ORGANIZING WITH IMMIGRANT WOMEN: A CRITIQUE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN ADULT EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article addresses two issues in adult education theory and practice in community development. The first is a growing recognition of male, eurocentric, western biases in adult education theory and the second, a glaring lack of the voices, issues and experiences of women, particularly racialized women, in the literature of North American adult education. Based on my organizing experiences with racialized immigrant women, this article deconstructs traditional literature about community development in adult education to reveal an underlying foundational system of beliefs that has privileged the experiences of white, western males. The exclusion of other realities has had serious consequences for what is taken to constitute knowledge and truth in adult education's understanding of community development. The issues and experiences of minority groups, especially racialized women, have not found their way into the knowledge base. Consequently, adult education has been unable to provide really "useful" knowledge to these groups. The article suggests that existing theories of community development in adult education remains limited, selective and partial and in need of revision. It offers some new directions and argues that racialized women's intellectual contributions are urgently needed. Adult education cannot respond to changes and demands arising from global economic restructuring without reformulating its explanatory frameworks.

Résumé

Le présent article concerne deux problèmes de la théorie et de la pratique de la formation des adultes dans le cadre du développement des communautés. Le premier est la réalisation croissante de la présence de parti pris pour les hommes d'origine européenne et de culture occidentale, et le second, un manque frappant, dans la littérature nord-américaine traitant de la formation des adultes, des opinions, questions et expériences féminines, en particulier de celles des femmes racialisées. En se fondant sur mon expérience dans des organisations de femmes immigrantes racialisées, cet article défait pièce par pièce la littérature traditionnelle sur le développement des communautés par la formation des adultes, pour révéler la présence d'un système fondamental de convictions qui a privilégié l'expérience d'hommes blancs occidentaux. L'exclusion des autres réalités a eu des conséquences sérieuses sur ce qui est considéré comme constituant la base de connaissance et la vérité dans la compréhension du développement des communautés qu'a la formation

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des adultes. Les questions et l'expérience des groupes minoritaires, en particulier des femmes racialisées, ne font pas partie de la base de connaissance de ce domaine. En conséquence, la formation des adultes n'a pas été en mesure de fournir une connaissance vraiment "utile" à ces groupes. L'article suggère que les théories actuelles sur le développement des communautés en formation des adultes restent limitées, sélectives et partielles, et qu'elles devraient être révisées. L'article présente de nouvelles directions d'action et propose que la contribution intellectuelle des femmes racialisées est nécessaire de manière urgente. La formation des adultes ne peut pas s'adapter aux changements et aux demandes issues de la restructuration économique globale sans révision de ses structures explicatives.

Doing Research as an "Insider"

This article is based on my personal experiences in community organizing with immigrant women. I first became involved with the immigrant women organization as a volunteer, not to "do" research. Although I was working at the university, I kept my identities of "researcher" and "volunteer" separate. I didn't think of my volunteer experiences and observations as being legitimate "objects" for research, reflection and analysis. But, over time, I began to make connections between these two identities. My organizing work began to inform my thinking, and my reading began to inform my volunteer work. Feminist, post-structuralist and post-modernist social theories helped me to think more clearly about my community work, and my organizing experiences provided me with a basis to read more critically.

In some ethnography texts my role as researcher might be described as an "insider" — a full member-participant (Fetterman, 1989; Adler & Adler, 1987). But as a community activist I was also fully involved in the organizational politics of the group. However, being politically engaged with the object of one's research is normally seen in the academy as illegitimate. Academic norms and values regulate the language, modes and objects of inquiry (Spivak, 1989; Makosky & Paludi, 1990) so that the researcher must separate herself from engagement with the "fieldsite" in order to maintain the "objectivity" and neutrality necessary to produce a "valid" scientific account of her observations. Moreover, a form of textual disciplining occurs in academic writing, according to Spivak (1989), that shifts the participant/activist role into a subordinate position. These are several ways institutional structures and processes operate to privilege certain subjectivities and knowledges (the academic and the objective) over others.[1] In the act of writing, I felt the need to resist this positioning and to reassert my activist identity. For example, after concluding that the traditional explanatory frameworks of community development in adult education were not very helpful in explaining the dynamics within the immigrant women organization, I asked myself the question—how can the existing literature be changed to account better for the experiences of racialized immigrant women?[2]

As a form of engaged scholarship, this article has three objectives: the first is to share personal insights into the dynamics of organizing within a multicultural, multiracial and multilingual women's group. The second is to offer a critique of

traditional theories of community development in adult education. The third objective is to suggest ways of reformulating theoretical perspectives on community development in adult education so that these frameworks might be more applicable to the actual experience of community development with a multiethnic, multilingual, multicultural women's group.

In analyzing immigrant women organizing, I found post-modern thinking helpful in several ways. The concept of multiple subjectivity, for example, frees one from the limitations and constraints of thinking solely in dichotomous categories of researcher and volunteer. From a post-modern perspective, several identities may be held simultaneously although only one subject identity might be privileged at any given moment. Additionally, a post-modern perspective allows one to see actors' identities in community development as continually being shaped by social forces and not as something fixed and given.

Post-structuralist feminist theories also suggest that identities and representations are socially constructed and should not be taken as *a priori* (Weedon, 1987). For example, actors' roles in the community development process would not be seen as determined by a predictable chain of events. Both the actors' roles and the process of community development would be seen instead as unfolding out of dynamic social interactions. Moreover, post-structuralism's suspicions of truth claims and foundational, definitive statements help one to ask questions of theories and knowledge once taken as "truth" and inherited wisdom.

But I am not interested in replacing one orthodoxy with another. My desire is to expose the blindness of adult education's understanding of community development to the realities of organizing a multicultural women's group. In doing this I hope to rupture conventional thinking about community development and bring traditional understandings to a point of crisis. Spivak (1989, p. 139) defines "crisis" as the moment at which you feel that your presuppositions about an enterprise are disproved by the enterprise itself. This is necessary and urgent because the actual internal dynamics of organizing within an immigrant women's community cannot be explained through traditional accounts. The established frameworks cannot explain the actual processes of community organizing with a multiethnic, multilingual, multiracial immigrant women's group. The article concludes with some suggestions for an alternative conceptualization of community organizing that better account for differences of race, gender, language and class.

Background

The ABC Organization (ABC)[3] was formally organized in 1984. The organization's beginnings are unclear since members recount different stories of its history and the organization's written records are dispersed in many members' homes. One version that many people tell is that the organization began as a support group for immigrant women organized by a local immigrant settlement agency. With federal government funding it grew into an independent organization with its own bylaws and elected officers. The name "immigrant" women is a misnomer because its membership includes "visible minority," "refugee," "white,"

foreign-born and Canadian-born women who support the goals of the organization. But all feel marginalized in some way. The membership is extremely diverse in terms of English language skills, educational levels, work experience, length of time in Canada, political ideologies, age and other characteristics. The organization is part of a larger provincial structure consisting of four regional chapters that differ in size and orientation. There has been a division of responsibilities between the provincial organization and the local chapters. In the past the provincial organization took responsibility for advocating on behalf of immigrant and other racialized women on broad social concerns while the local chapters provided social support and direct services. As a grassroots organization, ABC struggles to survive on volunteer labour and project grants. It is managed by an elected board of directors, receives no core funding and, like other grassroots women's organizations, is only as strong as the women who support it.

When I first became involved in 1989, the organization had been going through difficult and demoralizing times. The presidency had changed hands three times in one year. There had been charges of financial misconduct that included the use of organizational monies for personal advantage. Members accused each other of favoritism, nepotism, greed and other undesirable qualities. Membership had fallen off drastically, with fewer than twenty women and sometimes fewer than ten attending the annual general meetings. The organization also faced the prospect of no funding for the upcoming year. Because of internal chaos and a lack of decision-making, the organization had depleted its savings by renting large, costly premises when there was only one staff person working fewer than ten hours per week and offering no programs.

The personal relationships among board members were extremely fragile. At the first few board meetings I attended, the group dynamics were so hostile and acrimonious that the meetings would end in tears, shouting and accusations. At one meeting, chairs were thrown across the room. Meetings were long drawn out affairs that often led to at least one member storming out in protest. In this divisive climate, the annual elections were planned. Information about the membership list was withheld because one ethnic group did not want another ethnic group "to take over". I learned later that these dynamics were not unusual. The board members had not been working together for quite some time. Different factions in the board accused each other of bringing about the collapse of the organization.

During my first year on the board, two presidents had resigned. *The president* prior to the two resignations had served for three terms and had worked extremely hard for the organization. A highly trained professional woman from an upper class Pakistani family, she had provided the necessary leadership to the organization. But board members told me that, as president, she tended to consult with staff and a small group of supporters. This style of leadership was to have serious consequences for the organization.

How and why did this state of affairs come about? It is difficult to trace this history because many board members left in disgust or moved away. Others would

not talk about the situation with me. No one would accept responsibility for the organization's affairs. There are several possible explanations, but one important factor appears to be the degree of English language fluency or, rather, lack of fluency. Because ABC was a multicultural, multilingual women's organization, English was used as the common language. This meant that only women who came from English speaking countries or who were well educated and spoke English fluently were able to become actively involved in decision-making. Increasingly, women from ex-British colonies, primarily India and Pakistan, tended to dominate the board. An impression was created that the organization was not really open to all immigrant and visible minority women. Interest began to wane as more and more women perceived the organization to be unresponsive and irrelevant to their experiences. In recognition of the lack of participation from other groups, one of the main concerns during the time the elections were being planned was how to involve more Chinese, Vietnamese and African women.

Another reason for its organizational difficulties had been an over-reliance on government funding. The organization had received grants over three successive years from Canada Employment and Immigration for a Canadian Jobs Strategy Training Program aimed at job re-entry training for immigrant women. As a result of these relatively large grants and the president's leadership style, the organization focused mainly upon the administration of this job training program. It began to function as though it were a formal service agency. The organization became increasingly bureaucratized as the board concentrated on policy, management and administration of the job training program to the exclusion of other concerns. As with many other community-based women's organizations, diminishing involvement by members was closely associated with acceptance of government funding (see Findlay, 1988). Rather than being member-driven, the organization became staff-driven.

When ABC lost its job re-entry program funding, it also lost its staff. The newly elected incoming president had also just resigned for personal reasons. Immediately, the frailty of the organization was exposed. Because information and decision-making had not been shared, the remaining board members were limited in their ability to manage the organization administratively, financially and organizationally. Underlying class, ethnic and language tensions which had remained submerged and veiled suddenly exploded into a flurry of accusations of financial mismanagement, racism, favoritism and egotism. All the conflict was personalized and individualized since no one had been able to move to overall analysis. One of the most damaging effects was how it encouraged among the remaining members and the wider public a view of immigrant women as "lacking." Many members seemed to lose self-confidence in their ability to run their own organization.

The underlying disputes came to a head when the organization's annual general meeting was held in May of 1991. Few members had seen the bylaws and constitution, and even fewer could understand them, especially since there were several versions in circulation. A Canadian Secretary of State official who was in the audience intervened and began interpreting the organization's bylaws to the members. According to her, she was the only person present who knew the history

of the organization and was "neutral," but in fact she spoke up defending the actions of one of the board members. Frustrated and dissatisfied with the existing board and the chaotic meeting, members elected a relative newcomer as president. As a volunteer appointed to fill a vacant board position two months earlier, I was concerned that the organization was on the verge of collapse. Because I felt strongly that ABC was too important a "voice" for racialized women to be destroyed by personal divisions, I spoke out at the general meeting. I must have struck a sympathetic chord among members who elected me president by acclamation.

Making Sense of the Dynamics

In order to understand better the dynamics taking place among women in ABC, I turned to theories of community organizing and community development in adult education. But I found little that seemed relevant to my experiences. I found instead prescriptions based on certain norms and values that surprised me in their underlying assumptions. These fundamental concepts and theoretical frameworks of community development need to be examined closely. I feel it is these underlying assumptions that limit the capacity of existing community development frameworks to explain and make sense of the dynamics of organizing with immigrant and racialized women.

Undeniably, practices and theories of community development are varied (Christensen & Robinson, 1989; Sanders, 1970). Community development is not a monolithic enterprise. It is often viewed as "a process, a method, a program and a movement" (Sanders, 1970, p. 19). But because of the inextricable link between theory and practice (Jarvis, 1991) it is necessary to expand present theoretical frameworks to incorporate the diversity found in the field of practice. I hope this article will begin a reexamination and reformulation of existing explanatory frameworks in adult education and community development so that they better reflect the reality of practice.

Problems with the Basic Concepts

One reason that the theoretical explanations are not helpful is that immigrant and racialized women's lives are not to be found in the traditional literature. To be accorded their rightful significance and full stature, it is urgent to take apart notions of community so that the underlying assumptions that limit recognition and understanding of the reality of women organizing at the community level can be revealed. What seems to be missing from existing accounts is a complex understanding of the dynamics of language, race, class and gender as they operate within racialized communities.

Community development with racialized peoples can only be understood if one acknowledges the historical, social, political and economic context in which they exist. This would avoid the very dangerous essentializing assumptions about any group of people that see these groups as less than equal in their ability to employ specific community organizing strategies and tactics. The divisions, conflicts and tensions in organizing stem more from struggles over the politics of representation and identity

than from an inability to manage. The entire basis of how a group has become constituted as a community needs to be called into question.

Racialized women face specific strategies of domination and oppression that may include sexism, linguicism, classism, racism, eurocentrism and so on (Ng, 1988; Giles, 1988). But the specificity of these strategies of domination is obscured by the public representation that all immigrants face similar problems of adjustment and settlement. Social practices use visible physical differences and discursive strategies to signify all women of colour as "immigrant" regardless of their true citizenship status and signify non-white women as "other." Their "otherness" is continually reinforced through public representations of the social category "immigrant women" in government policies, prevailing ideologies and structured interactions of everyday life (see Ng, 1988). Myths of otherness and commonality become internalized, and these myths prevent researchers from recognizing that the category of immigrant woman is socially constructed. Rather than assuming that ABC automatically represents the interests of all immigrant women on the basis of a shared identity based on immigrant status in Canada, the organization should be understood as a re/presentation of a diverse group of women who differ in complex ways and who bring various histories and experiences of colonial, caste and class hierarchies into their everyday interactions. Begun by a settlement agency, it was "constructed" as a multiethnic women's group to serve a specific social service function. Any commonality is only possible in the context of a white, patriarchal society where anyone who is not Anglo-Canadian and male is taken as "other." Even administrative and legal categorization by government bureaucracy or public perception of a woman as refugee or immigrant is insufficient automatically to assume unity, commonality or community.

Eurocentrism, Androcentrism and Classism

These issues cannot be addressed by traditional explanations of community development. Of fundamental concern are the biases and silences in many conceptualizations that centre on eurocentric and androcentric assumptions. Batten (1957), widely recognized as one of the founders of modern community development, takes western norms for granted when writing about community development in the tropics. These communities are seen to be in need of improvement to bring them up to western standards. Batten takes great care to acknowledge cultural differences in community life, but he views small traditional communities as backward. Traditional communities must be assisted through community development processes to face the inevitability of modernization. Christenson and Robinson's (1989) recent text on community development continues this same logic.

Colonial Roots of Community Development.

We also need to be reminded of community development's long service in colonial governing (Batten, 1957). Batten (1957) and Roberts (1979) trace the history of community organizing as a distinct field of practice and scholarly inquiry to its origins in the colonial administration of colonized peoples. Colonial administrators meeting in 1948 defined community development as "a movement to promote better living for

the whole community, with the active participation and *if possible on the initiative of the community, but if this initiative is not forthcoming, by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to secure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement*" [my emphasis] (quoted in Batten, 1957, p. 1). In my view, this passage alone should remind those interested in community development of the need to critique and reformulate traditional theoretical frameworks. What is taken to be a spontaneous response on the part of citizens is often "stimulated" by external powers. Moreover, community development's colonizing roots may help to explain the racist and class biases that remain in today's conceptualizations.

Classism and Racism.

When I examined the literature for articles dealing with minority groups, I found that many writers view minority groups as homogeneous and imply their inferiority. For example, Edelston and Kolodner (1968) conclude that "the inability of uneducated poor people to conceptualize and their tendency to individualize all problems cast doubt upon the likelihood that the process (community development) itself can produce innovative ideas" (p. 238). Kuyek (1990, p. 91-92) writes,

> When *we* work with *other races*, *we* need to be rigorously honest with *ourselves*, having a sense of humor about *our* 'white mistakes.' ... The success that middle-class whites enjoy for following the rules and being reasonable often leads them to think that these are also good strategies for *non-white/poor* people to follow. In fact, most *non-white/poor* people can only use these tactics if they have *'acceptable' white, educated people* to do it for them [my emphasis].

This passage reveals Kuyek's underlying assumption that people can be differentiated on the basis of racial characteristics and income levels and that these differences somehow account for differences in community development abilities and motivations. Kuyek's use of the possessive and universalizing "we" reflects a view that "we" (the whites) can be set apart from "other races." The racist and classist logic in these statements can be traced as follows: "we" (whites) are more "successful" in following rules and being reasonable than the "poor" and "non-whites." In other words, those who are non-white and poor are culturally distinct (read inferior) and are incapable of participating in community organizations in the same way as white, middle-class people. The white, middle-class way of participating (whatever that is) is taken as normal. Therefore, other ways of participating are different and not normal.

The paternalistic and patronizing tone characteristic of liberal racism is carried in statements such as "[W]e" must be tolerant and "have a sense of humor about *our white* mistakes and the even more outrageous statement that "non-whites/poor" can only be successful in using middle-class community development tactics such as following rules and being reasonable if "acceptable whites" use middle-class tactics for them. But a more dangerous masking effect is revealed in how Kuyek collapses "non-white" and "poor" into a single term separated only by the slash. This elision both obscures and equates the specific oppressions faced by women and men who may simultaneously experience class, race, gender or other forms of discrimination. In the slash we see how Kuyek reproduces the mistaken belief that all poor are non-white

and all non-white are poor. This conflation can only take place because non-whites and poor people are seen as part of a monolithic "other."

Androcentrism.

There were similar problems with the issue of gender and community development. Gender, as an explanatory concept, rarely appears in the orthodox literature. Cruikshank (1990) found evidence of gender discrimination in her study of female community development practitioners. She suggested that female practitioners need space to reflect on their work. However, if female practitioners are working within a model of community development that erases and does not acknowledge gender differences, little legitimacy would be given to women's different experiences in community development. Conventional frameworks have tended to generalize and universalize from a limited male frame of reference. In most of the major texts the male pronoun "he" is used to refer to the community development agent. Generalizing from men's experiences ignores the different interacting realities of language, gender, class, age and race as significant factors to be considered from either the practitioners' or the participants' point of view.

As feminist research and theory have found, the experiences of men simply cannot be unproblematically generalized to women, nor can the experiences of white, middle class women be generalized to other women of different ethnic and class backgrounds (hooks, 1984). But despite the progress made through feminist critiques, with few exceptions, explanatory frameworks have generally failed to acknowledge or adopt perspectives that will help to recognize the complexity, diversity and contradictions in racialized women's organizing experiences.

Community As a Problematic Concept

In addition to the omission of the experiences of immigrant and racialized women in the literature, and the literature's more obvious race, class and gender biases, there exist fundamental flaws in the conceptualization of "community". In the following discussion several conceptual problems with the concept "community" as it is used in much of the literature are identified.

Idealizing Community.

Traditional notions of community hold as fundamental a common referent, be it location, need or interest (Roberts, 1979; Rothman, 1974; Sanders, 1970; Warren, 1963). In common-sense usage, this seems straightforward and self-evident. People are thought to identify and share something in common (see Cary, 1970a; Minar & Greer 1969; Roberts, 1979). But collapsing popular usage into analytical definitions has led to conceptual problems (see Young, 1990).

The assumption that a common identity is a necessary prerequisite for community needs to be interrogated. In a recent volume on community development, Christenson and Robinson (1989) define community as "*people* that live within a geographically bounded area who are involved in social interaction and have *one or more psychological ties* with each other and with the place in which they live" [my emphasis] (p. 9). This definition, very similar to those found in much of the literature,

is premised on the belief that citizens/individuals are universal, homogeneous subjects who can be brought together on the basis of some common, objective, preexisting social identity (Cox, Erlich, Rothman & Tropman, 1974). A unitary, transcending identity as the basis for community is a fundamental assumption underlying all traditional accounts of community development (see Kuyek, 1990; Rivera & Erlich, 1984). But according to post-structuralist theory, individuals are not unitary subjects; individuals hold many overlapping subject identities. But which identity is the basis for commonality? Is it one's class, race, gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, occupation, physical location in space or any one of several other bases for identity formation? Analyzing only one basis for commonality pushes all other bases for identity into the background. For example, Lovett, Clarke and Kilmurray (1983) analyze community development solely through the lens of a single collective working class consciousness. They privilege class identity as the common referent for community, thereby obscuring the dynamics of race, gender, language or other bases for social inequality in helping to shape an oppositional community consciousness.

In an immigrant society populated by dislocated people who have been uprooted to new lands either by choice or necessity, what is "community's" referent? What need or interest is held in common? How do categories of representation formulated and imposed on racialized women affect community organizing?

Ng and her collaborators have also raised concerns about the inadequacy of traditional frameworks to account for the diversity of people's lived experiences and forms of community organizing. Ng, Mueller and Walker (1990) argue that orthodox views of community, whether geographic location, felt need, interests or common identity, have not examined critically the state's role in constituting categories of representation. Moreover, the definitional and classificatory approaches customarily employed as theory in community development (see especially Rothman, 1974) are of little use in understanding the complexity of relationships involved in empowering racialized women. Although community organizing may result in oppositional strategies and empowerment, the practice of organizing can also further reproduce gender, class, race and language inequalities and maintain ethnocentric hierarchies under the guise of building "community".

In traditional views, once individuals are joined in a "community" any hierarchically structured basis of inequality among the collectivity seems to disappear and is transcended by a common identity (see Wilkinson, 1986). Cary (1970) describes functional role differences but not political or identity-based differences. Conceptual unity dissolves difference. The assumption that "community" is based on a transcending identity denies the possibility of examining power differences which may exist within a group or a community.

In the case of organizing within a multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic, multilingual women's group, ongoing conflicts over the basis of socially constructed identity positions cannot even be posed. There is no room in conventional community development literature for the possibility of constantly shifting identity positions or of external social relations that might structure the presentation of certain identity positions while subordinating others. The internal dynamics of group or community

formation somehow gets lost in the positivity of community in the traditional literature (see Hillery, 1955).

Widely held views on community development that accept as an *a priori* given a common community identity as the basis for forming community are tautologically flawed—"community exists because there is a need for it". Moreover, there is an underlying perennialism in these conceptualizations—"community is and will always be". While it may be true that society has always been organized in social units which social scientists have called communities, the community development literature should ask why communities take the forms that they do instead of insisting that communities must exist. There is a difference between the descriptive use of the noun community to refer to a common space, location, neighbourhood, interest or idea and the analytical use of the concept. Too often these two definitions are collapsed together (Young, 1990).

Animating Community as Metaphysical Spirit.

Another problem of idealization is the overwhelming acceptance in the literature of a "metaphysics" of community. This is often referred to as the "spirit of community". A healthy community is thought to have a "spirit". But a community spirit is not materially produced; it is somehow always supernaturally present. A community spirit somehow radiates by osmosis through individuals in a community. When Batten (1957, p. 6) talks about a "sense of belongingness" that holds people together in a community, he makes it clear that he is talking about something different from the material development of a community: "...that to encourage material development is to tackle only a part of the community problem. It is at least equally important as change occurs *to ensure that the feeling or spirit of community is not destroyed* (emphasis in original)." In the case of immigrant women organizing, the idea of "community" and "spirit" must be materially constructed and cannot be taken as given or supernaturally present.

Objectifying and Reifying Community.

Another difficulty that is related to the flaws identified above is that community is often reified as a fixed social entity existing as objective reality "out there". It is seen as an eternally pre-existing form outside of the people whom it supposedly encloses. Even where the literature refers to the process of "community building," actors supposedly work toward reclaiming or rebuilding a form of social relations that, although abstractly conceived, is still thought to be knowable. This reasoning reifies community as a social fact.

From an aggregate of individuals who naturally come together to form a community, in the Hobbesian sense, it is a small step to endow this collectivity with a sense of agency (see Christenson, Fendley & Robinson, 1989). Thus community is often used in a way that gives it a life of its own beyond the agency of its constituents. Community used in this way is often prefixed by the definitive article "the". We talk of the community taking action, the community speaking with one voice and the community needing X or Y. We use the noun "community" as a form of shorthand to refer to a conglomeration of acting individuals. But this leads to

thinking about community as a unified, conscious subject. A limitation of this kind of thinking is that, once reified as a monolithic acting entity, it is no longer possible to question how a community becomes constituted as a community.

Idealizing Community Through Oppositional Dichotomies.

Traditional approaches to community organizing have also been limited by a normative dualism found in opposing categories of community: rural/urban, *gemeinschaft/gesellschaft*, modern/traditional (Batten, 1959; Roberts, 1979, pp. 25-44). These oppositional categories have tended to preclude thinking about community as emergent social relationships that take different forms at different historical conjunctures. Polarized, dichotomous thinking about community supports an idealism that leads to normative and instrumental logic. Idealizing community obscures the reality of difference, politics and power.

But idealizing community as a concept can lead to contradictions. In the opposition of modern and traditional, for example, technologically driven community life is often seen as alienating and individualizing, but the contrary view is often espoused. Modernism is often more highly valued than traditionalism. This preference for one type of community over another is not in and of itself problematic, but when "western" is equated with modern, and "non-western" with traditional in North American versions of community development, the result is that traditional, non-western forms of community are taken as primitive and backward and thus less desirable (see McClusky, 1960; Warren, 1970). This in turn produces and reproduces eurocentric assumptions in community development that were discussed earlier.

Another ambivalence may be seen when the concept "development" is taken apart. Christenson, Fendley & Robinson (1989, p. 9) writes, "*development* implies improvement, growth and change. It is concerned historically with the transition of cultures, countries and communities from less advanced to more advanced social stages. Such terms as *industrialization, modernization, and urbanization* have been used interchangeably with the broader concept of development" (emphasis in original). Community development is contradictorily seen to restore traditional forms of community to their rightful place, while also being seen as a process by which the transition to a "modern" stage of community might be assisted. Thus men and women from developing countries would be seen to be in need of community development to assist their transition to a more "advanced" stage of community life. And people living in industrialized, urban locations would be assisted to return to more "traditional" forms of community life.

Technicism and Instrumentalism in Community Development.

The problem of idealizing community through normative logic and oppositional dualism leads to an emphasis on educational processes and methods to the neglect of other concerns. For example, Compton and McClusky (1980, p. 229) define community development as a "process whereby community members come together to identify their problems and needs, seek solutions among themselves, mobilize the necessary resources, and execute a plan of action or learning or both. This *educative* approach is one in which community is seen as both agent and objective, *education*

is the process, and leaders are the facilitators, in *inducing* change for the better" [my emphasis]. Compton and McClusky's perspective is widely adopted in adult education's view of community development, as evidenced in the writings of Brookfield (1984), McClusky (1960), Roberts (1979) and Sanders (1970).

Biddle and Biddle (1965, p. 243) assert emphatically that "community development is an educative process. It is this, first, last and all the time. All else is secondary to it and must take its place as a reflection, not as the end result." Because community development is seen as a field of professional practice many researchers in the discipline of adult education seem to want to privilege the educative or learning dimensions to the exclusion of other concerns (see Roberts, 1979).

As a technique, community development is often presented as a neutral or benign process that may be utilized in divergent ways: either as a tool to facilitate modernization or as a tool to resist change and modernization. Issues of power over the use of the process are rarely discussed. As a technique or strategy, community development is seen to be useful both to oppose undesirable change and to promote and manage desired change. But the question of how change comes to be valued as positive or negative, desirable or undesirable, is left unasked. As are questions about who gets to do the valuing. Beliefs in progressive development also reinforce the technicism underlying the literature. Given the right stimulus, it is possible to "encourage" people to adopt needed change. Blakely (1979) goes so far as to describe community development as an applied behavioral science. If, as Harris (1991) claims, social change is the new paradigm in adult education, replacing the old educative paradigm. Although I question this conclusion, one may still ask the question that was asked of the old educative paradigm, "social change for whom and why?"

The professions of social work, adult education and planning tend to see community organizing as a field of practice. In these professions, community is usually objectified as a site or collectivity where the community organizer, as a professional practitioner, intervenes as a conscious agent (see for example, Roberts, 1979; Cox, Erlich, Rothman & Tropman, 1984; Batten, 1957; Chekki, 1979). Other participants are seen as passive and needing to be directed, facilitated or led:

> ...hence he (sic) cannot direct or control them in detailed conformity to a national programme. He has to stimulate and educate them in relation to their own local needs and interests (Batten, 1962, p. 13).

The adult educator as community developer is seen more or less as a conductor who orchestrates learning opportunities and facilitates learning as a means of building community (Roberts, 1979; Chin and Benne, 1976). A community developer is "to help people to adapt their way of life to the changes they accept, or have had imposed upon them" (Batten, 1957, p. 6). This task is achieved by the organizer/adult educator bringing "strategies, techniques and tactics to the group (Cox, Erlich, Rothman and Tropman, 1984). Orthodox frameworks fail to theorize adequately about how participants act to take control of the development process. Little attention is paid to the micro-politics of groups and individual interactions. Therefore traditional theories have little to say about how the external environment selectively permits, delimits and otherwise shapes social interactions by constraining the actions of individuals.

In a major review of articles published in the Journal of Community Development, Christenson concluded that "the discipline devoted to community development seems to be caught in a treadmill of descriptive studies and needs assessments" (1989, p. 41). Drawing upon this literature and reinforced with its own technicist preoccupations, adult education also tends to be concerned with technical, applied issues of "strategies, techniques and tactics" (Cary, 1970; Cox, Erlich, Rothman & Tropman, 1984; Hamilton & Cunningham, 1989). A more critical analysis is needed. Perhaps it would then be possible to reveal and transform adult education's understanding of community development in a way that would make it more useful for understanding the dynamics of immigrant women organizing.

State and Power in Community Development

One way of moving forward is to situate the practice of community development in a broader political economic framework. Although the state plays a central role in mediating community organizations and community development processes, Ng, Mueller & Walker (1990) argue that orthodox views on community development fail to contextualize community development adequately. The state's role in constituting categories of representation in community is overlooked. Alinsky (1971) sees power as a quantity and a resource resting outside of the community in the hands of the state and big business. Typically, the state is seen standing above and separate from the community. In liberal accounts, the state implements change in the interest of the common good while in orthodox Marxist accounts, the state is seen to oppress the community in the interests of the dominant class (Jessop, 1991). More recently, neo-Marxist theories of the state have suggested that the state is not a monolithic entity operating over and above the community but that the state itself is a terrain of struggle (Poulantzas, 1978) and an important actor in constituting community and allocating status, legitimacy and resources (Offe, 1984). As a consequence of viewing community outside and separate from the state, the dynamic interactions among the economy, the state and community as mutually constituting entities tend to be overlooked in conventional theories. Without a theory of the state, community development cannot conceptualize its relationship to the wider context in which communities are situated. This is a major flaw in the literature on community development because it assumes too much independence, too much "free will" on the part of communities to effect change. The concept of "resistance" then remains undertheorized, and there is a corresponding naivete about how change comes about. Ng (1988), Ng, Mueller & Walker (1990) and Findlay (1988) demonstrate how different kinds of communities and community organizations have been mediated, regulated and otherwise shaped by the state even as these communities and community organizations contest these forms of intervention. This more open and dynamic view of the state is better able to account for contradictions in state funding and state/community relations.

Summary

Given the underlying biases in community development's analytical frameworks, theories and knowledge produced about community development cannot be taken as objective, eternal truths. They need to be subjected to ongoing critical deconstruction

and reconstruction or reformulation. This is the contribution that racialized women can make to the literature when research and theoretical formulations are grounded in their experiences and not imposed from above. In the tradition of the sociology of knowledge, the values and ideologies of social groups who deploy the knowledge will be reflected in the kinds of explanatory frameworks developed (Foucault, 1980). If community development began as a strategy of social management and control and if its historical emergence is linked to colonization, then dominant groups' interests would likely be reflected in its theories. Therefore, explanatory frameworks developed for community development may also help to support practices that privilege the goals of a white, male, European-dominated colonizing state seeking to promote capitalist development. That it does not always manage to accomplish this end is testimony to the power of resistance.

A major reformulation of traditional conceptualizations of community development is needed that allows for the specific material conditions, processes and activities that actually occur in the practice of community development. We need to move away from generalizing prescriptive and normative frameworks to explanations that allow greater specificity. To begin this reconstruction a more open and dynamic conceptualization of community must be developed. In the following section, some promising directions are identified that are based on my personal experiences in working with racialized and immigrant women and theoretical critiques available through poststructuralist, feminist and post-colonial frameworks.

Toward Alternative Views

At the beginning of this article I wrote that I began this journey through the literature in order to make sense of my community organizing experiences with racialized immigrant women. I also wrote that, as a form of engaged scholarship, I would attempt to suggest alternative ways of thinking about community development that would make theoretical frameworks more applicable to immigrant and racialized women organizing. Having found the traditional literature to be unhelpful, I turned to the insights offered in feminist, post-structuralist, post-modern and post-Marxist theories and theories of racialization. These perspectives offer a way of thinking about subject identity, community and organizing that permit a more sensitive analysis of the actualities of organizing with immigrant and other racialized women.

Who is Being Represented?

Community organizing with any group but particularly with racialized women, needs to be seen as a contingent and emergent process that to a large extent depends on the complex interplay of representational categories. Organizing "community" within these groups is necessarily dependent on the outcomes of the micropolitics of representation and identity that involve class, race, language and gender within an arena circumscribed by the state and the economy. By "representation", I mean discursive and material practices by which people—in this case racialized women—come to see themselves, are seen by others and are inserted into specific social categories by others. How one represents oneself, how others are represented to one and how one is forced to be represented publicly are dynamic and interrelated

phenomena (see hooks, 1990; Spivak, 1987; Mohanty, Russo & Torres, 1991). Each of these dimensions has a constitutive effect on other dimensions. For example, Ng (1988) argues that the social category of "immigrant" woman is a category that one enters upon arriving in Canada. Until she emigrates to Canada, a woman does not see herself, nor do others see her, as an immigrant. It is only upon her arrival in the adopted country that she finds herself represented in this way. Because the category of "immigrant women" is materially reinforced through laws and state administrative policy, she begins to represent herself as "immigrant" in order to survive. She finds herself continually reinserted into this category in her everyday life, and this is especially true if she is physically identifiable as "different" in which case racializing processes will continue to represent not only herself but her children and their children as "immigrant" and not really belonging to the nation.

There are many ways that racialized women have been represented and multiple overlapping categories of representation and self-identification. These categories of representation are not benign; they are part of a process of signifying or racializing people on the basis of certain physical and cultural characteristics. Racialization serves many purposes, but one major outcome is how it works to position women unequally according to signifying characteristics such as language skills, country of origin, length of time in Canada, physical characteristics, educational background, professional qualifications and so on (Miles, 1989). Analyzing the dynamics surrounding the politics of representation provides an entry point into understanding community organizing with racialized women. The issue of power would necessarily be brought into focus.

Representational categories played an important part in the unfolding of hierarchical relations among members of ABC. For example, members accepted the representation of the president who served three terms as a well educated, professional woman who knew best. She, in turn, behaved as though she did know best. The social relations that developed within the organization, especially among the president, staff and members developed out of reciprocal expectations regarding what was "proper". Non-English speaking working class members were seen as "clients", and they were treated and consequently behaved in a dependent, client-like manner. On the other hand, professional, English-speaking women were seen as "leaders." "Leaders" were identified on the basis of certain characteristics, including, articulate English language skills, a professional occupation and a high level of education. Women who displayed these attributes fitted a socially constructed category of "leader" and were thought suitable to represent ABC publicly. Hierarchical social relationships derived from the complex interplay of representational politics and socially constructed identities, underlie many of the conflicts in the organization. This is one example, but I hope it is sufficient to illustrate my argument that traditional perspectives of community development have failed to address the actual, real-life experiences of organizing with racialized women. Egan, Gardner & Persad (1988) is one of the few examples that has taken up the question of minority women's organizing experiences in Canada. Generally, traditional perspectives have failed to theorize the bases of conflict within multiracial, multiethnic and multilingual groups.

Rethinking Community

If one adopts a post-structuralist and post-modernist understanding of identity, identity cannot be taken as fixed and given. Community can be seen as being constructed on the basis of selected identities which is an outcome of power relations. Identification with a geographic location, for example, must be produced and constructed in the minds of people. This process of constructing an identification with a specific locale must be seen as part of the community-building process and not something which precedes it.

Moreover, common geographic locale does not mean that other bases of difference and identity are erased. Selecting the referent upon which a "community" will be or has been mobilized is a political process and should not be taken as naturally given.

An alternative way of conceptualizing community is available that sees community not as pre-existing, essential and eternal but as a social formation that is culturally and socially constructed. Benedict Anderson's (1983) formulation of "imagined community" provides a non-essentialist view of community as always in the process of being imagined. Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (1983) sees nation and community emerging from invented traditions. If community is invented out of a mythical past, then the preservation of community is no more than the preservation of a selected, partial and invented past. Community cannot then be reduced to eternalized essences and a metaphysical "spirit". No form of community can be privileged over another since all communities are selectively constructed for specific reasons. Bhabha (1990) also links community to nation-building. He suggests that " community" is a cultural space for the creation of peoplehood, one step on the way to mythical nationhood. Yet another promising direction is offered in hooks's (1990) notion of "yearning" for community that lends a poignancy to community that is missing in other formulations. Individuals can be desirous of a form of social relation that is not part of their everyday life. Community can be imagined or yearned for.

The idea of an imagined or yearned for community rejects essentialism and offers the opportunity to view community as an outcome of political struggles. Community can now be seen as an emergent social form rather than as an idealized, romanticized longing for an invented and imposed past. The idealized "gemeinschaft" type of community may be a cultural invention popularized to serve the purpose of nation-state formation.

Rethinking Subjectivity and Identity.

Community development requires a theory of identity and subjectivity in order to move away from the limitations inherent in holding a single unifying, transcending identity as the basis for identification with a community. Poststructuralist concepts of discourse, language, deferral, difference and subjectivity provide some possibilities. Weedon (1987) argues that because the meaning system underlying language is continually shifting and consciousness is linked to meaning it is possible for individuals to hold several identity positions or subjectivities. Lacanian psychoanalysis offers another insight into the construction of subject identities. Although certain subject positions may be privileged and others repressed through

discursive networks of power, individuals cannot be made into wholly homogeneous subjects (Weedon, 1987). The possibility for resistance is always present through submerged and deferred identity positions.

If there is a possibility that there are multiple identities in every individual that have the potential for generating contradiction and conflict in community organizations, how can community consciousness be constructed? One response is to view commonality as temporal, strategic and fragile. Even if women stand in political solidarity against oppression, they must be seen to do so only in a tactical sense that remains open and contingent. Accordingly, fractious disputes within community groups can be seen as a normal development, not as some incompetence on the part of group members. Moreover, there can be no necessary or predetermined logic governing community organizing. If the process of organizing is constantly developing and contingent on the outcomes of specific struggles—over representations of social actors, among other things—prespecified progression/development is not to be expected.

Rethinking Power and State.

In order to contextualize community organizing a theory of community development also requires a broadened conception of state/economy/community relations. Poulantzas (1978), Gramsci (1971), and Laclau and Mouffe (1984) have all contributed to a more open and relational view of the state. The state in these formulations is not seen as a separate monolithic structure operating outside of the community and the economy. Post-Marxism, as this perspective has been called (Jessop, 1991), sees the state as constitutive of community, as community is constitutive of the state. Moreover, the determinacy of the economy is no longer primary but also constitutive of and constituted through community and state interactions. Thus, the analytical distinctions between state, community and economy become blurred. This perspective helps to broaden our theoretical understanding of dynamic interactions which exist among social actors shaping community, economy and state. As the basis for empowerment for political action, the privileged position of class determinancy as the basis of social transformation is undermined.

Alternative conceptions of power, such as that found in Foucauldian analysis, do not see power as necessarily repressive and unidimensional. Rather, power is seen as relational and embedded in institutional networks and personal relations. Power is seen to operate on and through the body and through discourse. The physical act of bringing people together may reflect disciplinary power at work. In the case of organizing with immigrant women, for example, the group was initially organized by a quasi-state agency on the basis of certain signifying characteristics. Legal status as "immigrant" woman is only one of several criteria for inclusion.

The organization was initially formed, on the one hand, to organize a support group for immigrant women and, on the other hand, to better manage and regulate women who come from many different countries, speak a variety of languages and possess diverse backgrounds. The only aspect of their lives that is shared is their status as "other" in Canadian society. The categories of immigrant and women do not,

therefore, necessarily reflect a unifying basis for forming community. In part, the conflicts within the organization could be seen as structured by the state.

Accordingly, it is necessary not simply to juxtapose power differentials at the level of community against those actors "outside" of the community. All forms of community are conflict-ridden since power, as conceptualized by Foucault, invades all social relationship. Power can be analysed, as it actually operates in community organizing, as a relation which shifts strategically among variously represented categories of social actors.

Rethinking Community Development with Immigrant Women.

Post-structuralist theory draws attention to the need to view the constitution of community itself as problematic. If a common identification with community can no longer be taken as natural or automatic, community organizing can now be seen as a selective process of incorporating certain subject positions in community while excluding others. In other words, participation in various forms of community organizing can be seen as an outcome of struggle over representation and identity in "community".

A culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse women's organization is not a naturally occurring entity in Canadian society. Such an organization is a construction of the state. By this I mean that ordinary social relations among women, particularly among members of the immigrant, non-English speaking population, would normally be with those sharing at least a common language. Multicultural women's organizations are not organic entities. Instead, they must be seen as outcomes of government multicultural and immigration policies. Carty and Brand (1988) have argued that the National Organization for Immigrant and Visible Minority Women (NOIVM) did not grow out of grassroots demand but from a series of government sponsored conferences where bureaucrats, state-funded consultants and advisors played a significant role in shaping the conferences' agenda and selecting participants. Government policies and agents have constructed an invented community of immigrant and other racialized women who are perceived publicly as a homogeneous group sharing a unifying immigrant experience. Under the federal government's Women's Program funding guidelines, for example, single ethnic women's organizations are not eligible for certain types of government funding (Government of Canada, n.d.). Under the federal Multicultural Community Participation and Support Program, ethnic community groups are asked to serve several ethnic communities. Selective funding by the state of community-based multicultural women's organizations helps to construct the public representation of racialized women (see Wallis, Giles & Hernandez, 1988). This is not to say that state interventions necessarily result in containment and control of immigrant, ethnic and racial minority women. State intervention has contradictory effects since the outcomes of state funding are contingent upon the interaction of other forces, including the capacity of the so-called immigrant women to take action.

In a multiethnic, multilingual, multiracial and multicultural women's organization, I found that the dynamics of organizing could not be understood using the familiar

mantra of race, gender, language and class on a one-at-a-time basis because these very important social relationships interacted in complex, contradictory and entirely contingent ways. Because the ability to speak English is related to national, educational and class backgrounds, the leadership of the immigrant women's organization reflected world capitalist and class hierarchies as well as racialized hierarchies. Class/colonial distinctions that many immigrant women experienced in their originating countries were often re-enacted inside the immigrant women's organization. Many women were unintentionally placed into circumstances reminiscent of class/race-divided organizations in their own country. Those who were poor and non-English speaking became victims of charity work in their own organization. Language segregated women into those who had a voice because they were able to communicate effectively in English and those who were silenced because they were unable to communicate effectively. Although translation and interpretation services were available to facilitate non-English speaking women's participation, their voices remained muted and indirect. In this way multiculturalism as state policy helped to render non-English speakers more invisible than their English speaking sisters.

The well paid professional staff who were, incidentally, all white women and the president determined what was "best" for the members. The fact that this situation continued unchallenged for so long reflects the depth of internalization of class, race and colonial experiences of many immigrant women. These colonized identities were reinforced by the decision-making and power structure of the organization that operated to continue the silencing of the most marginalized. But the space provided by ABC for racialized women to speak, to validate their experiences and to gain confidence in organizing should not be discounted. Even though power relations within the organization were employed in a non-empowering manner for a period of time, members did resist silencing and employed democratic measures to bring in new leadership. Lack of English does not stop critical thinking in one's own language although, to others, silence may be understood as passivity and ignorance.

Through my own involvement as president, more contradiction was brought to the organization. Although a third generation Canadian, I am perceived by the wider community as an immigrant because of my physical characteristics. This doubled identity works to draw attention to the popular myth that all "racially" or phenotypically distinct people must be "immigrants". The juxtaposition of reality against imposed categories of representation is an effective tool of resistance, even while members insert me into an artificially constructed representation of "leader".

Despite the fact that one main goal for this community-based immigrant women's organization is to provide a voice for all immigrant and visible minority women, its inherent contradictions often worked to reinforce both an existing hierarchy of racialization based on language and ethnic background and a state-constructed "public" representation of a universal immigrant women's organization. Beyond questioning the conceptual bases of orthodox views on community, we may also ask whose interests are being represented in any community and why. Why are immigrant women publicly represented in this way, and why is this representation

privileged by the state? It is beyond the scope of this paper to probe these questions, but questions concerning categories of representation as they affect community organizing must be addressed by critical feminist organizers working with minority women.

Conclusions

This article has challenged traditional theories of community organizing/development on the basis of their inability to account for the dynamics at work in community development with immigrant and racialized women. Through a conceptual deconstruction of theories on community development, several problems were identified that hinder the usefulness of traditional perspectives for understanding community organizing with immigrant and racialized women. The article identified several other difficulties with discourses on community development that obscure the everyday experiences of organizing a multiethnic, multilingual, multiracial women's organization. Because existing theories have been based on male centered, eurocentric assumptions of community and community development to the exclusion of other realities, the article argues that theories of community development need to be reformulated to account for the absences of the voices of women, especially racialized women.

There has been a growing recognition of this need among some writers and researchers in adult education. Evidence that some adult educators are attempting to place the concerns of the marginalized on the research agenda in adult education may be found in the resolution presented by the feminist caucus to participants at the 1992 Adult Education Research conference. The resolution read, in part,

> The 1991 Black Book [*Adult Education: Evolution and Achievements in a Developing Field of Study*, Peters, Jarvis and Associates (Eds.), 1991] endorsed by the Commission of Professors of Adult Education, claims to represent the whole field of adult education. However, it is a book that reproduces the status quo and silences the voices that would challenge that perspective. These silenced voices represent the future of the field. (Blunt, 1992, p. 376)

A reconceptualization of community development in adult education is urgently needed to break the silences about the real-life experiences of marginalized women in Canadian society. There is an urgent need for adult education to move into this area, given the speed at which all societies are becoming pluralistic and multicultural. More intense demands for equity and justice are accompanying the global economic restructuring that is currently underway. Adult education cannot respond without reformulating its explanatory frameworks.

Notes

[1] It is important for minority feminist activist/researchers to write from personal, politically engaged perspectives and to ground their theoretical work in their own social reality. Mainstream feminist researchers have demonstrated that male-centered, logo-centered theories fail to account for the experiences of white, middle class women, and minority feminist researchers such as Moraga and Anzaldua (1983), hooks (1984, 1990), Mohanty, Russo and Torres (1991) have made similar points about mainstream feminism's inability to account for the experiences of minority

third world women. "The personal is political" remains an important strategy when the production of knowledge is seen as a site of struggle.

[2] I do not take the term "immigrant women" as representative of any objective truth. Instead, I prefer the term, racialized women. Miles (1989) has employed the concept of racialization to name the process by which certain groups of people are placed into different social categories on the basis of signifying racial characteristics. Since the 1950s, scientists have shown that there is no scientific basis for classifying people according to biological criteria known as "race". The question Miles (1989) raises is why does "race" continue to be salient?

Following Miles, I use the terms racialized and racialization to name the process by which women, for example, immigrant, refugee, "visible minority" or non-English speaking women, are separated out for differential treatment on the basis of signifying characteristics such as language, "racial" or physical features, religion, culture or ethnic and national origin or any other basis of differentiating groups of people for negative or subordinating treatment—racism. The name or category of "immigrant women" tends to imply that a homogenous group of women who fit this category actually exists on objective grounds. But because the label or category—immigrant women—has been accepted into everyday as well as academic discourse and because the group of women I have been working with choose to call their organization by this name, I use the term "immigrant" women most of the time when I refer to this organization. But I am cognizant of the problematic nature of this label.

[3] This is not the real name of the organization.

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