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Book Review:

International students and crime by Helen Forbes-Mewett, Jude McCulloch and Chris Nyland, Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, 312pp., \$US100.00 (paperback) ISBN 978-1-349-44209-6

With the ongoing strategic significance of internationalisation and its increasingly diverse manifestations globally, it is not surprising that 'safe study destination' has become an increasingly important consideration for students who embark on an educational sojourn. Crime's potential impact is paramount to the lives of international students, host citizens and host institutions, but it can likewise trigger a ripple effect on the bilateral relationships between students' host and home countries, possibly impacting the wider international education industry. This makes understanding the notion of crime and security both crucial and timely.

Despite this importance, a multi-database search from January 1935 to December 2016 of vast databases in education, psychology and sociology using key words 'international students' 'overseas students' and 'study abroad' and 'crime' yielded very few records, i.e. 29, 2 and 10 respectively, from approximately 3.3 million full text peer-reviewed publications contained in about 2,000 journals. By contrast, if the search term 'international students' is not combined with 'crime, the search shows almost 6,000 publications. This small number could be attributed to international students generally reporting feeling safe in the host country. This view is affirmed in this book, stating that 'most students do not become victims of crime and very few are perpetrators' (p. 280). Nonetheless, a profound understanding of contributory factors to criminal incidents is arguably a helpful strategy for avoiding and reducing crime in this age of dynamic global education. This book "*International students and crime*" seeks to address the dearth of qualitative research in this area, providing evidence-based, authoritative and comprehensive insights into a theme of global significance.

The authors outline in-depth and large-scale comparative research undertaken in the American, British and Australian contexts – countries that attract a huge proportion of international students. They have articulated and exemplified the complex intersection arising from the cultural transition experiences of international students, combined with policies, laws and regulations set in a distinct historical and political setting, with its own societal customs and practices and added local factors such as social and economic marginalisation and racism. They broadly shape the challenges, support structures and security measures that create safe environments for both international and domestic students. Linked to this notion of creating a safe study destination is the underpinning view of the vulnerability of *both* international and domestic students. Since students in the UK and the US customarily study away from home, it has been recognised, that students' unfamiliarity with the local conditions mean that they are at a greater risk and therefore, additional support services are justified. Support services such as safe on-campus accommodation, specific laws, particularly, the 'Clery Act' in the US,

and even specialist police that are intended to increase safety in educational environments, tend to benefit domestic and international students alike.

A notable, inherent strength of the book is the wide-ranging scope of the substantive research findings generated by interviews with 150 participants from the three countries considered the main providers of international education. It covers topics from international students, as either victims or perpetrators of crime, to the exposition of different categories of crime (e.g. serious and violent, non-violent, gendered, organised). It then proceeds in addressing the idea of promoting student safety and raising the crucial question of who is responsible for the safety of international students in their host country. Overall, the discussion is rich and varied – from descriptions of petty crimes such as library thefts to serious ones that may also involve gambling, robbery, domestic violence, sexual crimes, fraud, cyber crimes, terrorism and murder. Some crimes are fuelled by drugs, drunkenness, racism or broader social problems in the area. The book also includes in the discussion ‘under-recognised’ and ‘underreported’ type of crimes with associated contributory factors depending on the above-mentioned categories (e.g. gendered). The rich anecdotal stories not only make these incidents a real eye-opener but also make the book an interesting read. Since the chief purpose of international students’ sojourn is to pursue education, it is somewhat surprising not to see any mention of serious disciplinary offences (e.g. plagiarism, essay-buying, ghost-writing or other serious academic related offences) that jeopardise academic integrity. Plagiarism is ‘theft of ideas’, after all. Students who buy bespoke essays or dissertation services and then present them as their own work are also engaging in ‘contract cheating’, although such services are illegal only in certain countries.

Interestingly, part of understanding international students’ vulnerability or propensity to become either victims or perpetrators of crime is recognised as being underpinned by the cultural transition that is part of the sojourn. The competing influence of old and new societal setting can pose a dilemma, at times leading to a misinterpretation about what constitutes a crime; what is considered ‘normal’, appropriate and acceptable as opposed to exploitation. As found by the authors in their research, the notion of crime is influenced by the students’ original societal conception in their country of origin of what crime is and what it is not, which is not necessarily the same as how crime is conceptualised in the host country. A comment from a police officer in Australia (p. 47) is also typical of both the US and the UK:

I think international students ... base their understanding of crime on their own country and what is right and what’s wrong within their own country and their own culture. [This] creates a difficulty because what might be acceptable in one country might not be acceptable in another country.

As in academic acculturation, there is a strong argument for the necessity for international students to broaden their knowledge and understanding through careful negotiation of their own and the host cultures (see Elliot et al., 2016; He, 2002; Sawir et al., 2008 for example) as a strategic move to avoid falling into crime – either as a victim or a perpetrator. The abrupt loss of normal social support systems leading to a sudden new burst of freedom could mean less

attention paid to the students' moral compass in the absence of parents or guardians. Compounded with a lack of knowledge of the local community, customs or the protection available in the new environments, it can easily lead to momentary naivety and negligence, increasing their vulnerability and subsequently, endangering their personal safety. Some international students also tend to hold the view that 'only serious crime was viewed as crime and many petty crimes were not' (p. 67). This can have great implications for how they live and interact with other students and people from the host country. Further, lifestyles, misdirected trust due to general inexperience in life and naivety, misconception of safety, a trusting nature and easily letting their guard down, culturally 'learned' appropriate responses to incidents (including nicety and non-reporting) do not merely serve as the source but they can equally exacerbate crime-related experiences. At times, compounded by socioeconomic and mental health explanations, a small number of international students resort to theft, fraud or domestic violence. Even in these circumstances, an American student advisor asserted that 'the greatest influence on international students being perpetrators of crime was cultural misunderstanding' (p. 73). Given their distinct circumstances, it is not surprising that international students can easily become 'simultaneously vulnerable as both victims and perpetrators of crime' (p. 89).

The book also considers ways by which risks and crime affecting international students can be avoided and reduced, with the emphasis on improved social infrastructures and legislation. The possibility of matching students' study destinations and their level of support provision with incoming international students' experience of being away from family support or country of origin was also suggested. Whereas this might be a logical suggestion, the difficulty of putting this into practice is likely to entail an extra level of scrutiny of the applicants, possibly implemented by the respective institutions. In a climate of stiff competition in recruiting international students, the chances of universities refusing potential international students who are perceived to be unlikely to cope in their new university settings would be very unlikely. After weighing all the present evidence and differences of opinion presented, there is a consensus 'that international students were perceived to be more frequently victims of crime than domestic students' (p. 67). I concur with the shared view of both the authors and many of the research participants, i.e. support for safety should be a collective effort involving the institutions, governments, police and parents, starting with the international students themselves!

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