

Migration and adult education: social movement learning and resistance in the UK

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Abstract

The article is based on data and evidence from a project of 'activist research' in migrant and refugee social movements in South Yorkshire U.K. The article argues that migrants' social movements have been neglected as important in the development of popular adult education in the U.K. The history of migrants' social movements from 1945 is sketched to demonstrate social movement influences on the content and ideological assumptions of state provision of adult education. The history also suggests a similar trajectory to 'old' contentious social movements like trades unions. The current research in migrants and asylum rights movements reported in the article suggests that migrants social movements are active and proficient in developing popular adult education initiatives including critical analysis of racist political and power discourses. The importance of these movements is demonstrated in a case study of a high profile campaign against the privatisation of asylum housing in Yorkshire by the world's largest security company G4S.

Keywords: social movements; asylum; popular adult education; migrants

"So I come back to this question about teaching and learning, which is a form of politics by other means." (Shire, 2008, p. 18)

"I remember the history of those without rights and without property demanding the means to understand and alter their world, of the complicated interaction between their own self-organisation and not only those who would control and buy them also. Those who knew from direct experience, how hard, disturbing, and endlessly flexible any real learning is." (Williams, 1993, p.243)

"Education doesn't mean telling people what to believe – it also means learning from them and with them...if you want to change the world you'd better try to understand it. That doesn't mean just listening to a talk or reading a book, though that's helpful sometimes. You learn from participating. You learn from others. You learn from the people you're trying to organize." (Chomsky, 2012, p. 301)

Introduction

The article considers the impacts of migration on adult education in one particular part of Europe—the sub region of South Yorkshire, within the Yorkshire and the Humber region of England. I will attempt to assess responses in adult education pedagogy, theory, and provision which have been the reactive responses to labour migration and refugees—and much of the time have been created by migrants and refugees themselves as forms of resistance to, at best conditional welcomes from ‘host’ communities, and at worst to downright state racism and social and political hostility. The analysis will be framed through the lens of social movement theory.

The article is based on research evidence and investigative journalism from 2009 to the summer of 2013, with structured and unstructured interviews with a large and varied assortment of migrants, (asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented and documented migrants from a wide variety of countries). The research also included structured interviews with workers and volunteers in voluntary organisations and campaign groups (some of which was reported in Crosthwaite & Grayson, 2009; Grayson, 2011). The research evidence and theoretical perspectives are part of a project of ‘activist research’ (Chowdry, 2012) on popular adult education, which emerges from within social movement practice. Conventional research data from secondary sources have an important place in the methodology, but are matched by primary sources—formal interviews, research conversations and active involvement in meetings, actions, and debates. This research is generated at present from my role as a researcher and adult educator in ‘evidence based campaigning’ with an asylum rights organisation based in Sheffield, SYMAAG [South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group].

The research methodology and adult education practice owes much to Marxist and social democratic theorists, and popular adult education practitioners and colleagues, students and members of social movements. Experience of recent work with refugee and migrant social movements suggest that the activist research process can itself become an integral part of an adult educational process, rooted in community research, creating and mobilising ‘really useful knowledge’ for action by communities. This process mirrors Freirian ideas on critical consciousness with a political dynamic of interaction with ‘researched’ people and groups.

Really useful knowledge [RUK] here also retains its historical meanings cogently expressed in a letter to the ‘Poor Man’s Guardian’ in 1834 putting the case for learning for action fairly bluntly. ‘What we want to be informed about is: **how to get out of our present troubles.**’ (Johnson, 1979, p. 84)

Much of the ‘knowledge production’ in current migrant social movement research actions is built on the notion that interviews, group discussions with, and alongside, refugees and migrants, can not only be transformed into leaflets, posters for demonstrations, and newsletters and websites in practical workshops but also can ‘change the world’ and get us out of our present troubles. Thus in the G4S asylum housing campaign (see below) statements from asylum housing tenants in interviews and meetings, when recorded and reproduced, become totemic and actually generated action. Consider the case studies below.

- A Zimbabwean asylum housing tenant January 2012 at the beginning of the campaign in a meeting: ‘I do not want a prison guard as my landlord’ immediately focused on the human rights record of G4S in detention centres and prisons worldwide (he had encountered the company in prisons in Africa as well as detention centres in the UK).

- A mother of a toddler in a squalid asylum hostel: ‘They simply want to make profits out of us, they show us no respect focused on the privatisation of public housing for asylum seekers’.
- Another African mother, with a baby trapped in a house with cockroaches: ‘They give us no respect we have a right to a good house like anybody else’.
- A mother of a four year old daughter living in asylum housing with rats and a jungle of a garden for six months, after the garden had been tidied: ‘At least the neighbours might not mind now, living next door to an asylum seeker’.
- A young man: ‘I do not know why they want to humiliate us—we are simply trying to get a place of safety’. In an asylum reception centre in the grounds of a high security prison, with the camera on his phone he had created a ‘food diary’ with shots of his appalling main meals each day; He had photographed the dirty showers, and grubby dining hall. All for his personal record but he immediately made the evidence available for public consumption albeit anonymously.

The returning themes of respect, humiliation, rights, and demands for treatment, ‘like anybody else’, shine through the data. The whole point about really useful knowledge production of this kind, in a campaign, is that it is designed around statements, which are known to be ‘going public’. The aim is to re-map (Tyler, 2012), the position and status of refugees to influence wider ‘common sense knowledge’, and to change public perceptions. This knowledge is produced to be used collectively. *We* want to get *us* out of here. ‘Please use this information—it will make it better for other asylum seekers’, I heard at the end of many of the interviews.

Certainly the information went into major reports for Parliamentary committees, and into campaign articles on the international website OpenDemocracy.net, which in the period February 2012 to October 2013 recorded almost 80,000 ‘reads’ of the articles—many more reads for ‘asylum’ articles than on *www.theguardian.com*, one of the largest international sites—perhaps really useful knowledge indeed?

These research and publication methods are thus ideally suited to capture the processes of critical learning, organising and changing the world—knowledge production, against the grain, challenging ‘common sense’ and capturing and building on ‘activist wisdom’ (Maddison & Scalmer, 2006).

The use of these research methodologies does challenge basic tenets of research theory—the notion that knowledge production in academic institutions is ideologically neutral. These academic practices have come under internal attack in any event in the U.K. in the social sciences (Allen, 2010), but perhaps have been most dramatically and fundamentally challenged by the unparalleled events of revolt and revolution throughout the world in 2011 and continuing into 2013.

It is important to see this popular anti racist adult education described in the article as a political project, drawing on socialist traditions of adult education critiquing and contesting ‘common sense’ and developing critical consciousness and ‘really useful knowledge’. This involves and demands contesting official public political culture and discourses often articulated in media images. Popular anti racist adult education should facilitate and support political debate and political contestation. Michael Newman has recently described this as ‘teaching defiance’ (Newman, 2006).

An example would be an annual meeting of SYMAAG specifically designed for a number of refugees and asylum seekers who had survived the system to ‘tell their stories’ publicly to organisations and activists. One young woman had spent three years detained in a notorious immigration removal centre and had organised her own bail hearing, saved for a bail bond and was released. Later she sued the government for unlawful detention and won—and still found herself in appalling conditions in asylum

housing. Her testimony resonated around meetings and programmes for action for months—her ‘defiance’ became inspirational.

The article focuses on South Yorkshire, where I work as a volunteer researcher, campaigner, and popular adult educator in an asylum rights organisation, as a space which perhaps exhibits the challenges and the very real potential open to practitioners and researchers in adult education in other similar post industrial spaces. I take history, memory, and tradition as ‘really useful knowledge’ as drivers for change rather than inspiration for xenophobia—the ‘melancholic celebration of past glories’ of Paul Gilroy (2004, p.4). South Yorkshire represents an industrial society and a politics of social democracy (Grayson, 2011), and left social movements destroyed, but also remembered in the current activities and practices of adult education and social movements.

The new migration

Arguably since the 1980’s political elites across the globe have been restructuring the world economy, markets and the transnational labour market to regain power and wealth, threatened by the dismantling of colonialism and the growth of ‘welfare states’ in the period from 1945¹.

A central feature of this restructuring has been the exponential growth in labour migration and the displacement of millions of refugees from the Orwellian ‘never ending wars’; the ‘Great African War’ and recent conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Sri Lanka, and now Libya and Syria. By 2011 the International Organisation for Migration [IOM] estimated that 214 million people—or three per cent of the world population lived outside their country of birth (International Organization for Migration, 2011).

Since the financial collapse of 2008, Europe has been in permanent economic and social crisis. Adult education has been part of the crisis. The political economy and context for adult education has determined its very nature and also it’s potential. The development of popular adult education and its future is embedded and integral to social movements contesting current inequalities and oppressions and the threat of intolerance and racist futures.

With the re-emergence of mass protest and revolutionary demands in 2011, from the Arab Spring through ‘Indignado’ and Occupy (there were 951 cities in 82 countries in mid October with such movements), to general strikes and workers’ marches and rallies, what is now being recognised more than ever is that social movements, particularly contentious social movements, those involved in collective political struggle, have and have had in the past a cultural, and educational role at their core.

Educational systems have always been structured and restructured by broader political and economic trends and factors—adult education is certainly no different. The very term ‘adult education’ is determined by national histories, certainly in Europe and the Americas. Arguably these specific national histories of ‘adult education’ have in turn influenced definitions and practice in post-colonial nations and societies across the globe. Social movements, particularly ‘contentious’ social movements (Tarrow, 2008), have historically been linked to workers education and ‘learning’ which have been embedded in struggle. In workers’ social movements, or ‘left social movements’ (Grayson, 2011), ‘education’ was seen as a transformative even revolutionary process to be built in to organisation. Thus this *self-generated* and *controlled* popular education was a central feature in popular working class movements. What adult educators have perhaps failed to acknowledge is that in the U.K. migrants and refugees have been

involved in building such left social movements over the years, and popular adult education has been at the core of these movements too.

Social movements campaigning for migrant and asylum rights and against racism have resurfaced in South Yorkshire over the past few years with an embedded popular adult education agenda (Crosthwaite & Grayson, 2009; Grayson 2011). The geographies of racism and immigration are central to the context for this (Dwyer & Bressey, 2008). Racism and local social movements around resistance to racism, and for the human rights of asylum seekers, have been located in the main in those areas of the U.K. (the Midlands, Yorkshire, North West, North East, and Glasgow) which have been hardest hit by de-industrialisation since the 1980's, the U.K.'s 'rust belt'. These declining industrial areas were also designated 'dispersal areas' for asylum seekers arriving in the South East of England from 2000.

These are also the areas where in the very recent past the far right B.N.P [British National Party] (Trilling, 2012), achieved some of its electoral successes—there are currently (in 2014), B.N.P. Members of the European Parliament for the North West and for Yorkshire and the Humber.

Adult education, history and migrants' social movements

Jeffery Green, an adult educator in the U.S. engaged in 'public history work' has argued persuasively for the 'role of historical consciousness in movement building and in the mysterious processes that create human solidarity' (Green, 2000, p.1). Indeed migrant social movements in the U.K. have always campaigned around their histories. In October each year, Black History month, which began in the U.K. in 1987, celebrates the history and cultures of the 'African Diaspora' and was established through campaigns by African Caribbean movements, it now comprises a range of adult education events in many local authorities. Newspapers, ('The Voice' started in 1982) carnivals (in Leeds, and Notting Hill in London) and organisations (the Institute for Race Relations [IRR]) have all emerged from social movement struggle.

Many of the campaigners interviewed or encountered in the activist research in South Yorkshire, suggest that where places have a history of generating movements, and political activities based on the mobilisation of ideologies and transformational ideas and theories, they survive in memory as what Dai Smith (2010), writing about South Wales has called: 'Societies of purpose (where) it is then not nostalgic or historical wish fulfilment, to work to retrieve and take forward the values, of what was worthwhile in past lives that particularly speak to us, connect with us'(Smith, 2010, p. xx).

Social and community movements based around migration and migrants have been a feature of the historical landscape of South Yorkshire and Yorkshire and the Humber, often hidden by the dominance and variety of indigenous workers' 'community' organisations. A Northern College student survey in the Bentley area of Doncaster in South Yorkshire in 1999, a community with 20,000 residents, found over a hundred local associations for 'community benefit' (excluding leisure, sport etc.). It seems from the research in South Yorkshire, and possibly in Yorkshire as a whole, that here is a 'society of purpose' with a hidden history of migrant social movements linked to a social democratic culture and also to other left social movements.

Migrants doing it for themselves—early adult education initiatives

Early post Second World War migration to the U.K. began with 160,000 Polish Service personnel, (120,000 of whom stayed and settled). Winston Churchill actually offered the Poles immediate citizenship as a reward for their ‘valiant’ support of British forces (Winder, 2004). In Barnsley interviewees describe a tent city set up in the grounds of a local mansion to house Polish ex-service personnel, who were then moved on to work and housing. The Polish migrants took advantage of the emerging ‘welfare state’, free education system and local authority adult provision as it developed. But, as with every wave of migration to the present, the migrants themselves organised supplementary ‘adult schools’ in clubs and social centres in Sheffield and other areas. African Caribbean parents were to set up their own supplementary schools in the early 1970’s. The new Polish workers after 2004 also brought self help education to Barnsley with them. In the summer of 2013 local Barnsley Polish workers had established a Polska Biblioteka in the town centre in a trade- union ‘learning centre’.

In 1948 the British Nationality Act gave citizenship to migrants from British colonies. By the 1960’s labour migration expanded, particularly from the Caribbean and South Asia, (India, Pakistan, then later Bangladesh). In Sheffield there were also steelworkers from Yemen (Aden) and Somalia. Migrant workers arrived in Yorkshire bringing with them different traditions of adult education. Workers from the Caribbean often had long experience of organised trade-unions and socialist parties, which prioritised critical and political adult education.

Trevor Carter (1985) a Communist activist from Guyana described this in his memoir:

Having identified education as the key to change.... The first three things most of us did as soon as we arrived were one, find the Labour Exchange, two, find a room and three, look for the nearest institute to register for evening classes. (Trevor, 1985, p.77)

In Yorkshire migrant workers from the Punjab had trade union and political experience in the Indian Communist Party, and formed branches of the Indian Workers Association. Sikh activists became part of the community organising of ‘communities of resistance’ joining much larger community organisations from migrant African Caribbean groups in organising for protests and direct action. In Leeds in the Chapeltown area these joint campaigns also cooperated in cultural and artistic projects. The area organised Europe’s first annual ‘West Indian’ street carnival in 1967 earlier than the more famous London Notting Hill carnival, and it still survives.

Developments throughout Yorkshire in the 1960’s and 1970’s reflected nation wide evidence of ‘contentious’ social movements built by migrants reacting to racist political hostility from mainstream politicians like Enoch Powell, and also neo-fascist movements like the National Front. Direct action was fuelled by attempts by the state and police forces to criminalise dissent and resistance particularly from young Black people.

Black academics and public intellectuals involved with adult education combined campaigning, and political activity with research and analysis for movements, resourcing their actions. The Black Jamaican academic Stuart Hall, one of the founders of the New Left in the U.K., and his colleagues at the Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies at Birmingham University, contested the description of ‘mugging’ (street attacks and robbery) as essentially a Black crime, in their study *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state, and law and order* (Hall et al. 1978), and their later, *Empire strikes back: Race and racism in 70’s Britain* (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies,

1982)². Thus the ‘communities of resistance’ (Sivanandan, 1982), and the contentious social movements and ‘Black power’ groups, had research and adult education resources in the universities, and to some extent in the WEA (Workers Educational Association) and the trade-unions.

In Yorkshire, with the establishment of Northern College in Barnsley in 1979, a residential adult education college in the traditions of Swedish folk high schools and the civil rights college Highlander in the U.S., a resource was created for Black and Asian and other migrant campaign groups and social movements; as well as trade-unions, womens’ campaign groups and community groups. Programmes of ‘Black Studies’ were created with Black organisations in Sheffield, and Leeds (Grayson & Jackson, 2004); and specialist Black staff were appointed, including an Asian South African tutor who had been imprisoned on Robben Island, and worked in ANC [African National Congress] training camps in Tanzania. Black South African trade-union students were recruited for the college and became active links to local antiapartheid groups and campaigns. Chilean refugees from the Pinochet regime became students at the college supported by local trade-unionist and adult education staff. The Chilean students produced research and ‘diploma essays’ on their refugee experience and the Chilean military coup.

At community level, campaigning and direct action by migrant social movement organisations on occasions meant ‘riots’ in areas of settlement. There were riots in Chapeltown in Leeds in 1975, 1981 and 1987, in Dewsbury in 1989, and in Bradford in 1995 and 2001. The Asian Youth Movement [AYM] (Ramamurthy, 2013), had emerged in Southall in London in 1977 as a community defence organisation. In 1980 and 1981 there were riots in various parts of England notably Brixton (London), St Pauls (Bristol) and Chapeltown (Leeds) in 1982 a branch of the AYM was set up in Sheffield. The 1980s saw young Asians fight back against racist attacks, and face severe police harassment while doing so. In June 1982, Ahmed Khan was arrested and charged with serious wounding for fighting back against racists, an event that led to the formation of the Sheffield Asian Youth Movement. The Sheffield AYM organised against police harassment and deportations, and to support people being prosecuted for self-defence. It was never simply an ‘Asian’ group, with Asians, Afro-Caribbean and white skinheads marching with the AYM banner on demonstrations.

As in many other areas of Yorkshire direct action was linked to what the AYM called ‘cultural resistance’ in the production of newsletters, performance poetry carnivals and music events. In 1983 the first issue of the Sheffield AYM newsletter ‘Kala Mazdoor’, with its cover slogan ‘come what may we are here to stay’, appeared. The AYM and its organisation had an emphasis on self and collective education, an education, which was about seeking ‘really useful knowledge’. In the first issue of ‘Kala Mazdoor’ was an article from an anonymous (1983) member of the AYM stressing how important education and access to radical ‘book fairs’ of Black and Third World books and pamphlets was:

Like most black youth I felt the need to become politically aware and to re-educate myself. At school, education was of little interest to me but now I wanted to learn what interested me...at the book fair I found endless number of books which enriched my thoughts and ideas, books which related to the history of Black people and the reality of racial oppression. From the book fair the Asian Youth Movement purchased many books... with a view to setting up an Asian Youth Movement library in Sheffield. (Anonymous, 1983, pp. 10-11)

Current research in Sheffield suggests that the AYM membership and leadership either withdrew from politics or sought places and office in mainstream politics in the Labour or Liberal parties. This incorporation of social movement activities and informal education into more formal politics was typical of events in other neighbourhoods of settlement. Max Farrar's work in Leeds suggests such a trajectory (Farrar, 2004).

But if the movements declined the experience and memory of the political skills learnt seem to survive. Recent research with Asian community activists in Bradford suggests that Smith's 'communities of purpose' are relevant to migrant social movement activities (O'Toole & Gale, 2010). Activists remember and build on past struggles.

The door closes and racism grows

By the 1970's with an international oil prices crisis, and less of a need for immigrant labour, the U.K. started closing the door on its Black and Asian colonial citizens. 'Asian' communities from Uganda and Kenya were expelled and some were accepted as refugees but only welcomed if they fitted a compliant stereotype.

Mahmood Mamdani (1973) in 1972, lived in a Uganda Resettlement Board camp for refugees and detainees, and disagreed with the way they ran it:

What infuriated the Uganda Resettlement Board was not the nature of any particular disagreement, but the very fact of it.....The crux of the matter was that we had refused to act as refugees: as helpless, well behaved children, totally devoid of initiative, indiscriminately grateful for anything that may come their way; in other words, dependence personified...we were the children and the Board the father; we the flock, the Board the shepherd... except that we were *not* refugees. Circumstances had deprived us of our possessions, but not yet of our self-respect. For that last possession, our humanity, we were willing to fight. We would have to be *made* into refugees—but there would be no surrender. (Mamdani, 1973, pp. 126-127)

This pattern of 'resettlement' was to dominate future treatment of 'genuine' refugees in the UK and their education for citizenship. Refugees' fight for status and identity became a constant theme in popular adult education projects (see below in the G4S campaign). State funded adult education programmes were, and still remain, based on the image of the refugee as the powerless victim dependent and grateful for 'sanctuary'. The reality that refugees and migrants in general are often educated, highly skilled and often have a great deal of political experience is totally ignored.

For settled migrants the state decided through the Scarman Commission Report of 1981 that unrest and rioting amongst young black people in Brixton in 1981, was about individual 'disadvantage', not collective grievances about the state and policing and civil rights. Thus adult education focussed on Race Awareness Training [RATS] for public sector managers, civil servants and teachers in order that they could manage the crisis amongst young people. Later these programmes became the catch- all category of 'diversity training'. In community development and adult education programmes personal 'oppression' replaced state racism as apparently the real problem. In the UK context anti-racist adult education practice needs to be distinguished from this still dominant depoliticised notion of 'diversity training'. As Lentin (2004) points out:

An anti racism that seeks to relate racist practices to the disciplinary constitution of modern states, by means particularly of an emphasis on violence and institutionalised discrimination, is often thwarted by a depoliticised discourse that culturalises,

psychologises and individualises them so as to relegate them to the societal margins. Policies created to combat racism during the post-war era in Europe, most notably both the assimilatory and the multicultural models as well as much of the anti-racism of progressive social movements, have contributed to the development of a view of racism as disconnected from public political culture if not also the practices of the democratic state. (Lentin, 2004 p. 36)

Thus by the end of the 1990's four reasonably distinct strands had emerged in adult education for migrant (or Black and Minority Ethnic) groups:

- Anti-racist critical and political adult education through social movements and their allies in radical adult education practice.
- Philanthropic and 'migrants as victims' programmes for 'disadvantaged' communities funded from 'projects'.
- State funding for compensatory extra education and programmes of 'integration' for citizenship—language classes and citizenship tests.
- Employers and community development top down 'training'; RATS later 'diversity training'.

After 2001 with the '9/11' events in New York, and riots in the former mill towns of Yorkshire and Lancashire, migration became 'securitised' and official state 'training' and adult education programmes in the U.K. moved to depoliticise particular 'Muslim' communities promoting 'social cohesion' as part of the 'War on Terror' (Kundnani, 2009).

The new millennium and new migrations

The last twenty years have witnessed migration on a scale unparalleled in U.K. history. More than seven million people migrated to the U.K. between 1999 and 2011 Net migration increased from an annual average of 37,000 in the period 1991 to 1995 to an annual average of 201,000 in the period 2008 to 2012 (Hawkins, 2013).

From the 1990's conflict and forced migration drove flows in the unstable post Cold War international scene creating what one author has called the 'migration/asylum nexus' (Richmond, 1994). In the U.K. an interventionist foreign policy created refugees from Kosovo and the former Yugoslavia, then Afghanistan and Iraq, to add to flows from unstable former British colonies like Zimbabwe. By 2001 The EU enlargement programme into Central and Eastern Europe increased labour flows so much so that the U.K. by 2004 was undergoing the largest influx of migrant labour in its history.

From the 1990's migrants and asylum seekers were to encounter in the U.K. an economy and a polity which was becoming the most advanced neo-liberal country in Europe, dominated by the financial and service sectors, having abandoned to a large extent export led manufacturing industry.

The political economy of popular adult education also changed in South Yorkshire, and in Yorkshire as a whole with coal, steel and textiles employment gone, replaced by low wage service industry and public sector jobs. The region became the destination of 'asylum seekers' and refugees resulting from the 'dispersal' policies of 2002 where arriving refugees were relocated from London and the South East.

In December 2004 the Yorkshire and the Humber region had the largest number of dispersed asylum seekers (9350) in the U.K. In June 2005 there were 1320 asylum seekers receiving NASS [National Asylum Support Service] support in Sheffield from 56 different countries of origin. There were also around 1500 Slovak and Czech Roma in Rotherham and Sheffield who had arrived with the extension of the E.U. borders in

2004. In 2007 30% of births in the city were from migrant families. Census data suggests that Sheffield's minority ethnic population increased by a figure of 80 percent from 1991 to 2001, to around 45,000 people. By 2011 it doubled again to 19.2 per cent of the population – around 106,000 people. The 2011 census also suggests that there are now around 51,000 foreign born residents from outside the E.U. and around 14,000 from other E.U. countries (For detailed references see Grayson, 2011). As Paul Mason (2007) has observed:

A culture that took 200 years to build was torn apart in twenty. Today in place of a static local workforce working in the factories and drinking in the pubs their grandfathers worked and drank in, a truly global working class is being created. (Mason, 2007, p. xi)

Northern College and the anti racist response

The dispersal of asylum seekers from 2000 led to racial attacks on asylum seekers in the declining industrial areas where they were housed. An official Home Office report of 2005 covering 77 local authorities stated bluntly: 'The government's policy of dispersing asylum seekers is creating long term 'ghettos' in deprived areas where they are more likely to suffer racial assaults and harassment' (Travis, 2005, December 23).

By 2006 there was a growing awareness amongst groups and organisations in Sheffield that racism was on the increase and traditional attitudes towards political refugees had been replaced by a punitive, and at times brutal, operation of asylum legislation creating in Steve Cohen's memorable phrase 'the Orwellian world of immigration controls' (Cohen, 2006). Activists interviewed in Sheffield in the social movement organisations developed in response to these policies, told me of their anger. One of the leading officers of a refugee centre said simply 'We were outraged at the way asylum seekers were being treated' (Crosthwaite & Grayson, 2009, p. 8). A range of South Yorkshire organisations involved in anti-racist, asylum rights and anti deportation campaigning, mainly in Sheffield, had by 2011, around 400 activists willing to be mobilised for direct action in solidarity with asylum seekers (Grayson, 2011).

These organisations mobilised many activists in their fifties and sixties veterans of trade union struggles like the Miners Strike of 1984/5 and the 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' of the 1980's (in the period when Labour local authorities defied central government cuts in spending and were in return abolished). Interviews with activists suggested that many found, in asylum rights campaigns, a rewarding form of 'subterranean politics' (Kaldor & Selchow, 2012), challenging discredited party and electoral politics.

Solidarity campaigning and political education

There were formal anti racist and asylum rights courses established in the period from 2003 at Northern College, and in WEA programmes (Hartley, 2010; Grayson, 2010). The programme rejected notions of 'diversity training' current at the time, which evaded the central role of the state and politicians in generating racist discourses and policies. The aim of the courses was to mobilise popular adult education as a political project providing 'really useful knowledge', linking to political action in a traditional popular education way. This involved, and demands, contesting official public political culture and discourses articulated in media images with methods aimed at 'myth busting' and media critiques.

The college set out to work in solidarity with anti-racist community organisations and social movements of refugees and migrant workers, organising around local anti racist campaigning. Between 2003 and 2006 Northern College offered a programme of residential short courses of two or three days, called ‘Combating Racism’, to discuss and develop approaches with workers and activists in voluntary and community organisations. The courses were not offering ‘Diversity Training’; they were recruited from, and were resourcing anti-racist organisations in Yorkshire to develop anti-racist working, solidarity and strategies. This residential programme included ‘Kicking Out Racism in Your Community’, ‘Challenging Racism for Community Trainers’ and ‘Divided We Fall: Resolving Conflict in Communities’. Some courses confronted media distortions with titles like ‘Minorities, Myths and the Media’.

By 2005 the College had a range of anti racist short courses and a significant number of both asylum seeker and refugee students on its longer courses. It is perhaps significant that many of these popular adult education methods have been replicated in later social movement educational activities in South Yorkshire and Yorkshire as a whole.

Social movement methods of adult education

The Sheffield asylum rights organisations deploy popular adult education methods for solidarity campaigning—including ‘teach-ins’ and ‘awareness raising’ public meetings to mobilise workers and students. One meeting, in April 2009, was entitled ‘Atrocious Barbarism’, quoting the medical journal ‘Lancet’ description of the governments proposals to restrict access to health services for asylum seekers. Flyers for the meeting aimed at health and medical workers invited them to ‘Discuss the issues, organise resistance’. A hundred workers and campaigners turned out, and a branch of the action group ‘Med Act’ was formed by medical students attending. The ‘teach in’ model was also used by in March 2010 for a meeting on ‘Asylum Law and Justice’. Over seventy students lecturers, local solicitors, refugees and asylum seekers attended and started the process which established South Yorkshire Refugee Law and Justice in 2011, mobilising and training volunteer legal advisers and researchers for individual anti-deportation cases. Around half the activists in groups like SYMAAG [South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group] are asylum seekers and refugees; and their work emphasises human rights issues and solidarity through debates and workshops on the refugees’ countries represented in South Yorkshire.

The emphasis has now shifted from college and university courses to popular adult provision directly through campaigning organisations. For example Sheffield UAF [Unite against Fascism] has organised, alongside support for demonstrations, workshops to consider new publications analysing the BNP, and a day workshop in January 2013 to look at the ‘racialisation’ of criminal sex abuse cases. DEWA [Development and Empowerment for Womens’ Advancement], a womens refugee and asylum group in Sheffield, has in the last year organised a conference on women asylum issues in Sheffield, and cooperated with the UNITE trade-union South Yorkshire Community Branch in 2013 for welfare rights and campaigning training.

The politics of outrage: social movements and solidarity campaigning with asylum seekers

The 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act established the policy of dispersal from the South East of England for those seeking accommodation, whilst waiting for the outcome of asylum claims, to regions like Yorkshire and the Humber. Frances Webber (2012) has recently described dispersal and asylum “support” policies as a ‘monstrous system’:

Whereas the Tories had simply closed off parts of the welfare state to migrants and asylum seekers, Labour came up with a system of institutionalised inhumanity. It accepted responsibility for providing support but its anxieties to appease the right wing press and to create opportunities for the private sector created a monstrous system, which had a lot in common with the workhouse bare subsistence and a deterrent system of coercion, control and stigmatisation. (Webber, 2012, p. 92)

Migrants and asylum seekers resisting and organising

Migrants and asylum seekers have developed a range of organisations and campaigns through ‘migrant activism’ (De Tona & Moreo, 2012). There is an extensive literature on this resistance (Anderson, 2010; Henaway, 2012; Pero, 2008; Piper, 2009; Sawyer & Jones, 2011; Vickers, 2012), and it has been described recently by Longhi as ‘the immigrant war, a global movement against discrimination and exploitation’ (Longhi, 2013).

Migrants and asylum seekers have resisted personal horrors, in immigration detention centres in many countries (McFadyean, 2011; Athwal, 2005). They have organised hunger strikes and protests in U.K. detention centres like Yarl’s Wood and Campsfield. The Home Office in response has deliberately moved ‘trouble makers’ from centre to centre to break up organisation (Gill, 2009).

Extensive work in Ireland in the Trinity Immigration Initiative [TII] at Trinity College Dublin, has documented the varieties of migrant resistance networks and activism (Lentin & Moreo, 2012). The research clearly demonstrates extensive organisation and ‘migrant activism’, but very often in Ireland, not contentious or politicised, but aimed at survival and integration into a hostile, racist host country. This is a pattern observed by Sawyer in research with migrants in Sweden and the U.K. who argues that it is ‘of vital importance to pay attention to the “everyday” routinized nature that discrimination and resistance frequently take’ (Sawyer & Jones, 2011, p. 242). Interviews and case work with asylum seeker tenants in the G4S campaign (below) demonstrated this widespread, but often individualised, everyday anti racist resistance to the humiliations and lack of respect as they put it, shown in the administration of the asylum support system both by landlords and in local communities.

Campaigning and learning about asylum housing and against G4S ‘asylum markets’—the Notog4s campaign

In South Yorkshire the focus of activity from January 2012 for social movements of refugees and asylum seekers has been a campaign against the privatisation of asylum housing in Yorkshire by the world’s largest security company G4S (previously Group 4 Security).

In South Yorkshire there was little awareness of the G4S Company apart from the fact that their staff emptied cash machines in town centres, and read fuel meters in peoples' homes. Gradually research for the campaign, and gathering the everyday experience of asylum seekers and refugees who had experienced G4S, started to build a very different picture and image of G4S. G4S was the largest security company in the world, the largest employer on the London stock exchange with security personnel in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine.

South Yorkshire homes which asylum seekers were living in, were felt to be directly threatened by a company which had a brutal record of managing U.K. immigration detention centres; and it was G4S staff who restrained and 'unlawfully killed' an Angolan man Jimmy Mubenga who died whilst being deported in 2010. The campaign set out to connect Sheffield and other towns and cities, where the campaign flourished, to this wider world of the privatising international corporation. This developed very early through public demonstrations in Sheffield where local Palestine Solidarity Campaign activists simply joined the asylum housing protests with their own placards about G4S involvement in Israeli prisons for Palestinians.

A Zimbabwean refugee who trained activists to set up a website for the campaign, managed to get pictures and a report of the first demonstration in February 2012 into the Harare Times in Zimbabwe the day after the demo. At one of the first meetings a Zimbabwean asylum seeker, himself fighting against his own deportation, said loudly 'I don't want a prison guard as my landlord'. This set the tone for the campaign with asylum seekers and refugees who had experience of G4S; collecting evidence, speaking, organising and marching on the demonstrations.

The campaign was designed around a Notog4s Yorkshire research and monitoring group, which included academics and researchers from Leeds, Sheffield, Huddersfield and York universities, asylum rights campaigners and asylum seekers and refugees. The campaign decided to concentrate solely on Yorkshire although G4S had asylum housing contracts in the Midlands (including cities like Birmingham, Leicester, Nottingham and Cambridge). This meant that background research was feasible and crucially activists and asylum seekers could use their local and regional knowledge of asylum housing, council and private landlords and of course the asylum system. Two local notog4s groups were established first in Sheffield by SYMAAG with support from other asylum rights organisations there. The other was in Huddersfield where there were activists involved in the main regional dispersal centre for new asylum seekers.

The campaign was a major exercise in knowledge production. Regular meetings researched local housing companies and received reports on the dozens of cases where slum housing was allocated by G4S landlords. Activists in the Yorkshire groups worked in solidarity with asylum seeker tenants from Zimbabwe, Iran, Kenya, Ethiopia, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda, DRC, Pakistan and Sri Lanka fighting cases and learning about the UK asylum "support" systems, and conditions and struggles in countries across the globe. Campaign leaflets were produced, demonstrations and actions organised and dozens of articles were written as a result of briefing journalists or through a dedicated G4S portal at www.OpenDemocracy.net and on the IRR news service www.irr.org.uk. A SYMAAG website was established and social media links established at www.symaag.org.uk. A pattern of networking organisation recently analysed in commentaries on social movements (Castells, 2012; Mason, 2013). This work has culminated in a comprehensive report (Grayson, 2013a), which was part of Parliamentary enquiries into the G4S asylum contracts and their asylum markets in June 2013 and February 2014.

Refugees and asylum seekers as politicians and autodidacts

An under-researched field in migration is that of ‘political émigrés’ and their organisations and social movements. Often these self-organised networks are branches of political parties in exile. In Sheffield and South Yorkshire this is certainly the case with refugees from DRC, Zimbabwe, Eritrea, and Kurdish exiles from Iraq, and now Syria. They have their own political education programmes, workshops and cultural activities. These networks have often been mobilised to support anti- deportation campaigns in South Yorkshire and educational programmes. During the G4S campaign networks around the Congolese émigrés passed on information and gave support to dispersed asylum seekers from DRC. A Kurdish political network alerted the campaign to the plight of a journalist asylum seeker attacked by a mob of racists when he was dispersed to Stockton asylum housing (Grayson, 2012).

Asylum seekers in the U.K. are prevented from working, and are often imprisoned if they do so ‘illegally’. Many have therefore turned to volunteer working with asylum support charities or official refugee organisations. Interviews with asylum seeker tenants in the G4S campaign also established the extent of their self-education and their seeking out of training and courses. One prominent asylum seeker tenant activist certainly understood the asylum housing issues because she had a U.K. degree, and experience of working as a housing officer. Another, who was granted refugee status during the campaign, was completing a part time degree. Asylum seekers with horrendous experiences of trafficking and detention were enduring the humiliations of asylum housing, and at the same time volunteering for training courses with the Red Cross and undertaking college child care courses.

More generally interviews with asylum seekers and refugees in South Yorkshire who are active members of social movements evidence a significant number of both men and women also undertaking IT, social science, housing, and social work courses.

Contesting racist discourses framing asylum seekers

The G4S campaign emphasised the importance of building into processes of social movement learning, not only skills and popular adult education methods, but also transformative practices which contested not only policies and procedures of the asylum system, but also confronted the languages and political discourses, which framed the injustices of the system. Imogen Tyler (2012), describes this form of struggle and resistance against the abjection of asylum seekers as redefining and ‘re-mapping’ the public identities of asylum seekers. The definitions and language deliberately created by politicians (Grayson, 2013b; Philo et al, 2013), for electoral purposes not only frame popular learning about asylum in the media and create ‘common sense racism’, but also pattern and infuse the delivery of policies in detention centres and asylum housing.

An example of this confrontation with racist discourse in the asylum housing campaigns was the fact that G4S and their directors constantly described their development of asylum housing as part of their ‘asylum market’. In contrast, Barnsley local authority, who had lost the contract for providing the publicly funded housing, described it as ‘humanitarian housing for those fleeing persecution’. This crucial distinction and statements from asylum housing tenants like ‘I do not want a prison guard as my landlord’ or ‘they treat us like luggage’ or ‘they simply want to make profits out of us, they show us no respect’ were recorded and appeared in news reports meetings and workshops as part of the campaigning and contested dominant media images of asylum seekers as ‘illegals’.

This constant critique of dominant power discourses prevalent in the media as part of the campaigning and learning mirrored techniques of CDA [Critical Discourse Analysis]. In recent years, in the U.K., racist discourses around ‘asylum seekers’ have demonised those who have sought asylum in the U.K. The discursive framework (Fairclough, 1998; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), developed around issues of ‘immigration’, ‘citizenship’, and ‘asylum’ by politicians and media has influenced the growth of far right and xenophobic politics. This racist discursive framework has also had major implications for anti racist actions and popular adult education practice, stigmatising asylum seekers as powerless apolitical victims who ‘need’ only language training or citizenship education.

Activist research and journalism to deconstruct the meanings of xenophobic and racist narratives used by politicians and political parties can be an important stimulus to creation of materials and curricula for adult education initiatives; as well as for agendas, leaflets, and debates, setting the context for effective ‘learning’ in social movements. Putting it quite simply ‘a careful dissection of political language can be useful in exposing how the people at the top try to keep the rest of the world confused and powerless.’ (Salkie, 2000,). Fairclough defines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a tool to throw light on changing political orders of discourse by deconstructing political ‘common sense’ and also analysing the political uses of constructed narratives for electoral politics on ‘a terrain of hegemonic struggle’ (Fairclough, 1998, p. 145).

Conclusion

This ongoing activist research project into popular adult education in migrant social movements in one specific region of the U.K. is already perhaps suggestive of future trends and developments in wider adult education ‘provision’.

The state’s resourcing of solidarity campaigning (Featherstone, 2012), with social movements through formal and informal popular adult education programmes, has now almost disappeared (except perhaps in the Nordic countries and Scandinavia). There is now generally a rapid move towards marketised initiatives, dominated by vocational adult education for the labour market. In terms of adult education, with and for migrant social movements and refugees, the emphasis is almost entirely on programmes for assimilation. The political rejections of strategies of ‘multiculturalism’ and the ‘end of tolerance’ (Kundnani, 2007) in the U.K. have had dramatic effects on local and national state provision of adult education for migrants and refugees. English language training has become almost the only distinctive provision for migrants in many parts of the U.K.

Emphasis has now almost completely shifted to informal and non formal programmes of popular adult education embedded in the organisation and practice of migrant social movements, and asylum rights and anti racist social movements. To a large extent this is perhaps revisiting historically rooted traditions of organising and education sketched in this narrative, but it is also confronting perhaps newer challenges of a globalised labour market and definitions of citizenship, stigma and identity. Popular adult education perhaps has a central role in the future in re-mapping our collective understandings of migrants campaigning, organising and changing of all our world

Notes

¹ This argument relies on a range of recent studies for the U.K. (Dorling, 2010).

² Stuart Hall was, until his recent (2014) death, Professor Emeritus of sociology at the Open University founded in 1969, perhaps the best known adult education product of the Labour government of 1964 to 1970.

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