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by Shirin Housee**

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Shirin Housee (2018) *Speaking Out Against Racism in the University Space*, London: Trentham Books (ISBN 978-1-85856-869-0 [Pbk], 128pp)



In *Speaking Out*, Shirin Housee invites the reader to share in a personal and, at times, emotional and complex journey of some of the lived experiences of minoritised students in UK universities. In this book, Housee offers many compelling reflections that echo a voice that is finding considerable traction (*cf.* Arbouin, 2018) in these uncertain and discordant times that deserves to be shared and heard. Provocatively titled, the reader is provided with a sense of the unseen, silenced, unheard, or ignored accounts of students to offer a more nuanced and

critical understanding of racism in universities, whilst offering reflective tools to address an internal innocence or naïveté and to counter institutional racism.

The book is divided in two parts. The first considers the theoretical understandings of minoritised students' life experiences and explores their expectations and perceptions of university teaching and learning. It should be stressed that this is not a dense text – overall, at under 130 pages, this is diminutively-sized book for such a complex topic – however, it contains several student vignettes that are skilfully interwoven with the author's own professional development and insights as a teacher/tutor/mentor. Altogether, this 'thick description' eloquently addresses visible and invisible differences and the attitudes, socio-cultural influences and contexts of racism. This is brought to light, in particular, in Chapter Two, with a description of 'other-mothering' and the significance of shared racialised and gendered identities. This is then neatly developed in the following chapter which explores how women create and sustain support networks and a sense of belonging by drawing on solidarities across expressed cultural and religious differences. In this chapter, the reader gets a real sense of a university community space in flux, and of how minoritised students are continually negotiating their identities (religious, ethnicity, gender) pulling together commonalities.

It was insightful reading Chapter Four alongside Livesey's (2019) viewpoint piece in this issue of *Innovations in Practice*. Here Housee draws on her own research (Housee, 2008) and considers teacher and student relationships, and ethnicity in the teaching of race/racism. Here, Housee argues that the teaching of *any* academic subject should not be the preserve of any 'gendered or racialised people'. The focus should be, she argues, on embedding critical pedagogical teaching methods that question "whitearchy" and are inclusive of black experiences, whilst questioning the structures, relations and processes that drive some of the dominant perspectives. This is well followed up in the final chapter in Part One, which considers, albeit from a small sample (n=23) of undergraduates, the spaces that can facilitate students empowerment and sense of belonging and value.

The second part is much shorter than the first and, in many respects, feels a little imbalanced. In particular, it considers how students' experiences and their contribution to classroom discussions shape antiracism in universities. Drawing on her own teaching practices and observations, Housee examines the implications of opening up classrooms to discussions on race, racism, and sexism, and how the many identities students inhabit really do matter in teaching and learning. In this section (as with the interview with 'Evie' in the second chapter), one gets a real sense of Housee's empathy with her students, and passion for creating the right sort of spaces in the university for critical reflection.

This is a timely and valuable contribution to the recent literature on race/racism in UK higher education. For me, the sector is not

so much at a crossroads but on a knife-edge. For years we have discussed the attainment gap and black identity (NUS, 2011) but, as Housee references, there is an invidious populism in society at large that is impacting on our universities. *Speaking Out* was published before the announcement of the inquiry on racism on the campus (EHRC, 2019) and before the UUK/NUS (2019) report on the BAME attainment gap. Whilst Housee has focused on the academic experience, there are worrying signs of racism affecting the wider student experience (NUS, 2018) and even our support services (Ishaq and Hussain, 2019): all this points to the need of a more holistic solution.

In absorbing the lessons in *Speaking Out*, I welcomed Housee as a 'fellow traveller' on a painfully long road towards equality, respect, and the removal of abuses of power. By examining some of the critical perspectives of our teaching practice, embracing 'cultural democracy', and thinking hard and together about what we believe we know, what is established, and what works smoothly within present systems – to paraphrase Elizabeth Minnich (2013) – this can help free us from the auto-pilot of thoughtless, dangerous banalities, including those that are handed around thoughtlessly as proof that we are "good" or "on the right side".

Reviewed by **Virendra Mistry**

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