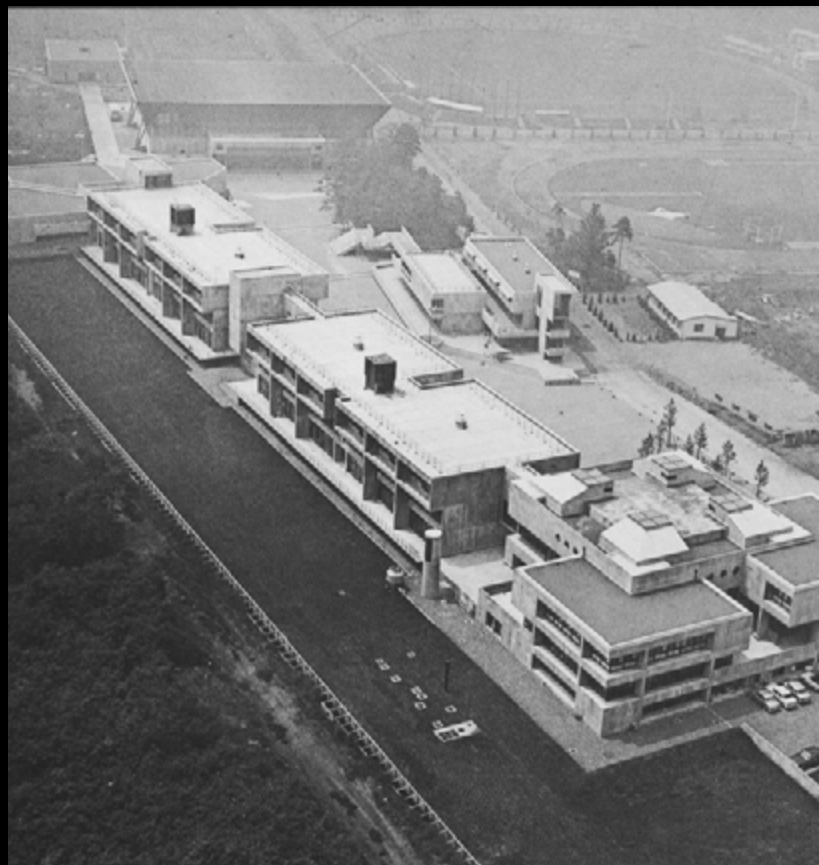


THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY IN THE MANAGEMENT OF MIGRATION FLOWS



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This text was written by Fabrika Yfanet assembly for a presentation in the NoBorder camp of 2016 that took place in the occupied campus of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since last summer migration flows, mainly from Syria, towards countries of central and northern Europe have increased rapidly while immigration from other countries such as Asia and Africa continues. To make our point clear: this does not mean that the migration issue just emerged out of nowhere. Migration towards Europe existed long before this. However, the events in Syria gave prominence to the migration in public discourse. Additionally, in this introduction we will not try to analyze the reasons for this, or attempt a geopolitical analysis searching for the genealogy of the flows. We will merely try to illuminate the current role of the university in relation to migration. In a period where the example seems to have changed, the dominant anti-migration rhetoric has been shifted and now speaks of “refugees” instead of “illegal immigrants”, “open type camps” although they are guarded by the army, humanism etc. The presentation is organized into two parts: firstly, how the university, being part of the social factory, sets the goals or helps in the formation of the anti-migration policy in a very direct and tangible manner through research programs, masters etc. Secondly, how the university institution, publicly appears to be in solidarity with migrants by asking students to voluntarily staff the detention centers, by organizing charity events and by supporting members of the academic community who conduct research on migration. All of these tie in nicely with the context of academic freedom of speech and the general context of democracy, resembling the two sides of the same coin, which is the management of migrating population from the State and the capital.

2. THE CAPITALIST UNIVERSITY

Universities are not institutions where independent and autonomous knowledge is produced. They seem to be far away from the notion knowledge for the sake of knowledge. On the contrary, all capitalist relations are reproduced within the university. The consistency of science and technology with capital needs can be observed almost from the beginning of their institutionalization. The university is a dynamic part of capitalist relations since, from the one hand, it streamlines the

workforce according to capitalist needs and, on the other hand, it is the means of organizing research to produce useful knowledge for bosses. The university operates as a part of the production process. Aligned with market needs, it produces specialized workers and scientific knowledge (or at least this is where it aims although it does not always achieve an efficient connection with the market). The educational system, however, does not remain stagnant but restructures itself constantly. At the same time, the higher education bodies are changing to serve the demands of the capitalist accumulation and the reproduction of the capitalist relations. For this to be achieved, the university is getting gradually privatized and the cost of studies is transferred to the students. A short note: We do not preach free and public education, nor do we believe that the privatization of the university is necessary for the external financing of research. Public universities and research have managed to coexist in harmony until now. Contrariwise, all of this is part of the continuous process of restructuring, in relation with the different social environments, to achieve the readjustment of universities in favor of capitalist accumulation.

The university itself as well as the various scientific research centers (more or less related to the official academic bodies) besides the State funds which are being reduced, are financed by private bodies and companies in order to produce research results which are useful to the reproduction of the capitalist relations. This process creates a bidirectional and interdependent relationship between academic research, State and businesses. The knowledge centers i.e. the universities through masters and doctorates and the independent research centers which are staffed with professors and postdoctoral researchers are those which State, army, national and supranational institutions and businesses invest on, materially and ideologically. The goal is, besides producing knowledge which is useful for the commodified world, to bind the technological and scientific community of each country with the State, the army and the security complex. In this way, scholarships and sponsorships are provided from the one side, and epistemological feedback is provided from the other.¹

1 In this text, we will not deeply analyze the reasons that lots of people choose to get a master's degree or a PhD at this juncture. We perceive these

The first research centers within the educational system appeared during the 1930 financial crisis, presenting solutions for the management of the situation. They hadn't increased in number till the 70s when they proposed ways of organizing labor for the benefit of the bosses and provided advice to the States regarding their international relations. Since then, they have dealt with a wide range of topics and at some degree they have even achieved core State policymaking in matters such as the management of migrant movement, border control, its militarization etc.

All the above, make the relation of the academic institutions with the State and the bosses clear. Various schools, professors, postgraduate or research programs are financed by companies, NATO or national armies in order to produce knowledge and innovations which will be useful for their various goals. Of course the produced knowledge is not intrinsically good or bad, we do not wish to demonize it. A new technology can be a mixed blessing, useful in the treatment of a particular illness (always produced within the context of the capitalist system), and simultaneously malicious in the hands of the army. We do not put forward neither aphorisms nor wishful thinking. We are obliged, however, to see the historical context within which each research program takes place, who finances it and for whom and we have to consider the continuities and the discontinuities between this apparently neutral knowledge and science and the army, the State, the bosses. Only in this way will we be able to illuminate this relation in the present and attack it. In any case, numerous examples exist which justify why we should be at least cautious. The following examples are drawn from the book "Now we are all bastards. War, science, academia and their role in the Greek example" which was published in January 2016 by the group burglars of student culture.

choices partly to be a part of the restructuring of education and labor. Often, these choices are made on a survival level on precarious conditions and not (always) in the logic of careerism. The restructuring of labor has fractured the communities which were formed in workplaces and collectively demanded their revaluation, has imposed the need for constant specialization with studies, training programs and lifelong learning, while the form of labor relation has become uncertain and individual through the promotion of new labor models like community service, vouchers, etc.

Before we get to the point though, we have to cite some information about the organization and the main institutions which form and organize the anti-migration policy at a European scale, in order to illustrate their relation with the various research programs conducted in the Greek academic institutions which deal with topics such border safety and the management of migrants. The foundations of the European border policy can be searched in the European Research Program for Safety (ESPR) of 2004, which was embedded in the 7th framework program for research and technological progress applied between 2007 to 2013. During these years the institutional infrastructure for the support of research regarding military security equipment is formed and a bit more than a billion euros is spent on various research programs which are conducted by arm companies in cooperation with academic institutions. In 2005 FRONTEX was formed and under their supervision EUROSUR, activated in 2013, began its operation. This system essentially processes all the information provided by the border guards of EU member-States and by FRONTEX missions and paints the detailed picture of migrating populations. Additionally, we mention the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), the military branch of the European commission, which was upgraded in 2014. One of its missions is to finance research and evolution of military equipment (for example drone fleets) and to make the necessary statutory adjustments for enabling the use of this equipment in the urban environment too. Finally, the “Horizon 2020” predicts a bit more than 4,5 billion euros to be spent for the further progress of the European Border Management System through the Internal Security Fund. The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki held a session last June in conjunction with the European commission, aiming to inform and support AUTH researches in relation to European Research Council (ERC) program, which will be running within the framework of the Horizon 2020 program. This means more billions and more research programs.

3. THREE EXAMPLES OF RESEARCH IN GREEK UNIVERSITIES

I. JASON

Scheduled: 2013-2015

The research was conducted by the laboratory of Photogrammetry of rural and surveying engineering school of national technical university of Athens. According to the official description of the program “it attempts to look into technologies in the field of engineering in order for a smart system, that combines satellite systems, telecommunication technologies, photogrammetry algorithms, to be implemented and for the extraction of measurements from collections of images that are obtained by ground and aerial receivers so that a better surveillance of the borders can be achieved.” In addition “for the support of the member States in their efforts to reduce the numbers of illegal immigrants that enter the EU”.

The coordinating company of the research was SpaceHellas. The national technical university of Athens also cooperated with IridaLabs under this program. These two companies have been the pillars of another program, called ACRITAS that was run in 2013, whose purpose was the manufacturing of an integrated system for the control of the borders from space. It is worth noting the relationship between IridaLabs and the academic community, as the company was set up by researchers of the University of Patras and is dealing with the production of face and movement recognition technologies. Finally, additional associates in JASON program are: the electronics laboratory of the Physics department of the University of Patras and the mobile radio-communications laboratory of the Institute of communication systems and computers (National technical university of Athens)

II. WALL AGAINST MIGRATION (FENCE IN EVROS)

Years of Construction: 2011-12

The construction of the fence in Evros is included in the “integrated program for the management of the borders and the confrontation of

illegal immigration” as it is officially called. Apart from the erection of the fence, the plan includes the construction of a series of control technologies, such as the supply of motor vehicles equipped with thermal cameras and the installation of a radar system for the surveillance of sea borders.

The construction of the fence and the rest of the control technologies was co-funded by national resources and the External borders fund, and their implementation was done fully at National technical university’s laboratories. If we take into consideration the participation of this institution in JASON and Poseidon programs, a “map of interests” emerges around the army and industrial complex, in which the academics of the institution can take pride in their accomplishments.

III. POSEIDON

Finally, another research program of the national technical university of Athens that has recently published the results of its research, is POSEIDON. According to the presentation of the program, it is suggested, as an answer to “illegal immigration through the sea, trafficking and illegal fishing”, “the development of a smart, cheap and viable system of surveillance of marine space, using arrays of cameras and sensor networks. The system would locate, watch and focus on water crafts and passengers even in lack of light, rough sea and other weather conditions, and it would notify the authorities in time. Moreover, it can be placed in inaccessible, remote areas.”

Conclusively, we believe that there is no neutral university, that focuses solely on knowledge. The university is an integral part of the capitalist machine. Its connection with programs like the above, with the production of knowledge and technology for the border military is not a deviation from its main function, but an integral part of it. The technology that is produced is neither neutral, nor innocent as some postgraduate, doctoral and professors might say. The technology that is produced by these programs, funded by the military, FRONTEX, NATO etc. favors its funders, and it does nothing more than enrich the ways in which the death of migrants is organized right now at the inland and water borders of Europe.

All of the above explains why it seems funny or even tragic to us as students when sometimes throughout the academic year we receive emails in our inbox, asking for volunteers to come to detention centers or inform us that the institutions are in solidarity with the migrants. However, we do not believe that the institution of the university suffers from some kind of bipolar disorder. Both the bargain described above and the public charity rhetoric, are tied with the State (anti) migration policy, which manages to contribute to deaths at the border by military means while preaching the gospel of "refugee crisis" and solidarity.

4. A FEW WORDS ON CHARITY THAT IS PRESENTED AS SOLIDARITY IN THE UNIVERSITY

Since summer 2015, the official rhetoric of the Greek State regarding migration has drastically changed towards a more humanitarian direction. The "illegal immigrants" were given the name "refugees", to whom, Greek people, should stand in solidarity according to the well-known phrase "our grandparents were refugees, our parents immigrants". Thus the national unity is reconstituted in the name of "solidarity" that conceals all the imaginative ways in which the Greek businesses profit from the immigrants by participating in a large chain of economic exploitation, that begins from the cops at the borders and ends in Greek shops on the islands, while it affirms and consolidates the separation between locals and foreigners, between what is familiar and what is not. It is from this separation that the various charitable actions that emanate from the university, are initiated.

In a recent announcement, the university informed us that "in the context of the social role of the institution, it is decided to contribute substantially to the struggle for providing assistance to the refugees during their stay in our country." In this context, many e-mails have been sent since, that mainly sought for volunteers. Indicatively, in a recent e-mail, the university was looking for volunteers to install wireless networks in reception centers. In an earlier announcement, the university community was urged once more to voluntarily participate in a children's activities

structure at the detention center in Diavata, that was set up by the university in cooperation with the municipality of Thessaloniki. Later, we were informed by the university that “the stay of refugees in Greece will not be over soon and we will be back with a new request. Please do not send any other applications”. Moreover, since the beginning of the year, almost every Friday, the concerts given by the State orchestra of Thessaloniki held at the ceremonial hall of the university, were about “solidarity”, where food supplies for Idomeni were collected. The irony is that while the university campus restaurant was sending portions of food to feed the immigrants at the port of Thessaloniki, it was prohibiting immigrants, unemployed and precarious workers from entering the premises. Finally, a number of progressive academics have come to the foreground on the occasion of the migrant issue by organizing conferences, surveys within undergraduate courses etc. More will be noted on this topic later on.

One might wonder, why do we point out all these university actions regarding immigrants when much more weighted things, such as capital flows to and from the institutions, are setting up this anti-migration policy? It is because we do not believe that the notion of charity is something separating or confrontational to the anti-migration policy. The latter aims to consistently control and manage the movement of immigrants, so as to safeguard the State and capital interests. The “illegal immigrants” may have been renamed “refugees” and the humanitarian rhetoric may prevail in the public domain, however the militarization of the immigration management system lately, with the police and the army taking over a large chunk of it, clearly shows that no matter how charitable it may appear at a rhetorical level, the anti-migration policy’s core aim (with the separations that it imposes, the illegalization of immigrants and the repression) is to ensure that migrants will remain a disciplined, inexpensive and easily manageable workforce. Philanthropic actions can make the conditions of this management more bearable to a certain degree, by responding to the staple needs of the immigrants, but on the other hand, they’re instituting and normalizing charity as another name for solidarity. “Solidarity” does not bother and is promoted as long as it emanates from the State, the university, the NGOs and all kinds of shops that drain funds and profit at the expense of the migrants. It does not bother as long as the unwaged

labor of volunteers is baptized as such, the volunteers that, even though they might have a humanitarian perspective of the issue in the first place (where migrants equals victims), they do not try to set up common struggles with the migrants for the revaluation of life but they contribute to the shift of the living cost of migrants from the State to society. This kind of “solidarity” is also welcome as long as it strengthens communities formed under a national notion, that evangelize national solidarity of the people who “know how it is to be a refugee”, hiding the exploitation of migrants and ratifying the separation between us.

5. PROGRESSIVE ACADEMIA, MIGRANTS, MOVEMENT

Several research programs, mainly those of humanitarian studies, have also managed to enhance the charitable profile of the university. Lately, a shift has been observed in research of anthropological - social sciences. Anthropology in line with post-colonial studies is shifting the research focus from colonies to metropolitan areas and mainly to European regions, where there is a lot of information. The object of research is losing its exotic character and is assessing the characteristics of a social and cultural phenomenon that is closer to the social and historical reality of the researcher's community.

A result of the above is the appearance of a rich variety of anthropological research that explores the subjects and the groups, the social relations in which they/we participate, their/our ways of organization, their/our resistances, their/our movements and social struggles – often with an antagonistic scope. We observe frequently that our collective movement constitutes the raw material for various research projects or subject of dissertations. It is worth noting that we do not believe that all this takes place within Academia, outside of and independently from social antagonism, since the university itself is a part of social antagonism in many levels. With their limits defects which will later be analyzed, such practices actually sharpen to some extent the antagonism within a specific social field. From the other side, academics' occupation with the social movements, at this occasion is perceivable as an outcome of class struggle

in Greece the last years. The fact that part of the movement has chosen to make political critique and action through their labor in the university, and elsewhere, consists another aspect of the defeat of the social movements.

The knowledge produced within academic institutions is registered, of course, in the framework of university, which, as described in the first part of this text, can not be seen as a detached, neutral space of producing objective knowledge. This framework dictates the terms with which this knowledge is reproduced as a relation (as a relation of separated intellectual labor, as a relation of labor exploitation and competition within the academic hierarchy, as the building of a career). However, the existing dialectical relation between knowledge/theory produced within the Academia and the radical movements, makes it difficult or even defective to raise a wall between these two, trying to stand up for some sort of “clear” revolutionary theory. The genealogy of this relation though can not be analyzed here, since it veers off the topic of this text which is the structure of this relation regarding migration the last years in Greece.

Greek universities can exhibit a wide variety of anthropological and sociological research that more persistently lately, due to the increase of migration flows, has placed migrants and forms of solidarity around them under the spotlight of their investigation.

Opposite to the technocratic research, things are much simpler in the field of anthropology. There are students that are willing to work on a voluntary basis without funding and equipment. You just need a car and a notebook and these are your toolkit for field research at Idomeni. As a consequence, papers are uploaded on Academia and professors build their careers at the expense of migrants.

And what do we mean by that? The previous academic year both the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and other departments of Anthropology in the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and in the Aegean University, provided courses such as political anthropology, where students could gain higher grades if they could take part in specific projects for local anthropological research in Idomeni and in relocation centers for migrants. In these projects, students under the supervision of

the academic staff had to come in direct contact with the migrants, the local society, the volunteers and furthermore with the assemblies that are in solidarity in order to draw conclusions as to the migrants' situation, their personal testimonies about war and movement, their assimilation by local society and the reasons that drive political collectives to declare their solidarity or even to share the same community with immigrants. Additionally, part of the academics through conferences, meetings, etc. asked the academic community, the students, the PhD students, other professors to help with their work, together with the shift of the social/anthropological sciences, to raise consciousness in society by standing in "solidarity" with migrants.

It is true that this trend of academia may really change migration policy promoting the establishment of favorable terms that have to do with management of migration crisis. Nevertheless, the social movements in which we exist do not care if the devaluation of migrants just gets more humanitarian characteristics. Because we know that even in that way their management will promote their devaluation, reproducing the same social relation that creates our devaluation; that the overcoming of the "migration crisis", like they call it, on these terms will only be in favor of the bosses. Our main purpose is to come together and fight alongside migrants against our devaluation. Such attempts were made with the migrant housing squat of Orfanotrofeio, as well as with the organization of the No Border Camp. Those actions open up perspectives of struggle and of meeting outside the limits of the charitable management which is promoted by the State migration policy. The dynamic of the relations formed within these attempts, the presence of migrants in the center of the city with an increasing frequency as a result of these and the struggle perspectives that were opened up was what made them dangerous and brought their repression. Finally, another reason for the repression (in the same context the Hurrija squat which was squatted during the No Border Camp and the squat at Nikis avenue were evicted) was the need for a spectacular answer on public speech level from the State.

In this context, quantitative and qualitative research, anthropological analysis regarding social groups, every research that examines migrants, movements and those who are in solidarity are subjects that interest the

State since they offer a means to glance at the resistance against it. All these research and projects, regardless if the researcher has an intention or not, are always under the supervision of the State and the capital and contribute more or less to formulate not only migration policy but also State policy regarding the management of social movements.

Consequently, we are cautious every time that our collective movement becomes the subject of research at academic projects, master degrees or theses, regardless of the level of involvement of the researcher in our procedures. The logic that preaches an intentional interaction between academy and social movements has in its mentality a clear separation between theory and action. That means that academics produce theory and movements produce the action. For us, movements do not need academics who will come up with the solutions and who will produce theory to back up their action. Movements are particularly concerned about their way of acting and based on their collectively processed experience produce their theory. We can not overlook that all this research, in contrast with the collective imprint of the experience of the movement “for the cause of social antagonism” as we usually write in the texts we publish, has individual names of authors and partners and contributes to fill out CVs. Our collective contents and practices become masters, dissertations and papers, converting collective experience into individual capital. Let’s not forget that there are progressive academic circles that promise a career. It is somewhere there that a line is drawn, which is often vague, between progressive academia and social movements.

All of the above are an attempt to analyze what we live inside and outside the university; an effort to understand the grid of social relations in which we exist and try to invent the ways and terms to meet with migrants, not to observe them and study them as something foreign, as the Other, but wanting to fight and live with them. We do not say this in order to worry about what to do now, but more to try to understand what we do and what limits and prospects we see. A kind of “theory”, let's say, which looks towards the overcoming of the separation between theory and action, which is not a dissertation, but the imprint of our collective movement, which does not have place in CVs, but in the procedures of the movement in order to sharpen the class antagonism (for our benefit).

We do not preach free and public education, nor do we believe that the privatization of the university is necessary for the external financing of research. Public universities and research have managed to coexist in harmony until now. Contrariwise, all of this is part of the continuous process of restructuring, in relation with the different social environments, to achieve the readjustment of universities in favor of capitalist accumulation.



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