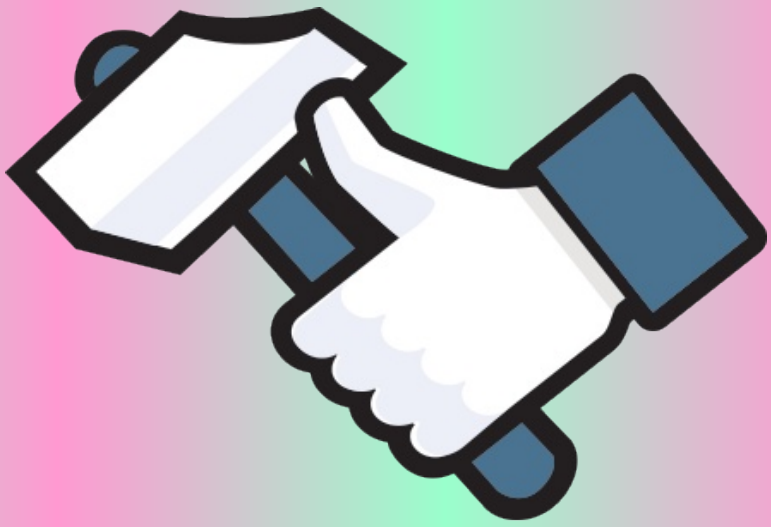
SPECIAL ISSUE



PERVASIVE LABOUR UNION

PRECADEMICS
85.42.1

#14

Editors' Note

Welcome to the third special issue of the Pervasive Labour Union zine, Precademics 85.42.1! This issue, prepared by the collective of the same name, brings experiences of precarity in Greek academia to the fore.

As a collective, Precademics 85.42.1 seeks to politicize anger, frustration and pain – the emotions accompanying the precarization of the working conditions of many 'young' academics in Greece. The austerity policies imposed as a result of the Troika (ECB, European Commission and the IMF) memoranda left lasting effects in Greek academia, where precarity is now the norm. While the Greek university has managed to remain public and free of fees, as provisioned by Article 16 of the Greek Constitution, Precademics 85.42.1 ask: at whose expense? For while it is vital that education remains free, a truly public University cannot and must not be built on neoliberal tenets that spell job insecurity for the many.

Isabel Llorey writes that precarization "embraces the whole of existence". Perusing the personal accounts published on this issue, that whole-encompassing character runs through like a connecting thread: the inability to form stable relationships, the difficulty to look ahead and plan for the future and the accumulation of debt due to delays or lack of payment are just some of the ways that job instability seeps into other aspects of these academics' lives. These experiences seem to echo Ned Rossiter and Brett Neilson's assertion that precarity's reference "(...) also extends beyond the world of work to encompass other aspects of intersubjective life, including housing, debt, and the ability to build affective social relations".

Frequently, however, precarious academics find it hard to find a voice. Their survival in academia is mostly dependent on securing external funds, leading these academics to work on a project-basis. This materiality gets opposed to the loftiness of higher education, and precarious academics enter difficult and stressed power relations with their tenure-track colleagues. Internalisation of this distance makes them question their legitimacy as real academics. Moreover, attempts to call into

question their working conditions often get misconstrued as a neoliberal attack on the public character of the university. These reasons, allied to the necessity of keeping good relations with elected colleagues, as precarious academics' presence in universities is often dependent on them, make speaking up about their situation highly challenging.

On the second special issue of the zine, "The Entreprecariat", editor Silvio Lorusso asked: "Or should insecurity itself become a paradoxically stable ground in which to build social cohesion?". To this question, Precademics 85.42.1 respond with a resounding yes, as there is an urgent need to challenge the silence to which their struggles have been relegated.

1: https://www.gnu.org/licenses/fdl-1.3.en.html

Accepted forms of payment

Politics of Opacity (a note on anonymity)

> The number 85.42.1 is the tax office code that employees in higher education in Greece use in order to provide educational services. This code establishes the new working status of the freelancer in university education in conditions of precarity.
> We are a collective formed to share experiences, politicize our needs and the difficulties we face in our everydayness, and to collectively claim better working conditions in research, teaching and management of Greek universities, research institutions and foundations. We operate in self-organized and horizontal processes of collective decision making.
> https://precademics.espivblogs.net/

Anonymity in academia is not expected. Developing a theoretical argument in obscurity is not recommended or acknowledged to put it mildly. Trusting 'reason', 'discourse', 'debate' and 'social contracts' entails that subjects know how to present themselves 'as such' or 'as they are' in the public sphere. The politics of identity is a fight for exactly that: the freedom for every 'minority', 'outcast', 'weirdness' or 'unconventionality' to co-exist safe (and visible) in their queerness and in civility with others. Many scholars in the humanities, the social and political sciences, and law schools have devoted their studies and interest in disclosing the socio-political conditions of exclusion and precarity. At least in Greece, there is a multitude of academics who have been well noted in the last decade for their writings on the debt crisis' dispossessed, the Syrian-war refugees, the precariousness of gender different, and the vulnerabilities of differently-abled.

What is particularly strange, in this context, is how in order to avoid facing their own vulnerability and anger, academics often become detached from lived experiences of precarity. Many, especially tenured members of staff but also precarious ones, spend entire academic careers writing about the precarity of others, but fail completely to break the silence on the unheroic precarious academia of the Greek University. At best, some calls

for discussion will address the current distances and advocate the need for more or better connection with the market or/and state services; thus, they will conceal even more the social conditions, the power struggles, and the modes of knowledge production that sustain academic precarity in the 21st century. To ask for one to disclose the 'public secrets' of tenured relations is to ask one to expose themselves to longstanding power relations. How vulnerable can one be for the sake of another colleague? Politics of opacity is not a request to protect one's academic name in face of their fragile social relations. Indeed, it results from the need to reveal 'toxic behaviours' and 'Machiavellian strategies' intensified due to reduced tenured positions, yet its purpose is not to protect one's 'bourgeoise' relationships. To the contrary, to engage in politics of opacity means to acknowledge that academic affinity is bonded through common interests and shared responsibilities; and that a much-needed debate should not turn into character assassination.

Politics of opacity entails an understanding of our ultra-individuated work interests and lives. No collective can speak easily in the name of precarious academics as a whole. Taking responsibility to write on academic precariousness means above all to politicize one's vulnerability, thus making it available for affective encounters and ethical responses. We are too many and too different, and no political party or state institution can incorporate our distress and frustration in such a way as to provide the much-awaited changes in academia.

Politics of opacity reflects that there is no single name or persona behind these texts, not because of a supposed need for anonymity but because many different people have edited and re-edited them. To engage in politics of opacity means to reduce attachment to 'texts' and 'ideas'; it means to engage in writing without expecting to see your name in the end product. Hence, it means to accept that a change in academic relations entails a change in ethics, not in politics as such.

Politics of opacity means to deny 'branding' the precariousness of others, let alone of your colleagues; it means to situate the changes in academia in the historical present of social media and platform capitalism within which personas, academic interests, articles and social mechanics mash-up reducing politics of representation to the desire for public recognition and personal

fulfilment. These are the social modes of current knowledge production, which we ought to reflect on, if not resist.

On the Precariousness of Precarious Academics

Precarious academics lead a life with few prospects of developing their social biographies. Their work involves underpaid short-term teaching contracts, acquiring temporary research grants, having to organize conferences and events, and producing peer reviewed publications - all practical work responsibilities without significant impact on sustaining normalcy in their everyday life, let alone on advancing fulfilling career goals. These working conditions have resulted globally from the restructuring of university institutions, which is based on a paradigm of 'liveability' and 'market orientation'. For precarious academics, it is hard to penetrate formal institutional structures, as available spaces are still very few and universities operate on the privilege of knowledge production. Moreover, precarity unfolds through relations of dependency on 'elected' members of staff, who are often given (perhaps as a gift) impressive research records created by their precarious colleagues. Dependency is a permanent feature of academic lives and university practices, with many academics in their thirties and forties facing no option but to remain perpetually precarious.

Not only academics find themselves in conditions of precarity and dependency. During the restructuring of university institutions, administrative staff was hired with similar terms in the so-called 'research offices' or 'funding management offices' to cover all types of ongoing bureaucratic needs – often irrelevant to the projects themselves – sucking, as the outer arm of 'host institutions', funding mostly generated by precarious academics. Instead of common struggles – that is, instead of having a 'common consciousness' of their precarity in Marxist terms – the relationships between these two interconnected groups of workers (academic and bureaucratic) are characterised by increased competition, hostility and tensions, as both are trying to get privileged access to limited resources and to enhance relations of dependency with tenured staff in order to secure tenured positions once they open. Intellectual identity and a sense of pride for academic achievements render it easier for precarious academics to identify with their privileged full-time colleagues. Indeed,

despite their distances in terms of working conditions and rights, the precarious and the elected staff have developed various forms of sectoral or discipline-based organising, that has so far done very little to raise the issue of precarity, even though many of them work hard on the need to preserve the 'public character' of universities.

Surviving precarity in academia involves a lot of unheroic compromise, manoeuvring, and adjusting that is often understood and treated as symptomatic and opportunistic. Precarious academics are often labelled as Projectariat – even ironically by themselves – an identity that testifies to a new regime of lower status and with less labour rights; while those who work on successive projects are often singled out and labelled as business-oriented 'project hunters', a derogative term describing lack of intellectual depth and a dubious commitment to profit making rather than pure, interest-free, independent research. Yet, to acknowledge the historical condition of precariousness in academia means for one to understand that reproducing stereotypes about the impartiality of academic research masks the materiality of precarity. Concealing precarity is mainly done by silencing precarious academics' need to constantly seek funding in order to survive unstable working arrangements; a need that elected academics – particularly in Greece and other countries with strong relations of patronage – are free of precisely because of evaluation procedures that favour social privilege. Silencing the new modes of knowledge production in academia masks the fact that the sustainability of the public character of universities is dependent upon precarious labour.

This masking of the materiality of precarity, as opposed to the supposed immateriality of 'pure' research, can be stigmatising. Most precarious respond either by internalising the stigma by repeating 'I am not a real academic as I am not in a position to do pure research' like a living mantra, or by reasserting academic purity by carrying out voluntarily unpaid or low paid research or teaching, which is – interestingly enough – less stigmatising. With some notable exceptions indeed – elected colleagues who quietly help and support their precarious co-workers – the greatest part of academia either profits or completely ignores their colleagues' condition of precarity. The challenge is how to raise issues related to precarity without falling into the trap of being accused of lack of intellectualism or being suspected of a neoliberal urge to put in question the 'public', 'open' or 'free

of fees' character of university institutions. The challenge is how to be open about one's precariousness without jeopardizing (already) fragile personal and professional relationships; without being targeted as a reactionary colleague; without losing prestige as one who is unable to cope with the pressing demands of academic life. Such dilemmas intensify the precariousness of precarious academics, and faced with them, most precarious end by silencing their experiences, frustration and needs.

Silencing Precarity in Greek Academia

There is a persistent silencing of precarity in Greek academia. This complicates the development of meaningful forms of resistance as any discussion of precarity often appears as an act of betrayal against the public character of the Greek University.

State-funded universities in Greece seem to be floating like an island in the perilous waters of global neoliberalism. Having resisted – so far – the push towards the widespread trend of neoliberal restructuring, they have managed to keep free of student fees and maintain a monopoly in higher education. The fact that degrees obtained from private universities operating inside the Greek territory are not recognised by the state, has contributed to their protected position. Similarly, tenured staff tends to enjoy a relatively privileged public servant status, which is the product of a combination of factors including struggles to resist fees and privatisation, failure to impose evaluation procedures, and informal norms preventing competitive applications. Despite significant reductions in their already low salaries, tenured academic and administrative staff have managed to sustain this status throughout the austerity waves mainly because of the constant opposition against governments' attempts to impose a neoliberal agenda and undermine the 'public character' of the Greek University.

The struggles for the preservation of the Greek University as a public body, however, were paralleled by the multiplication and diversification of precarious forms of academic labour that mostly went unnoticed. While historically early-stage informal and unpaid teaching and research are considered as preconditions for a successful academic career, it was since the 2008 sovereign debt crisis that precarious forms of labour began to multiply and spread across disciplines. It is, indeed, known that high-profiled institutions operating in advanced neoliberal ecologies have witnessed 'elastic' 'short-term' labour since the early 2000s. In Greece, however, the abrupt imposition of austerity reforms had its logical consequences in the regional paradigm. The discontinuation of public sector recruitment created personnel shortages, threatening the public character of Greek institutions. If it wasn't for precarious academics, it is likely that

universities in Greece would have great difficulties to survive and to continue functioning with the limited budgets allocated by the state.

These processes have led to the emergence of highly qualified academics, who enjoy none of the labour rights of their 'elected' colleagues. Employing precarious researchers, lecturers and administrative staff through temporary short-term contracts to cover on-going needs of underfunded universities, was mainly carried out by securing European Union funds. By sustaining the precarious as constantly dependent upon temporary external funding, Greek universities were able to survive the crisis. Labelling them as self-employed, the state ensured that the precarious would constantly be under the burden of seeking new funding sources in order to be present in academia, while simultaneously they will support financially the public University.

There is a latent rage amongst those working in precarious conditions in and around the Greek academia that has yet to find an outlet to be expressed productively. Although both precarious and non-precarious academics were, for the most part, vocal concerning their opposition to austerity reforms, tenured academics remained provokingly untouched by the institutionalization of precarity within universities. And that is because challenging privileges, dependencies, and the hierarchical divisions of tenured vs precarious professors, lecturers vs researchers, full-time vs precarious administrative staff, publicly employed vs sub-contracted cleaners, but also post-graduate vs undergraduate students requires a lot of painful work that no tenured staff is interested in undertaking.

Precarious academics in Greece find themselves in this vexed position to articulate a toxic public secret. At the same time, we uphold the responsibility of becoming vocal about precarity in a collective way, and of raising its question in a way that cuts across academic hierarchies. In effect – the most difficult aspect of this whole process – we find ourselves in a position to reimagine our ethics of relating by acknowledging the current economy of knowledge production: that is, by respecting academics' individual concerns for promoting one's interests, by honouring our 'bourgeoise' interpersonal relations, by situating our status in the global paradigm of neoliberal restructuring of the welfare state and the rising inequality, and indeed by claiming an open

yet state-of-the-art university that is beyond the mere demands of preserving a state-owned institution. Struggling to keep the University as a state institution at whatever cost is an extremely short-sighted strategy that reproduces labour inequality and antagonism between academics of different ages and genders. While there is a need to preserve the Greek University free of student fees, this cannot be done by silencing precarity.

The Precademics 85.42.1 2018 Manifesto

Towards Different Labor Regimes for the Precarious of Greek Universities

We, the precarious of the Greek universities, have remained invisible for several years struggling to survive, to produce research and to teach in the most transient, solitary and fragmented ways. During the infamous period of the so-called "Greek debt crisis" and austerity, we have experienced even more intensely the condition of precarity as it spread and became institutionalized in the context of financial cuts and strict limitations to public sector recruitment. However, as time goes by our numbers increase and we become more and more permanently present, contributing to knowledge production in Greece in many different ways. Our precarity is no longer a temporary deviation in education due to 'crisis', but the normality of the Greek university; one that declares itself to be 'public' and calls upon us to defend it, at the same time it places against us the most 'flexible' structures, conditions and labor expectations, while simultaneously preserving bureaucratic imperatives and regimes of 'exceptional' relations.

This condition of precarity cannot be differentiated from the 'new' opportunities on offer to supply our knowledge and skills to various cultural and research institutions. On the contrary, they intensify the principles of the market and by extension our own precarity. We participate wherever we are invited – in talks, workshops, public actions etc. – in an attempt to become visible, to be relevant, to show that we are productive, to preserve our support networks. All these activities are considered as 'gifts' in a regime of complete precarity and, indeed, none of these institutions views our work as worthy of payment. The time, the effort, the knowledge production, the investment in our social relations – fragmented and lonely endeavors presented as achievements; that is the unpaid labor that constitutes the new type of the utilized university worker.

The state programs for the 'Acquisition of Academic Teaching Experience' in Greek universities showed up in this regime of precarity in order to cover the teaching needs created due to

permanent academic staff shortages. As many other programs of this type, they do not recognize our labor as payable work, neither do they recognize the normalization of our precarity. Indicated by their title, they appear as a seemingly temporary, well-meaning and generous 'offer' to all of us; a unique opportunity to develop our CVs differently. This wonderful picture works precisely because it obscures the fact that our participation in the public production of knowledge is carried out with lower labor costs and through our complete dependence on the bureaucratic services of the Universities' Special Account for Research Funds that utilize our payments for their own (questionable) needs of balanced budgeting; it works since it is carried out by containing our labor rights.

The calls for the above programs are announced late and notices of selection are publicized in an equally slow pace. They are short-term and our investment in teaching is not secured; let alone our integration into the university. The cost of transport and accommodation is in no way compensated especially when we are paid six and seven months after the start of our work – having already endured these expenses personally on a daily basis. These 'technical' details illustrate the devaluation of our lives and our work, and it is only a part of the working conditions that the researchers, lecturers and fellows in Greek higher education institutions share.

We live in a state of constant anxiety for our everyday survival; for the preservation of our academic bonds to which we systematically invest; about the preparation of our courses that will already be incomplete; about whether we will be in the same teaching rooms the following year, especially when our time to prepare for the future is consumed by academic and writing responsibilities. Such academic conditions frustrate our labor and sever our bonds from departments, colleagues and students. No educator in any educational level can ever in such conditions produce work that creates long-term relations.

We identify with our teaching and research, and we demand the visibility of our labor and the precarious conditions in which it is carried out. The non-recognition of our rights makes it much more difficult and limits our ability to produce research and create publications as we ought to. For many of us, the only option is to work in multiple programs, in seasonal or ephemeral positions, within or outside of the university, devaluing our

everyday life and quality of our work. We cannot and do not want to be invisible anymore. We witness our lives being consumed in an on-going antagonism for determining which one of us will be more capable or lucky to get the 'anointing' or to preserve 'exceptional' relations, in order to pass to the other side, the one of permanent employment in the university, while the rest of us will continue to be precarious until the system washes us out because of age.

We demand:
1) Payment for participation in all educational/ cultural events
2) Special employment status for researchers and contract lecturers
3) To exempt scholarships and research positions from the state VAT
4) At last fellows, researchers and contract lecturers be paid on a monthly basis
5) More inclusive participation status for decision making in university departments.

The institutionalization of precarity in the Greek university by way of expanding and legitimizing this 'freelancing' regime in teaching and research contributes to the degradation of the public character of education. At the same time, this degradation is concealed in rhetoric about 'defending' the public character of the University – which indeed we also ought to do. We are sceptical towards such rhetoric when it introduces through our bodies the harshest neoliberal (re)forms – which makes even more crucial the question: What kind of University do we want?

Why should we accept a University that produces segregated categories of workers when they do exactly the same job? Like our full-time colleagues, we are not freelancers, we do not own companies, and we do not consider our students as clients. The public university requires political imagination from all of us. Our call is to create in common different labor regimes that recognize and ensure our contribution in the production of knowledge.

European Union Research Programmes in Greece: Precarity on End

In Greece, university researchers are treated as exploitable workers, only receiving freelance contracts. Even in the case of EU-funded programmes that legally bind universities to hire researchers with full-employment contracts, they blatantly refuse to do so, even though they stand to benefit through paid overheads. Instead, they contractually entrap researchers to conditions of precarity, marked by delayed payments and the withholding of a wide range of labour rights, such as full coverage of health and social insurance, work accidents, longer maternity leave, and unemployment benefit. Freelance contracts also mean no participation in departmental meetings, decision-making, supervising, and limited – if any – teaching.

This has been my experience with a Marie Skłodowska Curie Fellowship (Horizon 2020), a prestigious and highly competitive EU research fellowship, which I recently completed. A full-time research position for 24 months, the Fellowship was funded by the European Commission, whose regulations strictly require an employment contract for the researcher. As a second time Marie Skłodowska Curie (MSC) Fellow, I was shocked to see that my experience with the programme at a German university was radically different. In Germany not only was I granted all benefits of permanent staff in terms of the university's contractual obligations and services, I also shared privileges and responsibilities vis-à-vis departmental affairs and academic/ research opportunities.

My experience as a MSC Fellow at a Greek university was definitely a different affair. This bitter reality hit me early on with the refusal of the host institute to give an employment contract as outlined in the grant agreement and regulations of Horizon 2020. According to the latter, only national law can allow for any diversion from the regulations, which was not applicable in this case. In 2016, law 4386/2016 was passed in Greece concerning research; article 93 allows universities and research institutes to contract EU-funded fellows with proper employment contracts releasing employers from any obligation to turn these positions into permanent posts after the completion of the programme.

Despite this legal adjustment, Greek universities en masse refuse to give researchers employment contracts. Rejecting my request to honour the grant agreement, my initial host took a "take it or leave it" stance. With the optimism of one unaware of the institutional and bureaucratic hurdles of Greek universities, I changed host, opting for a university that was admittedly more open to follow the ministerial pressures concerning EU regulations. Even so, my freelance contract was never changed. Indeed, this is not a singular case limited to one university and its corresponding 'Special Accounts for Research Funds Department' (ELKE), but a policy encountered across the country. What transpired from the first few months were major delays in payments, which included money for mobility, family relocation, research expenses, and living expenses.

My first pay check arrived at the end of month six (!) By that time, I had to borrow approximately 8000 euros to cover living expenses for me and my child. Most importantly, I had to financially support the programme's research expenses, including research trips, conferences and workshops across Europe, all scheduled deliverables that could not be postponed. The delays continued until the very end, leaving me with outstanding debts of several thousand euros as I had to personally fund a planned international conference and exhibition; in the end some deliverables had to be changed or dropped due to these delays. Out of 24 months, I was only paid regularly for a span of six. A single parent and a foreign researcher in Greece, I had no established social or family networks to offer any kind of help or support on all fronts. During this time, I faced acute stress, insecurity, and financial woes that affected not only my research project but also my family life, to say the least.

These delays were linked, to an extent, to institutional problems and bureaucracy inherent in the ELKE system across Greece as well as to changes in the accounting system of ELKE recently introduced by law following Troika memoranda. More specifically, universities were made part of the national accounting system, a change which led to even more delays in payment. Another major problem was that many universities are in great debt or simply have no research money reserve to meet their requirements as hosts. This lack of research funds constitutes the norm rather than the exception in Greece right now. In this sense, to talk about academic precarity one has to also take into account the devastation Greece is

suffering in the context of the EU and the debt regime of the Troika memoranda, affecting all aspects of the national sector including universities. This does not, however, absolve any university employer from such appalling treatment and disregard of labour rights. Universities should refrain from taking on projects they cannot financially support. The worse though is being in limbo, never getting a clear answer from the administration about payments, reinforcing the condition of insecurity, stress, and frustration.

The silence of ELKE administration is partly linked with the diffusion of precarity itself. Often understaffed (as in the case of my university), ELKE consists mostly of short-term contractor administrators. Any question concerning payment meets a wall, prompting a referral to the department's head. This is not just a way to get rid of an angry beneficiary. It is deeply rooted in the precarious position they find themselves into, which makes them wary of assuming any kind of responsibility. That such delays are considered the norm and are tolerated by employees, colleagues, and the academic community leads to their perpetuation, rendering research in Greece a Sisyphean task.

In such research environment, tenured staff have undoubtedly an ethical responsibility to defend precarious colleagues and exert the needed pressure to their university departments, university and ELKE administrations. This pressure can take many forms, including refusal to supervise projects when the researcher's rights are not adequately supported and respected.

In my case, I was lucky to have the full and invaluable support of my supervisor. Beyond the excellent academic input, the supervisor 'put a fight' for me from day one up until the completion of the programme, pressurizing administrators and management, achieving results through processes that were not pleasant. Yet, my experience in a Greek university has taught me that there is currently no 'nurturing' or support of research from an administration point of view. The researcher is faced with a solitary path paved with obstacles and insecurity, a path she walks alone in the absence of a union for the precarious or, if lucky, with the support and solidarity of colleagues and collectives such as this one (i.e. Precademics 85.42.1).

A Letter from Jehan

I have that rare thing, a permanent academic post – I'm an associate professor in Switzerland. But neoliberal forms of labor exploitation and precarization are structured into my job on many levels. First, rather than a full position, I am employed part-time at 40% of a full position – the threshold that allows my school to avoid paying my health insurance. Since my part-time salary is not enough to live in Switzerland (the cost of living in that country would require a 100% position), I have to fly there and back from Greece, where I live, at my own expense, and also have to pay my accommodation in Switzerland while I am teaching. Over ten years, these expenses have averaged a full one-third of my salary. The school routinely shifts other costs onto me by manipulating administrative rules. For example, each year I am required to submit proof of research and publications, namely conferences attended and articles published. If I give a lecture in Copenhagen, or go to a conference in London, my school escapes paying my flights and accommodation, since I am flying to and from Greece, rather than to and from Geneva (where I cannot afford to live). This means that if I go to a conference, the costs could amount to another third of what I make that month. Moreover, the surveillance of faculty has been steadily intensified: we now are required to fill out calendars detailing all the days and hours we are present at school, doing what kind of work. (We are passively resisting this by simply not filling out and returning the forms.) This emphasis on 'hours' and quantified evaluation is transforming a professional job into wage labor, bringing public teaching and research more directly under forms of labor discipline and undercutting the autonomy of public education institutions. I realize that my situation is far less precarious than that of many others, and that the precarization of my 'permanent part-time' position is merely a small part of a general and on-going neoliberal offensive aiming to enclose, privatize and extract maximum value from all remaining public assets. All forms and degrees of precarious employment, divisive competition among workers, and coerced, uncompensated labor need to be resisted collectively, until precarity as a logic of exploitation is rolled back and abolished, full stop.

Prestigious Precarity

Not long ago I was attending a dinner with some colleagues in a western European city, where I was a visiting scholar for the winter semester of 2019-2020. I had just gotten the exciting news that a post-doctoral proposal I had submitted in the State Scholarship Foundation (IKY) of Greece was accepted. Joyous for my success, a Greek colleague – tenured social sciences professor abroad – shared the news to the company. After the first couple of beers, he made a toast congratulating me for getting, in his own words, "the most prestigious post-doctoral fellowship in Greece". Impressed, everybody wished me all the best for my new research. To me, however, calling this fellowship "the most prestigious one in Greece" sounded funny, if not disheartening, making me feel frustrated and a bit depressed.

The following days I found myself pondering in my office, wondering why I felt this way. What was odd about calling the IKY scholarship prestigious?

As the only public scholarship foundation in Greece, IKY could be considered as the most prestigious on a national scale. Indeed, my Greek colleague, once a beneficiary of IKY himself on a post-graduate level, was definitely right.

What do we exactly mean by the word prestige though? Does it refer to the importance of the foundation or its state character alone? I would answer negatively to both. Ascribing prestige to an institution ought to also consider the conditions in which scholarships and fellowships are given as well as the conditions in which researchers are required to do their work.

Here are some more details in brief.

The current situation in Greece does not allow IKY to fund post-doctoral projects on a regular basis. The financing of the post-doctoral program in question is secured by European funds made available by the previous government in order to support early career researchers, preventing the so-called "brain drain" that turned into a great political issue since the Greek debt crisis. With this program, IKY offers two-year fellowships to about 600 researchers in research institutes or universities in Greece. On

the one hand, this scheme gives incentive, managing to keep young researchers in the country. On the other, the scholarship falls short compared to the equivalent European ones and, most importantly, does not do justice to the researchers' basic rights. Estimated 1000 Euros per month, this funding does not include health insurance or pension, offering no coverage for research and travel costs or (laboratory) equipment, even though such costs are implicated in the proposals and deliverables (for instance, conference presentations, publications). Making matters even worse, payments are made every three months, if one is lucky. In fact, a term in the contract anticipates payment delays: since such programs are funded by EU schemes, payments, they note, will be made only after funds are transferred to the foundation. In other words, delays are to be expected.

A thousand Euros might not sound bad for Greece given that the basic income is 600 Euro at present. However, this is not a scholarship that allows researchers to do serious work. It is rather a charitable gesture to young scholars resonating a neoliberal political agenda that favors mobility, production and symbolic status. Because such kind of remuneration is not enough to sustain a decent living, cover health insurance, and the research and travel expenses entailed in research posts. Indeed we will be getting the most prestigious scholarship from the country; yet this is solely meaningful as another achievement added to our CV. In reality we will still be in an underpaid and precarious position, yet a prestigious one!

About Precademics 85.42.1

The collective Precacademics 85.42.1 was founded amidst (and because of) some critical reconfigurations of precarity in Greek universities that took place during the SYRIZA government. It might seem odd to hear that the higher education politics of the 'radical left-wing' party would legitimise precarious relations. Yet under the pressure of austerity and the restrictions in the recruitment of civil servants imposed by the Memoranda, the SYRIZA government opted for a politics that made it possible to cover teaching and research gaps through the introduction of temporary programs for the recruitment of precarious teaching staff with short-term, and (obviously) low paid contracts. Moreover, since 2016, it made available public funds for researchers (introducing for the first time the right of non-tenured members of staff to claim authorship and lead research programs) in the framework 'Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation' (ELIDEK) – under the condition that they had finished their PhD less than 10 years before the applications. All research and teaching programs were subsidized by EU funds; their stated aim was to enable young academics to acquire 'professional experience'. Indeed, these initiatives were celebrated in almost all left-wing circles as great social measures to deal with the problem of academic unemployment and brain drain; and they were (quite ironically) promoted as a generous 'gift' towards young and inexperienced academics.

'Young academics' were hired as self-employed freelancers deprived of the option to find employment outside the state apparatus since private universities in Greece – usually referred to as colleges – have no higher education legitimacy. Indeed, the trick is that as self-employed these 'young academics' ought to defray insurance costs, employer's share, 24% business tax, while at the same time being burdened with 100% tax payment in advance. In other words, SYRIZA government created a radical neoliberal regime of precarity within the public university for 'young academics' only. 'Young academics' – some over their forties – find themselves to be 'beneficiaries', under the hard taxation rules for the self-employed, with lower payment, and none of the rights of their full-time colleagues. Although payment is low, competition for

these positions is fierce, intensifying further the relations of dependency on tenured academics.

As teaching positions are renewed on a yearly basis, precarious academics who manage to enter disciplinary networks tend to move from university to university teaching different courses depending on the needs of different departments. This imposes a constant burden on them to carry out lengthy bureaucratic application procedures and to redesign new courses on different subjects each year; while there is also the constant need to sustain good relationships with tenured members of staff in order to increase their chances to sign a teaching contract based on their academic interests. Moreover, the time limitation (less than 10 years before the acquisition of PhD) is intended to make sure that these posts are only offered as a temporary opportunity excluding any type of even contingent security amongst (young) academics. The wave of appointments in 2018 that followed these reforms – the first after a decade of austerity – is a testimony of the regime of precariousness that was created in order to support the public character of the Greek University; many of the appointed academics had little or no teaching experience. So much for the gift of experience to 'young academics'; such is the particular normalisation of precarity in Greek academia.

Precademics 85.42.1 was constituted out of the need to understand this shift that was handed as a gift, challenging the silence of precarity. On occasions when the precarious meet and discuss, painful stories of vulnerability and anger unfold. On such occasions, the seemingly seamless pact with tenured colleagues for the preservation of the public character of the Greek University becomes frail and fragile since it becomes apparent that some carry a much heavier burden than others. The vulnerability of precarity is painful not only because of the stigma of the failed, but also because this radical neoliberal regime is carved in unreasonable hierarchical rules of seniority and privilege. Moreover, one cannot help being angry not only at others, but also at oneself for passively accepting one's situation of precarity. Precademics 85.42.1 was founded to politicize those emotions that otherwise go unnoticed, merge with similar others, and feed all kinds of reactionarism and conservatism in our present day of neoliberal dominance and alt-right growth.

The task for us, Precademics 85.42.1, is to rethink precarity in Greek academia in the face of the rise of the neoliberal

educational paradigm globally, which also seems to be informing the political proclamations of the newly elected right-wing government of New Democracy. While the present condition of precarity should be addressed, it ought to be contextualized with other equally problematic prospects beyond the sheer interests of 'young academics', such as fees, student debt, logistical evaluation procedures and the spread of precarious conditions. Politicizing precarity is the heavy task to understand the historical condition of a present-day academia that is unable to absorb the multitude of academics; it is, thus, an occasion to reimagine modes of living and working in the academia based on cross cutting alliances between tenured and precarious academics, academic and administrative staff, and – perhaps most importantly – staff and students. Without doubt, those who enjoy more security should have reasons to share this urgency. Introducing anew collective modes of working in academia may go beyond existing modes of teaching and research based on hierarchies, prestige, dependencies and antagonisms, which undermine the quality of both. The existential task of Precademics 85.42.1 is precisely an example of the need for new ways of producing the public University within and beyond the present-day neoliberal paradigm, that will be beneficial for all those who do not feel comfortable or who are tired of having to claim or deal with privileges emanating from discipline, seniority, age, formal education and gender.