

Backlash Against “Others”

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With profound implications for higher education, politics in the West is marked and marred by a backlash against “others,” against groups other than the traditionally dominant European ethnicities. Partly, that has been manifest in right-wing populist movements that have swept the world in the last year. Nationalistic campaigns and candidates have challenged established political parties, institutions (including universities), and orthodoxies about free flows of people and goods and the benefits of growing internationalization and diversity. Partly, the backlash has also intersected and animated the political deconstruction of the social democratic compact and the welfare state. That is evident in the systematic assault on, and disinvestment in, public sector institutions, including higher education.

ANTI-INTERNATIONALIZATION

The backlash against internationalization is, well, global. In one country and region after another, whether in the case of Brexit and the European Community, or in the campaigns and platforms, among others, of Donald Trump, Norbert Hofer of Austria’s Freedom party, or Marine Le Pen of France’s National Front party, there are countermobilizations against (im)migrants, Muslims, and the very idea of multiculturalism. At their core and at their worst, these campaigns express the ugliest and darkest elements of national and human history. And, in each, there is a strong theme of recapturing idealized glories of the nation’s past by railing against the current and future influx of people and ideas that undermine the dominant historical culture.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR UNIVERSITIES

Universities have been largely absent or ineffectual in relation to these campaigns. Yet the discourse, policies, and practices of the right-wing populist backlash are antithetical to what universities at their best stand for. More than that, like the neoliberal public policies of mainstream politicians that have reduced funding for education, the right-wing populists frame and target tertiary education as part of the problem, not of the solution to what ails society. Indeed, universities’ alleged progressive and politically correct, multicultural ideologies, as well as their internationalism, is demeaned and demonized, and provided as a rationale for reducing public support. The recruiting, hiring, accepting, and even celebrating of “others” and difference makes

public higher education, at its progressive and inclusive best, anathema to the demagogues and ideologues of the right.

As universities have become more diverse in the above regards, they have received proportionately less government funding. Nowhere is that more clear than in the United States, where demographic change has been accompanied by public disinvestment. The increased, though still inequitable, access of the growth demographics of students—lower income, students of color, and immigrants—to postsecondary education has accompanied reduced public funding, mirroring developments in elementary and secondary education. That pattern is less evident in Europe, where universities have experienced far less of an infusion of domestic ethnic minorities. Yet, there is some evidence there as well of the increased recruitment of international students being accompanied by some tensions in local communities and national politics. That has particularly been true in Britain. But it is true on the continent as well, where universities and educational institutions more generally are more likely to articulate and support what German Chancellor Angela Merkel has termed a *Willkommenskultur* (welcome culture).

RECENTERING CLASS INEQUITIES, AND INCLUDING “OTHERS”

At the same time, there is another side to universities, just as there is to the right-wing populism. Universities have a long history of exclusion by gender, ethnicity, and social class. To populists, universities are part of the establishment—they are effete elites. That characterization is not entirely inaccurate.

Despite expansion of tertiary education opportunities to the sons and daughters of working-class families, too many universities remain best at serving elites, nationally and globally. Moreover, like corporate business, when domestic markets of prospective consumers (i.e., in higher education, of traditional students) stagnated, universities turned to global markets of disproportionately privileged international students. Those students who study abroad, whether in the Erasmus program in Europe, or more generally, are considerably more likely to come from economically and educationally advantaged backgrounds than are other students.

Who benefits then, classwise, from internationalization? Too often, institutions that recruit international students who are mostly privileged are at the same time largely overlooking local students, often in their neighborhoods, who are mostly not privileged. Most elite universities would be diversified culturally at least as much by expanding access to low-income students of various ethnic and national backgrounds in their city, as by recruiting yet more rela-

tively privileged international, or, in the case of the United States, out-of-state students.

Recently, Cambridge University released a report sounding the alarm about the adverse effects of Brexit on Cambridge, and on British higher education generally. I doubt that the average working-class family in the industrial midlands—slammed by decades of economic upheaval and decline in the brave “new economy”—would sing a sad song for Cambridge or university dons more generally. Neither would those 15–20 percent of people living in poverty in Cambridge. That is understandable. For the new economy appears to be very much like the old economy, in terms of who reaps the prime benefits and who does the principal tough labor.

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Class inequities between labor and capital are increasing internationally, straining our social democratic compacts and institutions. University academics and executives must certainly redouble their efforts and discover new ways to work more effectively against the xenophobia—and racism, misogyny, and homophobia—that defines so much of right-wing populism. But we would also do well to learn a lesson from the rise of populism, by committing ourselves to bridge the social class divide that plagues the academy and society, dividing us into nations of a relatively few haves and too many have-nots. We need to find ways to realize more fully our social responsibility to democratize the societies in which we are situated. That should mean rebalancing and enhancing the global and the local, to enhance the opportunities and lives of the social class “others,” domestically and internationally, who continue to be relatively invisible and relegated to educational oblivion by our policies, practices, and belief systems in academe.

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Trump and the Coming Revolution in Higher Education Internationalization

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In recent months, we have seen the beginning of a sea-change in the patterns of higher education internationalization that have been entrenched and rapidly expanding during the past half-century. The most recent minitsunami is the implementation of several restrictions on citizens of seven predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States, and the havoc that has created. Brexit, inward-looking nationalist governments in Poland and Hungary, and the rise of the populist right in Europe are all parts of what might be called the “new world order” of higher education internationalization. While some observers feel that current patterns will continue, we disagree. We are not arguing that mobility will end or that the academic community itself is abandoning internationalization as a goal, and certainly not that the commercial interests that have recently entered the internationalization “marketplace” will stop. But we do think that we are at the beginning of a fundamental period of change.

One must keep in mind that higher education internationalization is a set of concepts and a series of operational programs. The concepts include a recognition of the positive elements of globalization and an understanding that it is a permanent element of the world economy; a commitment to global understanding; respect for diverse cultures; and an open society welcoming cooperation between different political, cultural, and economic partners. Internationalization is also often seen as part of a nation’s “soft power” influence. The operational side of internationalization has in recent years become big business—many billions of dollars, euros, and other currencies are spent on internationalization programs and earned by universities, private companies, and a vast array of providers, insurance companies, recruiters, and others. International students contributed more than \$32.8 billion to the US economy. And UK universities currently earn around one-eighth of their income from tuition fees paid by international students. These students also contribute around £7 billion a year to the economy.

Although the more idealistic aspects of international-