

Critical Turns in the Evolution of Diversity Management

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This paper seeks to extend and invigorate existing critiques of the aims and claims of diversity management. Four overlapping turns – demographic, political, economic and critical – akin to the broader and critical ‘turns’ in the humanities and social sciences are identified. When existing critiques are reconsidered through the framework offered by these four turns, then diversity management can be seen to: perpetuate rather than combat inequalities in the workplace; diminish the legacy of discrimination against historically repressed minorities in the workplace; continue to prescribe essentialist categories of difference and present problematic dualisms for effecting organizational change.

Introduction

On 22 April 1993, the black schoolboy Stephen Lawrence was murdered while waiting at a bus stop in south London by a gang of white youths. The initial investigation by the Metropolitan police failed to lead to any arrests, despite the fact that the identities of the five white youths were widely known, and they were subsequently prosecuted in a private case brought by the family of the murdered boy. The private prosecution was unsuccessful due to a lack of evidence (much of which was lost by the police in the early stages of the investigation), and the alleged murderers still remain at liberty. Not only was the murder itself racially motivated, but the failure of the police to conduct a proper investigation was seen by the judicial inquiry into the aftermath of the murder, not just as incompetent, but also as a product of ‘institutionalised racism’ within the police force (Pallister and Millar, 1999).

The police have responded by unveiling a number of internal initiatives to discourage racist behaviour amongst officers, and the revitalization of a ‘diversity management’ programme, which was first instigated in 1994. In this particular instance, the Lawrence murder and the recognition of institutional racism have given a sense of urgency to a

diversity management policy that had been in operation for a number of years. Critics of the police point out that the diversity management policy appears to have had no discernible impact on the attitudes of the police to the murder inquiry, nor on the wider racist practices of the police. Reflections on the nature of workplace discrimination and diversity management initiatives, particularly in light of Stephen Lawrence’s murder, can no longer be seen as another quirky expression of liberal opinion in the UK: they have become central to contemporary public debate.

Over the last decade diversity management programmes have been introduced into a wide range of public and private organizations both in the UK and elsewhere. They have been introduced with a range of ostensible aims, including: increasing the rates of participation of women and ethnic minorities, improving career prospects for these people, incorporating wider perspectives into decision-making processes and helping organizations reach new, and formerly untapped, markets. But their success, as illustrated above by the Stephen Lawrence case, has been patchy. Consequently, in order to understand the reasons for its success or otherwise, the diversity management phenomenon has been the subject of considerable academic debate.

Recent work has, for example, queried: the meaning of diversity management (for example, Jenner, 1994; Nkomo and Cox, 1996); its ability to lift morale and enhance productivity (for example, Thomas and Ely, 1996) and its underlying paradigms, assumptions and intentions (for example Wilson and Iles, 1996; Nemetz and Christensen, 1996). Prasad and Mills (1997) lament the 'absence of serious scholarship on the process of managing diversity itself' (p. 5) and question the *do-ability* of diversity management as promoted by its celebratory rhetoric. More recently, Litvin (1997) argued against the use of categories of persons (e.g. men, women, the aged, ethnic minorities/majorities) as repositories of difference on the grounds that they are divisive, and Blommaert and Verschuere (1998) have revitalized the diversity debate by arguing that it is not about managing diversity as such, but that it is about 'managing the negative side effects of undiverted and unaccepted diversity: the *fight against racism and discrimination* (Blommaert and Verschuere, 1998, p. 14, emphasis in original).

The range of issues raised by these critiques is worrying when so many organizations seem intent on 'managing diversity'. Although diversity management is common practice in the USA, evidence suggests that it will be a powerful influence in Canadian organizations (e.g. Taylor, 1995; Lynn, 1996) and in British ones (e.g. Littlefield, 1995; Iles, 1995; Watson, 1997). The organizations attending to, or involved in diversity management in these countries are many and varied, and span the private and public sectors, including for example, the chemical industry (Laabs, 1993), health care (Wallace, Ermer and Motshabi, 1996), public administration (Choudhury, 1996; Dobbs, 1996), retailing (Wilson, 1995), hotel and catering (Woods and Sciarini, 1995), finance and accounting (Molvig, 1995; Ferguson *et al.*, 1996; Hayes and Hollman, 1996; Thibadoux, 1997), food industry, (Gordon, 1992a; Beasley, 1996); newspapers (Anfuso, 1995), IT (PC Week, 1997), American Federal Agencies (Seligman, 1994; Tan, Morris and Romero, 1996), the energy sector (People Management, 1997) and the computer industry (Ellis and Sonnenfeld, 1994; Daily *et al.*, 1996).

This paper aims to invigorate the growing academic debate on diversity management by providing a reflexive critique of existing issues and concerns. We do this by starting with a brief discussion of current academic views of diversity

management, then move back in time and chart four overlapping turns in its evolution – demographic, political, economic and critical – in order to provide a context for understanding contemporary critiques. Using critical discourse analysis as a method of inquiry we then reconsider existing critiques under three broad headings: (i) the fight against racism and discrimination; (ii) identifying and scrutinizing difference; and (iii) changing responses to difference, in the hope that proponents of diversity management, both inside and outside organizations, will be more thoughtful about how they talk and represent difference, and their role in seeking to 'manage' it. This paper forms part of a wider intellectual objective of working towards a discursive space from which diversity management might be theorized and practised in a more reflexive, critical and historically sensitive fashion.

Existing critiques of diversity management

In this section we indicate, for those not familiar with the concept of diversity management, how it is commonly conceptualized in the existent literature by presenting two popular definitions: one from the UK and one from the USA. The examples that we have chosen are also very similar to those cited by Nkomo and Cox (1996) in their comprehensive account of definitions of diversity. We have focused on a definition from the UK first of all, because we are currently involved in a research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust entitled 'Managing Diversity and Being British'. Given that our research is therefore set in a UK organizational setting and that our experience and understanding of diversity comes out of living and working in the UK, we felt it both academically and personally relevant for us to focus on British discourse on the subject. As for a definition from the USA, a search of the literature on diversity management conducted in December 1998 confirmed that the vast majority of articles and prescriptions come from that country. Since many North American management theories and ideas are highly influential on the way in which similar theories and ideas in other countries such as the UK are conceived (Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991), we deemed it important to include a US definition.

'The basic concept of managing diversity accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people. The diversity consists of visible and non-visible differences which will include factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability, personality and workstyle. It is founded on the premise that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everyone feels valued, where their talents are being fully utilised and in which organisational goals are met.'

Source: Kandola and Fullerton (1998, p. 7)

Figure 1. A UK example

The UK version of diversity management has been extracted from Rajvinder Kandola and Johanna Fullerton's (1998) book, *Diversity in Action: Managing the Mosaic*, which is aimed at practitioners. These authors based their working definition on a comprehensive literature review, original research data from their survey of around 450 organizations in the UK and Ireland and on their 'personal experience of many years' work in organizations on both equal opportunities and managing diversity issues' (1998, p. 2). The first edition of this text, published in 1994, was specially commended in the Management Consultancies Association's Book of the Year Award. Their work has also been quoted in the Institute of Personnel Development (IPD)'s code of practice (IPD, 1997) which has been distributed (free) to all its corporate and individual members. As the prime responsibility for devising and implementing diversity management initiatives has been placed on HR practitioners, many of whom are IPD members, it would seem reasonable to infer that Kandola and Fullerton have played a seminal role in shaping a British version of diversity management.

The selection of a US version of managing diversity has been trickier as there are many more definitions to choose from. The definition chosen, from Patricia Arredondo's (1996) book, *Successful Diversity Management Initiatives: A Blueprint for Planning and Implementation*, is however typical of those on offer to practitioners in the USA.

A brief discursive analysis of these two statements provides clues to the managerial language of diversity and gives generalized reasons why its management is seen to be of benefit to organizations. In short, there is an implicit instrumental

'Diversity management refers to a strategic organisational approach to workforce diversity development, organisational culture change, and empowerment of the workforce. It represents a shift away from the activities and assumptions defined by affirmative action to management practices that are inclusive, reflecting the workforce diversity and its potential. Ideally it is a pragmatic approach, in which participants anticipate and plan for change, do not fear human differences or perceive them as a threat, and view the workplace as a forum for individual's growth and change in skills and performance with direct cost benefits to the organisation.'

Source: Arredondo (1996, p. 17)

Figure 2. A USA example

and mechanistic rationale underpinning these definitions. This essentially 'Modernist' rationale is predicated on a 'means-end' relationship where managing diversity is the 'means' and the successful attainment of organizational goals the desired 'end'. This relationship is established in both statements by first presenting diversity as a natural or obvious 'fact', identifiable in terms of human differences and attributes that set us 'apart' from one another. Managing this 'fact' is then rendered desirable in both definitions through the argument that it will lead to more conducive work environments, with participants better prepared for change because they are more valued, skilled, empowered, ultimately culminating in higher productivity and the achievement of corporate goals – principally economic rewards. While both definitions share this underlying discursive mechanism, there is more emphasis in the US version on diversity management as an overall *strategic* direction for the organization. Although considered elsewhere in Kandola and Fullerton's book, the centrality of this strategic focus in Arredondo's definition is indicative of the advancement of the North American discourse on diversity management into key areas of corporate strategic language.

More generally, however, it should be noted that apart from the US reference to affirmative action, there are few significant differences between the US and UK literature at this point in time, in either the language used to define diversity or its main purposes (which contrasts with the sharp distinctions found by Guest (1990) regarding US and UK versions of human resource

management). We would suggest that the strong resemblance between UK and USA portraits of diversity management is due to the strong dependence within the UK on 'learning lessons' from the USA (Greenslade, 1991) when managing diversity was seen primarily to be a 'North American affair' (Cox, 1994). In the following section we move away from definitions of diversity management and focus instead on its history, so as to provide a context for understanding contemporary critiques.

Turning points in diversity management's evolution

When a topic of inquiry becomes the subject of contemporary debate, as in the case of diversity management, it is easy, by focusing on the present, to lose sight of a topic's history, thus missing interesting twists and turns in its evolution. Noticing key turns in diversity management's history is helpful because they provide a setting with which to make sense of contemporary critiques. In this section we identify four main turns in ideas on diversity management which we label demographic, political, economic and critical. Each turn represents, we believe, a shift in thinking about diversity management, akin to the broader interpretive and critical 'turns' that can be found in the humanities and social sciences. Although for ease of reference these turns have been identified singularly, in practice they are neither separate nor distinct: rather they are parts of interlocking, continuous strands.

The term 'diversity management' can be traced back to 1987 when the Hudson Institute published its influential report, *Workforce 2000* (Johnson and Packer, 1987): there was little or no mention of this term before then (Mills and Hatfield, 1995). Put succinctly, this report informed North Americans that by the year 2000 the majority of its workers would be African-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, women and other 'minority groups' (Beasley, 1996). This news, according to Kandola and Fullerton (1998), startled many US business people and academics, particularly in the field of human resource management, causing them to take note of the changing *demographic* situation and to consider its effects. A flurry of statistics (Hammond and Kleiner, 1992) was then produced, at national and organizational

levels, which revealed the 'new' heterogeneity of workforces in the USA. The results of these statistics were seen as crucial, and contained a vital message to employers: by the year 2000 white males would no longer comprise the majority of their labour forces. Indeed, they would have become a minority. The relegation of white males to 'minority' group status caused organizations in the USA to reconsider whom their future managers might be. Keen to ensure corporate survival, they began to cast their eyes at other segments of the population, notably women and members of minority ethnic groups, who were already targets of affirmative action. However, as interest in changing workforce demographics gathered momentum, a new thought dawned: by using the term 'diversity' *anyone and everyone* would be covered: men and women of all ages, and from all races, classes, occupations, religious groups, regardless of physical ability or sexual orientation.

Interest in diversity management turned *political* when its inclusive philosophy was seen as an attractive alternative to 'affirmative action' policies, which were causing widespread unease. It was seen to be attractive because it linked neatly, as Gordon (1992b) argued, with the new-right thinking that began with the Reagan government in the USA and continued throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. Within the USA, diversity management was seen by the right wing as an acceptable response to the 'political correctness' lobby against liberal or left-wing policies, and to the 'cult of ethnicity' exhibited by the black (and white) power movements. And, as Lowery (1995, p. 150) states, 'corporate executives found diversity a lot easier to swallow than affirmative action, and much easier to sell to a predominantly white workforce'. The attractiveness of diversity management as a palatable alternative to affirmative action is echoed in the UK in Vince and Booth's (1996) study of diversity initiatives in local government. In their study they saw diversity management as often 'an attempt to take the politics out of change', and to 'supplant rather than supplement specific employment and equal opportunity goals' (p. 48).

Political interest in diversity management turned *economic* with the introduction of compelling arguments which warned firms – in articles such as *Diversify Now* (Scully, 1994) or 'The *Bottom-Line Value of Diversity*' (McNerney, 1994) – that if they did not pay immediate attention to

managing diversity their organization's performance or image would be put at risk. These economic arguments were highly seductive as they tapped into the existing fear that traditional monocultural organizations were no longer effective in meeting the demands of a global marketplace. This fear of competitive ineffectiveness is illustrated well by one CEO who commented at a US roundtable discussion on the values, capabilities and leadership required for the year 2010, on the senselessness of 'eight white guys at the top of the organization making decisions for 40,000 people around the world', (Sloan Management Review, 1995, p 16). The data provided by statistics on demographic changes in the US and UK labour forces (Johnson and Packer, 1987 in the US; IPD, 1997 in the UK) coupled with encouragement from both academics (Cox and Blake, 1991; Ross and Schneider, 1992) and practitioners (Rice, 1994; Kandola and Fullerton, 1994), who emphasized the link between diversity and organizational performance, persuaded organizations to pay hard attention to diversity management by turning it into a 'business' case.

In Table 1 below we have summarized the main arguments identified primarily in the practitioner

literature on making a business case for diversity management.

Although Table 1 includes a moral rationale for diversity management, economic arguments dominate, as alluded to in the analysis of the definitions presented earlier. In terms of advantage to the firm, for instance, the literature documents how such initiatives are likely to create an environment in which productivity is improved and bottom-line profits subsequently increased. Contained in articles such as '*Diversify for dollars*' (Segal, 1997) and '*Diversity: a bottomline issue*' (Owens, 1997), such economic discourse has become predominant, particularly in the context of US diversity initiatives. This discourse has become the centrepiece of the business case for diversity, highlighting as it does the way in which initiatives can attend to questions of social justice and inclusion by linking them to improved company performance and thus endowing them with commercial respectability.

Turning diversity management into an economic concern (a business case) legitimized organizational scrutiny of employees' responses to difference, and suggested that there were ways of changing them if responses were deemed 'improper'. In this sense diversity management became programmable, as it could be incorporated into the routines and procedures of human resource management. Organizations were encouraged to review or modify responses to difference by consultants armed with guidelines and prescriptions that, while not ignoring the problems likely to be encountered by a scrutiny of difference, tended to reduce them to minor hurdles which could be easily overcome if the right steps were taken. Guidelines such as Kandola and Fullerton's (1998) diversity framework with the acronym 'MOSAIC' (Mission and value; Objective and fair processes; Skilled workforce; Active flexibility; Individual focus and Culture that empowers) or Gardenswartz and Rowe's (1994) seven steps for 'capitalizing' on diversity, include within them stage models that outline the various phases through which organizations pass in their passage from monocultural to multicultural identities. The actions most commonly prescribed include the involvement of senior management; the regular revisitation of diversity goals, and the constant advertisement of diversity efforts. 'In a word, diversity becomes *do-able*' (Prasad and Mills, 1997).

Table 1. Diversity management as a business case

Economic rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves productivity (Gordon, 1992a; D'Souza, 1997; Owens, 1997) and encourages more innovative solutions to problems (Rice, 1994), and thus profits (Segal, 1997) Assists the understanding of a greater number of customer needs (Rice, 1994; Thibadoux <i>et al.</i>, 1994; Tranig, 1994; Capowski, 1996) thus increasing the customer base and turnover (Segal, 1997) Enhances corporate competitiveness (McCune, 1996; Tranig, 1994; Capowski, 1996) and continued survival (Miller, 1994) Helps lower the likelihood of litigation (Segal, 1997)
Moral rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes interaction between ethnic groups (D'Souza, 1997) Helps foster culture change in the organization (Laabs, 1993; Thornburg, 1994; Owens, 1997) Fosters attitude adjustment (Thornburg, 1994; Neck <i>et al.</i>, 1997) and thus counters prejudice (Smith, 1991) Can increase attitudinal commitment, particularly amongst women for example (Harris, 1995; Dodd-McCue and Wright, 1996; <i>PC Week</i>, 1997) Creates organizational harmony (Rossett and Bickham, 1994), is socially just and morally desirable (Carnevale and Stone, 1994; Rossett and Bickham, 1994)

The literature on diversity management turned more *critical*, however, when problems were encountered in its implementation. Instead of paving the way for a greater tolerance of difference, and despite all the positive intentions of sensitivity seminars, diversity audits and training videos, many diversity interventions were shown to have backfired. They led to outbursts of antagonism and resentment from those who had been subjected to the scrutiny of difference (Gordon, 1995a). Such outbursts have manifested themselves under a number of guises – male backlash, white rage, political correctness – as well as a general sense of frustration and disappointment from those who felt that diversity initiatives had failed to deliver its promise of greater equality within the workforce as a whole. Questions have been raised, by both practitioners and academics, for example on:

- the meaning of diversity management (Jenner, 1994; Cox, 1994; Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998);
- its claims to lift morale and enhance productivity (Tranig, 1994; Thomas and Ely, 1996);
- an increasingly litigious environment (Lubove, 1997) which may damage the reputation of the company (Overmyer-Day, 1995);
- on what people are held to be ‘different’ from (Mobley and Payne, 1992; Gordon, 1995b; Litvin, 1997);
- the promotion of existing stereotypes (Paskoff, 1996; D’Souza, 1997);
- what counts as equality (Parekh, 1997; Liff and Wajcman, 1996);
- on its underlying paradigms and assumptions (Wilson and Iles, 1996; Nemetz and Christensen, 1996).

At the heart of these questions lies an invitation to engage critically with the fundamental concerns implied. In the next section we begin this critical process by taking the issues identified in existing critiques on diversity management into the largely uncharted territory (for the field of diversity management at least) of social and linguistic theory and reflexivity. We have used reflexivity, a concept that is commonly used in sociology and social theory (Steier, 1991), because it encourages social actors, be they academics or practitioners, to look more deeply at what they are doing and to consider the political,

cultural and social implications of the knowledge they are constructing. However, as Siegle (1986) points out, a literal definition of the word reflexivity is something that, ‘must turn back on itself, and then turn back on its turning’ (p. 2). By identifying four ‘turns’ (demographic, political, economic and critical) in the evolution of diversity management we hope we have met the first part of that definition. In the next section we attempt to meet the second part of Siegle’s definition of reflexivity by turning these four turns upon themselves in the hope that the discursive analysis, presented below, encourages a more critical and historically sensitive conception of diversity.

A reflexive critique of diversity management

In presenting our reflexive critique of diversity management we have been mindful of Thomas’s (1993) advice that criticality can only be achieved if management is understood in its wider context, assumptions are identified and challenged, awareness is developed of alternative ways of doing things, and by being more sceptical about what is presented in management dogma. Although the four turns, discussed above, go some way to providing an historical, political and critical account of diversity management, we want to think more reflexively about the meaning of diversity management, its central motif of ‘difference’, its reinforcement of stereotypes and its underlying paradigms and assumptions.

To achieve this desired level of reflexivity we revisit the two definitions, previously discussed, but this time use critical discourse analysis to re-examine the claims and assumptions contained in these practitioner constructs of diversity management. We then draw upon ideas from radical feminists, gender studies, ethnic and racial studies, politics and the social sciences to discuss our findings. We have stepped outside conventional management literature and included these ideas because we believe that they add richness and complexity to critiques of diversity management already made by management scholars and researchers. Our review therefore extends the work of Milliken and Martins (1996), who based their critique on diversity management on journals from *inside* the traditional field of management.

A critical analysis of practitioner versions of diversity management

Earlier in this paper we provided a brief content analysis of two working definitions of managing diversity, one from the UK and the other from the USA. Although somewhat crude, that form of analysis showed that the general aim of diversity management was to help organizations survive, enhance their economic performance and to make a profit. Diversity management can, therefore, be viewed as an instrument or tool that uses people's diversity as the means of achieving economic end goals. However, as Vince and Booth (1996) suggest, the instrumental use of the diverse people that constitute workforces (often referred to as 'human resources' or 'assets') as a way of achieving such organizational goals is only possible through mechanisms of control or compliance. In order to demonstrate how diversity management operates as an instrument of control or compliance we return to these same two statements, but this time use critical discourse analysis to provide a reflexive interpretation.

Critical discourse analysis yields a deeper understanding of diversity management because it provides a socio-political interpretation of the words that are used in oral or written text (Fairclough, 1989, 1992). This form of critical analysis conceptualizes words and sentences as micro-level forms of discourse, which index macro-level expressions of power relations within society as a whole. This technique has also been used by Garnsey and Rees (1998) to examine the discourses surrounding Opportunity 2000, a major UK initiative which was designed to increase the 'quality and quantity' of women's participation in the workforce and in managerial roles. In the discussion of their critical discourse analysis, Garnsey and Rees suggested that the discourses of Opportunity 2000, instead of developing women's presence (Tanton, 1994), served to perpetuate gender inequalities, albeit unintentionally, by using language which reinforced prevailing power structures. This form of analysis is useful in critiquing diversity management because it enables us to ask: who is being constructed as different? For what purposes? And with what consequences? But more fundamentally, it tells us something about the power processes invoked in the management of difference.

A critical discourse analysis of the two definitions presents *managing* or *management* as the

subject of the discourse, with diversity as its object: who is managing whom, however, is unstated. In the UK version *diversity* is presented as being about fixed differences, thus suggesting that there can be no movement either within or across visible or invisible boundaries. The verb *harnessing*, normally used to describe the action of placing a bridle or rein on a horse, is used in this text as an index for the control of *everyone* so that none can escape. Differences are related to *fear* in the US version, though there is no information on what it is about difference that makes the uncounted all, many, some or a few, afraid. By returning to the UK version, which does define difference, it would appear that it is sex, age, background, race, disability, personality and workstyle that can generate this emotion. Each text then ends with *organizations* as the stated beneficiaries, but who within them is to be better off: those managing diversity or those being managed?

From this analysis we can identify a number of points which illuminate some of the questions raised in contemporary critiques of diversity management with regard to its meanings and notions of difference. First, managing, or management, is presented as the privileged subject which sees diversity as an object to be managed. Distance is therefore created between 'those who manage' and 'those who are diverse', so that they are split into two distinct groups, with the properties of diversity being located solely amongst 'the managed'. Second, drawing a boundary around 'the managed diverse' group, allows diversity to be identified and controlled as it is located in one space, and it this group that subsequently bears the stigmatization of difference (oppressed groups). Third, masking out the diversity of 'those who manage' is also a control mechanism because it serves to erase any questionable human differentials within this powerful group. This split between 'managers of diversity' and 'the managed diverse' has, however, been noted by Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) who regard this as a significant disjunction, to be found even in critical debates of diversity. They argue that debates on diversity, though couched in the language of tolerance, are really about managing the negative side effects of *undiverted and unaccepted diversity* (p. 14), but from the point of view of the most economically and politically privileged segments of society who are,

in the USA and the UK, traditionally members of the white, male and non-disabled dominant group.

Having looked at how the language of diversity management constructs its diverse group, we now move to discuss the ways in which undiverted and unaccepted diversity is managed, and how the differences supposedly inherent in the 'managed-diverse' are identified and scrutinized.

The fight against racism and discrimination. Efforts to manage the negative effects of undiverted and unaccepted diversity, or what Blommaert and Verschuere term, '*the fight against racism and discrimination*', are not new. They represent an ongoing concern previously addressed in anti-discrimination legislation, affirmative action in the USA and equal opportunities in the UK. It would seem, at first glance, that diversity management has made some advances over earlier initiatives because it has, as Liff and Wajcman (1996) observed, re-opened debates in the workplace about forms of equality (one of the questions raised in critiques of diversity). However, as Parekh (1997) points out, it is notoriously difficult to achieve consensus on what counts as equality, especially in multicultural societies such as the UK, where there are different versions of treating people as equals (Miller, 1997). Conflicts arise, therefore, not about the value of equality *per se*, but about competing suggestions of that value.

Within the UK we are now faced with two competing models of equality, equal opportunities or diversity management. The differences between these two models have been articulated well by Liff and Wajcman (1996) who explain that equal opportunities is based on a principle of 'sameness', whereas diversity management is based on the principle of 'difference'. At work, the principle of sameness assumes that equality of opportunity is possible if people with the same abilities, or who perform in the same way, are given equal access to jobs, rewards and employment benefits, regardless of social group membership. Diversity management, however, argues that the principle of sameness is detrimental to people because it suggests that there is only one way of working. It proposes instead, using the principle of difference, that there are many different ways of working and that these different ways should be acknowledged and seen as

beneficial to the organization because they provide a wider range of alternative perspectives.

Liff (1996) suggests, however, that diversity management may not be as good as it seems because the view that all of us are different has the ironic effect of *dissolving* the basis of disadvantage (on the grounds of social group difference) as attention is placed on broader, inclusive configurations of difference, i.e. gender and race/ethnicity, rather than specifically on women or minority ethnic groups. This has the effect of weakening the argument for affirmative action. Discourses on diversity management present, therefore, a dilemma on how to move forward on equality at work. For, if diversity is talked about in terms of the *total* workforce, as Cox (1994) advised, the need to reduce discrimination against women and other repressed social groups, is diminished. If, however, these groups remain targeted, as Blommaert and Verschuere (1998) argue, it is they, rather than everyone, who carry the full burden of being diverse, abnormal or different.

Returning to the working definitions on diversity, it would appear that Cox's (1994) call for totalizing diversity has been acted upon in UK and US organizations because each definition refers to a wide range of 'visible and non-visible differences' such as gender and race. Women or other historically discriminated groups are no longer mentioned: these types of diversity definitions have made them invisible. Their disappearance could, however, be a mixed blessing, at least in theory. On the one hand, their absence means that women and minority groups do not have to carry the full burden of difference; yet on the other hand, if they do not qualify for special attention, how will organizations, such as the police in the aftermath of Stephen Lawrence's murder, counter the discrimination and racism to which they are subjected?

Although organizations are now faced with a dilemma on how to move forward in dealing with discrimination and racism, the situation is even more complex for those organizations with global ambitions and/or offices and subsidiaries abroad. Organizations in the UK and the USA cannot rely on local policies and legislation, such as affirmative action or equal opportunities, because they are domestic affairs. Furthermore, within the UK context, the national identity of 'British' organizations has proved problematic as a result

of the largely ambivalent relationship which many parts of the world have with the colonial legacy of Britain's empire. Some organizations are, however, trying to reduce their association with Britain's imperial past by revamping their corporate imagery so that they present more cosmopolitan images of themselves. British Airways for example has redesigned its tailfins to include "world images" from Africa, Poland and China to reflect the fact that 60% of its customers are not British. BBC1 has replaced its old blue and black globe with a brightly coloured orange and yellow balloon so as to bring the 'whole country and the world together'. 'The billowing partial view of flag with splashes of yellow to signify style and vitality, and green to suggest landscape' (Ahmed, 1997, p. 6) replaces the British Tourist Authority's old 'wavy dishcloth' – the Union Jack: a symbol of British national identity contested by Gilroy (1987) in his book, *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*.

We are, however, helped in our struggle against discrimination and racism, both at home and abroad, by ideas from writers such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Bell Hooks and Salman Rushdie who are challenging Western, Anglo-Saxon views of the world, in what has come to be known as the 'post-colonial debate'. Post-colonialism's area of inquiry is vast: it is used to deconstruct European thought in areas as wide-ranging as philosophy, history, literary studies, anthropology, sociology and political science, so that it is no longer seen 'under Western eyes' (Mohanty, 1988). Post-colonial theory offers a fresh perspective to diversity management because it asks us to pay particular attention to processes of Western knowledge construction which stereotype and subordinate the 'Other'. Avoiding Western stereotypes of the cultural 'Other' has ramifications, however, that go beyond culture or race because they intersect with views on other classifications of difference, such as gender and class, and in doing so challenges us, as Mercer (1990) remarks, to theorize more than one difference at once.

In the next section we pick up the theme of classifications of 'difference'. By examining how difference is identified and scrutinized in diversity management discourses it is our intention to illuminate the very processes of Western knowledge construction which post-colonial perspectives invite us to explore.

Identifying and scrutinizing 'difference'. We argued, above, that the rubric of 'managing diversity' focused on the total workforce rather than on just women and minority ethnics who had previously been nominated as repositories of difference under equal opportunities initiatives. The ubiquity of this *everyone-is-different* metaphor of diversity management is confirmed by Litvin's (1997) analysis of textbook discourses on diversity. She found that diversity was frequently presented as being composed of 'six fixed primary dimensions of difference' (age, ethnicity, gender, physical attributes/abilities, race and sexual orientation) which are held to be inborn or immutable, and 'eight fluid secondary dimensions of difference' (educational background, geographical location, income, marital status, military experience, parental status, religious beliefs and work experience) which help to distinguish the self from the other, but are seen as less permanent and hence adaptable. Although the variety of choices offered in these dimensions or definitions of difference are intended to be helpful in managing diversity the collation of difference into discrete frames of reference exchanges, in Geertz's (1983) view, a well-charted set of difficulties (problems of identification) for a set of uncharted ones (the consequences of that difference). But what assumptions allow these 'choices' to be offered in the first place?

Bauman (1993) suggests that the classical temptation to bind, order and classify the world and its people is predicated on the belief that the wild profusion of human alterity can be known and controlled. He argues that such 'rational' ways of thinking about difference serve to disenchant the world by rendering the unknown known, the unpredictable predictable and the unmalleable malleable (thus emphasizing the controlling nature of diversity management). Ordering difference is, he remarks, a vain attempt, for all it does is 'to replace diversity with uniformity, ambivalence with a transparent order – and while doing so this turns out unstoppably more divisions, diversity and ambivalence than it has managed to get rid of' (Bauman, 1993, p. 5). The ordering of individuals into a taxonomy of humanity is often presented as objective, 'natural' and obvious. But as Litvin (1997) argued, nothing is less obvious than who exactly is a 'member' of these groups. She asks what criteria might be used to determine whether an individual is to be

classified amongst the 'elderly' (chronological age, appearance or behaviour), or belonging to a specific racial grouping (place of birth, ethnic heritage or colour of skin)? Her questions provide a more fluid description of the shifting nature of social identity, so that they are no longer seen as fixed and unchanging, as so often portrayed in texts on diversity management. The view that social identities are fixed is currently being contested within cultural studies which is engaged in an ongoing discussion on identity, and its relation to the self. Rose (1996), drawing upon Foucault's notion of the *regime of the self* or 'our relations to ourselves', reminds us how different ages have produced different psychological characteristics, different emotions and beliefs of the self. Current thinking would seem to suggest, somewhat crudely perhaps, two identifiable ways of thinking about identity and difference.

As Grossberg (1996) neatly articulates, notions of the self are inextricably bound up in questions of identity formation and the struggle over the following two models of the production of identity. The first model assumes that there is some intrinsic and essential content to any identity, defined either by a common origin (e.g. place of birth, racial heritage) or a common structure of experience (e.g. being a woman, black, old, gay or disabled). The majority of discourses on diversity management would appear to fall into this category since they commonly use essentialist divisions to signify diversity. Contestations against this mode of identity formation take the form of disputing negative images (i.e. sexist, racist, ageist, homophobic or disabled stereotypes) with positive ones as in the early days of the women's and black power 'liberation' movements (Daniel, 1997), and tries to discover the 'roots' or 'authentic' content of one's identity. However, the struggle over representation of identity in this model simply replaces one fully constituted, separated and distinct identity with another.

The second model on identity production rejects the possibility of fully constituted, separate and distinct identities, thereby denying the existence of authentic identities based on a universally shared origin or experience. It argues, instead, that identities are always temporal and unstable. Although Grossberg's (1996) second model of identity formation paves the way for an appreciation of multiple identities, these identities will still be constrained by certain discursive

practices, such as diversity management discourses, which adhere to the notion that identities are monolithic and fixed. This is illustrated by the writer Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989). As a writer, she asks where does she fit: with writers of colour, with women writers, or with women of colour? However, as she goes on to say, 'Being merely a "writer" without doubt ensures one a status of far greater weight than being "a woman of colour who writes"' (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1989, p. 6).

What Minh-ha seems to be highlighting is the existence of an asymmetrical power relationship between the two models of identity posited by Grossberg. On the one hand, this power relationship suggests that the status of multiple identities ('the woman of colour who writes') is lower than the singular identity of the ungendered or unknown race of the 'writer'. In this example, being diverse in multiplicitous ways constitutes a dilution of one aspect of one's identity and a reduction in one's status. On the other hand, if differences are signified from an essentialist perspective, the resultant identities lie in impenetrable, fixed and stable categories that contain little possibility for crossing boundaries or changing dimensions.

The existence of this asymmetrical power relationship is particularly disabling for the processes involved in signifying difference. These models render it difficult to theorize identities as multiplicitous in nature without devaluing the status accorded to them. There are clear parallels in Minh-ha's reference to the difference in status between being a 'writer' and being a 'woman of colour who writes', and the concomitant disablement of multiple identities, and being a 'manager' and 'one of the managed diverse'. As mentioned earlier, the differences to be found amongst those who manage are simply airbrushed out by the language of diversity management with the effect of creating a pool of managers who exhibit ostensibly coherent, stable, fixed and high-status singular identities. By contrast those who are managed possess incoherent, fluid and low-status multiple identities, and it is these type of identities which are the most unaccepted. They are in effect the 'liabilities' that need to be managed in case they get 'out of hand': the targets of racism and discrimination.

Locating difference, whether singular or plural, in categories of person has been challenged by Elias and Scotson (1994), who argue that their

continued usage is symptomatic of ideological avoidance action. By using notions of difference, one singles out what is peripheral to interpersonal relationships (differences, for example, in age, skin colour, gender, occupation) and turns the eye away from what is central (differences in power ratios), thus excluding power-inferior groups from positions with a higher power potential. Diversity management's focus on individual differences, rather than power differentials, is seen by Prasad and Mills (1997) as a naive attempt to depoliticize the gender conflicts, racial tensions and cultural frictions that are an endemic feature of contemporary organizational life. Nemetz and Christensen (1996) believe that these embedded conflicts, tensions and frictions tend, however, to become more stark in diversity initiatives because they pay insufficient attention to the importance of individuals' views of the nature of society and how it might be changed. In this final section we look at the problems of conceptualizing the route by which responses to difference might be changed.

Changing responses to 'difference'. Drawing upon Burrell and Morgan's (1979) extensive work on sociological paradigms, Nemetz and Christensen (1996) explain that action to bring about social change, such as that engendered in diversity management initiatives, is deeply embedded within views of the world which fall into two broad, polarized perspectives. The first, labelled the *sociology of regulation* (or functionalism), presents society as working towards unity and cohesiveness. The second, the *sociology of radical change*, characterizes society in terms of deep-seated structural conflict and modes of domination. When these polarized views are examined in relation to diversity management they present two courses of action for reviewing and changing responses to difference. There is either the functionalist view, which seeks to induce social change through problem-solving and building consensus from within the boundaries of existing authority and control, or the radical structuralist view, which maintains that social change is only possible by revolution which shifts power from the oppressor to the oppressed.

For those interested in countering discrimination neither of these options offers viable practices. For, if we take the functionalist route, we are, from a radical structuralist point of view,

seen as collusive and naïve because we are making the false assumption that it is possible to achieve consensus from competing vested interests of different social groups. Furthermore, we would not have any effect on the status quo because, as members, we are contaminated by the system that we are hoping to change. Internally we would be seen as meddlers and from outside, as colluders. Although this view dominates diversity initiatives (Vince and Booth, 1996), they tend to provoke backlash when the status quo is seriously threatened. The alternative route seems equally hopeless, for taking a radical structural path means that we would need to leave our jobs so that we remove ourselves from the influence of the dominant elite, i.e. *the* management, and occupy a position outside the system. We may then need to become a member of a revolutionary group that uses consciousness raising to illuminate the truth of domination. From a functionalist point of view we would be seen as separatists who reek havoc, chaos and civil disorder. There is, however, the added problem of knowing where one might belong in radical action when it would mean choosing one aspect of our multiple identities in order to be loyal to groups which see race, gender or class as their principal priority. Furthermore, we would, as Ferguson (1996) suggests, be in danger of becoming so pluralistic, fragmented and contextualized that we are left without a generalizable base of solidarity politics on which might rest 'principles of justice to redress unequal distribution of power, property and resources' (Ferguson, 1996, p. 577).

This paralysing split between functional and radical change; consensus and dissensus, or on being an insider or outsider is, Thrift (1996) argues, built upon a dualistic view of society which draws boundaries too tightly. Over the past two decades there has, as Chilton (1998) notes, been an increasing interest across the humanities and social sciences in deconstructing the notion of boundaries and examining critically all sorts of demarcations. As he explains, boundaries are an essential element of human thought processes and have been central in the emergence of scientific rationality, or what Cooper (1990) calls a *classical* system of ordering. This system is concerned with rationality, order and control with the world seen in terms of 'clear-cut boundaries and neat categories of thought', (p. 168). Although

human beings, according to psychoanalytic perspectives, rely, as Chilton explains, on boundaries in constructing their sense of self as a demarcation from others, this separation establishes difference and binary opposition. He argues, however that binaries – such as inside versus outside (referred to above) or the self versus the other – are not neutral products of demarcation processes, as one of the two oppositional poles often dominate.

The binary divide between insider and outsider, and the self and the other, has been discussed by Elias and Scotson (1994) in their study of tense relations between an established group and a newer group of residents in Winston Parva, the pseudonym given by them to a local community in middle England. Although that community exhibited none of the discernible characteristics which normally give rise to hostility between groups (i.e. major differences in race, class or monetary wealth), a sharp division existed between the two groups with the older established group (insiders) treating the newcomers as outsiders. The older-established group closed ranks against the outsiders and stigmatized them generally as people of lesser human worth. The claim that the newcomers were of lesser human worth was made on the basis that they were bad parents, whose children were juvenile delinquents as a result of their inability to raise them properly. Elias and Scotson established, however, that the actual rate of juvenile delinquency amongst the newcomers was no higher than that of the established group.

The established group in Winston Parva was able to hold on to its sense of superiority because its self-image was based on the 'good' characteristics of the exemplary, most nomic or norm-setting section of its '*best*' members. In contrast, the they-image of its outsider group as a whole was judged to be inferior because it was founded on the 'bad' characteristics of that group's '*worst*' sections – of its anomic minority. This *pars pro toto* distortion in opposite directions enabled the established group to prove its superior human worth to itself, as well as to others: there was always some evidence to show that its group was 'good' and the other group was 'bad'. Elias and Scotson argue, however, that the established group's view that it was 'better' than the newcomers, or outsiders, was based on a collective fantasy which included an image of greatness

which could lead to the established group's destruction as well as the destruction of other interdependent groups, including the outsiders.

Elias and Scotson argue that collective fantasies are also apparent in the we-images of once-imperial nations, such as the British, whose superiority in relation to others has waned. Although the group's charismatic we-ideal is modelled on an idealized image of themselves in the days of their greatness, it can linger on for many generations as a model they feel they ought to live up to. This fantasy of their special charisma acts as a double-faced shield, for although it gives a declining nation the strength to carry on, it prevents them from feeling the known changes in the group's position of power. Such fantasy shields, however, are dangerous as they disable the group from adjusting to the changed conditions of their group image and their group strategy, and cause them instead to launch a counter-attack (backlash to diversity interventions) on those they perceive threatening their apparent superiority. The binary divides contained within these fantasy shields can, however, be loosened if they are seen as 'high tension zones' (Star, 1991) in which both insiders and outsiders play a part in one another's representations. To do this we need to return to ideas from post-colonial theory and to what Said (1989, p. 207) calls the 'dreadful secondariness' of some people and some cultures.

The discriminatory assumption that some places or people are 'better' than their second or third-class others, this dreadful secondariness, is not a 'view from nowhere' (Fox, 1998). It is a view that can be traced back to Ancient Greece when the Athenian upper-class slave-owning warriors justified their ruling positions by arguing that 'nature' had made them socially superior and that societies had to be 'ruled by the best': the literal meaning of the term 'aristocracy'. This 'ruling of the best' be it in relation to 'whites' over 'blacks', 'men' over 'women', or the 'first' world over the 'third' world, is the 'modern' world's historical legacy which diversity management cannot ignore. The belief that diversity management is do-able rests on a fantasy that it is possible to imagine a clean slate on which the memories of privilege and subordination leave no mark. It is this historical legacy with which discourses on diversity management must directly engage, rather than mask out, if they are to avoid the

paradoxes inherent in the everyone-is-different metaphor and thus respond reflexively, critically and in an historically sensitive fashion to the contemporary exigencies of increasingly diverse workforces.

Reflection

As Siegle (1993) encourages us to do, we close this narrative, at least provisionally, by turning back on the turns contained in the paper and reflecting upon the knowledge that we purport to have constructed. This paper has been written in light of the increasing frustration with and backlash against organizational scrutinies of difference implemented in the name of diversity management, most notably in the USA. Instead of creating an atmosphere of tolerance and respect within the workplace, diversity management interventions would appear to have engendered responses of antagonism and resentment on the part of the 'managed diverse'. These responses have been the sustenance for an increasing number of critiques whose central concerns we have attempted to elaborate on with recourse to social theoretical and linguistic perspectives outside the canons of conventional management literature. Forming part of what we call a 'critical turn' in the discourse of diversity, these investigations explored reflexively the political, social and cultural conditions in which both academics and managers have constructed their notions of difference between people and the need to manage it. These investigations index the present authors' concerns with issues of language and the politics of representation.

In expanding on existent critiques with these concerns in mind, this paper has argued that diversity management initiatives can be seen to perpetuate rather than combat inequalities in the workplace, diminish the legacy of discrimination against historically repressed minorities in the workplace, continue to prescribe essentialist categories of difference and offer problematic dualisms for effecting organizational change. In following one of Thomas's (1993) criteria for criticality in the study of management, namely that we should be aware of alternative ways to do things, we have suggested that the discourse of diversity management be constructed within a different social theoretical space. We have sug-

gested that post-colonial theory can furnish us with a fresh discursive perspective that is critical, reflexive and historically sensitive. Above all, it helps us to theorize the intersection of differences with which humans might identify themselves, thus transcending the rigid boundaries of essentialist categories and to work with historical imbalances and inequalities in the workplace. A fuller exploration of this space would however require a further text of its own. Suffice to say that for the present one, it represents a development of the critical turn currently being experienced in the discourse of diversity management as it deals with the monsters (Law, 1991) of its own creation. Unless we engage in this opportunity to create a critical and reflexive debate on ways in which we might theorize diversity in a philosophically and sociopolitically different manner, then the discourse of diversity management will mark just another colonizing moment of the Other.

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