

Excursions

Volume 9, Issue 1 (December 2019) Fake



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Excursions, vol. 9, no. 1 (2019)

<https://excursions-journal.sussex.ac.uk/>

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Invisible Roots of Knowledge Production and their Role in Resistance to the Marketisation of Education

Since the 1970s, we have seen troubling relationships developing between institutions of higher education and industrial capitalism, concerns over limits to democracy in the institution, subordinate relationships with industry, and power exerted by industrialists in university councils (Thompson, 1970: 16). The Browne Report was released in 2010, leading to subsequent changes in quality management and funding, which many saw as making Higher Education an adjunct of corporate values and interests (Giroux, 2014: 53 - 76). The Education Acts from 2010 onwards, alleged to be for the good of the socio-economic situation in the country, have been ideologically driven, leading to austerity policies and public sector cuts. The marketisation of higher education has not involved the privatisation of a public sector service through a transfer of assets, where universities and colleges are bought and sold, but instead has involved them becoming part of a quasi-marketplace, which submits itself to the mechanisms of consumer choice and competition (Giroux, 2014; Ward, 2014; McGettigan, 2013).

This marketisation of education in the UK is seen by many as a neoliberal process, which coincides with increased mechanisms of oppression and control (Abendroth and Porfilio, 2015; Fanghanel, 2015; Molesworth, 2010; Giroux, 2011; Ward, 2014). Universities are being subject to intensified monitoring and evaluation processes dictated by the government in the name of public accountability, a confusing form of “decentralised centralisation” (Ward, 2014: 5 - 7). Cost-cutting has resulted in the marginalisation of ‘less profitable’ subjects such as the arts and humanities, and the closing down of humanities and modern languages departments (Nussbaum, 2016). The needs of workers and students alike have become subordinate to commercial interests. Such concerns are echoed across the sector in reports by University and Colleges Union (UCU), National Union of Students (NUS) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) who argue that the effects of marketisation of education impact negatively on the quality and sense of social responsibility within the UK education system.¹

In 2018 we saw the largest strike called in UK Higher Education history by UCU. Strike action followed proposals by Universities UK (UUK) to end the guaranteed pension scheme, which would impact on the pensions of tens of thousands of university staff working in teaching, administration and support services. The proposals threatened to change the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) from a defined benefit scheme which gives a guaranteed retirement income. It would have become a defined contribution scheme, with the value of the pensions floated on the stock market. This strike action lasted for fourteen days over four weeks, with 88% of members who turned out voting for strike action across 64 universities (UCU, 2018b).

Resistance to the marketisation of Higher Education in the UK, such as the pensions strike, cast such movements as part of a larger struggle to defend the public university. Professor Gurminder Bhambra, Professor of Postcolonial and

¹ See the following reports for more information: (Challenging the Market in Education, 2008; Beyond the consumerist agenda: Teaching quality and the ‘student experience’ in higher education’, 2014; A roadmap for free education Exploring our commitment to the public funding of higher education, 2014; Marketisation of Education, 2015; Quality Doesn’t Grow on fees - Green Paper Response, 2015; Education is not for Sale, 2014).

Decolonial Studies at Sussex, defined the public university in the context of these struggles as:

... a repository of the collective learning of communities... we must maintain its function for the public, for a critically informed public sphere, for the deepening of democracy. In defending our pensions, we are defending all of the above and defending the social democratic gains of the last half-century which are being systematically dismantled, and struggling for more (Bhambra, 2018)

The shared pension scheme is seen as one of the last defining features of the university as a public institution, entangled with the existence of a public university and indeed the democracy of the country. However, despite these high profile struggles connecting with broader issues, this debate on knowledge production is still largely insulated from the invisible work of the communities that sustain academic life including (to name but a few) cleaners, cafeteria workers and groundkeepers (Federici, 2018: 101). There is a shiny fake veneer placed over much of the work that reproduces the university and allows its everyday running. Sylvia Federici, in her book, *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* warns us if we wish to change the university in line with this idea of public construction of a 'knowledge commons' that there is a need to question "the material conditions of the production of the university, its history and its relation to the surrounding communities" (Federici, 2018: 101) and not just the academics within it.

This article briefly considers how Federici's approach to the politics of the commons deconstructs and potentially transforms approaches to resistance to marketisation in education. It considers how different structures of privilege and oppression structure what is represented, resisted and fought for within and by the institution. It argues that struggles against marketisation, and for a new type of academic freedom, should be seen in the broader scope of access to education for all, and what it means to be seen as human. Here, to be seen as human is to have visibility as a person with rights in the place of work or study, to be recognised as a member of a working community that is generating knowledge

for society, and to have some possession over what is happening in a place of work or study. On the other hand, to be seen as less than human is to be made invisible by the system, to be denied the rights and voice given to others, to be oppressed, discriminated against or exploited through poor working practices such as low wages or precarious contracts. In challenging this process of dehumanisation, the cooperative acts outlined below may seem small, but it is the shared learning, connections, cooperative skills and modes of organising in such projects that are really important.

Creation of New Enclosures: Structures of Oppression in the Institution

There are threats that the marketisation process brings to the rights of all workers at the university of, and to rights of students, and those who wish to access education. It stops education from being communally owned and turns universities into enclosures where students and staff become dispossessed of their rights. This threatens to reduce Higher Education to a form of primitive accumulation designed to prop up the capitalist system. Karl Marx's concept of primitive accumulation describes the origin of capital where the means of production are privatised and enclosed, workers run off their land and exploitative owners can generate capital from the surplus-labour of workers who, having been dispossessed of their means, have no other choice: it is a violent process linked with, slavery, war and colonialism (Marx, 2013). This can form the critique of our contemporary context. Primitive accumulation is not a process that has passed us by, pre-empting how capitalism currently operates but, as discussed by Federici "allow us to read the past as something that survives in the present" (Federici, 2017: 12) and part of the dehumanising process that alienates workers from their labour in the present day.

We can track processes of dispossession and enclosure within higher education and beyond (Federici, 2018; Harvey, 2000). There have been increasing threats to workers' rights and associated threats to the right to learn and access to education, in the context of the declining provision and access to public services, austerity measures, and the dissolution and dislocation of

communities in the UK more generally. Pressure on university resources looks only set to increase. The Augur report on post-18 education in the UK has recommended a cut of around £1750 in student fees, with the funding shortfall to be made up by a combination of teaching grants and further “efficiency gains” by universities (Augur, 2019). Likely this will mean a bigger push on recruiting high-fee international students, and reduced spending: freezing of posts redundancies; even smaller wage rises; increased casualisation and cuts to student support services.

Marketisation and managerialism in Higher Education constructs primitive accumulation within the university system as dispossession and enclosure. There is a focus on creating divisions and competition both between and within institutions’ departments with the primary focus on ‘value for money’ and ‘student satisfaction’ (Bhambra, 2018; McGettigan, 2013; Molesworth, 2010). Humanities and Modern Languages Departments have closed, staff and students displaced (Nussbaum, 2016). Institutions disassociate from ethical responsibility beyond the quotidian. Within this process, academics and students are artificially divorced from the chain of conditioned origination of knowledge production, that reaches back before the physical presence of the institution. This results in a forgetting of those who built the buildings where teaching and learning happens, those who maintain the teaching spaces, those who build technology and reproduce the labour force, and those who construct the environment for students and staff to work and study.

The marketised process involving the narrative of consumer and producer creates a separation between different groups of workers, students and management rather than building an academic community that is part of a process of shared knowledge production. By placing a price on knowledge, it brings with it the implication that such knowledge is only for those who can afford the price tag, and no amount of accessible debt destabilises this reality. It is worth noting that this includes not only student fees but also student rents, hidden course costs, childcare and living costs that have resulted in poverty for many students (NUS, 2019b).

Those most vulnerable are the most likely to be exploited. Staff face precarious contracts, outsourcing, overworking, discriminatory employment and promotion

practices; all of which have a disproportionately negative impact on anyone who is not a white cis male (Ahmed, 2017; Federici, 2018). In 2018, we saw pensions of academic staff under attack but much of the dialogue failed to include staff who were not lecturers (UCU, 2018). There is much frustration from administrative and technical employees of the staff in the university, voices which are frequently marginalised in debates. UCU are a dedicated education union for academic workers, yet the rhetoric of UCU is more aligned to the dialogical norms of university management. Representatives of unions such as Unison, Unite and GMB (General, Municipal, Boilermakers) are the most dominant unions for other campus workers, as general public-sector unions may struggle to be as powerful a force at the negotiating table in many institutions.

Trends of outsourcing further exclude those who are part of the material process of knowledge production from any sense of a university commons. This often includes outsourced cleaning, maintenance, technical and catering staff and increasingly HR, legal services and student IT support (Alexander, Phillips and Kapletia, 2018). They do not have the right to call themselves employees of the university; neither do those labourers working on the highly marketable ‘new builds’. Here, the university has a contractual obligation with an external organisation, essentially displacing much of the responsibility for the welfare or wellbeing of those working within its walls. They will have some health and safety obligations as they provide the spaces in which they work, but their employment policies need not fully protect these staff. The services or benefits universities provide to university employed staff may be denied to them; they need not negotiate terms with their union representatives (if they are indeed unionised) as this responsibility lies with the company who employs them, not the university. This is particularly important in terms of the visibility of these workers to the university. As Federici highlights in her earlier work, “the demand for a wage makes our work visible” (Federici, 1975: 5). When the university is responsible for a contract, and not a paycheque, it can place distance between itself and outsourced workers.

Outsourced staff are therefore invisibilised as they are not counted as being on zero-hour or precarious contracts as part of the university’s reviews; do not benefit from any university policy against zero-hour contracts as they are not

employed directly by them; and they need not be considered in their staff surveys and strategic conversations. They are bodies reduced to a mere contract and have been successfully dehumanised, written in as lesser bodies on campus, service providers that are not part of the academic community. They are disenfranchised in many decision-making processes; the work they do is devalued and invisible. Here these workers are positioned as less valuable than students and academic staff by the institution despite their essential role in ensuring the running of the institution. Cleaning staff, for example, frequently enter and leave the building when there are few staff and students around and are often not seen or considered. Academic research on their work and conditions is scarce and focused on their impact on consumer perceptions (Vos et al., 2019: 93). A recent study on cleaners argues that they should be brought “into the light” as more visible cleaning staff on day-shifts impacts positively on public perception, but these results can only speculate that this will reduce the stress of working anti-social hours and increase job satisfaction as the study was purely focused on the end-user (Vos et al., 2019: 100).

Students are also vulnerable to dehumanisation in study and employment. Working in precarious jobs (sometimes on campus) alongside their degrees to cover food and rent prices, often where they have no trade union and therefore little recourse to defence. Students’ unions do not perform this service, and their advice staff are rarely trained in such specialisms as employment law. Widening Participation practices mean that more people can come to university. However, they enter into spaces with poor support, where socio-economic status and difference becomes starkly highlighted and many drop-out with huge debts. Non-continuation rates currently sit around 6.3%, although they can be as high as 20% in institutions with high levels of widening participation students (HESA, 2019). Students from the highest participation areas and the least deprived areas have the highest continuation rates; those from the lowest participation and most deprived areas have the lowest (Office for Students, 2018) showing a direct link between higher socioeconomic status and success. Cuts to student support services leave those vulnerable in terms of finance, and those with specific learning, physical and/or mental health needs are increasingly vulnerable. Recent research found that half of UK university students have witnessed racism

and close to a third have personal experiences of racism, which is undoubtedly a contributing factor to the 26% black attainment gap (UCU, 2018a; NUS, 2019).

The process of globalisation of the Higher Education marketplace sees new enclosures happening for international students through mis-sold courses and overcharging to compensate for government underspend on the education system (The higher education market, 2017: 40). This is not new, and there has always been a link between colonial industry and commerce, and the flow of international students into the UK, even before the economic imperative of student recruitment due to public cuts (Bradley, 2000, p.418). Misrepresentation in marketing fails to prepare them for the reality of study “[g]lossy brochures which entice and then give rise to feelings of disappointment on arrival may add to feelings of ‘culture shock’ and poor levels of adjustment” (Bradley, 2000, 431). Due to cuts in student services more generally, international students are entering into spaces which are not only culturally insensitive, but that also have increasingly little support for those with English as a second language. Underfunded services cannot provide the infrastructure for social events to fight isolation in a new country with increasingly disturbing racist media narratives and hate crimes. Finally, there is a lack of care for international students, who are reduced to their economic contribution by the education marketplace, creating yet another dehumanising process.

Critiquing our Resistance

In this environment, narratives of resistance to this marketisation in Higher Education, while well-meaning, still create disproportionate invisibility on the grounds of gender, race and socioeconomic status. This lack of visibility links with unchecked discriminatory practices towards outsourced staff. This further dehumanises such bodies, undermining the value of their skill, time and emotional efforts, ignoring the material and intellectual value of many contributions to the processes of knowledge production (Federici, 2018).

Understandably, how spaces and acts of resistance operate follow existing structures of power and oppression. Campus workers not directly employed by the university are often excluded from consultation and disproportionately

negatively impacted as university cuts are passed onto those already on low wages. These groups are frequently not considered during disputes with the university that focus on teaching staff and students. Workers on temporary contracts in these posts are less likely to be unionised and as such their rights are less protected. There is a misuse of certain bodies, which become assumed commons through low-waged exploitation, and exclusion through socio-economic structures. This includes invisible labour of care provided by women and other marginalised groups (Ahmed, 2017; Federici, 2018; Fraser, 2013). This institutionally normalised distribution of labour is replicated in the organising work of resistance. In addition, work on diversity that does happen within the university involves a disproportionate amount of labour done by those most affected by intersectional oppression. Sara Ahmed points out:

“If you are not white, not male, not straight, not cis, not able-bodied, you are more likely to end up on diversity and equality committees. The more nots you are the more committees you might end up on” (Ahmed, 2017, p137).

UCU notes that women and BAME members are more likely to be equality reps than branch secretaries. At the same time, younger members from all equality groups (who are more likely to be on precarious contracts) are less likely to be active, and therefore less likely to have their interests represented (UCU, 2017). While they may try to adopt safe space policies and be inclusive through policy and practice, there are still considerable deficits in representation within these institutions. BAME students make up 20% of the student body, but only 4% of elected officers in students’ unions (NUS, 2019a).

Issues that are marginal or controversial are in danger of being avoided in increasingly legislated upon, and therefore risk-averse, students’ unions and trade unions. This reproduces student and staff bodies that similarly continue to propagate such damaging structures both within and out the institution. Student unions are subject to charity law which can encourage risk-averse behaviour in backing certain plans and actions, for example, the concerns raised around Feminist Pro-Choice Campaigns (NUS, 2015) and Faith Societies (Nagdee, Ghani

and Ibrahim, 2017). Both trade unions and students' unions are limited by the Prevent guidance of which has been widely criticised for being racist and Islamophobic (Allen, 2017; Nagdee, Ghani and Ibrahim, 2017; McGovern, 2016; O'Donnell, Alisinn, 2015).

Privilege and oppression dictate what is prioritised, what is deemed worth fighting for within and by the institution, and also what kind of resistance can legally occur. The biggest strike has been over pensions, which had a voting turnout of 58% and 88% in favour of striking (UCU, 2018b). The recent call for action over equality and fair pay, which disproportionately discriminate on groups of race and gender, only had a turnout of 41% and a support rate of 70% for strike action (UCU, 2019c).² While there may be many compounding reasons for this, the fact that it is a minority issue in a voting membership is undoubtedly one of them.

Our structures of resistance also exclude through precarity. During the 2018 Pension Strike actions, international staff and students were made particularly vulnerable due to the conditions of their visas, and the limitations placed on unauthorised absences. Uncertainty around deportation risks for international staff on Tier 2 visas during the strike was misleading and distressing. International students, who are subject to attendance monitoring, were taking more risks through participation. Both precarity and socio-economic factors played a role in who can participate. Some feel too vulnerable to strike for fear rebuttal by employers, or are unable to suffer a loss of wages due to precarious working conditions. Staff members with dependents would likely suffer more as a result of the loss of wages - those on low wages and part-time contracts in particular. The decision to participate in the strike as a staff member, or to

² Currently a gender pay gap of between 10- 15% exists between men and women in universities in the UK depending on which university you work at, gender imbalance among senior academic staff seen as the primary reason for this. A UCU survey found that 90% of black staff members report having faced barriers to promotion in colleges and universities, and over two-thirds (71%) said they had 'often' or 'sometimes' been subject to bullying and harassment from managers (UCU, 2018).

support the strike as a student, was not an easy one. There were disproportionately high sacrifices for those most vulnerable.³

Modes of resistance can also be problematic. Picketing, protesting, occupation and marching are by their nature ableist and physically inaccessible for many. Anxiety and fear of conflict may alienate some from public demonstrations. Academic rhetoric of teach-outs may be inaccessible to those outside of their disciplines. Cultural differences, particularly for international students, can exclude people, alongside limited knowledge of rights and employment law, often compounded by misleading information from university management. There are also issues with police violence at student occupations, and protest where institutional racism within the police force is likely to lead to disproportionate violence and arrests for black students. While recognising that organisers and participants may try to account for such things where possible, the structural inequalities and intersectional oppressions within the institution are unavoidably replicated, to some extent, within spaces of resistance (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2016). These are spaces where networks are built, and campaigns initiated, not just where resistance is met, and such exclusions risk replicating these problems throughout future resistance movements and campaigns.

Education for all, Finding the commons: Social Bonding and Cooperation

So how do we transform the modes of resistance in the university to ones that support and represent the commons? Any answer is necessarily multifaceted, a moving horizon to be continuously critiqued, and what is suggested here merely some arbitrary beginnings.

Federici defines the production of commons as the “the creation of social relations and spaces built on solidarity, the communal sharing of wealth and the cooperative work and decision making” (Federici, 2018, p.183). We need to think what this collectivisation of reproductive work would look like in the university,

³ For a more detailed discussion on the 2018 Strike Action and reflections on participation on Sussex campus see the article *The Sussex Campus ‘Forever Strike’: Estrangement, Resistance and Utopian Temporality* (McKnight, 2019)

and what this must look like in the struggle we face on the resistant path we must walk to such a critically utopian ideal. While what we have done so far is to critique this, however, we already see such modes of resistance emerging.

There are ways in which we can transform everyday practices into a terrain of collective struggle. With each seemingly impossible task, we must begin where we are. We can utilise and recognise existing networks of resistance and use them as a starting place to research and resist corporate narratives. We must map and understand the gaps in these networks, and fill them, with particular care for those that are disenfranchised, while working and supporting their day to day running. It is not that this does not happen ever, it is that it does not happen all the time or everywhere; normalising this, and decentralising responsibility from marginalised groups, needs to become a central concern. A rethinking around who the knowledge producers are can help us restructure the university as a commons that resists the violence of capitalist logic, rather than one that upholds it. Thus, problematising and reconstructing how we view the idea of a future university commons, in a way that recognises intersectional oppression and misuse of certain bodies as a commons in and of themselves.

Federici urges us not to lose hope “in the midst of destruction another world is growing, like grass in the cracks of the urban pavement” (Federici, 2018, p.1) and indeed some examples of foregrounding social responsibility towards all workers can be seen in different examples already. The SOAS Justice for Cleaners campaign has been ongoing for over ten years with support from Unison, UCU and their Students’ Union (SOAS SU, 2019a). The pop-up union created in 2013 at Sussex was set up by members of various other campus trade unions and students. It aimed to prevent the outsourcing of 235 campus jobs, including porters, cleaners, security and catering (Bergfeld, 2013). There was an occupation of the Balfour Beattie construction site by Sussex students during the 2018 strike to demand that the workers there had a right to unionise, highlighting issues around the material production of the university buildings and spaces themselves (Karaman, 2018).

Federici argues throughout her text that it is not possible to defend any existing communal rights or to fight the crisis we find ourselves in without creating a new reality (Federici, 2018, p.3). Trade unions and students’ unions

are key players in this resistance to allow legitimised modes of resistance within the institution, but they need to reimagine how their democratic systems work, and have shared goals that link with broader ideals to function in increasingly cooperative ways. They have a vital role in driving solidarity, politicising and supporting workers and students, providing the training in advocacy, support, and practices of resistance. Such transfer of skills and knowledge stay with their membership even if they choose to no longer engage with the unions. In order to fight against the way in which neoliberalism in Higher Education “saps the democratic foundation of solidarity, degrades collaboration, and tears up all forms of social obligation” (Giroux, 2003) campus trade unions and students’ unions need to be struggling towards shared goals and need to strive to overcome their differences. This should include the reimagining of a new shared non-hierarchical horizon of academic freedom.

Academic freedom for staff in the UK is narrowly defined under the Education Reform Act (1988) and maintained in the most recent Higher Education and Research Act (2018) as:

[F]reedom 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. (Education Reform Act, 1988, Pt 4 s.202(2)(a))

UK human rights documents have long been criticised as insufficient for protecting academic freedom (Rendel, 1988, p.86). Historically, politically and legally, the claim to academic freedom is distinct, and confers additional rights over and above what is recognised under these freedoms (Barendt, 2010). Currently there is no constitutional right in the UK preserving the right to academic or scientific freedom, while in many other countries it is noted as a separate right as part of their written constitutions. The UK lacks both the constitutional and legal protections found in other jurisdictions (Karran, Terence, Millinson, Lucy, 2017). While the UK is a signatory to the 1997 UNESCO recommendation on the status of higher education teaching personnel, it is not

compliant in many areas which relate to academic freedom such as tenure and governance (UNESCO, 1997).

Although students have no specific rights to academic freedom, they have the right to expect that free speech will be protected within the space of the university (Education (No. 2) Act 1986; Karran, 2009). Much like for staff, to some extent student academic freedom, depending on its form, can be said to be protected by rights to freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly (Human Rights Act 1998, Articles 10 – 11). However, these rights to political action are being ever narrowed, criminalised and subjected to private trespass laws (Finchett-Maddock, 2016; Enright, 2013). The Office for Students (OfS) regulatory framework for institutions couples the idea of academic freedom with institutional autonomy, yet academic freedom is mentioned twice in the framework itself, and one of these times only in the annex, compared to 25 references to value for money, and 19 of the market (OfS, 2018). Offering choice in the education marketplace is the focus of the OfS but is certainly not taking a holistic approach to the idea of the student, or general academic freedom. Significantly these rights are often considered separately for staff and students and not jointly viewing them as part of a community of knowledge producers.

Any new ideal of academic freedom must not be a limited, defined right, open to the few, but be an ever-changing horizon, a utopian process. This idea draws on Bloch's conception of a utopian process which is both forward-reaching and transformative, but also grounded in the critique of the now (Bloch, 1995). Looking forward, this new shared ideal of academic freedom is not only about the elite few academics, students and intellectuals in the academy; it is also collective and reaching beyond this. It must carry with it a sense of accountability and recognition of the oppressive paradigms it exists in. It is about the rights of all workers to recognition in this process of knowledge production, not just elite, empowered professors and senior academics. It must centre around the right of everyone to have access to education and access to the knowledge produced. It is about the shared rights to knowledge and shared learning of everyone in this community. In reclaiming academic freedom as a utopian process, we set the intention to liberate ourselves from existing in our naïve blind spot within academia. This new conception of academic freedom happens at the point of

realisation of the interconnectedness of the academic world with the world outside. It is the understanding of the broader structures that uphold, and are indelibly interconnected, with the processes of knowledge production.

This liberatory process must also be critical. It must contextualise itself as being about ‘freedom from’ as well as the traditionally colonial ‘freedom to’ that colours many of the problematic debates on academic freedom that allows it only to be available to the privileged few (Elliott-Cooper, 2019) or to be used as a tool for oppression for vulnerable minority groups such as trans individuals. It is about recognising and deconstructing how the university valorises and enforces colonialism, and how we resist it. It must be aware of and resistant to the ongoing and intersectional oppression both in the academy and beyond. This new academic freedom that we could jointly struggle for includes freedom for all to participate in political struggles within and alongside the institution; and the ability to engage in acts of criticism and protest.

Academic Freedom can then become a collective daydream of a better world, that must be co-constructed and adapted as we hold it at the edge of our anxieties and self-critique. For this to become this case, we must also work cooperatively and connect with the struggles of the local and international communities. Federici highlights how learning new ways of social bonding and cooperation are crucial to understanding how we will face more significant crises: “[r]esistance is constructing everything we need to maintain the life of our people” (Federici, 2018, p185). As we move forward, resistance must consider sustainability, connect with the current climate crisis and further recognise how this connects with colonialism. We must recognise the academic freedom that school students are exercising in their disengagement from school to strike against the climate crisis. It is about learning to work cooperatively and training in new ways of making decisions and sharing responsibility.

On campuses, we see examples of this in students’ unions’ responses to sustainability. Increasingly there are SU ran events on the Whiteness of Green and Co2lonialisation (SOAS SUa, 2019) and zero waste shops, set up by student cooperatives supported by their unions, are popping up across the country (SSU, 2019; Keele University, 2019; Davies, 2018). Also, various campaigns are organising to encourage the university to divest from fossil fuels that involve

joined-up working with community groups, and between trade and students' unions (Somerville, 2019; NUS, 2019b; LBSU, 2019). Many of these sustainability projects have involved students working closely with facilities staff in the institution, setting up student/worker cooperatives, and building relationships and friendships that break down barriers with outsourced workers.

There are many ways in which the academy dehumanises staff and students, making non-academic staff, and bodies of staff and students from marginalised groups invisible through marketised practices. The cooperative acts above may seem small, but it is the shared learning, connections, cooperative skills and modes of organising in such projects that are really important. Increasingly sustainability is being connected with wellbeing, and projects such as these allow people to connect and see each other as similarly human with shared vulnerabilities. It allows for care and affective work to be shared across groups, collectivising responsibilities that are traditionally feminised, individualised and invisible. Federici contends that “[t]o make a university a commons we need to overcome the hierarchies existing within it” (Federici, 2018, p.101). Here, we need not start by toppling the leaders, but instead by breaking down the barriers with those we have contact with every day, where the utopian process of reimagining the sector beings with mutual respect and cooperation of what will then be an increasingly empowered grassroots community.

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