



Choudry, A. & Vally, S. (Eds.) (2020). *The university & social justice. Struggles across the globe.* Pluto Press.

Jürgen Rudolph

Head of Research & Senior Lecturer, Kaplan Higher Education, Singapore; Editor-in-chief, Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2020.3.1.18>

In this laudably international collection, Aziz Choudry (an Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair at McGill University) and Salim Vally (a Professor and Director at the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT) at the University of Johannesburg) bring together contributions from a dozen nations. We are usually better informed about the goings-on in our own countries and (most probably) in the English-speaking world, but may know less about the Higher Education (HE) situations in countries that are less in the limelight, for instance, in Palestine or Nigeria. This book (to which a total of 21 authors, who come from a variety of shades of the political left, contributed) provides an excellent opportunity to learn more about student activism across four continents: Africa (Nigeria and South Africa), the Americas (Canada, Chile, Mexico and the U.S.), Asia (India, Palestine, Philippines, and Turkey) and Europe (France and the UK).

The student revolutions of 1968 are but a distant memory. However, the last half century has seen protest movements across the globe. In JALT's previous issue, I had reviewed Bhambra, Gebrial, & Nişancioğlu's (2018) edited volume, entitled *Decolonising the university*, also published by Pluto Press (Rudolph, 2019). The book at hand makes references to calls for decolonisation and 'Rhodes must fall' and can be seen as a companion volume. Student movements across the globe exhibit numerous differences, but many of their focal points can be subsumed under the concepts of economic and social justice. There are calls for institutional change (decorporatising and democratising universities) and there is opposition against military research, sweatshops supported by apparel manufacturers, environmentally-destructive businesses, sexism, racism, and economic marginalisation.

Whilst the editors appreciate universities for their potential to address social inequality and their facilitating the "circulation of knowledge" (8), a trend towards marketisation and privatisation is observed: "Universities are recast from a public to a commodified sphere, with students as consumers" (8), "faculty as customer service" (122) and "staff as sales consultants replete with corporate values and corporate planning networks" (8). Such a commodification of HE alienates "it from its emancipatory possibilities in the service

of profit" (10). In passing, there is also a warning against the blind embrace of EdTech and the ardent, techno-utopian promotion of the Fourth Industrial Revolution by university administrations in the editors' introductory chapter.

All contributors to *The university & social justice* were requested to reflect on some pertinent questions. "What can be learned from the strategies, tactics, demands and visions generated by student movements? How have these struggles resonated (or not) with other parts of society? How do current / recent movements / forms of activism relate to earlier moments in history / periods of struggle over education and society?" (6). And: "What are the horizons of possibility to reimagine education for liberation outside of the limited imagination of the neoliberal university and educational capitalism?" (16). These are highly politically-charged questions that to anybody with an interest in the global history of student movements and HE are worthwhile considering.

The 12 country case studies are kicked off with chapter 2. Jamie Woodcock (a researcher at the Oxford Internet Institute) reflects on his personal activist involvement and narrates the story of the 2010 UK student movement that was influenced by macro-events such as the Iraq war (supported by Tony Blair's Labour government), Israel's Gaza Strip invasion in 2008 (resulting in Palestine solidarity), and the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. The corporatisation of UK universities had a landmark event in 2010, when UK MPs voted in favour of tripling the existing limit of tuition fees to £9,000 p.a. (initially, the maximum fee was supposed to be an exception, but it quickly became the norm).

In chapter 3, Prem Kumar Vijayan (Hindu College, Delhi University) provides an excellent analysis of India's student organising in the context of castes and social classes. In the offensive bureaucratic terminology, there are 'Other Backward Castes (OBC)' that constitute close to half of India's more than 1.3 billion people. Historically, students from lower income families tend to be 'lower-caste' and excluded from HE. A reservation system was created to provide compensatory access to public universities, but its implementation is wanting, resulting in "techniques



Figure 1. Demonstration at the Palace of Westminster. Student demonstrators march past the London Houses of Parliament in opposition to planned spending cuts to further education and an increase in tuition fees in November 2010. Source: BillyH, English language Wikimedia, CC BY 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Student_protest_march_past_Houses_of_Parliament.jpg.

of exclusion disguised as stipulations of eligibility" (44). Moreover, there has been a trend towards HE's privatisation, with the reservation system not applicable to these largely 'upper-caste' institutions.

Gülden Özcan (Assistant Professor, University of Lethbridge, Canada) brings us to Turkey in chapter 4. Özcan argues that Turkey has a long history of violations of academic rights and freedoms – including "discriminating against women, LGBTQ people, people with disabilities and Kurdish people in academia" – despite the widespread perception that under President Erdoğan's rule, "these are the darkest times" (74). After the coup attempt of 2016, many thousands of academics have been persecuted, sacked, and/or banned from leaving the country, with President Erdoğan labelling academics as "traitors" (who support terrorism) and "pseudo-intellectuals" ("most of whom even are paid by the state, and carry state identity cards") who "are dark and ignorant" (cited in 65).

In chapter 5, Rosalind Hampton (Assistant Professor, University of Toronto) critically reflects on the 2012 Québec student movement and puts it into the historical context of settler colonialism, where through "appropriating the struggle of racialised, colonised others, French settlers re-imagined themselves as the 'native' population of Québec who faced invasions of the British colonisers and American capitalists" (86).

Javier Campos-Martínez and Dayana Olavarria are both PhD candidates at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. In chapter 6, they discuss three waves of Chilean student mobilisations between 2006 and 2018. During the 'Penguin revolt' of 2006, secondary school students in their classic black and white uniforms critiqued the high degree of segregation in the education system, the constitutional law inherited from the Pinochet military dictatorship, and "the differences in quality, resources and support between public and private institutions" (103). Other waves included the 'Chilean spring' of 2011 and the Feminist wave of 2018.



Figure 2. On 30 March, 2005, a group of students hoisted the students' symbol (a red square) on Mount Royal cross in Montreal. It took 24 hours before authorities removed it. On its lower panel, it said: "Arrêtons de sacrifier nos enfants" (Let's stop sacrificing our children). Source: Philippe42 at the English language Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=21009455>.



Figure 3: The entrance to the University of Chile which was occupied by students in July 2011. The sign reads "La lucha es de la sociedad entera / Todos por la educación gratuita" (The fight is for the whole society / Everybody for free education). Source: Osmar Valdebenito, English language Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_educaci%C3%B3n_no_cabe_en_tu_Moneda.jpg.

Rabab Ibrahim Abdulhadi (Senior Scholar, San Francisco State University (SFSU)) and Saliem Shehadeh (doctoral student, UCLA) in chapter 7 provide a case study of the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas (AMED) programme at SFSU. Islamophobia, as well as anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism, is decried, while labelling Palestine advocates as anti-Semitic, and equating anti-Semitic with anti-Zionist, are rejected. The issue is that Zionism espouses the re-establishment of a Jewish state in the territory of the historic Land of Israel, and this 'Holy Land' includes Palestine. Interestingly, SFSU has a student group named "Jews Against Zionism" (JAZ). Abdulhadi and Shehadeh exemplify how the 'Israel lobby' attempts to influence academic decision-making via million-dollar donations. The corporatisation of universities such as SFSU leads to an increased need for fund-raising, with "the measure of a university's success" being "the size of its endowment" (121).

With chapter 7 passionately arguing the Palestinian case in the U.S., Lena Meari (Assistant Professor, Birzeit University) and Rula Abu Dhou (a researcher at the same university) in chapter 8 discuss student activism in Palestine itself. From a Palestinian perspective, 1948 was the year of Nakba (catastrophe), "when Zionist military groups occupied 78 per cent of Palestine, destroyed over 500 Palestinian villages, and expelled two thirds of the Palestinian people" (139). Meari and Abu Dhou provide a helpful historical overview of origins and developments of Palestinian student movements. Birzeit University is described to be under neoliberal governance, and this led to proposed fee increases that students and faculty successfully fought against. The authors perceive this as a renewal of the Palestinian anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and social justice struggle.

In chapter 9, Alma Maldonado (a researcher at Center for Advanced Research, Mexico City) and Vania Bañuelos Astorga (a master's student, CREFAL) transport us to Mexico which has a long tradition of student revolts. They focus on three Mexican student and youth movements. The first, #YoSoy132 ('I am 132'), took place in 2012 as a protest against a presidential candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto. It began with a home video that introduced 131 Ibero-American University students who protested against the campus visit of the candidate (Peña Nieto became President from 2012 to 2018 anyway). The second movement, #TodosSomosPolitécnico (We are all Polytechnic), centred on mass demonstrations and a strike at a Mexican polytechnic. The third student movement was the Ayotzinapa protests. They occurred after 43 rural teacher education students had been presumably murdered "with the complicity of the police and military in Iguala, Guerrero" on 26 September, 2014 (159).

Julie Le Mazier is a postdoctoral researcher at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. Her chapter 10 is based "on an ethnographic investigation, through long-time immersion among student activists" (175) in France in the late 2000s. Unsurprisingly, amongst the far left, watchwords from 1968 such as autogestion ('self-management') and 'direct democracy' continued to be in use.

Chapter 11 by Asher Gamezde (a cultural worker, based in Cape Town) and Leigh-Ann Naidoo (an educationalist at the University of Cape Town) focuses on recent campus revolts

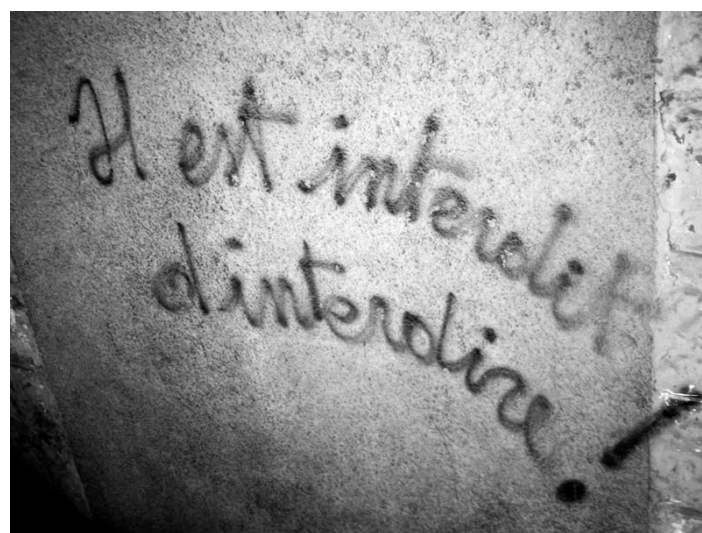


Figure 4. Situationist graffiti in Menton, France, 2006: The 1968 slogan "Il est interdit d'interdire! (It is forbidden to forbid!)", with missing apostrophe. Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/66/Situationist.jpg>

in South Africa and also contains a well-informed critique of standard academic knowledge production. The South African students' social media campaigns certainly showed savvy and humour: Demands for free education (#feesmustfall or #fmf) and in-sourcing (#outsourcingmustfall or #omf) came after the call for decolonising universities (#rhodesmustfall or #rmf) and #blackstudentmovement (#bsm).



Figure 5: Students from the University of Cape Town marched to the local police station on 20 October, 2015, to demand the release of other students arrested the night before. Source: Discott, English language Wikimedia, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Second_day_of_the_FeesMustFall_protests_at_the_University_of_Cape_Town_04.JPG.

Rhoda Nanre Nafziger (doctoral candidate) and Krystal Strong (Assistant Professor) research both at the University of Pennsylvania. They narrate the history of Nigeria's student movements in chapter 12. In Nigeria, "the fight against imperialism, militarism and neocolonialism in the struggle for human rights and equitable, accessible public education"

has been central to student mobilisations (207). Nafziger and Strong describe the sorry state of HE in the African continent's most populous nation in stark terms: "While Nigerian educational institutions were once recognised as among the best in Africa, many universities have become unaccredited, and the overall decay in the system has led to a mass exodus of faculty and students abroad" (218). The situation in the 1990s was described as "book famine, crowded classrooms, lack of consistent electricity, water supply and learning equipment, lecturers not showing up to teach, unpaid scholarships, and lack of general concern of the government to the deteriorating conditions of the universities" (cited in 211). Alas, there was no apparent improvement in the 2000s, with "starving, overcrowded and deprived students" (cited in 216).

The final chapter 13 by Sarah Raymundo (Assistant Professor, University of the Philippines) and Karlo Mongaya (an instructor at the same university) discusses the HE situation in the Philippines. The authors do not mince their words in assessing President Rodrigo Duterte as "a fascist demagogue" who throws "off liberal niceties in favour of militarist rule" (236). This would be an extremely ill-advised public statement if one indeed resided in a country ruled by a "fascist demagogue". A similarly controversial contention by Raymundo and Mongaya is that the Philippines' "so-called postcolonial governments are no different from the colonial governments of Spain and the US" (238).

I would like to end this book review with some critical considerations. Gamezde's and Naidoo's chapter 11 on South Africa is amongst the sections that I found most thought-provoking. I was, however, surprised by the apparent exclusion of non-Black students in the publishing project across several universities that is described in their chapter. It made me think about what Stephen Brookfield recently wrote on race and racism in the context of HE. Brookfield views "white supremacy as the philosophical foundation of racism" (2019b, p. 4), and I think this leads to the corollary that racism by Blacks is per definitionem impossible. If the issue of race is "one of the greatest scars on America's soul" (Brookfield, 2019a, p. xv), this must be at least as true for South Africa. This leads us to the question whether or not non-white racism is possible. To be clear, I am not accusing the authors of any racism whatsoever, and South Africa with its post-Apartheid national reconciliation and multiculturalism in the Rainbow Nation appears to be a shining example in many ways.

More critically, Ernest Mandel is cited as writing that the university as an institution "remains bound with golden chains to the power of the ruling class" (cited in 17) and "that any lasting radical transformation of the university could only occur if there was a radical transformation of society" (17). This idea from the editors' introductory chapter is picked up again in chapter 3 by Vijayan who recalls "the Gramscian-Althusserian contention" of "the primary objective of education (and any such institutional apparatus)" (42). This line of thinking perceives HE's systemic function as producing "malleable, obedient and docile"

subjects that are capable to contribute productively to "the larger hegemonic order" (42). With additional references to Foucault and Bourdieu, it is suggested that "the entire structure and infrastructure of higher education (HE) is deliberately designed (or has historically evolved in design) to tame and subdue the generations of 'unruly subjects' who will pass through them" (42).

Although the above contentions by some of the above-mentioned Marxist thinkers (in particular, Mandel, Gramsci and Althusser) and non-Marxist thinkers (such as Foucault) are worthy of our critical reflection, I personally do not subscribe to theories that posit teachers as being "unaware of the forces constraining" them and them being "somehow unwitting agents of the state mindlessly reproducing dominant ideologies" – as Brookfield put it so well in a recent interview (Brookfield et al., 2019, p. 85). We could also question the directionality of the statement that quasi-causally, the transformation of society is supposed to precede the one of the university. Could not educators bring about change that leads to societal transformations? Overall, it is certainly a more uplifting thought to view HE (with Marcuse and Brookfield) as a zone of potential liberation.

It may have been useful to include even more countries (Brazil, China, Hong Kong and Malaysia are some nations that spontaneously come to my mind). However, I enjoyed reading *The University & social justice* and found it surprisingly hard to put down. I recommend the book highly, particularly for its unique insights into HE and student movements by academic insiders in select countries across the globe. It provides us with a refreshingly different angle on global HE that should not be ignored, if we are to take seriously the oft-implored, mantra-like values of student-centricism and critical thinking.

References

- Bhambra, G. K., Gebrial, D., & Nişancioğlu, K. (Eds.). (2018). *Decolonising the university*. London, England: Pluto Press.
- Brookfield, S. (2019a). *Preface*. In S. Brookfield & Associates (2019), pp. xv-xix.
- Brookfield, S. (2019b). *The dynamics of teaching race*. In S. Brookfield & Associates (2019), pp. 1-17.
- Brookfield, S. & Associates (2019). *Teaching race. How to help unmask and challenge racism*. Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S., Rudolph, J. & Yeo, E. (2019). The power of critical thinking in learning and teaching. An interview with Professor Stephen D. Brookfield. *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*, 2(2), 76-90.
- Rudolph, J. (2019). Book review: Bhambra, G. K., Gebrial, D., & Nişancioğlu, K. (Eds.). (2018). *Decolonising the university*. *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*, 2(2), 125-127.