Working for Equality and Diversity in Adult and Community Learning: leadership, representation and racialised 'outsiders within'

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ABSTRACT This article uses empirical material from a qualitative study of adult and community learning (ACL) to explore issues around leading for equality and diversity in educational organisations. What the author is interested in is the way that the commitment to a 'community' context in ACL opens up (or keeps open) certain possibilities for 'diverse' educational leaders because of the connection it draws between pedagogic practice and the *politics* of *equality*. By calling for a mainstreaming of political knowledge around unequal social relations, participants problematise notions of leadership currently circulating in education. Whilst homogenising tendencies in their accounts may be read as going against the very grain of contemporary debates around the recognition of 'difference' and diversity, they also pose significant challenges to neo-liberal imaginings of diversity.

Introduction

[B]eing positioned as a[n educational] leader, and engaging in the practice of leading and leadership, is a place of *contextualised struggle* ... The real lives of heads, senior and middle managers ... and governors is one of negotiation, conflict and compromise, that is ultimately *about power and their place within it*. (Gunter, 2001, p. 139; my emphasis)

Leading for diversity and 'race' equality adds an additional dimension to such struggle in that it requires leaders to confront their relationships to racialised power. It is the set of issues which surround this struggle that I begin to explore in this article and the research project on which it is based.[1]

This struggle must take place within an increasingly complex social context. The endurance, and indeed continuing ascendancy, of neo-liberal versions of the 'performing' educational provider demands leadership with bureaucratic rather than relational underpinnings. Policy rhetoric tends to favour transformational, heroic and 'Jurassic management' over relational pedagogic practice (Gunter, 2001, 2003). On the other hand, more recent developments in 'third way' rhetoric have encouraged public institutions to incorporate notions of 'diversity', if not substantive equality, into organisational practices. In the United Kingdom:

> We are told that diversity is good for us. It makes for an enriched multicultural society. There is a business case for diversity. There is a governance case for diversity. Within these loud proclamations, what diversity actually means remains muffled in the sounds of celebration and social inclusion. In policy terms, diversity has overwhelmingly come to mean the inclusion of different bodies. (Puwar, 2004, p. 1)

As such, diversity tends to represent superficial commitments towards multiculturalism favouring narrow, formal, non-redistributive forms of equality (Duggan, 2003). This translates into an educational context which tends to 'value cultural differences whilst its hegemonic operations seek to regulate these differences' (Sharma, 2004, p. 106). The current policy context is thus populated

by competing messages as to what constitutes effective, efficient, but also *inclusive* educational leadership.

This article draws on work from ongoing qualitative research focusing on an adult and community learning (ACL) context. A feminist psychosocial relational methodology, drawing on interpretive and psychodynamic traditions, was employed to generate and analyse data (see Hunter, 2005a). Given the dearth of research into ACL generally, only more acute in relation to diversity and leadership in that context, the study was exploratory. The fieldwork involved serial biographical narrative interviews with 12 staff [2] from a range of ACL providers situated in different regions and from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The types of provider included local authority, voluntary community organisations, prison education departments, designated institutions, further education community learning, higher education continuing/community education, and the archives, libraries and museums service. Interviews were loosely focused on how participants came to be in positions of leadership within ACL, what constitutes leadership in that context and how this relates to diversity. Participants were selected on the basis of their involvement in some form of 'diversity leadership' within their institutions, as equalities officers or race equality officers. Only two were employed specifically to do equalities work as most providers incorporate responsibility for this work into other management or teaching responsibilities. I met most of the participants through a national cross-sector Black [3] adult education network. This network has undergone a number of incarnations. At the time of the research it had about 400 active members; its aim is to promote strategic policy issues relating to Black and minority ethnic staff and learners.

I begin the article by situating the research in terms of its community-focused educational context, exploring the possibilities and problems that exist as these are related to racialised constructions of community. In the second section, I explore how participants mobilise notions of leadership within a community educational context. I discuss the ways in which participants' accounts provide a means with which to question normative notions of educational leadership, and the ways in which this may facilitate moves towards equality and diversity. My argument refuses a pedagogical mode which tends to 'admonish and advise'. Instead, I use the empirical material to '*locate*, *engage*, and *expand* productive political moments for future elaboration' (Duggan, 2003, p. 81; original emphasis).

Situating Equality and Diversity in Adult and Community Learning

ACL is a particularly interesting context to explore issues of equality and diversity because of its association, both 'real' and imagined, with an agenda for social change. The notion of ACL is contested, with a vast range of provision which comes under this label spanning such diverse institutional forms as university continuing education, the Workers' Educational Association, Women's Institutes, local authority provision, learndirect in libraries, prison education, and voluntary and community providers. As such, the sector encompasses organisations with a range of histories, value bases (liberal, community and radical) and different relationships to the state. All tend, however, to be marginal to mainstream adult learning provision (see Hunter, 2005b). Because of this variety and the fact that this type of provision includes a range of unrecorded, informal, non-vocational learning, there is no agreement as to the size of the sector. Nor is there conclusive data indicating the social characteristics of the learner or staff base in ACL. Nevertheless, estimates suggest that roughly 19% of all adult learning takes place in ACL contexts (Hunter, 2005b, pp. 10-11) and that learners from a variety of disadvantaged groups tend to take up disproportionately this form of learning (Dadzie, 1997). Anecdotal evidence based on high rates of casualisation in the ACL labour force suggests that women and minority ethnic staff tend to be disproportionately concentrated in this type of adult learning provision (see Hunter, 2005c).

Notwithstanding differences within this range of provision, the common focus, even within more conservative forms of liberal ACL, has been on education for a 'social purpose'. This social purpose has been more or less explicitly linked to notions of citizenship. ACL tends to constitute 'first-rung' provision designed to 'hook' people back into learning on their own terms and in informal educational contexts (White, 2002). It is therefore viewed as distinct from other more formal, mainstream, generally skills-based adult educational provision in that it involves critical,

dialogic, negotiated practice (see Johnston, 2003a) which tends to be located 'closer to communities'. It has also been the site where inclusive learning and access have historically been most widely promoted (Burke, 2002). On the one hand, it has historically attempted to work with 'difference' in a variety of forms, acknowledging groups' and communities' assertion of the right to learn. On the other hand, this history has been linked to the liberal 'civilising mission'. Working with notions of 'second chance', 'return to learn' and 'outreach', it has tended to perpetuate deficit models of 'other' communities of learners. Stuart & Thompson (1995, p. 11) suggest that: 'The very notion of 'outreach' implies a reaching out from the centre of learning and power, and that the institutional centre is the necessary and appropriate starting point'. ACL has therefore also been implicated in forms of 'multicultural fantasy' arising from liberal humanist discourses of charity. Rather than challenging unequal power relations, these discourses tend to sustain such relations in favour of the benevolent compassion 'giver' (see Ahmed, 2004; see also Sharma, 2004).

A further related problem is the romanticisation (and homogenisation) of the classed community in ACL. Historically, in ACL:

> Within working-class neighbourhoods community became a place and a space within class ... The contradictions and fractures of gender, ethnicity and age divisions ... melted and were not constructed as a central part of 'communities'. Thus, community was located within a consensus constructed around the hegemony of white Englishness and homogenised as 'the community', becoming itself the subject/object of educational interventions. (Westwood, 1992, p. 234; see also Martin, 1993, 1996)

Discursive shifts within English social policies have served to racialise community. Lewis's (2000) work has documented the ways in which the notion of community has become discursively associated with inner-city urban communities more recently constructed as synonymous with racialised populations. She also demonstrates how institutional employment practices perpetuate this association. For example, the statutory provision of 'community relations' posts via Section 11 of the 1966 Local Government Act created a space for the employment of Black and minority ethnic staff in public service (see also Ray, 2003). These processes would seem to be reflected in the more general structure of employment within ACL, with many of the minoritised participants in this study having been employed in Section 11 posts. However, such spaces paradoxically contribute to the construction of community, culture and ethnicity as the preserve of minority groups alone (Westwood, 1991; Bellis & Morrice, 2003, p. 89).

These developments mean that current discourses of community have become a way of referencing 'race' and ethnicity without explicitly naming them. They simultaneously negate racialised language whilst constructing racialised reference points (Worley, 2005). Community thus becomes part of the 'metalanguage of race', where this language 'speaks about and lends meaning to a host of terms and expressions, to myriad aspects of life that would otherwise fall outside the referential domain of race' (Higginbotham, 1992, p. 255). Whether textually omitted or privileged, 'race' totalises and determines understandings of other social relations, obscuring class, gender, age and sexuality. Paradoxically, 'race' and community and culture as its more benign linguistic purveyors constitute the language of Black liberation, but can also homogenise and essentialise, constituting the language of Black oppression.

Notwithstanding the dangers associated with collapsing community and ethnicity, the more radical developments in independent community education created the space through which feminist and anti-racist struggles have been promoted in learning (see hooks, 1994; Stuart & Thompson, 1995; Mirza, 1997; Sudbury, 1998; Barr, 1999; Ryan, 2001; Alleyne, 2002). This is at least in part because a community context

> offers space for collective learning, where groups can develop autonomy, some way removed from the obvious restrictions of governmental and social control, and the opportunity to develop different forms of learning and participation. (Johnston, 2003b, pp. 55-56)

Community development approaches were strongly influenced by the historical materialist analysis in the work of Freire (1970) and Gramsci (see Nowell-Smith, 1971). A key concern was to problematise the power/knowledge relation, directly connecting the political and the pedagogical (Walters & Manicom, 1996).

It is because ACL has often served to question the power and authority of the educator within pedagogic relationships that this constitutes a site where it might be anticipated that equalities work might be central to, rather than an additional dimension of, leadership practice. It might even be a site where the very notion of leadership comes into question. The former assumption is certainly at work in current adult learning policies, where ACL is promoted as a model for diversity work, 'having flair in working with marginalised people' and, more specifically, minoritised learners (Learning and Skills Council, 2004, p. 1). Herein, however, lies the inherent contradiction in forwarding a community agenda *within* educational institutions. On the one hand, we have the danger of co-option by the state and the deradicalisation of negotiated learning agendas (Cairns, 2003; Hunter, 2005c). Indeed, parallels can be drawn between the current language of diversity in community education and the current vocabulary of the corporate boardroom (Walters & Manicom, 1996, p. 7). On the other hand, it is precisely ACL's positioning 'at the interface' that makes radical interventions in politics and subjectivities possible (Westwood, 1992; Barr, 1999).

Perpetually Racialised 'Outsiders' 'Within'?

The characterisation of ACL as 'for equalities' has resonance with participants' perspectives, many of whom moved out of other learning and teaching contexts into ACL explicitly to do equalities work. For Doreen, a West Indian head of service grade manager in a large inner-urban Local Education Authority, moving from an inclusive learning post in further education to a post in ACL was where her 'equality agenda sort of really allowed itself to be kicked in':

> I've always had an interest in equalities and I've done it in all the organisations that I've worked in. But actually, when you are out there and you are working in the communities it becomes more honed and sort of harnessed and you've got to be more aware of the types of groups that you are going into and you learn about the differences about the groups.

For Fredrick, a Black Caribbean development worker for a national adult education organisation, his first experience of ACL via secondment to a community arts organisation was like: 'coming home because I had worked in white [educational] institutions for four years and this was the total reverse of that. You know it was about being able to express myself more, culturally'.

Doreen is more explicit as to the role of 'race' and racism in the difference between educational contexts:

> The difference between ACL and FE [further education] is that in the community there are those issues [racism] but they're not as significant because you've got these diversities within the workforce. Where you get the issues is when the diversity of people in their jobs rises above a certain level so it's a level-based thing.

An ACL context at first sight, therefore, would seem to be more 'diverse', both in terms of who works within that context and how practitioners are able to practise, to 'express themselves' and to work with and 'learn about' difference. However, this link between community and diversity (where there is already a slippage between diversity and 'race' in Doreen's final comments) can be viewed as reflecting and perpetuating more general slippages between the notions of community and minoritised ethnicity. Fredrick's comments extend the slippage between notions of 'race', community, culture and home. There is the danger here that the community comes to constitute diversity and, in particular, racialised difference. Nor are more 'positive' representations of ACL to suggest that minoritised staff do not experience racism within this context, only that there are specificities to its operation dependent on context. As Doreen suggests, the similarity occurs when participants engage in upward movement through organisational hierarchies.

At a basic level, a 'white somatic norm' (Puwar, 2004) undoubtedly operates across ACL to construct Black and minority ethnic staff as racialised outsiders, fixed in terms of their ethnicity. It is this fixing which prevents them entirely 'fitting' in with their professional communities. Doreen uses an insider/outsider conceptualisation as a way of describing her positioning:

> You are ... like an outsider coming in and looking different ... And therefore when I go in it is almost a period of [White] people getting rid of their own preconceived ideas and

misconceptions and whatever, until they get to know you. And then there is a period where [White] people never get over it, because they never get to know you.

Her comments here can be read as one form of what Puwar describes as the 'disorientation' (2001; 2004, pp. 41-46) experienced by White staff when Black and minority ethnic staff take up posts. So, whilst Doreen's presence is framed in racialised terms, her very positioning, the moment of arrival, is also disrupting of organisational norms.

Doreen also describes another manifestation of the burden of racialised in/visibility produced by the existence of a 'white somatic norm':

The second sort of appraisal that I had there ... with my line manager there who was really very good as well, and it was excellent, and just at the end when it finished, I don't even think it was meant to be part of it, she said to me, 'Oh, there is only one other thing,' she said, 'I think you ought to be more visible in the organisation.' And I was saying, 'Visible? I come in at seven, I leave at seven, I am on every committee, blah, blah, blah,' and she said, 'Well, no, it's not like that,' she said, '[The director] never sees you.' And I said, 'Well, was that, did he make an appointment with me and I've never turned up, or?' And she said, 'Well no, he's not in very often so he doesn't see, and it wouldn't hurt to lick some arse sometimes to get to where you want to be.' And it was almost like you were being treated differently than any others, and I said to her, 'Well you know, I actually find this conversation a bit discriminatory, the tone to this conversation and I don't think that we would be having this with another development worker and I feel it is because I am a black person and being a black person, and quite a big black person, I don't see that I can't be visible,' I said, 'and I don't think we should have this conversation.' I remember saying you know at the end of it I walked out and I said, 'I would like to see how you are going to write this up,' and left. And it was almost like, 'Oh God, I'm really sorry, I'm really sorry' and then she wrote it up and I sort of sent back my comments and then she said, 'We've got to go for coffee and resolve this', and that she had learned that from doing what she did that you can't do this in a context of where you are working with black staff whose experience of discrimination has been x, y and z. And she actually came back and said, 'I hold my hand up, I handled it completely wrong.'

This example points not only to the paradoxical quality of racisms which mark Doreen's body as particularly visible within her organisational context, but also to the invisibility of her achievement *as a professional*. Her racialised visibility (already a product of racism) simultaneously eclipses her identity as a professional, positioning her in a situation where she is then expected by White members of the organisation to reproduce her own subordination by '"lick[ing] some arse"' [4] in order to 'get on'/become an insider. In other words, she is explicitly called on to become 'ontologically complicit' (Puwar, 2004, pp. 126-127) by playing the established 'rules of the game'. What is also noticeable here is the context for this encounter – this is the organisation in which Doreen's equalities agenda was able to 'kick in', an organisation where she was relatively happy, with a line manager who was 'really very good' and appraisal which was otherwise 'excellent'. Her line manager's comments here are ostensibly about 'supporting' Doreen to progress. Nevertheless, Doreen finds herself in a situation where it is necessary to explain and rehearse the nature of her racialisation to White staff within the organisation in order to justify her professional existence and also her refusal to perpetuate her own racialisation. This example is interesting, therefore, as it points to one of the specificities of racism within the context of ACL, which relates to the ways in which such 'supportive' environments and practices can still serve to disenfranchise. Thus, where people are more 'diverse' and the environment often more open to discussing issues of 'race' and racism, there is potentially increased responsibility placed on minoritised staff to challenge this.

The participants therefore often moved into ACL to become more 'at home', only to find that this was not necessarily the case. But they also moved into this field specifically to work for and 'improve the condition' of their 'own' communities. As Madonna, an Asian Caribbean senior lecturer in continuing education, put it, her move into community work was to 'give something back to your community', which 'instinctively' for her meant working with minority ethnic communities. Iopia, an African Caribbean first-grade basic skills teacher in a prison education

department, similarly entered this context specifically because 'there's so many of my own kind of people going into prison' with few Black staff who can 'understand their experiences'.

Paradoxically, this positioning within educational institutions simultaneously differentiates these participants from 'their communities'. Doreen's first comments hinted at this when she posited a separation between herself and the community 'out there'. Iopia tells us:

> at first when I started working in the prison I never used to tell people where I worked because it was sort of like that, it's not a place where black people work it's sort of like prison was [*pause*]. I can remember this old lady was visiting her son in the prison and she, um, came to church and she said that 'all, um, people that work in prisons are all devil people and, and they have to be the devil because they've got keys'. And that was my first memory of it 'cause I never really knew what a prison was growing up and that was my first, um, my first experience of prison was this woman telling me that only devil people work in there.

This is a vivid example of how Iopia, through her employment in the prison, runs the risk of being constructed as the 'devil' within her own community. The prison is somewhere Black people are confined by the state. Iopia's association with it positions her in 'a specific place in the process of incorporating racialized populations of colour into the field of governmentality' (Lewis, 2000, p. 204). The image of the Devil and the link made with keys is important here as it points to the reason *why* Iopia might be constructed in this way. Keys (locks and chains or shackles) have strong associations in traumatic collective memories and narratives around slavery, symbolic of the very real physical violence and emotional terrorisation of Black communities by White institutions (see hooks, 1992). Iopia is, therefore, potentially constructed as colluding with the Devil via her connection to the White institution of the prison.[5] Whilst the prison education context might be considered a particularly extreme example of the oppressive nature of White institutions, I highlight it here for two reasons relating to the argument I construct later in the article. Firstly, the extract points to the importance of collective memory around histories of oppression and struggle to the interpretation of present contexts. Secondly, it highlights the reproduction of similar relations, histories and struggles in the present. The example of the British penal system is important here precisely because of the overrepresentation of Black and minority ethnic groups within this system, which is of course related to racism (see Parekh, 2000, ch. 10; Commission for Racial Equality, 2003a, b).

Few other participants expressed the division between the self as an educational professional and 'the community' as vividly as Iopia in the above example. Nevertheless, the maintenance of some form of 'insider' status in terms of community connections was a constant consideration for participants. Fredrick here considers the implications of the processes of institutionalisation and the complicity that these potentially engender, again using the outsider/insider formulation:

> One of the reasons I got out of it [sixth form teaching] was because I realised that if I stayed any longer I would begin to accept things that I wouldn't accept otherwise. And that's what happens, I think, when you're in institutions and this whole process, I think, about institutionalisation and becoming, becoming conservative, and this is why you'll find that, um, people outside, black people outside of institutions are often critical of those within because almost invariably something happens to you. I mean, you learn the kind of culture and customs of that institution but as part of the process it may be that you accept things that you wouldn't otherwise accept.

As well as the length of time spent within institutions, the further this staff group progress within (White) institutions, the more difficult it becomes to maintain community insider status and connections. Black managers are further separated from Black and minority ethnic learners and also from staff who do not hold management positions. Doreen, for example, describes difficulties delivering staff training sessions, where colleagues comment: 'Oh well, it's alright for you because you have [achieved].' Despite popular imaginings of ACL as more equalities aware than other parts of the learning and skills sector, positioning within ACL is not without complexities for minoritised staff. Ethnicity, 'race' and racism continue to structure the dilemmas they face positioned as *either* community (educational or raced) insiders *or* outsiders – they open up some spaces as they close down others.

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Alternative Imaginings of Educational Leadership

The experiences of staff working within ACL seem to bear out the suspicions of critical race theorists who recognise that whilst ethnic communities (minority *and* majority) are imagined, in practice these collective representations tend to become rooted in a variety of social essentialisms. In recognition of this 'in practice problem', the direction of academic theorising has tended towards the outright rejection of notions of community and collectivity in favour of ambivalence, hybridisation and multiplicity. Werbner (1997, pp. 233-235; see also Hutnyk, 1997) argues that such an approach fails to appreciate the difference between the violent and violating ambivalences of racism; between ethnic absolutism and the positive interruptive juxtapositions of everyday ethnicity. In order to avoid this conflation, she argues for a clear distinction to be made between *objectification* and *reification*. The objective *politics* of ethnicity as a shifting, internally differentiated, hybridised mode of positive self-identification must be considered as analytically and substantively different to the reified politics of racism. The latter progressively essentialises, eventually producing the absolute negation of the ethnic Other (see also Gilroy, 2004).

In contrast to this reification:

> Within the spaces of civil society, the politics of ethnicity in Britain are not so much imposed as grounded in essentialist self-imaginings of community. Hence ethnic leaders essentialise communal identities in their competition for state grants and formal leadership positions [for example]. But – equally importantly – such leaders narrate and argue over these identities in the social spaces which they themselves have created, far from the public eye. Hence much of the imagining that goes towards mobilising ethnic ... communities in Britain occurs in *invisible* public arenas, before purely ethnic audiences. (Werbner, 1997, p. 230; original emphasis)

The politics of ethnicity therefore constitutes the construction of imagined 'communities of suffering', organised morally and aesthetically. These communities are not fixed but overlap, vary in scale and emerge situationally in relation to other moral and aesthetic communities (Werbner, 1997, pp. 235-242). The self-critical debate and dialogue which go on in these imagined spaces engender *socially self-conscious* notions of who 'we are', rooted in narratives of history and/or destiny. This not only involves constant struggles to both define and recognise what binds communities together, but also implies a recognition of axes of differentiation within these (see Yuval-Davis, 1997). It is precisely because racism and xenophobia are experienced as individual and collective violation (suffering) that people differently positioned in terms of class, generation, sexuality, gender and religion 'interpret and fabulate this experience ideologically, aesthetically and morally' *across difference* (Werbner, 1997, p. 248).[6] So, another way of looking at imagined communities is as them being based on a collectively constructed ideology which temporarily provides coherence, but does not deny internal contradiction.

This politics of everyday ethnicity requires something quite different from ontological denial. It requires deep reflexivity on the part of individuals and communities in order to first imagine, and then name, their belongings. Furthermore, different signifiers of community belonging are adopted at different points in struggles against racism for different purposes. Shifts in signifiers should therefore not be seen as attempts to eclipse or erase other belongings, but as useful in particular socio-historical contexts (see Ray, 2003, pp. 860-861). Nevertheless, there are important implications which flow from the fact that it remains ethnic *leaders* who in the end 'do the essentialising'. In particular, there are important gendered dimensions. Men tend to be positioned as community representatives and women as reproducers (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989; Lewis, 2005). Gendered roles are, therefore, often reproduced through community politics (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Sudbury, 1998; Yuval-Davis et al, 2005). In terms of how this politics gets played out in the arena of current multiculture, it is constructions of the passive minoritised woman which come to demonstrate one of the limits to such policies (Lewis, 2005). In view of this and other related challenges, individual and community essentialising must involve what Bonnett begins to outline in his notion of the 'visible interpreter' (Bonnett, 1993, pp. 192-194).

Visible interpretation does not necessarily imply stopping 'speaking for' – at some point we will all take up a speaking position (either individual or collective). However, visible interpretation *must* imply the recognition and consideration of how, for whom and why we speak, and the

understanding that this may well, and indeed should very well in some instances, preclude some forms of 'speaking for'. Black and minority women's critique of feminist authority emphasises the importance of positioning and social location to speaking practices (see, for example, Yuval-Davis, 1994; Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000). Because 'nothing [including the self] comes without its world ... trying to know those worlds is crucial' (Haraway, 1997, p. 37) to any interpretation of experience – no location is self-evident. That this practice will *always* be limited and partial does not make it either impossible or futile. Indeed, this very partiality attests to its validity precisely because the world never stays the same and locations are always changing. Modest witnessing thus looks to the past and the future. Its concerns with power and authority facilitate a more rigorous approach to diversity than neo-liberal body counts imply. It is precisely this kind of witnessing that I contend participants move to describe in their definitions of educational leadership.

According to Fredrick:

> [For anybody who's teaching] it's [leadership] got to be a, a dedication and a commitment behind it kind of over and above – you've got to kind of believe that you can affect change in some way in the world, so it's about maybe, um, certainly having a social conscience. I mean, you've probably met people yourself who don't have any sense of a kind of a social commitment, conscience or concern about anybody else and their position in the world really. So I think that, really, you would have to have a kind of a commitment, a social conscience and a kind of an awareness of those people who are less fortunate ... It is hard work really and maybe that's the crux of this whole thing, really, dealing with people is hard work [*laughs*] because we are talking about individuals with their own kind of experience and perspective on the world, really, so it's kind of dealing with that. I feel the management skills are important. I think some sort of a knowledge and understanding of the history of the kind of struggles that people go through to get to where they are now, so I think that all kind of, you know, if you kind of club all of that together, I think that it means invariably that for somebody to be, um, to be a role model, to be able to lead black people, black colleagues in adult education, they would need themselves to be credibly defined, um, as black, I would say so, definitely.

Fredrick's definition of educational leadership is different leadership to technical-rational models promoted through neo-liberalism. It has more in common with social constructionist models which maintain that the cognitive and the political are interrelated (see, for example, Morley & Hosking, 2003). He recognises the importance of 'management skills' for leadership but also foregrounds 'social commitment' and 'social conscience', and the social positionings of Others and also of the self. He later elaborates this commitment as 'knowledge and understanding of the history of the kind of struggles that people go through to get to where they are now'. For Fredrick, then, education is a space of politics, power and authority, rather than external to these relations (Giroux, 2004). Pedagogical leadership must constitute self-conscious political practice, underpinned by an understanding of inequalities. One reading of Fredrick's summative statement around being 'credibly defined as ... black' in order to lead Black colleagues might suggest homogenised and essentialist representations of Blackness. Such a reading, however, privileges an analysis of representational form over the *political* intent behind mobilising notions of community, culture and ethnicity, whereas it is the latter which is privileged in the context of the passage.

Madonna's account more fully exposes the complexities of such socially and politically engaged leadership. This extract comes from a much longer discussion around her experiences in consulting on educational issues with minority ethnic women and gender discrimination more generally. It is embedded in her description of attending a public consultation for the proposed single Commission for Equality and Human Rights (Department for Trade and Industry, 2004). The consultation was being run by a women's group: 'they were the ones that were pushing forward for consultation and they put a lot of information out'. Whilst there was a variety of representation across a range of equalities strands, the discussion at the event was largely dominated by the concerns of a West Indian community group who were worried that 'histories of struggles around immigration would be subsumed and lost'.

> I am in two minds about this but if, it's just been striking me more and more that I go to
> some events and you have people [older White women] who I think they are very well

intentioned. They have a lot of knowledge, they have worked in the area for a long time, and they were probably trailblazers because at the time there weren't people around who were doing [equalities work] and they were able to get on in there and get some things done and move things forward, which is absolutely fantastic, but I suppose I just feel now that there are a lot more [minority ethnic] people in their thirties, forties and older who have gone through the education system and have actually got a lot to say. And it's now looking slightly odd when you see people who are speaking for groups of people and they can be well intentioned and they can have an understanding, but they are not that group of people, and I feel you do have to have that voice that actually comes from the people. I don't live in an inner-city area. I don't live in a community that is. I suppose my community, if you like, is West Indian or Caribbean but I'm not Afro-Caribbean, so there isn't an obvious sort of community I mix with and am actually part of. I am Asian Caribbean [*long pause*], I don't fit in with people from the Indian subcontinent. I have nothing in common with them. I know nothing of their lifestyles or their religion. Religion wise I'm vaguely Christian. I am half Chinese but I have nothing in common with Chinese people. I know nothing again of their religion, they are Buddhists. I know nothing about China. I happen to have, you know, these two ancestral sort of links. So, I mean, I'm not saying that I am yet a person to actually represent views of any particular minority group and the only thing or the main thing, I suppose, I have in common with any ethnic minority group is obviously I am visibly from an ethnic minority group, and my family and myself have been through forms of discrimination and whatnot so, *so* we know what it's like and you know that's something that a white person cannot know, in-depth, because they've never been through it.

Madonna's comments here focus on the issues of witnessing and interpretation, foregrounded in a clear recognition of the complexities and ambiguities involved. She is 'in two minds about this'. She highlights the issue of 'speaking for' a community or 'groups of people' when you are 'not that group of people' and relates this to White people's capacity to speak for minoritised Others. But, she eschews a Black/White dualism. She does not preclude the possibility that White people 'can have an understanding' of minoritised experience. What she is challenging is the exclusion of the voices of Black and minority ethnic groups in this representation: 'you do have to have that voice that actually comes from the people'. However, the context of the broader discussion around the exclusion of minoritised women and Madonna's description of the setting are important to an interpretation here. As well as foregrounding a critique of the role of White women in the exclusion of minority ethnic perspectives, Madonna's description of the setting also suggests a critique of the role of Black men in prioritising certain perspectives and excluding Others. That Madonna gestures towards a role for herself as an Asian Caribbean woman in 'speaking for' is potentially disruptive of both such exclusions.

Later, the full extent of Madonna's own ambiguous positioning is made clear. Just as White people are 'not that group of people', nor is Madonna: 'I'm not saying that I am yet a person to actually represent views of any particular minority group' on the basis of religion, lifestyle or common ancestry. There is a sense that she is not only constructing common-sense ethnicised and essentialised divisions commonly deployed within multiculturalism, but is also grappling with how she disrupts such simplistic positionings. However, Madonna does have a clear connection. Indeed, 'the only ... or the main thing' that she is sure connects her to these people is her visible ethnicity. Madonna's comments can also be read as moving to challenge common-sense notions as to what constitutes community, thus challenging current conceptualisations of diversity in multiculturalism. Connection is not constructed as related to physical proximity or location, physical 'mixing', common cultures or religion. This is rather about shared histories (the reference to family and the earlier reference to generation are important here) of being different and experiences of discrimination. It is this experience which binds Madonna to community – it both connects people and crucially provides them with the justification for speech. Madonna is sure that some notion of discrimination must be foregrounded. Given that it is most often histories of racism which are occluded in current multicultural policies (Yuval-Davis et al, 2005, p. 523) and approaches to diversity more generally, this represents a significant opposition to this common sense.

The notion of not 'yet' being able to represent highlights another ambivalence for Madonna. She occupies a space of possibility. There is a sense that she is not currently positioned as able to speak, or represent in the present, but may well be able to *in the future*. She therefore challenges the right to speak by virtue of her ethnicity, even where this does suggest some element of shared experience of struggle; even where Madonna constitutes part of the 'we', issues of representation are not uncomplicated. This points to the way in which ethnicity (and, indeed, the politics of ethnicity) is learned (imagined) and not innate. Secondly, this does not automatically imply the right or ability to represent the Other. Madonna's comments point to what I interpret to be the meaning of Fredrick's initial comments on the necessity of being 'credibly ... black'. This is not necessarily about 'being something', rather it is about the necessity of imagining and connecting with the experiences of minoritised Others – a connection which must be worked at reflexively even for those *who are themselves minoritised*. She recognises that 'community comes to life through the collective act of remembering in the *absence of a common terrain*' (Ahmed, 1999, p. 344, emphasis added). Another less benign reading of the notion of 'yet' which must also be considered is the possibility that in the future issues of representation will become less problematic for Madonna.

It is precisely because we cannot know the lives of Others that the critical thinking process involved in 'understanding' communities and their perspectives implies the ability to shift (see Yuval-Davis, 1997) to *imagine* the lives and histories of Others. The notion of imagination is important as it encapsulates alternative spatial and temporal relations for communities than are commonly invoked in multicultural policy. It implies that you do not have to be positioned literally together in the same place to be able to belong to the same community. Moreover, as the imagination and its fantasies are epistemologically important as a gateway between the body and society, it not only connects individuals, but it is also 'fundamental to *why, whether* and *what* we are ready to experience, perceive and know in the first place' (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002, p. 325; original emphasis). It foregrounds the potential rather than the actual.

Current multicultural policies tend to focus on the construction of a 'future-oriented patriotism' – the creation of shared values rather than 'the inheritance of weighty tradition'. Commitment to the past and tradition in any form is viewed as an anachronism and presented as a political problem (McGhee, 2005, paras. 3.4-3.6). The uncritical construction of minoritised communities as committed to culture and tradition, as backward-looking, is considered to be another of the limits to their inclusion in the national culture. However, Gilroy (2004, pp. 153-168) has highlighted how it is crucial that a critical and reflexive relationship to the past must be maintained in order to be able to imagine different anti-racist futures which challenge a 'market-driven pistache of multiculture'. The White women who Madonna critiques in her comments are posited as having a relationship to the future, and forwards movement; the West Indian men towards the past. Both Madonna and Fredrick (and, indeed, Iopia and Doreen earlier) position themselves in a critical relationship to both the past and the future, representing the possibilities for other collective futures.

Conclusions

What I have explored in this article is the way in which the historical and social construction of ACL, which posits the interrelationship between politics and pedagogy via notions of community, provides a context in which leadership for equality *as well as* numeric diversity can be fostered. I have not suggested that ACL is exempt from racism or sexism, or other multicultural vagaries. Indeed, it perpetuates essentialist links between community and ethnicity. The link between learning and politics maintained by participants constitutes one of the necessary conditions for the process of modest witnessing of history and community which, in turn, facilitates leading for equality and diversity. It forms the coordinates for the *contextualised struggle* involved in such leadership. Because 'the success of the term [diversity] is that it can be "detached" from histories of struggle for equality, its success is also paradoxically dependent on being "re-attached" to those very same histories' (Ahmed, 2005, p. 13). Commitment to understanding and remembering and reconstructing *pasts* in some form is necessary for leaders to struggle for the space to imagine different educational communities and organisational *futures*. Belonging – support and space provided through imagined communities of suffering or (political) association *against racism* – also

provides the means by which participants could become more critical of their working contexts and begin to lead against the grain of common sense for equality and diversity.

The key questions, then, still remain. Who is or, more appropriately, *are* the communities that leaders are connected to? A more equitable social representation within educational organisations will *potentially* contribute to social inclusion. But, as Sharma (2004) notes in his forceful critique of multicultural education, the key issue is who has the power to exercise meaning and to create the community identifications that invite closures around these. Within liberal benevolent multiculturalisms it is the White norm which occupies central speaking position, but which has simultaneously been rendered invisible in this process of meaning construction. Black and minoritised leaders in ACL still struggle with the spectre of Whiteness, as I have demonstrated in the first section of this article. However, I also demonstrate that these questions around power, and the educational leaders' role within this, are as relevant for minority ethnic leaders as for White leaders. The ever-present danger is that inadequate attention to this by minoritised leaders sustains Manichean raciology. It privileges 'race' as a mode of being, potentially eclipsing and excluding other modes of being (gendered, religious, classed and others) with all of the potential problems this creates. Nevertheless, my reading for ACL and these participants is hopeful because their accounts are suggestive of the ways in which:

> We might find ways of thinking, speaking, writing and acting that are engaged and curious about 'other people's' struggles for social justice, that are respectfully affiliative and dialogic rather than pedagogical, that look for the hopeful spots to expand upon, and that reveal the pleasure of political life. (Duggan, 2003, p. 88)

Notes

[1] The research is ongoing and is being undertaken for the research project at the Centre for Excellence in Leadership, Lancaster University Management School, entitled 'Integrating Diversity? Gender "Race" and Leadership in the Post 16 Learning and Skills Sector'. The project explores how the notion of 'diversity' gets taken up and practised in a variety of contexts in the learning and skills sector, and the implications for leadership. The other members of the project team are Sara Ahmed and Elaine Swan (Co-directors), Sevgi Kilic, Tara Leach and Lewis Turner, each working on a number of linked subprojects in further education (including governance), higher education and across the learning and skill sector on diversity training.

[2] All names used in this article are pseudonyms chosen by the participants. Other details have been changed to preserve anonymity. The participants' ethnicity is described in their own terms.

[3] I use Black here following the network, which 'works with the definition of the word Black which includes members of African, African Caribbean, Asian and other communities who are oppressed by racism'.

[4] Whilst Doreen does not explicitly mention the operation of gender within this scenario, it is difficult to avoid the (hetero)sexualised nature of the notion of '"lick[ing] [the] arse"' of her male director. Another dimension of difficulty here, then, is perhaps that these comments come from a White *woman* manager. Indeed, it is perhaps significant that Doreen erases her gender in this example, instead using 'person' to emphasise the social distance between herself and her line manager despite any gendered similarity.

[5] This interpretation should be treated with caution. This memory should not be read as a simple inversion of essentialist racism following a Black good/White evil binary. Such memories are a fantasy (in the case of terrifying Whiteness), projected onto the Other in order to manage 'threat' by maintaining distance, the recognition of which *can* be productive (see hooks, 1992, for a full discussion).

[6] It is important to emphasise here that this *is not* the same as suggesting that ethnicity, 'race' or racism constitutes the sum total of the lives of minoritised groups.

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