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**Struggling to ‘be Diverse’ in Adult and Community Learning:  
Radical Educational Leadership and Racialised ‘Outsiders’ ‘Within’**

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# Struggling to 'be Diverse' in Adult and Community Learning: Radical Educational Leadership and racialised 'Outsiders' 'Within' \*

## Introduction

...being 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, 2001:139, my emphasis)

Institutional racism is not the proverbial grit in the machine that conventional programmes of race awareness training can remove. Rather it is *organic in nature and function and grows in cunning and resilience* with each challenge it successfully overcomes. Perhaps the only effective way to remove or neutralise institutional racism is to transform the institutional culture.

(Rangasamy, 2004:28, my emphasis)

Here Rangasamy highlights the subtle and resilient nature of racisms which morph contextually, growing in strength and breeding within the cultures of educational institutions. In this same paper he suggests that the 'all important need to survive' (2004:33) within these institutions prevents the type of flexible and imaginative behaviours required to combat the 'institutional commonsense' which perpetuates a range of discriminations. An important element in democratising this institutional commonsense is 'an active, enlightened compassionate leadership' (2004:33). But what constitutes such leadership? What are the complexities, challenges and issues which must be taken up, negotiated and faced in order to fulfil this *deceptively simple* notion of the 'active, enlightened and compassionate' leader who is able to practice what I describe here as radical educational leadership [for equality and diversity]? It is

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this set of issues that I begin to explore in this paper and the research project on which it is based<sup>1</sup>. As a starting point, suffice to say that this type of leadership, and indeed leadership more generally as Gunter's opening comments suggest, involves ongoing struggle which requires confronting the relationship of leaders to power, and more specifically their relationships to racialised power<sup>2</sup>. This involves exploring the ways in which leaders both perpetuate and challenge what Puwar (2001; 2004a) calls the [white] somatic norm within institutions.

This paper focuses on the experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic staff who participated in the project, all of whom I met through a large, national cross sectoral Black adult education network<sup>3</sup>. I begin the discussion by situating the research in terms of its community focussed educational context. I highlight the ways in which this context impacts on participants positioning in relation to the white somatic norm and the variety of insider/outsider dualisms that they seem to find themselves in as a result. In the final section I adopt a more critical approach to the notion of community, exploring how participants mobilise notions of leadership within ACL amenable to notion of [radical] relational pedagogic practice (Gunter, 2001) and critical multicultural educational practice (Giroux, 1998; Sharma, 2004).

### **Situating Equality and Diversity in Adult and Community Learning**

An adult and community learning (ACL)<sup>4</sup> context is a particularly interesting one in which to explore issues of equality and diversity because of its association, both 'real' and imagined, with an agenda for radical social change. Notwithstanding differences within this vast range of provision (see Hunter, 2004 for an overview) the common focus, even within more conservative forms of liberal ACL has been on education for

‘social purpose’. It often involves critical, dialogic negotiated practice (see Johnston, 2003a) which tends to be ‘closer to communities’ than other formal, generally skills based adult educational provision. It has also been the site where inclusive learning and access have historically been most widely promoted (Burke, 2002).

The real push towards more radical approaches to education which more clearly problematised the power/knowledge relation, arose where there was a connection between the independent community development tradition and class *politics* (Westwood, 1992). Such approaches were strongly influenced by the work of Freire (1970) and Gramsci (see Nowell Smith and Hoare, 1971). It was largely these more radical developments in informal community education that created the space through which feminist and anti-racist struggles have been promoted in learning (see Alleyne, 2002; Barr, 1999; hooks, 1994; Mirza, 1997; Ryan, 2001; Stuart and Thompson, 1995; Sudbury, 1998). This is precisely 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’ (Johnstone, 2003b:55-56 my emphasis). It is also an approach which places the role of the ‘professional educator’ under closer scrutiny than other traditions. As such, this is a key 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’ (Learning and Skills Council, 2004:1). Herein however, lies the inherent contradiction in forwarding a community agenda

within educational institutions; the dangers of co-option by the state and the de-radicalisation of *negotiated* learning agendas (Cairns, 2003). On the other hand it is precisely this positioning ‘at the interface’ that makes radical interventions in relation to politics and subjectivities possible (Westwood, 1992).

***Coming ‘home’ and leaving ‘home’: Perpetual racialised outsiders within?***

This characterisation of ACL as ‘for equalities’ has resonance with participants’ perspectives, many of whom moved out of other learning and teaching contexts into an ACL context explicitly to do equalities work. For Doreen [West Indian, LEA head of service grade]<sup>5</sup> moving from an inclusive learning post in FE to a position in ACL was where ‘my 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 [Black Caribbean, Development worker for a national adult education organisation, head of a Black education network] 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 the more, culturally (my emphasis)

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 practice, to ‘express themselves’ and to work with and ‘learn about’ difference. Doreen’s comments are interesting however, as they hint at one of the dilemmas produced by working in ACL; that communities are still positioned ‘out there’, somewhere that you ‘go into’ and presumably out of at different points. Nor are these positive

representations of ACL to suggest that Black and Minority Ethnic staff do not experience racism within this context, only that there are specificities to its operation dependent on context.

At a basic level Puwar's white somatic norm undoubtedly operates across ACL providers to construct Black and Minority Ethnic staff as racialised outsiders who do not entirely fit. Doreen uses precisely the insider/outsider conceptualisation developed in this paper 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; 2004a:41-46) experienced by white staff when Black and Minority Ethnic staff take-up post. Of course, racism and racialising practices are about much more than 'looking different'<sup>6</sup>.

Doreen also describes in particularly vivid detail one manifestation of the burden of in/visibility (Puwar, 2001; 2004a:57-64) experienced by Black and Minority Ethnic staff working within ACL.

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 organization'. And I was saying 'visible? I come in at 7, I leave at 7, 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 is particularly significant as it points 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'<sup>7</sup> in order to 'get on'/become an insider; in other words she is explicitly called on to become 'ontologically complicit' (Puwar, 2004a:126-127) by playing the established 'rules of the game'. What is also noticeable here is the context for this encounter, this is precisely the organisation in which Doreen's equalities agenda, was able to 'kick in', one where she was relatively happy and with a line manager who was 'really very good' and appraisal which was otherwise 'excellent'. Her line managers' 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 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 still serve to disenfranchise.

Doreen is explicit as to the difference between educational contexts:

...the difference between ACL and FE is that **in the sort of 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.

(my emphasis)

The similarity in contexts lies in the correlation between the increased demands placed on staff to be ontologically complicit and upwards movement in organisational hierarchies. The difference is precisely that 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 Black and Minority Ethnic staff to challenge this. The link made here by Doreen between the community and diversity is significant. This very concentration of Black and Minority Ethnic (and indeed other 'diverse') staff within ACL can be perceived as both a product of racialising practices operating *across* the learning and skills sector and as a means of reproducing these very relations. A product of these practices, in the sense that ACL can be viewed in terms of a racially structured occupational hierarchy where the less prestigious parts of a profession (such as ACL within the context of the learning and skills sector) are populated with more staff from Minority Ethnic groups. Indeed, Westwood notes of the Black access movement in ACL, such initiatives were often 'marginal in a marginal sector' (1992:239).

This link between community and diversity (where there is already a slippage in Doreen's comments between diversity and ethnicity) can be viewed as reflecting and perpetuating a more general slippage between the notion of community and ethnicity. Gail Lewis's (2000, ch. 2) work has documented the way in which the notion of community, has become discursively associated with the notion of inner city urban

communities constructed as synonymous with racialised populations. She demonstrates how 'community relations' posts within the more general context of social work as a profession have through various pieces of legislation (in particular section 11 of the 1966 Local Government Act, see also Ray, 2003) created a space for the employment of Black and Minority Ethnic staff. These processes would seem to be reflected in the more general structure of employment within ACL<sup>8</sup>. However, such spaces contribute to the construction of community, culture and ethnicity as the preserve of minority groups alone (Bellis and Morrice, 2003:89; Westwood, 1991). They also attest to the depoliticised commonsense notions of homogenous community which tended to dominate within ACL, albeit largely in relation to assumptions around classed communities (Hughes, 1996; Martin, 1993; 1996; Westwood, 1992). Because of assumptions as to the bounded nature of such [ethnic] communities it is Black and Minority Ethnic staff who are posited as able to 'understand' and work with these communities. There are a number of issues here; this reinforces the invisibility of the hegemonic ethnic majority community (Yuval Davis, 1997), simultaneously over-determining Black and Minority Ethnic staff in terms of ethnicity. Furthermore, these staff then also come to occupy 'a specific place in the process of incorporating racialized populations of colour into the field of governmentality' (Lewis, 2000:204). They become positioned as outsiders within in a second sense that I now want to explore.

Participants then, often moved into ACL to become more 'at home', but also specifically to work for and 'improve the condition of' their 'own' communities. As Madonna [Asian-Caribbean, educational consultant, previously senior lecturer in continuing education, South East] 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 [African Caribbean, 1<sup>st</sup> grade basic skills teacher, prison education department, North West], similarly entered the prison education department specifically because 'there's so many of my own kind of people going into prison' where there are few Black staff who could 'understand their experiences'. However, this positioning within educational institutions simultaneously differentiates these participants from 'their communities'.

... 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 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 then potentially constructed as colluding with the devil via her connection to the white institution of the prison<sup>9</sup>. 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. 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 over representation of Black and Minority Ethnic groups within this system, related as this is to racism (see Parekh, 2000, ch. 10; CRE 2003a; 2003b, see Carlson, 1997; Hill Collins, 2000 for education).

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 maybe that you accept things that you wouldn't otherwise accept...

(my emphasis)

As well as length of time spent within institutions the further this staff group progress within [white] institutions, the more difficult it becomes to maintain this status and connection. Black managers within institutions are also separated from Black and Minority Ethnic learners and also staff who do not hold management positions. Doreen, for example describes difficulties delivering staff training sessions where colleagues comment ‘oh well its alright for you because you have [achieved]’.

I have only been able to skim the surface here of the range of ways in which minoritised staff are apparently positioned *by others* within a number of dilemmas as *either* community (educational or ethnic) insiders *or* outsiders, and the role of

ethnicity [and racism] in structuring this experience. What is important here is that I adopt what Puwar (2004b:70) calls an ‘agnostic approach’ to these professionals where it is not their ethnicity which precipitates their involvement in ACL and equalities work, but the context of ACL which better enables them to express (and develop) political commitments to this.

### **Moving towards an engagement with the world: Leadership, community and histories**

In this section I want to begin to think more explicitly about the ways in which Black and Minority Ethnic staff construct and move towards practicing forms of leadership which challenge this insider/outsider dualism. I explore how this practice is integral to adopting a more critical approach to the notion of community within ACL, but also the problems that persist. Here I am particularly interested in the ways in which the notion of community is mobilised by Black and Minority Ethnic staff in order to challenge racialising practices which might otherwise demand their ontological complicity.

So firstly, how is leadership conceptualised?

[for anybody whose 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 of 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 here um, I think management skills ... 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 are put to go through to get to where they are now um, 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 somebody 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.

Here Fredrick constructs leadership as having two key components related to social conscience and management skills. First, he clearly situates leadership in terms of its pedagogical context. In turn he relates this to 'having a social conscience' or 'commitment'. Whilst his comment 'over and above' remains unfinished and therefore ambivalent, there is a strong sense that Fredrick views leadership within an educational context more widely than a commitment to 'just' education. Rather, this commitment is about a belief 'that you can affect change ... *in the world*' (my emphasis) and a concern for other people and 'their position in the world' including (but importantly not confined to) 'people who are less fortunate'. Later this is elaborated further as 'knowledge and understanding' of 'the kind of struggles that people are put through ... to get to where they are now'. Second, Fredrick situates leadership in terms of management skills.

There are a number of issues here. That Fredrick tops and tails his comments with issues related to 'social conscience' is suggestive of its key importance, rather than its additive nature. One reading is that Fredrick situates 'management skills' as in some way secondary to the issue of social conscience. What I want to suggest however, is that Fredrick's notion of 'management skills' is potentially infused with and rooted in this broader understanding of 'the world'. Whilst the notion that 'dealing with people is hard work' may seem a somewhat banal point to make (indeed his laughter here suggests that he recognises this), the important part of Fredrick's comments is contained in the second part of this phrase. The reason *why* this is 'hard work', is 'because we are talking about individuals with their own kind of experience and perspective on the world'. It is reconciling and negotiating different perspectives,

which is challenging for management and leadership. In the wider context of Fredrick's comments here (in particular his reference to 'history') this notion of perspective can be read as a reference to people's positioning in terms of collective [social] 'struggles', as opposed to individual misfortunes. This constitutes a broader understanding than management as reconciling people's different leadership, management or working styles, or even their potentially different professional backgrounds and or values, pointing to a wider notion of 'being in the world'; rooted in social experience and positioning. It is people's social locations rather than (or as well as) any 'traits' which are foregrounded here. This is therefore a very different notion of leadership than technical-rational models having more in common with social constructionist models which maintain that the cognitive and the political are interrelated (see for example Morley and Hosking, 2003)<sup>10</sup>. A final important point about the notion of 'struggle' is that Fredrick refers to 'struggles' in the plural. This use of the plural would suggest that this is not something that he views as necessarily restricted to any one particular group of people, so not necessarily only to staff in racialised groups. What Fredrick is doing here then is calling for a *mainstreaming* of knowledge in leadership practice around *unequal* social relations.

Finally, Fredrick moves to bring all of this together, suggesting that these components of leadership *do* mean something specific in relation to being able to lead 'Black people or colleagues'. One reading of these summative comments is that this specificity is related to 'being' Black. The notion of 'invariably' suggests that this kind of experience is conceived as an absolute; a baseline for leading Black and Minority Ethnic staff. However, there is actually more ambiguity than it would seem here, the notion of 'credibly defined' is important. Does this mean from Fredrick's

perspective that you have to 'be' Black or Asian to firstly have an understanding of such struggles, and therefore to be credible in such a leadership position? Or, does this mean that there is a credible way to 'be Black' in such a position, and therefore that there are also less credible ways of 'being Black'?

One conclusion which might be drawn from Fredrick's comments could be that you cannot credibly lead Black and Asian staff if you are white, and therefore an 'outsider' to 'their' experience. Another might be that if you are Black or Asian, you must have some form of 'insider' status through maintaining a connection to the historical struggles of other Black and Asian people and colleagues - be 'credibly Black or Asian' - in order to lead for equality and diversity. What I want to contend on the basis of the following discussion is that neither conclusion goes far enough. Both tend towards reified explanations which fail to account for the complexities that participants suggest are involved in this practice.

### ***Communities of suffering, visible interpreters and imagination***

Here I want to consider issues related to the role of identity, history and imagination which are necessary to the more explicit 'mainstreaming' of 'knowledge' relating to unequal social relations within radical leadership practice. In other words I want to take a critical approach to this rather commonsense notion of what precisely it means to 'mainstream' equality and diversity. In doing so I also problematise the notion of 'understanding' the 'history and struggles' of Others.

Puwar argues that ontological complicity within white masculinist institutions requires some level of ontological denial where:

Those [subjects] who are in whatever regard – race, class, sexuality or gender – fish in water ... do not feel the weight of the water, and hence they do not see the tacit normativity of their own habitus, which is able to pass as neutral and universal.

(Puwar, 2004a:131)

Where forms of ontological complicity are considered, it is usually the way in which white institutions demand complicity of racialised Others which is explored in detail. However, all communities, by their very nature demand some sort of ‘complicity’ in the normative behaviours of that group, that is *all* communities exhibit homogenising tendencies. This is precisely the reason why community has become such a slippery, almost dangerous notion within social science analysis. In particular the discursive connections made with notions of community and minoritised ethnicity (see Alexander, 2004 for an overview of some of the current discursive patterning of these connections) which I discussed in relation to ACL specifically above, have made this notion particularly ‘dangerous’ within critical race studies (see also Hall, 2000).

The crux of debates over the notion of community is that whilst it is recognised that ethnic communities (minority *and* majority) are imagined, in practice these collective representations tend to become rooted in a variety of social essentialisms. In terms of multiculturalism the enduring problem is that minoritised communities are more readily constructed in the popular imagination than the majority community. 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, multiplicity. Werbner (1997:233-235, see also Hutnyk, 1997 for an incisive counter to this position) argues that such an approach

fails to appreciate the difference between the violent and violating ambivalences of racism; 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 shifting, internally differentiated, hybridised modes of positive self identification must be considered as analytically and substantively different to the reified politics of racism which progressively essentialises eventually producing the absolute negation of the Ethnic Other. In other words, following Hoggett (1992:353) ‘in the context of ‘community relations’ the existence of differences should not be an analytical or social problem; rather the problem is the racialisation ... of such differences’; it is demonisation which produces reification.

Werbner argues that 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, 1997:230 original emphasis)

The politics of ethnicity then constitutes the construction of imagined ‘communities of suffering’ organised morally and aesthetically, they are not fixed but overlap and vary in scale and emerge situationally in relation to other such moral and aesthetic communities (Werbner, 1997a:235-242). The self[and Other]-critical debate and dialogue which goes on in these imagined spaces engenders *socially self-conscious*

notions of who 'we are', rooted in narratives of history and/or destiny. This 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, religion 'interpret and fabulate this experience ideologically, aesthetically and morally' across difference (Werbner, 1997:248)<sup>11</sup>. So another way of looking at imagined communities is as based on a collectively constructed ideology which temporarily coheres but does not deny internal contradiction.

This politics of everyday ethnicity then, requires something quite different from, in fact opposite to, ontological denial. It requires deep reflexivity on the part of individuals and communities. It requires naming (Puwar, 2004a:133). What Werbner (1997) considers in less detail however, is the problematics involved in that it remains ethnic *leaders* who in the end 'do the essentialising'. In view of this, an understanding of this individual and community reflexivity also involves what Bonnett (1993:192-194) begins to outline in his notion of the 'visible interpreter'. 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, by, 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'<sup>12</sup>. As such it draws attention to the enduring problem for radical community educational approaches related to liberal notions of *authority*, enlightenment and progress (Westwood, 1992). As I see this,

visible interpretation involves becoming what Donna Haraway would call a ‘modest witness’ who recognises that ‘nothing [including the self] comes without its world, so trying to know those worlds is crucial’ (Haraway, 1997:37). It is precisely this kind of witnessing that I contend Fredrick was moving to describe in his definition of leadership. That this practice will *always* be limited and partial does not make this 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.

I now turn to examine some of the nuances in the ways in which this notion of imagined communities is reflected in Madonna’s notion of leading for equality and diversity.

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 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 trail blazers because at the, there weren’t people around who were doing it [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 is a lot of people coming through and a lot more [minority ethnic] people in their thirties, forties and older who have gone through the education system and 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 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 actually be part of. I am Asian-Caribbean {long pause} I mean I am just saying, 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 had in common with any ethnic minority group is obviously I am an ethnic, I’ve got visible, visibly from an ethnic minority group, and my family and myself have been through forms of discrimination and what not so, **so** we know what it’s like and you know that’s something that a white person cannot know, any real understanding in depth understanding of because they’ve never been through it.

Madonna’s comments here focus firmly on the issues of witnessing and interpretation and are foregrounded in a clear recognition of the complexities and ambiguities involved. She is ‘in two minds about this’. She highlights precisely the issue of ‘speaking for’ a community or ‘groups of people’ when you are ‘not that group of people’. Whilst she does not immediately specify the racialised dynamics of this

situation, the issue is posited as relating to white people's capacity to speak for the minoritised Other. However, she does not preclude the possibility that white people 'can have an understanding' of minoritised others. 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'.

It is at this point that 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'. However, Madonna has a clear connection, indeed 'the only' 'or main' thing connecting her to these people is her [visible] ethnicity. What I want to suggest is that Madonna is actually challenging commonsense notions as to what constitutes a community here. Connection is not constructed as related to physical proximity or location, nor physical 'mixing'. This is rather about shared histories (the reference to family and the earlier reference to generation are important here) of discrimination, it is this experience which binds Madonna to community, it both connects people and crucially provides them with the justification for speech. The notion of not 'yet' being able to represent highlights another ambivalence for Madonna. There is a sense that she is not 'yet' positioned as able to speak, or represent in the present but may well be able to in the future. One implication of this 'yet' being that she has more understanding to develop around these issues. Madonna then clearly challenges the right to speak by virtue of her ethnicity even where this does suggest a some element of shared experience of struggle, even where she constitutes part of the 'we' who knows 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 that this does not automatically imply the right or ability to represent the Other. Madonna's comments point to what I interpret 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. Another less benign reading of the notion of 'yet' which must also be considered, is the possibility that when this has been achieved issues of representation become less problematic for Madonna.

It is precisely because we can not 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. I prefer the notion of imagination, over construction because it implies emotion and not only cognition. The notion of imagination better encapsulates the different spatial and temporal relations for communities the implication being that you do not have to be positioned literally together in the same place to be able to belong to the same community. The imagination and its fantasies are epistemologically important as a gateway between the body and society, it connects individuals, but it is also 'fundamental to *why*, *whether* and *what* we are ready to experience, perceive and know in the first place' (Stotzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002:325 original emphasis). It foregrounds the potential rather than the actual. This is clearly an important dimension to understanding Ethnic Minority leadership and organising. However, it is also vitally important to exploring the relationship of white leaders to equalities work,

as it is they who are (at least in terms of racialised social relations) powerful in terms of the structuring of racialised social relations.

### **Conclusions (and beginnings)**

Another way of thinking about what I am moving towards exploring here is a notion of radical educational leadership as ‘working the boundaries’. Where all educators are in some way ‘caught in between the inherently contradictory logics of care and control’ (see Hoggett, 2000; See also Hunter, 2003). Rather than avoiding the complexity of their own and others potentially contradictory positionings, the participants in this study work the already established boundaries of insider/outsider to challenge their very construction. What I have explored in this paper is the first step in the process, a modest witnessing of history and community which more often occurs within the context of ACL, than other parts of the learning and skills sector. This *potentially* enables participants to re-imagine the terms of inclusion and exclusion within their working contexts. Rather than becoming less radical within their institutions, belonging, support and space provided through imagined communities of suffering or [political] association (see Hall, 2000) provided the means by which participant could become more critical of these working contexts and begin to lead against the grain of commonsense for equality and diversity. It also suggests that the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion which construct insiders and outsiders are more malleable than ‘common-sense’ dualistic understandings might dictate.

To suggest that any of the participants discussed here experiences straightforward marginalisation or straightforward incorporation engendering ontological denial would be to oversimplify matters. This would also clearly be to flatten out the debates

which are ongoing amongst Black and Minority Ethnic staff as to how to both define themselves and resist racism. Participants' accounts provide examples of their positioning at what Michelle Fine (1994:71) calls 'the hyphen' where, Self-Other join in the politics of everyday life, that is the hyphen that both separates and merges 'personal' identities with our inventions of Others. What I want to suggest is that in the context of white institutions negotiating these insider outsider boundaries, or the hyphen is particularly complex for Black and Asian staff and ACL is no different in this. Indeed, if we take Puwar's notion of ontological complicity seriously what should not be underestimated are the difficulties in 'coming out'. 'Thus, acts that name have to be undertaken strategically and with the support of advocates who carry weight' (2004:155). The work involved in such strategising is in itself creates an added dimension to their work and is problematic in terms of a disproportionate expectation that they should resist racism. However, the notion of the advocate who 'carries weight' and are often white implies that there is a role to be played by white leaders here.

The fact that community comes to life through 'the collective act of remembering in the *absence* of a common terrain' (Ahmed, 1999:344, my emphasis), points to the possibility that white leaders can become involved in processes of community reconstruction. I am not suggesting here that those positioned as white should lead Black and Minority Ethnic groups, however they will find themselves leading in multi-ethnic organisations and this demands that at the very least that they practice radical educational leadership which takes account, of history, struggles and *narratives* about those seriously. In order to do this, they must confront and expose their own positioning within these relations. The important note of caution here is that

imagining does not necessarily constitute action, nor am I advocating the public politics of admission, and confessional practices (see Ahmed, 2005 for how anti-racist speech can block action). The notion of individual and collective struggle involves much more than morality tales about ‘suffering’ and ‘heroic struggle against greater forces, and a manifestation of admirable qualities like courage and strength’ (Shamir, *et al* 2005:21). Recognition of individual positioning in histories must always be linked up to the recognition of the institutional histories and fantasies which have been perpetuated by and perpetuate them. It involves tackling and acting to re-imagine and reconstitute these relations and is not about redeeming whiteness as a social relation (see, Roman 1997; Rosenberg, 1997).

Giroux in his discussion of a critical multicultural curriculum, extends this out to the broader organisation of educational institutions:

...a multicultural curriculum refigures relations between the [institution], teachers, students and the wider community. In this case [educational providers] must be willing to draw upon the resources of the community, including members of the community in making fundamental decisions about what is taught, who is hired, and how the [provider] *can become an integral part of the society it serves*. [Educators] need to be educated to be boarder crossers, to explore zones of cultural differences by moving in and out of the resources, histories and narratives that provide different students with a sense of identity, place and possibility.

(Giroux, 1998:192-193 my emphasis)

This type of practice implies a fundamentally different basis for leadership as a radical relational *pedagogic* practice (Gunter, 2001), where education is recognised as already being a space of politics, power and authority rather than as external to these relations (Giroux, 2004). Ahmed (2005:255:13) however, posits the paradox of diversity: ‘if 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'. In order to contest this paradox then leaders must be willing to struggle for the space to imagine different educational communities and organisational futures. The key questions then still remain. Who is or more appropriately *are* the communities that they are connected to? A more equitable social representation 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. To return to Gunter's initial comments these are questions around power, and the educational leaders' role within this.

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### **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> The research is ongoing and is being undertaken for the Centre for Excellence in Leadership research Project 'Integrating Diversity? Gender 'Race' and Leadership in the Learning and Skills Sector'. The project explores how the notion of 'diversity' gets taken up and practiced 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 sub-projects in further education, higher education, on governance and diversity training.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to emphasise at the outset the importance of power here in order to dissociate the notion of the 'compassionate enlightened' leader from links with liberal humanist discourses of charity which sustain, rather than challenge unequal power relations in favour of the benevolent compassion 'giver'. Such notions of compassion constitute one form of 'multicultural fantasy' (see Ahmed, 2004

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chapters. 1 and 6 specifically, see also Sharma, 2004 for a similar point in relation to [critical] multicultural ethics).

<sup>3</sup> The choice to use data generated in conversation with these participants is to some extent pragmatic at this stage, with these being the interviews carried out in the earlier stages of fieldwork. I am not suggesting that it is only staff from Black and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds that either do, or should practice radical educational leadership for equality and diversity, as I discuss later in the paper.

<sup>4</sup> This fieldwork involves serial biographical narrative interviews with twelve staff from a range of adult and community learning providers including, local authority, voluntary community organisations, prison education departments, designated institutions, FE community learning, HE continuing/community education, archives, libraries and museums service, situated in different regions and from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The study is ongoing as are interviews with the participants whose comments are discussed here. A feminist psychosocial relational methodology, drawing on interpretive and psychodynamic traditions is employed to generate and analyse data (see Hunter, 2005). Because this develops holistic interpretive analysis heavily dependent on psychosocial context for the interpretation of meaning any analysis made here is therefore provisional. Indeed, from this perspective any analysis and interpretation will always be partial and open to revision. This paper and the extracts from participants' accounts are therefore presented as suggestive of issues to be developed in further research and fieldwork.

<sup>5</sup> All names are pseudonyms chosen by participants. Their ethnicity is also described on their own terms. The names of organisations, places and sometimes job titles have been changed to preserve anonymity. In data extracts words in square brackets have been added by me to denote meaning, ellipses denote cuts for reasons of space, boldface denotes emphasis.

<sup>6</sup> Other findings from the Integrating Diversity project, for instance Sevgi Kilic's (2005) work in FE, documents a range of ways in which Black and Minority Ethnic staff constitute 'supplementary bodies' (2005:2) to be transfigured to mirror whiteness if they are ever to be enabled to take-up positions of authority within that context.

<sup>7</sup> 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 'licking [the] arse' of her male director. Another dimension of difficulty here then is perhaps that these comments come from a white woman manager.

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, many of the participants in this study had at one point or another been employed in section 11 posts.

<sup>9</sup> 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).

<sup>10</sup> The important difference between my own perspective and others which might be classified as social constructionist is my focus on the interconnections between the social/political, cognitive and the emotional.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to emphasise here that this *is not* the same as suggesting that ethnicity, 'race' or racism constitute the sum total of the lives of minoritised groups.

<sup>12</sup> Indeed the most obvious limitation to the discussion in this paper is my lack of attention to the way in which I too am a visible interpreter, in this sense I problematically make myself (in terms of my own history and location as a white woman academic) *invisible* here, with the exception perhaps of a visible political orientation. This is not to say that this is not something I consider within my research practice nor my writing (see note 5 and also Hunter, 2005).

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