


CHAPTER 2

The Double Bind of Academic Freedom

Reflections from the United Kingdom and Venezuela

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Over the last years, the concept of academic freedom has received renewed attention. Fighting for autonomy from state bureaucracies, academics have tried to reclaim this asset of the academic profession. However, there is a certain blind spot in the discussion. Academic freedom has predominantly been portrayed as absent in peripheral countries with illiberal regimes. Such narratives follow the 1980s liberal democratisation formula: a state capture by an illiberal regime blocks the free flow of capital and frustrates competition. The systemic solution, termination of state regulation by full embrace of liberal democratic values, including free flow of capital (Gagyi and Ivancheva 2019), is seen as a silver bullet solution to the problem of academic freedom. In this framework, the 1989–91 regime changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were celebrated for, among other reasons, the return of academic freedom as yet another freedom from state coercion (Altbach 2001). With the triumph of the liberal democratic West against the autocratic socialist East, celebrated with the ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama 1993) and There Is No Alternative (TINA) narratives, the legitimate concern about any type of freedom focused stubbornly on coercions by the ‘big state’ and side-lined any discussion of the coercion of the market (Harvey 2005). Accordingly, the literature on academic freedom has continually neglected key challenges to academic freedom in capitalist democracies, or the predicaments of democratic socialist regimes confronted with a liberal concept of academic freedom.

Building on my work on the Venezuelan higher education reform under late President Hugo Chávez (e.g. Ivancheva 2013, 2017a, 2017b) and my more recent research on the UK higher education system (Ivancheva 2020), this chapter problematises the liberal concept of academic freedom. Discussing the market intrusion into universities with broader im-

plications for academic freedom in both core and peripheral contexts of the global field of higher education (Marginson 2008; Ivancheva and Syndicus 2019), I show how ambiguous concepts such as academic freedom can be subverted and used against their transformative reading. In the case of academic freedom, while certain instances of state intervention under so-called ‘illiberal regimes’ are undeniable and need urgent action, the insistence on freedom from the state conceals bigger enclosures on university autonomy from state-enabled market forces, performed within liberal and illiberal regimes alike. It is also being used to hinder positive state intervention when progressive governments emerge.

The chapter complicates the concept of academic freedom in two ways. On the one hand, I speak of cases in advanced capitalist democracies where, under the rhetoric of academic freedom, state intervention that redistributes to and hugely benefits private companies, curtails workers’ rights and securities. The increased control of public higher education by market forces is expressed in enclosures that connect academic freedom to core areas of university activity: research, teaching and service (Swartz et al. 2019). On the other hand, in democratic socialist countries like Venezuela under Chávez, aiming to subvert such devastating trends, a concept of academic freedom was used by conservative opposition forces to entrench themselves in traditional universities and defy redistribution and social justice (Ivancheva 2017a). I show how, in both cases, the ‘occupation’ of the concept of academic freedom reflects broader structures of power, facilitates the reproduction of hierarchies, and – in the case of Venezuela despite the equitable institutional design – can inhibit the process of widening access to marginalised groups.

Academic Freedom: Conceptual Notes

The meanings of what constituted academic freedom have changed in different historical epochs and geographical areas with their specific university models. Originally, in late medieval universities across Europe, it signified the relative freedom from secular or religious authorities for faculty and students alike (Altbach 2001). It was reinforced in the nineteenth-century Humboldtian university model of *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit* – two concepts which stood, respectively, for teaching and learning freedom within the confines of scholarly discipline (Altbach 2001: 206). Such freedom did not protect the academic community from broader social and political issues; it did not extend beyond the

university gates, and did not mean any special protection for dissenting faculty or students (Altbach 2001: 206–207). Under the Napoleonic university model, developed in the same era and dedicated to civil service education, universities were central institutions to train and thus reproduce the elites presiding over the nation-state (Sam and Van der Sijde 2014). Academics were seen as public or clerical servants accountable to the secular or religious power rather than to science. State or clerical authorities had indiscriminate rights to intervene in university operations (Enders, de Boer and Weyer 2013; Lynch and Ivancheva 2015).

It was in the Americas at the end of the nineteenth century that the individual and guild privileges and the public service aspect of the university institution were combined in an extended definition of academic freedom (Einaudi 1963). Under the insistence of the public relevance of scientific knowledge, and the service function of higher education, the university community was seen as responsive to broader issues in society (Einaudi 1963). Protections of the academic community in public life beyond the ivory tower were seen as vital (Altbach 2001). In the US this meant research faculty were entitled to special protections of freedom of public speech and writing on all topics. Throughout Latin America, under the influence of the Cordoba Reform in Argentina from 1918, this protection went a step further (Altbach 2001). In Cordoba, and later through student discontent and public reforms across the continent, progressive students and academics demanded protection of the financial, legal and political autonomy of universities and even protection from police forces entering their campuses. This reform introduced some of the key principles of public higher education in Latin America: free access, democratic co-governance, transparent recruitment, and applied academic knowledge through outreach (*extensión*) (Tünnermann 2008; Ivancheva 2013, 2017a).

Thus, the concept remained stretched between distant, and even somewhat controversial definitions. At one end stands a narrow definition of individual or institutional freedom premised on an adherence to the scientific or disciplinary ideal. At the other extreme, academic freedom has had strong institutional connotations that require not only students and faculty, but also university institutions to be accountable to the public, by serving official authorities or by openly confronting powers-that-be (Altbach 2001; Traianou 2015). These definitions now find hybrid manifestations in different contexts. The broader concept is central in places where academic communities are involved in struggles for national liberation or against authoritarian dictatorships (Altbach 2001). The narrower one is professed in contexts where the academic

community is not seen as a politically relevant actor, but its right of free speech is regarded as unquestionable (Lynch and Ivancheva 2015).

The broader definition of academic freedom lost traction with the collapse of the socialist bloc in 1989 (Altbach 2001). Since then, academic freedom has mostly been absent or only featured in a limited sense in policy documents. In a rare appearance in the international arena, UNESCO defined academic freedom as academics' 'right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine', to freedom of teaching, discussion, research, publication, and uncensored critical speaking of the institution or system in which they work (UNESCO 1997). Institutional autonomy was, then, a guarantee of the rights of 'teaching personnel' to function to 'the proper fulfilment' of the teaching personnel's and institutions' duties (UNESCO 1997). In national documents, such as the UK Education Reform Act 1988, Section 202 (2), academic freedom was 'the freedom [academics have] within the law to question and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at their institutions'.

Such individually focused conceptualisations of academic freedom nowadays growingly surface in debates within academia and in public in relation to new illiberal governments' measures against liberal academics and universities (Ignatieff and Roch 2018). Individual institutions' and academics' right to be independent from any regulation, paradoxically, is also defended by the opposite conservative camp as they defend the right of misogynist, racist and other controversial opinions to be platformed at university campuses (see e.g. Simpson and Kaufmann 2019). While the latter discussion mostly takes place in advanced capitalist democracies, the former happens in the postcolonial or post-socialist space and in (semi-)peripheral economies where universities play a political role and academic communities express liberal democratic ideals (Lyer 2019). Yet both discussions omit the question of what project of statehood or public interest is represented in specific regulatory initiatives. Both also hail academic freedom as a privilege granted to universities and their faculty, without requirement that they serve a positively transformative social project (Lynch and Ivancheva 2015).

In light of this, a new wave of discussion of academic freedom has emerged in recent years, one that challenges both the broad and narrow definitions of academic freedom (Moreno 2008; Lynch and Ivancheva 2015; Traianou 2015; O'Keefe 2016; Ivancheva 2017a). While agreeing that freedom should be granted to academics and students, authors

express concerns about the way in which discussions of academic freedom elude the question of marketisation of university education. And while UNESCO (1997) insisted that academics, like all other citizens, are expected to ‘enhance the observance in society of the cultural, economic, social, civil and political rights of all peoples’, these authors have questioned how exactly the university institution serves the public. The question remains: under which circumstances should universities claim academic freedom, and under which could such freedom be challenged? This discussion first emerged around the question of campus freedom of speech and no-platforming, where freedom should not be given to those who harm the most vulnerable (O’Keefe 2016); and then around the question of how marketisation challenges academic freedom in advanced capitalist democracies (Lynch and Ivancheva 2015). It has also transpired that in certain contexts, academic freedom is used to prevent reform in universities that serves the public (Ivancheva 2017a). Two cases illustrate these points.

Case Study I. The UK: Enters the Market

Beyond the collegiate universities like Oxford and Cambridge, famous for blue-sky research conducted in scholastic isolation and dedicated small-group teaching for the chosen few, the UK has developed one of the most inclusive public university systems. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, a number of medical, science and engineering colleges were awarded royal charters and became secular universities, known as ‘red brick colleges’. Thereafter, university gates gradually opened not only to men from wealthy families, but also to women (Dearnley 2018), members of the colonial elites (Pietsch 2013) and, gradually, to students from working-class and ethnic minority backgrounds (Carpentier 2018). Massification accelerated after WWII with the foundation of new universities and colleges of advanced technology, which were eventually granted university status. With the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992, the binary system was abolished: all former polytechnics, numerous colleges of higher and further education and a handful of newly established universities received the status of universities, now known as ‘post-1992 institutions’ (Carpentier 2018). All these now amount to more than 160 public degree-granting institutions of higher learning, and are accountable for the steep rise of student intake of UK and foreign students (Carpentier 2018). The push for massification was paralleled with efforts towards ‘research excellence’ assessed through global and national university evaluation.

These produced a powerful image of a public university system in a capitalist democracy, offering universal access, education excellence and academic freedom alike.

Yet has academic freedom really been performing up to the same standards as such triumphant narratives suggest? How has academic freedom been affected by what scholars and commentators in the UK have declared over the last decade, namely a public higher education under attack (Bailey and Freeman 2011; Docherty 2015), suffering a ‘toxic’ or ‘Zombie’ turn (Smyth 2017; Murphy 2017) or even a tragic end (Wright and Shore 2017; Eagleton 2015)? To answer these questions, we need to take into account the different aspects of the introduction of a market logic into every aspect of higher education in the country through a number of historical shifts over the last half a century.

The oil crises of 1973 and 1979 prompted a recession that resulted in a period characterised by cuts in university funding as part of broader public sector austerity (Traianou 2015). Using its structural position, the central government carried out public sector reforms in ways impossible in federal states like Germany or the USA (Brandist 2017: 585). Under the motto of TINA, this was used as the ideological justification to introduce the new public management doctrine, which allowed successive UK governments to reposition higher education as a public service in need of cost-cutting and ‘streamlining’, while also indicative of the growth of the national economy (Carpentier 2018). To foster competition between institutions, policies involved the end of the block grant to universities, the introduction and gradual rise of student fees, performance management through metrics, installing competition as an organising principle of research, and the takeover of core functions of the university by private corporations and outsourced services (Komljenovic and Robertson 2016; Lynch and Ivancheva 2015). Power was centralised into a management structure more fit to run a business enterprise than a public service (Traianou 2015: 43). This affected the core functions of universities – research, teaching and service – in complex ways, challenging the myth of academic freedom.

In terms of research, academic freedom has been impacted by the dissolution of the block grant to public universities. The decoupling of research from the core budget (now generated from student fees) has meant universities no longer have research budgets, but scholars have to cyclically compete for them from external funders. Research council funding is increasingly tied to priority topics, rather than academics’ own research priorities (Traianou 2015: 42). Priority is placed on natural and life sciences as opposed to social sciences, arts and humanities,

which remain subject to increasingly Euro-centric, developmentalist, neocolonial frameworks (Lynch and Ivancheva 2015). Academics are discouraged from ‘straying away’ from established disciplinary dogmas as competition between universities, departments and individuals is measured through funding-based, discipline-bounded audit of outputs (Brandist 2017: 586). This commercialisation of research, aimed at unleashing freedom and creativity, has instead produced new academic enclosures. Obtaining research funding requires enormous human and financial resource investment in incessant grant applications with a minuscule chance of success, usually privileging a handful of historically advantaged universities (Anonymous Academic 2014) as well as historically advantaged social groups or classes. ‘Research excellence’ is measured by individual or institutional performance in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) or world rankings.

The effects especially of REF – a cyclical peer review process, making research funding subject to performance of ‘world class excellence’ – compromise academic freedom (Wells 2012). Research collaboration and interdisciplinarity are effectively discouraged through discipline-specific reviews (Wells 2012). To score higher, universities headhunt VIP academics while turning those not on an accelerated academic track into second-class citizens; these are usually women and academics from black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds (Megoran and Mason 2020). The proliferation of casualised contracts ensures that despite growing workloads, permanent faculty receive more time for grant applications and publications (Megoran and Mason 2020: 19). In 2017–18, 67 per cent of researchers and 49 per cent of teaching ‘only’ staff in the university sector were employed on fixed-term contracts. Together with seventy thousand ‘atypical’ contract staff, they form a reserve army of academics doing a significant part of teaching and research across UK universities (Megoran and Mason 2020: 6). Restrictive eligibility criteria make only permanent faculty eligible for grant applications. They are incentivised to take credit for work developed by researchers on low-paid fixed-term contracts, deepening the hierarchical culture of patronage (Mahalyfy 2014; Megoran and Mason 2020: 19–21).

In terms of teaching, when student fees became the core source of university budgets in the early 2010s, a number of significant infringements on individual and institutional academic freedom took place. The introduction of student fees meant accumulation of huge debt which new generations have to pay throughout their working life. Capped at £9,000 for Bachelors’ studies for home students, student fees exceed £20,000 per year for non-EU nationals attending some Masters’ programmes

(Hillman 2018). Loan programmes, covering subsistence, require debt repayment for graduates employed above the living minimum wage of £21,000 per year, setting university priorities to courses with a direct link to employability, jeopardising less career-focused programmes (Metcalf 2020). Teaching is now measured by its ‘value-for-money’ benefit rather than its contribution to student empowerment (Tomlinson 2018). The ‘digital turn’ requires the use of learning management systems, software and other technologies monitoring teaching, and increasing academics’ workload. Often bought via monopoly purchases from ed-tech corporations (Metcalf 2006), technologies limit faculty decision-making and freedom over teaching, while allowing for the appropriation of teaching materials as intellectual property of universities (Galpin 2018). Universities also bend under pressure from foreign governments, such as China’s, whose UK embassy ‘expressed concern’ about academic strikes and cracked down on Hong Kong support among students (Cavendish 2019). The UK government also obliged staff to monitor students as ‘PREVENT duty’, under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act (Simpson and Kaufmann 2019).

As national and global rankings rate research, teaching itself has become increasingly devalued in staff promotion and evaluation, and is increasingly done by casualised faculty (Ivancheva, Lynch and Keating 2019). Under working conditions that have become more and more insecure, the latter also have to deal with students suffering anxiety due to debt, insecure futures and consumer orientation (Bunce, Baird and Jones 2017). Yet, while students experience a mental health epidemic (Shackle 2019), services and face-to-face time with faculty are barely available (Goddard 2019), unless care is volunteered by faculty members undergoing their own mental health crisis (Morrish 2019). And yet the new Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) ‘awards’ top-performing universities nothing but the right to increase student fees (Hale and Viña 2016). Meanwhile, the ‘student experience’ mantra legitimates that universities invest part of the £44 billion sector-wide surplus (Bennett 2018) into on- and offline facilities (Adams 2019). While student debt has risen to £121 billion (CBDU 2018), new private dorms often run by offshore companies with over £2.5 billion total annual profit (Adams 2019) offer students residency at exorbitant prices (Osborne and Barr 2018). Public-private partnerships with online programme management companies (OPMs) develop online degrees and short courses with over 50 per cent profit for OPMs (Hill 2018). Often taught by precarious or outsourced staff, such courses target online students not using residential facilities (Lieberman 2017). Student

data is sold to marketing firms but kept behind payroll for researchers (McKie 2020; Matthews 2019).

In service, changes in research and teaching have produced similarly acute contradictions. Deriving from critique of the lack of practical application of academic knowledge, within the market framework the pressure to conduct research applicable by ‘external’ users (Traianou 2015: 42) means that practical utility and impact have to be known during the grant application, that is, before research is conducted. Academics need to prove they work with various – often commercially minded – ‘stakeholders’ (Knowles and Burrows 2014). As a commercialisation benchmark, however, ‘impact’ often means scientific production averse to academic freedom. Medical trials in capitalist democracies like the US have long been serving the tobacco and sugar industries (Bero 2019). Social scientists increasingly also cooperate with tech giants, for example Google funding research on ethics of Artificial Intelligence (Williams 2019), or Uber co-authoring articles concealing the problematic sides of the gig economy (Horan 2019). Research contracts often include clauses giving the funder the final say on whether the research can be published and jeopardising especially early career researchers’ work when such contracts are controlled by their line managers (Bero 2019).

Tied to the narrative of freedom, the narratives of data and resource openness have also been compromised. Articulated initially as vital to research transparency, data openness stemmed from a necessity to protect research participants, and research as replicable and publicly transparent. Resource openness addressed a global and historical asymmetry of knowledge produced and accessed by core countries, even when it was conducted about and with participants and scholars from the periphery (Ivancheva and Syndicus 2019). Yet new standards of processing personal data render research challenging for scholars, dangerous for vulnerable participants, and protective of repressive states and corporations (Yuill 2018; Peter and Strazzari 2016). An institutional and international push to break monopolies of publishing companies, which charge universities to access their own production, has raised awareness about how the surplus from academic labour benefits businesses and commercial publishers. Yet only scholars working at wealthy universities on grants can publish ‘gold’ Open Access articles, privileged in the UK competition for excellence (Tennant et al. 2016). Against the design and desire of movements for open data and resources, these now stratify scholars, endanger vulnerable participants, and sponsor for-profit publishers.

Case Study II. Venezuela: Exits the Market?

While the case of UK public higher education raises serious concerns about the curtailing of academic freedom under the logic of the market, this logic works even in places where it is identified, critiqued and acted against by progressive governments. The case of Venezuela under late President Hugo Chávez is noteworthy. Having come to power in 1998 and suffered a backlash from the educated middle class in Venezuela, by 2003 Chávez had set a programme to massify higher education in the country. Until then, higher education was predominantly public but also with a quite ‘elite’ and thus limited profile. It was also split between a few research-intensive, mostly ‘autonomous’ institutions and ‘experimental’ universities with a more teaching-focused vocational training profile (Ivancheva 2013).

Against this negative background, after the attempted coup d’état in 2002 and the petrol strike, which showed that the knowledge elite in the country was in large numbers averse to reforms challenging their privilege, Chávez received support from a group of progressive academics. The latter saw universities as a vantage point of transformation (Ivancheva 2017b). Under their design and leadership (Ivancheva 2017a), the new Bolivarian institutions of higher learning opened free access to all who wished to study; education was based on the premise of academic quality through challenging the marketisation of research, teaching and service alike (Ivancheva 2013).

In terms of teaching, the new Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV) and its decentralised classrooms (*aldeas universitarias*) across the country offered equitable education for all. They used critical pedagogy and decolonial thought to address severe social inequalities and the elitist culture of the classist and racist higher education system (Ivancheva 2013). In terms of research, UBV prioritised applied research where science had to serve society and address social ills. This happened through an alternative vision of the university-educated individual: a community organiser as responsible for social change. In service terms, UBV came back to the Cordoba reform’s premise of work with communities (*extensión*) for practical application of knowledge in order to achieve redistribution and social justice, and participation (Ivancheva 2017a). Within this framework, higher education in Venezuela followed a rationale of success and quality that did not fit the metrics universally accepted within the global field of higher education (Ivancheva 2013).

Yet, paradoxically, exactly in this scenario, the ideal of academic freedom was used to circumvent this project and make it impossible to

live up to its progressive design. Fought through many bloody struggles by liberal and left political factions since the early twentieth century, academic freedom has been a long-lasting ideal for Venezuelan university communities (Tünnerman 2008). As such, it became subject to one of the first reforms of the liberal government after a popular revolt that toppled the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez in 1958. Yet subsequent governments after 1958 did not decriminalise the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV), which fought against the dictatorship together with them. Academic autonomy was used by the underground left to protect its activity on university campuses where governments had no right to intervene (Ivancheva 2017a). Liberal ‘democratic’ governments, however, still intervened in key episodes of academic contention, especially during the University Renovation (1969–70), a sustained student protest wave demanding curricular and structural reform of the university. Such governments, regardless of whether they were from the Christian Democratic (COPEI) or Social Democratic (AD) part of the political spectrum, also found cunning ways to circumvent academic freedom. With the 1971 Law of Higher Education, autonomy was cemented for a small number of old public universities, but all new ‘experimental’ universities were deprived of autonomy, with management and curricula appointed by the government (Moreno 2008; Ivancheva 2017a).

At the few autonomous university campuses still functioning as oases of free speech and gathering, academic freedom remained a strategic asset in the struggle against the police state and the anti-neoliberal discontent in the 1980s and 1990s (Ivancheva 2017a; Moreno 2008). Yet universities have been increasingly subject to commercialisation and to becoming ever more exclusive with the introduction of graduate studies fees and entry exams (Lopez and Hernandez 2001). With the rise to power of Hugo Chávez, progressive academics tried to use the campus of the autonomous Central University of Venezuela (UCV) to wage a battle to make public universities more inclusive, but academic autonomy was used against them (Ivancheva 2017a; Moreno 2008).

In 2001, during a sustained occupation of UCV, progressives under the name ‘Movement for Academic Transformation’ (MTU) demanded reform of the university. However, guided by the principle of non-intervention in campuses under the ideal of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, the government of Hugo Chávez did not support the 2001 occupation (Ivancheva 2017a). A year later, UCV and other autonomous universities under increasingly conservative leadership failed to condemn the attempted coup d’état against the democratically elected President Chávez (Ivancheva 2017b). In 2003, a general strike

in the petrol sector blocked the country; almost twenty thousand workers in the state petrol industry walked out, causing huge disruptions in everyday life (Vessuri, Canino and Sánchez-Rose 2005). It became clear that if the government could not enter universities to reform them, they had to create new universities.

Established in 2003 by left-wing intellectuals and former student activists, the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV) became the vanguard institution of this reform. In order to provide schooling for over half a million poor Venezuelans, UBV employed thousands of university graduates new to the academic profession. However, those entrenched at traditional universities and state agencies, academics, university leaders and policy makers hostile to the Bolivarian government denied accreditation to UBV's programmes (Ivancheva 2017b). This caused traditional universities to remain dominant in the field of knowledge production and their students retained privileged access to graduate programmes and job market placements (Ivancheva 2017b). In contrast, UBV students – often adult learners and women, first-generation higher education scholars – remained at a disadvantage in the educational and job market. Their credentials were not officially certified, so they received little to no recognition or economic return for their education.

Inscribed within a global field of higher education dominated by rankings and performance metrics (Marginson 2008), and a national policy landscape in which UBV could only be accredited by official bodies dominated by representatives of established elite institutions, UBV faculty had to face a double-edged sword. Despite their huge teaching loads with a complex student population, they needed to gain post-graduate degrees to facilitate the accreditation of UBV's programmes, so that UBV students would be able to participate in the traditional job market. In this regard, it became clear that the government's decision not to intervene in support of the 2001 MTU occupation of UCV or in state accreditation agencies on the basis of the old ideal of academic freedom was a dangerous risk. Read through a liberal lens, academic freedom, once an ideal of the left used to promote political activity for transformative social change, was now used to defend the liberal *status quo* subverting the UBV project.

Conclusions

Academic freedom is under threat not only when political powers suspend democracy, but also when state and institutional-level decisions are dictated by the logic of the market. In the UK, one of the oldest

democracies of this world, scholars and students face ever increasing restrictions on '[their] ability to choose research topics . . . teaching subjects . . . organise their own time, and . . . choose the networks and communities in which they located themselves' (Megoran and Mason 2020: 18). Academics become less and less free in their pursuit of knowledge, tied down by the requirements of fundraising and publication peer reviews that disadvantage 'controversial', 'daring' or even interdisciplinary ideas and research. Research and teaching are pitted against each other while done by two reserve armies: researchers 'lucky' to have publications under the publish-or-perish ideal; and teaching-only faculty invisible and fearful of losing even their insecure low wages. Research, teaching and service are put second to serving businesses and prioritising profit as opposed to scholarship.

Thus, even if academic freedom is taken with its narrower definition of non-infringement by the political state apparatus into individual academic conduct, there is much reason for concern. If we do not have an understanding of the institutional and systemic importance of 'academic freedom' – a term that safeguards public universities as spaces of social change contributing to the public good – there is no basis for critique if a leading public university system increasingly serves the market (Traianou 2015: 39). With such understanding, the Venezuelan case demonstrates the limitations of the concept of academic freedom when it is used to perpetuate the market logic in higher education, bestowing individual or guild privileges on a tiny elite against a project that benefits the many, not the few.

The role of the state in this process merits a larger discussion that is beyond the scope of the current chapter. Suffice to say that cases like the UK show how many governments too willingly facilitate the market's entry into the higher education system through the front door, subjecting research to fundraising competition, teaching to student fees revenue, and service to profit for private companies. Cases like Venezuela show that unless progressive governments take regulatory control over universities, qualifications recognition systems and job markets, reform is difficult to advance. As long as scholarly debates focus on the narrative of academic freedom only as freedom from authoritarian states, the market assault on it in liberal democracies will remain unchallenged.

In this framework, it is especially important to remember when working with asylum-seeking students and faculty that condemning regimes in sending peripheral countries that destine them to migrate often happens in parallel to a dangerous romanticisation of the liberal

democratic institutions and states in receiving core countries. Such a stance is problematic given the key role of capitalist democracies in war and economic warfare against peripheral and formerly colonial territories, but also vis-à-vis the lack of discussion of the (barely existing) prospects of migrant scholars for a stable position beyond short-term ‘refugee’ or ‘scholars at risk’ grants (Vatansever 2020). Such selective omission legitimates the economic and military intervention by core countries, while overlooking the market-caused infringements on rights and freedoms in the former. It also overlooks the continuous precarity and economic coercion that migrants (and academic migrants) face in receiving countries as a more disadvantaged sub-group within their own profession. A liberal concept of freedom (and of academic freedom as its sub-species) can be used as a disciplining tool against non-conforming states, and – at times – against university reforms challenging free-market capitalism.

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