers and with hundreds of Aveos employees who had lost their jobs. Protests also saw environmentalists and students come out together. They stormed the top floor of a conference centre in which Charest was to unveil further details of his 'Plan Nord', a mining plan that will see a 1.2-million-square kilometre stretch of indigent land be sold off to big business. At the same time, other students stormed a meeting of the Federal Immigration Minister Jason Kenney, best known for his anti-gay and anti-immigration stances. While messages of solidarity from trade unions were common, the most significant action was taken by a group of lecturers at the University of Quebec in Montreal when an injunction against the student strike was served and lecturers formed a picket line in front of the student picket line.

#### FIRST STEPS IN COALITION-BUILDING: THE UK STUDENT MOVEMENT

The UK student movement took off after an initial demonstration on 10 November 2010, called jointly by the National Union of Students (NUS) and the University and College Union (UCU), ended up with the occupation of the Conservative Party headquarters. While the movement only lasted for a month or so, until the vote on tuition fees on 9 December 2010, it bears some interesting lessons regarding the relationship between such new movements and traditional unions.

Following the occupation of the Conservative Party headquarters, the lecturers' union, the UCU, withdrew their support for the students. However, a number of branches and rank and file activists continued to support the students, even though these were accused of endorsing violence (see Solomon 2011, p. 13). The relationship reached its lowest point when the official body of the student movement, the NUS, refrained from calling a demonstration on the day of the vote and invited all unions to participate in a 'glowstick vigil', which they did, and left the students who marched on parliament without any significant resources or union backing. Arguably, this left the students vulnerable to the police crackdown, which ensued that day.

Nevertheless, the students who did demonstrate managed to get the London engineering branch of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, the London branch of the UCU—dominated by the UCU Left—as well as the Billy Hayes from the Communication Workers’ Union to speak at their rally. In doing so, the students struck a chord with the left-wing sections of the union movement. In the months to follow, Len McLuskey, the leader of Unite, Britain’s largest union, addressed the police in his speech at the Trades Union Congress demonstration on 26 March by saying: ‘Get your dirty hands off our kids!’ Most support remained at the rhetorical level. However, it is interesting to see that the unions preferred to cooperate with the official bodies rather than informal student organisations and activist groups. As Upchurch, Croucher, and Flynn argue at a much broader level:

However, unions’ traditional commitment to social democratic institutionalization will constrain their ability to be disruptive in both conventional and innovative forms. Leaders tied to traditional social democratic repertoires may be reluctant to adopt more radical tactics, and unions as organizations may lack capacity to alter ways of working. (Upchurch et al. 2012, p. 862)

Slavoj Žižek, however, argues that the majority of protests are made up of the ‘salaried bourgeoisie’ who are protesting against their own ‘proletarianisation’. He develops this further by arguing that unionised workers on full-time contracts receive a so-called surplus wage:

These are not proletarian protests, but protests against the threat of being reduced to proletarians. Who dares strike today, when having a permanent job is itself a privilege? Not low-paid workers in (what remains of) the textile industry etc, but those privileged workers who have guaranteed jobs (teachers, public transport workers, police). This also accounts for the wave of student protests: their main motivation is arguably the fear that higher education will no longer guarantee them a surplus wage in later life. (Žižek 2012)

## CONCLUSION

The total anarchy of the market means that millions of young flexible graduates with transferable skills are produced in universities in order to fill the no longer existing roles in the public sector. Expanding the knowledge base and investing in skills have become catchphrases in order to

adapt education to the needs of private business and the state. No longer are universities about cultivating flowers that will bloom in the so-called free world. It is about preparing us for reproduction; reproducing the labour power required by advanced capitalism.

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# Whither Critical Scholarship in the Modern University? Critique, Radical Democracy, and Counter-Hegemony

*Cerelia Athanassiou and Jamie Melrose*

## INTRODUCTION

Things are dire in the ivory tower. ‘What I would say about the university today’, Terry Eagleton gloomily observes, ‘is that we’re living through an absolutely historic moment—namely the effective end of universities as centres of humane critique, an almost complete capitulation to the philistine and sometimes barbaric values of neo-capitalism’ (Schad 2015, p. 43). Sir Keith Thomas notes several ways in which higher education is ‘under attack’. These include ‘the withdrawal of direct public funding for the humanities and social science’, ‘a highly-paid executive class’ running our universities, and ‘the rejection of the idea that higher education might have a non-monetary value’ (Thomas 2011).

A worrying corollary is also the case. Opposition within academia is at a profound impasse. There is no Laclauian ‘people’ possessing a demand (Laclau 2007, p. 74), opposed to the institutional status quo in British

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higher education. Neoliberal ascendancy and the *katabasis* of the university's mild social–democratic features are hardly disputable (see Evans 2004), yet where is the coordinated response on the part of university workers? Effective resistance has not been forthcoming (see Bhambra 2013). Despite counterblasts (see Collini 2011; Bailey and Freedman 2011) prompted by the latest round of neoliberal entrenchment (see Browne 2010; Willetts 2011), and despite a vibrant student-led attempt to resist this restructuring, ‘academics have not, on the whole, mounted strong collective resistance to what most of them see as detrimental changes [...]. The sad truth is that despite pockets of resistance and some concerted union action, British academics have acquiesced to harm’ (Gopal 2014).

Granted, dissensus in the modern university, as the case of Thomas Docherty (see Morgan 2014) and Marina Warner’s *J'accuse* (see Parr 2014) demonstrate, is not easy, nor is it fostered by conditions on the ground. Voices questioning the current direction of travel are marginalised. There is, though, an obvious but remarkable aporia here. Academics live at the apogee of critical thought: Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Pierre Bourdieu are some of the most utilised authors in the human sciences (see Times Higher Education 2009). Humanities-oriented staffrooms conform to a certain right-wing echo chamber’s picture of trendy leftie posties (see Heath 2015). Aware of his or her continental philosophy, sympathetic to the resurgence in feminism and to the depravities of US imperialism, the critical scholar is alive and well in academia. But this general bias is not reflected in any credible counter-hegemonic movement to reclaim the modern university along the lines of, for example, the student movement in Quebec (see Hallward 2012) or the 2010 student occupations (see Ismail 2011, p. 123). Critical scholarship is depoliticised. The subject of the critical scholar is in crisis.

Taking this impasse as our starting point, we specify what we mean by critique, before moving on to the example of the complex of criticality in the university. We then outline our understanding of counter-hegemony, a notion that offers a neopragmatic articulation of how critical scholarship can authentically build coalitions and foster subject positions. Drawing on the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, we hope to counter possible charges of, first, hyper-subjectivism (‘I established a theoretical model of thought. How could I have suspected that people would want to implement it with Molotov cocktails?’ [Adorno 1969, p. 10]), second, materialist justification (why would academics in positions of relative privilege resist the status quo?), and, third, fatalistic anti-volunteerism



(what can we do given the odds?). We then explicate the counter-hegemonic project. We focus on the university as a front, reimaginable as a heterogeneous civil society.

## CRITIQUE

We suggest deploying critique as an opening crutch to our discussion because it contains two important manoeuvres. Critique is finding fault with regard to a target plus. Not merely thumbs-up or thumbs-down, it reveals why its target—film, psyche, university, and so on—is so malformed. ‘A critique’, Foucault contends, ‘is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest’ (Foucault 1988, p. 154). In revealing the constructed specificity of its target, pointing out as opposed to simply offering up a negative judgement, critique has a transformative potential. It has a form of activity, ‘a matter of flushing out’ (Foucault 1988, p. 154). Such radical criticism aims ‘not simply to eliminate one or other abuse’ (Horkheimer 2002, p. 207), but also to inform an audience how something far less ridden with abuses is capable of being engendered. In this vein, Henry A. Giroux describes a ‘critical literacy’ entailing both a ‘rigor’, an ability to spot abuses, and an intervention-based reading of the critical target, an ethico-political commitment (2013).

Moreover, as Theodor Adorno posits, critique can be conceived transcendently, immanently, or dialectically. The transcendent critique ‘assumes as it were an Archimedean position’. It ‘speaks the language of false escape’, conjuring up an exo-reality, which negating the target of critique can bring about. On the other hand, immanent critique ‘cannot take comfort in its own idea’; it immerses itself in the object of its criticism, exposing that object’s intrinsic flaws: ‘the logic of its aporias’ (Adorno 1982, pp. 31–33). When faced with the object of their critique, immanent critics do not baulk from criticising it on and from the grounds on which both it and they are situated. Situation is not to be risen above, as is the case with the idealist imperative of transcendental critique (Marcuse 2001, p. 57).

Immanent critique, though, in its commitment to start from somewhere, can, for Adorno, give too much credit to the object of criticism, critique as a response to the object. More dialectically conceived, immanent critique maintains *creatio ex materia* while introducing an antipathy

to its error-ridden object, thus ensuring that critique is both part of that which it moves away from and that which it moves to. ‘The dialectical critic of culture’, writes Adorno, ‘must participate in culture and not participate. Only then does he do justice to his object and to himself’ (Adorno 1982, p. 33).

Today, this commitment is echoed, for example, by Peter Hallward’s notion of dialectical voluntarism (see Hallward 2009, p. 17). This non-reifying notion of critique can also be found in Jacques Derrida’s definition of deconstruction and in Judith Butler’s critique of sexuality. Derrida casts deconstruction as subjecting its target to a sustained bout of deflation: ‘One of the gestures of deconstruction is not to naturalize what isn’t natural, to not assume that what is conditioned by history, institutions or society is natural’ (Dick and Kofman 2002). Suggesting an immanent-dialectical approach, Derrida’s strategic suspension of the certainty of the object of criticism, the removal of its taken-for-grantedness, is not the same thing as the emancipatory displacement of the object by an *ex nihilo* other. ‘[T]he very condition of a deconstruction’, Derrida observes, ‘may be at work in the work [...]’. One might then be inclined to reach this conclusion: deconstruction is not an operation that supervenes afterwards, from the outside, one fine day’ (Derrida 1989, p. 73). The internalist and the externalist fold in on one another. Butler notes how criticism ‘presumes [...] that to operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of domination’ (Butler 1990, p. 42).

This tradition of critique we have sketched and associate ourselves with haunts critical theory in the academy. Opposed to neoliberal structures, critical scholars, in their institutional form as academic actors, are presumably aware of their embeddedness. They must proceed from the given to effect the ‘new’, be that given the crony capitalist confines of the academic publishing industry (see Monbiot 2011) or philistine funding mechanisms (see J. Gill 2014). Or are they aware? Are they cognizant of the commodification of their work into objects of exchange? Are critical academics engaged in the recognition of their situation that takes its terms immanently dialectically into account? In the case of organisations in the UK opposed to current policy in higher education—the Campaign for the Public University and Council for the Defence of British Universities, for example—these groups are external sources of dissent, not designed to alter academic behaviour, to mobilise and effect radically different relations of university production. While representatives from such organisations may point to salient reasons for their current status—membership

or lack thereof, misconstrual of purpose, professional responsibilities, and so on—the absence of frank critique makes it hard to see how demand-orientated struggle is to be engendered unless the organisational aspect of political struggle is stressed more coherently by those who bemoan neoliberalism and all its works.

Present here on our part is a certain expectation. Of course, expectation can be a self-defeating state of mind. To have a theoretical disposition; to have an affirmative relationship with a body of propositions; to have bookshelves groaning under the weight of Marx, Deleuze, Chomsky, and Butler; to write an opinion piece in an establishment organ—none of these guarantees that a certain set of action-directed praxis ensues. One can recollect the famous case of Adorno in 1968, or the more prosaic example of Labour politician and academic Tristram Hunt crossing a picket line to lecture on Marx (see [BBC 2014](#)). There is no necessary self-contradiction at play here. There is a very tenuous link between philosophical conceptions and concrete political attitudes (see Foucault [1984](#), p. 374). The issue, then, is one of reflexivity. Are critical scholars aware of what they are doing, not in the sense that they are fully conscious of their actions, but rather, are they aware that what they are doing is reproducing the status quo? Questioning is important, we contend, for critical literacy; complacency, to be avoided.

### CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP: STATE OF PLAY

The neoliberal reform of British universities has been on the government agenda for a while, specifically since the mid- to late 1990s (see Callinicos [2006](#)). In the face of such developments within the university, critical scholarship has been steadily developing an agenda of reclaiming space for critique. Stefan Collini's counterblasts concerning higher education policy (see [2010](#), [2011](#), [2013](#)) are indicative of a consensus in critical academic circles on the shortcomings in higher education. Equally, however, Collini's case is ultimately disingenuous in its inability to harness and use the necessary tools for counter-organising. It fails to go beyond general calls for outrage at what is being imposed by a seemingly distant and all-powerful government. Despite demonstrating a clear awareness of the shortcomings (and their complexity), the sense is that, nevertheless, they originate in successive governments' attempts to commercialise universities, and that is where critique is levelled. There is no sense in this critical narrative that the commercialisation of British universities does not

proceed in one fell linear swoop from a defined ‘root cause’ situated in the upper echelons of higher education governance, but rather operates and is implemented at a multiplicity of levels, middle management within universities being a key such level: one could draw attention to deciding and implementing budgets that dictate redundancies, casual contracts, and privileging the chasing of research grants over more ‘mundane’ teaching. Where is the sense that this managerial aspect of the critical scholar’s institutional existence has to be reconciled with critical consensus on the status quo in higher education?

Our very own School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies (SPAIS) milieu of the University of Bristol can point to a tradition of critical inquiry, with the development of specialised courses that emphasise critical approaches to mainstream teaching, as well as carving out a space for research projects that do not conform to mainstream strictures. This space focuses on the value of ‘activist [...] scholarship’ (Herring 2006), the pedagogical need for universities that provide alternative modes of thought (see McLennan 2008), as well as the crucial role for ‘public intellectuals [to] resist [...] global violence’ (Pollock and Evans 2013). This is not intended as a grand project, but rather as a necessary attitude as regards change.

At the time of the student occupations at Bristol, there was significant worry among critical scholars about the policies being rushed through (see McLennan 2010; Vostal et al. 2011) and university management’s disregard for dissent. In the spirit of opposition at the time, there were the possible outlines of a common front on campus, forming hitherto underdeveloped alliances between staff and students; in a nutshell, a common counter-hegemonic cause against the ‘repugnant philosophy underlying the Browne Report’ (Thomas 2011, p. 10) and its recommendations of fees and cuts. And yet, 5 years after this moment, there has been no credible staff effort to build a front. We have experienced in our own institution a prevailing disregard for local politics and ‘stirring up trouble’ on one’s doorstep. The awareness of and commitment to concepts such as reflexivity in relation to research fieldwork (see Higate and Cameron 2006), the questioning of the wider orientation of international studies (see Rowley and Weldes 2013), or the preoccupation with ‘counter-hegemony’ (Christie 2010, p. 171) stand in contrast to any critique of neoliberalism’s effects on the university doorstep.

In 2012, in SPAIS, this took the form of a redundancy of a long-serving staff member, a ‘freeing up’ of space to hire more teaching staff on a more

'flexible' basis, required to manage funding streams that vary from year to year. Effectively, there was a lack of 'critical' solidarity: a defensive campaign was the order of the day (see The 'Keep Maggie' Campaign Group 2012). SPAIS are not alone in confronting such challenges, but such challenges illustrate how local action is not just about localised outcomes, and thus particular and distinct from a more general critical position concerning higher education, but also about resisting the wider forces at work in the specific misfortune. This is a connection that critical scholars fail to recognise when they disassociate themselves and their politics from specific cases that are preferably seen as personal or one-offs.

### COUNTER-HEGEMONY

We have identified a key challenge: mediating critical thinking with radical political activism and vice versa. In this respect, counter-hegemony is a useful concept, as it grasps 'practices which [...] disarticulate the existing order so as to install another form of hegemony' (Mouffe 2005, p. 18). We argue that counter-hegemonic intent links in well with the current conjuncture in universities, in which there is plenty of opposition but no sedimented opposition (see Scott 2014), no profound course of action in front of any 'us'. Theoretically, it clarifies the non-essentialist, open notion of identity integral to the critical tradition. To be clear, campus hegemony belongs to what Laclau and Mouffe describe as 'basically metonymical' (2001, p. 141). One can think of how a vice chancellor in a university becomes, rather than simply represents, the university in discourse. Undoing the ties that bind managers as universities, students as consumers, academics as producers of commodities, and so on, and thus prefiguring a dissociative alternative to these associations is a first step in any form of campus resistance: it is possible to redraw the naturalised linkage, for example, of management with the university. In terms of the lack of critical action that we have identified, in counter-hegemonic efforts, the centrality of the construction of a subject gives lie to passivism. Counter-hegemony is predicated on bringing to bear intensional political activism.

Counter-hegemony disregards a type of 'sociologico-teleological hypothesis' (Laclau 2000, p. 45). This hypothesis claims that we are either to be doomed or to be saved, to be limited to or liberated from our current conjuncture, on the fatalistic basis of external factors outside our ken (i.e., the enlightened despotism of rational university managers or a Labour government). Moreover, it holds no truck with a Jacobin decisionism that

our oppositional approach may imply; that is, ignoring conditions on the ground in order to advance righteous ethical principles, believing that if enough agents behave as they only would if granted the opportunity to, good will follow. Instead, ‘power and political mediation are inherent to any universal emancipatory identity’ (Laclau 2000, p. 46). In Laclau and Mouffe’s phraseology (2001, pp. 178–179), there is ‘no common core’ at which ‘a priori agents of change’, such as the university worker unvarnished or the untainted undergraduate, along with ‘privileged points and moments of rupture’, such as the demotion of leaders or thwarted strikes, coalesce.

As expounded by Laclau and Mouffe, counter-hegemony assumes conflict, difference, and the desire to deal with plurality by promoting a particularity: for example, in the context of higher education, supporting the student-led campaign to abolish tuition fees, or furthering staff-backed initiatives for more resources in terms of pay and pensions, while being aware that in these initiatives success can only be achieved at the cost of another marked interest, the university managerial class or the government. This pro-particularity, backing a certain horse, is, however, not tantamount to being besotted with the individuality in question, with the potential universal status of the particularity. For example, one cannot, in the case of staff and management within a university, suggest that these identities are truly self-serving, or that one group has a monopoly on truth. Rather, the counter-hegemonic conception of the political has the Machiavellian insight (see Mouffe 2005, p. 7) that if a we wants to formulate a we, a professed multiplicity of agents in a plural war of interests, we can effect stability in this flux. We can impose our will upon other wills in a territory or time, thus engendering ‘a series of universalising effects’ (Laclau 2000, p. 49). ‘Investment is the cornerstone’, Laclau notes, ‘of the operation called hegemony’ (2000, p. 85).

In developing a neo-Gramscian understanding of specific groups’ political articulation of differing demands and outlooks to achieve dominance, Laclau and Mouffe ‘see hegemony as a theory of the decision taken in an undecidable terrain’ (2001, p. xi). Contrary to common-sense mantras, alternatives always exist; any totality is nothing more than an ever-changing constitution. Thus, hegemonic constructs such as the current mode found in higher education have to be seen as partial if in fact dominant. Their contestability is not straightforward and external, as implied in the sociologico-teleological normative framing, but it is within the medium of the hegemonic interplay that we find the tools to challenge the

hegemonic order and to build our alternative. One does not leave or fall back from the university front because it is lost or unintelligible—‘even in order to differ, to subvert meanings, there has to be *a* meaning’ (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p. 112)—if one is adhering to a different interpretation, one stays there and works with what one has got.

In recent times, there have been attempts to build counter-hegemonic projects, to construct a subject. In Laclau and Mouffe’s vocabulary, this would be akin to a chain of equivalence, something to which Hallward refers with regard to the successful CLASSE student mobilisation in Quebec (see Hallward 2012). Forming a ‘collective will’, drawing together groups opposed to the ‘they’ (Mouffe 2005, pp. 52–53) of our aloof neo-liberal managerial adversaries, is the task at hand. At first, this may appear trite. If you are opposed to how the university is being run, you agitate for all individuals and groups—unions, societies, departments, and activist groups—to form a common front: ‘[t]he presence of the [counter-hegemonic, radical] imaginary as a set of symbolic meanings which totalize as negativity a certain social order [...] essential for the constitution of all left-wing thought’ (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p. 190).

Yet there is a radical democratic understanding of a robust civil society that qualifies such constructions of them and us. When Mouffe describes legitimising enemies (see Mouffe 2005, p. 52), that is, the agonistic mode of conceiving political contestation, she admits of a conflict that is only partially halted by the type of hegemonic commitment that we have discussed. Political conflict is also predicated on heightened debate being taken as the norm of things, an understanding that competing groups and individuals are in it together as much as they are legitimately opposed. One is not violating any code if one wants to draw attention to and organise around difference; acknowledging difference is not antithetical to constructive dialogue, nor is it a personal statement on an individual’s quintessential being (as vice chancellor or professor). In acknowledging difference, our universities are political spaces where victories are not the vanquishing of a deadly foe, but the establishment of a loser for the time being: ‘we have to accept that every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power, and that it always entails some form of exclusion’ (Mouffe 2000, p. 104).

In establishing our counter-hegemonic collectivity, the formation of a democratic equivalence, which relies on the construction of a new ‘common sense’, we would expect to see a shift in the identity of the different individuals involved. The coming together of our staff–student group is no

given experience. The demands of each are articulated equivalently with those of the others, so that, in the words of *The Communist Manifesto*, ‘the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all’ (Marx and Engels 2012, p. 62). Our equivalence is relational: built on the recognition that demands are not inalienable rights but ones that have to be fought for, bringing with them not only many possibilities but also responsibilities. Work is required to construct the substance of counter-hegemony; this is not a quality that exists, but one that has to be made. It is not found. Complacency in counter-hegemonic discourse, as in the case of critique, is not to be countenanced.

### HOW DOES THIS WORK IN THE ACADEMY?

Crucially, reflexivity with regard to the critical scholar’s implication in the system of neoliberal higher education is lacking. Where critique of the status quo in British higher education is currently externalised, critical scholars could instead focus their attention on how the neoliberal complex maps locally. This requires willingness to act. Contrary to suggestions that newer thinking is required—that universities should don more radical identities (see Castree 2010, p. 240), or that academics should resist neoliberalism’s imposition of new modes of labour (see R. Gill 2014) with their own versions of democratic utopianism (see Castree 2010; Giroux 2002; Collini 2013)—the tools to be used in the rethinking of the university can be found, reformed, and re-used in the infrastructures already existing, such as universities’ committee governance and trade union-centred collective bargaining. We are bound to start from somewhere, from within Butler’s matrix of power, that which we find ourselves in, and work from there. The question is not what project of reformation we apply going forward, but rather whether we decide to go forward, articulating the path as we traverse it.

This requires a step away from current tendencies to disallow the subject of the critical scholar any power, tendencies that render this figure a passive recipient of decisions. This is not to dispute the dire conditions defining the working life of increasing numbers of academics, nor the necessity of bringing these working conditions to light (see R. Gill 2014); it is to challenge a victimisation that denies the possibility of change. Where the subjectivity of the victim prevails, problems are individualised, both in their impact and in the ‘how’ of their solutions. No matter that when analysed, in the re-tweeting or sharing of a generalised rant about the



modern academia, through anecdotes mentioned in passing to colleagues on the way to a school meeting, there lies the grounds for a clear common understanding that there are serious structural issues to be overcome if one's, and others', situation is to be improved.

The realisation, then, of the critical scholar as a political figure is required, where critique is mobilised for the formation of a counter-hegemony that aims to be general, and finds alliances that reach beyond the immediate interests of the academy, admitting wider concerns and struggles. As in the case of the student occupations, both past and present, that have been fought not only on student issues but also in solidarity with teaching staff (see University of Bristol Students' Union, 2014) and wider struggles in neoliberal society (see University of Bristol Students' Union 2010), there would be recognition that the university is not defined by a specific constituency; rather, it is composed of multiple subjects, voices, and interests; a civil society that exists as a collectivity of individual moments (see Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p. 105) that can be seized upon in aid of counter-hegemonic re-articulation.

Political accountability is central to the formation of the kind of counter-hegemonic civil society we want to outline here. As must be clear by now, our complaint is not necessarily with the content of critical scholars' questioning of contemporary higher education, but with the lack of follow-through on this at all levels—collegial, departmental, university-wide. As Andrew McGettigan observes, 'over the last few years, attention has been on fees and loans, and understandably so, but there is a pressing need to assert democratic governance at individual institutions' (McGettigan 2014). The general problematic of the neoliberalised academy can manifest and be opposed to in local struggles to re-assert democratic control. Political awareness of the potential offered by critical scholarship—to relate the particular struggles of the workplace to the material conditions of higher education, and beyond—should be a key starting point for overcoming the critical impasse we have identified here.

## CONCLUSION

As things stand, there has not been any real effort to deploy counter-hegemony, where critique would be used to highlight key aspects of negativity so as to enable new orders to be built. We—as a collectivity of critical scholars, a collectivity that we are adamant has to be articulated rather than assumed—have remained static in relation to the common sense

that the neoliberal university is a heartless business, that it builds itself on exploiting the most vulnerable, and that it undermines pedagogy as well as research. We have shown how such a constellation of radical knowledge and complete lack of action can hold strong, even in the face of aggressive efforts of the neoliberalisation of education in the UK.

If critical scholarship and its dedication to progressive change can only be articulated in research grants or to progress one's career; if it cannot be brought back to one's immediate reality so as to challenge the very same relations of power and their more parochial effects; if it fails to expose its own internal contradictions so as to move beyond them—then it cannot have any value at all. The complicity of critical scholarship in the higher-education establishment has to be recognised. This would be done not just through apologetic awareness of the existence of contradictions (see Research and Destroy, 2009), but through the willingness to hold oneself accountable in forums of equal participants who can begin together to redefine and re-make the conditions on which the university is built. The crisis of critical scholarship is one of depoliticisation. Instant change cannot be expected, nor is it easy to confront one's own implication in a system to which one is also totally opposed. But if critique of the neoliberal university is to mean anything, this is the work that has to be done.

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## Academics as Workers: From Career Management to Class Analysis and Collective Action

*Hrvoje Tutek*

It is a well-known story: even before the sovereign debt crisis hit the European periphery and austerity was established as the dominant model of handling it, the conservative (fiscal) policies systematically applied across peripheral and core states had already begun treating large portions of state budgets as afflictions—they were there to be cut. With the financial crisis and its global spread, even the systems of tertiary education, despite being hailed earlier as fundamental pillars of development and driving motors of emerging ‘knowledge economies’, quickly became just another uncomfortable figure in state budget tables.<sup>1</sup> Encompassing a

<sup>1</sup>The European University Association report from January 2011 provides an overview of the severe budget cuts to public higher education across Europe, with peripheral countries hit the hardest: in Latvia, the higher education budget was first cut by 48 % in 2009, and then later in 2010 by another 18 % following recommendations by the IMF. In Greece, the government set cuts of 30 % as a target. Substantial budget cuts around or more than 10 % occurred in Romania, Estonia, and Lithuania, cuts of between 5 % and 10 % in Ireland, and

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shift in public education towards ‘market-based self-sustainability’ (Žitko 2012, p. 19) and the internationalisation of tertiary education systems, the pre-crisis ‘knowledge society bubble’ burst, and a halt was put to (at least nominally) expansive policies prevalent earlier<sup>2</sup> in this sector.

This major halt has, however, not been a symptom of wider systemic failure and has not provoked a consistent re-evaluation of the dynamics and consequences of the dominant regime of capitalist accumulation globally. As we well know, the system established during the last several decades remains tenaciously in place despite its crises and the socio-economic model of the ‘knowledge society’ is still current, both as an ideological compulsion (as the political elites still invoke the well-worn clichés of ‘innovation’, ‘entrepreneurial spirit’, ‘competitiveness’, ‘excellence’ when referring to the university’s role in helping to bridge the economic crisis) and as an institutional framework (as the entrepreneurial university proceeds with its organisational procedures-cum-disciplinary regimes of flexibility, mobility, and quantification of excellence—on top of maintaining its dedication to the production of intellectual property in place of what used to be conceived as ‘knowledge’). In her contribution to this volume, Danijela Dolenc concisely describes the transformation.

It is, however, unclear how the university should fulfil its role, even functionally reduced, under drastic measures that characterise the age of austerity: slashing of funds, dropping or stagnating faculty salaries,<sup>3</sup> moratoria on further employment in public higher education, underfunded research

up to 5 % in the Central and South Eastern Europe—Czech Republic, Croatia, Serbia, and Macedonia. Additionally, in countries like Hungary governments have discarded previous commitments to increase funding (see EUA 2011).

<sup>2</sup>OECD reports indicate that public spending on tertiary education increased in most OECD countries between 1995 and 2008 (see, e.g., OECD 2011). Simultaneously, however, the increase in the number of students in tertiary education systems has been dramatic and the costs of tertiary education also rose steadily (see Altbach et al. 2009).

<sup>3</sup>This has been a long-term trend. The UNESCO report states: ‘It is no longer possible to lure the best minds to academe. A significant part of the problem is financial. Even before the current world financial crisis, academic salaries did not keep up with remuneration for highly trained professionals everywhere. Now, with tremendous financial pressures on higher education generally, the situation will no doubt deteriorate further’ (Altbach et al. 2009, p. 92). In the UK, for example, ‘academic pay has fallen in relative terms. In 1981–2001 non-manual average earnings rose by 57.6 % after inflation. In the same period the salary of academics at the top of the Lecturer B scale in the old universities rose by 6.1 % above inflation, and that of academics on point 6 of the senior lecturer scale in the new universities by 7.6 % after inflation’ (Callinicos 2006, p. 16). In the USA, ‘a recent study by the American Association of University Professors shows that even full professors are underpaid in comparison to non-academic positions in similar fields’ (CFHE 2015).

projects, and unavailability of secure employment create adverse structural conditions for any type of work, including the dynamic production of ‘innovation’ seen as the entrepreneurial university’s *raison d’être*. In an attempt to resolve this contradiction and keep extracting value from public universities in accordance with the neoliberal ideological demands, the austerity governments are left only with the option to intensify the single-minded politics of ‘new public management’ put in place globally throughout the last couple of decades. Structurally short of alternatives, they resort to corporate strategies of ‘streamlining’, ‘raising efficiency’, and maintaining pressure to commodify services offered by the university and transfer costs to students and their families.

Having this continuum in mind, we should remember not to conceive the age of austerity as an anomaly or a short-term adjustment. It is simply a contingent recent development—an intensification, as it happens—of an ongoing process. Symptomatically, the 2009 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report prepared for the World Conference on Higher Education examining global trends in higher education since 1998 does acknowledge the still fresh financial crisis, but the austerity it mentions after examining pre-crisis ‘trends in the financing of higher education’ is older: ‘The immediate effect of these trends on the financing of higher education (again, varying by country) is a state of austerity in universities, postsecondary education institutions, and national higher education systems’ (Altbach et al. 2009, p. 70). There is also nothing geographically or geopolitically specific to austerity, as the UNESCO report states that these higher education conditions are ‘nearly universal’ and occur throughout the world-system (despite the fact that they occur at their most crippling in sub-Saharan Africa, developing countries, and countries ‘in transition’) (Altbach et al. 2009, pp. 69–70). Among their consequences, which is key to our topic here, the report mentions the problem of ‘restive and otherwise unhappy faculty’, as well as ‘faculty “brain drain” as the most talented faculty move to countries with fewer financial troubles’ (Altbach et al. 2009, p. 70).

It is on these two problems and the way they are conceptualised when they appear as problems of academic labour that I would like to focus here. UNESCO’s vaguely conceived ‘restiveness’ is a result of a combination of well-known factors: the flexibilisation of academic employment,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>It is often said that such developments affect young academic workers the hardest, but there are many casually employed academic workers who perform low-paid fixed-term contract or even free work well into their thirties, forties, and later, which also suggests that this is not a new development (see Courtois and O’Keefe 2015; Auriol 2010).



undercompensation, as well as a new regime of institutional discipline within the academic field that brings about a framework of practical limitations on research and teaching that appears as costs are cut and institutional procedures and technologies ‘streamlined’ under the watchful eye of expanding university administration (see Callinicos 2006; Martin 1998; Nelson 2011). The ‘restiveness’ under intensified austerity can then easily, if other conditions are met, turn into increased ‘brain drain’ (see Theodoropoulos et al. 2014), that old problem of structural asymmetry between the periphery and the core of the world-system. Comprehensive statistics on the movements of academic workers in the post-crisis period are hard to find, but if some of the most radical austerity projects in the EU periphery are anything to go by, it can be empirically confirmed that austerity politics significantly contributes to the intensification of emigration of academic workers from the periphery. In Greece, for example, the already high rates of émigré scientists rose catastrophically during the crisis, by 70 % according to some estimates (see Tzanos 2013), and the Baltic countries record similarly unprecedented emigration spikes and brain drain migration patterns: ‘At the peak of the crisis (2009–2010), emigration reduced the size of Latvia’s population by 3.6 per cent and Lithuania’s population by 3.3 per cent.’ (Juska and Woolfson 2015, p. 236) This, of course, further compounds the situation in which, according to a 2010 Ohio State University study by Bruce Weinberg referred to in *Nature* magazine’s report on global mobility of scientists, one in eight of the world’s most highly cited scientists from 1981 to 2003 ‘were born in developing countries, but 80 % of those had since moved to developed countries (mostly the United States)’ (Van Noorden 2012, p. 327).

But, of course, if we insist on the common underpinnings and the universal spread of recent transformations in tertiary education systems around the globe, it must be said that the flight of academic workers from the periphery to the core is far from a flight to safety. Along with the already mentioned changes in the institutional conditions of academic work, there is not only the problem of casualisation of labour but also structural unemployment: according to an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study, OECD countries have seen a 40 % increase in the number of doctorate holders in 2006 compared to 1998 (see Auriol 2010). At the same time, the number of available positions in higher education and research either declined or stagnated. According to the same study, the general unemployment rates of 1990–2006 doctoral graduates are low and ‘do not exceed 2 % or 3 %’, but ‘a non-negligible share of

doctorate holders also seem to be employed in non-related or lower qualified occupations' (Auriol 2010, pp. 11, 14). For some fields, especially the humanities, the unemployment rates are much higher, and many doctorate holders find themselves without permanent jobs well after they obtain their degrees: 'In 2006, five years after the receipt of their doctoral degree, more than 60 % in the Slovak Republic and more than 45 % in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Spain were still on temporary contracts. Yet permanent engagements accounted for over 80 % of all jobs in almost all countries' (Auriol 2010, p. 13). Having this in mind, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the influx of young researchers from the periphery, as states brutally cut their budgets in compliance with the demands of the age of austerity, might exacerbate these already existing issues in the countries of the centre. 'Knowledge economies', it would seem, structurally limit production of knowledge.

These issues are, however, rarely discussed in their systemic dimension. The movement of academic labour is most often conceived as a consequence of the logic of meritocracy and professional ambition,<sup>5</sup> which it often is, but identifying academic labour mobility solely with advancement of individual careers can be used cynically to justify structural asymmetries in the world-system, workforce flexibilisation in the systems of tertiary education, as well as to hide the precarious and often highly undesirable side of contemporary academic worker's potentially forced mobility. Because, as it is well known, a respectable academic career strives towards excellence, and excellence is from a peripheral perspective predominately found abroad. So it follows that mobility is nothing but a measure of quality. This manoeuvre not only sidesteps the discussion of adverse effects of brain drain, but also represents flexibilisation in the new academia as a form of liberation, an enticement to pursue seemingly delocalised excellence more vigorously.

Similarly to the discourse of mobility, when viewed in their structural dimension, the supplementary discourses of career management and excellence that are often used in the new academia can be observed as mechanisms of translation of social (structural) problems into the language of (work) ethics and personal responsibility. If Barbara and John Ehrenreich are right

<sup>5</sup>The above-mentioned *Nature* report features a graph showing that foreign postdocs outnumber foreign professors in almost all countries included in the GlobSci survey 'Restless Youth', thus completely disregarding the changing structural conditions of academic work between generations and naturalising a historical trend (see Van Noorden 2012).

in their thesis that significant portions of the twentieth century professional-managerial class—which academic workers belong to—are undergoing disintegration under pressure of the new regime of accumulation, technological changes, and shifted balance of power between labour and capital (see Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 2013), learning and utilising these languages by members of the transforming professional-managerial class can help with an effective socialisation into the new paradigm of capitalism, though at the price of lost (relative) autonomy which was once their class reward.

If, however, a more critical position is to be assumed, real subsumption of the ‘temple of the spirit’ (Krašovec 2011) and ‘life of the mind’ under capital has brought about conditions of precarity where affected academic workers face labour problems without available strategies or clearly visible organisational means to address those problems in their systemic dimension. Certainly, the professional-managerial class ‘needs to start from an awareness that what has happened to the professional middle class has long since happened to the blue collar working class’ (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 2013, p. 11), as the academic professions have been affected by gradual proletarianisation. But if this is so, it is also important to develop means of addressing the residual ideological conception whereby the academic profession is conceived as a ‘gentlemanly calling’ (Halsey 1992), romanticised as ‘vocation’, and naively accepted as a self-regulating meritocracy. Academic workers have no other options if they are to resist the adverse conditions they face in the workplace but to start acting as workers: to develop consciousness of the structural position they occupy within the mode of production, and to act collectively in order to gain control over the workplaces, professions, and social spheres that belong to them.

What I would like to concentrate on next, however, are examples that go in the opposite direction. The institutional protocols of the labour market and the ideology of neoliberal capitalism, as mentioned, demand learning the language of career management and mobility. Under the regime of often quite extreme precarity, modes of adaptation develop that steer academic workers towards an effective transition into a new contingent class form, and away from workplace organisation and development of antisystemic political potential.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>I am using ‘antisystemic’ here in Immanuel Wallerstein’s sense of ‘antisystemic movements’: ‘These movements were all antisystemic in one simple sense: They were struggling against the established power structures in an effort to bring into existence a more democratic, more egalitarian historical system than the existing one’ (Wallerstein 2014, p. 160).

A recent example from the EU periphery can be useful to demonstrate and exemplify one local institutional process by which a structural problem is ideologically translated into a problem of management, and a properly political effort necessary to address it is supplanted by a technical policy recommendation: in 2013/2014, the Croatian government Agency for Science and Higher Education initiated a reaccreditation procedure for some of the public institutions in the country and consequently tasked an expert panel of mostly international academics with reviewing them. One of the evaluated institutions was the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the largest faculty at the University of Zagreb, both by the number of students and employed academic workers. As a part of the evaluation procedure, the expert panel held a large meeting with the institution's junior staff, the majority of them early- to mid-career academics on fixed-term contracts responsible for both teaching and research. Many of them had been first employed in the expansionary pre-recession 'knowledge society' boom, signed 6-plus-4-year contracts which are now close to completion, and spent a considerable amount of time working and building careers in an academic job with reasonable security, at least in comparison to the trends which have become the norm elsewhere. However, in 2014 a freeze on hiring was imposed by the government in an attempt to reduce budget deficits. Thus for the junior academic workers whose contracts were near completion—hundreds of them—the prospect of unemployment suddenly turned very real, and this in a peripheral EU country plodding through its sixth year of recession, with registered unemployment rate of around 17 %. In the review meeting, the young academic workers explained the situation to the international expert panel in an openly emotional and quite typical discussion where a number of distressed comments mostly blamed the state or successive governments for negligence towards their public institutions and blindness to the key role that higher education plays in society. The expert panel members, in turn, tried to assess the adaptability of the public university staff to the new situation. The questions they posed—'have you considered alternative career paths', 'how do you feel about academic opportunities abroad', and 'are you familiar with external funding sources that would make your position sustainable'—impose the strategy of adaptation as primary. No one asked, 'Do you have a strong union?'

The later official report by the expert panel does indeed show an awareness of repercussions this problem might have for the functioning of the public institution. But it is framed, among the seven disadvantages of the

institution, not as a universal labour problem, but as that particular institution's management and 'staffing crisis':

1. The current institutional framework makes the Faculty unable to make staffing decisions or plan staffing going forward. The Faculty faces a definite staffing crisis in the next few years which will inevitably impact upon the quality of both teaching and research.
2. There is no research office to support the capture and administration of grants.
3. There is no careers office to support students (including doctoral students) in their future careers and to enable them to maximise their employability. (Agencija za znanost i visoko obrazovanje 2014, p. 11)

Thus, an ideological proposition is again implicitly made—employment and career prospects are a function of individual effort and the institution's readiness to foster and hone the individual 'employability profile' of the worker so that he or she can later be compatibly allocated into a 'future career' by the job market. But interestingly, the first 'disadvantage' identified by the expert panel vaguely draws attention to the role the institutional, systemic arrangement plays for the 'staffing crisis', whereby that term is inadvertently revealed as misleading: the phrase 'current institutional framework' points to the state as the ultimate address for and the unavoidable locus of resolution of public university problems. Of course, the 'current institutional framework' is a specific historical alignment of wider political and socio-economic forces crystallised in state institutions which remains hidden so long as it is treated as a technical abstraction. Observed in the historical dynamics that was outlined above, there can hardly be a better example of a systemic consequence of policies implemented in the name of 'knowledge economy' than the precarious position of the academic workers at this university. Consequently, this is not simply a problem of 'staffing' but of boom and bust cycles of capital, the structural integration of a peripheral post-socialist economy into the world-system, labour legislature favouring capital, and the neoliberal governance mechanisms making it difficult to solve this problem locally and democratically prior to passing it onto the job market for judgement.

So, the beginning of an answer to labour problems at a public university in such a situation should be to consider the logic and structure of this historical alignment, and to develop a relation between labour and state in which privately antagonistic relations to the state apparatus can be replaced by an institutionally effective formalisation and collectivisation.

As almost everywhere, however, the general weakness of existing traditional organs of labour organisation, such as unions turned into ‘social partners’, cosily sitting on a ‘three-seater sofa’ (Kostanić 2013) with capital and the state, as well as the peculiar social position and ideologies of the professional-managerial class in capitalist society make this a difficult project among academic workers. The default answers to this and similar systemic crises, regrettably, remain wedded to strategies of navigating the ‘job market’, through which individuals move accomplishing more or less clever or more or less successful balancing acts between their own intrinsic motivations and the ‘needs of the market’. The disciplining paradigm of ‘compulsory individuality’ (Cronin 2000) is an essential component of such conceptions of academic work.

However, even sensible career management, prudent choices, and a willingness to conform to the demands of the moment are no guarantee of escaping unemployment and casualisation in the new academia. Recent research shows that precarious employment might for many academic workers truly be ‘a hamster wheel’ (Courtois and O’Keefe 2015, p. 56). In other words, it is long-term, not a temporary stepping stone to a more secure position and a tenured professional life and very often no hard-earned security awaits after the initial trials and tribulations of early career. Academic workers, especially younger ones, in both the core countries and the periphery would be well-advised to realise that precarity is the only game in town.

In a 2002 article, at a time when this subject had still not been broached quite as extensively as it is today, Marc Bousquet advocated a shift from thinking about systems of higher education in terms of job markets and supply-side control of supposed overproduction of doctoral degrees. He suggested that the system<sup>7</sup> is, in fact, doing exactly what it is supposed to, extracting surplus labour and externalising costs, at the (apparently negligible) price of creating ‘waste product’ in the form of the doctoral degree:

Thinking about casualization means abandoning the vividly counterfactual job market premise, that doctoral education functions primarily to create a ‘supply’ of teachers with the Ph.D., and asking instead: What does it mean that the primary function of the vast web of doctoral education is to provide the university with teachers who don’t hold the doctorate? Any real examination of graduate education and casualization leads inescapably to the conclusion that the real ‘labor market’ in the academy is a market in

<sup>7</sup> Bousquet writes about the USA, but the same structural logic can be observed across the world-system.

the labor of persons without the terminal degree. And if this is true, the creation of persons holding the doctorate may be more properly named a 'by-product' of the graduate employee system: persons who don't hold the degree are inherently more 'marketable' than persons who do. That is, this is a system that creates holders of the Ph.D. but doesn't have much use for them. Indeed, the buildup of degree holders in the system represents a potentially toxic blockage. (Bousquet 2002, p. 89)

Bousquet goes on to explain that the system produces actual degree holders only 'out of a tiny fraction of the employees it takes in'. In the US humanities programmes of the time, doctoral programmes 'typically award the PhD to between 20 and 40 Per cent of their entrants. And the system employs only perhaps a third of the degree holders it makes' (Bousquet 2002, p. 90). The rest, the technological waste produced by the new system, is of course difficult to bury underground, flush into seas and rivers, or launch into space. So some sort of a recycling mechanism needs to be established, preferably at little or no cost to institutions, universities, who produce it. Thus we can observe, most notably in the USA, recent organisational attempts by academic workers themselves to help patch up the messy reality that is created systemically. Most often described by the two semi-related terms 'alt-ac' and 'post-ac', the purpose of such organisational attempts is both to help the unemployed academic workers transition to fields outside academia and to find jobs within the academic system that are not considered academic jobs proper, as well as to establish support and cooperation networks similar to occupational networks of 'knowledge workers' in other occupations, such as 'freelance unions'. Post-ac and alt-ac do not refer to specific organisations or groups, but are conceptions of 'alternative career tracks' for doctoral degree holders who are structurally unable to find academic jobs. What distinguishes these academic initiatives from regular networks of freelance workers in the 'knowledge economy' is the somewhat idiosyncratic position of the precarious academic workers within the professional-managerial class. As in the peripheral example described above, so in the core country such as the USA, exiting the university, a relatively hermetic system with somewhat autonomous mechanisms of organisation and production, becomes a necessity for many only after they have already invested years of work and gone through the effort of highly specialised training, socialisation, and career development under protocols specific to the academic field. In practice, this means that a more radical adaptation and a rougher 'transition'

is required than simply switching jobs, or even industries, as would be the case elsewhere throughout the knowledge economy.<sup>8</sup> But despite even the willingness to remain casually employed over a long period of time, take on debt, and withstand the ‘hidden injuries’ of precarious employment in the neoliberal academia (see Gill 2009), for many academic workers the ‘transition’ to other sectors in search of employment becomes a necessity. Thus the role of the mentioned networks also becomes a pedagogic or even a therapeutic one: not simply to exchange and distribute business contacts within a single profession, but to help unemployed academics cope with the ‘outside world’ and help their integration and orientation in a market where the skills they gained and identities they invested in are often seen as undesirable, ‘theoretical’, or outright useless. Miriam Posner, an outspoken alt-ac academic worker confirms this in an article for *Inside Higher Ed* where she writes that ‘many Ph.D.s have seized on the alt-ac movement as a beacon of hope in an otherwise fairly depressing situation’ (Posner 2013). And a 2015 report by the US non-profit Council on Library and Information Resources suggests the growing importance of such developments, even when advocating a conception of academic work beyond such ‘tracks’: ‘[O]ver the last five years, the chatter about alternative career paths for PhDs has grown into a full-scale conversation’ (Beck Sayre et al. 2015, p. 103).

As far as I am aware, there are currently no similarly formalised equivalents either in the periphery or in the European core countries in many of which the problem of ‘academic waste’ is relatively invisible or relegated to career management and grant application offices at particular universities. The difference might be the result of the size and further evolution of a similar structural dynamics in the US context, as well as the fact that the shape of the problem is different for those working in academic fields where European-style welfare state public universities are absent or do not represent a dominant model. The Croatian example elaborated above shows, among other things, the convolutions of peripheral public institutions that have still not completely given up on some form of public institutional role in organising even potentially superfluous academic labour—thus the state financing policy recommendations by external experts in order to

<sup>8</sup> Available research shows that 74 % of young academic workers in the US humanities expect to remain working in the academic field, while ‘43 % of humanities PhD recipients have no commitment for either employment or postdoctoral study at the time of degree completion’ (Rogers 2015, p. 2).



manage or rectify institutional problems created by series of its own prior political decisions and ‘structural adjustments’ suggested by equivalent types of earlier experts. Alt-ac and post-ac ‘movements’, as opposed to that, are autonomous (in relation to the state) attempts of parts of the professional-managerial class to self-regulate by adapting to the needs of the regime they are superfluous to, savvily avoiding to add to the costs of their maintenance: ‘For us, alt-ac is ultimately proof that there is a third way—that one can remain within the academy outside of a tenure-track position; teaching, publishing, and living the “life of the mind”, are all possible if one is willing to consider the myriad number of staff and administrative positions available in the academy’ (Posner 2013). Such language of possibility suggests a positive ideological charge of the term is necessary: alt-ac is beyond simple career advice, it is meant as an empowerment resource, and the conversation about alternative career paths for academic workers unsuccessful in finding tenure-track jobs is also meant to fight the entrenched and outdated occupational ideologies, to ‘combat the notion that anything short of a tenure-track job means failure’ (Beck Sayre et al. 2015, p. 106).

As opposed to such insistence on institutional (self-)preservation and the readiness to adapt to the new institutional limitations that arose in the socio-economic context characterised by casualisation and redefinition of the role of the university, post-ac perspectives seem to be characterised by a more confrontational, sometimes rhetorically militant, position. The militancy, however, is a resentful one, limited to criticism of new academia’s effects on its precarious labour, but avoiding an organisational or analytical engagement from within the system. The manifesto entitled ‘What Does It Mean to Be Postacademic? A #Post-Ac Manifesto’ published on the website entitled ‘How to Leave Academia: Peer to Peer Postacademic Support’ and offering resources, experiences, and advice on transitioning from an academic career to the broader ‘free market’ states:

[P]ost-ac is more than just being outside of academia or past one’s academic career: it’s a set of values about, and way of relating to, academia. [...] If alt-ac is the good daughter of academe, post-ac is the family’s black sheep—ready to air the dirty laundry in the hopes of shaking up the (damaging and corrupt) status quo. [...] Post-ac is at heart a state of disillusionment. [...] an identity or way of identifying in relation to the institution of academia, and a belief that the current system is flawed, cruel, unsustainable, and therefore impossible to directly engage with [...] It is an identity characterized

by completely divorcing oneself and one's identity as an adult away from academia, as a thinker/writer/worker, away from the academy. [...] Post-ac is interested in survival [...] has no shame about corporate employment, welfare, 'selling out,' or the need to talk about dollars and cents when it comes to jobs and debt. [...] Post-ac is a critique of the academy, its mythology, and its structure. Post-ac discourages people from pursuing graduate work. (Bell and Whitehead 2013)

This is certainly an outline of a strong politics of disillusionment. But disillusionment implies that there had to be a prior emotional investment in an illusion. Conceiving academic work in the manner of the twentieth century professional-managerial class, as a vocation and calling, is certainly a large part of that illusion. But it is, however, not enough to observe that the illusion is not real, a productive politics can only be built on an understanding why the illusion was put up in the first place. Abandoning one's occupational 'identity' and finding other markets to sell your labour to might be a temporary solution for many, but in class terms, post-ac as it is conceived here simply means a lateral transition to a currently more stable position within the same system whose injuries one is trying to escape. One does not get to choose to 'sell out', as it is suggested here, by going corporate and leaving behind the ivory tower and dirtying one's beautiful soul. It is a choice that is made for all of us long before we are even aware of it. In a system that depends on wage labour and extraction of surplus value for its reproduction, everybody cannot but sell out.

Distributing occupational advice and setting up support networks and hubs where people can read about the experiences of others, as well as exchange ideas, contacts, and often emotional support, should certainly be done everywhere where there is need. But without the baseline intention to organise a collective means of resisting the system that produces such effects in this and other sectors of society, it can only be observed as a purely pragmatic career advice and a localised attempt of parts of a 'disenfranchised' class to reconstitute lost privilege and autonomy. The focus on individualised navigation through the system, adaptability, conformity to disciplinary regimes of the new institution, as well as dreams of 'professional fulfilment' and 'making it out there', though sometimes empowering, also represent an excellent adaptation to a neoliberal dynamics and division of labour.

Despite their differences, the above perspectives share a reluctance to consider options academic workers might have that go beyond conformist

adaptation, that is, properly transformational options that require observing labour problems in their systemic dynamics and imagine autonomous, antisystemic answers and collective resistance. That can only happen if we realise that unemployment or precarity are neither mistakes or anomalies, nor betrayals of past entitlement, nor are they simply results of poor policies. They are also neither limited to particular countries nor badly managed national academic fields. Nor to particular people and badly managed individual careers. They are structural consequences with systemic functions of their own and can properly be fought only if they are addressed as such and faced collectively.

Recent activity on the part of academic workers' unions such as Graduate Student Organizing Committee/United Auto Workers (GSOC-UAW) in the USA, Academic Solidarity in Croatia, or wide participation of academic workers in anti-austerity protests in France, Greece, Chile, Spain, and elsewhere shows that this is becoming more and more current as the awareness dawns that the 'debt-ridden unemployed and underemployed college graduates, the revenue-starved teachers, the overworked and underpaid service professionals, even the occasional whistle-blowing scientist or engineer—all face the same kind of situation that confronted skilled craft-workers in the early 20th century and all industrial workers in the late 20th century' (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 2013, p. 11).

To finish even more directly: the struggle of academic workers for control over their workplaces and autonomous regulation of their job, the production of knowledge, must be fought as an internationalised struggle of organised labour.

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