

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 6th session of our webinar series, our two guests were Ester Gallo, Trento University, and Ian M. Cook, Open Learning Initiative, Budapest.

The link to the recorded webinar is here:

<https://zoom.us/rec/share/I3tKRSLebQ6aRtSmdXTUhUhlmlY0AyVs7C-RvejO6Rq9Qhv9bzd9FZ7SCR0mj093.Os0NUehHtp9GiDcP>
Passcode: ?%@sZ4gT

Ester Gallo is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Trento, Department of Sociology and Social Research. She works on migration, gender and religion, and on colonial history, memory and class inequality with reference to South Asia and Southern Europe. She has edited *Migration and Religion in Europe: Comparative Perspectives on South Asian Experiences* (Routledge, 2016). She is the author of *The Fall of the Gods: Kinship, Memory and Middle Classes in South India* (Oxford University Press, 2017). She co-authored with Francesca Scrinzi *Migrant Men, Masculinities and Reproductive Labour: Men of the Home* (Palgrave MacMillan 2016). Since 2018 she has been working on academic freedom and displaced scholars, and coordinates the protection program at the University of Trento as well as Scholars at Risk-Italy.

Her contribution, entitled "**Displaced Scholars: Protection as a Transformative Scientific Inclusion**," is summarized below.

Since 2015, many universities in Europe have confronted with the growing request of assistance by scholars who have to flee from their countries due to civil war and/or persecutions. Forced migration undermines scholars' possibility of being part of a university community. Relocation is not only about reducing the 'original risk': it raises the question of establishing fruitful relationships, engaging in socially meaningful transactions, and familiarizing with the norms, values and traditions that marks receiving scientific communities.

In her talk, she drew from the recent experience of the university of Trento with two 'at risk' scholars from the Middle-East and from Central Africa. She discussed the meanings - and

challenges - of protection as scientific inclusion in the field of social science teaching programs and of nutrigenomics laboratory research.

Ester Gallo reflected on the fact that protection that receiving HE communities are able to provide inevitably addresses the question of academic freedom as a two-faced concept. Protection involves the *negative dimension of freedom*, and specifically the removal of obstacles that impede free intellectual enterprises. Yet it also addresses the important dimension of *positive freedom*: the possibility to enter actively into a community of scholars and students, to further the ends of scientific inquiry and teachings by setting a dialogue that, ideally, transforms both ends.

Protection, therefore, also becomes a matter of scientific inclusions towards a renewed pluralism in the curricula and in research orientations. Displaced scholars bring with them experiences and perspectives that may be unfamiliar, at odds, or distant from the academic culture and orientation of a university, which is inevitably *also* embedded in specific territorial and intellectual traditions.

To what extent is a university able – or willing – to engage with internal changes actively brought about by displaced scholars? Ester Gallo suggested that focusing only on the negative dimension of freedom risks reproducing a patronizing image of receiving institutions as ‘liberal savior’. And that the key future challenge is the development of long-term inclusive strategies that are able to valorize scholar’s scientific contribution towards a renewed pluralism in higher educational territory.

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. He is co-editor (with Céline Cantat and Prem Kumar Rajaram) of the forthcoming book *Opening Up the University: Teaching and Learning with Refugees*

His contribution, entitled "**Openings through Teaching / Teaching through Openings: Relationships, Expectations and Adaptability within a University Access Programme**," is summarized below.

Ian Cook’s presentation offered some initial reflections on personal teaching experiences and interviews with 13 teachers from the OLIve Weekend Programme in Budapest, Hungary, an education access initiative associated with the Central European University. The programme aims to create a safe and inclusive learning space within a university setting for people who have experienced displacement, including asylum seekers and those with refugee status.

Its courses focus on academic knowledge, activist or advocacy knowhow, language learning, and careers abilities. Students gain practical and transferable skills through these courses, but

at the same time they develop the confidence and social capital needed if they are to participate in public life and knowledge production.

How does teaching unfold within such a setting? Ian Cook argued for 1) a heightened awareness of the relationships within the classroom; 2) continuously evolving expectations, goals and aims on all sides; and 3) extreme adaptability within the syllabus and teaching style. This entails a role for the teacher where she draws on her expertise whilst also moderating the knowledge and the experience that is present in class. Essentially a teaching that both seeks and creates openings.