

Hrubec, M., & Višňovský, eds. (2023) *Towards a New Research Era: A Global Comparison of Research Distortions* (Brill: Leiden/Boston)  
Review Article, by Leslie Sklair. *Critical Sociology*, online CRS 1237037

On February 26, 2020 I sent the following letter to the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague.

“On behalf of the Global Studies Association (UK) I am writing to tell you that we are deeply disturbed by the attacks on academic freedom directed against Marek Hrubec and the Centre of Global Studies. Dr Hrubec has been an important link between American, Western European, and Czech academics. He has regularly attended our annual conferences and invited academics from many countries to Prague to exchange ideas and do research. We also know of Hrubec's excellent work in Africa, Brazil, Europe and Asia. We call on the Academy to respect the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms. We understand this is part of the constitutional order of the Czech Republic. We call on you to protect the freedom of thought, conscience and religious conviction, as well as the freedom of scholarly research and artistic creation. Attacks on the freedom of speech and thought is a tragic step backward for Czech democracy. We urge you to reestablish the research program on "Global Conflicts and Local Interactions" and cease all attacks on Marek Hrubec's rights to speak to media outlets and otherwise carry out his work.”

I sent this letter in my capacity as the President of the Global Studies Association (UK). Similar letters were sent by Gerald Harris, secretary of the USA branch of the Global Studies Association, and others.

Dr Hrubec and others organised an international conference on ‘Global Capitalism and Transnational Class Formation’ which took place in Prague (16– 18 September 2011) sponsored by the Centre of Global Studies (Prague), the Global Studies Association of North America, and the International Sociological Association Research Committee RC02 (Economy and Society). This was the first international conference devoted to transnational capitalist class (TCC) theory and global class formation. Over the past decade a growing body of work has established TCC theory as an important theoretical approach for examining global capitalism. The conference set out to provide a place to

share research, debate and explore this newly emerging network of scholars and activists focused round global capitalism and transnational class analysis. Around 60 scholars from 20 countries came to Prague from Western, Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, North and South America, Australia, China Mainland and Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Turkey and Iran. The conference concluded with a business meeting that established the Network for Critical Studies on Global Capitalism as a framework to facilitate ongoing contact among the 60 who came to Prague, many others who were unable to attend but would have liked to do so, and to inform others with an interest in global capitalism and transnational class formation, widely.

This is the context within which I am writing this review and, providing to some extent, evidence to suggest how important the research of Hrubec and Višňovský and their co-authors is in the present climate of attacks on academic freedom around the world.

Hrubec and Višňovský's introductory chapter makes the following claims: "The commercial and bureaucratic deformation of academia stems from the neoliberal imperatives developed in the UK and U.S in late 1970s and early 1980s. The problems analysed have gradually spread to other countries in the North Atlantic area and other parts of the world in recent decades. These distortions did not start to take hold in academic institutions in various countries until around 2000 as neoliberal policies focused first on production and trade, where the greatest profits are to be made. The legal codification of these distortions in academia came a little later, in Central Europe, in the Czech Republic, for example, in 2008." Methodological Evaluation of Research Organizations and Programmes (known as M 17 +) in February 2020. Thereafter, the reforms became even more restrictive, especially after the election of a neo-conservative/neoliberal government in the Czech Republic in 2021.

The central theme of this book is that as a result of the new politics of research management around the world, researchers have been transformed into academic entrepreneurs or even capitalist managers who have to raise funds through grants and other means. This leads to a heavy dependence on project (grant) funding, which has ceased to be just a voluntary part of academic work. This, the authors of this book argue, entails a significant limitation of research

activity. It is probable that this analysis will resonate with academics all over the world, the problems that Hrubec and Višňovský highlight in this book are not restricted to the Czech Republic, though the political responses to them by the Czech government may be punitive in the extreme.

Faculty at Universities and other educational institutions globally have for some time been concerned by the overrated quantitative assessment of research results by public bodies according to criteria of journal databases - owned in many cases by private companies that primarily seek profit over socially relevant knowledge and the serious search for truth. Academics everywhere also have to face the so - called predatory practices of large foreign publishing houses whose considerable profits are derived from publications produced by academic institutions financed through public funds.

The impetus for this book (written mainly but not exclusively by Czech scholars connected with the Centre for Global Studies in Prague) is stated to be the neoliberal turn in education and social policy, and subsequently the “ordo-neoliberalism” identified as the German variant of economic liberalism, emphasizing the trend over the last decades for governments all over the world to focus on free markets while still using the rhetoric of the welfare state.

Chapter 2 on "Research change within social change" is written by Marek Hrubec. Hrubec deals with the transformation from a local internal critique to supranational institutional change, which would concern the field of research as an integral part of the social system. His chapter starts with a general formulation of the basis of his critical social philosophy and theory, particularly internal social criticism, and the methodological trichotomy of “critique, explanation, normativity” - Hrubec’s attempt to develop the classical Critical theory of the Frankfurt School in ways that are usable in theory and

practice for our time. This is a formidable task, one which has haunted Marxist and other scholars for many decades. Hrubec shows the connections between unsatisfactory conditions; funding and assessment of research on the one hand, and injustice in society on the other. He argues that change in research must be a part of larger social change. Instead of implementing many fragmented short-term grant projects, he argues, the emphasis should again be on long-term funding of public institutions, in particular research academies and universities. This requires stronger international and transnational platforms for these institutions. The shift towards research creativity and innovation to be pursued in the public interest requires a redefinition of the concept of research, which is closed by elites to the needs of the population now. Hrubec's chapter assesses the discussion to date on the themes and tensions in academic freedom, and its relationship to general freedom of speech.

Břetislav Horyna discusses "The problems of research in the project era". For many universities and other academic institutions this is a growing problem. The academic community is a part of the social system, having at its disposal rules for self-organisation and self-management, including generally recognised rules for moral action. Since the Bologna declaration in 1999 (at least) in academia, it is becoming clearer that sooner or later one will have to choose between education and a higher, systematic and omnipresent indoctrination. Martin Kopecký's "Politics, education, and power of research" focuses on the relationship between higher and adult education policy

and research, a much neglected topic. The neoliberal turn almost everywhere relegates the search for knowledge and understanding with its focus on the demands of the marketplace.

The third part of the book extends the analysis to research and education in the non-Western world: Latin America, Russia, China, Africa, and India. Limitations of space dictates detailed summaries of these chapters. Dominika Dinušová's "The social science interactions with Latin American reality" shows that in Latin America, where Research is closely linked to education and the overall image of knowledge as the framework of particular social and political practice, discussions about future perspectives on the shape of academic activity go beyond the university and express the need for broader social change. Albert Kasanda's "Marginalization of African epistemologies", focuses on the COVID-19 crisis. It explores the exclusion of the epistemologies of non-Western people in Africa, revealing important distortions of research, education, and institutions in Africa. Veronika Sušová Salminen's "The neoliberalised research in contemporary Russia" explains the role of research in official efforts to modernize Russia, especially R&D. The case study of the Russian state programme Project 50/100 provides an example of the neoliberalisation of Russian research. For Russian research, there are challenges related to Russia's peripheralisation globally, neoliberal tendencies at home, and neo-patrimonial features of the Russian political and economic system, creating obstacles for meaningful, domestically owned reforms. Kanchan Sarker presents a critical

analysis of "Neoliberalism, GATS and Higher Education in India: Moving Away from Its Original Objectives". Privatization of higher education in India began a long time ago. In the case of higher education the process has developed from philanthropy to profit-maximization. Lin Zhang and Gunnar Sivertsen focus on "The New Research Assessment Reform in China and Its Implementation". They explain a radical transformation of research assessment introduced in China recently, and present normative proposals of further development. A balance between the local relevance of research and its macro-regional relevance present challenges. Reference is made to a national journal assessment structure and peer-review evaluation in China. All of these chapters provide ideas and problems for the study of University systems around the world – they also show how difficult it will be to implement Hrubec's call for "Research Change within Social Change", however necessary that remains.

Overall, this book will come as a surprise to those who know little about the University system and social science research in general, but it will confirm the view of many scholars in the social sciences that what is happening in their universities has become an unwelcome global phenomenon.

While the view that the turn to neoliberalism is a key factor in what has been theorized as contemporary research distortions is compelling, historians of postwar Twentieth Century sociology might reflect that the "Sociology of Sociology" of the 1960s and beyond, especially in the USA was indicating the effects of similar research

distortions of various kinds (see Baritz 1960, Gouldner 1968 and 1970, Smith 1964 and 1965, Fitzgerald 1974, Nicolaus 1969, Reynolds and Reynolds 1970). For more details on these attempts to speak truth to bureaucratic power, see Sklair (2022).

Hopefully, *Towards a New Research Era*, will have a response from a wide spectrum of scholars concerned with the integrity of social science research in general, and the Sociology of Sociology in particular.

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