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## **Race, Racism and Education (SES): Working Paper**

# **The status of race and racism in policy: an analysis of project interviews**

### **SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 The SES Project**

At the June 2015 Advisory Board meeting for the SES *Race, Racism and Education* study the project team identified several themes recurring in project interviews. These included:

- The landscape of race (whether talking about race is now seen as ‘racist’; policy and the ‘white working class’)
- The significance of the Lawrence case (stakeholders v policymakers)
- The extent to which current political figures understand race/racism critically?
- Did policy ever *really* take racism seriously?
- Hindsight, memory and reconstructing the past

Subsequently, individual team members have taken the lead in developing analysis of the interview data and exploring emerging themes. The particular focus of this working paper is on interviewees’ perceptions of the shifting status of race and racism within education and within the wider public space, c.1993-2013. It encompasses discussion of the significance of the Lawrence murder case; the extent to which politicians and policy makers understand race and racism critically; and the availability of a public language for discussing race.

The period 1993-2013 saw the murder of Stephen Lawrence; the Macpherson Inquiry; the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000); London/ City Challenge; the growth of ethnic performance data; and debates on the black/ white gap in UK schools. In form, it comprises a type of oral history, using of interview data to reconstruct multiple viewpoints of a historical period. By shifting the focus of inquiry to foreground ‘hidden’ narratives, this approach enables accounts that might otherwise be trivialised as complaints or as anecdotes to stand as legitimate historical narratives. (Perks and Thompson, 1997; cf. Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). The analysis of interview sources draws on aspects of critical discourse analysis and critical race theory

## 1.2 Race: the forgotten inequality?

The project team's presentation at the SES Annual Seminar 2013 was titled 'Race and education: the forgotten inequality?' Its theme drew upon many years of anecdotal evidence suggesting that experienced stakeholders and activists in the UK have come to regard critical work on race, education and social policy as having slipped from the policy agenda. Our study of race and education policy between 1993 (the year of Stephen Lawrence's murder) and 2013 has afforded an opportunity for systematic exploration of views among educators, activists, academics and policy makers. This paper examines their claims, the narratives in which those claims were embedded and the ways in which they reconstructed past events.

The focus on the slippage of race equality issues also follows other work by CRRE staff on 'de-racialisation': that is, the 'de-prioritisation' of race in policy and in the wider culture (Gillborn, 2008; Rollock, 2009; Warmington, 2014). For example, Warmington (2014) notes that:

There have ...been critiques of education and social policy in both the USA and Britain that suggest not so much a post-racial field but a field in which education and social policy discourses have been de-racialized. In the late 1990s Manning Marable argued that there had been a profound de-racialization of public policy discourses in the USA, claiming that what used to be termed race issues had now been 'subsumed under a murky series of policy talking points, such as affirmative action, minority economic set-asides, crime, welfare reform and the urban "underclass"' (Marable, 1998: 1). In the UK an equivalent set of policy items for the 1990s and 2000s might be catalogued, including community cohesion and academic underachievement.

(Warmington, 2014: 127)

Interviewed in the current SES project, Baroness Doreen Lawrence was among those who referred to the absence of race in public policy. Publicly lauded for her campaigning work around racial justice, Baroness Lawrence was emphatic, stating that: '*race isn't on the Government agenda, they don't address race whatsoever...*' Those of us who work in the field of race equalities regularly encounter such claims. In a sense, they comprise a counter-narrative to the 'progress' narratives of education, achievement and social mobility offered by UK governments (DfE, 2014; Garner, 2014).

This idea of 'de-racialisation' or 'de-prioritisation' also harks back to much earlier debates on the targeting of education and social policy. Commenting on UK social policy during the 1970s, American academic David Kirp (1979) argued that the British preference was to speak in terms of language and poverty, rather than race. Troyna (1992) subsequently took issue with Kirp's distinction between 'explicit' and 'implicit' efforts by the state to address race and, or race in education. Troyna (1992) argued instead that the salient issue was what educational policies were explicit or implicit *about*. Explicitly racialized discourses may be explicit about, for instance, links between race and immigration but silent about the corrosive

effects of racism (Warmington, 2014). Moreover, race does not simply disappear from policy discourse; ostensibly colour-blind policy may still rest upon deeply racialized notions of poverty, class and social agency, even if it does not name race and racism. The project interviews illuminated the dialectic between silence and naming in public debate; interviewees' reflections illustrated that colour-blind policy can exist alongside deeply racialized (but inexplicit) discourses and practices. In this, they ran counter to contemporary 'post-racial' narratives.

## **SECTION TWO: METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 The participants**

The SES project combined two elements: analysis of statistical data on educational achievement and experience, and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders about the development of race equality policy in education. As of May 2015, 34 interviews had been conducted; another 11 people were contacted but either declined to be interviewed or did not respond to the team's approach. The selection of interviewees followed a 'key informant' model. Interviewees were selected because of their particular types of involvement in race equality/ education work during the period studied. The selection drew on the research team's extensive and longstanding networks of contacts with policy-makers, advisors and race equality advocacy groups. Given the number of people nationally that might potentially have fit our key informant' criteria, our 'sample' is inevitably small in scale and its bias difficult to gauge.

A key criterion in our selection of participants/ interviewees was that they should cover a range of (professional) roles. Initially, we conceived of interviewees as comprising (a) policy-makers and (b) stakeholders. However, this binary does not quite reflect the range of interviewees. So, for instance, 'policy-makers' included former ministers and also civil servants (e.g. from DfES). 'Stakeholders' included campaigners, academics and educators. There were also several interviewees who combined roles: Sir Keith Ajegbo was a former head teacher who had worked extensively as a government advisor; Sir Tim Brighouse was a former chief education officer (in London, Oxford and Birmingham) but also an academic; Max Farrar was an academic and also a veteran community activist in Leeds.

### **2.2 The interviews**

As regards format and structure, the interviews were semi-structured and in-depth, lasting between 40 minutes and 90 minutes. Organising themes included interviewees' perceptions of landmarks in race equality policy and race relations since 1993; the impact of Lawrence and Macpherson; understandings of concepts such as institutional racism and anti-racism; emerging issues in race and education. Interviewers tailored their questions to encompass the

particular roles and histories of the interviewees. Thus each interview also had a historical/biographical approach.

Broadly speaking, the analysis of interview material adhered to the ‘qualitative’/‘interpretive’ principles suggested by Miller & Glassner (1997). Thus it is necessary to acknowledge the forces mediating interviewees’ voices: the interview form itself, power relationships, managed self-presentation and, in particular, the retrospective nature of interviewees’ accounts. However, such factors notwithstanding, our analytic standpoint was that qualitative interviewing provided access to the ways in which the interviewees experienced their material, social and cultural worlds, and access to the meanings that they ascribed to work around race and education.

The interviews were analysed using a constant comparative method to identify recurrent constructs (Thomas, 2009). The analysis also drew upon Fairclough’s (2000) model of critical discourse analysis, in that the interviews were examples of ‘researching upwards’, that is examining the accounts of ‘powerful’ actors (e.g. politicians, policy-makers and civil servants). Fairclough argues the need to analyse the policy narratives that such actors construct and the ways in which their sense-making and their rationalisation of policy turns are organised around discursive equivalents and oppositions (e.g. the way in which a speaker such as Keith Ajegbo ‘opposes’ his approach to citizenship with that of Gordon Brown or Michael Gove; the opposition that Jack Straw constructs between Scarman and Macpherson; the equivalence that Tim Brighouse makes between his work in Birmingham in London).

This paper tends towards oral history, in that it focuses on the voices of the participants and on their narrative accounts of involvement in the policy field. It points towards spaces for theoretical development but is not, in its present form, primarily theoretical. However, interviewees’ depictions of policy shifts certainly indicate dynamics that might be understood in terms of critical race theory, e.g. interest convergence (see Maxie Hayles’ descriptions of urban unrest leading to government action) and contradiction closure (the ‘post-racial’ claim that race equality policy has been ‘done’ – see critical comments by, for example, Joy Warmington, Gargi Bhattacharyya).

### **2.3 Structure of the paper**

This working paper is thematic, focusing on the ‘de-prioritisation’ of race in the education sector. It does not attempt comprehensive coverage of all the project’s interview data; other narratives, themes and issues will emerge from subsequent analysis. The paper begins by focusing on interviewees’ discussion of the complex impacts of the Stephen Lawrence murder case and the Macpherson inquiry. These initial sections are also a space in which to reflect on methodological issues around retrospective accounts and meaning-making. Thereafter, the paper focuses on interviewees’ accounts of shifts in race and education policy. These sections include interviewees’ discussion of moments at which education and social policy directly addressed race equality (e.g. ethnic monitoring in Birmingham’s LEA,

London Challenge); slippage of race in the policy agenda; the operationalisation and eventual rolling back of Macpherson and the RRAA (2000); the marginalisation of the citizenship agenda; the dominance of ‘post-racial’/ colour-blind discourses; the narrowing of notions of achievement and equity.

## **SECTION THREE: MEMORY AND HINDSIGHT**

### **3.1 Education policy in 1993**

Teleology is the curse of historical research - and research based on retrospective interview accounts is particularly vulnerable. So it is important to begin by qualifying the idea of the murder of Stephen Lawrence as a ‘marker’. Stephen’s murder in April 1993, and the multiple failures of the police’s investigation, led eventually to the Macpherson Inquiry (1998, report 1999) and to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, both of which impacted in various ways upon the education sector. However, that does not, in itself, afford us an insight into the landscape of race equality or education policy in education in 1993. In fact, a number of the interviewees referred to the staggered route by which the Lawrence murder case impacted on race relations and social policy.

The impact of Stephen’s murder did not have an immediate impact on government policy, and certainly not on the education sector. So where was education policy in 1993? This was mid-term in John Major’s beleaguered Conservative administration (remember that in July 1993 Major was forced to seek a vote of confidence). Capital spending on schools had fallen to less than half what it had been in the mid-1970s and the education sector saw the continuation of market-led reforms (Tomlinson, 2008; Gillard, 2011).

In 1992 the Education (Schools) Act had established Ofsted. In the same year the Further and Higher Education Act removed FE and sixth form colleges from local authority control. Education Secretary Chris Patten laid out a commitment to expanding selection in the secondary school system, to providing ‘choice’ and ‘diversity’ for parents and to addressing falling standards in literacy and numeracy. These principles formed the basis of the Education Act (1993), which introduced special measures for failing schools, and laid the way for greater selection in grant maintained schools (Tomlinson, 2008; Gillard, 2011).

In 1994 Gillian Shepherd became the new Education Secretary. The Department for Education was renamed the Department for Education and Employment. Key policy developments between 1994 and the fall of the Conservative government in 1997 included: the Dearing Review of the National Curriculum (1994); Dearing’s subsequent review of 16-19 provision (1996); the 1996 Education Act (which consolidated all Education Acts since 1944); and the 1996 School Inspection Act. The Education Act (1997) included new responsibilities for school governors in relation to school discipline, raised the limits for

periods of exclusion, provided for baseline assessment schemes, made changes to pupil referral units and introduced the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Reflecting on race and education during the early 1990s, Tomlinson (2008) concluded that the period saw setbacks for BME communities and for multicultural approaches in education and social policy. Shifting away from the approaches suggested in the 1980s by e.g. Scarman (1981), Rampton (1981), Swann (1985), the Major government tended to subsume race equality under generic issues of disadvantage. Anti-racist work was deemed outside the remit of the National Curriculum and when the Teacher Training Agency was set up in 1994, it offered no special provision for teaching and learning in a multicultural society (Tomlinson, 2008). Local government funding to BME community organisations declined (Warmington, 2014).

In schools there was some improvement overall in the achievement of BME pupils but disparities in different BME communities' educational experiences became increasingly apparent, with African-Caribbean and Pakistani pupils having markedly poorer outcomes than those of Indian and Chinese pupils (Modood and May, 2001; cf. Gillborn, Demack *et al*, 2015). Disproportionate levels of exclusion among African-Caribbean children persisted; it was apparent too that the 'failing schools', which had become the object of media and policy scrutiny, were 'predominantly attended by minorities, special needs children, second language speakers and refugees' (Tomlinson, 2008: 123).

### 3.2 Remembering Stephen Lawrence

How then did the Lawrence murder case enter the public space? In the project interviews several participants, both stakeholders and policy makers, recalled initially hearing of Stephen Lawrence's murder. What was noteworthy was that they began by commenting on its 'typicality', rather than the exceptional nature of the case as it later came to be understood. It was 'typical', firstly, insofar as it concerned the violent death of a young black man in London:

I heard about it was because it had been in the newspapers, but it wasn't reported as anything exceptional...

(Trevor Phillips)

...it was another black young man being murdered ... So I'm afraid at the time ...he was murdered – it got in the papers - there wasn't much, as I recall, said about it

(Jack Straw)

Trevor Phillips is former head of the CRE and the EHRC but in 1993 was editor of current affairs show, *The London Programme*. In interview Phillips recalled that Stephen's murder became a news story at the point that it began to be understood as a *racist* murder - the result of a racist attack. However, Phillips also notes that this set it apart from the main debate

about the policing of black communities which were then (and which continue to be) dominated by issues of stop and search (EHRC, 2010):

...for all of my lifetime pretty much, the important issue has still been the treatment of black people, particularly men, by the police. Stop and search. Still the case. And... the Stephen Lawrence story was not really quite part of that story. It's not really quite the same point. It's not really quite the same issue.

(Trevor Phillips)

For Phillips, Stephen's murder was not initially understood as indicative of wider institutional racism. Moreover, Phillips suggested that the Lawrence case has often been misrecognised/misremembered and that the subsequent Macpherson Inquiry has led to it being too readily aligned with an ill-defined concept of institutional racism (see later discussion).

However, it should be noted that other interviewees remarking on the typicality of the Stephen Lawrence murder case suggested that, from early on, the case was understood in terms of wider community discontent over policing. It was a 'typical' case of police failure of black communities. Interviewees such as Heidi Safia Mirza and Maxie Hayles referred to the history of racist policing and miscarriages of justice (e.g. New Cross 13; Scarman Inquiry, Winston Silcott):

...the police force hasn't changed very much in its make up, we still have huge issues to do with racism in the police; look at Mark Duggan and other cases that triggered the riots in 2011 and ongoing issues to do with racism in the police.

(Heidi Safia Mirza)

Gargi Bhattacharyya referred off-mic to attending meetings in the early 1990s in which the Lawrence family were 'just one of many families' campaigning for justice, following mistreatment from the criminal justice system;

### 3.3 Becoming a landmark case

How then did Stephen Lawrence's case become 'exceptional', registering nationally, not only in black communities but also with politicians and policy-makers? Interviewees pointed to the particulars of the case: e.g. the combination of legal muscle and the fortuitousness of the personal link between the Lawrence family and *Daily Mail* editor Paul Dacre. These factors helped create a momentum in which government had to be seen to act. Former Home Secretaries Jack Straw and David Blunkett both pointed to the support of the *Daily Mail* for the Lawrence family's campaign, following the failure of their private prosecution:

One element that made a difference in public perception of what happened to Stephen Lawrence was the fact that Neville had done some work for Paul Dacre, the editor of the *Daily Mail*, and the attitude change of the *Daily Mail* to this case... because you

would not have thought that the *Daily Mail* would have taken this on. But because of that human contact, and we should never underestimate that we are human beings, and therefore systems/processes/ policy changes have to be seen in the light of us being human beings – that contact made a big difference to *The Mail* throwing its considerable public weight behind the campaigning and the demand for change.

(David Blunkett)

Academic Heidi Mirza (who was also a member of Blunkett's Labour government Task Force on Standards in Education, 1997) reflected on how the Lawrence family's campaign, one of many waged over decades by black families, became iconic. Mirza attributed the impact of the campaign to its highly organised legal team:

How I see the Lawrence thing and why the Lawrences are remembered as opposed to many, many others and we're sitting here... where the New Cross massacre was just down the road in 1980... you got lawyers, every eminent lawyers involved in the Lawrence case. Again, that whole progressive liberal well educated middle class lawyers who acted as conduits for that civil rights movement and I think it's really important to say that's what made the Lawrences distinctive. They had the evidence, the lawyers got the evidence in order to shift that ground and the state could not say 'this did not happen', the evidence was too overwhelming and the Lawrences got them with their pants down!

(Heidi Safia Mirza)

Jack Straw was the Home Secretary who ordered the Macpherson Inquiry. In his interview Straw offered detailed comments on the Home Office's role in initiating Macpherson. His reflections also offered an insight into the arc of the murder case, from local tragedy to national landmark. Straw commented on the effectiveness of Doreen and Neville Lawrence as campaigners and the involvement of leading human rights lawyer, Imran Khan:

We live inner London in Lambeth. So I'm afraid at the time ...he was murdered – it got in the papers - there wasn't much, as I recall, said about it. And, of course, that was partly because of the way the police had treated the murder - as if the victim was partly responsible for his murder ...It was only from July '94 when Tony Blair became the Leader of the Labour Party, and he made me Shadow Home Secretary that I really, you know, got more interested in the subject. But it wasn't really until Doreen and Imran Kahn and others came to see me, which I think was in '96 that it started really to feature on my radar.

(Jack Straw)

### 3.4 The politics of empathy

Both Heidi Mirza and Gargi Bhattacharyya pointed, in addition, to the importance of the (symbolic) representation of the Lawrence family as a family with whom the media and the general public could *empathise*:

...within the campaign and within the media ...it's racialised and class tropes going way back about the deserving and the undeserving, so Winston Silcott was undeserving and Stephen Lawrence is deserving

(Heidi Safia Mirza)

Bhattacharyya referred to the Lawrence campaign being strategically pitched (within an endemically racialized/ racist public space) to produce 'an empathetic vision of the black family which does touch ordinary British families of different ethnicities in some way...' She referred to teaching cultural studies sessions around the time of Stephen Lawrence's murder, and focusing specifically on:

constructions of the family and popular representation - what that does and how that positions us as audience and what kind of work that does in order to talk about why the Lawrence campaign, ...and also ...family campaigns more generally, as a very particular way of telling the story of racist violence in a way that can make human connections across communities.

(Gargi Bhattacharyya)

Her comments bear comparison with Trevor Phillips' reference to the empathy produced by the Lawrence campaign and the positioning of the Lawrence family. This was, says Phillips, exceptional and unprecedented:

For the first time in my lifetime, the majority community heard a story about black life with which they could unambivalently empathise. And I don't mean sympathise. *Empathise*. And that was to do with who the Lawrences were, how they handled themselves, how their persistence and their dignity in their persistence. Incredibly powerful story and that in itself, I think, changed attitudes quite dramatically.

(Trevor Phillips)

Bhattacharyya's reference to the family campaign (a *family-oriented* campaign) as a very particular way of addressing racist violence carries complex implications. Elsewhere in her interview she explained that the empathetic discourse of family and family loss was one that had been adopted (albeit with less attention) by numerous black campaigners:

...within family campaigns that I was associated with through the nineties, that's an ongoing campaign, whether it's a campaign about the racist killing or attack or whether it's a campaign about a deportation or anything else... how do you tell an

individual's story to show people a human while also saying it's not just me, that to also always be pointing to structural racism to say that this is a bigger picture. And I think that a lot of nineties politics was about that, about saying well, that you start from the very, very local, from the person, from the family.

(Gargi Bhattacharyya)

However, Bhattacharyya also argued that it was a tactic adopted, in part, because of the lack of a critical public language around race and racism:

...there is no black political space, so to create the black political space you have to organise around the things which are very much the immediate things on the ground about what's happening to this person so that you can communicate with others in the locality about what is happening in order to say what is happening here is indicative. This is how you will understand the structure of global racism, by what they're doing to your neighbour here - which I still really buy in lots of ways as a way of operating.

(Gargi Bhattacharyya)

### 3.5 Signifying what?

However, one consequence of this discourse and its adoption by news media was, suggested Bhattacharyya, that the Lawrence murder case has tended to be remembered as an example of a race hate crime. It has not always been remembered as a campaign around policing and wider structural racism within criminal justice:

...another thing happened very, very quickly in terms of the remembering and understanding of the case ...In the *Daily Mail* ...it very quickly ceased to become a story about police racism and incompetence and the history of police racism towards black communities and it became about, oh some terrible killers who committed an awful murder. You know, let's get them.

(Gargi Bhattacharyya)

The narrative around identifying and convicting the killers – the pursuit of individual justice – then produces what, in CRT terms, might be described as a contradiction-closing case:

...it becomes a whole other thing but it's probably connected to what has silenced discussion of racism because then there is a popular outcry and what we must do is cleanse and cleanse our society of these horrible racists because they're not like us, look they do these extreme things ...no connection between the numbers of black men killed by police officers. That's a different story ...there's no compassion for that.

(Gargi Bhattacharyya)

The remembering of Stephen Lawrence's murder primarily in terms of race hate was apparent in a number the interviews, particularly some policy-makers. For example, Sir

Michael Barber (Chief Adviser to the Secretary of State for Education on School Standards, 1997-2001; Chief Adviser on Delivery, 2001-2005, reporting directly to PM Tony Blair) commented on what he saw as the long term impact of the Lawrence murder case. For Barber, the Stephen's murder led to a fundamental change in public attitudes:

I think those basic assumptions (about) what is assumed to be wrong, just common knowledge about what is wrong - racism is considered to be wrong ... That doesn't mean people don't have racist – clearly they do, some people harbour racist views... but I do think there's been progress and I do think some of that is down to Stephen Lawrence and Macpherson and the Lawrence family and the way that's been kept going as a story.

(Sir Michael Barber)

Two other factors were noted by Jack Straw as giving the Lawrence murder case standing in the public sphere: Lord Macpherson's credibility as an experienced high court judge ('he wasn't a ...twenty four carat gold member of the British establishment ... but ...a very good judge - people couldn't ...dispute his findings') and the operational backing given by the Home Office machinery to the Macpherson Inquiry:

I also knew from my experience and from observing what hadn't happened over Scarman, which was the inquiry into the Brixton riots, (was) that unless you – the person in the hot seat, the Home Secretary - set up a machine for pushing things and for checking progress, the whole thing would just disappear ...just because of inherent inertia in the system. So that's why I set up this steering group and made sure that Doreen and Neville were on it.

(Jack Straw)

Considered historically, in the context of the campaigns for justice fought by black families and communities in the UK, Stephen Lawrence's murder contained many all too recognisable elements: a racist murder, police failures and miscarriage of justice. What made the impact of the case exceptional was the leadership and shape of the campaign, its legal teamwork, sympathetic media coverage and the opening of channels between the Lawrence family and policy-makers.

### **3.6 Reconstructing the past**

But if the case became an iconic marker, what precisely did it mark? Did it, as Barber suggested, shift public attitudes to racism? Did it, as Mirza argued, provide proof positive of police racism? Did it mark a new, more effective approach to black community campaigning?

Among the interviewees, Trevor Phillips took a heretical line, emphasising what he argues has been the misrecognition/ misremembering of the Lawrence murder case. Firstly, Phillips queried Macpherson's definition of institutional racism ('Macpherson never really

understood what institutional racism was actually. And the definition they used was partly unintelligible but also vulnerable to misinterpretation.')

[See later discussion]. However, Phillips also suggested that Macpherson's mis-definition was embedded in a fundamental misrecognition of the case itself, and of the basic nature of the police failures:

Because the point about Stephen, the point about the investigation, was that it wasn't just about that (the police) are all a bunch of racists who didn't care about a black kid. Actually what Macpherson showed more than anything else was that they were old-fashioned, incompetent, slow; they were badly organised. And it wouldn't really have mattered too much - I don't know what was in the investigating officers' hearts - but actually wouldn't have mattered if they were, you know, a super squad of the most right on Black Panthers. They were just hopeless. They didn't know what to do. And, you know, I think the reason I'm going this way around it is because I think there's a series of responses which are based on what we now - the story we have told ourselves about this whole episode - which don't actually relate to what happened.

(Trevor Phillips)

Phillips' comments reflect his current position on the usefulness of institutional racism as a concept and, like all the interviews, may include an element of retrospective justification (note, for instance, how in Phillips' quote managerialist language - 'old fashioned', 'incompetent' - replaces the language of institutional racism). However, the interviewees' attempts to recall their contemporaneous responses to Stephen Lawrence's murder are a worthwhile starting place because they alert us to the ambiguities involved in remembering historical 'landmarks' and 'shifts', in contrasting 'now' and 'then', and in judgements about the nature and extent of changes around race and education over a twenty year span.

One reason for beginning his paper with an analysis of interviewees' reflections on the Lawrence murder case is to draw attention to the complex role of memory and hindsight in interview-based research - to acknowledge the mediated nature of interview accounts and the contested nature of the historical accounts produced. The other reason is the complex role that the Lawrence murder case and the subsequent Macpherson inquiry played in interviewees' accounts of shifts in race and education policy over the past twenty years.

The remainder of this paper explores recurrent claims about 'de-racialisation': about the absence of critical approaches to race and racism in current education and social policy. Our interviewees repeatedly suggested that race equality work has become marginalised in the field of education - and that in the broader public space too there has been a rolling back, a retreat that has left little space for critical understandings of race and racism. For those of us working in the field of race and education, this is a commonly heard complaint among campaigners and activists. However, what was striking about the SES study was that similar claims were made by policy-makers and even senior politicians, as well as stakeholders.

## SECTION FOUR: RACE - OFF THE AGENDA

### 4.1 'We've done the equality stuff': the post-racial fallacy

In her interview Sally Tomlinson, the sociologist of education whose decades in the field have included work with seminal figures such as John Rex and Bernard Coard, was succinct in her judgement on the current standing of race equality work in the UK, noting simply that, 'Race is out of fashion.' So has race slipped from the policy slate? As previously stated, it is important to note the wide range of speakers who commented on the retreat of race equality in public policy. Baroness Lawrence, in many ways the public face of race equality (Olympic symbol, elevated to the House of Lords, member of government working groups), stated:

I've said publicly that race isn't on the Government agenda, they don't address race whatsoever and I think that you find that within schools, within outside, within the court system, the whole thing, race is something that people, race is, I think that's where the police were quite comfortable that there is no accountability when it comes to around race. I don't think there's any accountability around that. There isn't any accountability.

(Doreen Lawrence)

Among 'stakeholder' interviewees, grassroots community activists were often vehement in arguing that public/ policy debates around race are now beset by complacency and denial. Maxie Hayles, veteran Birmingham-based community activist, spoke of a post-racial fallacy:

There's a fallacy that we live in a post racial era and that's dangerous. It's dangerous because racism is not *if or but*; it's an inevitable process and we're not going to get utopia.

...just before Tony Blair came out of power, he ordered a report into equalities in Britain and the document was 120 pages and the word 'race' was only mentioned once ... That's why I use the term 'relegate'. How can you talk about equality and you've got to mention, no matter how good a writer you are, are you going to mention race within that document once?

...I'm not very optimistic in terms of race relations because... consecutive governments lack the will because for all different reasons, political reasons...

(Maxie Hayles)

Joy Warmington, CEO of the Birmingham human rights organisation brap, also spoke about the dominance of post-racial assumptions:

It's almost like we felt as a society that we'd done the equality stuff, we'd done the race equality stuff...

(Joy Warmington)

Both Hayles and Warmington spoke of the lack of legacy of what is often to be ‘landmark’ policy of the 1980s. Hayles criticised Scarman’s failure to name institutional racism explicitly; Warmington referred to the apparent lack of long term impact of Rampton and Swann on teacher training.

The academic Heidi Safia Mirza also spoke of the rise of a post-racial rhetoric, wherein a concern with race and racism is made to signify a backward-looking, regressive mentality:

I think people are shy and embarrassed to talk about race now, including my black friends... people that I might mix with outside of academia. They want to say that racism isn't something that they've experienced or know about anymore because it means that you are not progressive. So what I'm saying is that post-race discourse has established itself so strongly in our psyche, in our discourses, that we ourselves can't see race in an everyday way.

...So I think that the post-race psyche is really strong and since Obama and since we've got a rising black middle class, both here in Britain, across Europe and everywhere, you know, and it's been, what is it, 50 years since the independence of African and Caribbean countries, you know, round the 50 year anniversary of those countries' independence, we now don't talk about race in the same way. We're seen as having achieved certain status, like President of USA and civil rights has had its day. It's done its work.

(Heidi Safia Mirza)

#### **4.2 ‘To name race is racist’: loss of a language**

Mirza also referred to a current discursive trope, wherein to speak publicly about racism renders the (anti-racist) speaker open to accusations of racism:

So there is this sense in which, you know, race is something that only the bitter and twisted talk about, only the disillusioned, only those who want a special handout, only those who want special favours, you know. So I think that's the commonsense kind of way in which it works out: that we're kind of post equality because we've achieved equality.

(Heidi Safia Mirza)

This was point echoed in an interview with academic, trade unionist and community activist, Gargi Bhattacharyya:

...the discourse of anti-essentialism and the constructive-ness of race have been so effectively taken over by the other side that to name racism becomes the racist

...I think in every area, especially trade unionism, what an accurate account of what is happening. The first person to name race is the racist. If you say this is racism that means all you can see is race. I don't see race. You see race because you're a racist.

(Gargi Bhattacharyya)

While Bhattacharyya cautioned against the dangers of idealising earlier periods of anti-racist activity ('I suspect it was always a fraught space') but spoke in terms of a retreat in the face of 'the other side': determined opposition to anti-racism:

I would say that after many years of intensive activity and a great deal of quite heroic work by ordinary people in ordinary communities, somehow the work of the other side seems to have succeeded in - I hope temporarily - just squashing almost any public discussion of race, so that things which even ten or fifteen years ago... we were able to say to each other ...somehow the discourse about what can count as racism, about how racism can be articulated, has flowed in such a way that now it's much, much harder for communities to come together and say what is happening to us is racism and this is how we can have a shared understanding and do something about it.

(Gargi Bhattacharya)

Bhattacharyya argued that structural conceptions of racism have been trumped by those who prefer to define racism only in terms of personal prejudice:

...the script has been very effective in terms of silencing discussion of racism in a whole range of spaces and I think (that) has been very eagerly taken up by people in authority in a different range of spaces because it allows... things to be returned to interpersonal relations and racism to not be spoken about and nothing about institutional practice to be spoken about.

(Gargi Bhattacharyya)

### **4.3 Silent and invisible: marginalising race quality**

Bhattacharyya and Mirza were among a number of interviewees who spanned roles, combining activist experience with policy work (as had e.g. Doreen Lawrence; Inderjit Dehal). Another interviewee (anon.) was a civil servant who has also a range of practitioner experience. This interviewee (anon.) named specific moments and settings in which race equality was relegated from the policy agenda. The interviewee referred in this example to working on a New Labour-era DfES focus group with a group of influential head teachers from a priority local authority:

...one thing ...a conversation that I actually remember - I don't know whether they still do it at the Department for Education, but in those days they used to have groups of head teachers ...that used to come and advise the Government on education issues... I think they must have been started in the days of David Blunkett ...like

focus-group-type people ...who'd come for particular – different types of issues and give advice and, you know, meet with ministers ...and so on. And there was one made up of head teachers that used to come and advise. I remember this conversation where the feeling was amongst the head teachers in that focus group ...that they felt that race wasn't such a big issue. Things had 'changed'. Things were changing sufficiently and it wasn't such a big issue.

(Civil servant, anon.)

This interviewee perceived a retreat since the period of Lawrence, Macpherson and the RRAA (2000), suggesting that the terms of public debate had been radically reordered in ways that constrained the possibilities of addressing BME communities' continued experiences of racism and inequality:

...I think that post-Stephen-Lawrence phase was a period of awareness. And I think we've gone back since then. We might even be in a worse place. Because before Stephen Lawrence, black people were visible as the possible recipients of racism. Now they're actually invisible as the possible recipients of racism... Now it's like... you know, black people are integrated. They're settled. They're British. So now the racism that black people experience cannot even be seen, whereas in the past, before Stephen Lawrence, you could talk about people being racist towards black people, and black people might actually nod their head in agreement. Now it's like, 'No, no, no, no. Now it's the Eastern Europeans that have the problem.' Interesting where the problem is located.

(Civil servant, anon.)

However, it is noteworthy that the perception of policy retreat from addressing race and racism was not only held by the 'usual suspects': 'grassroots' activists or activists and stakeholders with backgrounds in/ allegiance to what might be termed 1970s/ 80s black left politics. Note, for example, comments by Derek Bardowell (Esme Fairbairn Foundation) and by Ray Lewis, expert in mentoring and work with black children and families who has also acted as an advisor to Boris Johnson. Bardowell referred to a current comfort zone, in which anxieties about addressing race and racism were displaced by insisting that racial disparities are 'better' than in the past:

that comfort zone... says 'we're not really comfortable with race, we're not really comfortable talking about it unless it's in these really generic, fine terms which say, 'Things are better, so we're kind of happy with that' and it seems to be either of the two extremes – 'Things are better, so we're comfortable with that' or the other extreme which is 'Oh ...we can't deal with that, you know, that doesn't exist, it's not apparent anymore.'

(Derek Bardowell)

Ray Lewis' judgement on policy-makers and the civil service was even more absolute:

They don't understand the importance of race and policy and the need to find targeted solutions to specific problems. They can't handle the race agenda. They have no language for it. It's outside of their skill set, even their values.

(Ray Lewis)

Katharine Birbalsingh, Head of Michaela Community School, a new free school, gained national attention at the 2010 Conservative Party conference, through her outspoken comments on academic standards, low expectations and poor behaviour in state schools. She spoke in terms of a wider public indifference to education and social mobility, among political parties, media commentators and, she asserted, many in black communities:

...I don't write anything anymore. You know why? Because it doesn't make any difference. I was writing all these articles, writing books, trying to do all this stuff, saying, 'I'm going to get people marching in the streets. I'm going to get things to change.' Nobody cares. Doesn't matter what I said to people.

(Katharine Birbalsingh)

Sir Michael Barber's comments on race in education and social policy might be read as evidence of the tendency Bardowell identifies. Barber tended towards a progress narrative, in which the education system in general was 'more sensitive to and effective at dealing with race differences than it was 20 years ago.' He referred to this effectiveness in technicist terms (the importance of nuanced achievement data) and in terms of the positive outcomes of London Challenge ('Hackney, just for an example, exceeds the national average on primary and secondary schools, which is incredible.'). Barber felt that in regions that have only recently experienced new migration, schools might be 'like a decade or two behind the debate on race', but was confident that, in national terms, there have been fundamental shifts in attitudes, naming the Lawrence murder case as a factor in shifting public views ('...attitudes are generally much different from 30 years ago ...racism is considered to be wrong').

Former Education secretary Gillian Shepherd also perceived fundamental generational shifts in attitudes, at least at the personal level:

I just think our young people are living in a much more multi-racial world and you – you think about pop music. You think about the Olympics. You know. There is no way that young people can...really can be racist now.

(Gillian Shepherd)

#### **4.4 From New Labour to Coalition: backwards steps?**

However, in discussing race and education policy, other policy-makers were less optimistic. Several suggested that there had been a deprioritising of race in government policy in recent years. Among them were figures who had worked with DfES on major policy initiatives and research projects. They included Sir Tim Brighouse (London Challenge; City Challenge;

Education Chief Education Officer, Birmingham, 1993-2002); Inderjit Dehal (DfES, EMAG, London Challenge, City Challenge); Peter Wanless (*Getting It; Getting Right* – 2006 report on school exclusions).

Peter Wanless described himself as having been fortunate to work at DfES (under Peter Housden, and with the supportive influence of Michael Barber's Standards Unit) during a period when DfES was receptive to 'sophisticated', community-driven research agendas (e.g. around school exclusions). However, he remarked that this approach had, in the latter part of the Blair government, become squeezed by the universal focus on literacy and numeracy within the school improvement strategy. He suggested that his own report on black Caribbean children and school exclusions (*Getting It; Getting It Right*), while enthusiastically received by parents and activists, had been marginal to emergent DfES work on achievement and school improvement and did not benefit from the 'intensive kind of follow-through' needed to embed policy:

...it wasn't sufficiently connected to a central drive of Government policy and priorities, I suppose, to be elevated to the position that if the report had been on doubling A grades at maths, you know...politicians would have leapt all over (it).

(Peter Wanless)

For Inderjit Dehal, who worked at DfES for some twelve years, the retreat from targeted policy on race and education was not entirely initiated by the Conservative Lib Dem government (Dehal referred to the slow erosion of the influence of Macpherson under New Labour) but it was hastened by the Coalition government, from 2010 onwards. The Coalition, he argued, combined small state convictions with a technicist approach to school improvement and a complacency around improved BME attainment:

I think we've taken tremendous steps backwards in the last five years. So, you know, I'm not trying to paint it in just party lines because... it's not all about the Labour/Conservative divide but (under Labour we had been) progressively able to do more on the race equality agenda. You know, we were able to get it on the table, we had to get schools to start addressing it... taking account of different needs of BME communities and it became a focus.

I'd say over the last five years that focus has completely gone, you know, there is no focus. I never hear any talk of inequalities in terms of false outcomes, whether it be at key stages, whether it be about exclusions. You still hear bits and pieces about the paucity of young people from certain minority ethnic communities going on to Russell Group universities or whatever. You don't really hear anything more than that and I think that's been down to two things. One has been the approach that the Tories have taken where, you know, race just isn't – or any type of equality – just isn't a factor. But the second part of it is how kind of pseudo-scientific school improvement has become.

(Inderjit Dehal)

Dehal, who worked within DfES for twelve years, was among the most explicit critics of shifts - 'steps backwards' - in education policy under the current government. For Dehal, the focus on race equality had 'completely' slipped from the Department of Education's agenda.

Sir Tim Brighouse, former Chief Education Officer in Birmingham, Oxford and London, also claimed that the Coalition had largely retreated from race equality as an issue:

...if you looked back at the 1960s and 70s and wherever you were then, you would say we are further on than then, but we have been further on than we are now... Gone up and dipped and gone up and dipped. And I would say at the moment it's dipping.

(Sir Tim Brighouse)

In his interview Brighouse talked of the need to understand race as a permanent social issue ('I don't believe racism will ever be cracked at all. I don't ...it's something you've just got to keep returning to'). He was particularly critical, therefore, of what he perceived as the current government's failure to address issues such as Islamophobia and a general failure to maintain a focus on equalities in education.

#### **4.5 Diversity and citizenship**

Another marker of the loss of policy focus on equalities was the fate of the citizenship agenda, prioritised by the previous government in Sir Keith Ajebo's (2007) *Diversity and Citizenship - curriculum review*. In his interview Ajebo depicted the Coalition as breaking with New Labour's strategies around citizenship and cohesion. For Ajebo, Gordon Brown had already begun to reshape the citizenship agenda into a much more conservative form (one concerned with promoting Britishness) than that envisaged in *Diversity and Citizenship*. However, under the Coalition the relationship between citizenship, community cohesion and issues of race equality was severed – and, very significantly, Ofsted's focus on race equality was removed.

Ajebo discussed the marginalisation of his own role and his sense that schools, anticipating the impending shifts in national government and the inspectorate, largely jettisoned his area of race equality work:

...we wrote the report, came out in 2007, and it was part of Ofsted inspection, and because it was part of Ofsted inspection, schools were incredibly interested in how do you get those things around community cohesion into your school, so when you're inspected... you can get outstanding?

So from 2007 almost until the 2010 ...local authorities, schools (were) rushing all over the place, doing lots of lectures, talking to people about the report on *Citizenship and Diversity* and sort of the ideas that we had about race and community. But it was

very interesting. Directly it became evident that the Coalition weren't going to have that as part of Ofsted, and that it was no longer so important for schools, and other things were going to become more important as the coalition's thinking, then those invitations dried up. (Sir Keith Ajegbo)

Later in the same interview Ajegbo underlined his point about the radical shift in attitudes to citizenship and diversity, and the crucial role of Ofsted's machinery in determining priorities:

...it died – absolutely died – when the coalition came in... it completely went, once it went out of Ofsted... citizenship and community cohesion were New Labour words that the coalition were not interested in.

(Sir Keith Ajegbo)

Ted Cattle, author of the 2001 report on community cohesion depicted a similar scenario, suggesting that the Coalition government had narrowed and then abandoned work on diversity and community cohesion in social policy:

And, of course, the Government then took it (community cohesion) out of the Ofsted agenda, and they're now trying to bring it back in a very partial way...

...Michael Gove, I think, personally, didn't understand; secondly, didn't believe it; thirdly, and the reason he gave, was that he wanted schools to concentrate on the key performance targets – maths, English, science – and any of this wider education stuff should be ditched. So he created a very, very narrow agenda, and of course the government... are now having to wider the agenda again.

(Ted Cattle)

Like Ajegbo and Brighouse, Cattle suggested that the Coalition's commitment to a narrow version of the performance/ attainment agenda had squeezed out concerns about the wider social context of schooling. Cattle named Michael Gove as the principal agent of this narrowing of focus, and reshaping of Ofsted's inspection criteria.

#### **4.6 The ministers**

Among the project interviewees were a number of former government ministers, both Labour and Conservative. These included three former education secretaries; one former home secretary; one MP who had been home secretary *and* education minister; one former minister for higher education. Some ex-ministers also suggested that race equality had been largely excised from the political agenda since New Labour's 2010 defeat. While it must be borne in mind that these critics were Labour MPs, who tended to locate the decline of race in education and policy with the Coalition government, their comments on the post-Lawrence/ Macpherson landscape should be noted.

Former higher education minister, David Lammy, conceded that some aspects of the Coalition's social policy (and its localist agenda) lent themselves to consideration of diversity but suggested that the Coalition was uncomfortable with defining diversity issues overtly in terms of race:

I mean, the backdrop of Britain circa 2014 is that we have a national government that is not committed overtly to a race strategy, does not like to define things in relation to race, which is different from the previous government ...it's more comfortable with diversity in all its guises but less comfortable with race. The last government has a quite strong agenda around social cohesion coming out of reports like the Cattle Report and the riots in Bradford in 2001. This government seems ...interested in integration but has dropped some of the language around social cohesion. So the national story on a kind of race specific agenda at this point in Britain is not present. There's no leadership from government. That does not mean that there is not a rich debate around race because actually what there is from this government - it's not for me to sing their praises - but there is a strong localism agenda ...and there's a strong autonomy agenda in schools. (David Lammy)

Note that, like Cattle and Ajegbo, Lammy refers here to the loss of the social/ community cohesion drive, to a lack of leadership around equality and diversity – and, like Ray Lewis and Gargi Bhattacharyya, to the loss of a *language* for critically discussing such issues.

David Blunkett, former Education Secretary (1997-2001) and Home Secretary (2001- 2004), pointed to shortcomings of both the previous and the current government. In particular, Blunkett suggested that New Labour's citizenship agenda had never been fully realised:

...on citizenship, you're entirely right. The difference in what we wanted to do and the difference in what happened is one of my sadnesses, not least that we didn't get head teachers to really understand the significance of what they were doing. (David Blunkett)

Later in the interview Blunkett referred to what he saw as a continued failure to develop the community cohesion work initiated in the early 2000s:

We've got to learn lessons, and we don't always learn the lessons ...If people now aren't looking at Herman Ouseley's report and they're not looking at Ted Cattle's report and reading the right things out of them, then God help us. (David Blunkett)

Blunkett also spoke at some length about the narrowing of the Department of Education's remit and, in particular, the failure to develop diverse and robust secondary age educational pathways, something that he believed would impact on the outcomes of BME and disadvantaged groups ('...we're driven by fitting students into what we think is appropriate,

and the new curriculum changes and what Ofqual are doing with the department are going to make this worse.’).

## **SECTION FIVE: WHEN DOES RACE BECOME A POLICY ISSUE?**

### **5.1 Race: now and then**

Fairclough’s (2000) version of critical discourse analysis (CDA) emphasises the ways in which narrative accounts of policy and of political shifts are organised around particular discursive constructions, such as ‘equivalents’ and ‘oppositions’. So while interviewees’ discussion of the retreat of critical debate on race does not imply that they idealised previous eras of policy (‘I suspect was always a fraught space’- Bhattacharyya), it is useful to consider the oppositions they drew between periods, in which to paraphrase Joy Warmington, policy was ‘doing’ race equality and the (current) period in which policy-maker imply that we’ve ‘done’ (or are ‘done with’) race equality. While this paper does not explore in detail interviewees’ reflections on the effectiveness of specific policies, it is helpful to identify where interviewees alluded to historical moments in which policy-makers had, however imperfectly, addressed race equality. What did interviewees believe had driven those moments – and why had political momentum subsequently been lost?

### **5.2 External events and politic responses**

Stakeholders, particularly long-time anti-racist activists, tended to refer to governments historically being driven to focus on race by external pressures. Maxie Hayles, for instance, referred to the series of landmark conflicts between black communities in major cities in the 1980s and to the cycle of local disturbance followed by government response that led to e.g. Swann, Rampton, and Scarman, and to the funding of community projects and anti-racist initiatives.

...under Thatcher - and I call them the disturbances of the 80s, I didn’t call it riots - ...during 1976 to 1981, I think at least 34 black people were murdered in this country and nothing was done ...Also we had during that time we had the Deptford fire, whereby 13 black youngsters was perished. We had a situation then when 20,000 people marched Downing Street... After that march, it was said that the Operation Swamp was a direct result of that march because the police wanted to get even...

...black youngsters were saying enough is enough and basically what they did, they riot; they took to the streets in the disturbance. Now BRAMU, Birmingham Racial Attacks Monitoring Unit, came out of that same period, that same era, and as I said earlier, the Tories, the education of black people then became more to the fore and policies begin to be made because they knew they had problems.

(Maxie Hayles)

Referring to more recent history, Ted Cattle spoke about his report on community cohesion as a (Labour) government response to disturbances in northern England in 2001. Cattle referred specifically to the Blair government's decision to commission a policy review (led by those with backgrounds in urban regeneration and community relations), as opposed to a judicial review.

A number of interviewees spoke of the murder of Stephen Lawrence, the family's legal campaign and the initiation of the Macpherson inquiry in these terms: as external events that impinged on government, demanding a policy response. One civil servant (anon.) felt that DfES' concern with race equality:

...really reached its crescendo after Stephen Lawrence was killed. And, of course, governments – at least, that's the impression I got – they need to respond to that. You can't – you know, they can't just ignore it. They need – because it was such a major event, there was a need to respond to that.

Civil servant (anon.)

However, even within these terms, some former ministers suggested noted that education was not initially a priority in government responses to Lawrence/ Macpherson. For Baroness Estelle Morris, former Education Secretary, the Macpherson Inquiry and the RRAA(2000) were regarded as being within the Home Office's remit, rather than of DfES. Another former Education Secretary, Gillian Shepherd recalled a delayed impact:

...certainly the kind of education focus that came out of the whole Lawrence affair seemed to me to start very much *after* the public enquiry, because they spoke also about the health service and education, whereas up until then it had been seen very much as a policing issue.

(Gillian Shepherd)

### **5.3 Insiders and instigators**

The depiction of governments needing to be seen to do something, to respond to events was repeatedly voiced by stakeholders. There was rarely a sense that race equality work stemmed from inherent government commitment or principle (note again Cattle: 'We do absolutely nothing to present a positive view of the advantages of diversity. The only time we've ever attempted to do it was when we put forward our bid for the London Olympics.').

However, interviewees (policy-makers and those whose backgrounds combined both activism and policy work) did refer to the importance of particular policy insiders whom they felt had, at pivotal moments, shown a grasp of key issues around race. Jack Straw was named by several interviewees, as were David Blunkett, Estelle Morris and Cathy Ashton.

...Jack Straw who was Home Secretary at the time (of Macpherson) ...because he was MP for Blackburn he knew what the issues were ...but obviously he had to temper the issues with a political realism ...he too obviously was facing white hostility.

(Sally Tomlinson)

In broader terms Michael Barber and Charles Clarke were referred to as ministers whose proactive approach to education research created space for innovative work (e.g. Peter Wanless' report on school exclusions). Within DfES civil servants such as Peter Housden were regarded as showing leadership in education research.

#### **5.4 Data-driven action**

The depiction of governments responding either to widespread social disturbances (as with Scarman, Swann, Cante) or to specific, often tragic, high profile cases (Lawrence, Burnage – but not New Cross) falls into a narrative model common among stakeholders and activists. However, among policy-makers and civil servants who were interviewed, another factor was repeatedly identified as helping drive race equality work in schools: pupil performance data.

The early 1990s saw the increased availability of nuanced performance data (although it was gathered at uneven rates across the UK). The importance of performance data in developing a case or targeted work on race and education was discussed extensively by, for instance, Tim Brighouse, Inderjit Dehal and Michael Barber. They regarded a robust statistical evidence base as having driven initiatives such as the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG), London Challenge and City Challenge.

Sir Tim Brighouse recalled his work as Chief Education Officer in Birmingham (1993-2002), emphasising that by the early 1990s the local authority had access to detailed data on performance by ethnicity and gender:

The period where I went to Birmingham - so that's '93 - by that time, in Birmingham ...we had rich data about how well different groups were performing. Now nationally we hadn't and I distinctly remember when I was in Birmingham saying, 'Hey, come on, I've got a problem with African Caribbean boys' - and girls - but particularly boys and particularly poor boys ...Incidentally when I (went) to a school and ask(ed), 'How are African-Caribbean boys doing in your school' - and I knew the answer - the leadership of the school were surprised that I was asking the question and clearly hadn't thought about it. ...So I think that the driver to get interested in all the issues from about that period on was because by the time I left Birmingham, then all that data was available.

(Sir Tim Brighouse)

Here Brighouse describes Birmingham as being ahead of many other local authorities in collecting ethnic performance data. He speaks about the data as giving him leverage to open up questions about racial inequality that many individual schools had not yet begun to acknowledge:

...for instance we set up two groups then finally a third when I left - just small groups which I personally attended every meeting - on African Caribbean achievement, on the achievement of kids from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds and a group finally, at my pushing and we never really got it going in any meaningful way, of white working class poor kids.

(Sir Tim Brighouse)

Later in the interview Brighouse described how New Labour built a national approach to generating and monitoring pupil performance data:

I do think that that was something the Labour Government did, that's to say they insisted that the data was made available to them and then they insisted that the data were made available to different authorities and since then, of course, we've become preoccupied with these data.

(Sir Tim Brighouse)

From 2002-2007 Brighouse was Schools Commissioner/ Chief Education Officer for London. Under Brighouse the London Challenge was initiated in 2003. It focused on resourcing and programmes in secondary (and later primary) schools across London, concentrating on leadership, school partnerships, buildings and environment, students' experiences and performance. Brighouse described how in planning the London Challenge strategy, data became both a lever to prompt action in schools and a way in which he, as education chief, was held to account:

...once you looked at the data, you began to say, 'Well, whatever it is we're doing up to now isn't working and therefore what else should we do?'

...every year I would have a third degree whole afternoon interview with my senior colleagues, from the city counsellor who was in charge of equalities and personnel. Data coming out of everybody's ears with accusations flying at me about have I done enough, you know what I mean.

(Sir Tim Brighouse)

Inderjit Dehal, who worked within DfES on London Challenge and the subsequent City Challenge roll out in Greater Manchester and the Black Country, made a forceful argument about the ways in which the availability of detailed performance data encouraged targeted approaches to addressing race equality in schools.

...the then Labour administration ...develop(ed) the first national strategy on tackling the under-achievement of certain ethnic minority groups. So that's where we started. The landscape at the time was that schools were fairly recent in their introduction to using performance data ...and so with the introduction of better and more finely graded data we were able to demonstrate the things that we already knew. So we already knew that, for example, black Caribbean boys were excluded at several times the average rate, we knew that their performance was worse than their peers, but it was all anecdotal. What we were able to do for the first time was to show ...time series data which demonstrates the degree of the gap ...and using that data we were able to get Ministers for the first time to take note of it.

(Inderjit Dehal)

### 5.5 Ministers take note: a national issue

For Dehal, the performance data provided the kind of evidence that meant that race equality could be understood in terms of the dominant standards and achievement agenda of the Blair-Blunkett-Barber period:

So it became a national issue, the whole notion of gap-closing ...it registered with ministers. It also registered with schools because we were then able to shine a light on individual school performance and individual pupil performance and we were able to go to schools and say 'look, do you know that if you look at Key Stage 4 there's a 30 percentage point gap between how black Caribbean boys do in your school as compared with how everybody else does in your school' ...for the first time we were able to have those intelligent conversations ...and to get schools and ministers to do something about it.

(Inderjit Dehal)

Dehal refers here to the strategic value of performance data: firstly, in moving conversations with ministers and schools beyond the anecdotal (a way of substantiating 'things that we already knew') and, secondly, in developing a *national* conversation around race and educational achievement. Performance data had political purchase; it provided an evidence-base, a rationale for targeted action around achievement:

Ministers weren't really interested until we were able to show them the data ...how do different groups do within those national averages - and when they were able to see, or when we pointed out the extent of the difference, it was then that they started to do something about it.

(Inderjit Dehal)

Dehal's estimation of the role of data cohered with that voiced by Michael Barber:

...overall I think that the education system is more sensitive to and effective at dealing with race differences than it was 20 years ago... and I think one of reasons for

that is that there's individual student level data available at school and system level. So you see it more, the patterns are clearer sooner ...that (performance) database started, which we talked about in 1997, and I think it wasn't ready until the year 2000 or so ...getting individual student level data and being able to track it.

(Sir Michael Barber)

David Blunkett also alluded to the priority that his office placed on building the kind of evidence base described by Brighouse, Dehal and Barber:

...because I worked so closely with Michael Barber and Connor Ryan, they did always want me to have an evidence base for what I was doing, and to examine what we were doing relative to international knowledge.

(David Blunkett)

## 5.6 Targeted policy

Insofar as interviewees suggested that there had been a retreat from effectively addressing race in education and social policy, what 'lost' initiatives, lost momentum, did they particularly identify. In other words, from what have we retreated? Interviewees such as Dehal, Brighouse and Wanless pointed to a series of targeted strategies that had aimed in the 1990s and 2000s to improve achievement among BME pupils. These included DfEE's Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG), London Challenge and City Challenge. It is also important to note that interviewees with long history of activism in the field (Maxie Hayles, Joy Warmington, Tim Brighouse, Sally Tomlinson) made reference to the ways in which the initiatives of the 1990s and 2000s built upon the pioneering work in the 1980s by bodies such as ILEA, some urban regeneration projects and, not least, the work of community stakeholders and independent BME education projects.

In 1999 the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant replaced Home Office Section 11 funding, which had been introduced as far back as 1966. The EMAG was allocated to local authorities on the basis of numbers of pupils from 'underachieving' BME groups and numbers of pupils with E2L (combined also with an FSM indicator). Its specific purpose was to narrow achievement gaps (NALDIC, 2011). Dehal argued that the introduction of the EMAG represented a significant victory in arguments over ethnically targeted measures and laid the ground for the subsequent London Challenge (2003-2011) and City Challenge strategies (2008-11).

Well a lot of it goes back to before London Challenge ...a lot of the ground had been won in developing ...the Ethnic Minority Achievement Strategy. So a lot of the ground had been won there ...ministers and senior officials' awareness had been raised significantly. Because of that we were able to take that into the London Challenge. The other interesting thing about the London Challenges was the reason that they were set up was that there was a recognition that the universal national

strategies hadn't worked in those areas. They hadn't worked for anybody, not just minority ethnic communities, they hadn't worked for white working class communities or communities as a whole.

(Inderjit Dehal)

London Challenge was initiated in 2003. Contemporaneous DfES circulars stressed the aim of 'high performance; high equity' (DfES, 2003), i.e. focusing both on raising general achievement and reducing achievement gaps. This entailed drilling down from universal provision to focus on the performance of BME communities in general, and to focus on the particular BME groups whose outcomes were poorest. In this spirit London Challenge provided individualised support to 70 of the most disadvantaged schools and intensive work on reshaping secondary school provision in key London boroughs. It was subsequently expanded, via the City Challenge programme, to schools in the West Midlands/ Black Country and Greater Manchester, running up until 2011.

Sir Michael Barber also reflected on the success of London Challenge, compared to other achievement strategies:

On education policy, the way I think about it is all the stuff that we worked on in the first Blair term, like dealing with school failure, dealing with bad boroughs – we intervened in Southwark, Hackney, Islington and maybe somewhere else – so we put pressure on the national literacy strategy, the national numeracy strategy, so I think all of those were good things. Education Action Zones was a good attempt but it failed. Excellence in Cities was a better attempt and it did better and then we got to London Challenge ...I think the London Challenge has been fantastically successful but I just think it's an interesting thing, particularly in the 20 years history that successful policies are often based on the experience of previous failure.

So in policy terms initiatives that kept race equality on the national agenda during the 1990s and 2000s might include EMAG, London Challenge, City Challenge and, less successfully, Peter Wanless' 'Getting It; Getting It Right' report on black exclusions. From 2000 onwards, there were measures stemming directly from Lawrence/ Macpherson and the range of duties defined in the RRAA (2000). At local level particular local authorities (notably Birmingham under Tim Brighouse) explicitly addressed race when focusing on educational achievement and school leadership.

## **SECTION SIX: ROLLING BACK RACE EQUALITY**

### **6.1 The current dip**

Let's return to Tim Brighouse's comment on the ebb and flow of policy work around race and education ('...we have been further on than we are now... Gone up and dipped and gone

up and dipped. And I would say at the moment it's dipping.'). If, as a broad range of interviewees suggested, critical approaches to addressing race and racism in the public space have ebbed, if they have 'dipped', then how, in terms of discursive oppositions, did interviewees account for the current dip? How did they suggest that the current landscape differs from the period of EMAG or the RRAA (2000)? Their explanations included media and political derision of multiculturalism; the refocusing of education policy around white working-class underachievement; and the dissipation of Macpherson and the RRAA (2000).

## 6.2 The 'white working-class discourse'

Gillborn (2010) and Warmington (2014) have written about the (re)emergence in education policy of a discourse of 'white working-class' failure and a parallel discourse of derision around multiculturalism. Increasingly dominant since the early 2000s, this policy discourse holds that white working class children now have the worst educational outcomes – and that their position has been exacerbated by the supposed priority given to BME (under) achievement in the 1980s and 1990s. Gillborn (2010) notes that this discourse relies upon a conflation of the categories of FSM and 'working-class' – a wilful misreading of the performance data.

In the project interviews policy-makers such as Brighouse and Dehal recalled how in the early-mid 1990s the availability of detailed performance data had been key in convincing ministers to focus on the underachievement of BME groups. What is also notable, however, is how in the interviews former ministers invoked the 'power of numbers' (Gillborn *et al*, forthcoming) to justify shifting away from targeted work with BME groups. Note, for instance, Gillian Shepherd's response here to the interviewer's comment:

Interviewer: ...whenever I go into schools or local authority or other universities and talk about race inequality, virtually the first question is always, 'Why are you still looking at this, Dave?' 'Cause the white, working-class are the lowest achieving.'

Shepherd: Well, this statistically is often the case. And I can remember when I was secretary of state, the first evidence was coming out that it was poor, white boys who were the ones who were least attendant to and most likely not to succeed. And...I can't remember what we did. I think we put Ofsted onto it, and this was when we did the initial literacy and numeracy pilot schemes.

In Estelle Morris' interview, there was a similar exchange:

Interviewer: How did we shift towards recognising white working class children as a group that needed to be targeted in –

Morris: Because of the data. Don't forget it was data rich...

Later in the interview Morris traces the shift in policy focus to white working-class performance to the late 1990s.

In terms of straight attainment, I think there was a gap between particularly Afro-Caribbean girls, Pakistani, Bangladeshi girls, Indian boys and girls, follow(ed) by Pakistani boys. I don't think the world and the system realised that they'd crept up and left the white working class absolutely behind. And I think that's why in the later 1990s, I think that's why it switched so much.

(Estelle Morris)

Other policy-makers made similar claims:

...they're still not doing a great deal with African or Caribbean boys, although I think they're doing better than some of the white working class boys nowadays, but that's not saying a lot.

(Michael Barber)

...we knew that when we were taking steps to dramatically improve literacy and numeracy, we were going to have an impact on those groups in the education system that had historically lost out. Not just ethnic minorities – although... any look at a place like Tower Hamlets shows just what an impact you can have if there's a focus - but also on white, working-class boys, which are really the minority now ...And that are affected most in terms of under-achievement.

(David Blunkett)

### **6.3 Straightforward populist racism?**

In discursive terms these positivistic readings of performance data arguably served to 'de-politicise' the white working-class agenda, which could now be presented simply as a response to factual conditions. However, among BME stakeholders, in particular, the racial politics of this policy refocus were firmly critiqued. Patrick Roach, Deputy General Secretary of NASWT, reflected on the shift in policy focus to white working-class underachievement and away from BME pupils, depicting it as a variation on a wider 'nativist' discourse:

Well, I mean I think it comes back to these questions about a notion of displacement that somehow certain communities, migrant communities, have taken too much of the public resource... or public opportunity and whoever the 'we' is, we want it back. ...so whether it's ...a narrative which is say no to the EU or British jobs for British workers or, you know, white, working class underachievement in schools, it's all pretty much all part, you know, variations on a theme, it seems... is that a more palatable way of talking about race? It's interesting you talked about class because I'm not entirely sure that it is a narrative about class. I think it's a narrative about race.

(Patrick Roach)

Gargi Bhattacharyya also regarded the current policy agenda around the white working-class pupils as a racialized political response to fears about resourcing – and about racial standing. She suggested that black communities’ historical willingness to engage in organised struggles around schooling led to fears of white invisibility and to a nativist/ majoritarian backlash:

...the black community’s response is “What do you mean (education) won’t get me anywhere? Let’s go and have a fight”. So in the politicised space of public education race is made an issue by force, by people who are facing racism. White people are still being badly served because all regular people are being badly served but then that becomes available as a kind of counter rhetoric, in order to say oh look these... darkies taking up all the public space. They’re getting more. Somehow they’re getting more of something. And so much of the discourse around dispossession of white working class people is that we wouldn’t mind but it’s not fair, they are getting more of something. They are also poor but somehow they’re getting more than us, they’re getting another park ...so it’s about that kind of displacing of dissatisfaction to your near and other neighbour.

(Gargi Bhattacharyya)

(It is worth noting David Blunkett’s comments on what he believes were fundamental policy mistakes around community relations and resourcing: ‘I’ve had to say to people in Sheffield, before the austerity measures – before 2008 – “Don’t just fund this heavily ethnically diverse area; you’ve got to fund the neighbouring area as well because otherwise what you think is a really positive move will turn into a disaster.”’ Here Blunkett prioritised the ordering of public spending in ways that did not lay local authorities open to claims they were ‘dispossessing’ white communities.)

Bhattacharyya went on to argue that the white working-class agenda was embedded in a racialized discourse about the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor:

I think rhetorically at a national level it works as a national story because, as a national story, you don’t even have to have a neighbour. It’s ...there are really deserving people, the poor white people that are out there. You hear it in middle class circles all the time. And what about the white working class, that’s why people are rioting, that’s why there’s extremism, all these things because we’ve not taken account of the white working class. You think well, what do you mean? What would it mean to take account of the white working class? Let’s overthrow capitalism ...And the other side of it ...is that that discourse of the white working class ‘un-classes’ black people, as if we have no class.

(Gargi Bhattacharyya)

This discourse, said Bhattacharyya, was a racialized project, and it was not one that politicians even bothered to present in coded form, but rather was an example of ‘straightforward populist racism.’ Sally Tomlinson was also explicit in her view that public policy is currently constrained by racist political discourses:

...the immigration debate has made any notion of discussing race, immigration, refugees, asylum seekers, whatever, it’s a toxic brew and so I think at the moment we’re really caught in that and those of us who have been in it a long time are, I think, ...quite horrified...

(Sally Tomlinson)

#### **6.4 The legacies of Macpherson**

The racialized ordering of public priorities was an issue also raised when interviewees addressed the impact and legacy of the Macpherson Report and the subsequent RRAA (2000) in the education sector. While complex narratives emerged, the interview accounts suggested that the relationship between Macpherson, RRAA (2000) and the education sector was oblique, and that the education sector had offered a confused and truncated response to the legislation. Several speakers suggested that resistance to Macpherson/ RRAA (2000) and the eventual rolling back of, for instance, impact assessment and Ofsted role in monitoring schools’ race equality duties played a substantial part in marginalising work around race in education.

Veteran anti-racist activists, such as Max Farrar (Leeds) and Maxie Hayles (Birmingham) argued that Macpherson’s focus on institutional racism was a belated attempt to grasp the endemic presence of racism in the UK’s social formation: an attempt to address structural racism in a national culture that prefers, they suggested, to conceive of racism in terms of individual prejudice, in terms of aberrance. They compared Macpherson’s conclusions with those of 1981’s Scarman Report:

The clear implication with Scarman is that he knows that there is racism operating throughout all of (London policing), but if you remember, he draws back from, he explicitly draws back from saying there is institutional racism.

(Max Farrar)

Scarman, when he had the opportunity, he choose to let racism and refuse to let racism be (addressed) by the ...community and that was an ideal opportunity ...it took years after for Sir William Macpherson to actually do another enquiry and then to put racism in its real context to say listen, there is institutional racism...

(Maxie Hayles)

## 6.5 Institutional racism: conflicted responses

However, if institutional racism was Macpherson's key analytic principle, its reception was, according to some interviewees, uneven. Interviewees read the concept in strikingly different, sometimes contradictory, ways. Patrick Roach (NASUWT) recalled initial resistance among teaching unions to the application of the term to public bodies other than the police:

I remember writing our internal strategy in the post Macpherson era and it was one of the first times that we'd begun to talk about institutional racism as an organisation and whether indeed schools were institutionally racist ... I have to say that at that time this union (NASUWT) took the view as, frankly, did other teacher unions, that actually institutional racism was not a label that should be applied to schools; it is a label that fits with the Police.

(Patrick Roach)

However, subsequent research by on teaching as a profession (rather than pupils' experiences/ outcomes) prompted a reversal within NASUWT:

When we eventually moved on a few years later to do some work with – we commissioned some work via the National College for School Leadership, as it was then, the NCSL, that we commissioned the University of Manchester to do some work on the career aspirations and career progression of BME teachers and their access to leadership roles – we could find no compelling case other than a failure, a systematic failure of the system to take account of issues of race, to recognise these issues, to give them visibility, to have clear strategies to actually address racial disadvantage in the workplace. We could find no other explanation other than institutional racism.

(Patrick Roach)

Peter Wanless' report on racism and school exclusions adopted the term 'institutional racism' in accounting for continued disproportionate permanent exclusions of black pupils. However, Wanless remembered reservations among the research team:

(Peter Wanless)

In the group, we had people who were absolutely confident and comfortable with calling what we were seeing 'institutional racism', and there were others who were of a bit more of the system. There were probably – you know, I never declared myself, but I would probably include myself.

Wanless' reservations were, in part, tactical. He believed that the report would be more easily dismissed if it rested too heavily on the idea of institutional racism; readers who rejected the concept would reject the report. He also worried about the blanket nature of the claim:

When you have a school or a class with lots of black African/black Caribbean boys in it, that class and that school were much more likely to get it, because their whole

strategies demanded that they were sensitive to the context and the capabilities of the pupils in front of them. Where you've only got one in the class or one in the school, that's very much more difficult to develop whole-class teaching and learning strategies and so on.

...And so they were less likely to get it. So if you then called that institutional racism, it was a – it felt like an extraordinary, you know, allegation or criticism to make of teachers who were delivering for 29 out of 30 and were delivering potentially reasonably for the 30<sup>th</sup>, but not with the differentiation, and when it went wrong, it went badly wrong, if you see what I mean.

(Peter Wanless)

Sir Keith Ajegbo reflected specifically on the concept of institutional racism used in schools. He concluded that the impact on pupils' experiences was limited:

Institutional racism: some of that stuff was discussed in schools, but I'm not sure how big a difference it made, because there didn't seem to be a massive difference in outcomes. If you're looking at schools from an institutional racist point of view, what you would want to know is that that school was changing, in terms of being less institutionally racist, and as a result of being less institutionally racist, things would change for the young people. And I'm not sure in those years that there was a massive change for the young people.

(Sir Keith Ajegbo)

## 6.6 Macpherson's contradictions

Of all the interviewees, Trevor Phillips went furthest in critiquing Macpherson's conceptualisation of institutional racism. Like Wanless, Phillips felt that the term was a hostage to fortune: too open to outright dismissal. Moreover, Phillips argued that the uneven response to Macpherson and to the race equality duties it spawned were rooted in inherent contradictions in Macpherson's reading of institutional racism:

...Macpherson never really understood what institutional racism was actually. And the definition they used was partly unintelligible but also vulnerable to misinterpretation and that gave rise in my view to the second point which was that the way in which Macpherson used the term institutional racism allowed it to be hijacked and to become an obstacle actually, in the end, to progress. Because what institutional racism meant when it was first coined by Stokely Carmichael, was loosely (about) the tendency of institutions to produce biased outcomes, irrespective of the will of the individuals in the institution. The way that Macpherson phrased it and then told the story allowed, particularly the police, to present it as though he was saying every individual in the police was a racist, which was clearly never going to be the case. So something which actually ought to have ...led to a more sophisticated understanding

of the way institutions worked, for about ten years meant that we were bound up endlessly in a conversation about whether institutional racism meant that every policeman was a racist.

(Trevor Phillips)

At first glance, Phillips' comment resembles a common claim made by Macpherson's critics (see Neal, 2003; Gillborn, 2008), i.e. that institutional racism was a judgement that all individuals in an organisation were racist. However, Phillips explained that his own understanding of Carmichael and Hamilton's (1967) concept was that it described what he termed 'systemic bias', institutional practices that produced racially biased outcomes, but which were not in themselves the product of individual professionals' backgrounds or attitudes (Phillips gave the racial profiling in stop and search as an example of organisational culture producing racially biased systemic outcomes). In this respect, Phillips claimed, Macpherson's definition was blurred and open to (deliberate) misunderstanding:

...I don't think Macpherson really understood what institutional racism as the term was originally coined meant ...I thought that the way he had expressed it left him vulnerable to being misunderstood and, in any event, meant that people who did not want to do anything about the problems that he identified, it allowed them to create a kind of cloud of confusion and debate about things that frankly did not matter and, thirdly, people of goodwill had spent enormous amounts of energy arguing about this thing and fourthly, because it was all so muddy, what in essence it had come to mean in the popular mind was that essentially everybody white was basically at fault because they were white. Now of course that's not fair. Of course, it's not what anybody meant but it is what had happened and that is the way it was received. And what happened is it had become an obstacle... the minute you say the words 'institutional racism' you can see everybody folding their arms and going defensive.

(Trevor Phillips)

So my point was this has not helped us... let's create something which is perhaps a little bit more precise and that's why I suggested a systemic bias ...what I think that whoever had been advising Macpherson probably wanted to get at was, what in another field you might call the ...inflexibility of organisational behaviour and organisational culture, which meant that patterns of behaviour which, most of the time, have nothing at all to do with race, produce a racially disparate effect. And so I was suggesting let's use that term because it's more precise and it gets us away from endless arguments about whether individuals have hate in their hearts.

(Trevor Phillips)

It might, though, be argued that Phillips' own analysis of Macpherson is somewhat ambiguous. Was it that Macpherson simply did not understand the concept of institutional racism? Or was it that Macpherson's conclusions were badly expressed? Is there a zero-sum dynamic in which institutions either produce racial bias through malicious intent or as an

effect of unintended consequences? And what of the agency of those readers who misrepresented Macpherson and created ‘a cloud of confusion’? Phillips offers no analysis of their antipathy, their lack of will, but his point is that the term was unhelpful, impracticable.

In partial contrast to Phillips, David Blunkett claimed that his reservations over the term ‘institutional racism’ were due to his concern that it would absolve individuals from responsibility for her own professional practices:

I understood what was meant – that it wasn’t just down to individuals being racist; that they were affected by the structures, the processes and the attitudes around them, not least the example how it was seen by senior management ...so that if the intolerable is tolerated, people become absorbed into it. I understand all that, but ...my worry about the term ‘institutional racism’ was that it made it sound as though it exonerated – you know, the individual could say, ‘Well, it was because of what was happening around me. It was because of the structures and the systems’, rather than, ‘I have a part to play in this. What was I doing?’

(David Blunkett)

Former education secretary Gillian Shepherd’s comments on the usefulness of the term ‘institutional racism’ perhaps lends credibility to some of Phillips’ claims about Macpherson’s ‘unintelligibility’.

Interviewer: ...do you think it was a useful idea?

Shepherd: In the sense that it implies that people were being racist without realising it... it was a useful idea –

Interviewer: It was?

Shepherd: —because it caused people to think, ‘God. Have I thought in this way?’ And then they would examine their own attitudes.

Interviewer: Right, OK. Because –

Shepherd: So I do think – I mean it’s been much mocked and derided, but I do think it was very useful from that point of view. Because people certainly did think, ‘That’s a funny thing. Am I like that?’ And I think – I’m sure teachers – teacher training, universities – they must all have looked at themselves in the light of that, and saying, ‘Are we doing well enough?’

Here Shepherd seems to understand institutional not in terms of systemic bias or institutional practice but in terms of uncovering individuals’ unconscious bias.

## 6.7 From action to bureaucracy

Trevor Phillips concluded that post-Macpherson debates over institutional racism truncated efforts to *operationalise* Macpherson/ RRAA(2000), often hindering organisational change, becoming a lost opportunity (‘...the people who run the police, schools, the universities, the FTSE100 ignore it, because none of it touches them, it doesn't matter to them. Of course and they are quite happy to encourage this free and open debate because actually it soaks up all of the energy in a way that does not mean that anybody has to do a single thing.’).

Even stakeholders who were less critical of the fundamentals of the Macpherson report suggested that its operationalisation within organisations was often ineffective. However, they tended to attribute this not to Macpherson’s conceptualisation but to the mechanisms proposed for addressing inequalities in organisational settings. For Gargi Bhattacharyya, both academic and trade union activist, the bureaucratic approach to operationalising Macpherson / RRAA (2000) not only undermined the potential of Macpherson itself, but also had a deleterious effect on broader anti-racist activism:

...I really feel like there’s a whole generation of activists who after the Macpherson Report came out ...got buried in paperwork for more than a decade, in order to try and pursue what institutional racism meant in our various work places, organisations, services, because what it created was the opportunity of a highly bureaucratised response to the accusation of institutional racism ...it’s easy to be smart in hindsight isn’t it? Of course, we should have known it. We said, ‘Oh, what we need is ...bureaucratic machinery’ and what they said is, ‘You think you know about bureaucratic machinery? We will show you bureaucratic machinery.’

(Gargi Bhattacharyya)

This, she suggests, led to busy bureaucratic activity but little in the way of effective legacy:

...sadly I think in a lot of institutions ...I don’t think we won very much despite a large, large amount of work being done, that process ...became a diversion ...you’re in this constant quest for a process to agree what the reporting of data and the reviewing of data will be and where the data will be from and what the mechanisms will be. And, of course, that seemed important because that was the Race Relations Amendment Act ...which was directly out of Lawrence...

(Gargi Bhattacharyya)

Bhattacharyya claims that the aspirations around Macpherson were to create lasting dialogue with and accountability to (BME) communities and that it was in this respect that the shortcomings of Macpherson/ RRAA (2000) were most apparent:

... (the) political objectives that lots of activists across different spheres have had (are): ‘OK. We must make them acknowledge what is happening, be accountable for what is happening, tell us the community what is happening, be in dialogue with the

community. In practice, the attempt to operationalise that ...didn't get far beyond aspirations for many sectors; (it) sucked up time and energy which ...left the political vacuum ...Because people only got ...so many hours in the day ...if you take a big swathe of people who are very, very active on this issue and just saturate their time with this, that only leaves some of the people. ...there was, there's just the moment of extreme shift into very, very bureaucratic negotiation, lots of which I think never came to fruition or came to much more minimal fruition than was really planned for Lawrence.

(Gargi Bhattacharyya)

Bhattacharyya describes the bureaucratic approach as a 'moment of extreme shift': one that had a constraining influence on activism, on critical work around race and racism. It was not so much the concept of institutional racism that killed the momentum, as some organisations' canny understanding of how to play bureaucratic systems. Bhattacharyya comments on how organisations negotiated the statutory duties that were supposed to ensure accountability and transparency around race equality:

...there were some places that reported well but I think that's the minority of places ...and, of course, there have been changes in equality legislation and all the ones who were dragging their feet ...thought, 'Aha, now (it's) only ten years later and the Equality Act has come in, so we don't have to do this anymore.' ...Ten years of never quite getting together their race equality reporting. And now surprise surprise perhaps we don't know how to do it after all.

(Gargi Bhattacharyya)

Academic Heidi Safia Mirza spoke of Macpherson/ RRAA (2000) unintentionally creating a 'Catch-22', whereby organisations (such as universities) were able to adopt rhetoric around challenging institutional racism as a means of concealing the persistence of racist practices:

...it's meant to be this iconic moment but what ...happened is it solidified racism in new ways, so we had the ...speech acts - performativity of anti-racism ...and so you have to look what invoking certain terms does. So, if you invoke the term 'institutional racism' in a policy sense ...our universities target black bodies in order to make change without changing themselves. By invoking the fact that they are 'tackling' institutional racism, they're seen as doing race and then that means that the world is all right; they've tackled the issue. So what happens is nothing really changes. So racism becomes more - the technologies of concealment become more difficult to reveal because the language is there, of race, but ...the very policy mechanisms themselves, have solidified racism. So we're in this Catch 22.

(Heidi Safia Mirza)

Learning the language of Macpherson was, for many organisations, some suggested, enough; it became 'proof' of commitment to tackling racism. Moreover, Mirza claimed, in many

bodies Macpherson's focus on addressing racism transmuted into dabbling in organisational diversity: into activity that could be quantified and check-listed:

...And that whole discourse around diversity really disavows racism ...so our institutions claim that they are diverse institutions. So, for example, any university would say 'we've got a diverse student body therefore we're not racist. Look, we've got multicultural catalogues and websites' ...the whole discourse around diversity was about saying we're diverse organisations and we're tackling institutional racism. So it was a quite powerful way of people feeling safe with race. You know, we could talk about being diverse ...and then we had the Race Equality Act which gave us specific duties which of course was another tick box exercise, so any policy that university would have, like changing their entry criteria ...it would go through the institutional checklist ...but it was only as good as the people that did it, so what I realise is that if I didn't have scrutiny or oversight as somebody who knew about race, it was just totally institutional, you would just tick the box, people would say yes. The question was, 'Have you thought about race or gender or disability in this new policy' and all you had to do was say, 'Yes.'

(Heidi Safia Mirza)

Joy Warmington drew a similar arc to that depicted by Mirza and Bhattacharyya. She speaks here of the initial value of Macpherson/ RRAA (2000)'s initial definition of institutional racism, with its onus on examining organisational cultures and structures, as opposed merely to condemning individual prejudice. However, she too claims that its bureaucracy encouraged superficial, performative responses by organisations:

...for many organisations and individuals ...like ourselves ...that had been arguing that this is more than just the odd individual here and there, it was really good to be able to 'out' organisations in a sense - but I think we were very simplistic about the mechanism that we were going to use to address such a complex issue and that's the problem, you know, the complexity. I mean Britain is a mother and a father of a lot of this; it orchestrates and perpetuates the belief in its colonial past and glorious conquering and ideology of fairness and rights and all of this sort of stuff. It's a big thing to say actually we're going to tackle this institutional background - that goes back centuries and it's reinforced through every kind of leadership structure within our country by an impact assessment, you know, we're not matching the... challenge. So on one hand it has been really, really useful... getting people to do the Catholic thing ...successive leaders coming up and saying 'Forgive me, we are an institutionally racist organisation.' It doesn't really help us.

(Joy Warmington)

Here Warmington speaks of a deeply rooted cultural resistance to addressing racial inequality, concealed by a language of fairness and justice. Rob Berkeley (formerly of

Runnymede Trust) also spoke of a strong cultural counter-flow to Macpherson that encouraged contrition, but little action. There was, said Berkeley, a:

farcical ...moment of various institutions saying 'we're institutionally racist', which at the time I was very suspicious of in terms of – really it seemed to be fashionable to claim institutional racism. It didn't seem to be that fashionable to do very much about it.

(Rob Berkeley)

Berkeley suggested that by the end of the decade that began with the RRAA (2000), the limits of Macpherson's impact had become apparent:

...there's an important moment ten years on from the Lawrence enquiry ...in 2009, just a realisation that despite a lot of talk and a lot of effort from some, actually the outcomes hadn't changed. So the stickiness of the political system and the institutions towards change, I think, is instructive.

(Rob Berkeley)

Berkeley was also firm in the belief that whatever space for critical discussion of racism had opened up in the Lawrence-Macpherson-RRAA (2000) had closed again for the foreseeable future:

...it may be that what we've ended up with is after 15 years of work on this (is) it hasn't shifted the matrix and a generation of policy makers are now saying we can't really do very much about this – or a period of benign neglect might be appropriate now and we'll get back round to it in 15 years' time. But that doesn't deal with the urgency issue which I mentioned before, in that there are another generation of young people from minority backgrounds who are feeling excluded from our political system and from engaging with our economic system.

(Rob Berkeley)

While querying the usefulness of the term 'institutional racism', Inderjit Dehal claimed that Macpherson and the RRAA (2000) had created space for discussion of race and racism in public institutions but, like Berkeley, he concluded that it was a space now largely 'eroded':

It does go back to Macpherson and, you know, at that point you got the recognition of institutionalised racism ...institutionalised inequality, and so you were able to have those conversations and you were able to argue to do things about them. All of that's eroded. You know, again if you raise that issue you're again thought of as a mad person, which you probably were prior to Macpherson.

(Inderjit Dehal)

Dehal's reflections bear comparison with Sir Tim Brighouse's comment about the current dipping of government commitment to race equality issues. Dehal suggests that the current retreat has taken policy back to a 'pre-Macpherson' state.

### **6.8 Narrowing the (achievement) agenda**

In considering the erosion of race equality policy, the unseen context of this study is the range of education policies that were prioritised during the period 1993 – 2013. In the New Labour period these included a mass of educational drives around early years, literacy and numeracy, children's services, *Every Child Matters*, the 14-19 curriculum and A-Level reform, to name only a few. The Coalition's term included the roll out of free schools and the expansion of academies. Moreover, throughout the period covered by this study there has been the overarching concern with raising achievement in schools and unstable, shifting approaches to equity (boys' underachievement, FSM, white working-class pupils).

Certainly, the perception of several interviewees was that work around race equality was, from the early 2000s onwards, increasingly subsumed into/ or marginalised by the achievement agenda. When Peter Wanless comments on the lack of follow up in DfES to the 'Getting It; Getting It Right' report on exclusions (DfES, 2006), it is worth remembering the concurrent DfES priorities that attracted large scale funding from central government. Wanless concludes that his work on racism and exclusions:

...wasn't sufficiently connected to a central drive of government policy and priorities, I suppose, to be elevated to the position that if the report had been on doubling A grades at maths, you know...politicians would have leapt all over (it).

(Peter Wanless)

Referring to education and social policy during Gordon Brown's administration, David Lammy spoke of competing micro-agendas even with the area of achievement and equity: in particular, the dissipation of the 'consensus' around the need to prioritise closing the black-white achievement gap:

So I go back to where I started, that does not mean that there is not wonderful examples of good practice around the system where people are just getting on with it and doing tremendously wonderful things. But it means that it's patchy and it means that the consensus language that takes most people with it is not quite there on this agenda. I think that if you go back 5 or 6 or 7 years where there was quite a lot of work going on around the closing the gap and around the attainment particularly of black boys in the system, there was some broad consensus across the political spectrum of the need to do that and some really good work going on in that area.

(David Lammy)

Derek Bardowell also alluded to the de-prioritisation of race equality amidst competing policy agendas:

I would say in recent years we've probably had stronger proposals around gender and equality than we've had instead of race and equality. I would say that's definitely, definitely been the case. So people are trying to tackle gender violence in schools and things of that nature (are) more prevalent than really strong applications around... race and equality in schools.

...the gender and equality voice and the third sector (are) stronger at this particular point. There's a number of people within that sector who are very forceful in their – and I don't mean that in a horrible way, I mean that in a very good way – in their views, they've re-imagined it for a new generation.

(Derek Bardowell)

In the same interview Bardowell reflected on whether the retreat of the race equality agenda was due not just to a more complex reading of equality and diversity but also to a premature willingness to read improvements in achievement among black pupils in London as evidence of mission accomplished:

...we do know, from statistics, particularly when you're talking about progression from education, that these niggling and persistent inequalities still exist ...In terms of how it's tackled and who tackles it ...it seems to be that... - because black kids, particularly in London, are getting higher grades - that people think it's all good and it's all right ...but we also know that they're still being criminalised and stopped and searched a hell of a lot more. We also know that they're being excluded at high rates. We also know that they're being diagnosed or being statemented with special educational needs at a higher rate. We know that they're less likely to get employment, more likely to get into the criminal justice system. So you can't take one thing in isolation and say 'yeah, we're doing really well with this and we've got it licked' ...that one thing might be well but all of the other things that surrounds that young person's life is incredibly negative ...to what degree are schools - beyond the grades - preparing young, black people for the other elements or the next levels of their life?' That's what you would question.

(Derek Bardowell)

Here Bardowell alludes to a perceived narrowing of the goals of schooling: a narrowing that prioritises achievement and credentials over broader socialisation. The implication, made by other interviewees too, is that race equality has become collateral damage in the drive to quantify and raise achievement. Compare Bardowell's comments with, for example, Keith Ajegbo's reflections on the removal of race equality criteria from Ofsted's inspection remit and the consequent slippage of race equality to work to the point where, in many schools, it was seen as an 'extra', not an explicit part of schools' core work:

...to get an outstanding Ofsted, you had to have a high percentage of A to Cs and good SATs results, and (race equality work) didn't particularly contribute to that. And also what schools would argue is... – as in the old 'golden days' ...when you could do ...really imaginative stuff 'cause you didn't have a national curriculum and you weren't constrained by levels and inspections - they would say... 'Where's the space for this stuff?' As if anything in the curriculum about race and class and religion and difference is ...in some ways something extra. And our argument in the report was that this is ...the stuff of education. This is the stuff of life.

(Sir Keith Ajegbo)

Ted Cantle offered similar reflections on Michael Gove's lack of support for the wider citizenship agenda ('...the reason he gave was that he wanted schools to concentrate on the key performance targets – maths, English, science – and any of this wider education stuff should be ditched. So he created a very, very narrow agenda...').

For Inderjit Dehal, it is not only debate around race equality that has been rolled back; there has been a dismantling of the infrastructure that enabled effective work around inequalities, replaced by 'generic' models of school improvement:

I felt we got to the stage where we were developing quite an agile infrastructure to enable improvement in schools (which) has been completely dismantled and it's left to school by school. Schools are judged on generic standards and how well they do against those generic standards; so there is no focus in terms of the performance management system ...in terms of it highlighting how the groups do in respect of each other. There's a bit of it within the OFSTED frameworks; the OFSTED framework talks about the fact if you have a significant group, if the significant groups within the school are seen to be under-performing, that will affect how well your school does overall in terms of achievement. But where you've got schools with large numbers of minority ethnic kids in them, more or less everybody will be doing poorly now.

Note again that speakers such as Dehal, Wanless, Cantle and Ajegbo are, in a sense, insiders: civil servants and government advisers of many years standing. Yet their conclusions are that issues related race and diversity are simply not regarded as part of the core focus of education. Moreover, their analysis is a structural one: where the machinery of curriculum and inspection disregards social equalities, then the space to address issues of race and racism is eroded.

## SECTION SEVEN: CONCLUSION

The SES project's dataset contains rich interview material and opportunities for further analysis. As noted at the outset, this is a thematic working paper, which focuses on one set of recurrent themes emerging out of the project interviews. It does not comprise a definitive analysis of the interview data but it highlights the way in which the project captured key informants' perceptions of the changing standing of race in education policy and in the wider public space. By focusing on participants' voices, it captures multiple viewpoints. Yet it does suggest an overarching historical narrative: the period 1993-2013 was seen by many of the interviewees - policy-makers and civil servants as well as activists and campaigners – as a period in which momentum around race equality of policy built and then failed.

From the mid-1990s race equality issues became imperfectly embedded in education policy (just as in the 1980s Swann and Rampton were imperfectly embedded). Interviewees pointed to a number of converging factors. These included work that built on the longstanding efforts of bodies such as ILEA; the increased availability of ethnic pupil performance data; and the public policy response to the Lawrence campaign, which culminated in the Macpherson Report and the RRAA (2000). While race equality work was uneven nationally, innovations such as EMAG, London and City Challenge, and work in major cities such as Birmingham helped to create something more than liberal goodwill; they created the beginnings of what Inderjit Dehal called 'an agile infrastructure' for supporting school improvement in ways that were conscious of race and racism.

Yet interviewees suggested that by the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, less than a decade after the RRAA (2000), a downward arc was apparent. In the education sector, as in other areas of public policy, race equality became an increasingly marginal concern. Interviewees who adhered to this narrative had backgrounds and standpoints and their accounts were nuanced. Insiders such as Sir Keith Ajegbo, Sir Tim Brighouse and Inderjit Dehal referred to the dismantling of infrastructure (e.g. the undermining of the role of Ofsted). A range of interviewees, from Trevor Phillips to Heidi Safia Mirza argued that Macpherson's legacy had been dissipated by direct organisational resistance and by performativity – bureaucratic tick-boxing. Others, such as Sally Tomlinson, Gargi Bhattacharyya and Derek Bardowell spoke of a strategic colour-blindness deeply embedded in the public sphere, whether presented as optimistic 'post-racial' rhetoric or aggressive anti-racism.

However, the paper should not be reduced to a pessimistic arc. Its purpose is to capture a range of voices and to surface often marginalised narratives, hidden histories in policy-making, educational practice and activism. Its purpose is also to generate further questions about the standing of race in education policy. For educators, parents, students and campaigners, the narratives it depicts will hopefully be of use in their ongoing work of negotiating the structures and politics of the education sector.

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