

Education in Exile as a Hope-making Practice: the Case of Russian Higher Education Projects

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the self-conceptualisation of higher education projects (HEPs) relocated out of Russia or created in exile by Russian emigrants after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, analysed by thematic analysis, and discourse analysis of projects' promo-materials, this paper explores how HEPs formulate their goals and aims concerning the conflict zone—their homeland. The research argues that these projects manage to overcome 'exiled consciousness' and appear as a hope-making practice. However, aiming to preserve the relocated academic heritage, HEPs limit their self-reconceptualisation, i.e., further reflection on the continuity of their practice. Along with presenting current narratives, the study suggests further directions for exploration of the imagined future and its materialisation mechanism through educational means in the context of a political and humanitarian crisis, along with the way the international education landscape is being reshaped in it.

Keywords: exiled academics, education in emergencies, higher education, transnational diaspora

Introduction

The spread of armed conflicts, political repressions and authoritarian rise have had a devastating influence on higher education around the globe. As a result of various forms of repression, dozens of thousands of scholars emigrate and continue to educate from exile. The phenomenon of academic emigration has been explored from a variety of perspectives; however, a particularly noticeable focus is on personal narratives of those leaving due to crisis or political oppression, as in the cases of Turkish (Aydin et al., 2021; Aydiner & Rider, 2022; Özdemir, 2019), Syrian (Dillabough et al., 2018; Parkinson et al., 2018, 2020), Ukrainian (Zavorotna, 2020) or German (Reisman, 2007) academics. The emphasis is on intellectual knowledge as, first of all, personal knowledge; reflexive and personal narratives cover the way of adaptation and transformation of fleeing scholars to their new environments and the cultural, social and economic difficulties they encounter. The voices of their struggle reveal the particular language of this status— what Ashley and Walker (1990) call the

‘language of exile.’ It drastically differs from (voluntary) emigration, as it appears as a ‘limbo,’ ‘in-betweenness’ that causes frustration and prevents assimilation (Hall, 2018; Said, 2013). As a result of this personal experience, academics in exile, therefore, form a very specific subgroup of refugees. While an academic career entails mobility as one of its primary components, forced displacement is construed as diametrically opposed to academic mobility, undermining the trajectory of a scholar's development rather than fostering it (Axyonova et al., 2022).

Besides literature on personal strategies and narratives of emigration, there are several cases of what could be seen as collective exile – the relocation of the whole institution or the creation of a new one abroad (by former colleagues). Such a collective exile is represented by several notable examples, such as the New School's 'University in Exile' project (Durin-Horniyk, 2013; Krohn, 1993; Mack, 2017), the European Humanities University relocation from Minsk, Belarus (Dounaev, 2007; Mikhailov, 2009) or Central European University move from Budapest to Vienna (Baskerville, 2019). Besides, the experiences of universities fleeing Soviet occupation after World War II, such as the Ukrainian Free University, Baltic University in Germany, and the Polish University College in London (Rudnyćkyj, 1949), illustrate the concept of relocating entire academic establishments to maintain a familiar socio-cultural milieu, preserve accrued knowledge, and sustain stable academic networks. This deliberate action underscores the challenges scholars confront, including constrained avenues for homeland engagement and the potential distortion of the exiled scholar's identity, and elucidates their efforts to surmount these obstacles in the new countries.

To understand this practice of collective exile that aims to relocate or re-establish higher education projects (HEPs), I further explore the phenomenon of HEPs through the prism of ‘education in emergencies’ (Burde et al., 2017; Cardozo & Novelli, 2018), aiming to understand the role HEP could play in conflict and post-conflict periods while operating out of the conflict zone. While existing research in this area still primarily focuses on secondary and primary education, the emerging literature on HE has begun to reveal the importance of universities and tertiary sector in peacebuilding, recovery, and resistance in times of conflict and post-conflict periods (Millican, 2017; Milton, 2018; Milton & Barakat, 2016; Pherali & Lewis, 2019). HE institutions started to be given a role in crafting new futures after war (Russell, 2022), and it is recognised to be a key entry point for broader political, economic, and sociocultural change after the conflict (Cardozo & Novelli, 2018). However, the HE contribution to post-war restoration is mainly explored as HE being an entity within conflict space (Millican, 2017; Milton, 2018, 2019, 2021; Milton & Barakat, 2016; Pherali & Lewis, 2019), but not as one temporarily relocated out of conflict. Yet, this phenomenon of HEP relocation could uncover additional aspects of HE engagement in both the restoration and disharmony of the homeland. As a result of this gap, further research questions arise that navigate the paper: how relocated HEPs conceptualise themselves concerning their place of origin in times of conflict and what goals and aims they present to the broader society while being in exile. Exploring HEPs' self-perception provides further insight into the role and place of HEPs in the case of crisis. The following sections cover the theoretical underpinnings that guide this work, followed by the methodology. Finally, the findings present emerging narratives of the HEPs' organisers in the case of Russian emigration after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Future Anticipation Through Exiled Consciousness

Within this paper, ‘relocation’ (*relokacia*) of HE is a specific term that Russian emigrants claimed after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 to mask their status of exiled. The latter encapsulated several aspects of emigration. First, this type of emigration happens involuntarily– one finds oneself in exile due to the inability to be part of the home country or as a form of punishment for dissidents (Ashley & Walker, 1990). Second, exile is perceived as temporary (even though it could last for a whole life), and thirdly, exile is a form of emigration strongly associated with intellectuals and academics (Claussen, 2009; Freire, 2014; McArthur, 2011; Said, 2013). The latter distinguishes ‘exile’ from ‘forced emigration’ and ‘displacement’, which could also lead to diaspora formation. While all three incorporate the meaning of involuntarily leaving (from one place to another), exile is distinguished by the sense of dissidence, the leave due to being opposite (in

most cases – to the homeland politics or regime). On the contrary, both ‘forced emigration’ and ‘displacement’ incorporate the idea of fleeing from external events, whether war, conflict, revolution, or natural disaster (Lindley, 2014). However, all three notions bear “a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future” (Clifford, 1994, p. 304), forming a desire or anticipation of the eventual return “when the time is right” (Ibid, p. 305). Such a longing about coming back to the homeland appears as “the consuming question of return” (Kettler, 2011, p. 208), an organisation based on anticipation of an eventual return to a place of real or mythical origin someday in the future. It is a future-oriented consciousness that influences how exiles navigate in their circumstances and subsequently could affect relocated HEPs' strategies and actions or even prevent any activity entirely. Such a ‘consuming question’ forms quite complex ties between the individual (and the institution one establishes) and their homeland, as in the case of New School (Chopra & Dryden-Peterson, 2020; Durin-Horniyk, 2013; Krohn, 1993), as the latter is a reason of institutional establishment in exile in the first place. Within this study, this contradictory wish to depart while also contemplating a potential return in the future, as described earlier, is referred to as the exiled consciousness.

Those waiting for a return, exiled in diasporas may interact differently with their place of origin while it is in conflict. Their controversial contribution could be both as peace-makers and warmongers, sometimes even simultaneously (Smith & Stares, 2007; Van Hear & Cohen, 2017). Exiled education could also contribute dually; while it could be one of the key means of peace-building (Brinkerhoff, 2011; Dryden-Peterson & Reddick, 2019), it could also undermine development by conflict escalation through perpetuating discrimination, racism, and other stereotypes (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). The HEPs' self-assumed role could be traced in their rhetoric about the anticipated future through the mission and the goals they strive to achieve. Thus, by focusing on self-conceptualization, that is the process of forming, developing, and organising one's own understanding and perception of oneself through actions and beliefs, this study outlines various narratives that could shed light on the connection of relocated HEPs with their homeland in crisis. The following section presents further context that is useful in understanding the specific cases of Russian emigration after 2022.

Context of the Study

This study follows four higher education initiatives ‘relocated’ out of Russia or created in exile by Russian emigrants due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and subsequent persecution of the academy at home. In this section, I will briefly describe the broader picture of Russian higher education in the context of war, then provide some insights on the nature of academic emigration since February 2022 and the subsequent formation of diasporic HE. While crackdowns on higher education had already begun prior to February 2022, the most severe impact occurred following the commencement of a full-scale war. The Russian Ministry of Higher Education and Science (MHES) adopted several strategies of repression and censorship to identify and expel disloyal scientists. One such strategy was monitoring (and potential prosecution) of scientists collaborating with the international academy, demanding the latter to report on any international contacts, as well as mandatory verifying foreign funds (Majer et al., 2023). These restrictions allowed to control scientific work, and in case of disobedience, scholars and scientists could be labelled ‘foreign agents’ (according to the amendments to ‘The Law on Non-Profit Organisations,’ an individual or an organisation that receives foreign funds must be registered as a foreign agent with the Ministry of Justice; such an individual cannot perform teaching activities and would be fired from university). Social and humanities scholars are mainly prosecuted for ideological disloyalty, while natural scientists and mathematics could be prosecuted for high treason, mainly for ‘violating state secrets’ (BBC News Russian Service, 2023).

This leverage, along with overall state repression and censorship, forced scholars to leave the Russian academy en masse. According to various estimates, thousands of academics could have left after the 24th of February 2022, primarily due to politically motivated layoffs, ‘foreign agent’ labelling and/or closure or pressure on faculties or academic teams (Balahonova, 2023; Martov, 2023). Since 2022, at least 2500 scholars have changed their affiliation from a Russian-based

university to a foreign one (Levin, 2024). While some decided to fully integrate into foreign academies (through various assistance and support for fleeing scholars, whether short-term contracts, scholarships or ‘academic-at-risk’ positions), the others decided to relocate as a collective(s). Such a collective relocation appears in two ways: first, as a relocation of the existing institution(s) or its parts and second, as re-establishing the new institution with former colleagues in exile.

This group of newcomers is distinct with a specific feature. While there are emigrants among them who could be considered political refugees, there are many academics and other professionals in education who decided to leave the country as a form of political statement. Such a ‘voluntary leave due to political reasons’ blurs the traditional division between political and economic emigration; as Pilkington (1998) notices, “the split between ‘voluntary’ (economic) and ‘involuntary’ (political) migrants is the first dichotomy which has traditionally shaped migration studies” (p.12). As a result, their identity appears blurred. They are not prosecuted “enough” to justify their viewing themselves as “refugees” or exiles, and yet their move is not motivated by economic reasons or the ambition to build an international career. This ambiguity causes them to adopt alternative terms (such as ‘relocation’ instead of exile) to incorporate their experience. Based on this disturbed identity and considering the peculiarities of academic struggle in exile, the following section presents the study's methodology.

Methodology

Such a disturbed identity appears as a methodological entry point of this study. This study sees identity as personal temporal ‘layers of the self’ (Čapek & Loidolt, 2021, p. 223), which could be explored phenomenologically. Temporality comes as a result of elements of identity like self-image and the constitution of oneself in society undergoing transformations influenced by personal experiences. Through the personal perspective of the HEP organisers, I explore how relocated higher education maintains its ties with homeland and how exiled educators constitute roles for their projects and present these roles both to the broader society and the conflict society in the place of origin. In this section, I first present the cases and then briefly describe data collection and analysis in relation to detailed research questions.

Projects included in the study represent a range of HEPs that vary in their level of institutionalisation (see Table 1), i.e., the process of becoming an embedded part of a society and higher education system. Institutional rules may affect organisational structures and their implementation (Meyer & Rowan, 1977); therefore, institutionalisation aspects reflect how projects understand and present themselves. Three aspects of institutionalisation are taken into account: formalisation, legitimisation, and autonomy. Within the context of this study, formalisation is understood as a level of the organisation's formal structure. According to La Belle (1982), while formal education is embedded into the national educational system, non-formal could be understood as ‘any organised, systematic educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system’ (La Belle, 1982, p. 161). Legitimacy in relation to institutionalisation, as defined by Suchman (1995) is “a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (p. 574). Finally, autonomy represents the organisational relations of an entity with an external system, emphasising self-management, egalitarian, nonhierarchical structures, and consensus-based decision-making (Pruijt & Roggeband, 2014). Within this study, autonomy could provide additional insight into why particular organisational and structural decisions are made within HEPs.

Drawing on publicly available information, cases are presented in terms of their level of institutionalisation to anonymise initiative names and exclude identification and further possible persecution of the HEPs faculty.

Table 1

Projects included in the study and their subsequent level of institutionalisation

	Mode	Established	Formalisation	Legitimacy	Autonomy and Independence
Project №1 (P1)	Online only	August, 2022	non-formal	Recognised as an alternative non-formal space for knowledge, it is not recognised as a formal higher education entity	Fully autonomous as an organisation, however, relies on external funding from donors and sponsors
Project №2 (P2)	Online with further plans to establish in-person (formal) courses	October, 2022	non-formal, but include some formal courses (credit-based)	Recognised as an informal successor of Russian-based faculty, established with the support of host-country/international university	Part of the host university, funded by the host university and complies with the academic framework of the host university
Project №3 (P3)	Started online and then transferred to in-person on campus	September, 2022 (announcement); first course September, 2023	Formal, accredited as a higher education	Recognised as a formal successor of Russian-based faculty, established with the support of host-country university	Accredited as a higher education institution and complies with national frameworks, funded by third-party
Project №4 (P4)	In-person, on campus	spring, 2023 (announcement); first course September, 2023	Formal, accredited as a faculty	Recognised as a higher education faculty by a partnership with a host university and international partnership (academic exchange)	Part of the host university, complies with the academic framework of the host university.

Varied in their level of institutionalisation, these initiatives share two key features: first, they are created as a reaction to the war or due to the war outcome (political repression and/or extreme war censorship towards faculty); and second, being out of the homeland, they still maintain a feasible connection with it, for instance, by teaching prohibited at home topics in Russian and/or attracting students from Russia. It is also worth noting that HEPs emerged in the form of close collaboration between each other and the ‘sharing’ of the lecturers beyond geographical borders; the same scholar could be part of several HEPs. Therefore, they appear as a network of HEPs around the globe, which resembles the transnational diasporic nature of the overall current emigration wave (Kostenko et al., 2023).

This study uses two methods of research: first, phenomenological semi-structured interviews conducted with the leaders of the projects and, second, discursive analysis of the materials that uncover projects’ self-presentation (such as promo materials and open table discussions). While some of the materials could be accessed publicly, within this study, the list of used sources is anonymised (see Table 2) to protect the identity of the projects’ representatives and avoid possible intensifying persecution from the Russian state. Drawing on these two methods, this research uncovers the phenomenological perspective of exiled higher education. It explores how relocated HEPs conceptualise themselves in relation to their place of origin in times of conflict and what goals and aims they present to the broader society while being in exile. To underpin this inquiry, several corresponding research questions are in place:

- What is the key rationale for developing the HEP abroad?
- How does ‘exiled consciousness’ influence the actions and strategies of HEPs?

- What other roles of HEP appear other than the production, curation and dissemination of academic knowledge?

Table 2.

The materials used and interviewees who participated in the study

HEP	Discourse analysis		Interviews
	Type of media	Date of pub	Role
P1	social media post announcing the initiative	15.08.2022	co-founder of the school
	article by one of the faculty about the educational experience in the school	29.03.2023	
	Recording of the interview	25.05.2023	
P2	social media post announcing the initiative		co-founder of the school
	video (discussion) and project presentation ('Open Days')	21.10.2022	
	video presentation of the courses with faculty	27.12.2022	
	publication about the initiative (interview of the founder)	28.10.2022	
	Video discussion on education in exile	3.11.2022	
	Video discussion on education in exile (including P3)	30.08.2023	
P3	Recording from the conference, announcing the project	25.09.2022	member of the working group
	Course descriptions sent to potential students after Open Day (website)		
P4	Call for papers (research grant description with project annotation) (website)		co-director of the Academic Center at the Faculty
	Founder interview about the project	6.07.2023	
	Recording of the project announcement	15.05.2023	
	Official program presentation (website)		

For data analysis, this qualitative study employs conversational discourse analysis (CDA) for the list of materials and thematic analysis (TA) to analyse semi-structured interview transcripts. As a result of CDA, the list of “coherent discourse units” (Biber et al., 2021, p. 20) is formed that represents key ideas and focuses shared by participants. Following CDA, TA presents an inductive ‘thematic map’ (Guest et al., 2011) iteratively constructed after interview analysis.

Triangulating these two data sources via ATLAS.ti and iteratively analysing appeared themes and coherent discourse units, the following section presents core narratives that occur throughout the analysis.

Results

The following section presents the narratives that reflect the motifs, ideas, and goals of HEPs, as well as suggests further conceptualisation of HEP's nature. Results are presented as three separate subsections to reflect various aspects of HEPs' self-conceptualisation: first, as an infrastructural entity ('safe haven'); second, as a space for pragmatic preservation; and third, as a realm of active hope ('hope-making praxis'). The ideas within the sections are attributed to different projects to reflect if and how the institutional level influences their self-conceptualisation. All narratives include quotations from both discourse analysis and interviews incorporated into the text ("*using italics in quotation marks*") to illustrate ideas. All quotes are translated into English from Russian by the author and could be shortened to convey meaning in a written text.

Safe Haven

The first subsection reflects how projects conceptualise themselves and what role they strive to perform and communicate to wider society. First, as the following quotes illustrate, HEPs present themselves as an infrastructural entity that aims to help others, namely, fleeing scholars and students.

We started with mini-courses [...] to give professors who left because of the war the opportunity to continue teaching. (Participant 1)

[To do an accredited degree] is important because it is another part of our mission. We can talk as much as we want about teachers, research, etc., but this is not a university. One of the missions is to help those people [students] in Russia who want to leave. (Participant 2)

Firstly, funding is essential to cover the positions of Russian scholars at risk, who will also teach at this program and in order to provide scholarships to students [from Russia]. (Participant 4)

Depending on their level of institutionalisation, it could be access to knowledge (P1, P2) or more substantial help with positions for scholars (P3, P4), visa assistance for students and scholars (P4), higher education abroad in the Russian language that allows student more smooth integration into European HE (P3, P4). According to HEPs, the latter appears as a substantial barrier for students who want to continue their education abroad, as there is "*poor knowledge of English in Russia*" that limits fleeing students with further options. The organisers strive to assist those in need due to political prosecution or dissent, both fleeing faculty staff and students who want to continue their education abroad, allowing them to keep their professional and/or national identity in international settings. HEPs act as a smoother transition phase, allowing to keep existing achievements in case of forced emigration. Furthermore, scholars' transition and assimilation into new academic environments in the case of forced migration can lead to a perceived erosion of one's professional identity, expressed as a sense of "*dissolution*". In this case, HEPs provide familiar spaces for teaching and learning practice, which allows continuity of one's academic endeavour.

It's difficult to build a career there [in the West], and not everyone, after becoming a professor [in Russia], wants to work as a postdoc on other people's projects. [...] Everyone still wants to preserve their collectives and continue what was good in Russia. (Participant 2)

Besides, HEPs act as places of normalisation, forming informal therapeutic communities, i.e., spaces that promote a sense of belonging and responsible agency (Pearce & Pickard, 2013). While official propaganda at home “gaslights” dissidents, claiming nothing is happening, emigrants form a space of solidarity abroad to express their agency and keep their academic identity. Participation in HEP means a “safe space” of intellectual freedom, where one can name things as they are, being less frightened by the repressions.

[There is] a feeling of complete gaslighting [as if you constantly hear in Russia] ‘nothing has happened, everything is fine, has something happened? Someone left? Was there someone in the first place? we don’t have anyone, everything is just fine, there is no politics, no repressions. (Participant 2)

These roles, both as infrastructural help and as sanctuary, highlight deficiencies in the existing international education framework, where institutions might be out of reach for some students and scholars at risk. While academic and student mobility is understood as something desirable, displacement due to forced emigration highlights the limited abilities of both scholars and students to integrate into the international academia, as the following quote depicts.

It is obvious that no one really needs us [...] no one has made any Western careers. It is clear that some were more integrated into Western academia, others less so, there were publications, but you couldn’t build a career on them. (Participant 2)

This limitation could be considered a pivotal aspect in the formation of diasporic communities, as diaspora refers to the dispersion of a group of people beyond their homeland, united by a common ambition to preserve their initial identity (Clifford, 1994). Hence, HEP serves as a knowledge hub that nurtures the diaspora and may provoke tension within the local host community (“We try to constantly consult with them [with the local educational community] so that all this is appropriate and does not irritate them”). This presents a complex challenge for projects to balance integration and assimilation into the new national/international context while preserving their identity within the new diasporic environment. The subsequent subsection elucidates how fleeing scholars grapple with the consequences of this balancing act by engaging with international higher education institutions and reflecting on their ‘academic heritage’.

Preservation and reconceptualisation

The second subsection illustrates how HEPs strive to preserve and transform their academic practice, which has formed since the 1990s. On the one hand, HEPs are derived from the intent to maintain and perpetuate their schools of thought (“schools of thinking”), which have evolved within several notable organisations. HEPs claim that social science and humanities are basically destroyed at home due to war censorship and repression, and they endeavour to maintain ‘their heritage’—what is left within their fleeing collectives.

I believe that [my institution] has been destroyed, and there has been some kind of raider takeover with its founders’ participation. [What remains] has nothing to do with our traditions. (Participant 2)

Our faculty collapsed, although we had an excellent faculty, and the director [of the faculty] was simply repressed. We decided that we should continue what we were doing there. (Participant 3)

HEPs aspire to save and preserve this heritage through teaching practice and research approaches by re-establishing it abroad—it presents a rationale for relocating existing institutions in the first place, as in the case of P2 and P3. This intent resembles one of the ‘White’ waves of emigration (1917–1921) that was fleeing after the Bolsheviki revolution; as Raëff

(1990) notes, ‘If they remain in exile [...] it was to preserve [...] their notion of what constitutes the genuine Russian culture’ (p. 47). Along with cultural preservation, HEPs work to safeguard the ‘*academic language*’ – the Russian that is used to teach, explore, write, and publish, especially in social science and humanities. While it is impossible at home due to censorship, it should be saved and used outside the country.

It is apparent that this [such programs] is simply impossible to do in Russia now because of the war. (Participant 1)

On the other hand, HEPs seek to engage in the process of sense-making, i.e., analysing the roots of the current catastrophe (namely, the Russian-Ukrainian war). They seek to collaborate closely with international HE (through a partnership with another university, as in the case of P3, or academic exchange, as in the case of P4) to reconceptualise their previous knowledge and experience. Instead of isolation and pure preservation, projects aim to incorporate into the fabric of the international academy (P2, P3, P4) or engage in ongoing public discussion on war in case of less institutionalised projects (P1).

Some [external] influence is good, other traditions and vision –it enriches everything, expands the vision and gives you a wider frame [for research and understanding]. (Participant 3)

This intent allows to overcome ‘exiled consciousness’, as it usually suggests that such preservation is done temporarily till the moment preserved (usually unchanged) ‘can return to build a democratic society in their homeland’ (Bulanova, 2011, p. 177) as in the case of previous mass forced emigration in 1917–1921. Temporality implies a finite duration, suggesting a passive strategy of anticipatory patience, which was very common among the ‘White’ wave. On the contrary, HEPs formulate their role as active and pragmatic; education is perceived as a valuable process in itself and, therefore, worth doing even if “*the beautiful Russia of the future will never come in our lifetime*”.

It’s strange to think that we’ll just hang out somewhere, do something temporary, and then come back, but first of all, no one promised us that we’d come back. We should do what we can now. (Participant 2)

However, while their current learning experience should be studied in more detail, the presented educational approaches and declared content that constitute ‘*heritage*’ appear to be very limitedly reconceptualised and reflect the inherent continuity of their practice. HEPs present previous forms of education as quite successful but failed due to external circumstances (failure of liberal reforms, increasing authoritarianism, conservative resistance, and repressions). For example, one of the approaches that are preserved by fleeing academic collectives is the liberal arts model (P2, P3), which was practised within several institutions. This model appears as a ‘system of higher education designed to foster in students the desire and capacity to learn, think critically, and communicate proficiently, and to prepare them to function as engaged citizens in a democratic state’ (Becker, 2014, p. 17). Therefore, pedagogical and organisational principles of HEPs highlight the necessity to educate active democratic citizens with a broader understanding of the world instead of a narrow vocational focus (i.e., graduate to secure a job). HEPs underline a crucial role of critical thinking that could serve as a basis for decision-making and informed choices after student life, insisting that higher education should prepare students to be multidisciplinary thinkers, sustaining and cultivating democratic virtue that should prevent something similar to the Russian brutal invasion.

We probably have a good education in mathematics, computer science, and physics, but they [graduates] are completely devoid of background, except through personal efforts. Well, what did this lead to— people with right ideas leave [country], others people do what they do, completely ignoring the context. (Participant 1)

Such a focus on the student's personal development (humanistic rationale) opposes two other common narratives about higher education mission in Russia, that is, professional rationale and ideological one, in Smolentseva (2017) terms, economic instrumentalism and social instrumentalism, respectively. However, while the liberal arts model is sustained in a democratic state, it could be very limited in changing the status quo in an authoritarian state, where there is no space for exercising democratic virtues. While HEPs see themselves as a structural reference for future educational reforms that might be useful for “*country restoration in order to prevent anything similar [to the current war]*,” I argue that further, more profound reconceptualisation of preserved educational practice might be beneficial to elaborate educational model more relevant to the existing context in Russia and further post-war restoration.

Another example of limited reconceptualisation could be seen in hierarchical teaching methods used in less institutionalised projects (P1, P2), even if their level of autonomy is relatively high. While some of the programs reflect the idea of horizontal collaboration between peers and co-creation of non-hierarchical knowledge, others perpetuate the ‘banking method’ of teaching, which Freire (2018) describes as “the scope of action that allows students to extend only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits of teachers' knowledge” (p. 58). Such an approach limits potential student transformation as it reflects the idea of enlightened citizens who need to be ‘filled’ with the right content to make rational and thoughtful decisions. Further experimentation with more horizontal and creative educational approaches could provide projects with active instruments of student transformation and create possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge beyond existing narratives. Overall, the ongoing reconceptualisation process seems inconsistent and incomplete, necessitating more concentrated efforts to address irrelevant or detrimental elements in the relocated heritage. Nonetheless, the subsequent section underscores how this pragmatic approach to preservation serves as a beacon of hope, fueling the continued implementation of HEP.

Hope-making praxis

The third subsection reflects on how HEPs try to transform the consciousness of anticipation into the practice of active hope. They do not only dream of returning (“*of course, we all want to get back home*”) but also act towards bringing the desired future, even if it never comes (“*if we do not do something now to achieve the future, then our chances of achieving [it] will be even less*”). Through the process of sense-making and international collaboration, they claim to be focused on the feasible goals and engage with current circumstances, whether or not the situation at home improves and allows them to return.

We are trying not to have mystical connections with Russia, but to take and do what has been done and root it in different places. I think this can be compared to plants that you divide like a bush. Well, yes, it has been separated, and then it somehow continues to work for the better tomorrow. (Participant 2)

Such a future-oriented function presents what Bloch (1995) calls ‘the anticipatory consciousness’, i.e., the human capacity to envision a future that is not yet realised, thereby shaping our actions and aspirations in the present towards that potential future. Such a consciousness is bound with hope, as there is always a gap between the present and ‘Not-Yet’ made future (Hammond, 2017). In the case of HEPs, it could be seen as a *hope-making praxis*, which Freire (2014) and Hooks (2003) describe as a pedagogical practice of faith reflected in concrete action. This practice combines concrete action of societal transformation, *praxis*, intertwined with a hope that this action produces, as hope appears to be a “crucial element of political struggle, especially when the conditions we find ourselves are becoming more authoritarian, morally intolerable,

and politically dangerous” (Giroux, 2022, p. 193). HEPs articulate a certain vision for the future of the homeland (for example, “*an educated European Russia of the future*”) and claim to undertake specific actions towards it (“*we think long-term and invest in the development of humanities and social science while abroad*”), despite a limited future horizon. This process creates hope that this future is possible, working as fuel for further action. As one of the faculty notes during the course presentation, “*It is... so hopeful to be part of {NAME} initiative!*”.

However, the desirable future and conceived image of Russia's restoration should be further scrutinised to explore inherent biases and exclusions that were part of the preserved heritage before forced emigration. Some statements declared by HEP (“democracy,” “human rights,” “active civic engagement”) seem axiomatic yet need further critical inquiry. At the same time, some other narratives are already being rethought. For instance, some HEPs reflect on their appearance within the local community (“*How should we [our new institution] be established here in order to avoid a colonial approach?*”), striving to differentiate themselves from Russian transnational campuses, which are rather seen as a form of colonial power (Chankseliani, 2021) aligned with the state agenda. While this reflection is in progress, further exploration of colonial biases could be undertaken, not only in relation to the new local community but also towards the variety of Russian indigenous people and HEPs accessibility to them. Therefore, a deeper investigation into the imagined future can yield a more intricate comprehension of various hopes engendered within relocated initiatives. Additionally, it could shed light on the individuals and groups systematically excluded from or marginalised within the overarching narrative of futurity.

Conclusion and Discussion

Since the full-scale criminal invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the division within Russian higher education has deepened, prompting thousands of academics to choose emigration, either by necessity or out of a sense of being pushed out. In a bid to maintain elements of the established order and to provide support to departing peers, some of these emigrants have left in the form of fleeing collectives and (re)-established academic and teaching initiatives (higher education projects – HEP). Viewing these initiatives as instances of 'emergency education', albeit relocated out of the conflict zone, this study aims to examine how these projects cultivate a sense of identity closely intertwined with the forsaken homeland. Ranging from informal online courses to comprehensive degree programs, these projects assert various objectives and rationales for their establishment that were presented within this study. First, HEPs’ role transcends mere academic pursuits; they strive to serve as sanctuaries of intellectual freedom and act as reactive support systems for the politically persecuted and those who decided to leave as a statement of anti-war position, reshaping the landscape of international education. Second, departing collectives endeavour to safeguard their legacy encompassing accumulated academic, research, and teaching practices, seeking to replicate it in novel contexts. Despite the inclination towards preservation, the HEPs have taken varied, albeit notably restricted measures to reconsider the exported heritage. Third, their pragmatic position results in active practice; despite an exiled consciousness, that is, hope for a return and expectation of it, HEPs focus on what is feasible here and now. As a result, they foster social transformation through praxis (educative means), which, in turn, is fuelled by hope and simultaneously produces hope for those who find themselves in the intricate dynamics of voluntary exile.

However, further examination of this praxis could be valuable. First, the continuity of the initiatives' practices could be analysed, referencing geographical (‘central’ versus ‘peripheral’) and organisational (private versus state-owned) dimensions. The inherent biases and stereotypes that are unconsciously brought into the newly established learning experience could appear through them. Second, the international influence and global narratives should be studied to understand how the broader context reshapes 'the preserved.' Third, it would be beneficial to trace the discrepancies between the imagined abstract realm of thoughts (desired and declared mission and goals) and the everyday practice of teaching and learning. Exploring these gaps could allow for an understanding of the mechanism(s) of future creation that HEP fosters (or limits). Fourth, due to the ever-changing nature of conflict and its dynamic cycle, further long-term research on the role of

HEPs in relation to the homeland might be beneficial to trace the changing HEPs' self-conceptualisation. Lastly, additional investigation on the broader landscape of international education can delve into deficits of the current status quo that force emigrants to create their own HEPs instead of integrating into the existing academy individually. Besides, the way HEPs reshape this terrain could be a valuable entry point in understanding the geopolitical landscape for future research on collective relocation of higher education out of the conflict zone.

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