Preface

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Research over the last two decades demonstrates that individuals from minority ethnic communities continue disproportionately to experience adverse outcomes. While there is some variability by ethnic group since BMEs are by no means a homogeneous category, BME staff and students experience considerable disadvantage (Arday & Mirza, 2018; Pilkington, 2020). BME academic staff are more likely to be on fixed term contracts, continue to experience significant disadvantage in career progression, especially in gaining access to professorships and the senior ranks of university management, and there remains an ethnic pay gap two decades after the publication of the Macpherson report. Indeed, a recent report based on interviews with BME staff is skeptical that much has changed in the last 20 years: the vast majority continue to experience subtle racism and feel outsiders in the White space of the Academy (Bhopal, 2018). Meanwhile BME students continue to be less likely to be enrolled at elite universities and awarded good honours degrees even when prior attainment and socio-economic status have been taken into account, and to experience lower retention rates and progression rates from undergraduate study to both employment and postgraduate study. A recent inquiry by the Equality and Human Rights Commission found that around a quarter of minority ethnic students had experienced racism since the start of their course and yet many did not feel confident in reporting incidents, not least because of a lack of faith in them being dealt with appropriately. And another investigation by the Guardian confirmed the reluctance of universities to recognise the scale of racism and failure to keep appropriate records. In this context, it is not altogether surprising that minority ethnic students express significantly less satisfaction than their White peers with their university experience.

And yet, despite this evidence of the remarkable persistence in racial disadvantage, universities remain extraordinarily complacent. Such complacency partly stems from the dominance in the academy and indeed of much of society of a liberal as opposed to radical perspective on equality. Universities typically see themselves as liberal and believe existing policies ensure fairness; they thus ignore adverse outcomes and do not see combating racial inequalities as a priority. The Chief Executive of the Office for Students (the body which since 2018-19 now distributes government higher education funding for teaching and has taken over from OFFA responsibility for fair access) even acknowledges such 'complacency' in the sector (Batty quoted in Pilkington, 2020). Such inertia will remain intact unless significant pressure is placed on universities to change. Since the early noughties, the salience of race equality as a policy priority has steadily waned with the result that remarkably few initiatives have been mounted within the Academy to promote race equality.

This book arrives at a timely moment. The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the wake of widespread shock felt across the world over the murder of George Floyd at the hands of the police in the US has triggered a renewed concern with race equality and encouraged organisations, including universities, to reflect on what they are doing to address this issue. While we shall have to wait to see whether fine words are translated into effective actions, there is little doubt that universities are currently more willing to listen to BME voices.

Since 1998, governments of different persuasions have continued to claim widening participation to be a priority and typically have seen policy in this field as the chief means for addressing race equality in higher education. This book examines the impact of this national policy in three very different institutions (an FE college, a pre-1992 university and a post-1992 university) on BME students. The author reminds

us that, in the formulation of national policy, the primary focus is on social disadvantage in general rather than racial disadvantage specifically. It is perhaps not altogether surprising in this context that the implementation of this policy at institutional level (which itself differs by institution and is primarily focused on outreach work) does not meet the needs of BME students. The author goes further, however. After analyzing key documents, interviewing staff responsible for WP and conducting focus groups with BME students in her three case study institutions, Dilshad uncovers disturbing evidence of racism and in the process demonstrates how premature it is to claim that the institutional racism identified in the MacPherson report in 1999 and acknowledged by the government at the time has been eradicated. This is a truly shocking indictment. After over 20 years of the implantation of a policy which purportedly promotes race equality, many BME students feel unsupported, isolated and marginal. The author draws upon the framework of critical race theory not only to detail the continuing disadvantages faced by BME students but also utilises this framework to develop a socially inclusive model for action. We need to listen. It is high time that universities were shaken out of their complacency. This book helps us to do just that.

REFERENCES

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