Leadership to resist vampirism: A Gothic Marxist study of landlord-tenant struggle

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Landlordism has been a boom sector of the UK economy since the privatisation of public housing in the 1980s. Political-economic choices continue to erode social housing, making increasing numbers of people who need such housing vulnerable to the exploitation of private landlords. Yet little research exists on how landlords organise their tenants for profit, let alone how tenants resist exploitation. This inquiry contributes by theorising the dialectical struggle between landlords and tenants. We present an empirical study of a community union, drawing on: semi-structured interviews with 30 members; and 18 months of participant-observation data of one of its organisers. We employ a Gothic Marxist approach to make visible the exploitative, draining and normalised practices of landlords – but also the resistance leadership of tenants, which grows in the shadow of monstrosity. The vocabulary and grammar of horror is employed metaphorically to make vivid but plausible connections (Rosenhead et al, 2019) between the draining of victims by vampires and the capture and exploitation of tenants by landlords.

Gothic Marxism draws inspiration from Marx's (2004: 405) positioning of capital as 'dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks'. Such a parasitic relation is amplified in the case of landlords, a non-productive fraction of rentier capital. The central preoccupation of Gothic Marxism is bringing to light 'the very insidiousness of the capitalist grotesque…the ways in which its monstrosity becomes normalised and naturalised via its colonisation of the essential fabric of everyday life' (McNally, 2011: 2). At the root of this argument is the sense that monstrous phenomena are normalised to such a degree under capitalism that they cease to register as horrifying. Bringing into light the monstrous that is made normal involves a twin focus. First, naming the monsters and their acts through a 'capitalist *monsterology*' (ibid). Second, restoring dignity to a society's 'detritus' (Cohen, 1993: 11), the victims of its monsters. Hence why Gothic Marxism has been used to elucidate the overlapping ways in which patriarchy-capital violently positions and exploits women through culture (e.g. Newitz, 2006).

By drawing on additional conceptual resources in the related areas of social reproduction theory (e.g. Bhattacharya, 2017; Ferguson, 2019) and critical geography (e.g. Harvey, 2019; Massey, 2005), it is possible to extend the remit of Gothic Marxism to illuminate exploitation through housing – how gender, class and race are exploited by landlords and how such exploitation is normalised and made more horrifying through the dank, seemingly inescapable spaces of rented housing. Tenants are trapped in the reproductive roles of housekeepers to damp and mouldy spaces, which are made prison-like and uniform through the power landlords exert in the housing market. Victims experience routine intimidation, all the while paying a substantial portion of the income they earn from selling their labour power - to landlords. Thus, their subjective and economic freedoms are drained by their vampiric captors.

Yet people do fight back. We contribute to the literature on resistance leadership (Collinson, 2020; Sinha et al, 2021; Zoller and Fairhurst, 2007) by showing how tenants collectivise and resist in ways that are dialectical and spatial. They do so in two ways. First, through a process of *awakening* from the hazy stupor of their capture. By doing so, they make their normalised exploitation seem 'weird' (Fisher, 2016) and 'monstrous' (McNally, 2011). This is a mutually reinforcing process that builds autonomous self-determination in relation to the spatial environments in which union members live and agitate – a process of reclaiming resources and freedoms. Second, by *illuminating*, dragging vampires into the light – exposing the monstrous practices of landlords by embarrassing them in the wider world of neighbours and business peers.

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Exploring the internal, discursive, and micro-processes of Corporate Social Responsibility

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Abstract

In an age where corporate scandals around diversity, equity, harassment, and other social issues continue to surface, particularly in the wake of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, scholars must reconsider the role of business in society. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) provides organizations with a way to benefit stakeholders, society, and themselves beyond legal compliance. However, while practitioners and other stakeholders have often viewed CSR as an external, reputation or crisis management tool, its conceptualization is changing shape and operationalization in response to growing social concerns and pressures on corporations to "do the right thing." With this call for expanded aims of CSR, scholars are pushing for an internal view of CSR through the consideration of employee perspectives regarding CSR efforts. Thus, research has begun taking a "micro-turn" in analyzing CSR, focused on an individual analysis of such practices *within* organizations (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

This study takes a mixed-method, multi-level, and micro-approach to understanding internal processes around CSR. In particular, this study explores how organizational members (i.e., employees) construct knowledge (via their sensemaking) of and identify with internally-focused CSR policies. Through analysis, I take a communicative and discursive approach in viewing CSR as a socially constructed phenomenon (Schultz, Castello, & Morsing, 2013) and (social) movement within organizations (see Georgallis, 2017). In presenting a case study, this dissertation contributes to research on the micro-foundations and limited internal perspective of CSR and provides important pragmatic implications given the timely and relevant nature of this work.

Deconstructing Hegemonic Assumptions for a New Social Order:

Framing Participatory and Democratic Leadership on Commons and Cooperatives

Abstract 739 words

Leadership can be conceptualized as a social myth that legitimizes a specific social order creating assumptions about society and organizations and how people and workers need to relate. According to Gemmill & Oakley (1992), "the major significance of most recent studies on leadership is not to be found in their scientific validity but in their function in offering ideological support for the existing social order" (p. 115).

Today, to support the capitalist system and the neoliberal social order, mainstream leadership theories emphasize individualism, top-down decision-making, and the concentration of power within a leader, which are considered effective leadership characteristics from a mainstream perspective (Ferry & Guthey, 2020; Learmonth & Morrell, 2021). Thus, leadership can be seen as a discourse that legitimizes values and assumptions about human relations at work and social orders at a broader level. For example, "the language of 'leadership' represents a particularly subtle but powerful opportunity for the pursuit of individual elite interests to be disguised so that it looks as if it is for the benefit of all" (Learmonth & Morrell, p. 1, 2021). Besides, "referring to executives as 'leaders' draws a veil over the structured antagonism at the heart of the employment relationship and wider sources of inequality by celebrating market values" (p. 1). Therefore, since mainstream leadership discourses and rhetoric contribute to reproducing the dominant system, could a critical narrative that reframes mainstream conceptualizations of leadership be a tool for challenging the hegemonic social order and unfolding more participatory and democratic processes? Furthermore, what would be the main

leadership practices and strategies for framing new values and assumptions of a more equal and fair social order?

In the last decades, new forms of solidarity, reciprocity, property, and participatory and democratic governance have been analyzed, reimagined, and promoted through the logic of the commons and cooperatives. This paper analyzes and compares from a perspective of systems thinking leadership practices and strategies of framing focused on participatory and democratic processes within Som Energia and Mondragon corporation. The former is an example of common in Catalonia that resells energy bought from the market and develops its renewable energy projects to produce energy for its members. At the same time, the latter is a corporation in the Basque Country that unites more than 80 cooperatives in the region.

Comparing a common and a cooperative through systems thinking lens represents an opportunity to learn about leadership as a complex process of relational influence that enables interconnectivity and adaptability. Besides, this analysis can shed light on how framing and re-framing participatory and democratic leadership can enhance participation and collective action within organizations and contribute to creating creative business models that align with more democratic societal values and purposes (Kempster et al., 2019). In essence, leadership can be seen as a process that builds and transforms assumptions and social orders regarding how organizations and societies work (Hosking & Morley, 1988), and framing becomes a critical tool that needs to be analyzed more in-depth.

A system is a set of elements or parts coherently organized and inter-connected in a pattern or structure that produces a characteristic set of behaviors, often classified as its 'function' or 'purpose.' (Meadows, 2008). Although leaders and followers are situated within social systems that influence and limit them (Harter, 2021), at the same time, these leaders and

followers can shift the prevailing system in a new direction or create entirely new systems broadening their possibilities and options (Kellerman, 2021). Thus, the defining activity of leadership would be to shape or manage the human-made versions of these systems (Donaldson, 2017). Applied to the commons and cooperatives, this study focuses on framing and sense-making processes that, although constrained by the system, contribute to shaping, managing, or changing the system and its subsystems creating new values and assumptions around a fairer social order.

In conclusion, studying different sources of empirical inspiration that go beyond mainstream organizations such as commons, cooperatives, social movements, trade unions, or arts organizations (Sinha et al., 2019; Smolović Jones et al., 2020) can bring new insights to challenge mainstream assumptions and approaches of leadership that are central to reproduce neoliberal hierarchies, values, and practices. So far, mainstream leadership research and even critical studies have been focused on either capitalist organizations or hierarchical forms (Sutherland et al., 2014). Bringing our attention to commons and cooperatives is an opportunity to learn from alternative understandings of leadership values and practices that challenge those that reproduce the neoliberal social order.

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