Intercultural Education,
Vol. 17, No. 2, May 2006, pp. 133–146

Ogbu and the debate on educational achievement: an exploration of the links between education, migration, identity and belonging

Ghazala Bhatti*
University of Reading, UK

This paper looks at some of the issues raised by Ogbu's work in relation to the education of different minority ethnic groups. Ogbu poses questions such as the value attached to education, its links to the future and its measurable outcomes in terms of 'success' as experienced by black participants. The desire for better life chances leads families to consider migration to a new country or resettlement within the same country, thus making migration both a local and a global phenomenon. As an example, attention is drawn to the situation facing South Asian children and their families in the UK. In terms of ethnicity and belonging, the wider question that is significant for many countries in the West after 'Nine-Eleven' is the education of Muslim children. A consideration of this current situation throws Ogbu's identification of 'autonomous minority' into question. It is argued that a greater understanding of diverse needs has to be accompanied by a concerted effort to confront racism and intolerance in schools and in society, thus enabling all communities to make a useful contribution and to avoid the 'risk' of failure and disenchantment.

Introduction

Ogbu's location of 'blacks in the American system' and 'the exclusion of blacks from the more desirable social and occupational positions because of their caste like status' (Ogbu, 1978, p. 4) sets the scene for a comparative discussion of academic success for children and young people from recently migrated families, as well as young people who are the descendents of longer settled communities. Ogbu's analysis of the situation in the USA, where the field work for *Minority Education and Caste*

---

*University of Reading, Institute of Education, Bulmershe Court, Reading RG6 1HY, UK. E-mail: g.bhatti@reading.ac.uk

ISSN 1467-5986 (print)/ISSN 1469-8439 (online)/06/020133–14
© 2006 Taylor & Francis
DOI: 10.1080/14675980600693772

was conducted, is relevant for the UK and the rest of Europe today. The socioeconomic structures or 'the system' works in different ways for different 'community forces' or various community groups (Ogbu and Simmons, 1998). It is at the intersection of different ethnic communities' self perceptions, aspirations and the negotiation of power relations between the ethnic majority and ethnic minority communities, that academic and social aspects of 'success' and 'failure' are defined. Each country translates complex global experiences such as migration into social policy in a different way, depending on its particular historical and sociopolitical context. Even when renewed discussions about the meaning of modernity (Giddens, 1991; Castells, 1997) and the far-reaching, still unfolding multilayered effects of globalization (Gray, 1998; Giddens, 2002) are considered, Ogbu's contributions remain thought provoking and disturbing. The pull of modernity and pleas for rational judgement have not eradicated the negative effects of centuries of racism and exploitation. Globalization can seem innocuous. It can appear to have the potential to knit different nations together by influencing mutually beneficial communication, yet it leaves inequality within those nations intact. It is the 'darker side of globalization' (Giddens, 2002) which, while sweeping through the social fabric of the world, leaves it culturally a much poorer place, causing less developed countries to become suspicious of the 'civilized world'. This is critical, as most of the migration to developed countries in recent years has taken place from less developed countries. So now, instead of 'othering' the problem (Said, 1979) the gaze must be reflected back upon itself. If the vast majority of blacks and members of other minority ethnic groups remain outsiders and disenfranchised in the USA and in other developed countries, then democratic nations which aspire to idealized notions of 'civilization' have to address the vexed question: why?

The uncomfortable debate that Ogbu's work initiated about power, success, change and adaptation which people make when they move from one cultural context into another remains challenging today. The interplay of ethnicity, identity, belonging (or not belonging) and the desire to have a stake in the future is a complex process. These issues will continue to pose a challenge for all societies that attempt to meet the educational, social, economic and political needs of many communities and of different generations within those communities. With transmigration, as individual and group identities are re-shaped, distinctions between 'marginal' people and those at the 'centre' become problematic. That relationship is constantly re-negotiated and re-drawn. With the addition of social justice and human rights dimensions to the equation, the challenge becomes even greater, as values are contested and important questions arise. These questions are concerned with coexistence, individualization and different understandings of citizenship, of rights and obligations to the country of residence and nostalgia for the 'homeland' which has been left behind 'voluntarily' or 'involuntarily—in both real and symbolic terms (Ogbu, 1978). All Western societies where migration has taken place are involved in some form of mass education. It is within the domain of education that new futures are formed while others are dismantled (Ball *et al.*, 2000; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). But what sort of education is it, and for what purpose?

In the UK, as in many other countries in Europe, post-colonial encounters between the descendents of once-colonizers and once-colonized are being re-negotiated. This is taking place in a globalized context where the 'migrant' worker is both a resource and a challenge. It is felt that youth unemployment needs to be avoided precisely because it becomes an extra burden. On the one hand, Europe's ageing population needs younger tax payers who include migrant workers (still called 'guest workers' in Germany) while, on the other, affiliations to adopted countries cannot be taken for granted if young citizens continue to feel excluded on an individual and institutional level. Could it be that this exclusion is imaginary? If members from some communities feel they have no stake in the future, or what they have to offer will not be accepted, then they will become alienated and disenfranchised. Meanwhile (in the background of minority ethnic experiences, including those of the excluded Roma communities in Europe), social and political issues of European future 'unity' are being hotly debated and put to referendum. In other words, identity and survival are inextricably bound together. It is an uncomfortable truce, as there is always a local and a global context for education and development. In the UK, as in the rest of Europe today, there are structural parameters within which power is contested and where the descendents of the once-colonized struggle to survive and try to succeed. It is not a level playing field. Education provides life chances, but only for those who know how to survive with dignity in a world which is experienced by most inhabitants of the developed world as a precarious existence in a 'risk' society (Beck, 1992). How much more 'risky' is it, then, to belong to a minority ethnic community within the risk society?

Ogbu's arguments are worth re-visiting because his work invites readers to re-locate, re-categorise and re-conceptualise issues of equity, identity, ethnicity and belonging. Even more importantly, Ogbu's speculations have something to say about the possibilities for future empowerment or disengagement of young people who belong to different ethnic and social class backgrounds. His work raises questions about social norms and the absence of role models from different communities, which might inspire young people to aspire to a fairer world. This in turn has implications for harmony and social cohesion. As the arena of education is the contested space where some futures are forged and others extinguished, it makes sense to look at aspirations, achievements and success. The diverse ways in which different communities negotiate their way in society for the benefit of their children are crucial. Equally significant is how this knowledge is transferred, not just for the purpose of limited gains such as social mobility within single family units, but also for the sustenance of long-term optimism, survival of a collective memory for communities which gives them respect, integrity and hope. In this paper, I draw upon some research findings on South Asians in Britain and also on the situation of Muslim communities in Europe with the aim of drawing together some issues which are linked to the 'bigger questions' that Ogbu raised in his work and which are at the very heart of his contribution: the desire for education, its links to the future and its measurable outcomes in terms of success as experienced by the participants themselves.

Migration, ethnicity and education

The case of South Asians in Britain

South Asians have now been in Britain for over three generations, though parents and grandparents of most school-age children migrated in the 1960s. South Asians—Indian, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis—present an interesting case. It is only fairly recently that details have begun to emerge about the very different socio-economic profiles of various communities in Britain (Modood *et al.*, 1997) together with the evidence of the poverty that afflicts some communities more than others (Berthoud, 1997, p. 180). When it comes to minority ethnic communities, research evidence in Britain presents a case of Indians and Chinese students doing better than white students at school-leaving age and also beyond compulsory school age of 16 years, while Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and African Caribbean students are underachieving, though some recent research has indicated that Bangladeshi girls' academic achievement is beginning to improve. That African Caribbean boys experience exclusion from school more than any other group is particularly worrying, and this has been linked to racism prevalent in society and to teachers' attitudes (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Indeed, the existence of institutional racism has now been publicly acknowledged in British law after the murder of the young black teenager Stephen Lawrence (Macpherson, 1999)

Nothing is straight forward, however, when it comes to schooling. If ethnicity and colour are relevant, why do Indians succeed where Pakistanis and Bangladeshis underachieve? Would poverty explain this? If it is religious barriers that affect the ways in which children meet each other and work together in school, why is it that Pakistani and Bangladeshi children, who are predominantly Muslim, underachieve as do African Caribbean boys whose cultural and religious affiliations are not identical to those of Bangladeshi and Pakistani students? Is Ogbu's'caste-like' definition sufficiently rigorous? Does caste essentialize people's identities in a way that is analytically unhelpful? Can American experiences be imported into the British educational and social landscape? (See Ladson-Billings, 2004) Or is something else happening in Britain and possibly also in other European countries? I shall draw upon a study of South Asian school children and of recent university graduates, as well as reported findings from other studies which present a complex picture of inequality and disengagement in many cases and some small optimistic signs of high aspirations, academic success and a slow recovery, among others.

Migration

Each family of South Asian heritage migrated to Britain for a different reason. For some, it was an opportunity for better livelihoods, while other families from mostly rural ex-colonies in the sub-continent sent single young men abroad to earn some money and send it 'back home'. These men came to fill low-paid jobs in 1950s and 1960s, when there was a labour shortage. They intended to go back, but the myth of return (Anwar, 1979) became a different reality when their families joined them many years later, when the men could afford to send for them. Once in Britain, it became a matter of survival. There are ways in which all 'visible' minorities were initially viewed as 'different' and slowly, painstakingly, teachers, parents and children began to work together. Some local education authorities were more innovative than others, though the language used to describe experiences changed over the years. Words such as 'integration' and 'assimilation' were used for different political reasons, while words such as 'intercultural' never became popular. There were moves to acknowledge that Britain is a 'multicultural' country. There was a time when it was still fashionable to talk about cultural issues and a government-funded enquiry began to look at issues of multiculturalism (Swann, 1985). Some hailed the report as a triumph for multiculturalism, while others saw it as a whitewash and not assertive enough to bring about positive policy changes. Many 'multicultural centres' were set up as resource centres for teachers in different local education authorities. These have now disappeared. An allusion to 'sari, samosa and steel band' culture was made by Troyna (1984) to suggest that the three 's' approach stood for symbolic and superficial gestures: mere tokenistic acknowledgements of different cultures. It was suggested that schools were not really engaging with deeper issues concerning diversity, and real respect for all communities was lacking. In the late 1980s, some academics and teachers began to talk about anti-racism as a specific target which should inform local education authorities and school policy. 'Race', ethnicity and the education of minority ethnic communities is a topic which has long been debated passionately in Britain (see Gilroy, 1987; Rattanzi, 1992).

Ethnicity

Since the late 1990s, there has been a change in attitudes in schools. When teachers were trained in the early 1980s, there were lectures on linguistic diversity, on the importance of pronouncing children's names sensitively and carefully, of children's entitlement to bilingual classes in schools if there was sufficient need and if central government funded 'Section Eleven' money was made available for use in schools and other public services. There was a Linguistic Minorities Project which looked at the different languages of England (Stubbs, 1985). It was possible for South Asian children to learn their heritage languages after school or sometimes within school time. There has been a slow erosion of focus and funding for these kinds of initiatives in Britain. It has not always been easy to access reliable figures for all the different ethnic groups and different language teachers in a local education authority or in every school register as a matter of course. Bilingualism is not always seen as an asset by monolingual teachers. Unlike in certain states in the USA (see McEachron and Bhatti, 2005), facts about linguistic diversity are not published routinely and annually in UK. They have to be prised out. What *are* published every year are other kinds of tables—league tables which enlist the academic position of different schools in the country, such as the 'best' and the 'worst' schools. Depending on their resources, different South Asian communities have tried to set up their own language classes in community settings or in hired rooms over the weekends, and

Qur'an/Arabic classes in mosques after school (Rashid and Gregory, 1997). This leads children to feel that their home languages are not accepted in schools. The silencing of minority languages and the conforming to what is normalised as acceptable has implications for child development and the quality of education on offer. This is both a global (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) and a British issue (Wright, 1992).

It has been suggested that some communities, such as Indian Sikhs who are twice migrants (Bhachu, 1985) have developed the ability to transfer skills to their children. Their ancestors were taken as indentured labourers to Uganda and Kenya and, when those families from East Africa were forced to migrate again, and the UK accepted them as British citizens in 1960s, these communities had become resilient and well adapted to change. Others, who were first-time migrants from subcontinent villages to urban locations in the West, found it an uphill task, challenging and exciting at the same time. There was both a sense of loss and a new beginning. South Asian communities brought their languages, customs and traditions with them. Their impact on the High Street in British cities can be seen in the cuisine served in urban and cosmopolitan locations. But restaurant and shop owners want a professional future for their children (Bhatti, 1999). So when the schools do not provide that glittering outcome, they are seen to 'fail' these children and their communities. What is happening nationally to the children who have been born and educated in Britain and who are no longer migrants? This question is still being addressed as researchers try to piece together a picture of this under-researched area.

Education

South Asian parents want an education that equips their children to compete in the British job market while at the same time maintaining their links with the subcontinent. Parents want to retain their traditions, which might seem old-fashioned, but they are valued because they are built on knowledge passed on from one generation to another. Many South Asian parents find it impossible to accept that the price they must pay for economic betterment through migration must come at the cost of the loss of deeply held values. The children experience life differently and their teachers hold yet more different views. I present below a very brief glimpse of different perspectives on education from children's, South Asian parents' and teachers' perspectives, based on an empirical study of 50 families.

On a simple level, one would expect to find a gap between rural migrants and their children, who are the first generation to be educated in Britain. The rural background of the parents is encapsulated nostalgically in a way that is still a reality for many in developing countries in rural South Asia and Africa:

> My childhood memory of learning is sitting under a tree fidgeting, poking the boy sitting next to me, while we all rocked from side to side repeating what the Master Sahib said … all twenty of us. There was hardly any paper then, it was a sing song learning. That and the cane! (Pakistani father; Bhatti, 1999, p. 73)

Their children see a different world as would be expected.

> How do you mean I don't tell them about school? They wouldn't understand what a litmus paper was, or a graph and what a test tube is! (Bangladeshi teenager; Bhatti, 1999, p. 128)

The teachers who are with a few exceptions mostly monocultural and monolingual, experience schooling 'these children' a challenge. They complained that Asian parents do not come into (secondary) school frequently enough. They were unaware of the sacrifices families had made and also the parents' cultural and emotional investment in their children's education.

> Dad must go out to work and they see their mothers and sisters sitting at home not doing anything except housework and these mums can't control their sons always … They don't know what is happening in the world outside. (Religious education teacher; Bhatti, 1999, p. 219)

This teacher had never actually spoken to any South Asian mother.

Research evidence points to the fact that problems do not stop at school but that they continue into university, which is experienced differently by different minority ethnic groups (see Bhatti, 2003; Modood, 2004). When education is not distributed in an even-handed way, it leaves confusion and chaos in its wake. There are different kinds of universities in Britain. Some degrees from some universities have more 'market value' than others. This means that some degrees lead graduates into gainful employment, while others lead working-class young people, including young Muslim women who fought hard to get an education, 'in the wrong place at the wrong time'. The disenchantment among those who were the first to go to university in their families is poignant. They feel that no one guided them. They were not expected to go to university by their school teachers.

> I went from school to sixth form college, to another college and then to a (new) university. If my teachers had bothered to explain to me at school what a rubbish place the local college was, I would never *never* have gone in there! My stupid degree in media studies is worth nothing … (British born and educated Pakistani 24-year-old unemployed woman) (Bhatti, 2003:74)

> Now my brother makes fun of me too. He thinks the system doesn't want Muslims to succeed even if they get educated. Maybe he is right? It is not fair is it? (24-year-old -BA Honours, Bangladeshi born and educated woman—the only graduate in her family). (Bhatti, 2003, p. 75)

For these young people, Britain is 'home'. Their parents' nostalgia for life back home' is not real for the second and third generation of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis settled in Britain.

Much effort is being directed into recruiting more teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds into the teaching profession and researching their experiences (Clay *et al.*, 1991; Osler, 1997). But students from under-represented communities leave before completing the initial teacher training courses. Cole (2003) has written about identity and racism in British society, which might explain some of the reasons for this. The stereotypical images which are prevalent among ethnic majority teachers and parents might have discouraged some students (see Bhatti, 1999, pp. 231–232).

We do not as yet have comparative national data on teachers from different ethnic linguistic and cultural backgrounds who are teaching in mainstream schools in other European countries, such as Turkish teachers in Germany or Algerian teachers in France. People do not remain bound within their enclaves unless there are reasons for it. The education of children from minority ethnic communities continues to need serious attention and concerted resources. In Britain, there is a drive for separate schooling for different religious groups and that, too, has something to do with identity, acceptability and belonging. There are some black schools for black children in USA. Should there be different schools for different religious groups in Europe?

Identity and belonging

The case of Muslims in Britain

There is a certain type of social capital which minority ethnic communities are not prepared to forego. It is tied to faith and belief in some communities. When there are institutional moves to absorb and 'silence' a community, or if a community feels that an oppressive move is afoot, there is a reflex action, a collective move to retain cultural capital through whatever means possible, including the maintenance of identity through religion and setting up faith-based schools. This is an effort to retrace old footsteps and to rediscover tried and tested ways, to renew ties with tradition. Recent events such as the aftermath of 11 September 2001, the London bombing in 2005, the Iraq War, together with other unresolved matters in the Middle East, have all come together to re-open questions about Muslim identity and Muslim consciousness among young people and their families in Britain. It is a reaction to what has been termed 'Islamophobia'—a new word in the English language, first used in print in 1991, which later gained currency through the publication of a Report by the Runnymede Trust (Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, 1997). The report defined it as 'unfounded hostility towards Islam, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims' (see Richardson and Wood, 2004).

Identity

When communities feel 'not accepted', they begin to find different ways of coping with new challenges. In Britain, until fairly recently, most Muslim children went to school with children of other faiths or of no faith. However, there is now a growing debate about state-funded Muslim faith-based schools. This might be an anathema to the French or Italian schools which take Catholicism for granted and which might not give serious consideration to state funding for Muslim schools that seek to educate Muslim children separately. In the case of Muslims in Britain, there are at least eight different countries of origin: Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Egypt, Libya and Morocco (Parker-Jenkins, 1995). There are over one million Muslims in England (Peach and Glebe, 1995; Vertovec, 2002) and over fifteen million Muslims in western European countries (Richardson and Wood, 2004). The questions being raised about the rights of Muslim children in Britain therefore have implications for other countries in Europe.

The question of separate educational establishments for Muslim children becomes a complicated issue when possible outcomes are considered. There are issues about identity and belonging: how will the children contribute to society in the future? There is also a half-voiced fear of fundamentalism—a concept not confined to Islam. (For a discussion of Christian and Muslim 'fundamentalism', see Castells, 1997, pp. 14–27.) Will Muslim schools produce reactionary, disenchanted youth? Are the youth happier where they are now? There is an unease among educationalists of different persuasions that the British government miscalculated the possible consequences of allowing Muslims to set up their own schools. Is lack of support affected by guilt for past neglect for the educational rights and living conditions of children from minority ethnic back grounds? Parents wonder whether it is a coincidence that children from some of the poorest communities just happen to be Muslim and continue to underachieve in ill-resourced schools? As long ago as 1992, Tomlinson commented on the disadvantageous situation in some schools in London that had no teachers for Bangladeshi children. The reality is that there are several independent Muslim schools which are not very well funded. Parents pay fees which meet the schools' expenses. In terms of government-funded schools, in 2002 there were 4800 Anglican, 2000 Roman Catholic, 32 Jewish, 4 Muslim and 2 Sikh schools in Britain (Walford, 2002). In terms of equity and entitlement, there is a case for setting up Sikh, Hindu and Muslim schools in exactly the same way as there are other types of religious schools. However, the deeper troubling question of academic failure and underachievement is worrying. Muslim boys, both Pakistani and Bangladeshi, are currently underachieving in schools: does that justify state funding for separate schools for Muslim boys and girls? Will separate schooling solve underachievement? Will 'good' Muslim schools become selective schools or will they accept all kinds of children from all socio-economic backgrounds? What will become of children with special educational needs if Muslim schools have entrance exams and only select the ablest children? What does that say about equity and entitlement? Is it the case that, in the past, state-funded comprehensive schools failed to incorporate Muslim parents' views, so now Muslim communities feel they must look after their own children? In a study of 12 minority ethnic teachers, including Muslim teachers (Bhatti, forthcoming), who are mature students learning to become secondary school teachers, I found resistance against Muslim schools among some, while others felt that they would not send their own children to any state school and would home school them instead.

> I would not like to have gone to a Muslim school for Muslim girls. My life would have been a bit limited. I have a Palestinian friend who is now studying in London University. She went to a Muslim Girls School and found university very difficult. She felt totally lost. (A Muslim Iraqi 24-year-old female student on a one-year post-graduate teacher training course in England. She wears a *hijab* and is a practising Muslim)

> I went through a strange system. I am learning to teach and then I will educate my own children at home. My wife has a degree in physical sciences. She is at home looking after our two young children. She prefers to do that, as do many English (white) professional women with young children. It is her choice. It is not a 'Muslim thing'. No, I don't want

> my children to be exposed to oppression in British schools! We will educate them at home. (A 35-year-old Pakistani student on a one-year post graduate teacher training course)

These are just two views from the field. They might not be typical of every Muslim trainee teacher, but they are significant because they capture the dichotomy about educational futures and the possible educational trajectories of these participants' children and the next generation. It has become a more fragmented world from that of 1980s England. Children used to attend state schools in their local neighbourhoods and mosque school in the evening. For a vast majority of Muslim children, it is still possible to do that. For other children, schooling offers other kinds of possibilities.

Belonging

The story of the head scarf or the *hijab* in France fuelled a debate in Britain. On the one hand, it is just a piece of cloth; on the other hand, it came to be interpreted both as a sign of confidence among young women and a symbol of defiance and identity. Gender issues seem to be at the heart of the matter. Are these young women oppressed or should they be allowed to wear what they choose and be allowed to express themselves as they wish? Should this have an impact on social acceptability or social mobility? What have clothes got to do with intellectual abilities and contributions to society? Is it a question of inclusion. One researcher found that Muslim girls are more feminist in Muslim schools (see Haw, 1995). How widespread might such sentiments be, and what do they have to do with educational opportunities?

There are as yet no empirical data available about the professional destinations of the children who attend Muslim schools in Britain. It would be useful to know what becomes of the young women and men in the job market. Are black students greatly helped by attending all-black schools in USA? Would the same logic work for Muslim students attending Muslim schools? It could be argued that, at present, compared with other countries in Europe, Britain appears to be more 'open'. Debates about ethnicity, religious affiliations and achievements are being debated, considered and published, as are issues of underachievement and racism. Looking at the *hijab* issue in France from a British perspective, it seems as though it was blown out of all proportions. This does not mean that women wearing *hijab* in Britain do not have to deal with prejudice (see below), but the issue being raised among some teenagers growing up in Britain is an uncomfortable one. Will teachers not teach them well because of what the children wear? Is the lack of legislation about *hijab* a sign of respect and tolerance or sheer indifference?

Image

What young people are not prepared to do any more, especially in the second and third generation of South Asian families, is to play out the 'victim' image. They do not want to feel pathologized or pitied. If they do not feel accepted, they will 'do their own thing'. Other young people will begin to work with who they are with confidence and courage. They will carve out a place for themselves and, with it, form a new identity (see Ramadan, 2004). With the rise of Islamophobia, there is a quiet reaction among Muslim youth. A return to religion might give some a sense of belonging and security. If it leads to self-exclusion from the wider social issues, there will be greater divisions than those that currently exist among different minority ethnic communities, and that would indeed be a lost opportunity. A study I am currently involved in entails interviews of university students. It was surprising to learn from young people between the ages of 19 and 25 that it was during their university years, away from their families, that young people felt compelled to return to their faith:

> because at X university all the medic Christians were desperately trying to convert all the other medics to Christianity, I had to go back and learn things about my own Islamic faith, my own inheritance.

Will universities continue to provide safe places for difficult dialogues about identity, or do students who belong to different faiths lead parallel and separate lives? What opportunities will society provide young people who have attended universities, as compared with those who have not? There is a need for greater understanding and more dialogue and respect if we are to enable young people of all persuasions to achieve that which the future demands. The fragmentation and risk attached to a breakdown of communication is something we need to make a concerted effort to avoid. Obgu raised the question of different levels of motivations. It will be an impossible situation if the productive, creative energies of young people are not tied to productive educational outcomes. Inequality, racism and intolerance increase the 'risk' of disengagement and fracture. The situation in Europe demands a re-evaluation, greater understanding and respect.

I end on a quotation from Osman, a 16-year-old Pakistani student I interviewed recently. His experiences sum up a new dilemma for an old world.

> I have a little beard so I am called Osama (bin Laden). Do I look like Osama? I will try to become an optician and cure people's eyesight! My sister wears a *hijab*. No one made her do it, but she wants to. My mother doesn't wear one. She doesn't need to, she says. My sister is studying Law in X University. People in the street call her 'Paki'. They are stupid! Some days she cries, she gets so angry. She will do Human Rights Law and change the world she says … This is my country. It has some stupid people in it, but my religion and my family keep me going!

He is a third-generation British Pakistani. His father is a shopkeeper. His grandfather was a factory worker. He is planning a career as an optician.

What would John Ogbu tell Osman—that he belongs to an 'autonomous minority' and that his survival depends upon it? The risky business of belonging to a minority ethnic community is only possible because Osman and other like him look to their families for support, and individualization seems not to have set in, as yet. This generation will write its own story of success and survival and hopefully inspire others to do the same.

What does the future hold?

We live in a fluid world where more and not less communication across languages cultures and traditions is necessary. And communication is a two-way process.

The idea of many young people feeling that they do not belong is not a comfortable one. Ogbu's questions about different kinds of experiences among different kinds of blacks in the USA assumed that there was an identifiable, essentialized characteristic which needed to be understood. This takes away the power of agency and presents a foregone conclusion. Or it could be said that it simply highlights stark temporary differences and invites a critique and a re-negotiation in order to create a just outcome for many more people.

Ogbu's questions are concerned with issues about achievement and identity which are relevant today. To what extent do people live within the confines of their class or caste or community? Does it make it easier or harder for them to reach out beyond those confines? What motivates young people to succeed? Is there a substitute for positive role models from their own communities, or do young people have the capacity to look beyond rhetoric and measure wordy promises against their own life chances? Does underachievement cause self-exclusion, irrespective of what people wear and where they live?

To be stuck at the point of fixed caste-like encasements is to miss the bigger picture. We need to look beyond the essentializing debate at the questions that point to the future. Of course, communities will evolve and people will change, but will they get better educational opportunities, will their children's opportunities improve? Will they have a better future? Ogbu asked some difficult questions. We might get closer to answering them if we continue to debate them and if we do not silence the voices from the margins. We need an unflinching capacity to listen to voices of dissent and unease and to respond to them with understanding and compassion. If we do not do that while there is still time, an opportunity to learn together will have been lost. The fracturing effects of globalization, combined with competition and variable achievements, might cause young people from minority ethnic communities to become even closer to each other and to create stories of success and survival with dignity. It is time to look out for those success stories. A lot depends on it!

Notes on contributor

Dr Ghazala Bhatti is a lecturer at the University of Reading, UK, where she is Director of MA in Inclusive Education and MA Research in Education. Her main areas of research are concerned with Social Justice, including ethnicity and gender.

References

Anwar, M. (1979) *The myth of return* (London, Heinemann).

Ball, S. J. Maguire, M. & Macrae, S. (2000) *Choice, pathways and transitions post-16* (London, Routledge-Falmer).

Beck, U. (1992) *Risk society: towards a new modernity* (London, Sage).

Berthoud, R. (1997) Income and standards of living, in: T. Modood & R. Berthoud (Eds) *Ethnic minorities in Britain: diversity and disadvantage* (London, Policy Institute Studies), 150–183.

Bhachu, P. (1985) *Twice migrants: East African Sikh settlers in Britain* (London, Tavistock).

Bhatti, G. (1999) *Asian children at home and at school: an ethnographic study* (London, Routledge).

Bhatti, G. (2003) Social justice and non-traditional participants in higher education: a tale of 'border-crossing', instrumentalism and drift, in: C. Vincent (Ed.) *Social justice, education and identity* (London, Routledge), 65–82.

Bhatti, G. (forthcoming) Widening participation and the attraction of IT: experiences of PGCE students from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Castells, M. (1997) *The power of identity* (Oxford, Blackwell).

Clay, J., Gadhia, S. & Wilkins, C. (1991) Racism and institutional inertia: a 3-D perspective of initial teacher education (disillusionment, disaffection and despair), *Multicultural Teaching,* 9(3), 26–31.

Cole, M. (2003) Ethnicity, 'status groups' and 'racialization': a contribution to a debate on national identity in Britain, *Ethnic and Racial studies,* 26(5), 580–8.

Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (1997) *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all* (London, Runnymede Trust).

Giddens, A (1991) *Modernity and self identity: self and society in the late modern age* (Cambridge, Polity Press).

Giddens, A. (2002) *Runaway world: how globalisation is reshaping our lives* (London, Profile).

Gillborn, D. & Youdell, B. (2000) *Rationing education* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

Gilroy, P. (1987) *There ain't no black in Union Jack* (London, Routledge).

Gray, J. (1998) *False dawn: the delusions of global capitalism* (London, Granta).

Haw, K. (1995) Why Muslim girls are more feminist in Muslim schools, in: M. Griffiths & B. Troyna (Eds) *Antiracism, culture and social justice in education* (Stoke on Trent, Trentham), 43–60.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2004) Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? in: G. Ladson-Billings & D. Gillborn, D. (Eds) *The Routledge–Falmer reader in multicultural education* (London, Routledge), 49–67.

Mac an Ghaill, M. (1994) *The making of men: masculinities, sexualities and schooling* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

MacPherson, Sir W. (1999) *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry,* Cmnd 4261-5 (London, Stationery Office).

McEachron, G & Bhatti, G. (2005) Language support for immigrant children: a case study of schools in UK and US, *Language, Culture and Curriculum,* 18(2), 164–180.

Modood, T. (2004) Capitals, ethnic identity and educational qualifications, *Cultural Trends,* 13(2), 87–105.

Modood, T., Berthoud, R., Lakey, J., Nazroo, J., Smith, P., Virdee, S. & Beishon, S. (1997) *Ethnic minorities in Britain: diversity and disadvantage* (London, Policy Studies Institute).

Ogbu, J. U. (1978) *Minority education and caste: the American system in cross- cultural perspective* (New York, Academic Press).

Ogbu, J. U. & Simmons, H. D. (1998) Voluntary and involuntary minorities: a cultural-ecological theory of school performance with some implications for education, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly,* 29(2), 155–188.

Osler, A. (1997) *The education and careers of black teachers: changing identities, changing lives* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

Parker-Jenkins, M. (1995) *Children of Islam* (Stoke on Trent, Trentham).

Peach, C. & Glebe, G. (1995) Muslim minorities in Western Europe, *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 18(1), 26–45.

Ramadan, T. (2003) *Western Muslims and the future of Islam* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

Rashid, N. & Gregory, E. (1997) Learning to read, reading to learn: the importance of siblings in the language development of young bilingual children, *One child, many worlds: early learning in multicultural communities* (London, David Fulton), 107–121.

Rattanzi, A. (1992) Changing the subject? Racism, culture and education' in J. Donald & Ali Rattanzi (Eds) *'Race', culture and difference* (London, Sage), 11–48.

Richardson, R. & Wood, A. (2004) *The achievement of British Pakistani learners: work in progress* (Stoke on Trent, Trentham).

Said, E. W. (1979) *Orientalism* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul).

Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000) *Linguistic genocide in education—or worldwide diversity and human rights?* (Mahwah, NJ and London, Lawrence Erlbaum).

Stubbs, M. (Ed.) (1985) *The other languages of England: linguistic minorities project* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul).

Swann Report (1985) *Education for all: the report of the committee of enquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority groups* (London, HMSO).

Tomlinson, S. (1992) Disadvantaging the disadvantaged: Bangladeshis and education in Tower Hamlets, *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 13(4), 437–46.

Troyna, B. (1984) Multicultural education: emancipation or containment? in: L. Barton & S. Walker (Eds) *Social crisis and educational research* (Beckenham, Croom Helm).

Vertovec, S. (2002) Islamophobia and Muslim recognition in Britain' in: Y. Y. Haddad (Ed.) *Muslims in the West: from sojourners to citizens* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

Walford, G. (2002) Classification and framing of the curriculum in evangelical Christian and Muslim schools in England and the Netherlands, *Educational Studies,* 28(4), 403–419.

Wright, C. (1992) Early education: multiracial primary school classrooms in: D. Gill, B. Mayor & M. Blair (Eds) *Racism and education* (London, Sage in association with the Open University), 5–41.