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Introduction: 'Race', Learning and Teaching in Social Policy in Higher Education

Bankole Cole*, Gary Craig and Nasreen Ali*****

*Criminology and Human Rights, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK
Email: b.cole@shu.ac.uk

**Law School, University of Newcastle, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
Email: gary.craig@galtres8.co.uk

***Public Health and Equality, University of Bedfordshire, Luton, UK
Email: nasreen.ali@beds.ac.uk

In 2008, one of us wrote an article (Craig, 2008) called 'The racist tail wags the welfare dog', which argued that Britain's stance towards ethnic minorities has been janus-faced: developing an increasingly repressive and restrictive stance towards immigration, and – supported by a strident media – portraying minorities and migrants as undermining British culture and values, 'sponging' on the welfare state. Domestic policies of successive governments, including some ameliorative community-based programmes of community and race relations, and occasional claims that governments were determined to create a compassionate and caring multicultural society, have not fundamentally addressed the racism inherent in immigration policy and practice. The consequence has been that the welfare of Britain's minorities – measured by outcomes in every branch of welfare provision – has largely been disregarded by the British state. Despite these few liberal initiatives supposedly aimed at improving the lot of Britain's minorities, the racism inherent in policy and practice persists. Worryingly for the social policy academic community, the article argued that this racism extended beyond the political practice of social policy to the academic discipline of social policy. It was still not uncommon, it argued, for mainstream social policy texts to treat debates on 'race' and racism as marginal. This is striking considering that the social policy discipline is concerned centrally with issues of citizenship rights, welfare, equality, poverty alleviation and social engineering. This lacuna extended, the article also suggested, to the practice of social research, where many proposals, proposers, funders or commissioners still treated the dimension of ethnicity as too complex, too expensive or too marginal to be worthy of serious attention.

In 2012, there followed a further article (Craig, 2012) called 'The invisibilisation of 'race' in public policy.' This argued that the situation was getting worse in terms of policy-making, because there was now an increasingly explicit encouragement from government for policy-making at both national and local levels to downplay or even completely ignore the dimension of 'race' and ethnicity. In the meantime, the infrastructure of equality organisations was steadily being dismantled by government with community relations networks being closed, alongside cuts in staffing and funding to major national equality bodies. Despite the provisions of the Race Relations Amendment Act, which followed on

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from the McPherson Enquiry into the death of Steven Lawrence, many public-policy-making bodies were failing systematically to engage in the promotion of racial equality which the Act required. By the mid-2010s, a clear message emerged in policy that, as Theresa May put it when appointed Home Secretary, equality was a dirty word (Craig, 2012). At the time of writing, more than 100 racist murders had come to light (ibid).

The situation within social policy as an academic discipline and source of employment had hardly improved since the 2008 article (Craig, 2008). As Heidi Mirza noted (ibid), only 7 per cent of University Professors in 2008 were Black and the proportion of social policy Professors who were Black was even smaller. A quick analysis of mainstream social policy journals suggests again that still very few articles were being published which treated the dimension of 'race' as a significant part of mainstream arguments. These two articles were effectively precursors to the present volume.

This brings us to the present day. As a result of growing concern amongst the discipline, the present authors were commissioned by the Social Policy Association (SPA) to undertake an audit of the teaching of 'race' within social policy courses (Craig *et al.,* 2019). The audit comprised various approaches: a review of the literature (which was found to be sparse), an analysis of published data and other UCAS statistics relating to student admissions, retention and progression; data on student and staff profiles, interviews with a series of 'experts' – that is, a group of academics with wide-ranging areas of expertise and, in some cases, many years of teaching social policy – and a survey of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) including social policy in their undergraduate and postgraduate taught course offers. The report was formally published in 2019 (Craig *et al.,* 2019). The SPA acted quickly producing an action plan which is even now being developed and operationalised to address the issues raised by the report.

Overall, the conclusions of the report were dismal reading for the social policy community, made more dismal by the fact that, set against a rising tide of racism in the country at large, particularly since the 2016 Referendum (but certainly predating it), it should surely be a key role of social policy to confront the growth of racism within welfare provision and outside it; to challenge the messages being delivered at institutional and individual levels by the media, by the government and by right-wing political parties such as Brexit and UKIP, which place the blame for all the country's ills at the feet of so-called 'immigrants' (bear in mind that more than 50 per cent of all UK ethnic minorities were born and grew up in this country); and to remind the wider population of the immense contribution that migrants are making and have made to the UK's welfare provision despite all the obstacles put in their way.

Despite some hopeful initiatives, it was clear that this could not be done from the current base of social policy teaching in higher education. The staff profile in most social policy departments is almost entirely white, providing little impetus for the development of courses which address issues of 'race', colonialism, slavery, and the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic experience of welfare; promotion for BME[1] staff is problematic; achievement levels for BME students are generally poor in the absence of appropriate support; drop-out rates are higher than average, and all the elements which might make up a supportive environment for BME students are usually missing. Most of the HEIs surveyed seemed uninterested in the audit at best: after three reminders including one from the SPA, only sixteen HEIs responded out of sixty-five surveyed. Responses were incomplete and we were often referred to university administrative sections for data on staffing and student numbers, which should have been a matter of core concern for teaching staff. Only three

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BME social policy professors were identified within these sixteen HEIs. Where there was a significant body of BME students, these tended to be at newer universities which were physically embedded in neighbourhoods with large BME populations and where staff had done significant outreach work. The profiles of Russell Group universities showed up particularly poorly. Few HEIs had any provisions in place to target recruitment of BME applicants or provide support. Interestingly, where there had been initiatives, they had been prompted by student action rather than from staff groups.

As well as the development of the SPA action plan, we were encouraged to learn that the Royal Historical Society (which organises academic historians) and the British Sociological Association had also produced reports addressing the failure of their respective disciplines to address the issue of 'race' adequately. We were then approached in 2020 by the Editorial Board of the present journal to develop a special themed issue of the Journal around the same topic and the present issue is the outcome of our work in this regard. The original intention was for a themed section within a single issue of the Journal but the response to our call for contributions was so great that we finally decided to aim for a single whole issue: happily the Editorial Board of *SPS* agreed.

The need for this, we would argue, is now even more critical than it has been in recent years as the government has embarked on what can only be characterised as a cohesive and determined pushback against those, apparently politically motivated activists and academics, who believe that the UK remains a profoundly racist society in its institutions, structures and policies, This argument has been fought out in the last two years over a variety of terrains, including the Grenfell fire, the toppling of statues and other icons 'celebrating' the contribution of slave owners to British (imperial) history, the growth of the Black Lives Matters movement (which might finally put the issue of 'race' firmly in the public eye), the distorted and partial account of racism delivered by the widely-challenged Sewell Commission report, and the latest iteration of government policy on immigration and asylum which notes that the system is failing but blames that failure on those fleeing violence and war rather than the structure, policies and misperformance of the Home Office and indeed of the Home Secretary, accused of being racist and forgetful of her own family's history as, effectively, a victim of the ethnic cleansing of Idi Amin. The current Prime Minister's lead in purveying racist remarks (those in burqas likened to burglars or letter boxes, for example; Craig, 2012) has been followed by similar comments from a succession of Ministers and their political appointees. In this divisive context, social policy as an academic discipline and as a body of thinking and critical people has to lend its weight to the task of ensuring that the oppression faced by millions of minorities is recorded, analysed, publicised and resisted. We hope this issue will contribute to that enormously important task.

The articles in this special issue tackle some of the pressing issues raised in the social policy review report (Craig *et al*., 2019). The eight articles and three case studies that make up the issue critically address the issue of 'race' in higher education, highlighting and explaining some of the factors that are responsible for the gap in attainment, retention and performance of Black, Asian and other minority ethnic students compared with their white counterparts, raising questions about the higher education institutions (HEIs) that ignore or even promote racist learning environments and Eurocentric curricula that are not conducive to effective learning, in the process marginalising and disenfranchising BME students. A large number of the articles focus on the teaching curriculum, especially in the social sciences (including social policy, sociology and social work), providing arguments

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in support of the 'decolonisation of the curriculum' debate, including examples of ways by which this has been/is being implemented in some HEIs and suggestions not only on how decolonisation can bring about a more inclusive and diversified curriculum that is fit for the 21st century higher education but also how it can increase students' participation in their own learning experience and their empowerment to intervene and challenge what are evidently inequitable structures and behaviours. The issue does not directly address the question of the dimension of 'race' within social policy research: that would be worth another special issue in its own right.

In the opening article, Jason Arday, Charlotte Branchu and Vikki Boliver examine recent UK trends in ethnic group differences in rates of access to, success within, and positive destinations beyond HE, all of which reveal significant gaps between BME students and their white counterparts. Specifically, the authors examine how the nature of UK universities as exclusionary spaces which marginalise/exclude BME students in a myriad of ways, not least through curricula that centre Whiteness, can lead to a poor sense of belonging which might be contributing to low levels of engagement by these students and consequently their low performance. Most importantly, the authors discuss the impact of the marginalisation of BME students on their mental health. Wellbeing, they argue, is an essential but often neglected area within psychological health when considering the inclusion of ethnic minority students within universities. The exclusion, marginalisation, and 'othering' of BME students and their experiences of discrimination and racism within UK universities is taking its toll on the mental health of these students. It affects their self-esteem, creates emotional instability and ultimately results in poor performance. The authors conclude by highlighting the important roles that academic communities and HE policymakers must play in advancing the wellbeing of BME students, academics and professional staff within universities as an essential prerequisite to establishing a sense of belonging, which 'facilitates integration rather than marginalisation within spaces where ethnic minorities are often few'.

Using parts of Emirbayer and Desmond's (2012)[2] framework of disciplinary reflexivity, Coretta Phillips and Fiona Williams trace the discipline of social policy's habits of thought but specifically its lacunae in the production of racial knowledge. This entails focusing on the discipline's different forms of institutionalised and epistemological Whiteness, and what has shaped the omission or marginalisation of a full understanding of the racialisation of welfare subjects and regimes in the discipline. The article proposes some ways forward to correct the marginalisation of race and to enhance the teaching of social policy within a decolonised curriculum. They argue that this is essential in order to avoid the discipline of social policy 'sleepwalking' into what Goldberg (2015) defines as the 'post-racial', whereby racial dynamics are seen no longer to limit economic and social wellbeing in residential settlement, education, employment opportunities, and social interaction. This will involve, as Emirbayer and Desmond propose, an exercise in disciplinary autocritique that involves unpacking and analysing disciplinary beliefs by examining how they are formulated, critiqued, rejected, amended, and upheld.

Applying two out of the three levels of reflexivity proposed by Emirbayer and Desmond – namely, the social unconscious and the disciplinary unconscious – the authors provide a critique of the Whiteness of social policy in terms of people and concepts (the social unconscious) and habits of thought (the disciplinary unconscious). They argue that key concepts in Social Policy studies are based upon white, heteronormative experiences which are then generalised to the universal: 'where race and

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racism are accounted for, it is often only as an additional dimension of inequality or set of experiences rather than a recalibration of how a concept is framed'. The authors discuss some of the limitations of social policy to seeing the bigger picture of geopolitical relations of racial dominance which lies, for example, in its methodological nationalism. As they point out, '. . . identifying the individual nation as the frame for policymaking rather than understanding the place of that nation, its nation-building and nationality construction in terms of the histories of colonisation and settlement, is common practice'. The article concludes with pointers towards a re-envisioning of Social Policy, within a framework in which postcolonial and intersectional theory and praxis are championed. Only then might a decolonised curriculum be possible in which race is not peripheral to core teaching and learning.

De-colonising the curriculum is interrogated in many of the articles in this special issue, including attempts to provide a workable definition of the concept and suggestions on how it might be applied in order to promote an anti-racial, integrated and realistic curriculum. There is a growing tendency to deflect the critical core of the debate on decolonisation by referring to the need to make the curriculum 'more inclusive': we, like other authors represented here, would argue that this dilutes the message and undermines the need repeatedly to focus on 'race' and racism as the core structural problem to be addressed.

In this regard, focusing on sociology, Katy Sian argues for a deep questioning of the colonial underpinnings of the discipline and argues that a series of conceptual, methodological, and institutional concerns must be addressed if we are profoundly to transform teaching and learning agendas in universities. The author starts by acknowledging the fact that decolonising the curriculum is rapidly becoming a sound bite, crudely hijacked by neoliberal university managers as a marketing strategy to recruit more students; this has led to a superficial engagement with the term, reducing it to a slogan on a T-Shirt that anyone can wear – rather than a critique of power structures. In contrast, the author aligns herself with a critical understanding of decolonising the curriculum, framing it as a political project requiring analytically to examine, collectively challenge, and creatively reflect upon the embeddedness of Eurocentric discourse and praxis, which not only dominate the syllabus, but also feed into the broader structures of 'Western' universities, whereby the 'other' remains a subject that lacks agency and can only be read in contrast to the idea of the West. The article explores how these conceptual representations work to erase the experiences and voices of 'communities of colour' constructed as objects of study, rather than active participants in the shaping of society and the discipline itself. Thus, mainstream sociology has only been able to represent a limited view of the world. Decolonising the curriculum also requires an unlearning and disrupting of hegemonic epistemologies and practices – an intervention which has a series of conceptual, methodological and institutional corollaries. The article concludes that decolonising the curriculum must therefore include a commitment at three levels: the conceptual, the methodological and the institutional. This three-pronged approach means that decoloniality and anti-racism are profoundly embedded throughout the entire university, rather than just simply concerned with a handful of different courses and programmes.

Barbara Adewumi and Lavinia Mitton's article focuses on the HE social policy curriculum. In this article, the authors demonstrate how diversifying reading lists can be an important component of the agenda to decolonise the curriculum. Reporting on the findings from a study of the award-winning 'Reading List Diversity Mark Project', carried

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out at the University of Kent in 2018-20, which investigated how many Black, Asian and other ethnic minority authors were included on undergraduate reading lists, the authors offer a practical methodological 'toolkit' for creating more diverse reading lists for social policy teaching. The authors argue that decolonisation is not simply about helping students see how the colonial legacy has influenced policymaking and its subsequent impacts on marginalised groups and on society as a whole; it is about helping students further to cultivate critical thinking skills and helping them to appraise the usefulness and limitations of any knowledge sources, emphasising students' capacity to be open to multiple and different standpoints, and to be able to challenge established hegemonic standpoints; it includes diversifying the voices heard to include BME and alternative knowledge sources. They conclude that while diversifying authors on reading lists is a starting point, this alone may not be enough to

> "undo social policy's roots in social administration, at one time a primarily British imperial administrative project, with epistemes intrinsically situated in Western ideas and hierarchies of 'social progress' that have historically marginalised, omitted, or repressed other worldviews and sources of knowledge."

Ethel Brooks, Colin Clark, and Julius Rostas's article also focuses on decolonisation but specifically as a means of tackling the legacy of Gypsylorism and the political climate in which the teaching and learning of contemporary Romani Studies have occurred in Hungary (and by extension, many other East and West European countries). The article focuses on the evolution of the teaching of Romani Studies programmes at the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, the challenges that have occurred as a result of growth of Antigypsyism in Hungary – a country where there is state-sanctioned racism directed towards the Roma population alongside a lack of political will by the Hungarian state and its far-right supporters to confront this problem. Thus, the authors highlight the fact that the political environment in which change is being sought is important. The authors showed how, despite the hostile and racist environment, the Central European University managed to sustain and nurture a thriving programme in Romani Studies, first in Budapest and later in Vienna. A significant transformation is that courses that were previously taught by non-Roma scholars and which promoted a vision of Roma as a pathologised and impoverished 'underclass', with specific traditions and culture that contributed to its own exclusion, are now being taught by Romani academics. The authors conclude that we must remain committed to advancing and promoting a form and type of knowledge production, both inside and outside the academy that best represents misunderstood and marginalised populations.

In a similar tone, David Mayeda and colleagues show how national governments in Aotearoa (New Zealand) have failed to address the colonial disparities and inequalities in the country's Higher Education system and, specifically, how historical privilege and institutional racism have continued to shape and frame both opportunities and experiences of indigenous Māori youths. Aotearoa is a settler society where British coloniality has functioned for roughly two centuries to diminish tikanga Māori (Māori customs and traditions). It has also imposed western theory that has bolstered efforts that marginalise indigeneity. The authors claim to have been inspired by kaupapa Māori theory – a theory that 'came out of a particular struggle for the legitimacy of Māori identity and the desire to operate as Māori within the education sector'. Kaupapa Māori is a constructivist theory

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that has similarities with critical theory and the Frankfurt School. It is grounded in māutauranga Māori as it derives from te reo [the language] and tikanga Māori. The authors provide a brief account of the history of the imposition of British education on the Māori in Aotearoa and the nature of Māori resistance to this move. The British education system served as an institution that forced Māori assimilation into western cultural norms and channelled Māori into unskilled manual or domestic labour. Māori educational disparity at the primary and secondary levels ultimately explains their under-representation in higher education. The article then goes on to describe how, upon entering higher education, Māori students' successes have depended on the extent to which they are able to see themselves as part of the university structure. The authors cite research in Aotearoa that found that having support services embedded with tikanga Māori and Māori role models was a significant factor in helping Māori students succeed in some undergraduate programmes. They argued, however, that the disproportionately small number of Māori staff at New Zealand's HEIs has meant that there is a correspondingly small number of role models for the equally disproportionately limited number of Māori students. Adding to the lack of role models are trends in Eurocentric university curricula that fail to reflect issues particularly relevant for Māori students or Māori ways of learning – a curriculum in which Māori world views are marginalised and seen as inferior. In conclusion, the article highlights the need for curricula to be made more relevant for minority ethnic students and for HEIs to address the experiences of racism that such students frequently experience at University and which have been shown negatively to affect their integration and performance.

Relational learning and teaching for BME students is the main theme of the articles by Jean Dillon and Diana Pritchard and also by Jamie Caine and colleagues. Drawing from advances and challenges from within Social Work education and the experiences of BME social work students, Dillon and Pritchard explore the significance of promoting safe and transformational learning environments through supportive lecturer-student relationships that are founded on vulnerability and relational wellbeing, including a range of 'love' concepts/approaches. Their article focuses on the role of staff in building safety, confidence and trust as well as facilitating connected learning spaces and promoting anti-racism and social justice. But the pervasiveness of managerialism within HE compromises the teacher-student relationship by emphasising measured changes in student 'outcomes' whilst ignoring the multiplicity of factors impacting BME social work students' learning experiences and outcomes. Black student attainment has continued to lag behind that of other students on social work courses. They disproportionately also experience negative progression issues including being less likely to finish their social work degree on time due to having academic work referred, and/or owing to interruptions in, or the termination of, practice placements. Courses are mostly delivered by non-BME aff who are not representative of the student body; also, most of the staff or service users on social work placements are mostly white. The authors cite comments from BME students to support the points made. They argue in support of building relationships between lecturers and students to confer a sense of belonging amongst BME students and to make them feel supported and encouraged in their daily interactions within their institutions and with staff members. Finally, the authors explain what they meant by love in learning spaces (or pedagogical love) which is love conveyed through implicitly communicating to students, their intrinsic uniqueness, beauty and worth as human beings. This can help students to open up to each other, share their unique personal and professional stories and make

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broader and deeper connections to their learning. The lecturer-student relationship is visualised as a two-way process of a 'circle of love' from lecturer to students, students to students and from students to lecturer, which can facilitate mutually-growth-fostering relationships in which all parties feel they and/or their contributions matter. This 'circle of love' is salient where "it provides the opportunity for racism in teaching and learning to be challenged/addressed; for educational spaces that can militate against cultural loneliness through the fostering of a sense of loving belongingness and greater educational support to be provided to enhance degree attainment". The value that students attach to lecturers' being authentic, open, warm and 'real' cannot be underestimated because it can permit the opening up of emotionally supportive and connected learning spaces that reduce anxiety, facilitate deeper learning and provide students with a sense of well-being, safety and belongingness. The authors conclude that applying a relational lens is essential for BME students as it can help them to develop a sense of belonging in their learning community, experience caring and nurturing relationships that develop connections and create an awareness of potential networks of support in their social and learning communities.

Jamie Caine and colleagues report on progress on a race-specific initiative at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) established by the authors. Through a self-study and survey with BME student participants, the authors reflect on some of the key successes of this initiative. Entitled 'Principles of Success', this initiative arose essentially from the authors' objection to the apparent deficit thinking within the education context which assumes that students have limitations in facets such as cognitive, motivational, and other factors that lead to underachievement. The Principle of Success initiative challenges this majoritarian narrative which, they argue, is mostly done under the banner of setting an inclusion agenda rather than addressing racism head-on. Principles of Success (PoS) is an organic progressive change initiative that is centred upon enhancing race inclusion. The initiative was developed by SHU's African, Asian and other Minoritised Groups (AAMG) staff against the backdrop of a legacy of a distinct lack of enhancing the sense of belonging, leveraging cultural wealth and the absence of a clear integrated progressive approach within the different faculties across the university. PoS was developed though an ethics of love, the founders (the authors) being inspired by the work of H.R. Milner (2007). The initiative is aimed at all AAMG students in the university. The initiative brought students and staff together in a space where 'one can speak openly about their heritage and culture, and it resonates with someone else in the room'. Thus, PoS did not only offer a place of comfort for students categorised as AAMG, it also offered a sense of belonging and community.

Through a relational pedagogical approach (termed 'Progressive Relational Pedagogy' – PRP) underpinned by: (1) Sense of Belonging, (2) Student Voice, Value and Cultural Wealth, (3) Globalised Curriculum, and (4) Links to Industry and Community, students were able to be their authentic selves. Through a number of work streams consisting of targeted activities, PoS provided opportuneness for AAMG students, amongst others, to leverage their cultural wealth, enhance their confidence and self-leadership skills and improve their employability. All the students who successfully completed the scheme demonstrated leadership in various capacities, such as student course representatives, student employability mentors, NHS volunteers for dementia patients, and in community development initiatives. Some of the students even supported widening access work to HE initiatives to inspire and raise aspirations of local secondary school students from working-class areas to further their education. Most importantly, all the final-year undergraduates

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who took part achieved at least 2.1 or 1st class degree classifications. PoS also includes an element of Staff and Organisational Development wherein Module Leaders across an academic department were supported in evaluating their modules through a PRP lens during designated staff development. This enabled the ability to review course diets in order to identify areas of good practice alongside areas for development and enhancement such as culturally-relevant case studies and facilitating students to insert their cultural wealth into the curriculum and throughout their learning. A reflective account of the student character named 'Tonie', revealed that the students that took part in the initiative felt more confident, better equipped and empowered to take on life after graduating. The initiative also provided the students with a sense of belonging.

In the first of the three shorter case studies, Shirin Housee explores the importance of anti-racism in the classroom. She argues that lecturers must take responsibility to create a learning environment that promotes discussions about everyday racisms, to help build a fairer and a more anti-racist world. Reporting on examples of student-led movements in the UK HEIs to decolonise higher education and draw attention to the racial divide, the under-representation of BME staff, and the Euro-centricity of the teaching curriculum, the author argues that it is important for us (their educators) to listen to their demands. Arguing mainly in favour of decolonising the curriculum, the author maintains that de-colonising the curriculum requires a hands-on approach – it is not simply about diversifying the curriculum with more non-white texts and stories, although this is a useful start; it also requires systematic challenging of the misrepresentation of minorities. 'To do this, we have to seek out literature and research materials from diverse communities; this includes BME and white anti-racist academic writings'. In conclusion, the author pays particular attention to the need for our teaching to value our BME students' experience and view it as cultural capital. We must involve our students with curriculum developments; we must talk to their interests and ask what is going well with our curriculum development and what it is we can improve on. We must also aim to encourage a teaching/learning style that is empowering, that enables student voice, so their experience is shared and validated. This enhances their sense of belonging, promotes self-esteem, builds their confidence and, indeed, helps with retention and performance.

In her case study, Hyun-Joo Lim reports on one of Bournemouth University (UK) 's initiatives to improve the learning experiences of their BME students, increase their engagement and satisfaction as well as reduce the attainment gap between them and non-BME students at the university. The initiative described is a student-led project that has provided a platform for BME students to take initiatives in identifying the underlying issues that are affecting them as students as well as provide ways though which their learning experiences could be improved. The students were assisted in identifying problems and supported to work towards effective solutions. An evaluation of the impact of the initiative revealed that all the students that participated in the project claimed that it helped them to engage better with their learning. One of the reasons given for this is that participation in the project enhanced their awareness of issues and barriers that BME students face as well as knowledge of the range of opportunities available at university that they were only able to learn from other students on the project. In addition, the attendance records of these students were improved and some of the students stated that they had become more proactive learners. Finally, almost every student on the project agreed that their participation enhanced their sense of belonging and community through their 'discussions of shared experiences and realisation of other people who 'have similar

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struggles' to their own. Talking about issues and problems with other BME students in a supportive network can be a powerful tool to motivate them to work harder and think more positively about their future. The students felt more confident to seek help, which contributed to improvement in their learning. Echoing other writers, the author concluded that ethnicity can operate as a form of social capital that can offset the disadvantaged social positions of minority groups in society, through dense ethnic networks and support. She added that reciprocal sharing and mutual respect are important components in the development of ethnic capital. Maximising the potentiality of ethnicity as a form of social capital could be a powerful resource that could bring significant changes in the experiences of BME students and subsequent outcomes of their learning during and after university. This is the potential that universities should tap into by providing a structural platform, built on a supportive and inclusive foundation that encourages the proactive participation of BME students in their learning and beyond, in collaboration with academic staff.

Finally, Caroline Wilson, Christine Broughan and Guy Daly's case study is a review of a cross-institution curriculum change initiative at Coventry University (UK) called 'Curriculum 2025'. This initiative is one expression of the University's strategic commitment to address the dimension of 'race' in its learning and teaching. The initiative is designed to help shape all courses to meet the needs of future students. It includes eight key interconnected themes which are being embedded across all the university's course designs including sustainability and social responsibility, flexible and personalised learning, decolonisation, curriculum co-creation, inclusion, authentic assessment, graduate skills and health and well-being, and a sense of belonging. In terms of application, the Curriculum 2025 team provides a series of courses, resource toolkits, webinars and training workshops for those who want to own their changes independently or to learn more before taking action. In addition, it provides an opportunity for academics to 'examine themselves' and reflect on their contribution to the agenda. Furthermore, the Curriculum 2025 team provides help and guidance directly, such as by working alongside course teams on new learning and teaching materials whilst, at the same time, respecting that course teams retain academic ownership of their curriculum. Another facility made available to colleagues is the curation of best practice examples to enable them to develop their own ideas on how to take their subject forward. Also, there is a toolkit for each of the eight themes of Curriculum 2025. The authors concluded by agreeing with Gus John (2019) that decolonising the institution and its leadership is a fundamental prerequisite to decolonising the curriculum. According to John, 'Decolonising the institution and its leadership is a fundamental prerequisite to decolonising the curriculum. The culture and institutional values and arrangements that frame processes such as curriculum design and content and pedagogy and assessment don't just exist. They are the result of leadership, sound management and a shared vision both of the kind of institution one is seeking to build and of the society one wants those leaving the institution, staff and students, to build and manage.'

Taken together, the main message from this special issue seems quite clear: there is a huge amount of work needed to address the racism inherent in current social policy and related curricula, and this work will not be effective unless it draws on the knowledge, experience and perspectives of BME students and staff themselves. There is already beginning to be a range of attempts to do just this, some of them recorded here – but to make the shift from what remains effectively a White curriculum to one which reflects the

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diversity of current UK society requires action; which is driven by a clear institutional commitment going beyond smart rhetoric and embraced at all levels of the academy. There is not space enough to provide a full account of an agenda for change here although many of the articles provide partial agendas but the means for making progress are clear enough, given institutional impetus, and include, at the very least (pulling out a few key common points), fundamentally questioning the meanings of universalism, autonomy, equality and rights, but also how the history of welfare states is framed, radical policy changes in how higher education is delivered if minority students are to succeed in line with more general expectations, the need to create learning cultures and environments that prioritise inclusion, belonging, collaboration and compassion, and the active encouragement of BME students to take ownership of the issues directly facing them.

The editors of this special issue of *Social Policy and Society* thank the Editorial Board for their encouragement in developing the issue, the executive of the SPA for their preparedness to begin to confront the challenging issues raised here and, in particular, the authors of these articles for their willingness, within a fairly tight timetable, to share their knowledge, insights and experience. We also thank Irtiza Qureshi for help in compiling the resources section. We hope this contributes to the development of a wider debate and, more importantly, a far-reaching programme of action despite the, at present, extremely hostile political circumstances.

As an Independent Commission recommends that the statue of Cecil Rhodes at Oriel College should be removed and that steps be taken to improve the offer and acceptance rates for BME students, this special issue is dedicated to the hundreds of thousands of potential BME students who have been denied a good and appropriate higher education experience.

Notes

1 We have used the acronym BME, denoting Black and Minority Ethnic groups, throughout this editorial, to be consistent. We are familiar with the wider debates on this issue and we recognise that there are other conventions. We are certainly not trying to homogenise the experience of differing minority groups. We have also allowed each contributing author in this issue to use their preferred convention.

2 We are not providing full details of most of the key references mentioned in this Editorial Introduction as these are provided in the appropriate article.

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