'You end up doing the document rather than doing the doing': Diversity, race equality and the politics of documentation

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Abstract

This article examines how the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) has shaped a new politics of documentation, which takes diversity and equality as measures of institutional performance. Writing documents that express a commitment to promoting race equality is now a central part of equality work. Rather than assuming such documents do what they say, this study suggests we need to follow such documents around, examining how they get taken up. This article will interrogate the politics of documentation, by drawing on interviews with diversity and equal opportunities officers from ten universities in the UK. It focuses on how documents are taken up as signs of good performance, as expressions of commitment and as descriptions of organizations as "being" diverse. It concludes that such documents work to conceal forms of racism when they get taken up in this way. And yet, by allowing practitioners to expose the gaps between words and deeds, these documents can be used strategically within organizations.

In the United Kingdom, the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) makes promoting race equality a 'positive duty' under law. In actual terms, 'promoting race equality' has meant that all public bodies must have a race equality policy and action plan. In order to comply with the new law, organizations first had to write their race equality policies. These documents are required under law to be available as public documents. The Race Relations Amendment Act [RRAA] has hence generated a considerable amount of *documentation*. This study will

interrogate the politics of documentation, by drawing on interviews with diversity and equal opportunities officers from ten universities in the UK, analysis of policy documents, as well as my own involvement in race equality work.[1] My aim is not to assess the broader impact of the RRAA upon the Higher Education sector, which is beyond the scope of the research, but to consider how we can understand and interpret some of the processes that the Act has put in place. How do the policies get translated into action in different contexts? What is the relationship between 'doing the document' and 'doing the doing'? Or even, more simply, what do these documents do?

My analysis of the politics of documentation takes documents as 'things' that circulate alongside other things within institutions, which in turn shapes the boundaries or edges of organizations. Lindsay Prior has suggested, documents are not simply written materials; they also involve 'fields, frames and networks for action' (2003: p. 2). Prior also suggests that documents are what shape or even make organizations; as he puts it, 'the University is its documents rather than its buildings' (2003: p. 60). The document brings organizations like the university into existence. Documents also circulate within organizations, creating vertical and horizontal lines of communication. So if documents help to create organizations, their work does not stop there: we can also analyse what documents do within organizations, considering where they do (or do not) go, and how they do (or do not) get taken up. In considering the politics of documentation, we need to follow documents around.

My study of what I call 'diversity documents' explores how these documents circulate within higher education institutions [HEIs]. These documents are authorised by institutions (they are signed by the Vice Chancellor on behalf of an institution); they make claims about the institution (for instance, by describing the institution as having certain qualities, such as being diverse), and they point towards future action (by committing an institution to a course of action). My analysis of the politics of these documents is indebted to critical race scholars who have analysed institutional racism in higher education (Modood and Acland 1998; Shiner and Modood 2002; Law, Phillips and Turney 2004). My argument will extend their work, by asking questions about the relationship between the new discourses of racial equality and institutional racism. Rather than considering the turn to promoting racial equality as a sign of overcoming institutional racism, my argument will address the 'terms' of this promotion, and whether these terms might sustain forms of racism.

Writing documents

The Amendment of the 1976 Race Relations Act imposes a new 'statutory' duty on all public authorities to 'promote race equality'. The

Amendment recognizes that the previous Act had failed to deliver equality: that you need to do more than make discrimination unlawful. On the Commission for Racial Equality website, they discuss exactly how this duty should be described: 'the duty to promote race equality is commonly referred to as the "race equality duty".' Within this law, specific duties follow from the general duties, which are differentiated according to sector. For further and higher educational institutions, the first of the specific duties (what is 'required') is to 'prepare a written statement', followed by a duty to 'maintain a copy of the statement'.

Many practitioners described the importance of the legislation as a 'kick start'. One interviewee describes: 'within Higher Education it only really started with the RRAA legislation when everybody's kicked up the backside. At the first conference, you should have been here it was great. You know it was total panic that the world was going to end.' Practitioners report how much of the energy in this initial stage was directed towards finding someone to write the document. So the first duty was not so much to write the document as to find the writer. The document is not the starting point, even if the legislation seems to start from this point.

How were these documents written? In all my interviews, practitioners suggest the ideal would be to have a broad working group to take responsibility for the writing of the document. One practitioner argues that what was useful about writing the document was 'the networks it helped set up'. However, in most cases the process of writing the document did not involve the creation of networks, at least at this initial stage.[2] Universities either appointed a new race equality officer whose primary duty was to write the document, or they extended the duties of an equal opportunities officer already in employment, or a member of staff in personnel. This meant that the documents were produced by individuals in situations of extreme pressure. One practitioner describes her situation as follows: 'The initial policy, I basically had to kick-start and get done quite quickly, because I was appointed in February 2002 and we had to have something in place'.

In these cases, documents were written by individuals and then sent out for consultation. Joyce Hill, the director of the Equality Challenge Unit, which oversees equality issues in higher education, describes the problems with such a practice:

> the institutions that have come nearest to [having a working group] do actually do better on average, do better race equality policies and action plans and implementation than those who tell the registrar to sit down and write a policy. Or even the poor old equality officer who should "take it away and write it please" because that actually leaves it really in one person's brain and tends to make it as it were

the specialist activity of somebody when it absolutely isn't and can't be because ultimately it's the responsibility of one and all.

How documents are written also affects how they might be taken up. If the document becomes the responsibility of an individual within the organization, then that organization can authorise the document (can sign it) and refuse responsibility for the document at the same time. However, this is not to say that having a working group or network in place simply avoids this problem. In my own experience as a member of a race equality group with responsibility to write a document for the university, there was a sense of shared ownership of the document within the group. We were able to talk about what it meant to write this policy, as well as what the policy should be about. However, this did not mean it was any easier for the document to be shared beyond the terms of its authorship. Such groups can easily be constituted as if they are individuals with sole responsibility for the document. This does matter. As one of two black academic staff in the group, working in a very white organization, it was quite transparent that 'how' the group was constituted replicated the problems we were trying to address. The responsibility for writing the document was uneasily distributed along racial lines. The uneven distribution of responsibility for racial equality can be considered a mechanism for reproducing that inequality.

Who writes the documents is crucial to what documents do, even if the signs of authorship are not transparent within the document. If documents are not the starting point, they also are not the end point. We also need to consider where these documents go, once they have been written. The Equality Challenge Unit emphasizes the importance of communication to what documents do. As they describe:

It is important to look at how you're going to be publicising and publishing the race equality policy and action plan. It's not enough to really just put it on the website and hope for the best you know just put it on the institution's web site you need to raise awareness of it. A lot of institutions are doing things like producing summary leaflets of their race equality policies that they are including in freshers packs so people are aware of what the institution's stance is on race equality as a whole and they have a signpost because it tells them how they can get copies of the race equality policy and action plan.

Publishing the document is about raising awareness. Creating a culture of awareness is described in terms of publishing strategies: of re-packaging the document into more useable forms. However, some

practitioners are sceptical about this emphasis on communication strategies. One practitioner suggests: 'I'm inclined to be quite sceptical about whether they are used at all. You've got a document and you put it on the Web, you do some advertising about it when it goes on, so people are aware of it . . . but the idea that it's banded around and pawed over I think that would be naïve.' Or as another describes, 'it gets put into everything; it's in every Contract of Employment now; it's on everybody's Internet sites; it's on every student bit of paper they get given; it's on every college bit of paper; it's all over the place, you can't get away from it. Does anyone read it, I wouldn't know, I wouldn't have thought so.' The more a document circulates, we might assume, the more it will do. But here, by implication, the dissemination of the document does not necessarily do anything, other than add new words to existing documents. Indeed, if the success of the document is presumed to reside in how much it is cited, then this success might 'work' by concealing the failure of that document to do anything. The passing around of the document might simply create a trail.

It is interesting to note that the circulation of documents does involve changing hands: it is not simply that universities put them on the website, or disseminate them by reproducing them as glossy 'user friendly' leaflets. Many universities include their race equality policies in packs that new staff receive: when I arrived at my new institution in 2004, not only was I given a pack that included the college policy, but I was shown the policy by the personnel officer who said 'I am required to show you this under the terms of the Race Relations Amendment Act'. The officer pointed to the document by pointing out that she was required to do so under the terms of the law. Such an utterance places the circulation of documents 'under the law' and makes the gift of the document a way of being subject to the law. In effect, the utterance took my attention from the document, as if the only point of the document was to follow the law. So it is not simply that documents change hands, but they also get directed in specific ways in how we speak *about* them, which affects what they do.

Documents as performance

If documents 'act', then what kind of actions do they perform? I want to consider how documents become forms of institutional performance in two senses. They are ways in which universities perform an image of themselves, and they are also ways in which universities perform in the sense of 'doing well'. The Race Relations Amendment Act is often described as moving beyond compliance. Joyce Hill, the former Director of the ECU, suggests:

The word that we are very wary of is the word compliance and really as a group we've more or less vetoed its use haven't we, tacitly at least. We'd far rather talk about meeting the requirements of or fulfilling the requirements of something. Because compliance does sound very much like a kind of minimalist tick box approach, look over your shoulder; see whether you can be done for not doing something as it were. Whereas our approach is very much yes, of course, to meet the requirements of the legislation that's the very least one can do, but to do that in a spirit of understanding what the legislation is really there for and to tackle what it is really there for and not just what it actually literally says. So that you move into fulfilment, I feel, rather than compliance. So you move into the area of good practice and set standards which are in the good practice zone rather than the compliance zone. Although you set up your good practice zone in such a way that it embraces the compliance, wouldn't you say that's our general kind of tack? And consequently I think the word compliance is then an unhelpful word to use because it's the sort of minimalist cop out phrase.

This distinction between 'meeting the requirements', 'fulfilling the requirements' and compliance is crucial to the argument. To fulfil the requirements one would not only comply, as such compliance would be a 'minimalist cop-out phrase'. By implication, the cop out of compliance does comply with the law, 'as the very least one can do' and might even meet its requirements. So the law does make possible a 'tick box approach' even if the spirit of the law takes us beyond such an approach. I would even describe the 'tick box' as a spectre behind this law: the tick box is what we want to avoid in interpreting the legislation, *and yet it is also what the legislation requires or even puts in place*. Moving beyond compliance becomes a matter of compliance, but one that takes us into a different zone, described by Joyce Hill as the 'good practice' zone.

In other words, the positive duty to race equality becomes associated with being good at race equality: here, going beyond the tick box, becomes a matter of institutional performance. And yet, good practice is clearly a term used within a tick box approach, insofar as 'doing well' is presumed to be something that can be ticked, measured, distributed and shared. An anecdotal example mentioned by a number of practitioners is of a university that had as its target that 100 per cent of its staff be diversity trained, and then put diversity training on line so it could meet its target. Having met its target, online diversity training becomes a form of good practice.[3]

Good practice and the tick box can thus be seen as operating in the same zone rather than in different zones: after all, both are implicated in what Jill Blackmore and Judyth Sachs describe as 'the performative

university': 'one that focuses on measurable and marketable consumer satisfaction' (2003: p. 141). Diversity and equality become 'things' that can be measured, along with other performance outcomes. A good examples of this process can be taken from the Equality Challenge Unit's toolkit on communications, 'Good Talking: The Higher Education Communicators Equality and Diversity Toolkit', which includes the following as an example of 'general good practice: 'University of Southampton has produced institutional equality and diversity gifts and novelties that are in great demand'.[4] For diversity novelties to become a sign of 'good practice' is clear evidence of how diversity is being repackaged, as if it were a property of objects that can be passed around. So an organization even gets a tick for its novelties.

The Act signals a shift within the public sectors towards seeing equality and diversity as performance indicators, as things that can be measured. Heidi Mirza (2005) has described this process as the 'bureaucratisation of diversity'. The Act has encouraged the shift towards seeing diversity and equality work itself as auditable. Audit culture not only measures performance, but it depends upon the reliability of such measurements. It also associates good performance with accountability, efficiency and quality as assumed 'goals' for organizations (Power 1994: 1). Race equality would be a sign of accountability, efficiency and quality: if we are doing 'it' well, or can be seen to be doing 'it' well, then we are doing well.

Practitioners expressed mixed-feelings about equality and diversity becoming auditable. Some suggested that auditing equality and diversity would be a good thing, as universities only take seriously the activities that are attached to financial returns or penalties. As one interviewee describes: 'I think it would be useful in the Higher Education sector because it wouldn't have been done, just thinking about how they could operate and how they've been lagging behind, it was the push, you know you had to do it.' Audit becomes here a 'stick', which would compel action, as a compulsion which energises, or which creates an institutional drive.

Others suggested that audit would not necessarily work, given how audit culture involves an awareness of itself. As one practitioner describes:

> an audit can establish if we have gone through processes, it can't really determine whether we are altering culture here. It can perhaps show whether we are reaching various targets, say you know, the same teacher of leadership staff who come from various backgrounds over time. But the trouble is when dealing with audit you tend always to respond in terms of process you know, we've done this report, we've got a plan out and all that sort of stuff. And I could see that you could get a rough idea if universities were putting

effort into diversity by doing that, but the trouble is that in universities we've got an audit aware culture in administrations. And so people are practised at how to show auditors that processes are being gone through.

So if diversity and equality were audited, then universities would be able to show they have gone through the right processes, whatever processes they actually have. In other words, you can become good at audit by producing auditable documents, which would mean the universities who 'did well' on race equality would be simply the ones that were good at creating auditable systems. Michael Power suggests that audit culture is what 'makes things auditable' (1994: p. 33, see also Strathern 2004). Or, as Chris Shore and Susan Wright describe, in their excellent account of audit in higher education: 'The result has been the invention of a host of "auditable structures" and paper trails to demonstrate "evidence of system" to visiting inspectors' (2000: p. 72).

What are the effects of measuring such documents *as* signs of institutional performance on race equality? My own experiences of writing such a document as a member of a race equality group were instructive. In working on this policy, we tried to bring a critical language of anti-racism into the wording of the document. This meant that in the document we identified inequalities and racism as the history behind the document: in other words, we took up 'diversity' and 'equality' as terms within the document *given they do not describe the institution*, given that the institution was unequal and not diverse (predominantly white). I was taught a good lesson, which of course means a hard lesson: the language we think of as critical can easily 'lend itself' to the very techniques of governance we critique. So we wrote the document, and the university, along with many others, was praised for its policy by the Equality Challenge Unit [ECU], and the vice-chancellor was able to congratulate the university on its performance: we did well. At this meeting with staff, the vice-chancellor described 'our commitment' to equality and praised the staff for our work, referring to the letter from the ECU. It was a 'feel good moment', but those of us who wrote the document did not feel so good. *A document that documented the racism of the university became usable as a measure of good performance.* Here, having a 'good' race equality policy got quickly translated into being good at race equality. Such a translation works to conceal the very inequalities that the document was written to reveal. The document becomes a fetish object, something that 'has' value, by being cut off from the process of documentation. In other words, its very existence is taken as evidence that the institutional world documented by the document (racism, inequality, injustice) has been overcome.

We must persist with the question: what is being measured through such documents? I asked this question to one diversity practitioner, who answered, 'we are good at writing documents'. I reply, without thinking, 'well yes, one wonders', and we both laugh. We wonder whether what is being measured are levels of institutional competence in producing documents. If diversity and equality are becoming measures of institutional competence in writing documents, then we need to consider the effects of this measurement. The Equality Challenge Unit ranked the race equality policies of all universities in England and Wales. Although they did not produce a league table on diversity and equality performances, they did publish a list of 34 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that were given an 'exemplar' ranking. Although the ECU stress that this process was an 'evaluation of the written policies and action plans only' and not 'an assessment in practice,'[5] it is striking that a number of HEIs make reference to their exemplar rank in the race equality reports, and do so using the language of pride. For instance, one HEI mentions this rank in their 2005 annual report, and then state: 'we aim for excellence in everything we do, and our approach to race equality should be just as professional and rigorous as all our other activities. . . . is very much part of our mission to maintain and develop our position as a world-class university.' Here, having a race equality document being ranked as exemplar becomes incorporated into an organizational mission to be world-class.

It is no accident that many of the universities that were judged to have 'exemplar' race equality policies are also the most resource rich, white institutions including Oxford and Cambridge, although it does not only include such institutions. Indeed, if what is being measured by race equality policies is the extent to which organizations can mobilize resources for writing them, then being good at race equality might even be a sign of privilege. If resource privileged organizations are more likely to be racially privileged, then there may even be an indirect correlation between being 'good at race equality' and institutional forms of whiteness. Race equality becomes a form of capital that measures existing forms of capital, which are unevenly distributed across the sector.

Some of the practitioners involved in this study worked at universities that received the initial rank of 'exemplar'. Their responses to the effects of this rank were mixed. While some expressed pleasure at the recognition, others were highly critical of its effects. As one practitioner describes:

> I was aware that it wasn't very difficult for me and some of the other people to write a wonderful aspirational document. I think we all have great writing skills and we can just do that, because we are good at it, that's what we are expert at. And there comes with that

awareness a real anxiety that the writing becomes an end in itself, the reality is being borne out because, for example, we were commended on our policies and when the ECU reviewed our Implementation Plans last year there were a number of quite serious criticisms about time slippages, about the fact that we weren't reaching out into the mainstream and the issues hadn't really permeated the institution and the money implement in certain specific areas. And it wasn't that there was hostility, it was much more of this kind of marsh mallow feeling.

This is a fascinating statement about the politics of documentation. The practitioner describes her skill and expertise in terms of writing a 'wonderful aspirational document', though this is not necessarily the kind of document that was written. Being good at writing documents becomes a competency that is also an obstacle for diversity work, as it means that the university gets judged as good *because of the document*. It is this very judgement about the document that blocks action, producing a kind of 'marsh mellow feeling', a feeling that we are doing enough, or doing well enough, or even that there is nothing left to do.

Many practitioners and academics have expressed concerns that writing documents or having good policies becomes a substitute for action: as one of my interviewees puts it, 'you end up doing the document rather than doing the doing', or as another puts it, 'too much time can be spent on actually writing policies and action plans and I suppose it can detract from just getting stuck in'. Because of the labour involved in writing documents, and because of the continual need for new documents as a result of new legislation, for some practitioners, 'doing the document' is all you can do.

Furthermore, the orientation towards writing 'good documents' can block action, insofar as the document then gets taken up as evidence that we have 'done it'. As another practitioner describes, 'Well I think in terms of the policies, people's views are "well we've got them now so that's done, its finished" I think actually, *I'm not sure if that's even worse than having nothing*, that idea in peoples heads that we've done race, when we very clearly haven't done race'. The idea that the document is a doing is what could allow the institution to block recognition of the work that there is to do. So the idea that the document 'does race' means that people can think that race has been 'done'.

Documents and commitment

The documents also function as statements of commitment. Take the following opening paragraphs of two Higher Education race equality policies[6]:

> *This Race Equality Policy has been published to inform all xxx staff and students and all other partners of our institutional commitment under the requirements of the RRAA 2000. xxx recognises that by embracing diversity it can achieve its ultimate goal to become a'world class University' and pursue excellence in research, teaching and clinical service.*

> *xxx values its diverse community and is opposed to racism in all its forms. The xxx is committed to the fair and equal treatment of all individuals and aims to ensure that no-one in the xxx community is disadvantaged on the grounds of race, cultural background, ethnic or national origin or religious belief.*

These documents are interesting to read as they show the different ways in which the university is imagined as a subject with a commitment to race equality, equality of opportunity and good race relations. In the first quote, the RRAA as a document is cited as the starting point. The document names its commitment by already framing that commitment as a requirement: we are committed insofar as we are required to be so under the law. Commitment is usually described as beyond compliance, but here becomes another form of compliance. Commitment is produced through a chain of reference between documents.[7]

The second quote also names a commitment: we are committed to the fair and equal treatment of all individuals. It seems to take us further, insofar as it names racism, and declares the organization as 'being' opposed to racism. And yet, the statement constitutes the university as opposed to racism, rather than being a place where racism happens. Declaring a commitment to opposing racism could even function as a form of organization pride: anti-racism might then accumulate value for the organization, *as a sign of its own commitment*. A university that commits to anti-racism might also be one that does not recognize racism as an ongoing reality. It is as if the organization could now say: if we are committed to anti-racism (and we have said we are), then how can we be racists?

In one newspaper article about racism experienced by international students at Royal Holloway, 'Anxiety in the UK' (2005), we can see exactly this mechanism at work. Students from Korea complained about racism experienced on campus, and about the failure of the College to respond adequately: 'Students, particularly east Asian students, feel fearful of these attacks and are deeply concerned that something should be done. But, according to Jin, they have no proper channels of complaint and are worried that too much noise would have a negative effect on their status at college'. The article shows us the multiple ways that racism can affect the experiences of black and

Asian students: it can involve direct violence, and also affect how students respond to such violence, fearing that reporting racism would lead to further marginalization. But the response of the College to this report was to deny the students' charges: 'the spokeswoman said: "This could not be further from the truth. *The college prides itself on its levels of pastoral care.*"' In other words, the self-perception of being good at communication and care blocks the recognition of racism. Organizational pride prevents the message getting through, as a pride in being good at hearing messages. Such a speech act does exactly what it says that it does not do: it refuses to hear complaint by saying that it does hear complaint. If colleges have pride in their policies of pastoral care and anti-racism, then they also fail to hear about racism. Being committed to anti-racism can function as a perverse performance of racism: 'you are wrong to describe us as uncaring and racist because we are committed to being anti-racist'. Anti-racism functions as a discourse of organizational pride.

As I have suggested, many of the race equality documents function as statements of commitment, and take a simple form 'we are committed to'. Such statements of commitment might work to block rather than enable action, insofar as they block the recognition of the ongoing nature of 'what' it is the organization is committed to 'opposing'. However, we can still ask the question, what do statements of commitment commit institutions to do?

When asking practitioners about this process of writing race equality policies, I ask specifically about statements of commitment. What do they (or do they) commit the university to do? In the following exchange I had with staff from the personnel department of a university, we can see the hesitation that follows such a question:

> It's a statement of commitment clearly as many of them are, do you feel that the statement itself commits the university to something?

> I would say yes but don't say why.

> Yes it does, but my angle I suppose, is that you have to have reminders, examples, arguments all the time.

> And I think it's a good working document that people can take with them.

> But people don't like being told to read it.

> Yes they don't like it.

> We don't like being told we have to tick these boxes.

It is true, but it exists and I think it's a reference document and people will go back and read it if they wanted to find out something. But people don't want to be told to read it.

If we took statements of commitment as self-evident, we would say that they commit you to something. But such self-evidence is far from taken for granted by practitioners. The first response is that the statement of commitment does 'commit', but for unknown reasons. This uncertainty is itself telling: for it suggests that commitment is in some ways mysterious; it needs to be explained. In other words, the commitment does not simply follow the letter of the document. The word 'commitment' does not do what it says. The second response also is a 'yes', but a qualified yes: the statement of commitment does 'commit', but has to be supplemented by other forms of institutional pressure (reminders, examples, and so on). In other words, the commitment is not given by the document, but depends upon the work generated around the document. It is interesting that the next intervention begins with a further qualifier, a 'but': 'but people don't like to be told to read it'. If the statement of commitment does not necessarily commit the university to doing anything, then practitioners have to keep up the pressure; it is this pressure that can undo the force of the document. If people are required to read it, then they don't like it. Indeed, the following utterances turn from 'they don't like it' to 'we don't like being told to tick boxes.' We can identify a paradox: to make these documents into commitments would be to undo their force, as people would be less committed to them.

The question then becomes 'where' commitment is located, if it is not 'in' the statements of commitment, or in the people behind generating such statements? Why does 'commitment' matter so much to diversity and equality work, if it does not seem to be where it should be? I asked why statements of commitment matter to another practitioner:

Oh that's hard. I think you cannot not have them, if you don't have them, well to me as a practitioner it's a starting point, again it's whether that gets fitted into practice. Commitments can't come without other actions. So the commitment to me is about what the institution believes in and what it intends to do – it can't stand alone it has to come with how you're actually going to do it. I think if they weren't there then, well I refer to them quite a lot as well know, if you're trying to, let's say there's an issue that's come up and somebody is not, maybe there's an issue and perhaps they're racist in what they bring up in their practice or something like that and it's good to refer back to these documents, but actually you're an employee of the university and the university has made a statement

about this. So in terms of watching the other members of staff and in my own experience, I've used it for that.

The sentence 'commitments can't come without other actions' is instructive. For it suggest that commitment is an action, but it is one that does not act on its own, but depends on other actions, or on what is done 'with it'. Commitment might be, in other words, a technology that can be used or deployed within specific settings. The work of commitment is how you act on the action: which is about what the action allows the practitioner to do. The statement of commitment is described as a reference point, something you can use, when challenging how people act within the institution. In other words, the statement of commitment does not commit the institution to anything, but allows the practitioner to support their claims for or against specific action. The statement functions as a supporting device.

So although a statement of commitment can block action by constructing the university or organization as 'already committed' or behind race equality, they also can within specific settings support other actions, *precisely given this illusion of being behind*. Practitioners use such statements to challenge people within the organization, by showing they are 'out of line' with the direction of the organization, even if this line is imaginary. Documents do not simply have a referential or descriptive function: it is not simply that they describe principles that a university already has. Indeed, in a way, the documents might even perform a lie, insofar as they represent the university as if it has principles that it does not have. *But this can be a useful lie*: by producing the university as if it was a subject with such principles, the documents then become useable as it allows practitioners to make members of the university as well as 'the university' itself as an imagined entity, subject to those principles.

Diversity in documents

Race equality documents often describe the university not only as having certain principles, but also as having certain quality, characteristics and styles. Through such documents, universities are constituted as if they have these qualities. One of the most obvious features of this descriptive purchase in the context of the Race Relations Amendment Act is the use of the word 'diversity'. Diversity enters such documents not only as something the university is committed to, but as a quality the university already has, by virtue of the kinds of staff and students that already exist within the organization. Take the following opening sentence from a race equality policy: 'The University values the richness of the diversity of its students, staff and members of the local communities in which it operates.'

The discourse of valuing diversity is of course mainstream, and hesitates between discourses of economic value (the business case for diversity) and moral value (the social justice case). This model of diversity reifies difference as something that already exists 'in' the bodies of others (we are diverse because they are here). Their difference becomes our diversity. It is this model of diversity as something others bring to the organization which we can see at work in the use of visual images of diverse organizations: images of 'colourful' happy faces, which show the diversity of the university as something it has embraced.

It is worth noting here the powerful critiques of the 'turn' to diversity within higher education offered by feminist and critical management scholars. Such critiques have suggested that 'diversity' enters higher education through marketisation: the term is seen as coming from management, and from the imperative to 'manage diversity', or to value diversity as if it was a human resource. Such a managerial focus on diversity, it has been argued, works to individuate difference and to conceal the continuation of systematic inequalities within organizations (Kandola and Fullerton 1994; Deem and Ozga 1997: 33; Kirton and Greene 2000, Benschop 2001: 1166, Lorbiecki 2001; for summary, see Ahmed and Swan 2006). For these scholars, among others, the institutional preference for the term 'diversity' is a sign of the lack of commitment to change, and might even allow universities to conceal the operation of systematic inequalities. We can ask, in light of these critiques, what does the word 'diversity' do?

In one of my interviews, we discussed a research project on perceptions of the university that had been funded as part of the university's commitment to race equality. What did the research reveal?

> OK yes. It was about uncovering perceptions um, about the xxx as an employer. . . . xxx was considered to be an old boys' network, as they called it and white male dominated and they didn't have the right perceptions of the xxx in terms of what it offers and what it brings to the academia. I think most of the external people had the wrong perceptions about the xxx.

> And I mean, quotes, there were such funny quotes like librarians they were sitting there with their cardigans you know. Um, and things like that, they were shocking reports to read really about how people, external people, perceive the xxx so we have to try to achieve you know, we have to try to make the xxx an attractive employer.

The politics of diversity has become what we could call 'image management': diversity work is about generating the 'right image', and correcting the wrong one. I was quite shocked that they were shocked by this image, given what I knew of the staffing profile of this university. What organizes this shock is the presumption that the perception is what is wrong. According to this logic, people have the 'wrong perception' when they see the organization as white, elite, male, old-fashioned. In other words, what is behind the shock is a belief that the organization does not have these qualities: that whiteness, for instance, is 'in the image' rather than 'in the organization' as an effect of what it does. Diversity work becomes about *changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations*. Doing well, or a good performance, would then be about being perceived as a diverse organization.

Diversity is cited in documents and becomes a way of re-imaging organizations. But it is also a term that is used within organizations by practitioners. How do practitioners mobilize the language of diversity? How does the institutional desire for diversity relate to what practitioners do? Many practitioners are very critical of how diversity is used by their organizations. As one practitioner put it: 'I think the concept of diversity, in the way that it is now used in equality, rather than diversity as a word, which I don't really think it has much relationship to, I think it's used as a complete and utter cop-out. I think it's a dreadful concept'. Indeed, this practitioner felt so strongly about 'the cop-out' of diversity that she refuses to describe herself as an equality and diversity practitioner, even though her job title involves both terms. She goes on to describe 'diversity' as a cuddly concept that extends the university's self-image as being good:

> So now we'll talk about diversity and that means everybody's different but equal and it's all nice and cuddly and we can feel good about it and feel like we've solved it, when actually we're nowhere near solving it and we need to I think have that, well diversity as a concept fits in much better with the university's idea of what it's doing about being the great benefactor.

We could describe diversity as a politics of feeling good, which allows people to relax and feel less threatened, as if we have already 'solved it', and there is nothing less to do. I ask another practitioner why she thinks that the word 'diversity' is appealing. She argued that it is because: 'it obscures the issues ... It can, diversity is like a big shiny red apple right, and it all looks wonderful. This is an example actually a member of staff came up with in my focus group about gender issues, she says but if you actually cut into that apple there's a rotten core in there and you know that it's actually all rotting away and it's not

actually being addressed. It all looks wonderful but the inequalities aren't being addressed'.

Again, the suggestion here is that the appeal of diversity is about looking and feeling good, as an orientation that obscures inequalities, like the obscuring of a rotten core behind a shiny surface. As such, diversity as a term has a marketing appeal; it allows the university to sell itself, by presenting itself as a happy place, a place where differences are celebrated, welcomed and enjoyed. Diversity becomes a brand, and a form of organizational pride. Not only does this re-branding of the university as being diverse work to conceal racism, but it also works to re-imagine the university as being anti-racist and even beyond race: as if the colours of different races have 'integrated' to create a new hybrid or even bronzed face.

And yet, this practitioner also acknowledges that there are some benefits to diversity, in the sense it can 'start to engage people'. It is given how diversity might make people feel good, that it can be a useful term, as it allows people in: once they are 'in', by implication, then we can do different things, or even use a different set of terms. It is precisely how diversity might work to conceal racism that might make it a term that can do things. Indeed, most practitioners describe their work as a question of 'what works', of using whatever language works for the different audiences they speak to (see Ahmed 2007). Diversity is used by some precisely because it's a 'cuddly' term, which allows people to engage more easily with this kind of work. In other words, the appeal of the term for organizations might be what makes the term useful *as an appeal* for practitioners.

The term 'diversity' is appealing as it does not necessarily challenge organizational culture, even if it allows a change in appearance. To add 'diversity' to a mission statement, hence does not necessarily add anything, other that than just put an educational mission in different terms. And yet, that word still has baggage, and still gets associated with people who 'look different'. As Nirmal Puwar points out, 'In policy terms, diversity has overwhelmingly to mean the inclusion of people who look different' (2004: 1). Ironically, the hope of putting diversity into university documentation is that this word will keep these associations, however problematic they may be. The point would not be to constitute racial others as the origin of diversity, as what adds colour to the white face of the university. Rather, insofar as diversity signifies the presence of racial others, then it might expose how organizations are orientated around whiteness, around those who are 'already in place'. The happy smiling face of diversity would not then simply re-brand the university, but point instead to what gets concealed by this very image: the inequalities that are behind it, and which give it its surface appeal.

If we consider the politics of documenting diversity, we can see that documents create fantasy images of the organizations they apparently describe. The document says 'we are diverse', as if saying it makes it so. In a way, our task must be to refuse to read such documents as doing what they say. That is not to say that such documents do not matter, or that they do not do important work. They do. Indeed, the fact that they fail to describe organizations is what makes them useful as tools: practitioners can use the documents to 'show' the gap between what organizations 'do do' and what they 'say they do' or even how they appear. In other words, by putting diversity in writing, as a commitment, performance or description, such documents can be used as supportive devices, *by exposing the gap between words, images and deeds*. This is not to say we should not be critical in the hope invested in the documentation of diversity and the transformation of race equality into diversity documents. We must be critical. But we must also consider how such documents circulate, how they move around, how they get stuck. Following documents around begins with an uncertainty about what these documents will do. They might, at certain points, even cause trouble.

Notes

1.   This project is part of a wider project assessing the turn to diversity within the learning and skills sector (including adult and community and learning, and further education), as well as higher education. I was co-director of this project with Elaine Swan, and the project team included Shona Hunter, Sevgi Kilic and Lewis Turner. My own study was based in higher education, and involved ten interviews with diversity practitioners in Australia (see Ahmed 2007) and ten interviews with diversity practitioners in the UK. This article draws only on the UK data. As a small study, the data cannot be seen as representative, although it includes a broad spectrum of different kinds of institutions, including old and new universities, urban and rural, and universities from the North and South of England, as well as Scotland.

2.   Obviously, I cannot generalize about practices across the sector on the basis of a small sample. However, I attended meetings and conferences on race equality during this period, which involved sharing many anecdotes and 'scare stories' about the pressures of having to 'be' and 'do' race equality, both for practitioners who took this role as an extension of their existing duties, and for practitioners whose jobs were created to take on this role.

3.   The very desire for good practice could even be a means through which racism becomes concealed from view. In other words, the very desire to hear about 'happy stories of diversity' is what allows organizations not to hear about racism. Our experiences of researching diversity under the auspices of the Centre for Excellence in Leadership [CEL] were instructive. CEL, which trains leaders in the Further Education sector and also funds research into leadership, is what I call a 'diversity proud' organization. Their funding of our project was often cited as an example of their commitment to diversity. Such commitment converts very quickly to hostility towards diversity workers, especially those who talk about racism. Not only were we continually targeted with criticism (all through informal modes of communication), but attempts were made to discredit our findings. By not fulfilling the terms of their commitment (by refusing to tell 'happy stories of diversity') we became a bad object within the organization. This experience mirrored many of the

accounts from diversity practitioners across the sectors. Diversity proud organizations tend to see discussions of racism as a threat to their reputation as 'being committed' to diversity.

4.   See: http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/guidancepublications/GoodTalking.pdf

5.   See http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/updates/02-03.pdf

6.   These are randomly chosen. These documents do follow a similar form, and the effect of reading a number together is quite uncanny. As they are all available on web sites, they are easier to access using conventional internet search engines.

7.   Indeed, documents are produced that refer to other documents, creating lines of communication or cross-referencing between documents. So they move back by citing the law, as well as sideways, by citing other documents that derive from the law. As one practitioner describes: 'There is a statement at the beginning of the Charter, which says this text is from various other University documents and it's a way of bringing together Statements of Principle in a way in which people can use. So in a sense it is a derivative document.' The documents can authorise a specific institutional policy by copying other documents, creating a circular or self-referential chain of documents, which point to each other.

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