

‘Freelance academics’ and the dream of ‘permanent’ position (0309)

Magdalini Kolokitha

University of East London, UK

Outline

This paper aims to discuss spaces of independence and freedom for academics with no permanent positions in Higher Education establishments in Greece, by a) analysing the European and national education policies concerning employment in academia and b) the accounts of Greek academics in short term contracts. Since 2010 Greece has been not only in economic recession but also in the economic supervision of Troika or ‘The Institutions’, meaning the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The financial obligations agreed by the institutions and government have a direct impact on areas beyond the economic sphere with a subsequent influence on education policy.

In particular, in the extended area of Higher Education Institutions no permanent appointments of academic staff, research and/or teaching, have been made the last five years. That is due to financial agreements aiming to the minimising of the public sector. Specifically, the percentage of public sector appointments has been defined by ‘The Institutions’ as 1:5 (paragraph, 2: Article 37: Law 3986/2011), meaning that one new appointment is made for every five permanent members of staff moving out of their job. Moreover, a considerable amount of permanent academics has moved into retirement. On the other hand the latest policies regarding access to higher education were complied with ideas of widening participation in a system that access to HE is only through national exams. Previous research (Kolokitha 2010) has shown the difficulties posed by the Greek policies on widening participation access in Greek institutions, in terms of lack of academic staff to support the extended numbers of students.

This paper claims that these two policy pillars, the non-opening of permanent academic positions alongside the increased student numbers have created a space for a new type of academic research and teaching staff, the ‘freelance’ academic. Within the Greek employment context of short term academic staff two distinct characteristics arose. Their status does not allow them to apply for research funding and in certain institutions they are not expected to introduce their knowledge into their teaching as teaching materials are provided in the form of one textbook.

Freelance academics are mainly understood in academic literature either as people offering para-academic services focusing mainly on selling academic writing pieces or as engaging to freelance jobs outside academia, such as writing for newspapers. However, a new understanding of freelance academics has emerged by Earl in 1994 and is being rationalised lately by the work of Tutek 2016, Žitko 2012, Bousquet, 2002 and others. The main conceptual framework is defined as “Extreme market-based scenarios involving freelance academics and itemised billing for specific services are contrasted with the present system involving very incomplete contracts for academic employees and package deal purchases of degrees by students” (Earl, 1994, p 131). Recently, as Tutek (2016) suggests the burst of the ‘knowledge economy bubble’ has left a great number of PhD holders

who aimed to an academic career either jobless or engaged in very limited contracts in terms of academic activities.

This paper will present data from an on-going qualitative research focusing on academic staff with no permanent positions in the Greek tertiary sector. The sample consists of two types of free-lance academic staff: a) those that have completed their education (BA, MA and/or PhD) required for an academic post in Greece and b) those that part of their education or work experience has been gained in a different national context. This distinction between the sample is of significant importance as to establish and minimise the role of personal connections, networks and knowledge of the system has in the process of acquiring a job.

Methodologically, the research adopts a discourse-based (MacLure, 2003) qualitative approach utilising semi-biographical interviews with academics that are engaged in academic institutions with either a research or teaching position but hold no permanent contract. It aims to offer an interpretive and reflexive account of the policies that influence academic job acquisition in the Greek Higher Education context through the investigation of the personal accounts of the interviewees in their attempt to claim and secure a position. This account consists of a conceptualised understanding of the social context under research as it was at the moment that the research was conducted. It is time and space-oriented and is also primarily dependant on the collected data, the particular participants in the research and the reflections of the researcher on them. These features are dependent on the researcher's choices acknowledging that "the important thing is that deliberate choices are made and that researchers consider the implications of their choices for the claims that can be made about the data collected and the kind of analysis that can be offered as a result" (Ball, 1990, p. 164).

Finally, the account aims to be part of the 'critical discourse analysis' tradition and to concentrate on the marginalisation of particular discourses within geographical and educational settings, on how these discourses construct a 'discursive reality' for the subjectivities and processes they promote and how they disqualify or disadvantage possible alternative cases; as it will attempt to describe "the distal context - how it privileges some actors at the expense of others and how broad changes in the discourse result in different constellations of advantage and disadvantage, particularly within the Foucauldian tradition" (Phillips and Hardy, 2002, p. 25) and also will aim to "attend to the multiplicity of meanings that attach to (and divide) the people, spaces.... that compromise its focus...and to the passion and politics that are inevitably woven into those meanings" (MacLure, 2003, p.12).

References

Ball, S. J. (1990), *Politics and Policy Making in Education: Exploration in Policy Sociology*. London: Routledge.

Bousquet, M. (2002), *The Waste product of Graduate Education: Toward a Dictatorship of the flexible*. *Social Text*, 20, 1, p. 81-104

Earl, P.E, 1994, *The Economic Rational of Universities: a Reconsideration*.

Prometheus: *Critical Studies in Innovation*, 2, 2, p. 131-151

Kolokitha, M. (2010) Kolokitha, M. (2010) "It's the end of the „University“ as we know it" *The realisation of the Bologna Process: cases from England and Greece*, IOE Prints, Institute of Education library

MacLure, M. (2003), *Discourse in Educational and Social Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Phillips, N. and Hardy, C. (2002), *Discourse analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction*. (Vol. 50). Thousand Oaks, CA.

Tutek, H. (2016), Academics as Workers: From Career Management to Class Analysis and Collective Action. in Suman Gupta, Jernej Habjan, Hrvoje Tutek (eds) *Academic Labour, Unemployment and Global Higher Education: Neoliberal Policies of Funding and Management* (p.231-246)

Žitko, M. (2012), *The Social Consequences of Imposed Austerity: The case of Education*. Green European Journal, 2, 1, p. 17-22