CHAPTER 5

The Politics of University Access and Refugee Higher Education Programmes

Can the Contemporary University Be Opened?

CÉLINE CANTAT

Opening Up the University to Displaced Students?

In recent years, a number of access or bridge programmes aimed at students who have experienced displacement have been established in Europe. While often anchored in the problematic and exceptionalising discourse of a 'migration crisis', such programmes also attempt to respond to a number of unfavourable circumstances faced by displaced students. In addition to financial support, they usually consist of a set of interventions aimed at developing students' linguistic and academic skills, helping them identify their discipline and academic programme of interest and providing support with applications for degrees and funding. As illustrated in this volume, these programmes have taken many forms and mobilised different pedagogies, philosophies and ethos of inclusion and participation. They are also embedded in different types of higher education institutions and systems, which leads to a range of arrangements, objectives and relations to the broader structures of the university.

An important aspect of these programmes is that they are usually concerned not only with the 'moment' of entry (formal acceptance into a university programme) but also with the hierarchies and inequalities in processes of learning, teaching, socialising and knowledge production in the space of the university – which may or may not be explicitly recognised as related to factors of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion and positionality more broadly. In this sense, they could be thought of as sites from which new struggles around closures and openings in and at the margins of the university are being conceptualised and enacted. Yet multiple discussions and formal interviews with colleagues and

This chapter is from Opening Up the University edited by Céline Cantat, Ian M. Cook, and Prem Kumar Rajaram
https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. It is available open access under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license
thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. Not for resale.

students involved in related initiatives, as well as my own experience as instructor and academic coordinator in CEU's OLIve programmes, indicate that those are located in a space of tensions and perhaps contradictions. Being geared towards the facilitation of entry into existing structures, they heavily focus on preparing and equipping students in order for them to fit into the norms of behaviours (e.g. how to interact, speak, raise questions and carry one's self in the university) and knowledge (e.g. what is legitimate theory and what rather is seen as merely particular or anecdotical; what forms and epistemologies may conceptual knowledge adopt and so on). Besides, though often exhibited by university administrators on their websites and recruitment booklets, access programmes for displaced students constantly face institutional obstacles and disempowering dynamics inside universities, relegating them to the margins of institutions.

This has, of course, an impact on students themselves; in many cases, as they leave the relatively sheltered units preparing them for degree programmes, they are confronted with university structures and behaviours that have remained unchanged and broadly exclusionary. They might feel intimidated and underrated, like they do not belong or like their specific background and experience are less valued than those of mainstream students from dominant social groups (Aparna et al., this volume; Al Hussein and Mangeni, this volume). In other words, while those working and studying within them may dream of reforming the university, various structural and institutional limits mean that the possibilities for access programmes to propel transformative dynamics and social change remain questionable.

In this chapter, I take interest in two main points: the understandings of access and inclusion that such programmes put forward, and whether a more comprehensive conceptualisation of access can become a starting point to push forward progressive openings of the university and its boundaries. In the first part, I explore the politics of access to higher education in a historical perspective in order to illustrate its connections to (raced, classed, gendered, religion- and sexuality-based) valuations that exist outside the university and to the reproduction of the dominant social order. In the second part, I examine how such politics of access have also been contested and appropriated through a range of struggles focused on challenging the boundaries and contours of higher education institutions and systems, and reflect on some of the issues met by such mobilisations against the historical organisation of the university. With this background in mind, in the third part, I critically reflect on the tensions that come with the institutionalisation of access

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

programmes for displaced learners based on my own experiences and discussions with students and colleagues.

I use empirical examples from three access programmes I engaged or worked with, one in a public, non-elite university in the suburbs of Paris, one in a private and elite American-Hungarian university in Budapest, and one in a public, elite institution in central Paris. While I was a volunteer and subsequently a paid staff member in the Budapest-based programme for several years, my relationship to the two access programmes in France was more distant. In one case, I was mostly connected to the students through my involvement in Syria- and migration-related activism. In the other case, I was employed as a researcher in the university where the programme was being run, and I approached the institution with the intention of working together. Based on these experiences, I examine how transformative processes that aim at progressively reforming the university intersect with and confront deep-seated logics of competition and elitism (Cook, this volume) as well as with other types of transformations that push forward closures, in particular the growing dismantlement of ideas of the universities as a public good and state attacks against critical knowledge (Ivancheva, this volume; Safta-Zecheria, this volume). Ultimately, based on the examples of these programmes, the chapter illustrates the embeddedness of higher education's structures and contents in the historical evolution of the university as an establishment for the reproduction of classed, gendered, racialised social relations and argues that attempts at radically opening the university must constantly push forwards understandings of inclusion that feature both effective access and equal participation within the walls of the university.

Historicising the Politics of University Access and Knowledge Production

Since the opening of the first universities, the issue of who can access them and under which circumstances has been a central concern of actors both internal and external to the university. The politics of access across space and time reflect and are embedded in changing social structures and dominant understandings of who constitutes politically legitimate and socially valued groups in different contexts. In this sense, historicising access demands scrutinising the connection between changing paradigms of in/exclusion in higher education, and broad historical shifts that reconfigure political structures and their relation to different publics. Student selection reflects which socio-political

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks
to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

subjects are valued, not solely by educational institutions, but by the broader system and social hierarchies within which these institutions exist. This selection also reflects the needs of rulers for administrating their territories, governing their population and for differentially associating social groups with specific characteristics. As we will see below through a series of examples, universities have also been subjected to conflicting ideologies and, at various points in time, their control has represented an important battlefield for opposing actors, for instance religious authorities versus state sovereignty. Observing who can and who does access university therefore tells us a lot about any particular social and political architecture.

Here, I draw largely on Clancy and Goastellec's comparative study of university access (2007), which identifies three key organising rationales of access policy over time: inherited merit, equality of rights and equality of opportunity. The authors present these rationales as successive over time, while it rather seems to me that these different logics may also coexist, targeting differently various social groups and taking changing shapes across the (European) education landscape, based on different local traditions and histories of the university. All in all, this section historicises and contextualises university access in order to demonstrate how access connects to broader politics of social organisation and valuation. This background is thus necessary for providing further guidance on the question of how displaced people are currently engaged with in higher education institutions.

The first broad organising principle identified by Clancy and Goastellec is that of 'inherited merit', which governed access in the medieval and so-called early modern university. While students were selected academically, they nonetheless had to belong to specific social groups and categories in order to be considered in the first place. In western Europe, university access was opened almost exclusively to males from upper-class backgrounds living in urban areas. Merit-based selection was thus practised, but included only students belonging to the dominant groups in society. Since the specific features of privileged groups vary across social organisations, historical periods and geographical contexts, the social identity of those gaining access to universities was contingent on particular configurations. Yet the reproduction of social and economic elites, and associated hierarchies, was a key function and organising factor of the early university.

Beyond the socio-economic background of potential students, a range of other factors also determined who could enter sites of higher learning. As demonstrated by Goastellec (2019) in her history of wom-

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

en's access to the university, those factors were determined through the confrontation between different forms of authorities and ideologies. Goastellec shows how, between the fourth and seventh centuries, women from the local elites across western Europe had been able to access learning and education, in particular by entering (in fact sometimes establishing) double monasteries: monastic communities made up of both men and women within which learning was central. The author then shows how the gradual assertion of papal authority meant that, by the time the first universities were opened in this part of the world, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a 'world without women' had been imposed. Double monasteries had been forbidden already in the eighth and ninth centuries and if, for some time, distance from royal and religious powers had allowed local aristocracies to perpetuate social arrangements involving women, the consolidation of central authorities eventually made this impossible. Therefore, with few exceptions, from their opening until the nineteenth century, universities and faculties in western Europe excluded women.

Outside Europe, many of the early 'modern' universities were similarly opened to serve the children of dominant groups. In South Africa, the first colleges were built to educate the children of British migrants while, in Indonesia, the first faculties were created by the Dutch in order to provide access to children from both the colonial and the local elite that cooperated with the colonisers (Clancy and Goastellec 2007). In their review of the educational policies of Spain and the English in Mexico and India, respectively, González and Hsu (2014) show that in colonies in which the native population outnumbered European colonisers, and where colonisation thus crucially relied on native cooperation, the education of native elites was seen as an integral part of imperial enterprise.

One of the primary roles of the university has indeed been to produce individuals able to administer the state and contribute to its economy. In such colonial contexts, this was premised on a narrative that saw educating natives as necessary in order to make them understand the new political, moral and economic landscape of colonialism. Importantly, this also foreclosed the possibility of native knowledges, seen as inadequate for dealing with 'modernity'. Higher education was thus closely connected to the civilising and proselyte dimensions of imperial endeavours. For instance, in India, several universities such as the University of Calcutta, the University of Bombay and the University of Madras (opened in 1857), and the University of the Punjab (1882) and the University of Allahabad (1887), were set up following a recom-

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks
to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

mendation from the President of the Board of Control of the East India Company (EIC), in order to 'enhance the moral character of Indians and thus supply EIC with civil servants who can be trusted'.[1] The relation between access and knowledge production was thus at the heart of the politics of inclusion within higher education, while these early examples of internationalised higher education endeavours also highlight the close relationship between the state and capital at play in the establishment of higher learning institutions.

In contrast, in the context of settler colonialism, González and Hsu (2014) show that in countries such as the USA, where white settlers displaced the native populations and carried out the work of the colonies themselves (or by importing labour through slavery), the first colleges were catering exclusively to the offspring of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant community. It is also interesting to observe how, at the individual level, participation in higher education could be seen as a means or an attempt to subvert dominant regimes of citizenship. In his study of indigenous elites in colonial Mexico, for instance, Villella notes that holding a university degree 'indicated something more than mere education' for members of the local elite: it was a quality that 'transcended ethnicity' (2012: 12) and a means to circumvent colonial hierarchies based on racial stratification. In this sense, university education can be both a result of and a tool towards the acquisition of broader participation rights. Yet politics of knowledge production and participation remained embedded in larger social and political norms to the extent that status acquired through learning would often run up against embedded racisms that obstructed equity, and foreclosed certain modes of knowing and seeing the world.

One important exception in settler colonial contexts were historically Black colleges and universities in the USA, institutions of higher education established primarily in the years after the American Civil War and before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, often with the support of religious missionary organisations, and with the intention of serving the African American community. At the time, especially in the segregated south, the majority of higher education institutions were white and completely excluded African Americans or used quotas to limit their admission. These colleges thus offered the only higher education opportunity for Black students, and they were often characterised by the engagement of Black teachers for whom imparting knowledge and skills to Black youth was seen as a political statement (hooks 1994). Related to our topic here, an important episode concerns the fact that those historically Black institutions were among the only ones to hire Jewish refugee ac-

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks
to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

ademics (both men and women!) fleeing Nazi Germany and who had arrived in the USA in the 1930s (Jewell 2002; see also Edgcomb 1993), thereby setting an early tradition of sanctuary academia.

Inscribing Access in Rights: Mass Education and the Limits of Formal Inclusion

The second broad organising principle of access policy identified by Clancy and Goastellec is the norm of 'equality of rights'. Broadly speaking, this rationale emerged with the rise of the nation-state and consolidated as part of the welfare state project – meaning, in western Europe, particularly in the period following the end of the Second World War. It is based on the belief that higher education should be accessible to larger numbers and be inclusive of individuals regardless of their social origin. It is seen as a public good that benefits both the individual and society: the state is seen as responsible for expanding access to the broadest spectrum of students, including those from under-represented groups. This, of course, was in no way an exclusively western European process. For instance, during the same period, in eastern Europe, nationalisation coupled with communism also promised to guarantee equal access to education in ways that can be seen as more extensive and encouraged multiple academic and student exchanges with the global south and non-aligned countries, thereby effectively opening up the university to different groups. This idea of the university as a public good draws on its gradual opening over the course of the nineteenth century, in the context of the solidification of the (capitalist) nation-state and of the emergence of a series of nation-building institutions. The university is considered as having a role to play in the construction of a sense of national belonging and loyalty. As noted by Kwiek (2005: 331), 'with the rise of the nation-state, the university was set at the apex of institutions defining national identity'. The university therefore functions in close association with state power, and its role in relation to the public sphere is mediated by the dominant political project of the nation-state. In this context, the issues of the responsibilities of the institution and the boundaries of the student body are resolved by their insertion within the broader project of the nation-state. The 'nationalisation' of higher education (Neave 2001; Kwiek 2005) was also connected to the nationalisation of scholars: the introduction of civil servant status for academics hence contributed 'to impress firmly upon the consciousness of academia its role as an emanation of the national wisdom and genius, creativity and interest' (Neave 2001: 30).

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks
to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

This nationalisation was also reflected in the development of centralised procedures and patterns of validation and certification of academic competencies and education. These differ from country to country and reflect varying ways in which knowledge is valued and assessed.

In western Europe, this set the context for a massification of access in the period following the Second World War. While the process was also shaped by economic motives and demographic needs (e.g. the production of particular types of labour), it should be understood in relation to a specific moment of capitalism marked by the rise of the welfare state and particular ideas of its responsibilities. The idea of the university as a public good opened up space for more radical political and ideological agendas concerned with social inclusion and equality. Those translated into calls for more equity, including by requesting that university systems and students/employees better reflect the diversity of societies. Those calls were also framed as a matter of democratic legitimacy for the state.

It is in part such arguments that were mobilised in struggles to secure women's participation in higher education. As of the 1870s, an increasing number of systems around the world started granting women the right to study, graduate and teach. At later stages, the norm of equality of rights – and struggles to achieve it – were also invoked to remove formal barriers to other social groups that had been preventing access to university on the basis of race, ethnicity or religion. It is important to highlight the conflictual and combative aspects of the opening up of the university. For instance, in the USA, it was not until 1954 and the *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* decision by the United States Supreme Court case that racial segregation in state-supported graduate education was prohibited so that Black students could formally access all public higher education institutions. This decision followed a series of legal struggles started two decades earlier by African American scholars and activists who helped plaintiffs bring lawsuits against segregated school systems in the name of equal rights.

However, equality of rights as an organising principle around access places an unexamined notion of merit as the sole factor of student selection. In theory, there is now equality of access because formal barriers on the basis of gender, race and class have been officially removed. However, 'merit' is defined in relation to students' ability to acquire certain (dominant) norms, knowledges and resources, and is understood as an individual process. The notion is also premised on specific moral values and particular ideas of success, which people have to work towards in order to be seen as having merited their inclusion into

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

university systems. The existence of social hierarchies that define what constitutes desirable knowledge, skills and norms away from underprivileged groups, and the persistence of social inequalities which in turn shape how much students may access such competencies, are not taken into account. Ideas of merit are in fact premised on certain representations of normalcy and desirable outcomes that reflect the experience and features of particular (privileged) socio-economic groups. In other words, if left unexamined, the notion of merit ends up privileging those students who already have access to enhanced social, economic and cultural capital. Therefore, meritocracy often ends up reproducing dominant social hierarchies while concealing the deeply unequal basis on which access politics operate. In other words, certain notions of merit that in fact favour more privileged groups are one of the points of crystallisation of the tensions and conflicts between the structures of higher education and attempts to open up its boundaries.

Moreover, in a context of increased participation, inequalities in higher education also took on a different form as discriminatory ideas of merit became networked into unequal education systems. In particular, diversification and hierarchisation along disciplinary, institutional and sectoral lines has meant that there is a growing degree of stratification within higher education systems. In France, for instance, the public university system exists in parallel to a highly competitive system of *classes préparatoires* and *grandes écoles*, which to this day is recruiting students among the most privileged social strata in order to train them for upper-level positions in the public and private sectors. These hierarchies exist both between and within the higher education institutions and academic disciplines (Donmez 2020). Therefore, even though access was formally democratised, inequality in relation to higher education became reconfigured in terms of the type of education access granted to different individuals and social groups. Inequality is thus reproduced through various mechanisms, which also include the development of a private sector only available to the wealthiest social layers or institutional stratification where elite universities continue to recruit students from the most privileged social backgrounds. Over the last two decades, these processes have been further encouraged through the intensification of competition within academia, premised on a culture of academic auditing and ranking where all tasks and outputs are increasingly quantified and assessed, with the view of classifying institutions and academics in relation to one another (Cook, this volume). Again, this shows that the politics of access do not solely revolve around the issue of admission, but also involve a range of nuances and dynamics

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

pertaining to the kind of education and knowledge students can engage with, and their possibility to shape and define those. In other words, thinking through these issues shows the embeddedness of structures that make the project of opening up the university extremely difficult.

In *Teaching to Transgress,* bell hooks (1994) proposes a disturbing account of desegregation. She recalls the combative and caring spirit of the segregated high school she attended, where Black teachers imparted a sense of pride into their students. In contrast, she remembers her shock when she entered a desegregated, highly racist and white higher education institution, where she felt like an intruder and where teachers treated her as someone to be adjusted (hooks 1994). This less celebratory account of desegregation powerfully interrogates the limits of the university as an institution, its embeddedness in structures of domination, and the way in which classrooms can become sites for the reproduction and reassertion of social (racial, gendered, class. . .) hierarchies. It illustrates how these structures lead to the normalisation of certain types of pedagogies that can be exclusionary and geared towards reproducing certain hierarchies.

Beyond Formal Access: Rethinking Inclusion, Equality and Equity

In this context, Clancy and Goastellec identify a third governing rationale of university access, that was pushed forward by various groups at the internal or external margins of university in order to respond to and rectify some of the shortcomings of formal equality. According to the authors, the principle of 'equity' emerges from the recognition that formal opportunity of rights does not suffice to prevent social inequalities being reproduced within the university. Therefore, it emerges from a critical assessment of the notions of merit as used in mainstream meritocratic discourses, which calls for interventions aimed at redressing existing inequalities in order to effectively widen access to students from more marginalised groups. This has been done, for instance, through a redefinition of merit that accounts for students' positions in social structures, contextualises school results obtained prior to seeking university entry, and focuses on students' potential and expected benefits from higher education, rather than merely their projected individual ability to obtain a high-class degree (Clancy and Goastellec 2007). In turn, these considerations have led some institutions to design alternative admission paths or to implement access programmes.

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

These strategies of widening access have been, in many cases, mobilised by prestigious institutions, traditionally tasked with the training of national elites, in order to widen their student body, often following an understanding of the role of prestigious universities as cultivators of individual talents, regardless of background. However, although there is a growing consensus around the need for such affirmative actions, national traditions of elite formation, structures and modes of recruitment in public higher education systems, and dominant understandings of social inequalities, contribute to determining to a great extent the shape, extent, structure and availability of such interventions across contexts.

While they may be extremely important and beneficial at the individual level, generally speaking, these strategies do not fundamentally challenge broader structures, nor do they question in deeper ways how universities participate in reproducing inequalities through filtering access in certain ways, and through their knowledge positions and pedagogies. Rather, they are often intended to bring people into the structures of power while downplaying or limiting their capacity to change those structures.

This short and non-comprehensive overview has attempted to show that university access is crucially embedded in larger processes that prop up the structures of higher education by connecting it to the reproduction of a dominant social order and normalising its inequalities. Notions such as that of merit used in a naturalising way (e.g. people either have or do not have skills and talents at the individual level that allow them to succeed at school and university, and these are seen as disconnected from material conditions) are in turn put at the service of an exclusionary vision of higher education. I have also attempted to illustrate some of the tensions and potential contradictions that may emerge from struggles around enlarging access and opening up the university. I now turn to reflecting on the access programmes I have experienced in order to reflect on the possibilities and limits they come across as they try to navigate this dense field of possibilities and limitations.

Can Access Programmes to Higher Education Open Up the University?

I now draw more directly on my own experiences as teacher and academic coordinator in access programmes for displaced students in Budapest, and as an individual whose research, academic and activist

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks
to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

work centres on migrants' and education rights. Through these experiences and interests, I have developed overall knowledge of the workings of access programmes for displaced students in different European contexts. On the basis of my professional and political activities, and of my broader research into such programmes, I present below reflections on three preparatory programmes. These reflections do not have any pretension to exhaustivity. Rather, they point to a number of tensions and possibilities which I have identified as of importance when thinking about and working around higher education and displacement. My relationship to and involvement in these three programmes vary: in one case, I was involved indirectly in a programme as it involved people I work with in the general field of migrants' rights and migration-related activism; in another case, I worked in shaping, developing and running a full-time preparatory programme; and, in a third case, I was tasked with investigating the details of an existing programme with a view to incorporating them into a consortium focused on providing access to university for refugees. The insights I develop below aim to help us examine the way in which such programmes interact, challenge or at times reproduce the complex dynamics and politics around access I have attempted to describe above.

These insights do not pretend to provide a definitive answer to the question of whether the university may or may not be 'opened up' through the inclusion of socially marginalised students – and those who experienced displacement in particular. Besides the fact that inclusion can be tokenistic or differentiated, as mentioned, it also seems to me that such openings always remain unfinished and continuous processes. As structures, relations and contents that exist in evolving socio-political contexts, universities are always in motion as they are shaped by a range of broader developments. In recent decades, for instance, what has been called the neoliberal project and characterised by a situated yet connected series of dismantlement and privatisation of public services has had a key influence on the structures, role, content and working conditions in universities. What I attempt to do, rather, through a series of vignettes based on access programmes I have encountered, is to sketch out some of the issues and possibilities that emerge as we set out to run programmes enlarging university access for displaced students, and see how these impact on the question of the opening up of higher education in a broad sense.

The first 'refugee access programme' I was involved in was launched in France in early 2016. It was primarily offering language classes, in a public university located in the northeast suburbs of Paris. The stated

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

aim was that, once students reach a good command of the language, they would be able to join study tracks at the university (for a critique of certain approaches to language learning, see Burke, this volume). The limited financial means were somewhat counterbalanced by enthusiastic instructors and a combative identity based in the local working-class and migration-related history. Being open to those displaced and dispossessed by global processes and local structures was seen as an integral part of the identity of this left-leaning, critical institution, with roots in student protests and experimental pedagogies.[2] Moreover, the history of exile characterising this part of the Parisian suburbs was evoked as providing a particularly fertile ground for the initiative, whereby mutual understanding between local and displaced students was seen as more instinctive than it would have been in other institutions.[3] Prospective students in the programme also shared this impression, and explained how they appreciated 'not feeling like absolute outsiders here' and, as put by a Syrian friend, 'kind of not sticking out'.[4]

My presence was connected to my involvement in migration solidarity circles and my close relationships with several of the people who had been selected as students. In later conversations, the framework put forward by students to explain their ease was one of intersectionality, whereby the working-class feeling and the presence of Black and Arab students provided a frame for identification and belonging for many. This testifies to the situated and political nature of access, as an experience at the intersection of structural and interpersonal relations and shaped by a number of hierarchies. However, students in the access programme still felt that they had to account for their university interactions in terms that other students, albeit from working-class or migration-related backgrounds, did not. Their narrative insisted on shades of belonging, on questions around the legitimacy of their presence, and on a relation that remained premised on forms of hospitality rather than rights.

I left France a few weeks after the programme first started. By then, a series of strikes and occupations had begun in opposition to a proposed reform of the French labour code, and students of the university had mobilised in support of the social movement. Many of the students from the language programme had joined in the protests and several reported that this common political experience broke down further barriers and produced new grounds for identification. What is perhaps important to highlight, then, is that in contexts where the university retains a public and political role as a space of mobilisation, different transformative horizons sometimes can become imaginable.

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks
to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

Ultimately, the students' experiences of the programme were shaped by the intersection of two converse understandings not solely of university but also of the state, its institutions, and its relation to a broader public. On the one hand, the commitment to a free, public higher education system, which should be accessible to all and function as a means for social change, produced an inclusive environment, where students interacted with peers from a range of backgrounds and felt 'not like outsiders'. While the concrete realisation of equity still met challenges, the feeling that there was a principled dedication to offer equal opportunities was reported by many students in discussions. On the other hand, the unfolding of the programme encountered a social movement that emerged in response to attempts at further neoliberalising the French labour market, through a law that is part of a wide set of measures trying to reshape the French state and its public responsibilities and roles. In this sense, the programme and its students were affected by the exclusionary tendencies that come with the broader neoliberal project of successive French governments, premised on a reduction of public budgets and a shrinking of university resources, which make the effective possibility of inclusion and equity ever slimmer. In sum, this first programme is a striking illustration of the difficulty of setting a genuine social agenda for higher education under conditions of neoliberalism.

I came to explore this issue from a different angle later that same year. In the spring of 2016, I started teaching an academic skills class as a volunteer instructor in the OLIve weekend programme. I had recently moved to Budapest and started working at CEU, a private university established in 1991 with the mission of 'building open and democratic societies' through providing fully funded academic training to the region's youth. By the time I joined, CEU was undergoing intensive transformations, including a process of internationalisation but also a questioning of its 'social' model in favour of a more heavily fee-paying system. These ongoing dynamics were further exacerbated by political attacks against the institution on the part of the Hungarian authorities.

I became involved as the programme was entering its second term, and welcoming new students among its cohort. On the opening day of the new session, some of the academics and administrators involved in creating and running the programme greeted the students, old and new, and insisted on the sense of community, friendship and mutual learning that had characterised the first term of the programme and that they hoped would continue in this new session. OLIve also started in a grassroots manner through the mobilisation of members of the university during their time off and in a volunteer fashion, but was taking

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

place in a private, privileged, English-speaking institution in Budapest. Its politics were less rooted in an intersectional approach to the common positionalities of would-be students and members of the university; it nonetheless insisted on notions of participation, comradeship and equality.

Ten months later, we launched another access programme (a full-time version of the original course), for which I was appointed as a salaried academic coordinator, and which had received funding from the European Commission and the Open Society Foundation. In this position, I had frequent (direct or mediated) interactions with the university's administration and was to an extent dependent on their understanding of our work. What became clear through multiple episodes during which the scope and goals of our programme were being discussed was that, for senior managers, the focus was not on refugee education as a political commitment to further equality, but rather on the programme allowing the 'brightest' to fulfil their own individual talents through their inclusion within the ranks of this prestigious institution (Cook, this volume). This exceptionalising speech was setting the students aside from, and above, other displaced people and using their admission as the benchmark of their social worth and their positions in hierarchies.

On several occasions, I was also puzzled to hear CEU's senior management referring solely to the two, male and tenured, members of staff who became directors (respectively of one of the programmes and of the newly established unit hosting them). The way the directors were turned into the people 'in charge' concealed the collective effort by members of the university, activists and students themselves who created, shaped, fundraised and ran these programmes. It also hid the uneven distribution of labour within the programmes and the double marginalisation experienced by some of its staff – by being peripheral to the key departments and centres of the institution as a whole, and by being kept in a state of precarity and unstable employment. Thereby, the complex story of mutual work, tensions and disagreements that had led to the programmes being established and run was replaced with a narrative of visionary (masculine) minds conjuring a vision from above. I also frequently felt awkward about having myself moved from being a volunteer teacher to a paid employee (on a part-time, short-term contract) officially tasked (among other things) with 'supervising' the hourly-paid instructors who provided students with teaching, mentoring and support.

This illustrates the way in which the process of institutionalisation – which had seemed valuable as we hoped it would bring stability and

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

durability to our activities and thus to our students – came with embedding our initiative within the moral economy and hierarchies of this quickly changing private university. In other words, we were faced with the fact that only certain students were recognised as legitimate subjects, certain forms of labour were valued, and particular notions of merit, success and prestige prevailed. While, as members of the programme, we remained critical of this approach, we also found ourselves engaging with it, for instance by allowing certain institutional representations of our programme that worked towards promoting our institution as a space of social justice and inclusion, even though the narrative reduced those concepts to the cultivation of individual skills, in this case the adjustment of 'refugees' to their new environment. The gap between our experience largely shaped by marginalisation and precarity – as a university unit and its workers and students – and the representations of our work was reminiscent of Sara Ahmed's analysis of the difference between institutions' symbolic commitments to diversity and the experience of those who embody this diversity within institutions (Ahmed 2012).

Although many of us interrogated our pedagogical approach and discussed our drive to develop more alternative, decolonial and/or feminist modes of learning, teaching and producing knowledge, our institutional status and the goal of promoting our students' inclusion in the institution created many restrictions and obstacles in that regard. Most importantly, perhaps, while one of our original aims was to indeed open up the university and to promote inclusion based on equity – by rethinking our curriculums, pushing reforms to administrative structures and addressing the discriminatory if not racist stigmas still present in the university – we found ourselves spending most of our energies on trying to conform to existing systems in order to secure study places for our students. When, a couple of years later, our programmes were suspended (see Introduction, this volume; Trencsényi and Braverman, this volume), we realised once more how little we had achieved in terms of 'opening up the university'. In a private university that was experiencing intensive transformative dynamics, taking it away from a mission of providing fully funded education, we remained a surplus and marginal programme, easily disposable and certainly not seen as fully belonging to the university. Our students could be sacrificed in the name of a (racialised, gendered and class-based) idea of the 'greater good' that, it transpired, excluded them.[5]

The third programme I came into contact with was run at another French – prestigious and elite – institution which I joined on a postdoc-

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

toral contract after leaving Hungary. I only had marginal interactions with the programme and its students, and these reflections are based on observation and my involvement in a series of short discussions with the institution's management, as well as with some of the programme's coordinators and teachers. This education programme for refugees had been established primarily following an impulse by concerned members of the student community and then subsequently institutionalised. Partly because of the prestige of the institution in the French higher education landscape, I had previously heard about the initiative and been exposed to some of the official communication around the institution welcoming refugee students within its walls. The adopted model was, however, following a rather different rationale than those underpinning the two other programmes I had been involved in. For instance, when the teaching activities started, the university offered to lend some of its facilities to a separate NGO so that they could run the programme in their building and benefit from their institutional label. While a number of professors have since become involved, the institutional involvement remains limited so that, all in all, the programme exists in a more tangential relation to the broader structure, sharing a space but not necessarily partaking in the same circumstances.

Importantly in this regard, the programmes were not conceived as bridges or access paths to the institution. Rather, classes were seen as an opportunity for students to share in the privileges of an elite university, before continuing their academic life or picking up a career elsewhere. They were temporary guests, welcomed under certain circumstances for a defined period, but not seen as potential equal members of the community. In relation to the typology of access proposed above, this programme seems to rely on yet another path, where a form of differential inclusion is on offer. Rather than educational courses aiming at and based on equity, it is premised on the (necessarily arbitrary) appreciation of the individual circumstances and difficulties of students, seen primarily as 'refugees'.

This indeed resembles a humanitarian gesture, where the right to education is eclipsed by forms of exceptionalism and benevolence that produce uneven and unequal sets of opportunities. Ultimately, and without questioning the commitment to the students animating the programme's instructors, the structural form taken by this programme reflects the extreme challenges that such initiatives may face in the increasingly privatised and neoliberalised landscape of European higher education. It shows that, in spite of attempts at opening up the university, students often face forms of institutional glass ceiling.

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

All in all, these three programmes follow different shapes, modalities and ethics and exist in different types of institutions – both public and private, elite and more accessible. While broadly identifiable as access programmes, the questions of access for whom and to what are responded to in largely different ways. The budget and resources also vary greatly, leading to differentiate configurations and outcomes. However, they also shared similar features, such as their reliance on short-term funding and precariously employed or voluntary teaching labour; their marginal position within the university's structures even where official discourses present them as central; and the complex sets of relation that their students entertain with the broader community, characterised by various degrees of inclusion but always framed as raising the question of 'belonging'.

These experiences say something about the historical institutionalisation of the university in relation to the capitalist nation-state and its class, racial and gendered hierarchies, and the way this has propped up powerful structures of marginalisation. They also illustrate that inclusion is about much more than formal access and that we need to think beyond the 'moment' of entry – which, for many prospective university students and employees, is always much more than a mere moment – in order to accumulate the necessary capital, resources, networks and formal documents required for effective admission. Inclusion is thus an ongoing process that is both shaped structurally and experienced subjectively, through interpersonal relations with members and representatives of the institution, specific learning experiences and pedagogical practices, and the politics of knowledge production, among others. As explained in the Introduction and Afterword to this volume, in the case of displaced students, the issue of formal access intersects not only with the racialised, gendered and class-based social hierarchies that structure societies in their new countries of residence, but also with migration law and welfare systems, with implications in terms of the administrative 'readability' of students' situations and of their connected dependency on the good-will of specific bureaucrats.

Conclusion

By historicising issues of access to university, this chapter has attempted to provide an angle of reflection on the relation between higher education and inequalities. In particular, it has set out to show that higher education institutions have historically intended the reproduction of an

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

elite or the production of individuals seen as capable to work towards the maintenance of certain structures. While there have been important struggles around such boundaries, which have managed to widen access to higher education for social groups previously marginalised or forbidden attendance, this has not been enough to radically transform and open up the university.

In particular, the very structures that sustain higher education systems and their connections to dominant socio-political projects mean that certain ways of teaching, working and organising have been naturalised. This process narrows down and limits what is seen as constituting education, knowledge, social change and transformation within the university. It has also created norms and hierarchies. When access programmes that aim at pushing against such systems enter the university and become institutionalised within it, they come across not only the formal boundaries preventing access to displaced students on administrative or financial grounds, they also face the way in which certain moral economies have become normalised and certain values have been institutionalised in ways that impede deeper changes. While there is no definite answer to how those pressures may be navigated and fought against, a recognition of the complex set of politics that frame the issue of access, and how it relates to structures, knowledges and modes of being within the university, seems to be the unavoidable starting point from which to keep rethinking and expanding our praxis collectively.

Céline Cantat holds a PhD in Refugee Studies from the Centre for Research on Migration, Refugees and Belonging at the University of East London and is currently a Research Fellow at Sciences Po Paris. Previously, Céline worked at the CEU in Budapest where she conducted project MIGSOL: Migration Solidarity and Acts of Citizenship along the Balkan Route and worked as teacher and academic director for CEU's OLIve programmes. Her research interests include migration solidarity, globalisation and migration, racism and exclusion in Europe, state formation and dynamics of mass displacement.

Notes

1. Wood's Despatch of 1854, available at https://archive.org/stream/dli.csl.5554/5554_djvu.txt (accessed 22 November 2021).
2. Discussions with a range of people present on the programme's opening day, 7 March 2016.

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.

3. Observations based on attending the opening day of the programme (7 March 2016), and on conversations with organisers, volunteers, teachers and prospective students.
4. Discussions with students on opening day and on subsequent occasions.
5. Other critical disciplines were also put under extreme pressure. For instance, official accreditation for gender studies programmes was revoked by the authorities. In many ways, these attacks belong to a larger project of the government to erase any form of diversity both in higher education and beyond.

References

Ahmed, S. 2012. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bhatia, M. 2020. 'The Permission to Be Cruel: Street-Level Bureaucrats and Harms against People Seeking Asylum'. *Critical Criminology* 28(1): 277–92.

Clancy, P., and G. Goastellec. 2007. 'Exploring Access and Equity in Higher Education: Policy and Performance in a Comparative Perspective', *Higher Education Quarterly* 61(2): 136–54.

Donmez, P. 2020. 'Educational Enquiry Reflective Report'. Unpublished.

Edgcomb, G.S. 1993. *From Swastika to Jim Crow: Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges*. Malabar, FL: Krieger.

Goastellec, G. 2019. 'L'accès à l'Université enjeu de l'organisation sociale', *SociologieS*, Dossiers: Repenser les comparaisons internationales: enjeux épistémologiques et méthodologiques. http://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/12152.

González, C., and F. Hsu. 2014. 'Education and Empire: Colonial Universities in Mexico, India and the United States', Research and Occasional Papers Series, University of California at Berkeley, Center for Studies in Higher Education 7(14).

Graham, M. 2002. 'Emotional Bureaucracies: Emotions Civil Servants, and Immigrants in the Swedish Welfare State', *Ethos* 30(3): 199–226.

hooks, b. 1994. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge.

Jewell, J.O. 2002. 'To Set an Example: The Tradition of Diversity at Historically Black Colleges and Universities', *Urban Education* 37(1): 7–21.

Kwiek, M. 2005. 'The University and the State in a Global Age: Renegotiating the Traditional Social Contract?', *European Educational Research Journal* 4(4): 324–41.

Lipsky, M. 2010. *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Neave, G. 2001. 'The European Dimension in Higher Education: An Excursion into the Modern Use of Historical Analogues', in J. Huisman, P. Maassen and G. Neave (eds), *Higher Education and the Nation-State*. Oxford: Pergamon.

Villella, P.B. 2012. 'Indian Lords, Hispanic Gentlemen: The Salazars of Colonial Tlaxcala', *The Americas* 69(1): 1–36.

This open access edition has been made available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license thanks to the support of Knowledge Unlatched. https://doi.org/10.3167/9781800733114. Not for resale.