Leadership insights

LEADERSHIP IN THE FAULT LINES

Professor Martin Hall,
Solution Space, Graduate School of Business,
University of Cape Town, South Africa

Leadership in the Fault Lines

Doris Salcedo's installation at the Tate Modern – Shibboleth – is an emblem for the leadership of universities in uncertain times. This 167-metre fissure in the floor of the Turbine Hall is a fault line that "represents borders, the experience of immigrants, the experience of segregation, the experience of racial hatred. It is the experience of a Third World person coming into the heart of Europe" (BBC, 2007). Cut deep into the floor of the museum, the fault line is part of the building's structure; while it requires attention it cannot be wished away or covered up with a coat of paint. The contradictions it represents are here to stay (Bal, 2010).

"The idea of having a large portion of the population excluded from civil rights, from many, many possibilities, implies that you have people that can almost be considered socially dead. What does it mean to be socially dead? What does it mean to be alive and not able to participate? It's like being dead in life."
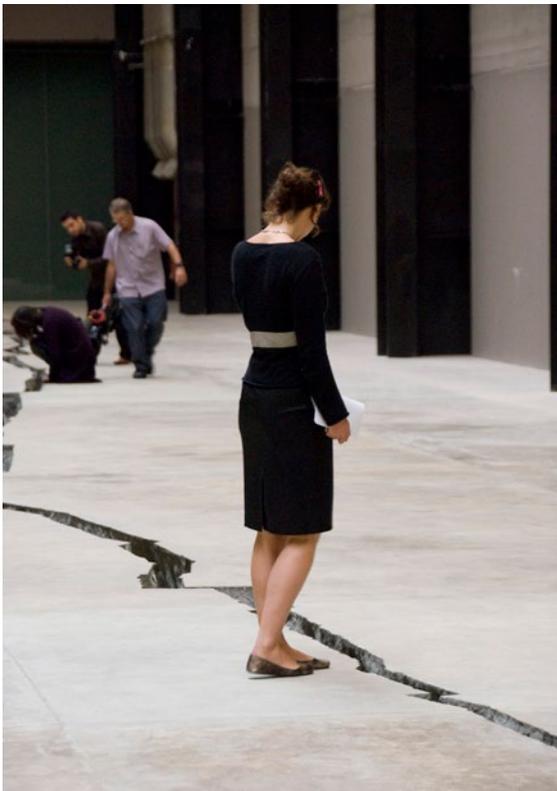
(Doris Salcedo, Variations on Brutality, 2008)

Figure 1 Doris Salcedo, Shibboleth, Tate Modern, 2007

Shibboleth –"stream" in Hebrew - combines the image of the river and crevasse with reference to the violence inherent in the language and customs used to repel the outsider: "a *shibboleth* is a kind of linguistic password: A way of speaking (a pronunciation, or the use of a particular expression) that is used by one set of people to identify another person as a member, or a non-member, of a particular group. The group making the identification has some kind of social power to set the standards for who belongs to their group: who is 'in' and who is 'out'" (Kemmer, nd).

This powerful metaphor encapsulates the multiple threats to universities; for leadership in uncertain times. Faced with the fault lines that have come to define our world today, university leaders have a choice to make. They can fall back on well-tested responses to the cacophony at the gates, trusting that established forms of knowledge claims will be sufficient to absorb dissent into the modes of debate and reason. Or they can recognise that times have changed; that some of these fault lines have significant implications for universities; that continual change and uncertainty will be perpetual; that violence and violations of personhood are to be expected. And, most importantly, they can confront this violence and these violations as part of their leadership brief.

Concepts of leadership at any level – whether by governors, vice-chancellors, administrators, programme leaders or teachers – are inseparable from the nature and purpose of the institution being led; from the idea of the university. To resort to well-tested responses is to depend on institutional forms and traditions that have shaped and defined knowledge since the early 17th century and have accompanied every aspect of empire and colony. Such forms and traditions are countered by a significant and growing critique of their validity and efficacy well captured in Mignolo's emphasis on the "zero point", the false claim to an "ultimate grounding of knowledge". "Zero point" thinking obscures the contextualisation that shapes all knowledge with the claim of universal truth or insight; "since the zero point is always in the present of time and the center of space, it hides its own local knowledge." From the perspective of the south, this is the direct continuity of empire and colony, "the universality to which everyone has to submit" (Mignolo, 2011).

This paper explores the leadership imperative of the recognition that the zero point, far from being universal, is contributing to a world where crevasses are opening across institutional structures. Times have changed. Here is Cameroonian philosopher and political scientist Achille Mbembe, reflecting on the challenges to the hegemony of the traditional curriculum that have reverberated from Cape Town to Oxford over the past two years:

"The harder I tried to make sense of the idea of 'decolonisation' that has become the rallying cry for those trying to undo the racist legacies of the past, the more I kept asking myself to what extent we might be fighting a complexly mutating entity with concepts inherited from an entirely different age and epoch. Is today's university the same as yesterday's or are we confronting an entirely different apparatus, an entirely different rationality – both of which require us to produce radically new concepts?"

(Mbembe, 2015)

My response to Mbembe's question is that this reappraisal of the idea of the university will require, as a necessary condition, a form of leadership at all levels that can live with contradictions – fault lines. Again drawing on Salcedo's work, I understand this as the capacity for "singularity". Through her art, Salcedo keeps alive and focused the continental fault lines of violence – the disappearance of tens or thousands of victims of repressive regimes – by forcing close and intimate engagement with the traces of personhood. Here, there is no hiding in the comfort of abstract theory or academic euphemisms. Rather, the value of "singularity" is in keeping the contradictions that we have to live with in the forefront of leadership priorities, however uncomfortable this is.

Specifically, I trace three fault lines that have particular impact on universities and which, in combination, are often hidden in plain sight, too substantial to be addressed by the traditional crafts of leadership. These three fault lines are: the violence of war with its massive displacement of people, the immigrant as outsider and, cutting across the other two, the excesses accompanying the information age.

The violence of war and displacement

The first new fault line is the collapse of the Arab Spring, the reassertion of autocracy across the Middle East, the war in Syria and the shadow of violence. This originated in the revolutionary wave that began in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread across the countries of the Arab League: Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Egypt.

Driven by diverse circumstances and objectives, the common feature was the use of social media to organise loose and transitory coalitions. Along with the Occupy movement, this broad swathe of social movements was seen as a harbinger of fundamental change, "a revolution caused by the near collapse of free-market capitalism combined with an upswing in technical innovation, a surge in desire for individual freedom and a change in human consciousness about what freedom means … Right now the future hangs in the balance" (Mason, 2013; see also Castells, 2012; Harcourt, 2013; Mitchell, 2013).

But the balance tilted away from revolution. By the middle of 2014, Egypt had moved from the euphoria of Tahir Square to the election of the former head of the military as president (Fantz, 2016). Syria was engulfed in a civil war: by the end of 2016 almost five million Syrians were refugees. Conflict has spread across western Iraq and eastern Syria, shaped by the Islamic State, believed to be active from Afghanistan to the Philippines (BBC, 2017). By 2015, 65.3 million people – one in every 113 – had been displaced from their homes by conflict and persecution (UNHCR, 2016). There is no immediate prospect of these conflicts being resolved.

This fault line brings the imminence of violence to the heart of every city, as a concern for every campus; the everyday possibility of attack. It is also the visceral experience of the refugee living with the memory of conflict and violence and the epistemic violence of prejudice (Lee, 2016; Pacheco and Johnson, 2014; Watenpaugh, Fricke and King, 2014).

Provocation 1: when the possibility of violence is an everyday reality and violent conflict has touched the lives of increasing numbers of students and staff, how should universities balance the constraints of heightened security with freedom of expression and acceptance of controversy?

The Immigrant as Outsider

The second new fault line, closely aligned with spread of endemic violence, has been the turn to the right across Europe and the decision that Britain will leave the European Union. While there are multiple dimensions and complexities to these political flows, their essence is captured in the demonic image of the immigrant as Outsider.
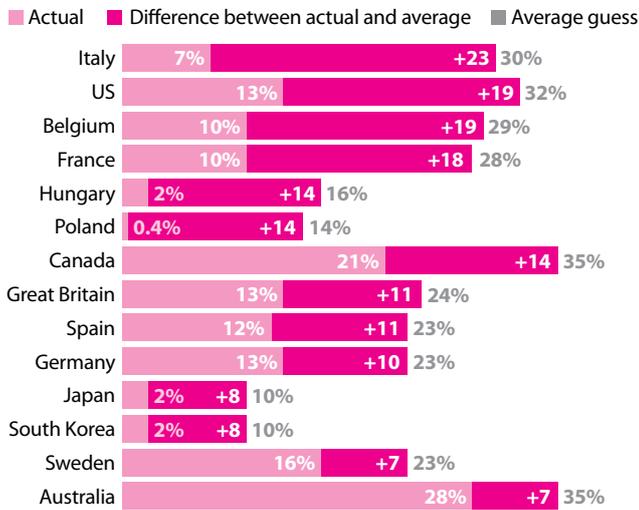
Prejudice against the Outsider is contrary to the etymology of the university as a concept. Because politicians adapt to voter perceptions and prejudices, the marked rise in prejudice against the Outsider over the last 15 years has placed collective university leadership against the interests of the political establishment. Despite the evidence that the public is less worried about students than other categories of immigrant and the clear economic benefit of high levels of recruitment of legitimate university students, successive governments have persisted with restrictions on international student recruitment. In this, the political establishment is adapting to the demonisation of the Outsider, rather than leading in countering the trend.

These contradictions are exacerbated by the extent of displacement resulting from the escalation of violence. There has long been a challenge in meeting the needs of students who are refugees; an example here is the work of Article 26, a project of the Helena Kennedy Foundation that promotes access to higher education for asylum seekers in Britain (Article 26, 2016). These approaches, offering a small number of partly funded openings at a university each year, have been overwhelmed by the scale of the new refugee crisis. Refugee students often lack documentation. Institutions where they previously studied may not be functioning; an enquiry for academic information about them may put them, and others, at risk. Potential students may be in temporary camps, under difficult circumstances (Hall, 2016; Morris-Lange and Brands, 2016; Watenpaugh, Fricke and King, 2014).

Persistent prejudice is demonstrated in surveys that ask representative samples of people how many immigrants they believe to be living in their country, with high levels of overestimation across a range of countries (Nardelli and Arnett, 2014). In Britain, respondents overestimate immigration by more than a third (a perception of 24% against a recorded 13%). The extent of prejudice increases when people are asked the same question about Muslims; the proportion of Muslims in Britain is overestimated more than fourfold (a perception of 21% in contrast with a recorded 5%). As would be expected from these high-level overviews, and in contrast to the closing years of the last century, immigration is now a leading political issue. Oxford University's Migration Observatory has found that, by August 2016, this was the issue most often chosen by survey respondents (at 34%).

At the same time, these survey results have interesting nuances. Between 2008 and 2013, a large majority of those interviewed as part of the British Social Attitudes Survey wanted to see immigration reduced, which is not surprising given the combination of overall prejudice and lead concerns. However, those surveyed persistently denied that immigration was a problem in their own neighborhoods, wherever their neighborhoods were (Migration Observatory, 2016). This paradox is consistent with the demonisation of the Outsider; the immigrant or Muslim who is perceived as a shadowy and threatening figure rather than the friendly shopkeeper down the road.

Out of 100 people how many do you think are immigrants to this country?

Actual ■ Difference between actual and average ■ Average guess

Country	Actual	+Diff	Average
Italy	7%	+23	30%
US	13%	+19	32%
Belgium	10%	+19	29%
France	10%	+18	28%
Hungary	2%	+14	16%
Poland	0.4%	+14	14%
Canada	21%	+14	35%
Great Britain	13%	+11	24%
Spain	12%	+11	23%
Germany	13%	+10	23%
Japan	2%	+8	10%
South Korea	2%	+8	10%
Sweden	16%	+7	23%
Australia	28%	+7	35%

Out of 100 people how many do you think are Muslim?

Actual ■ Difference between actual and average ■ Average guess

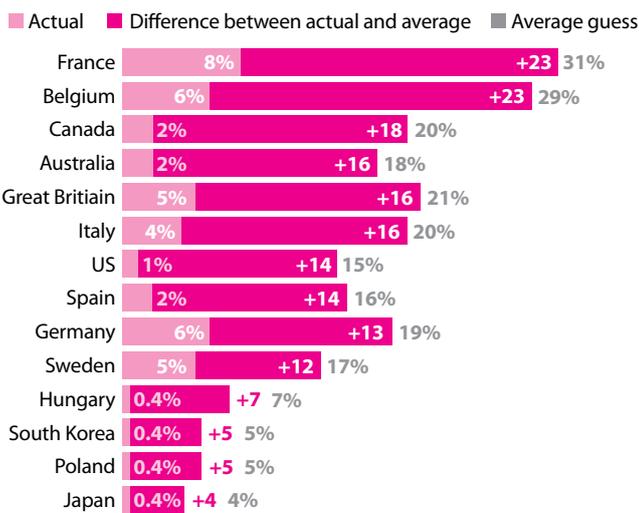| Country	Actual	+Diff	Average
France	8%	+23	31%
Belgium	6%	+23	29%
Canada	2%	+18	20%
Australia	2%	+16	18%
Great Britiain	5%	+16	21%
Italy	4%	+16	20%
US	1%	+14	15%
Spain	2%	+14	16%
Germany	6%	+13	19%
Sweden	5%	+12	17%
Hungary	0.4%	+7	7%
South Korea	0.4%	+5	5%
Poland	0.4%	+5	5%
Japan	0.4%	+4	4%

Figure 2: Attitudes to immigration (source: The Guardian)

This combination of anti-immigrant politics, the closure of borders and the scale of the new refugee crisis and its accompanying administrative difficulties reverse the ideals of an open and borderless world that stemmed from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet this unprecedented set of circumstances has been barely mentioned in the formal discourse of international higher education (De Wit and Altbach, 2016).

Provocation 2: what is the role of universities in countering prejudice against immigrants? Should universities engage more with the political discourse of immigration, to compensate for the widespread failure of the media to provide balanced perspectives in the public interest?

Excesses of the information age

The demonisation of the Outsider and the closure of borders also reverses the optimism for the "network society" of the early 1990s, magisterially defined by Manuel Castells (1996). This us to the third fault line; the rising tide of misinformation and "fake news" that is undermining established ways of legitimising knowledge and, in this, eroding the core structure of the traditional university.

Today, the rising tide of digital information is overwhelming points of authority. New and trusted conventions for evaluating information in an age of super-abundance have yet to emerge. "News" is immediate and everywhere, public intellectuals compete as bloggers, official information sources are widely mistrusted and propaganda and misinformation are readily available weapons. The quantity and variety of digitally conveyed information that is now available is well known, provoking extremes of enthusiasm and despair, projections of an enchanted future and dystopian fears of an apocalypse. Almost a third of the people in the world now carry a personal digital device that can connect them to the equivalent of about 36,000 years

of continuously streamed high definition video. In less than a decade, this deluge of digital information has eroded the long-established mechanisms for evaluating the quality of information. Previously, observations, claims, opinions and assertions were tethered to piers of authority; official information agencies, newspapers of record, universities and research publications, expert agencies, the practical wisdom of recognised experience.

Digital technologies speed everything up, at an ever-accelerating rate. Digital innovation is distinctive in the exponential-like increase in memory, processing power and the speed of data transmission. This pattern of change will continue as new innovations, such as quantum computing, come into widespread use. In turn, this has the effect of foreshortening time and diminishing the utility, and value, of experience. Rather than a sense of stability, in which we form an interpretative image of the dimensions and dynamics of our lived world, we experience the disruption of perpetual innovation.

This undermines the key rhythms of the university. The concept of the university is grounded in respect for expert knowledge. This expertise may be the assertion of factual truth – the traditional paradigm of the sciences – or the assertion of the explanatory power of theory, including theories that all facts are relative. What unites this spectrum of attitudes to research and enquiry is an expectation of respect, outside academic circles, for the superior value of the interpretations of the world that the work of universities offers.

The underlying cause of this fault line is not just a change in attitude by the political class; political discourse is opportunistic. Rather, the combination of the unprecedented volume and speed of information flows and the rapidity of change is swamping the opportunity for filtering and reflection; cacophony rather than coherence. There is an inverse symmetry here with the optimism of the 2011 social movements. Then, the ideal was that social media would allow the equitable distribution of information, transparency and optimal outcomes through collective decision making. Now, the reality is that social media is swamping the distinction between valuable information and malign misrepresentation, creating an opacity that is useful primarily to narrow sets of interests.

Provocation 3: how can university leaders reassert the value of evidence-based inquiry from the cacophony of unsubstantiated assertions and deliberate misinformation? How can universities re-establish respect for knowledge by turning the prevalence and power of digital communication to their advantage?

Leadership for uncertain times

What does an appreciation of the salience of these – and other – fault lines mean for emerging forms of university leadership in uncertain times; for the ability to be both coolly analytic in the face of torrents of misinformation, prejudice and threats, and also passionate in outrage at the destruction of the hopes and aspirations of personhood?

The primary requirements of leadership have changed. Five years ago the priorities were poverty, inequality and social mobility: "since all education institutions have a significant level of engagement with their local and regional communities, whether this is acknowledged or not, it is difficult to argue convincingly that the issues that arise from poverty and inequality have nothing to do with institutional practice, or with public policies that shape institutional practice" (Hall, 2012: 13). These are still priorities. Overall, there is a broad perception of inequality and lack of opportunity for improvement, believed to be a significant factor in the 2016 vote to leave the European Union (Tetlow, 2016). But these earlier imperatives have been overlain by

the new threats and uncertainties brought together here through the concept of the fault line.

Seen in this way, the challenge of leadership is finding and holding on to the things that matter, of preventing today's scandals becoming tomorrow's narrative. Fissures and fault lines – the broad schema that are useful in describing the contradictions that shape higher education as a whole – generate a constant bombardment of shrapnel that injures the individual: refugees, black and women students, who are not flourishing in hostile institutions; first generation students, who are mocked for their accents and their errors. This, in turn, affects everyone, damaging the university as a place for consideration, reflection and sanctuary. Leadership in today's everyday needs to find new ways of engaging with these small things and with the recognition that the contradictions of the fault line are here to stay.

Again, Doris Salcedo's work shows how this can be done. The authority of her installations comes from including both the general and the specific in the same point of representation: "I have focused all my work on political violence, on forceful displacement, on war, on all these events but not on the large event. I focus on the small, individual, particular experience of a human being. I'm trying to extract that and put it in the work (Salcedo, 2008). This is what Mieke Bal (2010) calls "singularity". For example, in her Atrabiliarios - "defiant" – installations, Salcedo presents the sweeping atrocity of extra-judicial execution in Columbia in the trace of clothing. Niches contain a single pair of carefully arranged, worn shoes, covered by translucent animal skin, coarsely sutured to the wall and evoking faded photographs. This insists on the singularity of violence on the person, while recalling the near 100,000 people who have disappeared in Columbia, and the generality of violence everywhere:

"a worn shoe, with traces of sweat and dirt, of corns, calluses, and the distortion of bones that come with aging and labor, of the idiosyncrasies of the toes and bones of a particular individual whom we have never met and will never meet because she is dead or otherwise disappeared"

(Bal, 2010: 53)

Figure 3: Photograph: Atrabiliarios SFMOMA Sergio Clavio, Alexander and Bonin, New York

The form of presentation – small niches, the opacity of the translucent screen – forces the viewer to come close, to engage. Salcedo demands similar participation in her Unland installations, in which individual strands of hair are woven into everyday furniture. In her close analysis of Salcedo's work, Bal shows how singularity prevents recourse to the general narrative – to the comfort of the "zero point".

Provocation 4: how can the concept of singularity – the discomfort of always keeping in sight the consequences of leadership decisions on individual lives – be used in the leadership narrative of a university's particular circumstances? How can the insights from art be given a central place in a university's consideration of institutional priorities?

An initiative at Brown University shows how this insight can be translated into forms of leadership appropriate for our times. Brown University began as the College of Rhode Island, founded in 1764. In the same year Nicolas Brown and Company, prominent providence merchants, financed a voyage to West Africa by the Sally, a 100-ton brigantine slave ship. 196 Africans were purchased, of whom at least 109 died on the home voyage from disease, starvation, suicide and through a failed insurrection. The Sally's voyage was one of numerous similar expeditions; Rhode Island merchants dominated the north's part in the transatlantic slave trade, mounting more than a thousand voyages before abolition of the trade in 1807, and then many more illegal expeditions after this (Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice, 2016).

The Browns, through several generations, were significant benefactors of the college, which was renamed for them in 1804. The family had wide-ranging business interests and was itself divided on the issue of slavery. As with many other institutions, the university's complex entanglement with history came under public scrutiny as a result of the

civil rights movement, calls for restorative justice and, in particular, the question of appropriate reparation. However, rather than seeking to erase the trace – as other universities with similar histories have done – Brown has engaged actively with its slave legacy. In 2003 an inquiry was launched, to examine and report on the university's complicity in slavery and the slave trade, and recommending that the university should make its own history a focus of its scholarship (Brown University, 2006).

Ruth Simmons, Brown's president from 2001 to 2012, sees her controversial decision to open the university's engagement with slavery to public scrutiny as vindicated by the exigencies of the present. And in opening a 2016 exhibition to mark the 10th anniversary of the Brown initiative, Brown president Christina Paxson made the direct connection between past, present and an uncertain future (Hall, 2016). In February 2017, Brown, along with 16 other universities, filed an amicus brief in opposition to the Trump administration's ban on anyone from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen entering the US. Paxson was explicit in her rejection of the Trump's executive order as contradicting "our unconditional rejection of every form of bigotry, discrimination, xenophobia and harassment" (Brown University, 2017).

Through this initiative, which has shaped Brown's leadership for more than a decade, singularity is achieved by associating the specific violence of Rhode Island slavery with the broad canvas of the university and the nation. The force of engagement – and equivalent of the worn shoes in Salcedo's Atrabiliarios – comes from the details of the Sally's 1764 slave voyage; the manifests, accounts and reports of mundane violence cruelty and death.

Together, these fragments and reflections - one grain in the vast legacy of slavery - serve as a synecdoche for the contradictions that define today's fault lines, and as a point of engagement for a different kind of leadership. These fractured images both contribute to the substance of university leadership and provide the ability and authority to speak, listen and see in a new way.

How can the Brown story be adapted as a model for university leadership in general? Every university has a history characterised by contradictions and compromises. As with Rhode Island, some British port cities built their prosperity on the slave trade; for example, from 1698 until the abolition of the slave trade in Britain in 1807, over 2,000 Bristol ships took part in slaving voyages, taking some 500,000 Africans into slavery in the Caribbean; just under a fifth of the total British trade in slaves (Smart, 2017). Universities are implicated in all aspects of conquest and empire, from training colonial administrators to collecting body parts for the science of racial superiority.

Singularity, though, is not about re-writing history. It is rather the requirement that two dimensions of comprehension are held at the same time, and in the same frame. Singularity is closeness to the trace of the person; a worn shoe, a strand of hair. This intimate engagement works against generalising and essentialising, against consigning the individual life to the general human tragedy. Without singularity, "agency is mangled or erased, and the paralysis of a hopeless generality sets in" (Bal, 2010: 45). Singularity is also about understanding this intimacy as one element in a global canvas of politics, interests, repression and violence. In the context of Brown, this is the link between the individual lives that were destroyed in the Sally's founding voyage, the transatlantic fault line of slavery and today's unresolved contradictions of civil rights. Many universities have a similar story to tell.

Here, the key point for leadership in uncertain times is the link between each university's unique narrative and engagement with current issues. The depth and consistency of the Brown initiative provides authority and legitimacy in the complex, clouded and attenuated politics of the present. Singularity is achieved through the combination of passion and outrage of the ways in which global fault lines deny a person opportunities and destroy individual lives, and the considered, analytical skills of research, interpretation and professional practice that are used to understand our contemporary contradictions and the competing interests that perpetuate them.

Provocation 5: what is your university's unique narrative? In what ways do the widespread fault lines that define contemporary society affect the everyday in your institution? How can you shape the substance and style of leadership to acknowledge these fault lines and mitigate their consequences?

Finally, singularity requires the abandonment of hubris – recognition that the efficacy of "zero point" thinking is gone. The contradictions that define fault lines such as endemic violence, prejudice, demonisation and torrents of misinformation will not be resolved; rather, they will shift in shape and direction and give rise to new polarisations. Present and future fault lines need a different set of responses, embedded in new imaginaries and linguistic and visual markers. They require the ability to listen to a range of voices and to see a multitude of images, such as those created by artists like Doris Salcedo. These are not temporary challenges that can be resolved with the standard, one-dimensional tools of mission statements, strategic plans and hierarchical management.

The insertion of Salcedo's Shibboleth into the floor of the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall was intended as a trace, resisting closure. The intention was to change the gallery forever, marking a change in awareness of the nature of the world: "there is a crack, there is a line, and eventually there will be a scar and that scar will remain" (Tate director Nicholas Serota, BBC 2007). A final word from Doris Salcedo, as an epigram for leadership in uncertain times:

"There is a fragment of the population that is on the borders of life, on the edges of life, on the epicenter of catastrophe, and I would like to focus on them"

(Doris Salcedo, Variations on Brutality, 2008)

Five provocations

Provocation 1: when the possibility of violence is an everyday reality and violent conflict has touched the lives of increasing numbers of students and staff, how should universities balance the constraints of heightened security with freedom of expression and acceptance of controversy?

Provocation 2: what is the role of universities in countering prejudice against immigrants? Should universities engage more with the political discourse of immigration, to compensate for the widespread failure of the media to provide balanced perspectives in the public interest?

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Author:

Professor Martin Hall is emeritus professor and senior scholar in residence at the Solution Space, graduate school of business, University of Cape Town. He was previously vice-chancellor, University of Salford, and deputy vice-chancellor and dean of higher education development at the University of Cape Town.

This thought leadership paper was commissioned by Leadership Foundation in its portfolio of Leadership Insights, in the series *Leadership in Uncertain Times*. All the papers in this series will be discussed at the Leadership Foundation's Symposium on 23 June 2017. Places can be booked **here** up until the date of the event.

The Leadership Foundation is grateful to the four funding bodies of the UK for investing in the development of the publications and the event.

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