



# ON BEING INCLUDED

*Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*

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## On Arrival

What does diversity do? What are we doing when we use the language of diversity? These questions are ones that I pose *in* this book as well as *to* diversity and equality practitioners working in universities. These questions can be asked as open questions only if we proceed with a sense of uncertainty about what diversity is doing and what we are doing with diversity. Strong critiques have been made of the uses of diversity by institutions and of how the arrival of the term “diversity” involves the departure of other (perhaps more critical) terms, including “equality,” “equal opportunities,” and “social justice.” A genealogy of the term “diversity” allows us to think about the appeal of the term as an institutional appeal. We might want to be cautious about the appealing nature of diversity and ask whether the ease of its incorporation by institutions is a sign of the loss of its critical edge. Although this book is written with a sense of caution about diversity, I am also interested in what diversity can and does do. The more I have followed diversity around, the more diversity has captured my interest.

How did I come to be following diversity around?

Every research project has a story, which is the story of an arrival. The arrival of this book is a significant departure for me as it is the first book I have written that draws on qualitative empirical research. There are at least two ways of telling the story of the arrival of this book: one focuses on research practice, the other on institutional practice.

The first version: I had previously written about questions of race and difference, although, thinking back, it took time for me to get to the point when I could write about race. My initial research was on feminist theory and postmodernism. When I was working on my doctoral thesis in 1993, I remember searching for an example to ground the chapter I was writing on subjectivity. I can recall actually looking around the room, as if an object, one that I might find lying around, could become my subject.<sup>1</sup> At this moment of looking around, I recalled an experience, one that I had “forgotten.” It came to me as if it were reaching out from the past. The very reach of the past shows that it was not one I had left behind. It was a memory of walking near my home in Adelaide and being stopped by two policemen in a car, one of whom asked me, “Are you Aboriginal?” It turned out that there had been some burglaries in the area. It was an extremely hostile address and an unsettling experience at the time. Having recalled this experience, I wrote about it. The act of writing was a reorientation, affecting not simply what I was writing about but what I was thinking and feeling. As memory, it was an experience of not being white, of being made into a stranger, the one who is recognized as “out of place,” the one who does not belong, whose proximity is registered as crime or threat. As memory, it was of becoming a stranger in a place I called home.<sup>2</sup>

Why had I forgotten about it? Forgetting has its uses; unpleasant experiences are often the ones that are hard to recall. I had not wanted to think about race; I had not wanted to think about my experiences growing up, as someone who did not belong. Allowing myself to remember was a political reorientation: it led me to think and write about the politics of stranger making; how some and not others become strangers; how emotions of fear and hatred stick to certain bodies; how some bodies become understood as the rightful occupants of certain spaces. Throughout the course of my writing, I have tried to write from this experience of not

belonging, to make sense of that experience, even when it is not the explicit subject of recall.

One of my aims in this book is to show that to account for racism is to offer a different account of the world. I thus do not begin with the category of race but with more apparently open terms. The racialization of the stranger is not immediately apparent—disguised, we might say—by the strict anonymity of the stranger, who after all, we are told from childhood, could be anyone. My own stranger memory taught me that the “could be anyone” points to some bodies more than others. This “could be anyone” only appears as an open possibility, stretching out into a horizon, in which the stranger reappears as the one who is always lurking in the shadows. Frantz Fanon ([1952] 1986) taught us to watch out for what lurks, seeing himself *in* and *as* the shadow, the dark body, who is always passing by, at the edges of social experience. In seeing the stranger, we are most certainly seeing someone; in some cases, we are seeing ourselves.

We can think from the experience of becoming a stranger. A stranger experience can be an experience of becoming noticeable, of not passing through or passing by, of being stopped or being held up. A stranger experience can teach us about how bodies come to feel at home through the work of inhabitation, how bodies can extend themselves into spaces creating contours of inhabitable space, as well as how spaces can be extensions of bodies (see Ahmed 2006). This book explores the intimacy of bodily and social space: it develops my earlier arguments about “stranger making” by thinking more concretely about institutional spaces, about how some more than others will be at home in institutions that assume certain bodies as their norm.

There is another story of arrival. I became co-director of the Institute for Women’s Studies at Lancaster University in 2000. I began to attend faculty meetings. I was the only person of color at these meetings.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that I noticed this: whiteness tends to be visible to those who do not inhabit it (though not always, and not only). During the discussion of one item at a faculty meeting on equality, the dean said something like “race is too difficult to deal with.” I remember wanting to challenge this. But the difficulty of speaking about racism as a person of color meant that I did not

speak up during but after the meeting, and even then I wrote rather than spoke. Saying that race is “too difficult” is how racism gets reproduced, I put in an email to the dean. The belief that racism is inevitable is how racism becomes inevitable, I pointed out. (One of the favorite arguments made by senior management was that the university was “very white” because of geography—and that you can’t do anything about geography.) Do something about it, he replies. It shouldn’t be up to me, I answer.

How quickly we can be interpellated! My correspondence with the dean took place in 2000 just before the Race Relations Amendment Act came into effect, which made race equality into a positive duty under law, and required all public institutions to write a race equality policy. The dean spoke to the director of human resources. She got in contact with me, offering an invitation to become a member of the newly formed race equality team responsible for writing our university’s race equality policy. There were two academics on the team, both people of color. There are problems and pitfalls in becoming a diversity person as a person of color. There is a script that stops anyone reading the situation as a becoming. You *already* embody diversity by providing an institution of whiteness with color.

It is certainly the case that responsibility for diversity and equality is unevenly distributed. It is also the case that the distribution of this work is political: if diversity and equality work is less valued by organizations, then to become responsible for this work can mean to inhabit institutional spaces that are also less valued.

We can get stuck *in* institutions by being stuck *to* a category. This is not to say that we cannot or do not value the work of these categories. But we can be constrained even by the categories we love. I had experienced already what it can mean to be “the race person.” Indeed, both academic positions I have held in the United Kingdom were advertised as posts in race and ethnicity, the first in Women’s Studies, the second in Media and Communications. In both cases, the experience felt like being appointed by whiteness (even if the appointment was intended as a countering of whiteness). There we can find ourselves: people of color being interviewed for jobs “on race” by white panels, speaking to white audiences about our work. In both cases the experience was one of solidarity with



those who have to face this situation. Whiteness can be a situation we have or are in; when we can name that situation (and even make jokes about it) we recognize each other as strangers to the institution and find in that estrangement a bond. Of course, at the same time, I should stress that we do want there to be posts on race and ethnicity. We also want there to be more than one; we want not to be the one. Becoming the race person means you are the one who is turned to when race turns up. The very fact of your existence can allow others not to turn up.

Although being part of the race equality group made me uneasy for these reasons, the experience of being in the group was nevertheless inspiring. I learned from our conversations, and they provided me with a framework I later developed in the research project on diversity upon which this book is based. What was important and reorienting for me was the experience of working closely with practitioners from human resources. The conversations we had about how to write our race equality policy taught me about what it means to pose questions strategically: to think, for example, about words as tools for doing things, and to think of strategy not as the absence or bracketing of thought (as strategy is often thought) but as the unfolding of thought. The experience of working “on” the institutions “at” which I worked also brought my own thinking closer to home.

At this point I had no intention of writing about those experiences. If anything I welcomed being involved in institutional work that was not related to my academic scholarship. The imperative to transform all experience into writing can reduce the value of an experience by treating experience as a means to this end (though, as I have suggested, writing as a prompter for recollection can be reorienting). Doing this kind of work allowed me to think more about my relationship to institutional worlds. I had imagined that my task as an academic in the race equality working group was to bring a critical vocabulary into the wording of the document. I realized very quickly that critique is not something that academics bring; those employed to write policies and frameworks can be just as (if not more) critical given their very involvement in policy worlds. I realized how the presumption of our own criticality can be a way of protecting ourselves from complicity. As Fiona Probyn-Ramsey has observed, com-

plicity can be a starting point; if we start with complicity, we recognize our “proximity to the problems we are addressing” (2009: 161).

I also came to realize that documents, once written, acquire lives of their own. In my previous work I had offered close and critical readings of multicultural policy documents (see Ahmed 2000, 2004). I began to appreciate the importance of focusing not so much on what documents say but what they do: how they circulate and move around. Indeed, when I began the research, one of my questions was about a diversity and equality policy published in Australia in 1996.<sup>4</sup> I asked the first practitioner I interviewed about it. She described it as “an amazing document.” But she then said, with an intonation that gave the impression of qualifying the value statement: “We changed government and it got buried; it’s virtually never been dealt with that I know of in any arena I know.” The document thus acquires no force. It ceases to have an official existence, even if it still exists in electronic and paper form. To read the document for what it is saying would be to miss this point by making it the point.

In this project I ended up following diversity documents around. But it still took time to get to this point. How did I end up doing an empirical study of diversity work? As with much research, the story of an arrival is a story of our encounters. I began to work more closely with scholars from the Management School at Lancaster University. It happened that Elaine Swan, based in the Management School, was involved in a major bid with colleagues to be the research arm for a new center being set up by the Department for Further Education and Skills on leadership in the Further Education sector (what became the Centre for Education and Leadership). So much research is premised on the “hap” of a happening! They were successful in the bid, which meant they had a budget to support a number of research projects on leadership. Elaine asked me if I would be interested in working with her on a project on leadership and diversity. I saw so much potential in this opportunity: to talk to diversity practitioners across a range of institutions about what they do, to support the Institute for Women’s Studies by bringing research funding into it,<sup>5</sup> and to work with a team of feminist and critical race theorists on a project about institutional change. The story of what happened to the project is part of the story of this book. It unfolds, as the book does.

## The Research Project

My aim in this project was to talk to diversity practitioners about their experiences of doing diversity work within the higher education sector.<sup>6</sup> Overall, I conducted twenty-one interviews, including ten semi-structured interviews in Australia in 2003 and 2004 and eleven in the United Kingdom (all of these took place in 2004 and 2005, except for the eleventh, which I undertook in 2009).<sup>7</sup> All of these interviews took place in the office of a diversity practitioner based in a higher educational institution, except for two interviews with those working at a policy level: in Australia, with one member of staff responsible for equality policy from what was then the Department for Education, Science and Training, and two staff members from the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), which has responsibility for overseeing equality in higher education in the United Kingdom. For all semi-structured interviews, I arranged to meet and interview an individual person. However, in Australia, three of the interviews ended up being with two people; in the United Kingdom, four interviews ended up being with two people, and one with three. My decision in all cases was to “go with the flow” and make explicit my willingness to listen to anyone who wanted to talk to me. I actually learned a great deal from conducting interviews with more than one person, as it gave me the opportunity to listen to the ways diversity gets talked about. Where possible, I have tried to preserve the conversational flow of a group discussion in my use of data from these interviews.

My project was originally framed as a comparative study of diversity work in higher education in the United Kingdom and Australia. I soon realized that a properly national comparison would require more interviews than I would be able to complete myself. The project became reframed about the experiences of practitioners in a range of different universities: my aim was to ensure that the data set included old and new universities, urban and rural, and research-led and teaching-led. I was particularly keen to speak to practitioners in institutions that had diversity as central to their educational missions and those that did not.

My experiences of doing the research in Australia and the United Kingdom were quite different, which could be because of the timing of the

research, as well as the contrasting national environments.<sup>8</sup> My early interviews in Australia were very much focused on questions of language and strategy, as my own starting points in the research (chapters 1 and 2). In the United Kingdom, the focus became more on the relationship between diversity, equality, and performance culture; my interviews took place after the process of writing race equality policies as a result of a change in legislation (chapters 3 and 4).<sup>9</sup> Changes in legislation instituted what I call a “new equality regime” premised on the redefinition of equality as a positive duty. The Race Relations Amendment Act (RRAA) of 2000 was followed by the Disability Discrimination Act (2005), the Equality Act of 2006 (which introduced gender equality as a positive duty), and most recently the Equality Act of 2010, which requires that all public institutions have a single equality scheme.<sup>10</sup>

Together these acts have changed in significant ways the kind of labor involved in doing diversity work: in effect, since 2000, practitioners in the public sector in the United Kingdom have been writing documents to comply with the law. We can ask about the relationship between the new equality regime and what the sociologist Joan Acker calls “the inequality regimes”: the “interrelated practices, processes, action and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender and race inequalities” (2006: 443). To pose this question as an open question requires not only that we do not assume that an equality regime is necessarily aimed at the overcoming of an inequality regime but also that we recognize that an equality regime *can be* an inequality regime given new form, a set of processes that maintain what is supposedly being redressed.

My interviews in the United Kingdom offered an opportunity to reflect with practitioners on the experience of this process and address the question of what the effects of this new equality regime are. The experience of this process offers us the opportunity to “thicken” our description of institutions. The philosopher Gilbert Ryle suggests that “thicker descriptions” require more than describing an action; it would locate an individual action in terms of its wider meaning or accomplishment. He suggests that a thin description of what a person is doing (such as doodling) requires thickening “before it amounts to an account of what the person is trying to accomplish” (Ryle 1971: 498).<sup>11</sup> This book is premised on the

assumption that we can thicken our description of institutions by offering an account of what diversity practitioners are trying to accomplish.

The experience of conducting the interviews was quite nerve-racking: as a text-based researcher by training, I found working with “living subjects” a challenge. Texts can and do talk to us, but their voices are less audible. At the same time, I loved doing these interviews: they became opportunities to have a dialogue with practitioners, to hear their voices. I learned so much from practitioners in both Australia and the United Kingdom who, in giving me their story, also gave me the story of their institutions. As I have already suggested, in arranging the interviews, my explicit aim was to speak to practitioners from different kinds of institutions (a project on diversity needs to think from and with a diversity of institutions). And indeed, unsurprisingly, in most of the interviews, practitioners related their work directly to the kinds of institutions they work in: diversity work often involves “working out” what works given the workplace. I became particularly interested in how diversity workers aim to associate the word “diversity” with the terms that are already valued by organizations. The story of diversity thus becomes a story of diversity’s inclusion into the terms of an institution.

For me, the experience of doing the research was as much about visiting different universities to conduct the interviews, which gave me an opportunity to attend to the different kinds of spaces they offer. In my field notes after my first interview, I noted the following:

This is a very different environment than Sydney University [where I was based on sabbatical]. There is no sandstone. Somehow that goes with the kind of bodies that populate its lawns and buildings. There are lots of black and brown bodies; I can really see the difference. In the student union, the atmosphere is lively. The socialist workers are visible outside, and posters cover the walls about women’s space, queer groups and anti-violence campaigns. Although we can’t stick all of this together (buildings, bodies, politics) somehow it goes together.

The process of visiting different university campuses in Australia and the United Kingdom allowed me to revisit my arguments about the politics of diversity and think more about how diversity becomes associated with

certain bodies, shaping how the university comes to appear *as* body. Although I feel at home in the body of the university, entering it as a researcher of the environment was a new experience. The university reappears when you see it from the viewpoint of a stranger, as someone who is looking “at” rather than “from” its environment. I do not intend to privilege my own vision here, or to imply that a view from a stranger is necessarily more objective. But I suggest that the research process is a process of estrangement, which creates an orientation in which some things come into view that had previously been obscured.<sup>12</sup>

Given that this study involved a relatively small number of interviews, it is important for me to note that I cannot generalize my findings. The research was never intended to generate the kind of findings that can be generalized. The desire for findings can even reduce or limit what can be found. Practitioners across the public sectors repeatedly said to our diversity team that too much research in this field is premised on findings that institutions *want found*: from toolboxes to good practice. Too much research thus becomes translated into mission speech, turning stories of diversity and equality into institutional success stories. There is much less research describing the complicated and messy situations in which diversity workers often find themselves. When description gets hard, we need description.

It was thus very important to guarantee anonymity for both the interviewees and their institutions. Anonymity was necessary to create a certain freedom within the interview to discuss institutional failures and bad practice. I noticed in some of the interviews how accounts of bad practice “came out” gradually: to work for institutions, as practitioners do, can require that you develop a habit of talking in mission talk, what we can call “happy talk,” a way of telling a happy story of the institution that is at once a story of the institution as happy. Over the temporal course of the interview, the happier languages seemed to wear out, and a very different account of the institution was generated. We need space that is not designated as institutional space to be able to talk about the problems with and in institutions.

The research process helped me to think more about the difficulty of equality as a politics: of how in legislating for equality (and against in-

equality), it can be assumed that equality is achieved *in the act*. As I explore in more detail throughout this book, it is as if having a policy becomes a substitute for action. To challenge this substitution (which can work to conceal the inequalities that make the law necessary in the first place), I began to think more explicitly about social action. I came to ask whether there is an investment in both law and policy as “performatives”: as if they do what they say, as if they bring something into existence. If what they do depends on how they get taken up, then the action of policy (as law or letter) is unfinished.

Recognizing the unfinished nature of a social action can be thought of as a methodological challenge. In meeting this challenge, I wanted not only to talk to diversity practitioners about diversity but also to inhabit the world of diversity, to offer an ethnography of this world.<sup>13</sup> In addition to my interviews with diversity practitioners, I draw on my participation in what we can describe as “the diversity world” (meetings, conferences, and workshops on diversity and equality within higher and further education, as well as some events run by the then Commission for Racial Equality [CRE]<sup>14</sup> that were aimed at all the public sectors) and my own experiences as a diversity practitioner. An ethnographic approach to diversity is necessarily “multi-sited” given that the diversity world is a world of mobile subjects and objects, of the networks and connections that are necessary for things to move around. As Mark-Anthony Falzon observes, “the essence of multi-sited research is to follow people, connections, associations, and relationships across space” (2009: 1–2; see also Marcus 1998).

In reflecting on diversity within the university, this book provides a different lens through which to see the environment of the university. I have been influenced by the work of the social anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (2000, 2004, 2006), who draws on her own experience as a university administrator to consider the university as a field of knowledge. The book could thus be considered part of a growing body of literature that offers an ethnographic approach of the university (see also De Bary 2009). To provide such descriptions of the university as a field site is a way of bringing academic knowledge “back home.”

To describe a world that is emerging and to account for the experience of that world from the points of view of those involved in it are the tasks of

ethnographers who participate in worlds they also observe. In writing from and about my involvement, I am both an insider and outsider to the world I am describing. As an academic, I am at home in the environment of the university in a way that many diversity practitioners are not; as someone who has been involved in equality work (as a member of a race equality group, as a participant in equality and diversity committees, as well as my experience as “diversity champion” for my department), I experience the institution in ways that I share with those appointed as diversity practitioners. This is why the task of description became for me not only about giving an account of what practitioners are doing but also to show how much the experience of practitioners can teach us about how we inhabit institutions, what we can simply call “institutional life.”

I should note that in inhabiting this rather vast and fuzzy world of diversity, many of my accounts are premised on “fleeting encounters” with individual actors rather than the more lasting encounters we (rightly) associate with ethnographic research. Perhaps a more precise description of my methodology would be “an ethnography of texts.” To ask what diversity does, we need to follow diversity around, which is to say, we need to follow the documents that give diversity a physical and institutional form. Following documents is also about *following the actors who use these forms*. The question of what diversity does is also, then, a question of where diversity goes (and where it does not), as well as in whom and in what diversity is deposited (as well as in whom or in what it is not). The book draws on the conversations I have had at conferences and meetings on diversity and equality in the past ten years, which taught me a great deal about what does and does not tend to “come up” when diversity and equality are the explicit objects of conversation. It also draws on my own experience of equality and diversity committees at the two institutions in which I have worked, including some description of the conversations we had, when I think it is legitimate to do so (legitimacy becomes an important question when the anonymity of the institution and thus of participants cannot be guaranteed).

By following diversity around, my aim is certainly to describe the world that takes shape when diversity becomes used as a description. It is also important for me to locate this study in terms of intellectual worlds. I con-



sider this book part of the specific tradition we can call, following Heidi Mirza, “Black British feminism.”<sup>15</sup> I was very lucky in the early 1990s to meet Mirza and have one of my first academic essays be included in the collection she edited, *Black British Feminism* (1996). To be part of a collection can be to become a collective. Working as women of color in British higher education does provide us with a shared political and intellectual horizon.<sup>16</sup> To borrow Nirmal Puwar’s (2004) wonderfully evocative expression, we share experiences of being treated as “space invaders,” as invading the spaces reserved for others. We might even experience ourselves as space invaders, a way of experiencing spaces as if they are not reserved for us (and, indeed, they are not).

Yet it might be noticeable to readers that this book does not systematically address the gendering of institutional processes and organizations.<sup>17</sup> In what ways, then, can this book be thought of as a feminist project? Feminist theory has generated a body of knowledge of gendering as social process. However, that does not mean that feminism is necessarily *about* gender; as Judith Butler has argued, gender does not provide feminism with a proper object (2004: 181). In reflecting about gender as a relation, feminist theorists offer critical insight into the mechanisms of power as such and, in particular, how power can be *redone* at the moment it is imagined as *undone*. This book offers a set of feminist reflections on the subtle and not-so-subtle forms of institutional power.

Feminists of color have offered some of the most cogent critiques of the language of diversity (Davis 1996; Carby 1999; Bannerji 2000; Lewis 2000; Mohanty 2003; Puwar 2004; Alexander 2005; Anzaldúa and Keating 2009). Feminists of color have explored the relationship between diversity and power by showing how diversity is incorporated by institutions: “diversity management” becomes a way of managing or containing conflict or dissent. In particular, Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s *Feminism without Borders* and M. Jacqui Alexander’s *Pedagogies of Crossing* are important precursors to *On Being Included*. In these books, Mohanty and Alexander attend to the grammar of diversity and offer substantive critiques of diversity as a practice within educational institutions (Mohanty 2003: 208–16; Alexander 2005: 133–44). Mohanty shows how diversity is a discourse of “benign variation,” which “bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmo-

nious empty pluralism” (2003: 193). Alexander explores how diversity documents have an ideological function in the “manufacture of cohesion” and create the impression of “more diversity” than “actually exists” (2005: 135). Following both these authors, this book interrogates diversity as a set of practices, asking how diversity can participate in the creation of an idea of the institution that allows racism and inequalities to be overlooked.

Furthermore, feminism of color provides us with a ways of thinking through power in terms of “intersectionality,”<sup>18</sup> to think about and through the points at which power relations meet. A body can be a meeting point. A concern with meeting points requires that we attend to the experiential: how we experience one category depends on how we inhabit others. It is important to note that the language of intersectionality is now associated with diversity. As Rachel E. Luft and Jane Ward observe, “the distinction between intersectionality and diversity remains blurry” (2009: 14). We need to think about how this blurriness can do things, such that the terms, in pointing to each other, can also obscure each other. If, as I have suggested, the focus on intersectionality within feminism of color meant a concern with the points at which power relations meet, then it is worth noting that these points often recede from view. This is why when we attend to intersectionality we are actually making a point. There is labor in attending to what recedes from view.

We can ask: what recedes when diversity becomes a view? If diversity is a way of viewing or even picturing an institution, then it might allow only some things to come into view. Diversity is often used as shorthand for inclusion, as the “happy point” of intersectionality, a point where lines meet. When intersectionality becomes a “happy point,” the feminist of color critique is obscured. All differences matter under this view. Yet diversity in the policy world still tends to be associated with race. The association is sticky, which means the tendency is reproduced by not being made explicit. This book investigates what diversity does by focusing on what diversity obscures, that is, by focusing on the relationship between diversity and racism as a way of making explicit a tendency that is reproduced by staying implicit.

My concern with what recedes from general view also signals the importance of phenomenology to this project. I would not describe the

research itself as phenomenological, although I do make a case in my conclusion for thinking about diversity work as a phenomenological practice. Nevertheless, phenomenological models have shaped some of my orientations, including my concern with orientation (Ahmed 2006), as well as my concern with describing how the most ordinary aspects of institutional life are often those that are least noticeable. Phenomenology provides a critical lens through which to think about “institutional life.”

This book can be read in relation to the interdisciplinary literature on diversity, which includes scholarship in education, sociology, management, and organizational studies. I was struck in reading this academic literature by how little research into diversity has involved speaking to diversity and equal opportunities practitioners.<sup>19</sup> We have important studies of equal opportunities from the 1980s and 1990s that focus on the costs and difficulties of doing this kind of organizational labor, including Cynthia Cockburn’s (1991) pioneering work, as well as Sarah Neal’s (1998) study of equal opportunities within British universities. More recently, Gill Kirton, Anne-Marie Greene, and Deborah Dean (2007) conducted an interview-based study of diversity practitioners from private and public sector organizations within the United Kingdom.<sup>20</sup> They suggest that the shift from the framework of equal opportunities to that of diversity has involved a corresponding change in how practitioners understand their relationship to institutions. Kirton, Greene, and Dean argue that as diversity becomes more professionalized, practitioners are less likely to mobilize an activist framework. They suggest that diversity practitioners have an *ambivalent* relationship to institutions, as captured by their use of the phrase “tempered radical” to describe the attitude of practitioners (2007: 1981), a term they borrow from the earlier work of Deborah E. Meyerson and Maureen A. Scully (1995).<sup>21</sup> My interviews are full of similar accounts of ambivalence. We learn from this ambivalence about institutions and the ways practitioners can simultaneously experience themselves as working “for” and “against” them (see chapter 2).

It is important for me to address the politics of location in terms of the location of the research project. The study is of diversity practitioners based in Australia and the United Kingdom, two countries in which I have lived and worked myself. However, the arguments and accounts have a

wider relevance. I argue that the languages of diversity are mobile, and the story of diversity's inclusion within and by institutions is transnational. We could take as an example the group Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations. They organize a conference (which in 2012 will be in its twelfth year), a journal, and a book series and function (in their terms) as "a knowledge community" that is "brought together by a shared interest in diversity in one or another of its manifestations, in organizations, communities and nations."<sup>22</sup> Although the significance of diversity can be described as international, the means by which diversity manifests itself will be local. We need to have conversations with each other from our specific locations. An example of this kind of conversation about diversity is offered in the edited collection *Doing Diversity in Higher Education* (Brown-Glaude 2009) in which faculty based in universities in the United States talk about their experience as diversity leaders within different kinds of institutions. When diversity becomes a conversation, a space is opened up. I have indeed learned from my conversations with academics and practitioners who are "doing diversity" across a range of locations.

I should note that although this book is very much a conversation with diversity practitioners, we should not assume that practitioners form a single community of actors. They do not. Although in both Australia and Britain there are professional associations for diversity practitioners in higher education, not all practitioners participate in these associations.<sup>23</sup> My conversations with practitioners both in interviews and informally at meetings or conferences gave me a very clear sense of the many different biographical as well as social routes into diversity work.<sup>24</sup> My task has been to engage with and analyze how practitioners describe the work they do.

### **Organization of the Book**

The first chapter reflects on the institutional nature of diversity work exploring how practitioners aim to embed diversity such that it becomes an institutional given. I reflect on the relationship between diversity and institutional whiteness. I also ask what happens when the language of institutional racism becomes institutional language. In the second chapter, I turn to the significance of the word "diversity" itself, asking how practitioners use (or do not use) the term. The chapter aims to explain what

appears as paradox between, on the one hand, the ubiquitous use of diversity as an official language by institutions and, on the other, how practitioners experience those institutions as resistant to their work. I am especially interested in how practitioners describe diversity as a tool that allows them to do things. These first two chapters are concerned with how practitioners describe their own work and with the strategies and tactics used for getting messages through to different actors within an institution.

As I have suggested, a key purpose of this book is to offer an account of the changing equality frameworks in the United Kingdom in terms of their effect on practice. The third chapter reflects specifically on the impact of the new equalities regime on what gets counted as equality and diversity, which includes a discussion of equality as a system for counting. In particular, I discuss some of the problems that follow when equality becomes a performance indicator. In the fourth chapter, I turn specifically to the question of commitment as that which is described as missing when diversity and equality become “paper trails.” I offer a thesis that statements of commitment are non-performatives: they do not bring about the effects they name.

The final chapter offers a reflection on some of the consequences of diversity becoming a form of public relations. I reflect on how racism is heard as an injury to an institution and as damaging to an institutional reputation for “being diverse.” I suggest that diversity can be offered as a narrative of repair, as what allows us to “recover” from racism by recovering the very signs of injury. In exploring the risks and necessity of speaking about racism, as both my starting point and conclusion, my aim is not to suggest that we should stop doing diversity, but that we need to keep asking what we are doing with diversity. If diversity is to remain a question, it is not one that can be solved. Indeed the critiques offered in this book are critiques of what follows when diversity is offered as a solution.