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RETHINKING THE PARAMETERS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH IN MULTIETHNIC SOCIETIES – A CHALLENGE FOR SOCIAL WORK

Migrations, movement and mobilities characterise the contemporary landscape of Europe. Europe has witnessed a steady increase in the flow of immigrants, with the European Commission estimating some 25 million non nationals now resident within the Union. At the same time diversity amongst indigenised groupings has been rapidly increasing. In the wake of such far reaching changes to the social and economic circumstances of societies, researchable questions and research activities emerge and become imbued with very specific, political meaning and sometimes conflicting functions. Research agendas can become complicit in constructing and reinforcing the 'problem of minorities' or by contrast serve to illustrate and illuminate the 'problems *for* minorities' by focusing on the inequalities and the experiential impacts of their new encounters. These tensions and concerns should lie at the heart of any contemporary research projects, in the sense that research itself can be harnessed as an instrument of change reflecting the social justice mandate of social work and in the sense that the conduct of research has moral and political dimensions. This paper adopts a socio-political perspective to consider the problems and possibilities associated with making research relevant to the multiethnic, multicultural nature of contemporary societies and to improving the circumstances of minority ethnic groups in Europe today. It argues this does not so much pivot on questions of how to do 'race'/ethnic research but more fundamentally questions what social work research is doing about 'race' and ethnicity.