Book Review

Crimmins, G., ed., 2020. *Strategies for Supporting Inclusion and Diversity in The Academy: Higher Education, Aspiration and Inequality*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan

In her introduction to Strategies for Supporting Inclusion and Diversity in the Academy, Gail Crimmins ascertains that there is a gap in the scholarly work on exclusion and inequalities in further and higher education institutions. The book calls for a new hands-on approach that re-routes the debate by pooling a myriad of interventional initiatives to counteract the social and academic injustices experienced in the academy. The nineteen chapters offer educationalists and policymakers a nuanced perspective of the difficulties that face strategies for diversity in higher education, with a view for excavating the brutal implication of inequalities within institutions and across the sector and navigating innovative practical ways of resisting and breaking the cycle of normalised injustices.

Geographically, the contributions bring in experiences from key Anglo-Saxon academic contexts, namely the UK, the US and Australia, except for two case studies from India (chapter 8) and Spain (chapter 9). Crimmins divides the book into four parts, and each features a key ground for exclusion in the academy: racism, sexism, classism and ableism. Section One focuses on the role of pedagogy and curriculum in mapping relevant strategies for supporting racial diversity and offers critical perspectives on pushing the boundaries of exclusion particularly for international (chapters 3 and 6) and refugee students (chapter 5) in British universities and indigenous groups (chapter 4) in US universities. Section Two brings in a more inter-national perspective by presenting more heterogenous case studies of intersecting layers of exclusion from India, the US, Spain and the UK. The section is unique in the way it focuses on the processes of defying gender barriers and using identity fluidity for 'thriving in the academy' through a broader ecological approach (chapter 10) that transcends university territories. Section Three revolves around the role of dialogic engagement as an inclusive strategy for non-traditional and socio-economically deprived students. It comprises different models of inclusivity in three British universities and a fourth from the Australian context. Then Section Four discusses three interventional strategies from American (chapter 16) and Australian (chapters 17 & 18) institutions for dismantling exclusionary practices which students with intellectual and learning disabilities experience in the academy. The section presents the reader an ecological approach to capitalise on social partnership and allow for advocacy beyond the physical terrains of the institution.

The key theme that ties the book together is the authors' call for emancipatory action to com-bat dominant power structures and address social and academic grievances in the academy.

The action is shaped through empirical models and practical approaches that offer the reader the opportunity to understand the different processes of exclusion and the means for resisting academic inequalities rooted in a colonial legacy, patriarchal structures and the heavy-handed-ness of neoliberal policies in higher education institutions within the contexts illustrated in the volume. In my view, the main question that the book attempts to answer is: How can higher education institutions combat long-standing narratives of domination and counter-act historical privilege and what means are available to empower and practice agency? Unlike the wide range of literature on inclusion and diversity in higher education, the book outlines the need to start from the end, divert the attention from philosophical debates to the nuances on the ground and bridge the gap between theory and practice. Navigating the contributions, I choose to bring to the reader some insights on the methodology and approach used in collating this scholarly work and a few implications for the arguments it brings to the fore in the discourses of inclusivity in higher education.

Overall, the chapters collectively, appear to be influenced by critical feminist notion of praxis, in that they investigate the issues of diversity in the academy from a feminist perspective that is typically informed by theories of critical race, epistemic justice, critical pedagogy and lib-eratory transformation. This ontological and epistemological position allows for the synthesis of an interesting range of compatible methodologies. To name a few: narrative inquiry, life-story method and participatory research. For example, Athena Lathouras' chapter on Critical-Rela-tional Approach to Community Development that increases Well-being, Learning Out-comes and Retention of International Students proposes the use of 'dialogue circles' as a 'bot-tom-up' participatory method for producing knowledge of inclusive environments for interna-tional students (chapter 6). Sally Tazewell's chapter on Using a Funds of Knowledge Approach to Engage Diverse Cohorts through Active and Personally Relevant Learning utilises a 'funds for knowledge approach' to promote epistemic equity and activate students' agency and pride in their local knowledge and raise awareness of implicit bias and epistemic violence in the academy. In fact, the gamut of the interventions amplifies the voices of those most de-privileged by the academy using methodology as vehicles for inclusivity and as means to critique dominant discourses and structural disadvantage that have been stealthily rooted in universities for a long time. These approaches reshape research participants roles in knowledge generation and ex-change. The feminist approach and methodologies are key strengths of this concerted effort and consolidate the empirical work. Branching from the feminist standpoint, such methodologies are not immune from criticism, especially the ways they resonate with issues around hidden hierarchy and false consciousness in academic research (see Gottfried, 1996 – an outdated but valuable resource).

A second point to raise here is the decision of the editor to focus, in the most parts of the book, on the contextual particularity and empirical positions of diversity and inclusion in the Global North. It is evident that the UK, the US and Australia remain a playing field for this area of knowledge and the social and academic demands for substantial change are immense. In es-sence, the book contributions coincide with the rise of the movement for 'Decolonising the

University' and build on the existing momentum of the academic and scholarly investment in this activism agenda. Needless to say, the notions of inclusion and diversity have been at the centre of the debates on decoloniality in western academia over the past few years. Institutional endeavours to address and curtail exclusionary practices and structural in-equalities are still seen as dispersed. Hence, the book is a breakthrough in this field of knowledge, offering a pragmatic approach to test valuable means of embedding diversity and inclusion and in relation to the decoloniality project. However, this poses a question on the implications on advancing scholarship in this field, maintaining the centrality of the western interpretations of 'the' academy (singular form), and patterns of representation, diversity and inclusivity in higher education. Singular interpretations remain narrow, restricted and, by time, op-pressive. One interesting example comes from chapter 8, by Karuna Chanana, on Women and Leadership: Strategies of Gender Inclusion in Institutions of Higher Education. Interestingly, the chapter is the only presence of interventions from the Global South (India) and presents different social and academic position and experience. Chanana argues that higher education is the equivalent term for universities, highlights gender inequity in named academic disciplines and presents a thought-provoking argument for gender segregation (women-only) institutions as means for activating agency for women academics. The context and proposed strategies present a substantially different approach to empowerment in the Indian academy than those offered in countries such as the UK, the US and Australia. This invites more engagement with the ontologies, nature of dominant powers and social organisation of academic contexts and the ways they relate (or not) to the wider projects of diversity, inclusion, resistance and emancipation in the academy in the Global South. This coincides with recent scholarly calls for engaging with a multiplicity of interpretations (for example, Bhambra, Gerbrial and Nişancıoğlu, 2018) of 'the academy' which invokes questions about the transferability of experiences of diversity in Anglo Saxon higher education institutions to help explore the struggle for diversity and inclusion in higher education in the Global South.

Reviewed by
Gihan Ismail, University of Bath, UK

References
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