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PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.

The anti-racist social worker: stories of activism by social care and allied health professionals, by Moore, T. and Simango, G. (eds), St Albans: Critical Publishing., 2021, 154pp., £18.99 (paperback), IBSN 978-1-914171-41-3

In his Foreword to the book, Clenton Farquharson MBE, reflecting his own lived experience of social work, reminds us that we, social workers, "understand intersectionality and see the multiple disadvantages created by skin colour, ethnicity and disability means a person who draws on care and support can be left behind". More emphatically, he sets the challenge "while racism remains a part of lived experienced, dismantling racism must be part of the day job for social workers" (xvi).

And whilst the subtitle on the cover is "*stories* (my emphasis) of activism by social care and allied health professionals", the stories in the book are very much *guides* to doing just what Farquharson states – dismantling racism wherever social work happens.

Farquharson's encouragement is inspiring, but looking back at my initial notes when reading this book, I see that I underlined the phrase 'dismantling racism' with my pen, furnished in the margin with '???!!!'. With the ever-increasing challenges faced by social workers in target-driven, resource-tight contexts I wondered how social workers could dismantle racism alongside the day job.

The book, and this challenge to the profession, was written in 2021. This was the year after the murder of George Floyd, and the second year of the pandemic which saw higher risk of COVID-19 infection for ethnic minority groups living in the UK (HMG: 2021a).   These events, and the shock, impact, grief and trauma resulting from both seemed to offer clear examples of racism's persistence in the UK and USA and its multiple, harmful effects. Yet, around the same time that *The Anti-racist Social Worker* was being published, a UK government-commissioned investigation into race and ethnic disparities in the UK concluded that the 'dismantling' had largely been achieved. Life chances for minority groups result not so much from the experience of racism, but from factors like "geography, family influence, socio-economic background, culture and religion" and moreover, to a "fatalistic narrative that says the deck is permanently stacked against them". Conversely, success is possible, the commission argue, through individual and community agency (HMG, 2021b).

So, here, you have activists writing about their experiences of racism and calling us to pledge and act as anti-racist social workers, whilst the UK government commission suggests we need only a 'road map for racial fairness'. Why then, should we read this book?

First, this context, which can polarise causes as between structure versus agency, is the context of our practice and a daily focus for our analysis. What is going on here, and what is contributing to this situation? Social workers are not simply working with a person's internal landscape and agency, nor are we only addressing structural factors. Social workers have always worked with complex narratives. We consider the intersection of internal and interpersonal factors, with institutional and structural forces. We see the cumulation of psychosocial events across space and time and see how this shapes lives. We shape our interventions accordingly, and work with people in contexts. We reject fatalism but respect the limits of choice and agency in context.

And this book, with its stories of activism inspires us to do just that. Before I share some highlights from the book's contents, there are 2 further reasons why I recommend this book to prospective readers.

First, the very structure and content of the book makes it very accessible. The contents section offers a range of themes, so readers can use those chapter headings to dip in and out. The chapter titles don't always help readers know much of what the chapter is about, but the very handy and welcoming 'Meet the Storytellers' section after the contents section introduces the authors.

And this leads to my second point for prospective readers *and* writers. This '*Meet the Storytellers'* section, and the overall style of the book show the authors to simply be people like you and I. They are a diverse group of practitioners, some new to writing, some new to activism, some new to anti-racism and some are very new to social work. Rarely do you have a publication that offers epistemic products from such a diverse group of practitioners; rarely are such diverse testimonies given such an equitable platform. This book is about more than content celebrating diversity; this book challenges hierarchies in relationships. This book is anti-racism.

In terms of content, each chapter offers not just new learning across domains that be of interest to readers, but offers space to reflect and a call for action. Within and across chapters, the authors seek to both disrupt and strengthen the basis of relationships at the individual, organisational and national level.

For example, chapter 1 flips traditional power relations in an organisation with a newly qualified Black social worker mentoring a White senior manager resulting in illuminating lessons about exclusion and inclusion, using their combined influence on the personal, cultural and institutional levels. Chapters 2 and 3 shows how activism can be embedded in practice, what it is and what the outcome should be. Moore stresses that it's a verb and not a noun (14); a 'doing' word. In the next chapter, her interview amplifies the voices of Black student activists challenging bystander behaviours and colonialising assumptions within the institutions of higher education and social work. Their challenge that "No social worker should relax with the world the way it is today" (27) made this reader question their own complacency.   As a Scottish person, who has only ever practiced in England, these chapters made me revisit surprises about social work in England's ambivalent relationship with activism and 'politics', including how the move to professionalism and standardisation has the tendency to disarm dissent and activism in social work. I was curious about how this would chime with readers across the UK and internationally, and conveniently aligned myself to that 'other', more political and agitating tradition of social work as social justice.

Chapters 4 and 5 disrupted this entirely. Thomas's experiences as a Black woman in academia, a "space that is usually reserved to preserve Whiteness" (35) and Howard's discussion of White social workers occupying the safe 'non-racist' space, quickly cut through social work's self-concept as the 'good guy'. Thomas made me echo her question "where are the Black lecturers in my institution?"; and to consider how "White complicity, White privilege and White inaction" sustains this absence, and finally, how the injury here, using the concept of Ubuntu, is to us all (37). Thomas provides institutions with a (very practical and entirely possible) model of reparation to undo this complicity, whilst Howard shows us how practitioners move beyond merely performative (and complicit) allyship, to 'authentic, effective and actionable' allyship (43).

In Chapter 6, Williams invites us to change what our brains and bodies can do to embody anti-racism. Williams uses metaphors and concepts that are perhaps theoretically more familiar to readers of JSWP, but borrows upon both the critical and psychoanalytical traditions in social work to argue for supervisory and organisational spaces where anti-racism can be nurtured.

Chapters 7 and 8 both linked current challenges to histories of persecution. Both chapters also offered opportunities for members of smaller minorities to speak up about the particular challenges

they face. A highlight of the book indeed was chapter 7, where the authors seek to address epistemic injustices (Fricker, 2007) faced by their communities and then both fill the knowledge gap for readers, in a sort of 'all the misinformation you didn't know was wrong' chapter section, followed by rich and moving stories from authors' lived experience. And again, this chapter shows that it is relationships, and the way relationships are organised that bring change, justice and power.

The editors have arranged Chapters 9 to 14 to look at how 'race' has shaped assumptions, relationships, cultures and practice within and across professional communities. A diverse collection of practitioners, including family therapists, occupational therapists and others working in social care organisations demonstrate the process of creating anti-racist workplaces. In all of these, there are patterns: there is a sense that the time has come for change; there are tentative and careful conversations, sometimes mediated by skilled facilitators, always needing allies, but where some momentum is built. Listening is done, voices grow stronger, momentum grows. Barriers are identified, the models of collaboration are considered and there is a shared responsibility for planning and intervention. These chapters are not just about the outcome; the processes are emancipatory and anti-racist.

Whilst you can see that this reader certainly found the book a valuable read, it might also be useful to say here what the book isn't, or what is doesn't do.

This is not a book that focuses on methods of intervention in social work; it's not a step-by-step manual to creating anti-racist organisations either. I sort of hoped it would be. I like a book that tells me how to do something. Or, something concrete to teach or cascade to students. But of course, that rarely exists in social work. Interventions always occur in context and need thoughtful application. And there are no *vade mecum* guides to anti-racism either.

This book rarely refers to the existing tradition of anti-racist, or even Black perspectives in social work. On the one hand, skipping over the theory and research base may have enabled the authors to focus on the immediate experience and the opportunities for activism. On the other, this neglects a whole tradition of anti-racist scholars in social work. That such an omission occurred is not simply a criticism of the book, but perhaps underlines the effect of removing anti-racist practice from the social work curriculum, in favour of inclusion, assimilation and diversity. This shift removed the discourse of anti-racism in social work, so much so that it had to be re-invented.

What you don't have here either, is much representation by people who have used services, or much about the racializing conditions that shape their experiences with professionals.

But these are all things that other books do. This book is about stories of activism by social care and allied health professionals. It is a book of responses to an injustice that shocked the world, an opportunity for not just reflection but to showcase "catalysts for conversation and change" (118). It is a book about hope. Returning to Omar and Diana in chapter 3, it shows us that profound change is possible through agitation, connection and communication. It tells of the strength, confidence, humility and creative that grows in practitioners when they listen, when they speak with and for others. This is what social work could do every day.

NOTE: For readers new to the debate around 'Racial and Ethnic Disparities', you can find an accessible starting point of the critiques of the commission's report, including the research on which it was based in a Guardian article by Mohdin & Walker (2021). Examples of more extended and theoretically robust critiques include Tikly (2022) and Curry *et al.* (2022).

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