

European Universities – Critical Futures
Refugee Access to HE Working Group
April 30, 2021 Webinar

The aim of this webinar series is to open a space for students, practitioners and researchers to engage together in issues related to the inclusion of students with a refugee background into higher education (HE) structures. What brings the participants together is their wish to understand further the dynamics at play, not only the obstacles but also the opportunities in widening access, from multiple perspectives. We believe a diversity of voices should be heard to support the idea that higher education can provide a range of answers and opportunities for people undergoing forced migration in all their diversity; and to support further action to improve access to HE.

In this 7th session of our webinar series, our guests were Céline Cantat, Sciences Po, France, Ian Cook, Open Learning Initiative, Budapest, and Prof. Prem Kumar Rajaram, Central European University, Budapest & Vienna.

The link to the recorded webinar is here:

https://zoom.us/rec/share/yHolxtQIUIMkmjR_vm1MpfPr73osOqSU0O5M9PpKKGVBtIdY8FjimsyD0iDmCdRu.sU3Im2uYcWIsWRIK
Passcode: X6C=b%Tm

Céline Cantat is a research fellow at CERI, Sciences Po, as part of H2020 MAGYC which looks at crises and the government of mobilities. She previously conducted research into solidarity and activism by and for migrants along the Balkan route as part of Marie Curie fellowship at CEU in Budapest. Céline gained a PhD in Refugee studies from UEL with a thesis looking at mobilisation against borders and in support of migrants in different EU member states.

Ian M. Cook directs the Open Learning Initiative's Weekend Programme in Budapest. An anthropologist working primarily on cities, digital media, environmental justice and doing academia differently, he has published work on small cities, housing, vigilantism, land, environmental injustice and podcasting.

Prem Kumar Rajaram is Professor of Sociology & Social Anthropology at Central European University in Budapest and Vienna. His research is on the inter-relations of capitalism, race and displacement, and on critical approaches to teaching and learning.

Opening Up the University: Teaching and Learning with Refugees

The talk presented some of the ideas from a forthcoming edited volume – *Opening Up the University: Teaching and Learning with Refugees*. People called 'refugees' are particularly marginalised when it comes to access to higher education. Thinking about academic institutions – their structures, contents and boundaries – from the perspective of the exclusions they

generate, and the experience of displaced students more specifically, teaches us a lot about the relation of universities to broader social, economic and political constellations. In the presentation, the speakers talked and they focused on a few chapters that deal with specific instances of opening up.

Prem Kumar Rajaram opened the webinar by presenting some of the key themes of the book - academic displacements, re-learning teaching and debordering the university.

According to him, opening up the university is to call into question :

- how higher education has been institutionalized in ways that serve larger projects of political and economic power and domination
- how this leads to the exclusion or marginalization of certain populations from the university through pedagogic practices and institutional structures that reinforce and solidify historically contingent expressions of the relationship between knowledge production and publics.

Therefore, not studying refugee access to higher education in isolation is crucial.

The university is a site where the historically contingent relationship between knowledge, higher education and publics materialises and that, in its current form in Europe and elsewhere, this relationship has led to a narrowing of the university.

It is narrowed by Eurocentric epistemologies and pedagogies that ignore imperial colonial histories and patriarchal occlusions, by an increasingly marketized understanding of higher education as 'sector of the economy', and by its focus on the individualised careers of teachers and students.

University access and exclusion are experienced, challenged and reworked across at least three different scales: 1) in the classroom; 2) in programmes and institutions; and 3) at the level of the wider social formation. It is therefore useful to rethink the borders of the university in terms of the broader struggles and messy social inequalities and power structures, and to address the common marginalisations of people called refugees and others who are marginalised in the university

In particular, observing who gets into universities at any given time and place tells us what types of people and subjectivities are valued and perceptible and which are not. It highlights the narrowing of the purposes of the university: the cultivation of individualised life projects that serve national and capitalist projects.

Actually, the way entry to higher education is governed makes it open and welcoming to some, yet it imposes an obligation to adapt on more than a few, while outrightly excluding others. These borders apply not only to who is accepted to university, but also what types of knowledge production and curricula are made canonical, what types are tolerated, and what types are entirely dismissed. We see the effects of bordering practices in how value and meaning (positive and negative) are cast on students, knowledge and institutional rules.

Ian Cook then presented three proposals for opening up the university.

- **Create education programmes for learners** by rejecting humanitarian frames of 'helping' or 'saving' 'refugees', recognising learner needs, and building relationships of solidarity
- **Allow for disruptive education:** 'Refugee students' should not be seen as meek, mild grateful receptacles of western knowledge or objects of study; we should strive to develop flexible approaches to learning with and through the diversity of student's skills, experience, knowledge and potential (more on this later...), and value teaching.
- **Defund the university management:** University senior managers are paid too much and there are too many of them; at a bare minimum they should justify high wages by defending academic freedom (but they often don't); complex programmes for displaced learners cost money.

He also shared two innovative projects to take up these proposals further:

Experts by Experience: The Scope and Limits of Collaborative Pedagogy with Marginalized Asylum Seekers by *Rubina Jasani, Jack López, Yamusu Nyang, Angie Deoparsad, Dudu Mango, Rudo Mwoyoweshumba & Shamim Afhsan*

'Can We Think about how to Improve the World?' Designing Curricula with Refugee Students by *Mwenzu Blell with Josie McLellan, Richard Pettigrew & Tom Sperlinger*