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Toward a Theory of Institutions: Institutional Betrayal and Dispersions of Accountability at Johns Hopkins University

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ABSTRACT

To more fully understand how trauma can be inflicted by institutional betrayal, in this article I suggest that we first must ask who or what is the institution. To understand this, I analyze two recent events at Johns Hopkins University (JHU), the establishment of a university private police force and funding cuts to the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Graduate Teaching Fellowships (WGS). Paradoxically, JHU claimed it was necessary to establish a private police force because of a lack of accountability of the Baltimore Police Department; however, simultaneously JHU was unaccountable to direct JHU affiliates by ignoring their explicit disapproval of a private police force. JHU imagined themselves as accountable to an ambiguous ‘us’ beyond direct JHU affiliates and dispersed its accountability, evidenced by advocating for state legislature and making mayoral campaign donations. This lack of accountability was rearticulated in discussions about WGS cuts, when JHU embraced a rhetoric of the market to substantiate their claims and evade the questions of direct JHU affiliates. These cases show how articulations of who the institution imagines itself as accountable to are dynamically mutating, yet build upon precedents that set the conditions of possibility for how trauma is produced and mediated. I conclude by suggesting that it is important to move beyond a monolithic conception of the institution, and to be attuned to how dispersions of institutional accountability create new terrains where institutional contestation take place as well as the institution's strategic rupturing of the concept of the institutional citizen.

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Introduction

Surging public protest, human displacement, and novel forms of global inequality have turned the attention of a number of disciplines to the roles of social institutions. This special issue specifically considers the institution's relationship to trauma and the institutional narratives called upon which produce and mediate trauma for individuals affected by institutions. Within these narratives are understandings of when the institution may be viewed as

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accountable for trauma, and when so, how the institution may be held accountable.

One response to the questions of institutional accountability has been the concept of institutional betrayal defined as “a description of individual experiences of violations of trust and dependency perpetrated against any member of an institution” (Smith & Freyd, 2014, p. 577). Building upon experiences of the trauma inflicted upon the institutional citizen, the concept of institutional betrayal has attempted to further its response to accountability by suggesting ideas for responses to institutional betrayal. A recent talk at a conference on Trauma, Narratives, and Institutions described an example of a response when the President of the University of Oregon issued an apology to a woman nearly 15 years after her sexual harassment claim had been submitted (Canzano, 2014). Following the talk, the speaker and members of the audience commented on how this response was in large part dependent upon the willingness of the university president to do so and was most likely reviewed by a legal team before the apology was publicly issued (Freyd, 2019). In other words, this example of addressing institutional betrayal highlights the shifting and multifaceted nature of who or what the institution is: in this case, a university president with the power to issue an apology and their legal team to safeguard the larger institution.

Today’s dynamic institution produces challenges in being able to respond to institutional betrayal, as well as institutions more broadly. While the development of the concept of institutional betrayal has helped to return our attention to the institution, its origins in the field of psychology and trauma studies have centered its focus on the experiences of the “betrayed” and their “understandings of trauma” rather than a close analysis of the “betraying” institution (Smith & Freyd, 2014, p. 581). In this piece, I suggest that to understand institutional trauma, we first need to understand the institution. To do so requires returning to questions of who or what is the institution and what are the methods different actors use to articulate themselves through the institutional imaginary.

In response to this question, I analyze two recent conflicts which have taken place at Johns Hopkins University (JHU) in Maryland, USA in 2018 and 2019. First, in April 2019, JHU announced that it would be establishing a private police force. Leading up to this announcement throughout 2018 there was large faculty and student resistance, including signed petitions, public hearings, and unauthorized protests. Second, in November 2019, JHU announced that it would cut funding to the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Graduate Teaching Fellowships (WGS) resulting in signed petitions and public hearings. Both of these events provoked unprecedented resistance in the recent history of JHU from faculty, students, and the neighboring JHU community. To detail these events, I draw on first-hand experiences from JHU as well as semi-structured interviews carried out with those involved in the conflicts. These

moments of conflict provide what Das has referred to as “critical events.” In the moment of a critical event, the conjunctures of the institution producing the conditions for trauma become visible and a relational understanding of the “mutual implications” of social life can be revealed (Das, 1995, p. 6). In other words, the significance of institutional (in)action during critical events helps to identify the methods employed which enables institutions to be made and remade in forms which can produce the conditions of possibility for trauma. By specifically focusing on institutional relations and articulations, this piece uses critical events to show how institutional trauma is often produced in contexts where institutional actors work to disperse the accountability of the institution.

Private police: defining accountability

Private police forces began to grow gradually in the United States beginning in the 1960s. The gradual removal of the role of law and order from the branch of the state has been suggested to reflect larger movements of market liberalization throughout the latter half of the 20th century (Spitzer & Scull, 1977). One location of private police growth has been the university. Today, a growing majority of private universities have established private police forces as this increasingly becomes desired by potential undergraduate students; this rise has been most notable amongst elite universities. However, concerns have been raised about the actions of private police forces, specifically in reference to private police shootings which have occurred at the University of Chicago in 2018 and Yale University in 2019, amongst others (Kartik-Narayan, 2018; Romero, 2019).

It is within this context that the decision to establish a private police force was made by the JHU administration in April 2019. Historically, JHU has employed an unarmed security force which contacts the Baltimore Police Department in emergency situations, but the JHU administration claimed that an increase in crime demanded that it have its own armed private police force (Johns Hopkins University, 2018). However, the process by which JHU came to the decision to create a private police force required strategically broadening the individuals who JHU is accountable to; this meant expanding JHU’s vision of accountability beyond individuals at JHU and its neighboring community to also encompass the City of Baltimore and the State of Maryland. By reimagining who JHU is accountable to, this produced a moment where the institutional boundaries of JHU became blurred and silenced individuals’ claims for institutional accountability.

Discussions of starting a private police force at JHU formally began in early 2018; however, private police had to first be approved through state law. In response, students promptly formed an organization titled “Students Against Private Police Force.” After JHU administration initially discussed private

police with the state of Maryland, on April 17, 2018, the Chair of the Maryland House of Delegates, Joseph Vallario, wrote a letter to the President of JHU, Ronald Daniels, requesting JHU to “undertake an interim review and community engagement process” on the possibility of independent institutions of higher education establishing campus police forces (Vallario, 2018). As suggested by Vallario, “this process would include the University soliciting additional input from students, faculty, staff, neighbors and guests to their several campuses” (Vallario, 2018). When the JHU administration accepted the invitation, the JHU Student Government Organization conducted a student survey which showed that more than 75% of undergraduate students were not in favor of establishing a private police force (JHU Faculty, 2018). Following Vallario’s request, JHU held four public meetings with students, faculty and the residential community surrounding JHU where strong opposition to the idea of a private police force was voiced. At these meetings, the JHU administration continued to inform those opposed to the private police force that they were in the process of taking all perspectives into consideration. However, many students claimed that no one really knew who those in support of the police force were. Later, over 110 JHU teaching faculty signed an open letter voicing concern about a private police force, stating that “private [armed] police on campus are likely to exacerbate racial profiling, with even more dangerous and potentially fatal consequences” (JHU Faculty, 2018).

On December 21, 2018, JHU published a 160-page report which explicitly recommended JHU to establish a private police force (Johns Hopkins University, 2018). While Vallario had requested for community voices to be heard and JHU had stated that they would incorporate perspectives that were resistant to the private police force, the report failed to mention this resistance. Instead, the perspectives that were seen as legitimate to consider within the report included issues beyond the university – including increasing crime rates and concerns about the accountability of the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) – as well as the money that could be saved for JHU with a private police force. In this sense, by voicing concerns about the accountability of BPD, it provided JHU with the opportunity to imagine the institution as accountable to individuals beyond direct JHU affiliates, including all universities in Baltimore at risk of increasing crime rates and an unaccountable BPD. Operating within a new realm of accountability, this enabled JHU to adopt an epistemic lens within the report which silenced the resistance of JHU students, staff, and faculty to the private police force and instead focused on concerns of a larger, citywide nature. Paradoxically, JHU’s claim to compensate for the lack of accountability of BPD simultaneously enabled JHU to weaken the accountability of the institution to JHU’s direct affiliates. What is significant about this event is that in spite of JHU’s guarantee to include perspectives of resistance, by reimagining who the institution is seen as accountable to this “guarantee” was not upheld, similar to what Sara Ahmed has

termed as a “non-performative speech act.” For Ahmed, “the failure of the speech act to do what it says is not a failure of intent or even circumstance, but is actually what the speech act is doing” (Ahmed, 2012). In other words, by claiming that JHU’s direct affiliates would be listened to, the institution claimed to fulfill its obligations of accountability by producing a nonperformative speech act: saying claims would be listened to was the extent of accountability to which JHU held itself responsible to its direct affiliates.

As disputes progressed, JHU continued to broaden who they were accountable to by increasingly collaborating with the State of Maryland on the topic of the private police force. On February 4, 2019, Senate Bill 793 was introduced to the Maryland State Senate titled the Community Safety and Strengthening Act, which would legalize private police forces on university campuses in Maryland (Senate Bill 793, 2019). On February 22, 2019, Daniels gave an address to the Delegation of the Maryland General Assembly, which would later vote on the bill. Daniels mentioned how they had been asked by Vallario to solicit feedback from the community, although he did not voice any of the resistance to the private police force in his address. Continuing with the rationale of the report, Daniels emphasized “the unrelenting pace of murders and shootings all over the city” and how this crime “is hindering economic growth and opportunity” (Daniels, 2019). The direct link to the JHU campus in these statistics remained unclear. Daniels also used the opportunity to stress the accountability of private police forces and framed the necessity of a private police force due to the shortcomings of BPD’s accountability. Daniels’ speech made clear that JHU private police was “the right thing to do for our city and for Johns Hopkins” (Daniels, 2019). Daniels explained how, as JHU President, he has “insisted that we [Baltimore and Hopkins] are one. I committed to partnering with and investing in us” (Daniels, 2019). Daniels’ testimony represents the methods JHU administrators use to reimagine accountability. Daniels first silenced the resistant perspectives to the private police from its own students and faculty by rearticulating the epistemic lens of crime rates and finance used by the report. Second, ensuring the Delegation that JHU had solicited community feedback, Daniels expanded the realm of JHU’s accountability to encompass both JHU and the city as “one.” In other words, by utilizing the specific epistemic rationalities from the report and imaging JHU’s accountability beyond direct JHU affiliates, it enabled Daniels to become accountable to an ambiguous “us.” Doing so required JHU to develop involvement with the passing of legislation to legalize university private police forces in the State of Maryland.

Hopkins students against the police force have cited a number of instances highlighting the intersections between JHU administration and the state. In January 2019, Hopkins administrators including five vice presidents, the university provost, and the past and current president of Johns Hopkins Hospital

gave individual donations totaling 16,000 USD to Catherine Pugh's 2019 Mayoral campaign for Baltimore; this included a 3,000 USD donation from current JHU President Ronald Daniels (Reutter, 2019). In March 2019, the then elected Mayor Pugh spoke on behalf of the JHU police force and also wrote a commentary supporting the proposal (Pugh, 2019). On April 1, 2019, Senate Bill 793 was passed and was signed by the Governor of Maryland on April 18th and solidified Daniels' claim that JHU was accountable to those beyond its direct affiliates (Senate Bill 793, 2019). By working with the state to pass legislation, not only did this expand the realm of JHU's accountability, but by claiming JHU is accountable to an ambiguous "us" this abstracted and dispersed who JHU is accountable to. By dispersing accountability, this weakened the legitimacy of the claims that direct JHU affiliates could place upon the institution. Soon after legislation was passed JHU announced that the JHU private police force would be established on July 1, 2019.

However, 2 days following the announcement of the establishment of the private police force, on April 3, 2019, a group of around 10 JHU students began a sit-in at Garland Hall, the JHU administration building; one of the largest acts of student resistance in the history of JHU. Although protests had been held in Garland Hall previously, this was the first protest that did not seek prior approval from the administration to protest in recent JHU history. As such, students expected to be arrested on the first night of the protest, but to their surprise they were not. By the second day of the protest, students had mostly not slept for fear of being arrested and were unsure of what to expect. However, other students began to show up with study materials and sit with them in solidarity. By the third day, faculty began to relocate classes to the sit-in in solidarity. The following days, non-JHU affiliated members from the surrounding residential community began to show up; some remarked how this was their first time on the JHU campus. In the first week of the sit-in, Daniels spoke with two representatives of the protest. When the students asked Daniels if he would reconsider the decision to establish a private police force, he "responded that a democratic decision had already been made *in the state legislature* and that he was not willing to enter into any negotiation" [emphasis added] (Homewood Faculty Assembly, 2019). At this moment, Daniels' response to the protestors rearticulated that the claims of direct JHU affiliates upon the institution for accountability were not legitimate, and instead "democracy" existed beyond the reach of JHU affiliates alone. Without any change in policy from JHU, the sit-in lasted for nearly 36 days when on May 8, in the early hours of the morning, reports of over 70 Baltimore Police Officers entered the building and made five arrests for trespassing. Two more arrests were made for blocking vehicles as the police attempted to leave (Anderson, 2019). There was also a report of a transgender identifying student protestor being forcibly entered into a police van designed for male detainees (L. Smith, 2019).

Even in the midst of written resistance throughout late 2018 and early 2019, as well as the physical presence of the opposition in April 2019, JHU was still able to support the private police force. In this case, the collusion between JHU and the Maryland State was fundamental to defending the logic of the private police force. Paradoxically positioned against a historical context of a lack of accountability within the BPD, by embracing the state JHU broadened who the institution was accountable to and worked to disperse their accountability and weaken the legitimacy of claims from direct JHU affiliates. Similarly, the apathy shown by JHU to the sit-in at the climax of the private police force disputes represents the result of JHU dispersing their accountability. Collectively, throughout the process, JHU administrators spoke through discrete and indiscrete means; discretely through campaign donations and denying acknowledgments of staff and student resistance, and indiscreetly through public testimony to the Maryland Delegation and institutional reports which furthered the aims of the police force.

The point of this account is not to make explicit the forms of trauma that were experienced at JHU during the private police force dispute. Instead, I have tried to highlight the abstraction and dispersal of institutional accountability through the state which enabled institutional (in)action. It is within these institutional forms where the conditions of possibility for trauma arise. However, by tracing these institutional forms it allows for a more nuanced understanding of the way trauma manifests and resurfaces for individuals directly affected by institutions. This account specifically highlights the temporality of trauma, where trauma existed before, during, and after the private police force dispute. Previous trauma from the Baltimore Police Department and its failure of accountability manifested itself in JHU's advocacy for a private police force. Forms of trauma were generated within the private police force dispute itself: during the protests, students reported that the surveillance of the protest by JHU administration echoed issues of racial discrimination on campus, all were forcibly arrested, later some arrested students would be forced to go through legal proceedings, some were put on academic probation, and others had to delay exams (Homewood Faculty Assembly, 2019). This trauma continued beyond the protest; or rather, the institutional conjunctures I have tried to illuminate here created a new context in which trauma became negotiated. To understand the sustenance of trauma both within the institution and those it affected, as well as how this sustenance is able to continue to shape institutional structures themselves, I turn to the recent dispute of JHU's funding cuts to the WGS occurring in the fall of 2019.

Women, Gender, and Sexuality: negotiating the institution in times of dispersed accountability

Recently at JHU a number of interdisciplinary academic programs has received budget cuts or have been cancelled. The program on Race, Immigration, and Citizenship was canceled; the East Asian Studies staff was significantly cut, and a number of teaching fellowships were reduced; and the Latin American Studies program has been put on hold (R. Smith, 2020). However, none of these cuts have been seen as large a response as that of WGS fellowship which, after 22 years of existence, JHU had announced in November 2019 that the WGS fellowships would not continue into the 2020–2021 academic year. Although there is a larger backdrop to the way in which the JHU administration implemented the cut to the WGS fellowship, I would like to highlight here the ways in which the resistance to these cuts built upon existing dynamics between the institution and the individuals it affects. This example demonstrates how institutional forms generated within historical moments carry on within both the methods of the institution and the responses seen from the individuals the institution affects. Finally, I will show the university's everyday rhetoric is key to understandings of who it is accountable to and how it actively works to reify dispersed structures of accountability.

The Vice Dean of JHU, Matthew Roller, announced the administration's decision to withdraw WGS funding in the fall of 2019. Roller suggested that those wishing to pursue WGS teaching fellowships can apply to the Dean's Teaching Fellowship (DTF), which is open to all course proposals from all academic departments. Roller further stated that the DTF was not receiving enough applications, and fellows would receive employment benefits, such as health care, within the DTF, which were not available within WGS. While students and faculty were opposed to this decision, conversations I have had with WGS faculty leadership receiving Roller's decision have revealed that there was a desire to not politicize this decision *specifically* in light of recent protests over the JHU police force. WGS faculty leadership was concerned over what they considered to be a morally violent treatment of students and the apathy of JHU's response. However, while WGS leadership attempted to safeguard its teaching fellows, upon learning about the funding cuts the graduate students' response represented the solidarity of the community that had formed following the private police protests.

Within a week of the announcement of funding cuts, current and former WGS fellows had published an open letter in defense of the fellowships and launched a petition which went on to gain over 600 signatures (Change, 2019). The open letter details how WGS provides unique "disciplinary specific training and mentorship" which enables WGS fellows to secure "tenure track positions in a range of departments at other universities"

(WGS Fellows, 2019). In the context of two faculty recently resigning due to sexual harassment, the letter also draws attention to the likelihood that removing WGS funding can “exacerbate the perception that JHU does not provide as welcoming an environment for women, trans, nonbinary, and queer students as its peer institutions” (WGS Fellows, 2019). The graduate students also argued that while Roller claimed to be attempting to increase the equity of funding within graduate teaching fellowships, DTFs were equally inequitable because academic departments reallocated DTF funding resulting in many fellows receiving vastly different salaries. The letter prompted a town hall meeting with Roller; however, although previously receiving a copy of the letter, Roller had begun reading the letter as he was walking to the meeting (R. Smith, 2020). Numerous students at the meeting explained how substantial meeting time was taken to rearticulate the contents of the letter to Roller. Roller’s replies did not address the concerns of the graduate students, and instead rearticulated how DTFs were “under-saturated” and that this would help to provide more equity. This response echoes the explicit claims of what faculty and students have voiced to me about the entire negotiation process of WGS with the JHU administration: the admin has failed to produce evidence for their claims, their claims are often false, and when claims are false administration fails to respond or correct them. This silencing of claims has forced students and faculty to make sense of and respond to institutional actions in light of incorrect information and a lack of communication.

The efforts of the graduate students gave WGS faculty leadership more clout in negotiations with the JHU administration. At the time of writing, the JHU administration has allowed WGS fellowships to continue as a subprogram within the DTFs themselves. However, the number of WGS fellowships has been reduced from 5 to 2 and the program received a 4,000 USD budget cut. Further, the inequities in how departments allocate their funding still exists. When speaking with graduate students and faculty leadership of WGS, in light of a lack of administrative communication, several have reached the conclusion that these actions reflect larger efforts at attempts to centralize administrative control, reduce university expenditures, and corporatize JHU’s education.

The institution’s response to the WGS community puts on display how and what the institution is using to articulate itself. Echoing the silencing of resistance to the private police force, by Roller not responding to graduate students’ claims about WGS’ pedagogical benefits it denies these claims a space within the institutional understanding of WGS. Further, Roller replied to the WGS community’s claim that the DTFs were not equitable by continuing to state that in the eyes of the administration the DTFs were in fact equitable. In this case, JHU dogmatically silenced claims by suggesting the opposite of the WGS community without engaging in discussion on

points of difference. To the WGS community, not only was this non-factual but it was logically incoherent. This was further echoed by the fact that Roller quoted incorrect statistics about teaching fellowships at the town hall meeting (R. Smith, 2020).

Rather than attempting to read this case within the confines of “rational choice,” to understand how institutions articulate themselves, Mary Douglas has shown how institutions rely on more than the rational choice of their participants, but upon “a parallel cognitive convention to sustain it” (Douglas, 1986, p. 46). For Douglas, institutions accomplish this by drawing parallels between the institutional citizen and the body; for example, “the analogical relation of head to hand was frequently used to justify the class structure” within capitalist production between the capitalist and the laborer (Douglas, 1986, p. 49). At JHU, Roller selectively employs cognitive conventions to make sense of the administrative decisions to its students. However, Roller does not embrace a cognitive function which is relatable to the WGS community, such as the body as seen in Douglas’ work. Instead, Roller employs a cognitive function of the market speaking about the “undersaturation” of fellowship applications to the DTF. The cognitive function employed illuminates who the institution is accountable to: the market. In doing this, Roller reifies the institutional form capable of dispersing its accountability beyond the WGS community. Further, because Roller uses a cognitive function which reasserts the institution’s dispersal of accountability it enables the institution to move beyond “rationality”; as long as the cognitive function of the institution is the market, the competing claims of which form of fellowship is more equitable do not need to be resolved and it makes possible a dismissal of these claims through a dispersed accountability to the market.

The rhetoric of the market then acts as a form of substantiation for administrative actions by reifying the existence of dispersed structures of accountability beyond those who are directly affected by the institution. The popular response to JHU from those affected by the WGS fellowship cuts has often included accusing the intentions of JHU as desiring increased university privatization and monetization. My point is not to analyze whether JHU is increasingly privatizing or not; what is of interest here is that JHU has been able to create an image of the university enterprise. In doing so, this imaginary creates the grounds of engagement for institutional accountability as one which is dispersed a-priori. In other words, by JHU using the cognitive function of the market to justify WGS funding cuts, this demands that any engagement from direct JHU affiliates takes place in an arena already beyond the reach of those affected by WGS. Significantly, the image of the university enterprise produced through the cognitive function of market rhetoric then reifies the dispersion of institutional accountability.

Here again, the interest of this article is not to make explicit the forms of trauma which these types of disputes may produce, but instead to draw

attention to how institutional forms can produce the conditions of possibility for trauma. In this case, the previous trauma inflicted to students immediately contextualized the faculty response to the WGS fellowships when WGS faculty leadership hoped to avoid further morally violent treatment of students and decided to initially not dispute the decision. However, previous trauma had also produced a form of solidarity amongst students which enabled them to coordinate a response to the WGS fellowship cuts. Responding to student resistance, JHU returned to forms of dispersed accountability that were conceptualized within the private police force resistance. However, instead of relying upon state collusion, JHU called upon the cognitive function of the market to accomplish a dispersion of accountability. In this sense, trauma travels through time in both its embodied sentiment for those affected by trauma, as well as in the institutional forms which produce the conditions of possibility for trauma to manifest and be addressed.

Conclusion

What I have shown in this piece is how to address the relationship between trauma and institutions, it is necessary to see institutions within a relational dynamic beyond a monolithic superstructure. Documenting the establishment of the JHU private police force, I suggested that by JHU promising to listen to its staff, students, and surrounding community and failing to incorporate their perspectives into JHU's position about the police force was possible because of JHU's dispersal of accountability. When JHU was able to disperse its accountability between its own affiliates, the State of Maryland, and the city of Baltimore encompassing an ambiguous "us," this enabled a silencing of the perspectives of direct JHU affiliates. These methods later lead to directly ignoring JHU protestors and inflicting forms of trauma through their arrests. The dynamic between the institution and its citizens following the establishment of the private police force set a precedent for how students would respond to cuts to the WGS program, representing the solidarity that had formed amongst JHU's students. In the face of the cuts to WGS, JHU's administrative response represented new articulations through a market rhetoric again signifying the institution's understanding of how they are accountable to more than just their direct affiliates.

Through these accounts, I have not tried to suggest whether a JHU private police is good or bad, or if WGS cuts are beneficial to the overall working condition of teaching fellows, but I have attempted to track the claims made by the different institutional actors at play to understand how the institution functions. It is exactly in these moments – the critical events – where accountability becomes dispersed that the institution's dynamic relationship becomes tangible and the imaginary of the institution's accountability becomes visible. As I have suggested, the institution's dispersion of accountability creates new

terrains where institutional contestation will take place and evokes new methods from the institutional citizen. The actions of JHU also strategically rupture our understanding of who the institutional citizen is as a mechanism to disperse accountability. This ambiguity suggests that to address the afflictions of people, we need to not only rethink our monolithic conception of institutions but to think more critically about who is able to become affected by an institution and when. In this sense, not only does the institution become relational, but so too does the act of betrayal as currently thought about in trauma studies; this can allow the experiences of the betrayed to be more easily made sense of through the methods of the different actors at play which may exist outside the scope of monolithic understandings of the institution and those it affects.

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