



# A discussion program to "Academic freedom and the commercialisation of universities: a critical ethical analysis"

Jon Bernat Zubiri-Rey

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Saturday 18 June 2016 ; **Session 1: Domination and Resistance in education ;**  
**Speakers: Kathleen LYNCH and Mariya IVANCHEVA (from University College Dublin) <sup>1</sup>.**

**A discussion program to “Academic freedom and the  
commercialisation of universities: a critical ethical analysis”**

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**ABSTRACT :** This contribution is structured in three sections. In the first section I will synthesize the most important ideas of the Irish colleagues' article, with a critical commentary to their contribution. Then, I will provide, founded on my own academic labor and social struggle experiences, the same evidences about the commercialization of universities and the declining autonomy and freedom of their staff in the reforms imposed in the French, Spanish and the Basque university systems<sup>2</sup>. In the third and last part of this exposition I will discuss some critical ideas and questions to contribute to the political transformation of the university institution's way.

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<sup>2</sup> Being the University of the Basque Country submitted to the Spanish neoliberal governance mechanisms, applied without reticences by Basque autonomous governors, we will project our own work experience in a common sense.

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- French says “oui”... and English understand “we”
- Basques say “sei” [six] and English understand “say”.
- Communication in Inglis ???! Yes ? or slip away ?

The paper of Kathleen LYNCH and Mariya IVANCHEVA<sup>3</sup>, of University College Dublin, is a great contribution to an important issue concerning the neoliberal era of capitalism. It focuses on declining university autonomy and academic freedom, because of the institutional reforms in last years and the increasing non tenure – or intermittent carriers – of young and not so young staff. In the article they analyse as well the geopolitics of knowledge, who is dominated by Western thinking in epistemological choices and determination of research and teaching subjects. At the end, they focus in the gendered care-lessness prototype of most academicians around the world, what's named by Spanish feminist economists as *mushroom men*, a male worker's everyday reproduction founded in feminine care work, without any cost for the capital (Orozco, 2014).

## **1 – Commercialization of universities against academic freedom. Some evidences from Ireland, Great Britain, Germany, USA and other countries**

In the first part of the article they introduce the evolution of universities and higher education institutions as a new way of stratification, founded in many mechanisms of differentiation, “*exacerbated with the growth of global ranking systems*” (page 1). They analyse how “*the rise of new managerialism across the public sector has led to a new type of regulatory autonomy for universities*”, implemented in lots of countries and having and incidence in how “*global capitalist and geo-political interest exercise considerable indirect control of higher education through multilateral agencies*” (p.2). This “*soft power*” model increases the incentives to produce “*market-relevant knowledge*” and has the **Bologna Declaration in 1999** as a common event in the European governments' implementation of this process (Carreras et al., 2006)<sup>4</sup>.

During the last 15 years this package of **reforms** has been applied in **national university systems** and in most research plans and programmes throughout Europe. In the mane of “autonomy”

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<sup>3</sup> LYNCH, Kathleen and IVANCHEVA, Mariya (2015), “**Academic freedom and the commercialisation of universities: a critical ethical analysis**”, *ETHICS IN SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS*, Vol. 15, Section ‘Academic freedom and tenure’, 15 p.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the *Official Journal of the European Union* (2011) is explicitly referenced in their strategy to push for a global reform of “*the governance and financing structures of universities allowing for greater autonomy and accountability*”, having a “*diversified revenue stream and more effective collaboration with the business world*” (p.2).

the financial, political and managerial machinery of capitalism has been developed against the real autonomy and freedom of academic staff, research teams and higher education institutions. The subjects of the degrees have been modified everywhere and most of non-profitable disciplines have been marginalized, producing lots of individual and collective problems to continue a free and autonomous production of knowledge. The “*communism of scholarships*” is under a permanent attack, and “*produced and owned in common with others*” (p.4), as a quotidian way of life has been substituted by competition, more individualistic and really punitive system of Darwinian selection.

In the neoliberal era of capitalism, this freedom and real autonomy of the universities and research institutions are considered as a problem for many corporate sectors – in defence and military industries, pharmaceutical companies, electronic or bio-tech industries, for example–, who are increasingly interested in financing and determination of subjects in public universities. “*In research terms, universities provide opportunities to develop patents and commercialise products as scientific discoveries are increasingly defined as private properties*” (p.5). In the other hand, the sale of “educational services” are a commodity to be exported by several countries and it's considered that “*if higher education were an industry, it would be one of the world's biggest and most dynamic*” (p.5).

As always in the history of the countries mainly analysed in the article (Ireland, Great Britain, Germany and USA), the “*state has functioned as a mechanism to defend capital from labour*” (p.5) and this tradition is nowadays actualized in an “*increasingly corporatized and politically-determined*” academia, by the normalization of new **financing mechanisms** and **political control** of study and research actions and institutions (p.6). “*Higher education as a net contributor to the economy rather than a public service was accelerated by the austerity plans imposed*” by the Troika institutions (p.6), as is analysed by Álvarez et al. (2013) in an European integrated approach.

A second half of the article explains some key aspects of this process, as tenure and casualization of contracts, geopolitical and class intersections aspects and, at the end, the care-lessness academic prototype of most staff of the universities. For the first, the authors understand **staff's tenure** as a main aspect of academic freedom. Only permanent researchers and teachers are autonomous to learn and search about what's not in political and economical mainstream orientation. So “*it is widely accepted that without tenure, it is more difficult to exercise academic freedom*” (p.7) and its crumbling is a main reason for “*decreased interdisciplinarity and increasing instrumentalization of research for business purposes*” (p.8).

For the next, they analyse the geopolitics of academic knowledge, understanding universities as a functional collective agencies, operating not only by scientific rules and logic but under different governance regulations. It a *Bourdiesian* approach of power and knowledge, they consider the “*long tradition of servicing the interests of powerful groups*”, that is historically founded in a racially marked way of “*cultural and intellectual colonisation*” (p.8). That's a main aspect of universities' composition of their members, who defines that “*successful academics are overwhelmingly white, Western and male*” (p.8). This model requires as well “*to challenge the doxa that universal truths and universally applicable theories are produced in the Western metropole of knowledge production*” (p.8).

This **colonial approach of knowledge** blocks peripheral countries and their researchers to deal with universal issues, being pushed “*to solve nationally-specific problematics*” (p.8). As analyzed by Freire (1970), or Arévalo-Robles (2008) as well, “*the rights of communities of knowers to be recognised and enabled to name their own world academically*” (p.8) is annulled. This section finish by identifying the feminist critic of this approach “*in which the domain of assumptions of male researchers led to the trivialisation of the feminine, both in theory and research*” (p.9). In the same way that they have not interest of disabled people or other issues not involved in their biographies and their cultures.

At the end of the article the authors analyze the **gendered care-lessness** prototypical **academic staff**, being more easy to adapt themselves to this model for the male middle-high class people. That means that the academical way of life “*assumes a relatively care-free life*” and that “*primary care-givers, most of whom are women, like people whose skin is brown or black, do not quite fit the 'shapes' required by higher education organisations*” (p.9). As more globally identified by Morini (2014) in the contemporaneous social relations of production, the problems of “*exhaustion, stress, overload, or not being able to work intensely, or publish more*” (p.10) are more concentrated in women and have a reel impact in their expulsion from academic and research institutions. So the liberal rational male, with a “*deep-rooted care-lessness*” is “*at the hearth of academic thinking*” (p.10).

The article finishes with some **conclusions** about the subjects analysed. So we consider that “increasing competition for a small number of secure, reasonably well-paid positions” plays a role in the way of labour force's outcomes and the insertion in production relations of students and researchers (p.11). That's a main problem of higher education institutions, “while declining power of academics to 'rule the university' is attributable both to the rise of neoliberal policies...and, at times, related moves by governments to regulate the autonomy of those who control large amounts of public money” (p.12). At

the end, this process implicates an “*organisational strangulation*” and “*kill of academic ideals*” and only “*the principle of disinterestedness*” can protect the freedom of the universities (p.12).

## **2 – Development of the same process from French, Basque and Spanish universities and social struggles**

All the article has an emotionally political impact because of my own experience of academic work and social struggle experiences in the universities. In the next paragraphs we connect some ideas mentioned in the paper with comments about the same process in French, Spanish and Basque university systems :

### **2.1 – University sectors and State Power : two antagonist models**

As we can see in the article (p.3), managerial elite of the universities are often aligned with the state. Senior academics are usually incorporated into the decision-making machinery of the state, as well. In the same way they conclude that the universities “*have been party to forming the power and status of the professional classes of the state*” (p.11).

We can find the same tradition of imbrication between the university and the state in **French** case, with lots of main political men of the country having studied in the E.N.A. (**École nationale d'administration**) and having a reel concentration of notables front the E.N.S. (École normale supérieure), *Science Po* Paris and other **grandes écoles**, witch are oriented to the reproduction of a powerful friendships in social elites and governors. A god example of this tradition are the *Rapports au President de la République* (Reports to President of Republic) for orienting the main political choices in lots of knowledge domains.

Universities have not the same powerful role in **Spanish** case, with a **traditionally long distance between the academic staff and the political decision** makers. In the Spanish case, the university has often been a more critical but not influential corpus of autonomous intellectuals, with a political class not having a consistent budgetary interest in their research and consulting services for the main State affairs. Since the **Carlos Berzosa's** presidency of the biggest Spanish (public) university – *Universidad Complutense de Madrid*– **between 2003 and 2011**, we can see a big change in this point, not only

because of the institutional action of this heterodox economist (member of our [Economía Crítica network](#)) in the way of social transformation. In **last two years**, we can see the **Complutense's clan** (activist group of young non permanent teachers and researchers of this university, with the famous political scientist Pablo Iglesias Turrión in the head) in the origin of the emergence of **Podemos** political party, being really important in social imaginary about politics the high level of academic experience of the future governors of Spanish social and political change.

## **2.2 – Reforms in finance and evaluation model as a main issue of staff tenure in the French universities**

In the article we can read that “*university teaching and research have been largely funded from the public purse in Europe*” (p.5). This means that “*individual freedom is exercised under institutional constraints*”, more and more present in the universities with the “*greatly reduce funding to higher education for both students and staff*” and implicate “*increases in student fees*” (p.6).

In **French universities**, some reforms in last 13 years have increased the **financial dependency of research** from the business world and big enterprises. Some law reforms (Licence-Master-Doctorat in 2003, Research Plan in 2007 ; Liberties and Responsibilities of Universities LRU in 2007 ; and Teacher-Researcher status reform in 2009), as well as the new evaluation agencies (ANR and AERES), impose a restructuring process of this public sector, with a **financing model** oriented to **work-by-project** in short term and abolishing for many disciplines the financial stability tradition of French universities. The *New Public Management* (Vinokour, 2008) and the new governance procedures (as Mobility Law of teacher and researchers in 2009 or the reform of CNRS<sup>5</sup>) has many consequences in all the model, starting by a declining work conditions, protection mechanism for the staff and, more largely, a new orientation of research objectives not in the direction of public or common interests (Zubiri, 2012a; 2012b). In a big survey about **precarious employment in university and public research** (PECRESS, 2011 : 40), they identify the end of the equilibrium between permanent and contractual funds as a main problem.

Academic tenure and rate of permanent staff, as well as the not meritocratic but more class and racial background of university teachers and researchers, are analysed in the article (p.7). We can

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<sup>5</sup> The National Center for Scientific Research



**compare** the declining tenured employment in **USA** – from 75% in 1970 to 30% in 2007– with our own studies about **Alpes'** universities and public research centres (Zubiri, 2012a : 17-26). We have identified a **lower degree of non permanent staff in France** than in the USA. From 25-35% of non permanent in official reports of more excellent and internationalized universities, to 43% in a pirate survey in CNRS-Alpes (done with union's collaboration) and 50% in the official source of the humanistic and cultural studies faculties. That's the **Sarkozy** President's philosophy of “**not replace one public servant between two being retired**”, a big attack **against university and research institutions as well**. This precarious worker of the university “*can be a man, is more often a woman ; he or she has thirty years old in average, multiply the precarious contracts since fours years and a half in average and their wage has never been increased. 25% have a wage under 1.200 Euros*” (PECRES, 2011 : p.11).

Spanish social cuts and public budget reductions are common as well since the earlier 2000', as has been studied by Carreras et al. (2006) and Sevilla (2010).

### **2.3 – Colonial knowledge in the intersection of many oppressions**

Colonial knowledge is identified as an imperial category, reproduced by the language, as a main power mechanisms, and by the state's violence, only if it's necessary and, more in everyday, by “*a deep educational and philosophical indifference to the dependencies and interdependencies that are endemic of human condition*” (p.10). “*Academic thinking brackets issues of emotions and values outside of academic understanding*” (p.9), and that's a main limit of universities around the world.

In Spain some militant-researchers defined the *situational analysis*, in witch the subject and researcher interdependency is defended (VV.AA., 2004). In the same way, the Latinoamerican academicians promote as well an indigenous epistemology for building an operational knowledge for the communities in their liberation process (Arévalo, 2008). All this frames have the potentiality of intersection of many oppression axes, not only because of not being a Western White Able Male. We can find as well a non meritocratic mechanism of reproduction in the original social class – see 3.1–, age or generation membership and, at the end, not being born in a centred urban or economic or political important cities.

## 2.4 – University resistance against isolation as an important zone of social struggle

As explained by Barcelona (en Comú)'s academician Albert Recio – in Asamblea PDI-PAS (2009)–, all the reforms analysed in the article are defended, as well as in Spanish and French cases, by internal collaboration degree from some academic sectors, being ideologically or because of particular interests aligned with the neoliberal model. This process of competition have been “*pushing people out of positions*” (p.3) and promoting the “*isolation*” and “*no protection for scholars as a group to claim the right to freely undertake research on subjects of collective interest*” (p.4). My teacher from Grenoble University, Ramon Tortajada's case is a good example in the **marginalization** of *Economical Thinking History Unity of Research*. Only a little example of this authoritarian way of “modernising universities”, being a real crazy movie from the LMD-2004 Bolonia's French version of universities' commercialisation.

But the university struggles are common everywhere, because of the millenarian tradition of defending ourselves from attacks, and they are often in contact with larger social mobilisations against capitalism, labour reforms and other neoliberal plans against people's well-being (Asamblea Universidad Crítica, 2008, Collectif 4bis, 2007). Because the university is not a lack of freedom in the era integral reform of Western economies, we can understand this strategic sector as a bottom-up part of the emergence of a *service salary economy* (Albarracín, 2003), comprised as a powerful model of generalized and permanent precariousness, intermittent employment, low paid and non-stable work relations (Zubiri, 2014). In this context, the **university** has to **explain and take part to the resistance of working class** (Bérout et al., 2008 ; 2009), being usually the faculty and school centres a main organization zone of strike movements – CPE labour reform in 2006 and retirement system reform in 2010 (Zubiri, 2011). That's surely not the same in actual movement against work law from mar 2016, more concentrated in place occupations – Egyptians' Syntagma or Spanish 15-M's style – and in branch workers unions' radical block actions.

### 3 – Somme key authors and ideas about all this questions

#### 3.1 – Sacristán's conception of University as an hegemony mechanism of dominant class

As we said in Cottet et al. (2009), “*the university is defined by Sacristán (1969) by their three main historical functions : knowledge transmission for the configuration of professional issues ; forming the researchers and the production of scientific and technological work ; and, at the end, the production of the dominant class' hegemony*”<sup>6</sup>, so – as the Dublin's colleagues says, they “*have a long tradition of servicing the interest of powerful groups*” (p.8). As explained by Sevilla (2010), the transition from *elite universities* to *mass universities* has democratized the university, but has not abolished the class stratification process in the structure of career opportunities, intensified in the last transitions to *enterprise university*.

In the same way, the intermittent academic careers, because of the declining tenure of university staff, has a really stratified incidence in different social classes. Career continuity is not evident nowadays. The old dreams about social equality built by the State are a classic issue of French republican elite. As we said in our survey in the Alpes' “*the problem of the unequal incidence of new managerial systems for each social class is more evident in research and high education public institutions. The employment precarization and, more clearly, the unemployment period's force the young or not so young staff to continue for free, looking for the next contract, and that's only possible for people being members of privileged social sectors* (PECRES, 2011 : 130).

#### 3.2 – Gorz's incompatibility between knowledge production and capitalism

In the article being at the origin of this comment, the authors mentioned Merton's four imperatives for the scientific and scholarly research – universalism, communism, disinterestedness and organized skepticism (pp.4-5). The actual process of **commercialisation** is a big problem of our era and, as was explained by Gorz (1988; 2003). It supposes a structural **incompatibility with** a economic model founded in **knowledge** (Lisbon Declaration, 2000). Because, as he responded during an interview, this knowledge economy<sup>7</sup> “*needs to be an economy of **abundance**, of **share**, of common*

<sup>6</sup> See as well Fernández Buey (2009).

<sup>7</sup> In French literature we recommend to look at Foray (2009) for an introduction about the knowledge economy and Citton (2010) for a critical and more extensive approach. Fumagalli (2010) analyze this model of *bioeconomy* and *cognitive*

work, of *omnilateral self-organization by permanent agreement*” (Gorz, 2004). In this process of commercialization, the article points that governors assume that “*knowledge and research conducted by profit-driven operations and/or by other powerful interests*” are not the norm in the contemporaneous universities (p.5).

### **3.3 – Declining tenure as intergenerational transmission mechanism interruptions. Izan zirelako gara...**

In the article they say that “*scientific advance involves the collaboration of past and present generations*” (p.5). Tenure is “*a way of creating incentives for innovation and excellence and contributing to the continuity of intellectual memory in the university and its academic community*” (p.7).

So not only a free university requires a permanent staff, a quality university as well. That's the only way for a permanent **inter-generational transmission of knowledge**, without interruptions or generational holes in the process of share and construction of teaching and researching institutional dynamics. Interruption of this transmission is a “not return way” and we have to fight this process to continue the historical “**Izan zirelako gara eta garelako izango dira**” (From what they were we are. From what we are they will be).

### **3.4 – Orozco and Spanish feminist economists against patriarchal capitalism**

The mentioned limits of Western science paradigm are analysed by **Spanish feminist economists**, who understand the **interdependency of agents** as a **antagonistic model to the independence paradigm of liberal tough** (Carrasco et al., 2011 ; Orozco, 2014).. Face to the amoral individual rational agents of mainstream academy, founded in self-entrepreneur and auto-exploitation (Bifo, 2003), we have to built a collective resistance against all the quotidian demonstrations of patriarchal capitalism. This way is the only way to “*look for common knowledge lines against the unhappy passions of fragmentation, precarization and scare*” (Malo :2004).

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*capitalism as a new accumulation paradigm.*

But, that's not so easy :

*“How can an a people mass, individualised, separated and fragmented in their productive processes and economic and social condition, be transformed in an active movement ? How can she built a common political point of view, with substantially common behaviour and horizons, always being respected each one's sensibility and training differences ?”*

*Balestrini y Moroni (1988-2006: 443)*

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