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POLITICAL IMAGINARIES AND UNIVERSITY POSSIBILITIES: RESPONSIBILITY, CONFLICT, AND THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF BROWN UNIVERSITY AND EUROPEAN HUMANITIES UNIVERSITY¹

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Политическое воображаемое и возможности университета: ответственность, конфликт и трансформации Университета Брауна (США) и Европейского гуманитарного университета

Как политическое воображаемое может содействовать расширению возможностей университета с точки зрения публичных следствий его деятельности? Автор уже обращался к этой проблеме в других публикациях. В данной статье он рассматривает роль конфликта в преобразовании университетов как одного из ресурсов в формировании целей и потенциала университета. Автор предлагает сравнительный анализ генеративной роли конфликтов на примере Университета Брауна (США), имеющего длительную историю, и Европейского гуманитарного университета как “университета в изгнании”. Однако не все конфликты настолько генеративны. Многие конфликты могут быть и весьма деструктивными, особенно когда есть социальные силы и политические

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интересы, стремящиеся уничтожить трансформационные политики, которые университеты пытаются воплотить.

What political imaginary enables greater university possibilities for public consequence? To answer that requires that we recognize the character of our challenges, on the one hand, and on the other, the means at university disposal. While I have considered this question elsewhere,¹ especially in terms both of the global resonance and public engagements of universities, it is especially important for such a publication as that in which this article appears to consider the role of conflict in the transformation of universities. After all, the very existence of the European Humanities University in exile is a function of its conflict with the authorities of the society in which it was born, to which it is first responsible. To be a university in exile demands understanding conflict as a resource in the generation of university purpose and capacity.

Conflict, however, is not only critical for universities in exile. My own Brown University has realized much of its public distinction *through* conflict, most notably over its claims to put excellence and universalism to the fore while wrestling with an institution born with slavery's profits in a society defined by racism and gross class inequalities.

However, not all conflicts are so generative. Indeed, many conflicts can be positively destructive, especially when there are social forces and political interests seeking to destroy the transformative politics universities necessarily, or at least ideally, embody.

By recognizing the contradictions and contests animating higher education in these times, and by considering the conditions under which these contests can be either destructive or productive, and possibly, of course, both, we not only recognize universities' sociological conditions much more clearly. We might also recognize more readily the paths along which we might more productively travel.

In what follows, I consider the challenge in general, and how I might understand it at Brown University. I take the lessons of my own Brown University in order to pose critical questions for the European Humanities University, too. We might begin, however, by recognizing the university as a global form.

The University as Global Form

Universities are extraordinary organizations – on the one hand, besides religious institutions they are the most enduring form of modernity. On the other hand, universities have also become expressions of the world that is becoming.

To the extent we believe in what many call the “knowledge society”, we know that to be on the cutting edge means having outstanding research universities. Indeed, for a society to move up in the world system means, in part, to develop ever more pres-

tigious universities capable of producing research of global recognition and consequence. As much if not more than any other upwardly mobile society in the world system, Singapore exemplifies this investment.² But it is far from alone. China, the United Arab Emirates, and other rapidly changing societies have invested substantially in universities, especially around science, technology, engineering and management. Indeed, recent debates in Poland propose concentrating resources in some of the nation's top universities in order to compete on a global scale.³

Why does the university occupy such privileged status in this discussion? Former Columbia University Provost and sociologist Jonathan Cole proposes that “we depend increasingly on knowledge as the source of social and economic advance...”⁴ and he goes on to list the ideals that define the university and the discoveries that are of huge economic and social consequence, from research on and with DNA and supercolliders to computer technology itself. It's not just the exceptional discovery that is critical, however.

Universities also provide the scripts with which we can recognize the future. Those associated with “world society” approaches see universities as the settings in which the agendas for global transformation are made. Universities come to map reality and in turn help to constitute it by increasingly privileging a certain constitution with a global over local edge.⁵ As this sociological school regularly demonstrates, one can trace many of the leading terms of our global society – human rights, climate change, and so on – back to university communities.

This imaginary, so extensively documented by the scholars associated with the “world society” vision, depends on a political imaginary of a world that is increasingly integrated, isomorphic, and convergent. They document the mechanisms that produce this coordination, too – the organization of prestige in the world and its consequent emulation. The increasingly global training and labor market, where scholars and students travel across the world in pursuit of their own academic recognition, helps to produce this very effect.

This global process and its accompanying political imaginary works best for those parts of a university that are relatively unmoored from place. Engineering, computer science, life sciences and many other disciplines appear to exist within epistemic cultures that are beyond context, without any publics other than similarly trained colleagues and those who might invest in the products that these scholars produce. University excellence depends on climbing that reputational ladder. One could see that very process at work when Brown University sought to reimagine its own place in the world, and to become more of a research university.

Brown University as a Global University

In 2013, and with a new president at the helm, Brown University embarked on a mission to rethink the purpose of the university in general, and in particular, with this

question to start: “What is the role of the 21st century university? Where is our place in tomorrow’s world? How can our unique strengths be channeled to address local, national, and global opportunities and challenges?”⁶ It was reported that our academic community engaged in “deep introspection and dialogue” about what those emphases might be. Seven themes emerged:

Using Science and Technology to Improve Lives

“Scientific and technological boundaries are dissolving, as new applications and common tools are used to solve diverse problems. Brown’s scientists, engineers and computers scientists feel right at home” (p. 17).

Understanding the Human Brain

“How can we explore the mysterious, uncharted territory of the brain to discover new therapies, new insights, and new understanding of the intrinsic properties of the human mind?” (p. 29)

Deciphering Disease and Improving Population Health

“How are hundreds of committed medical students and residents, physicians, researchers, public health experts and others using Brown’s research to improve the health status and well-being of people and groups worldwide?” (p. 45).

Sustaining Life on Earth

“How can integrated teams of geologists, sociologists, biologists, and researchers in other disciplines focus their passion and expertise on the new properties of our changing planet and the responsibilities of humans to steward its resources?” (p. 54)

Cultivating Creative Expression

“How shall we examine and express and share the poignant, paradoxical, whimsical, tragic, bewildering, surprising, transcendent, common and unique experience of being human?” (p. 5).

Creating Peaceful, Just, and Prosperous Societies

“How can we contribute to the stability and well-being of local and global communities by understanding and addressing the intellectual and visceral experiences of human dignity, economic inequality, and more?” (p. 37)

Exploring Human Experience

“How shall we harness the power of the Humanities to parse the political, social, and philosophical constructs that influence our lives, inform our discourse, bind us together, and drive us apart?” (p. 21)

In nearly every instance, these integrative themes were organized around one or a few university interdisciplinary centers, featuring those institute leaders or prominent scholars associated with the endeavors. These efforts, in turn, built on the previous president's wish to turn a university best known for its undergraduate curriculum into a research university. Thus, one might argue, both presidents put Brown on a track for increasing world recognition, which in turn might also make it a more attractive site to study, a place that can more readily recruit world-class faculty, and a place that could inspire additional support by the university's graduates, parents, and promoters. This was truly a worldly endeavor.

Of course that was only a vision, but envisioning futures is critical to establishing possibilities. Indeed, if one were to compare that program with its operational expression,⁷ one could appreciate the real revisions of imaginations in practice. But that transformation does not only come from changes of leaders and their visions. Sometimes that involves coming to terms with an institution's foundations and the conflicts and contradictions associated with it.

Conflicts, Racism and Injustice at Brown University

Brown University was founded with money made out of the slave trade. The first African American female president of an Ivy League institution, Ruth Simmons, made the founding of a center to come to terms with those origins one of her top priorities. By the time her tenure ended, the center was established as the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice alongside the naming of its director, Tony Bogues. It has been obliged both to recognize the ways in which past injustices and current struggles over human rights, justice, and freedom might be connected. It mobilizes scholars who see that connection and, therefore, might reach out proximate publics.⁸

A new Center for Race and Ethnicity in America was also founded recently, focused on the articulation of diversity and justice.⁹ Its founding director, Tricia Rose, became one of the leading faculty on Brown's campus to explore how the racism that has rocked American publics could inform the ways in which we could figure diversity's place on campus; in recognition of that role and in anticipation of a campus to be remade, she was subsequently appointed as Associate Dean with special responsibilities to "implement strategies designed to recruit, retain and support faculty from historically underrepresented groups (HUG) in the social sciences and humanities". But this is not just a question of wisdom from above.

Like the rest of the USA, Brown has been engulfed in a series of contests over White privilege in the University, as have other universities.¹⁰ Brown University was among those which moved most deftly in response, with new Provost Rick Locke figuring a way to engage the protest: to figure data-driven methods to draw in protest to the university's vision of its future in diversity.¹¹ Brown's President Christina Paxson has said that student movements have transformed university priorities; "constructive

irreverence” is her term of preference.¹² But it’s not just the qualities of protest; it’s also a matter of the translational work the Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan rendered.

The administration rearticulated protest into institutional transformation, one so promising that one of the faculty most associated with the struggle for diversity and inclusion, Tricia Rose, could label it “bold and audacious... a great model both in the way it was developed, with the inclusion of a wide range of community input, and in its multifaceted implementation vision.”¹³ To my mind, Tricia’s applause was well placed, especially given the extent to which it set into prominent virtual public space a means for assuring accountability, and assessing progress on action steps.²

That accounting mechanism demonstrates the university’s abiding focus on its core public – faculty and students, and sometimes staff and alumni. Of the eleven action items set up, only two relate to publics beyond campus under these charges: “promote the University’s positive impact on Providence and the surrounding region” and “convene a working group to evaluate and report on Brown’s contributions to Providence and Rhode Island”, with the former being a matter of communicating more effectively what is going on, and the latter more a matter of exploration as to what might, and could, happen. This is especially evident when it comes to Native Americans.

To extend diversity with regard to Native Americans and Indigenous peoples, Brown has had to refigure its relationship to its proximate publics. As the university has increased support for Native American and Indigenous Studies at Brown, the university also connected with proximate publics, too, especially among Narragansett and Wampanoag peoples. Elizabeth Hoover, an anthropologist and herself of Micmac and Mohawk ancestry, was most critical at the start of this revival in indigenous work with her support of Native American students at Brown. But the most demonstrable public event signals a new, desired relationship. Their annual powwow has

improved the relationship between Brown and the local Native community.” Before, she explains, Brown was perceived by many local Native Americans as “an elitist, snobby institution sitting on Native land, not wanting anything to do with us.” While the majority of Native American undergrads at Brown are from tribes in the Southwest, Hoover and the other organizers make sure to include the traditional dances of local New England tribes. As a result, the powwow has become a popular regional event.¹⁴

² Of course the plan is difficult to implement when there is such uneven understanding of what diversity and inclusion mean, and when there are so many other grievances and priorities that compete with diversity’s importance – an early signpost of one of those objections concerned the relative significance of free speech <http://www.browndailyherald.com/2015/10/15/cheit-josephson-loury-miller-70-p02-spoehr-free-expression-matters/> But there are challenges beyond the easily anticipated ideological contest of diversity and free speech, a recurring theme not only at Brown (note the contest around the “Ray Kelly Incident” – I discuss that in chapter 4 of *Globalizing Knowledge*) but at other universities, too.

The relationship of Brown University to its core and proximate publics have not always been so positive and mutually beneficial, however.

In 2012, various authorities associated with Providence challenged whether the university contributed sufficiently to the city. The university responded in detail by listing its contributions to the economy and developing human capital, which, for the most part, were mainly “derivative” from what the university did anyway (Kennedy 2015:146). Other universities had been much more aggressive in making their environs more than a context for their work, and much more of a partner. I focused on the examples of Syracuse University and the University of Pennsylvania in those days, and their conceptions of themselves as “Anchor Institutions” (Kennedy 2015:146-49). But Brown has itself been working to change that relationship, notably around its commitment to “engaged scholarship”. President Paxson presented it this way in her 2013 “Building on Distinction”.

Connecting to the world | Consistent with our mission to serve “the community, the nation, and the world,” learning that connects academic and real-world experiences is central to the undergraduate experience at Brown. As an established leader in this area, Brown is in a position to define the “second wave” of integrative approaches to engaged learning. (p. 5).

This engagement is not simple, however, and builds on a substantial tradition of criticism.

Some students have seen Brown take advantage of, rather than partner with marginalized communities in its most proximate city. Rather than facilitate civil society, one critic has seen it as dominating the city’s life, where civil society’s organizations depend on funds that come from beyond the communities themselves, relying on skills, like grant writing, that depend on a certain kind of professional education that diminishes those with different kinds of human capital, and providing help in a way that reproduces how power works. The author puts it bluntly, echoing critiques of white savior complexes¹⁵ elsewhere:

Strongly resembling neocolonial missionary work, the University lauds nonprofit work as a career path in which students can specialize and develop their skills and expertise in. True to its mission, the University dedicates whole centers and programs – such as the Swearer Center for Public Service – to connecting students to community organizations throughout the city and state along with other mechanisms (Teach for America, Americorps VISTA, etc.) that act as feeder-tubes into buffer zone occupations.

A significant number of grassroots, community, labor, and youth development orgs active in the city today have been started by Brown students in their activist phases and since then have been administered by the same ilk. Those not directly founded

by Brown alumni, were founded by alumni of other Ivy League schools and maintain close institutional relationships with those from Brown. One only needs to dig into historical archives to find that numerous influential nonprofit organizations have consistently been initiated, led, or administered by Ivy League students and alumni: Providence Student Union, the Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence, Rhode Island Communities for Justice, Rhode Island Urban Debate League – and still the list continues. Even left-oriented radical “social justice” grassroots organizations aren’t immune from this trend: Direct Action for Rights and Equality, Providence Youth Student Movement, Olneyville Neighborhood Association, and Rhode Island Jobs with Justice have all been founded by Brown students.¹⁶

This question deserves more engagement to be sure, for, as the author presents it, there are too many assumptions built into the study and not enough critical sociological research and analysis. Future work about the university’s place in Providence, in fact, should complement what has already been done in Providence.¹⁷ But that could require that we embrace a new kind of knowledge activism and engaged scholarship.

Mayer Zald once argued that sociology split off from social work at the start of the last century in order to engage an upward mobility project. If social work’s partners were powerful and privileged clients, that association may not have been so bad; but because social work’s clients were generally less powerful, sociology found it was better off to distance itself from any publics at all and become more ivory tower academic.¹⁸

A decade later Michael Burawoy made this question of extra-academic audience central in his own manifesto for public sociology.¹⁹ In short, we need to recognize that debates within academic disciplines create the space for extra-academic audiences to be recognized. Engaged scholarship results from that kind of contest, within the academy, and between the academy and its various publics. Brown University has, itself, put that engaged scholarship to the center of its mission without losing its commitment to those themes of integrative scholarship. The Swearer Center is Brown’s leading edge on this, and presents its own accent this way:

“Engaged scholarship” refers to community-based inquiry by students and faculty in partnership with community members outside of the academy. Its goal is to create high-impact learning experiences and collaborative educational partnerships that address major social challenges and produce tangible public benefits. Engaged scholarship is premised on the idea that reciprocal exchanges between academic and non-academic partners – in the classroom, on campus, in the community – create rich opportunities for learning, knowledge-creation, and problem-solving that will help to create a more just and equitable society.³

³ <https://www.brown.edu/academics/college/special-programs/public-service/engaged-scholarship>

With this emphasis the Swearer Center is changing its very sense by changing the character of learning they are to provide. Even more, their intellectual and institutional move promises to challenge the very sense of what Brown University should be known for. Not only might Brown be recognized for world class scholarship, but it might be appreciated for its recognition of community agency and reciprocity.²⁰ As the Swearer Center put it,

We believe that the programs that seek to make change in communities are best designed, delivered, and led by members of those communities and/or community-based organizations closest to the work. This is community agency, where power and decision-making authority exists at the individual and organizational level closest to – and most informed about – the community’s challenges and assets. We will reimagine our role as preparing students, and partnering with communities and community organizations, to develop opportunities that are owned by, or in full partnership with, those community members and/or organizations (<https://www.brown.edu/academics/college/swearer/scholarship>).

In this, universities are not missionaries. They are, in the words I learned from colleagues at Warsaw University, the facilitators of developing “solidary knowledge”, or “active “co-action” with local actors and policy makers in making change.”²¹ While I am actively engaged in figuring how these principles might travel, from University of Prishtina²² to University of Warsaw, it’s not so obvious to consider how knowledge activism might translate into the challenges facing European Humanities University.

The European Humanities University as a University in Exile

The European Humanities University (EHU) is not simple to understand, but its meaningfulness extends far beyond its status as an accredited university. Its particularity is critical, but its broader world historical significance is worthy of additional reflection.

The European Humanities University was founded in 1992 in Minsk, Belarus, but it is today physically located in Vilnius, Lithuania. It is Europe’s only university in exile, and has been since 2004 when on July 24 the Ministry of Education revoked the university’s license. Nevertheless, the greatest majority of its students, and its faculty, come from, and even still live in, Belarus. Indeed, some of its students, so called “low-residence” students, don’t even travel to Vilnius to learn, but rather enjoy a kind of distance education. This endeavor in higher education is both physically within and beyond Belarus therefore. It is also culturally within, and beyond, Belarus.

In everyday discussion as well as in official projections, one cannot lose sight of the EHU intention to be a Belarusian institution. It’s not just its personnel; it’s also in its curriculum and conversation. There is, of course, debate about *how* Belarusian it is.

Nobody says it is too Belarusian, but some charge that it is insufficiently so. But this is complex.

One of the dominant motifs of the organization's life is the question of its return to Belarus, for when it is possible, it intends to return to its country. But it cannot. And that is the first and foundational conflict defining the university's existence.

Of course, the world knows what universities in exile are; indeed, the New School for Social Research in New York City began as just that during World War II. A university in exile during the age of totalitarianism made sense, however; but in this world defined by transition,²³ EHU did not. It has been, as Belarus has been, an anomaly. In this sense, it was relatively easy for the West to understand the mission of EHU as itself an extension of democracy's struggle.

Nobody could have believed, at the time of EHU's departure from Belarus, that the university would come to be in exile longer than it operated in Minsk. Most believed that was a temporary problem until the aberration that was Lukashenko would be supplanted by a more democratic and capitalist Belarus than he would allow. One might argue, however, that Lukashenko was no aberration. He was an anticipation of things to come.

Lukashenko is no Putin, but they are not dissimilar either. They hold onto power tenaciously. They don't obviously murder their opponents (although attributions to Putin are greater than to Lukashenko), but they know how to develop ties that bind and tactics that disable those who don't easily repress their ethical and intellectual responsibilities. They know that the law is used as a means of power, not as a means to regulate power. They know that dissimulation works well in managed democracies, as the latter term itself implies. But this style of governance is not only born out of former Soviet-type societies. It now grows out of those thought to be democratic, as Hungary and the United States itself suggest with their own leaderships. In this sense, we might not consider the project associated with European Humanities University to be an anachronism of failed transition culture, but a manifestation of the struggle for academic freedom's place in European and global futures. Central European University's struggles are increasingly well known,²⁴ but the challenge is even greater for EHU. As CEU struggles to remain in Hungary, EHU is now a creature of globalization itself.

Faculty and students are, for the most part, Belarusian, but they are increasingly at home across Europe, too, and especially in their institution's Vilnius home. It has been legally defined as a private Lithuanian university since March 10, 2006, while The Atlantic Council in 2013 gave the university its freedom award in appreciation of its dedication to a democratic education for Belarusian students.

Some, however, have criticized the institution for being insufficiently focused on Belarus; while the number of courses in Belarusian is not substantial (but comparisons to courses offered in Belarusian in Belarusian institutions would help make the case appear more empirical than ideological), the references to Belarusian questions within a European framework are obvious. In this the critics are right; Belarus is understood

not as an isolated nation, but as part of a larger project of Europe, of modernity, that needs be engaged. That's not an unusual position for most universities when it comes to their own nation. And the same for EHU.

Boundaries are not so important, as students and faculty regularly traverse the border between Belarus and Lithuania, and the European Union. In that Vilnius location, faculty and students *feel* as much a part of Europe as a part of Belarus. Indeed, that sense of belonging to more than one space, simultaneously, that cosmopolitan disposition, is readily apparent. But it is not a cosmopolitanism at ease.

Because the EHU infrastructure depends on the hospitality of other nations that owe nothing to EHU and to Belarus, because it depends on the solidarity Lithuania, and the European Union, and all those who believe in the resonance of the EHU project and EU mission, provide, EHU cannot take for granted its Europeanness. EHU is a guest in, not a member of the EU project, of the Lithuanian nation. In this, EHU must constantly demonstrate, even prove, that it deserves to be part of Europe, appealing to the sensibilities of its hosts, and its sponsors. It must demonstrate its European quality, and not, simply, assume it. And it must, in order to earn that European support, also demonstrate its Belarusian essence even as some Belarusians work to undermine it.

One should expect that Belarusian authorities would mobilize all sorts of resources against EHU, for its very existence is a reminder of what Belarus is not, and what Belarus cannot allow within its territory. In order to justify what was, perhaps, simply a policy decision made on impulse by an insecure political leader, Belarusian authorities must continue to justify why EHU is a threat. Of course, they cannot acknowledge that "free thinking" is, as Professor Mikhailov argued in his presentation to the New School,²⁵ the basis for that threat. Rather, they must invent dangers, and create enemies.

On the one hand, therefore, European Humanities University's capacity for blending humanities and social science, especially through a kind of hermeneutic social science, suits it well, for there is no simple cultural terrain in which it can embed itself. It must work constantly at translating across cultural horizons. Alas, those horizons are not always in search of fusion.

Conflicts, the Nation, and the Global Question at European Humanities University

All universities face contradictions in their work. On the one hand, their principal public, their students, receive the most attention from staff and faculty. On the other hand, the principal base for prestige, research, demands that faculty spend as much time as possible in scholarly pursuit and its publication or even public engagement. While research *can* benefit from teaching, and certainly teaching from active research, time is limited. As such a professor, and once administrator, I know very well that universities, and professors, struggle to find the right balance between doing right for the university's curriculum and doing right for their own individual careers of recognition

beyond the university *per se*. Universities, as institutions, always must support this balancing act. EHU does, too, except in this case with added political complexity.

Life as a member of the EHU community is not easy. For most of the faculty, it involves maintaining a professorial life in Lithuania and a private life in Belarus. It involves the challenge of balancing cultural conflict between one's state authority (and their supporters, who may be your neighbors and your family members) declaring your work inconsistent with Belarusian values, and their own intellectual integrity declaring such work to be the fulfilment of those values. Even students face this challenge; they may thrive in the EHU scholarly atmosphere while acquaintances at home warn them that they will have no future in Belarus as EHU graduates. The simplest way to resolve that conflict is to decide one has no future in Belarus which is, in the end, a terrific loss for Belarus given the great quality of students I have encountered.

Belarusian authorities must understand this quality point. While they may, from time to time, harass someone on the border as they travel back and forth, for the most part Belarusian authorities allow this university in exile to employ some of the country's best faculty and teach some of the country's best students. Someone in those authorities must understand that it is good for Belarus to allow its students to learn at and its faculty to teach at EHU. Perhaps some part of everyone, even some part of President Lukashenko himself, recognizes the value of this transnational learning for Belarus. At the same time, however, those authorities know they need to remain enemies in order to justify continuing to deny EHU its home in Belarus. This foundational contradiction means, then, that understanding the EHU project requires a different analytical lens.

European Humanities University cannot be understood simply, or even with that familiar critical lens as an academic organization where administration and faculty can be viewed in class terms. Academic management vs. faculty labor does not provide sufficient optic. This class struggle approach is certainly part of the story, as it is in every academic setting. But at EHU it is overlaid by another contradiction: between conceptions of the university's resources itself.

EHU is defined by the contradiction between being a national body, dedicated first and foremost to Belarusian students and faculty, while on the other hand, its scholarship is defined by its openness to the world and its embrace of a mode of learning defined by a culture of critical discourse. In this sense, it is dedicated to a model of the global university defined by excellence itself.

EHU does not, however, have the resources that enable it to compete with universities that are the benefactors of nation-state investments, on the one hand, or on the other, of major private donors wishing to see their alma mater, or their children's university and alma mater, become ever greater. In this, therefore, we find the greater contradiction than even that which defines an approach rooted in class conflict. It's a contradiction between mission and resources. EHU's mission is global, even while its resources are always provisional on assuring its donors that it is fulfilling a national destiny in globalizing university form.

For those who see a university in exile to be a reminder of *why* it must be in exile, the best strategy for denying EHU legitimacy is to undermine global donor confidence in EHU mission. That is the foundational, existential, contradiction facing EHU.

It is, however, not an unusual problem for global universities. Indeed, even Singapore faces these challenges as the contest over global vs. national interest reigns in discussing who ought to be the nation's university faculty.²⁶ And this contest structures how resources flow, and how various values contend in the definition of excellence and university purpose. Donor confidence must always be managed, regardless of whether these are private philanthropists, state agencies, or foreign aid organizations. And this challenge must always be managed alongside the other conflicts and contradictions facing universities in everyday life.

In conclusion, I'll revisit one recent conflict and contradiction at Brown University to illustrate the challenge at a place with much more secure resources than EHU.

Foundational Conflicts and University Responses

Although Brown University has undertaken substantial work to figure its relationship to its slave trade origins, it has done relatively little to imagine its debt to the indigenous whose lands and resources were taken by the British colonial regime in which Brown University was founded. The annual powwow was one way to begin that recognition, and the decision last year to change Columbus Day into Indigenous People's day another.²⁷ But a recent action clarified even further the ways in which founding moments can challenge, and even rearticulate, university priorities.

On August 20, 2017, a group claiming descent from the tribe associated with the martyred King Philip II occupied land that Brown University owned, claiming that this was sacred land to their people, to the Pokanoket. Although that occupation was itself contentious among the indigenous of Rhode Island, *that* conflict was kept off public stage. In such conditions, it is difficult for those cognizant of the expropriations defining colonial and US history toward its native peoples to challenge those who occupy the most radical position in naming that injustice. Even more, to claim, simply, that Brown University held legal title to the land could not satisfy those who view such a legal regime's claim to rest in genocide. At the same time, the government recognized Native American tribes were not, themselves, the motive force behind this occupation, making it impossible for Brown University to respond simply to Pokanoket demands.

Nevertheless, on September 21, 2017, Brown University and representatives of those who occupied the land signed an agreement that would transfer Brown property to a preservation trust to assure the land's conservation and sustainable access by Native tribes in the region. The Pokanoket ended their occupation on September 25. Brown also offered a powerful symbolic point acknowledging the divergence between justice and the law. The agreement "acknowledges that the Mt. Hope lands to which it has record title in Bristol, Rhode Island, are historically Pokanoket and that part of the

land contains sacred sites that are important to the present-day Pokanoket Tribe and Pokanoket people, who are dispersed among many tribes, and other Native American, American Indian, and aboriginal peoples of New England.”²⁸

Brown University is dedicated to the continuous work of being a globally recognized research university, but that is not just in the work of its individual scholars and students. It also means ever greater awareness of the conditions of its own possibility, and the institutional rearticulation of those challenges into its practice and its rules. At one time, Brown might have asked the police to remove those protestors from the land to which it has record title, much as it did when students have occupied university buildings in the last century. But it did not this time, in part because it has come to recognize that conflicts and contradictions defining its university practice are not distractions. They can become an opportunity to demonstrate what university learning represents, and how a more knowledgeable society can act with dignity and respect toward all of those in its milieu regardless of race, class, gender, sexuality or even citizenship.

Conclusions

European Humanities University has faced its own conflicts and contradictions well beyond its founding as a university in exile. But unlike those animating Brown's own trajectories, where challengers are motivated to criticism because they see a gap between Brown's pronouncements and its practice, some of those who challenge EHU practice may be motivated to end the university as such. There are too many who would wish to undermine the European Humanities University, to complete the Lukashenko prophecy that Belarus needed no European ties to become all that it might be. Indeed, Lukashenko may have been right, for the kinds of free and open universities symbolized by the European Humanities University are now under assault, with the Central European University being the most obvious now in European Union imaginations.

Although this contest is painful at times, its product is a reevaluation of what universities do. People struggle over what ought to be taught, who ought to be the beneficiaries of learning, and above all debate what universities owe the communities of which they are a part.

It's not obvious, however, that contest always breeds the political imaginary that revalues universities and higher education. That takes administrators of vision, of courage, but also of caution. We have reason to fear the world that is becoming, one that attacks academic freedom in the name of national values known only to those who control the means of violence.

We face a world that is increasingly polarized; I have seen universities in various parts of the world become the captive of political forces, and lose their autonomy. That is a nightmare for intellectual responsibility. On the other hand, I would hope to see universities, as corporate agents, enter the political fray not as partisan, and not as arbiter, but as a kind of collective engaged scholar who poses new ways of viewing

both immediate and wicked problems, modeling the kind of transformative practice we might see citizens and communities themselves take up. Indeed, if universities are better partners, I wonder if civil societies might not produce better politicians, ones than find in dialogue and transformative vision the kinds of communities we need generate if we are to thrive, and maybe even survive.

Both Brown University and European Humanities University are part of that future we need to see, but we need to work constantly to assure that commitment in practice, and in support. This is not just about the fate of particular universities; this is about the value of learning, knowledgeable, and decency in the definition of our societies, of our futures.

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 - ³ "Gowin: The Model of Mass Higher Education Has Become Outdated" April 21, 2017. PAP: Science and Scholarship in Poland, News of Polish Science. April 21, 2017. <http://scienceinpoland.pap.pl/en/news/news,413895,gowin-the-model-of-mass-higher-education-has-become-outdated.html> Accompanying transformations have also prompted extensive debate about priorities: McKenzie Wark, "Cultural Studies Threatened in Poland: An Interview with Ewa Majewska" Public Seminar November 2, 2017. <http://www.publicseminar.org/2017/11/cultural-studies-threatened-in-poland/>
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 - ⁵ David John Frank and Jay Gabler. *Reconstructing the University: Worldwide Shifts in Academia in the 20th Century*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.
 - ⁶ Cristina Paxson. *Building on Distinction: 2013 Annual Report of Brown University*. <https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/strategic-planning/2013-report>
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