



Workshop
May 18, 2021

**Free as a Bird:
Academic Precariat and the State of Academic Freedom
in the Global North**

Call for papers

Due to the rise in anti-intellectual interventions in higher education and attacks on scientific communities worldwide, the issue of academic freedom has found renewed interest in recent years. For the most part, the entire discourse on academic freedom revolves around the political aspect. However, while the authoritarian offensive attracts more attention at first glance, there is another, structural factor which is not less threatening for the future of knowledge production: The increasing precarization of the academic labor force.

The commodification of knowledge and the privatization of higher education in the last few decades have radically transformed the academic landscape. Universities have been forced to eliminate non-profitable research and degree programs to become "market-smart" – and not surprisingly, this argument is often used to eliminate critical strands like Marxist Theory or Gender Studies. Meanwhile, the cost-cutting mentality came to shape the academic employment relations. We can see it in the steady elimination of tenure and its replacement with contingent employment practices. The drastic cutback of public funds in higher education rendered researchers and institutions overly dependent on third-party funding. The overdependence on external funding increased the influence of the market massively, as can be seen in how the business-oriented rhetoric of "excellence" infiltrated the entire academic world. Under these circumstances, we need to ask what is left of academic freedom even in countries hitherto seen as the bastion of it.

In view of the entanglement of entrenched quasi-feudal hierarchies and neoliberal reforms in the so-called leading scientific countries, the "Free as a Bird: Academic Precariat and the State of Academic Freedom in the Global North" workshop on May 18, 2021 aims at expanding the discussion on academic freedom to the underexamined relationship between labor devaluation and critical knowledge production. Thus, we invite inputs on precarious academic employment, early-career researchers' experiences, and market-oriented restrictions on scientific production in the global North, including but not limited to:

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- The impact of economic, social, and cultural capital-based disparities on career start and progression
- institutional hierarchies and undemocratic decision-making structures at the universities
- the role of patronage relationships vis-à-vis the meritocratic criteria in academic careers
- the implications of market-driven research and overdependence on third-party-funding for research agendas, peer relations, and future prospects of non-tenured researchers
- the impact of accelerated digitalization on academic labor, especially in times of Covid-19
- tensions between adjunct workload, care work, and political engagements
- intersectional discrimination in the sphere of higher education and academic career
- the impact of increased managerialism and quantification on scientific production
- types of unpaid and unrecognized labor expected from academics
- the political organization of contingent academic labor, or lack thereof, against increasing precarization
- the proneness of the non-tenured staff to labor coercion, unpaid labor, workplace misconduct, and (self-)exploitation
- the limits of Eurocentric and purely political notions of academic freedom

The workshop language is English. It is planned as virtual-only, one-day event on **May 18, 2021**. Speakers will be paid an honorarium of 200€ for their time and contributions.

Submissions are welcome from researchers at all stages of their careers, from any theoretical and methodological approach, and across multiple disciplines.

Please send your abstract of no more than 500 words by April 18, 2021 to:

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We will inform you about your participation until April 30, 2021.