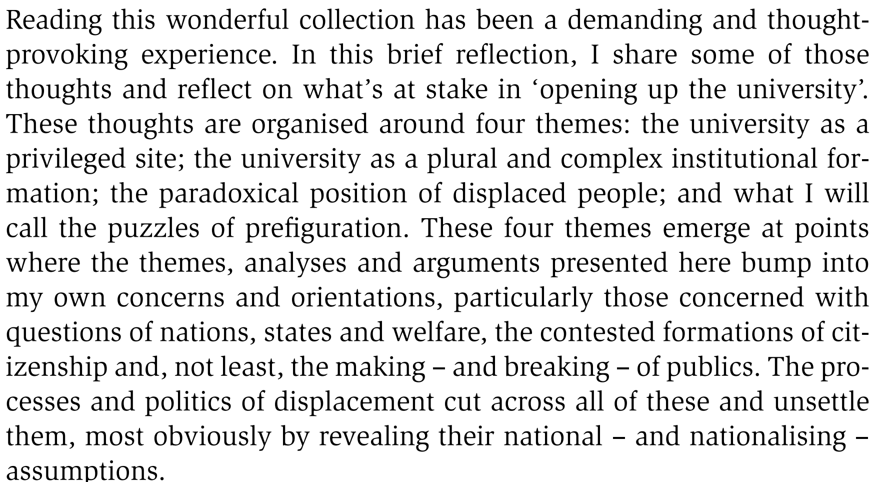
AFTERWORD

Privilege, Plurality, Paradox, Prefiguration

The Challenges of 'Opening Up'

JOHN CLARKE



Reading this wonderful collection has been a demanding and thought-provoking experience. In this brief reflection, I share some of those thoughts and reflect on what's at stake in 'opening up the university'. These thoughts are organised around four themes: the university as a privileged site; the university as a plural and complex institutional formation; the paradoxical position of displaced people; and what I will call the puzzles of prefiguration. These four themes emerge at points where the themes, analyses and arguments presented here bump into my own concerns and orientations, particularly those concerned with questions of nations, states and welfare, the contested formations of citizenship and, not least, the making – and breaking – of publics. The processes and politics of displacement cut across all of these and unsettle them, most obviously by revealing their national – and nationalising – assumptions.

Each of those areas tends towards the nation as their, often unspoken, condition of possibility, and each has increasingly become the focus of nationalist and nativist politics in the last decade, particularly (though not only) across the Global North. Such politics, as many contributions here make clear, have had consequences for universities and for their attempts to engage in offering education for displaced persons as refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and more. In this piece, I follow the editors in referring to 'displaced people' rather than the various juridical and quasi-juridical categories of asylum seekers, migrants and refugees. While those categories certainly have consequences (if not necessarily those originally intended), they tend to split and conceal the common dynamics of displacement: people being brought into motion by a variety of conditions (economic, political, social, military, climatological – and often more than one). Given that these conditions are unlikely to

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reduce or disappear in the near future, perhaps this is the time to move beyond the short termism of what Gallo, Poggio and Bodio (this volume) call the 'everlasting emergency' and start to remake the university and its borders. Given the focus of this book, let me begin with the entangled relationship between the university and privilege.

The University as a Privileged Site

The University is, as Cook's chapter argues, a setting for the production and exploitation of a certain form of privilege – prestige. It is able to function in that way because it has long been a site of social privilege, as is made clear in Cantat's chapter on access to the university. This institutionalisation of social privilege has worked in several ways, beginning with the relatively strong institutional boundaries between the university and the wider society, grounded in the claim to produce and distribute valued knowledge. Those boundaries have manifested themselves in various ways, most obviously in the claim for 'academic freedom' in the pursuit of knowledge (Ivancheva, this volume), but also in the longer history of the university as a (largely) self-governing community – a community of scholars. This institutional separation delivers what the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser once called 'relative autonomy' (1969). Althusser was, of course, referring to the 'relative autonomy' of the other instances of a social formation (the 'superstructures') from the economic base as a way of dealing with questions of determination. But the term might also be used as a way of thinking about the 'relative autonomy' of the university from the wider social formation and, indeed, the demands of the (nation-) state. I think it's useful because the concept quickly takes us to more empirical questions about the degree of relative autonomy (just how relative is this autonomy?) and its conditions and limits. But for this approach to make sense, there is another move to be made – a shift from talking about The University (as a singular and abstract concept) to universities in the plural, while recognising the symbolic prestige and privilege that the idea of The University brings with it. The idea(l) of the University has been materialised in different forms in different places and times and is subjected to different forces in those contexts. Several of the chapters in this book, as well as the editors' introduction, make this context-specific institutional formation of universities clear. Here I want to draw attention to the contradictory implications of the relative autonomy of universities. It makes them a space of pos-

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sibility, innovation and experiment – both in general terms and in the specific form of experimenting with education for displaced people. As the chapters by Aparna et al. and Lounasmaa et al., as well as the OLIve initiative that created the springboard for these conversations, make clear, universities offer spaces for creative innovation and contain people who are willing to engage in – and fight for – those innovations and for the resources necessary to make them happen. I will come back to some of the (changing) contingency of those possibilities later, but it is important to celebrate even the cramped, confined and straitened spaces of innovation that universities have held open. Universities are not alone: civil society organisations of many kinds have also worked with displaced people to help with their transitions and to resist their marginalisation and exclusion, but universities offer one variety of privileged space that, contingently, makes possible routes to access weaker forms of privilege and prestige, not least in certification and routes to further study. In this dynamic, it is worth thinking beyond the binary distinction between inclusion and exclusion and injecting a third term: the varieties of subordinated inclusion that states and social formations make available (see also the idea of 'differential inclusion' developed by Mezzadra and Neilson [2013] and its use by Segrave [2019]). Sometimes, these positions are referred to as being 'second-class citizens'; at others, they are marked by a more marginal and liminal presence: tolerated but not accepted (temporary residents, migrant workers and so on), present but disdained or despised for not being 'really' British/Italian/French/European.

Nonetheless, the relative autonomy of universities needs to be understood as a changing condition, such that when we talk of 'opening up the university' we have to recognise the ways in which universities have been – and are being – reshaped in ways intended to constrain and discipline aspects of that relative autonomy. At the core of these changes has been a growing desire to 'instrumentalise' the university, to find ways of making its privilege add value to a range of economic, political and social projects. From the creation of a global higher education market to the systems of 'workload management' for individual academics, a whole variety of reforms have been put into play as ways of 'modernising' the university (discussed more extensively in Clarke 2010). We might include the systems of comparison, competition and ranking that now produce – and valorise – university reputations nationally and internationally. Then there are the expectations that universities will be producers of 'useful' knowledge, rather than knowledge

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in general: such useful knowledge should be developed in the service of economic advantage and the greater success of The Nation plc. Indeed, the globalisation of higher education coincides precisely with the drive to nationalise universities, articulating them to national systems of control (e.g. research and teaching evaluations, new financing systems and calls for 'accountability'); to imagined national futures (building a 'knowledge society' and so on) and to nation-building projects. Meanwhile, universities are expected to produce 'subjects of value' as employable material and, as Rajaram's chapter reminds us, as properly socialised 'active' (rather than activist) citizens both within nations and in the European Union space. It is certainly true that the forces and demands bearing on universities vary from place to place. Hungary's view of both what can be taught and what sorts of institutions may award degrees is not the same as England's installation of the mindset and tools of the New Public Management (or new managerialism) across the world of higher education. But both reflect the desires of governments to constrain the autonomy of universities and to subject them to nationalising forms of discipline. The drive towards instrumentalisation (and the narrowed concept of value that underpins this drive) coincides painfully with the rise of nationalist politics in the Global North (and elsewhere, for example in the effects of Hindu nationalism on Indian universities or in Safta-Zecheria's discussion of the attack on universities in Turkey in this volume). As the Central European University (CEU) found, this shift towards nationalism and nativism takes a dim view of universities spending scarce resources on 'outsiders' of different kinds (with the exception of value-bearing 'international students', of course).

As a result, the idea of the University as a privileged space operates in increasing tension with the current imperatives that seek to both constrain and instrumentalise the production and distribution of knowledge. That tension is experienced across the range of activities that universities engage in, especially in times of fiscal austerity, and comes to bear particularly on those activities of low symbolic and material value, most visibly in education for displaced people. Nonetheless, those activities may, at times, intersect with different imperatives that universities are, sometimes and contradictorily, expected to acknowledge and address, notably in the pressures to 'widen access' in the pursuit of a more equitable society, or at least (more instrumentally) in creating a critical mass to be counted as a 'knowledge society'. But it is precisely this sense of contradictory pressures that points to the complex institutional formation of universities.

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The Plurality of the University: What Needs to 'Open Up'?

The image of 'opening up' the university is a compelling one (especially for someone who spent most of his working life at the UK's Open University). But that same experience makes me attentive to the puzzles and problems of opening, as well as their importance. The Open University's open-ness largely rested on a passive liberal understanding of being open to anyone who might want to study. This sense of openness overcame some blockages (entry requirements, evaluation interviews and the criteria – visible and invisible – that tend to govern entry to university education). But it had little to say about less obvious dynamics of culture, of hidden (as well as visible) curricula, the economic and emotional costs of studying at a distance and more. Later, widening participation programmes struggled with some of these, driven by concerns about classed and racialised imbalances of application and retention. 'Access' to university education covers many different types and practices of inclusion and exclusion, from formalised entry requirements that assume membership of a common – national – culture to the more literal sense of entering the physical space of the university. As a critical story in Aparna et al.'s chapter here reminds us, universities are spaces of privileged access, regulated by security systems and security personnel. My nominally 'Open' university implemented a system of entry to its buildings, governed by swipe cards, and I remember the collective embarrassment that accompanied our hosting of a conference of the Oecumene[1] (Citizenship After Orientalism) project. All visitors had to move between sessions, refreshments and even toilets accompanied by a person with an OU card to ensure they could get access to what was to happen next. Sites of privileges protect their privileges in multiple ways, as projects to widen access or participation have recurrently discovered (see also Cantat, this volume).

As the editors have made clear, one key part of the challenge of 'opening up' the university involves the structures and systems of knowledge itself. Epistemologically exclusive, offering a world of knowledge framed and structured by a Western, colonial and patriarchal conception of what is to be known and what it means to know, the university produces and circulates a strangely ossified and commodified version of knowledge to which its Others are expected to be grateful to be allowed 'access'. Without ever needing to say so, the knowledges framed in this way carry with them a hierarchy of bodies and ways of knowing that remains profoundly differentiating and disempowering. Challenging these ways of knowing and the curricula in which they are enacted

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in the name of 'decolonising the university' (Bhambra, Gebreil and Nişancıoğlu 2018) has become an important and recurring site of conflict both for the excluded and for the rising nationalist right (committed to defending the national or European way of knowing as history's natural end point). This privileged institutionalisation of knowledge extends to both the practices of knowledge creation (and the celebration of the heroic lone scholar) and to the disciplinary – and disciplining – ordering of the world into relatively closed academic compartments. As the chapters by Blell et al. and Jasani et al. in this volume have indicated, such knowledge framings tend to exclude both other ways of knowing and other desires for knowledge that do not fit with this ordering.

These framings of knowledge and the canonical systems that they deliver merge almost imperceptibly into questions of pedagogy. Pedagogy remains largely framed by questions of transmission: the processes by which those who know things transmit what they know to those who do not know, but desire access to the knowledge. The architecture, apparatuses and technologies of teaching remain inextricably linked to this model of educating people – and the lecture remains the model device for transmission (whether in person or online). A colleague in a university moving to online teaching as a response to Covid-19 told me that the 'support' for his move to online teaching included a virtual backdrop that would make it look as though he was speaking in a lecture theatre. This dominant conception of pedagogy has been challenged, not least by those working in marginal and innovative settings with what are sometimes called 'non-conventional students' (including the 'disadvantaged' and displaced persons). Diverse pedagogic innovations have tried to displace the 'transmission' model of learning, offering more collaborative, exploratory and dialogic relationships and practices, often challenging the finished or over-solidified conceptions of knowledge that underpin the transmission line. Nevertheless, student-centred learning, student-driven learning and collaborative learning practices remain emergent alternatives, rather than the dominant educational processes.

These, however, are the visible dimensions of the university as a social institution. There are also the less visible elements of the arrangement of people, places and power that bear upon the challenge of opening. Some of these, as Rachel Burke's chapter demonstrates, involve questions of language (the formal languages of university conduct and the languages of sociality) which tend to reproduce normative national (and indeed international) assumptions about how universities work,

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and on whom. Language conditions 'access' in many ways, enabling or denying entry and engagement. Then there are the ways in which universities act as organisations: as the editors make clear in their introduction, universities function as rule-bound bureaucracies, as more or less adaptive organisational cultures, and as systems of habits and expectations. Bureaucratic rules and categories govern entry to the university and progress within it: they announce roles, norms and the expectations that universities have of 'the student' (usually a singular and monocultural figure). Those expectations are translated into practice within departments, units and teams who may bend or flex them in unpredictable ways (sometimes in a spirit of generosity, at other times in excluding and oppressive ways). All bureaucratic organisations (which certainly includes universities, however much they may try to imagine themselves otherwise) also create the spaces and possibilities of what Lipsky (1982) called 'street level bureaucrats' decision-making. Academic and administrative staff in universities may think themselves above street level, but they operate in the messy decision-making spaces created by university regulations and managerial imperatives. As Humphris's study (2019) of Romanian migrants to the UK has shown, critical decisions (about forms of welfare and citizenship) are increasingly negotiated in the interactions between migrants and front-line workers, and are significantly shaped by the moral, political and social judgements of those workers. In the process, relationships of both conflict and collusion, desire and dependency are surprisingly central to apparently 'rational' bureaucratic order.

These issues lead in two rather different directions. On one side, they underscore the complexities of 'opening up the university' because the university is not a coherent and singular entity that requires only one type of can opener. On the other, the diversity of sites for possible contestation also multiplies the potential alliances that might be formed in pursuing the challenge of opening universities. Existing struggles – to decolonise the university; to challenge oppressive and discriminatory behaviours; to change standpoints; to challenge academic and student precarity, debt and more – create potential intersections and possible allies committed to transforming the university in progressive ways and to resisting the pressures that seek to enclose them.

The Paradoxical Place of Displaced People

As Aparna et al. (this volume) suggest, displaced people occupy a paradoxical place in the value regime of universities, being both desired

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and despised. As research subjects, their stories may be of value (see also Glanville, this volume, on the humanitarian ethnographic gaze). By virtue of occupying liminal positions in the inter-state system of nationalised identities, migrants, refugees and others can speak to the effects and experiences of displacement. In contrast, they are of little or no value to the educational calculus of universities. They are not fee-bearing 'national' students who add value to departmental and university budgets. Nor are they the 'super' fee-bearing international students so avidly desired and recruited by universities of the Global North (as manifested in the proliferation of recruiting shop fronts opened by European and North American universities in southern and eastern states). Displaced people, in this calculus, are precisely the wrong sort of international: they incur economic, organisational and social costs rather than being 'subjects of value'.

Nevertheless, they may sometimes carry value with them. For example, they may enable universities to add reputational value (see Cantat, this volume). Those universities offering educational provision for displaced people may discover symbolic value in being able to present themselves as liberal, humanitarian and internationalist. Such symbolic value may add lustre to their reputation among current or potential students, although as CEU discovered it may also attract the attention of nationalist and nationalising governments. In such circumstances, providing education for displaced people can bring economic, symbolic and political costs. Either way, the paradoxes of displaced people as students remind us of the profoundly national framing of (educational) citizenship. Discussions of access to education (of all sorts) typically take the nation as the framing scale and spatiality, occasionally interrupted by regional innovations (as in the EU's commitment to cross-national possibilities of study and the promotion of European values). This is the long history of citizenship as an identity formed and lodged in the nation-state, rather than an effect of recent nationalist political movements. But such movements have recurrently framed welfare questions (including access to education) in terms of the costs to 'our people' who are imagined as being deprived of their birth right by 'in-comers' who have earned no 'entitlements'.

This paradoxical status means that projects providing education to displaced persons have a potentially contradictory relationship with other educational innovations aimed at 'widening access'. They share many political, philosophical and pedagogical orientations, given that they are working – literally and metaphorically – on the borders of

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university institutions. They stretch the conception of ‘the student’ by seeking to enrol ‘non-traditional’ demographics from the ‘under-represented’ or ‘hard to reach’ groups and often share a conception of ‘opening up the university’ in diverse ways. Many of the pedagogical initiatives derive from shared understandings of the failings and limitations of mainstream educational policies and practices – and the name of Freire occurs regularly across such initiatives.[2] However, the drive to widen access in the UK has remained largely framed by the national conception of citizenship and rights of access. While such projects certainly aim to broaden access for marginalised or excluded groups, these are typically groups within the nation, rather than in the liminal space at the nation’s edge: for example, drives to get women into subjects dominated by men (e.g. Women into Science and Engineering); the construction of non-standard entry routes to those lacking formal qualifications (such as adding a preparatory year in adjunct institutions); or the attempt to enrol increased numbers of working-class or minority students to elite universities. Even if the ‘target’ groups for widening access projects do not match the imagined and preferred national citizen, especially being members of minoritised ethnic groups (for example, what official discourse in the UK now refers to through the uncomfortable acronym of BAME communities – Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic), they are nonetheless citizens who are deemed worthy of being promoted from second-class to first-class citizens in educational terms. Of course, these are not stable differentiations, as the pursuit of ‘hostile environments’ by successive UK governments over the last decade has demonstrated (Gentleman 2019). In those policies, settled Black and Asian people with UK citizenship were nonetheless pursued, harassed and even deported under the assumption that they were not ‘legitimate’ rights-bearing citizen-subjects. Such bordering practices create shifting categorisations of membership.

In these atmospheres of intensified hostility and suspicion, displaced people become the focus of governmental scrutiny and concern, to the extent that organisations (whether universities or civil society groups) find themselves exposed to extra scrutiny and run the risk of making those with whom they work visible in new ways. In the UK, the combination of the ‘hostile environment’ and the Prevent scheme (aimed at identifying potential radicals en route to terrorism) have applied extra demands on universities to monitor both the status and the attitudes of ‘suspicious’ people. This enrolment of universities into what Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy (2017, 2019) have called ‘everyday border-

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ing' (away from the nominal borders) exemplifies the drive towards abjection – the constant suspicion of and threat towards the person deemed to be 'out of place'.

The Puzzles of Prefiguration

As Cantat (this volume) demonstrates, experiments in education for displaced people take place in the margins of universities. Indeed, the margins are the usual space for experimentation and innovation – a location that has some benefits, such as weaker systems of scrutiny, management and regulation to offset against the many downsides of marginality (ranging from chronic underfunding to precarious status, for both projects and those who work on them). Marginal spaces, both in universities and the wider social formations in which they are embedded, are seed beds for future-oriented projects, including what some feminist scholars have called 'prefigurative' practices. In these comments, I borrow from the work of legal scholar Davina Cooper (2017, 2020; and Cooper, Dhawan and Newman 2019) who has explored questions of everyday utopias, the dynamics of reimagining social and political arrangements and ways in which prefigurative practices may create the possibilities of institutional and social transformation. One specific focus of Cooper's interest is a form of prefiguration oriented around the principle of acting 'as if' the desired conditions already prevailed:

> Unlike prefigurative registers which explicitly foreground the relationship between means and ends, here the effectiveness of what is done (or the worldmaking it is part of) may depend on obscuring its 'as if' character. Yet, the 'as if' is important. When overtly aligned with play, it allows actions to happen – crowd-sourcing a people's constitution, for example – that might otherwise struggle for lack of official propriety and formal legitimacy. More generally, acting 'as if' gives political action a boost. This is partly because innovative, utopian or provocative actions happen despite lacking the institutional conditions they seem to require. But it is also because actions reimagine their conditions of possibility, and act as if they were already there. Prefigurative action entails a significant reimagining of the environment in which action is set so that a social, scientific, ethical and political 'otherwise' justifies, validates, normalizes and holds up the actions undertaken. (2020: 896–97)

Education for displaced people can, of course, sometimes be a functional translation of existing educational forms and pedagogical practices to a new target audience – the migrant, the refugee, the asy-

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lum seeker. More often, however, it tends to be prefigurative in one or more ways. It may treat displaced people as if they are already citizens (whether citizens as bearers of rights or members of an egalitarian political community). It may be prefigurative in terms of pedagogy and the relationships through which knowledges are created and shared, breaking hierarchical norms and forms. It may also, as the editors of this collection indicate, be prefigurative of new institutional forms and relationships of the university in wider terms, creating different conceptions of the 'academic community', its internal ordering and relationship to its wider social and political conditions. Enacting new ways of being and being with (or accompaniment; see Watkins 2019, for example), new forms of conduct, new pedagogic practices, new epistemologies and practices of knowledge production and sharing, even new institutional and architectural forms of 'The University' that challenge extant conceptions of the Ivory Tower, the Knowledge Factory, or massified and instrumentalised education: all of these might prefigure the wider transformations at stake in 'opening up the university'.

As Cooper and others recognise clearly, prefigurative practices carry no guarantee that they will deliver the desired outcomes (much like every other form of political investment, perhaps). Such risks are integral to prefigurative politics and are similarly embedded in the dilemmas of working at the margins of institutionalised systems. Cooper describes institutions in terms that I recognise, pointing especially to their contradictory character as structures of domination and possibility, and as both contingent and contestable:

> Adopting an expansive account of institutions, to take in more than rules (including the tacit 'rules of the game'), I approach institutions as durable, patterned processes and formations, tying together rules, procedures, norms, systems, knowledges, temporalities, spaces, things, moralities and people in ways that are meaningful, forceful and with effects. This does not mean institutions are stable or monolithic . . . They evolve and change; are plural, heterogeneous, and contradictory; and can be counter-cultural and hybrid as work on critical institutionalism also explores . . . Yet, despite their variation and contingency, institutions remain important to the extent that patterns, routines and processes – established and recognised by dominant forces, and giving rise to unequal effects – exist. Indeed, it is this very existence which stimulates and provides a target for critical (as well as more hopeful) political engagement. (2020: 894)

Although not the focus of Cooper's analysis, it is important, as I suggested above, that institutions have margins: less tightly governed

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spaces in which both innovation and 'leakages' between inside and outside can take place (the idea of a 'leaky' institutional system or nexus borrows from Enzensberger 1970). The margins form a space of possibility but also encompass characteristic dilemmas for those seeking to build on experiments to create transformative possibilities. In some respects, these centre on questions of scale – and the implications of 'scaling up' innovative projects or, to borrow a different framing, the demands of 'mainstreaming'.

Such transitions are typically framed by the pessimistic concept of incorporation: radical projects have their radicalism defused, they become assimilated into dominant ways of thinking and being; or they are at risk of being 'bought off' and 'bought in' (the financial imagery is not accidental). Drawing on a study of how feminist activists negotiated 'spaces of power', moving between activism and government, Newman (2012) has suggested that this view of incorporation or co-option misunderstands the shifting and dynamic nature of power and opposition. While recognising that 'neoliberal inclined governments tend to seize on such interventions and bend them to their own purposes', Newman nonetheless argues that:

> Rather than a singular narrative, of a post-political world heralded by the triumph of neoliberalism, this points to the need (political as well as theoretical) to understand the simultaneous dynamics of retreat and proliferation, creativity and constraint, activism and incorporation. (2013: 528)

Borrowing from a different conceptual vocabulary, I am tempted to argue that our inherited concepts of incorporation and co-option are strikingly undialectical. They treat political outcomes as fixed in one decisive moment in which domination is once again secured rather than as part of an ongoing 'war of position' (Gramsci 1971). Gramsci's idea of a war of position addressed the constant – and shifting – struggle for cultural domination and hegemony in which the state and the apparatuses of civil society (including, of course, educational institutions) formed the terrain of conflict. (This idea is interestingly explored in a study by Peter Mayo [2005] of an adult education project in Malta.) A more dialectical understanding of these processes would consider the ways in which dominant ideas – and resources – may be borrowed, bent and redeployed for alternative purposes, framed by an understanding that the meanings of ideas and practices are never permanently fixed but are always contingently open to contestation.

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Despite their current structures of domination, marginalisation and exclusion, the three domains that the editors introduced at the beginning of this volume – the university, the wider social formation and the state – are also contradictory and contested fields. Displaced people are the products of those fraught dynamics and, from time to time, become the object of efforts to 'include' them into other places (as well as the more visible efforts to exclude them). Such inclusion is, needless to say, not unconditional: it is hedged around by doubts, disciplinary practices and systemic marginalisation. But it is these spaces of possibility – however confined and contradictory – that this book has explored in a commitment to understanding the ways in which both displacement and education for displaced people matters. At their core, such innovations point us towards the twin project of 'democratic education' and 'education for democracy'.

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Notes

1. http://www.oecumene.eu.
2. Paulo Freire's work has remained a constant source of inspiration for educationalists across many settings (not just universities). His commitment to – and modelling of – anti-oppressive practice remains a key reference point not only for education but for workers across a range of public services, including social work (see, e.g., Freire 1996).

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