

Leading Through In/Visibility

Vidya Shah (00:00:09):

Hello and welcome to season two of the UnLeading podcast series. We're thrilled to be back to explore questions, wonderings, tensions, and contradictions and leadership. UnLeading asks us to question the taken for granted assumptions we have of leadership and asks how we might embody, construct, and imagine leadership differently when we center different knowledge systems. UnLeading asks us to question how we have been socialized into leadership and how this socialization has allowed us to turn our gaze towards some things and away from others. It's been so wonderful to hear from aspiring and practicing leaders in education and community throughout Canada and internationally, Who have engaged with these podcasts as individuals and collectives. I'm so thrilled to introduce this topic, Leading Through In/Visibility, and our wonderfully dynamic speakers. In our pre-meeting, the energy and synergy were just profound, and I'm really excited for you to experience that alongside us. If you wanna know more about our panelists, you can find their full bios and contact information on the UnLeading webpage at www.yorku.ca/edu/unleading, all one word. In this podcast, we highlight just some of the experiences, realities, and identities that are often invisibilized or intentionally ignored in more common explorations of equity and anti-racism. In our title you'll see a dash between in and visible. And this, this framing of invisible was first introduced to me by one of my mentors, Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya at the College of Education in the University of Florida. The way that we think about it in this podcast is that, you know, for those who have been, whose identities have been hidden or silenced, they are simultaneously invisible in terms of their full range of experiences and realities and worldviews and multiplicities and different ways that they express their identities. And yet, certain aspects of their "difference" are made hypervisible - maybe their accent, maybe their religion. And that's often for the benefit of the white settler capitalist state. We explore in this podcast how leaders lead through and against invisibility. And this topic is personal to me. I have experienced invisibility as a diasporic brown woman who grew up in a Hindu and Jain

Harpreet Ghuman (00:03:41):

Thank you so much, Vidya, for the warm welcome and to give this platform to us, to provide this platform, to share and tell our stories. And having said that, I'm gonna get right into it and just share what an honour it is to provide this intro to such a dialogue and to such an esteemed group of leaders that you've brought together. How do educational leaders push through the experiences of their own invisibility and honour the current generation of learners who look to them for voice and validation? The importance of each of us showing up as our full selves cannot be underestimated. I say that, however, despite spending some of my schooling trying to hide the very essence of my own Sikh identity. As a student growing up, much comes to mind about identities centered, those represented, and those celebrated. I also think about those not acknowledged, not present or reflected by those leading or in power, or perhaps even those erased from the space entirely one way or another. Their voices, their stories, their being, their contributions, their knowledge and wisdom, their essence, their brilliance, their excellence, their humanity. So many identities perhaps never discussed, seen or heard, not made visible through books, lessons, conversations, announcements, assemblies, school, and community events, professional learning conversations, staff meetings, and systemwide forums. Our incredible guests this evening are influential leaders who may themselves have experienced such feelings of invisibility and perhaps they still do. So how do they now lead their respective spaces, whether in classrooms, university lecture halls, or in the broader society? How do they reconcile past and/or perhaps even present day erasure and challenges, and continue leading as their authentic self? What creates feelings of invisibility? This, of course, differs for all of us and how we process this varies. What leads to notions of not being

seen or heard? And how do we disrupt this reality for a multitude of identities, who are sitting in classrooms or in school board offices or in the broader community? How do we enter spaces as our full authentic selves? What brings or inspires us to be fully ourselves and what prohibits us from doing so, whether in classroom, in a staff meeting or in the community. We are leading communities and we may ourselves be feeling invisible. Do we enter these spaces with a sense of full authenticity, our full sense of humanity, our vulnerabilities or with a somewhat self-censored sense of being? And this is precisely where our social location or power and privilege in systems and in communities greatly impacts how we move, and the risks or rewards we face. I hope for each of us to walk into this space with the pride and strength of our ancestors over the systemic conditioning and silencing. I'm sure that many of you listening in as well as those on our panel may have had some experiences of invisibility, regardless of your background or identity. Our position in the educational world or lack of positional power may also impact notions of invisibility. What, then, is the influence of positional leadership? For those listening, who may be leaders in community and education in leadership of all forms, informal, formal or aspiring leaders, what role do you play for those who may be unseen or unheard? New educational leaders internalize the profound impact their sense of acknowledgement for others, specifically, those on the margins can have. For some, this may be the only sense of recognition or acknowledgement. What does it mean to not erase our identities while standing in racial solidarity with others? When I think of identities and communities who may be feeling invisible, there are no shortage of those that come to mind. And by naming some of them, I know that we are inevitably invisibilizing those that are not named. I will reference some from recent conversations with students, staff and families. Tamil and Palestinian students have recently shared with me their perspectives of feeling invisible or at times not feeling represented or acknowledged in the education system. I've heard similar sentiments from families from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. I was inspired by the recent work of a Bangladeshi-Canadian Muslim identifying teacher and her grade seven and eight virtual class conversations about the media spotlight to the crisis in Ukraine. Some of the students reflected on the lack of attention to these issues and the conversation slowly shifted to the people of Yemen and their current crisis that they're facing. This learning took place during the month of Ramadan, as students reflected on prioritizing the needs of others and their roles as allies. The class of students identified themselves as Indigenous, Egyptian, Indian, Filipino, Latinx, Persian, and Bengali. When I asked how the centering of the people of Yemen became a reality, many shared their own feelings of invisibility in schooling, experiences and in the mainstream society. And that their wish now was to use their voices to amplify the cause of another group that they felt was unseen or unheard. To situate myself personally in this, I often reflect on my faith based values and teachings from the Six Scriptures around being a voice and ally for those facing oppression, and tyranny. Seva or Selfless Service for Six can take on so many forms from offering longer and warm meals through our community kitchen to physically protecting those in harm's way. This helps to align the work of anti-oppression and anti-racism because it is very much tied to my own personal and spiritual journey. While I'm grateful for the connection and strong identity I feel now as an adult to my Sikh roots in history, this was not always the case while I was a student. For five years, Harpreet would be known as Mike. I will save that story for another time, but in 2020, I wrote a short piece entitled, "When You See Me", that helped me to come to terms with some of these experiences. And from this, I will now share a short passage: "Cut off my hair, I changed my name. I felt so lost and so ashamed. To laugh on Malcolm and found myself. He was the missing book, not on the bookshelf." I guess you could say culturally relevant and responsive teaching is not what I, or many of us listening we're exposed to perhaps. How does one feel affirmed when you don't see yourself or your people's rich history and contributions? And how did this iconic Black leader and figure that I referenced, Malcolm X, become a doorway for a young Brown boy to discover his Sikh heritage? As author, Nayyirah Waheed wrote, "The greatest teacher will send you back to yourself. And for many years, the teachings of Malcolm X would echo in the mind of his journey for Black liberation and it impacts me to this day.

Through his words, he became that culturally affirming teacher whose words and lessons would guide me back to my own roots and history. And some that really resonate with me include his questions, Who are you? You don't know? Where are you and what did you have? What was yours? What language did you speak? What was your name? Why don't you now know what your name was then? Where did it go? Where did you lose it? Who took it? And how did he take it? What tongue did you speak? How did the man take your tongue? Where's your history? How did the man wipe out your history? By honouring the lived experiences of those we serve, we honour both their stories and their humanity so that they can be fully present. And if you see me or hear me advocating for Palestinian students or other groups who may be feeling unseen, unheard, invisible or perhaps facing oppression, know that this is the function of my Sikh identity coming more and more to the surface and the presence of my authentic self into the space. Inheriting these examples is our connected struggles for human liberation, our racial solidarity amongst many tribes, many people, and their voices and stories honoured and visible. And on that note, I'm so grateful again to be in this space this evening with the voices that you're now about to hear. Vidya.

Vidya Shah (00:12:46):

Oh my goodness, Harpreet, thank you so much for that beautiful introduction. For your words, for the words of Malcolm. Just opening up a space for us to delve into such important conversations, truly grateful for you and for the work that you do in education. Standing up and with groups that you both identify with and that you don't. Just thank you to you for all that you do, all that you did today, and all that you do in education. And as you were sharing, you also made mention of the amazing panelists that are also on this podcast. I'm so excited to introduce them and bring them into this conversation. We were thinking really carefully about how we can include a wide range of people and speakers, again, from community, from the academy, from the classroom, to think about how we might engage in this conversation around Leading Through In/Visibility. I'm so excited to welcome the panelists on, and I'd love to sort of just hear your voice folx, so people on the other side can connect your name to your voice. First, I'd like to welcome Gen Ling Chang. And you know, I love this at the beginning, I said to everyone I'm not gonna read your full bios, but tell me how you'd like me to introduce you in a sentence. And Gen Ling says, I am here. I consist of friends, family, food, history, literature, and song. How beautiful. Welcome Gen Ling.

Gen Ling Chang (00:14:25):

Thank you so much, Vidya. Thank you Harpreet because I listened to your voice and set of a chain of thoughts that did not come with me, but spark those chain of thoughts in me.

Vidya Shah (00:14:40):

Next, I'd like to introduce Cristina Guerrero. Cristina is a mom, a runner, an educator working at Humber College Lakeshore and the daughter of immigrants from Ecuador. Welcome Cristina.

Cristina Guerrero (00:14:54):

Thank you so much Vidya for having me here and Harpreet, beautiful words. I'm really, really looking forward to our chat.

Vidya Shah (00:15:01):

Beautiful. And next I'd like to welcome Rizwana Kaderdina. Rizwana is an educator, she's a Brown woman and a visibly identifiable Muslim woman. Welcome Rizwana.

Rizwana Kaderdina (00:15:13):

Thank you so much Vidya. I'm so grateful to be in this space with all of these amazing folk. I'm going to echo everyone in thanking Harpreet. Harpreet, Gen Ling talked about you sparking a chain of thoughts that didn't come with her. I feel the same way, and also, just was experiencing a lot of emotion that I didn't anticipate. So, I'm very grateful for what you have already brought forward.

Vidya Shah (00:15:38):

Thank you so much, Rizwana. And last, but certainly not least, Muna Saleh, welcome Muna. Muna is an educator who teaches at Concordia University in Edmonton. Muna identifies as a Muslim-Palestinian mom of three, welcome.

Muna Saleh (00:15:53):

Thank you so much Vidya, and thank you Jocelyn for all your help, and Harpreet, your words to start just like Rizwana said and all panelists both also echoed. It was absolutely beautiful and it made me really emotional. I still, I'm not used to others saying the word Palestine or used to saying Palestinian. And so it makes me super emotional when people do because I grew up with it being completely erased. So anyways, thank you so much. I look forward to this conversation.

Vidya Shah (00:16:28):

Thank you, Muna. So we are gonna dive right into this important conversation and hear thoughts and ideas and stories and experiences from our panelists and have an opportunity to really just be in dialogue about these important issues. So the first question that we're asking is, what does leading through invisibility look like in your everyday practice? And Cristina, we'll start with you.

Cristina Guerrero (00:16:58):

Thanks so much, Vidya. This is a question that really had me thinking when we're talking about the very notion of the term, leadership, who is a leader, what do they look like? And, you know, really bringing up that notion of emotion as well. What does leadership and particularly through invisibility look like, sound like, and feel like? It's a very deep, multi-layered experience. I always grew up not thinking about myself as a leader, even though I attended school in what people would call the inner city, although my teachers were white, particularly, often male and led in a certain way. The way they would speak to people and people would just follow, there was no relationship building, there was no conversation or collaboration. And so as I grew up and as the years passed, for me, I came to understand leadership in a different way through invisibility. You know, really thinking of my own social location as a Brown woman, Spanish speaking, female Latinx. For me, it became something totally different. I wanted to see, I wanted to hear my community also engage in leadership initiatives, whether it's through the community or in other spaces that weren't meant for us. And going back to that idea of what it would look like, sound like, and feel like for me, what it came to be, and it was a process. I didn't have a definition. I also walked alongside mentors and friends and colleagues. And for me, it was about how I talked to and with people and about people how I sounded as in my tone, commanding people in my community doesn't really work. It's about asking how you are, how was your day? What can we do together? And from there comes the action, the solidarity and as Harpreet was talking about earlier in terms of how do we affirm people's identities. And even though I speak of myself as being a Brown, Latinx female, also honouring the fact that even within our own communities, there's so much diversity. So how do we bring that to the forefront, whether it's at schools or in our community locals, and really bringing to the forefront what's important to us. And very importantly, leading through invisibility in my everyday practice, you

know, I know I'm talking a lot right now, but a lot of it is really listening intently, finding out the stories of people in not just in my community, but in many other communities. Finding out their needs, finding out their stories and then engaging in plans of action. It's not about a title, it's not about a sense of command, it's not about leading people as it might be romanticized in the movies, but it's a way of being here in the now and leading towards anti-oppressive and more just future.

Vidya Shah (00:20:13):

Thank you so much, Cristina, that's beautiful. Leading towards more just futures, I just love that, I love that. Thank you for sharing. Rizwana, I would love to hear from you.

Rizwana Kaderdina (00:20:24):

I'm so taken with what Cristina shared that I'm having to recover my thoughts, but I was thinking about this question from maybe from a different perspective around how do we strategize and on an everyday basis to navigate and to be able to lead, right? I realized that I grappled with this because I grew up in a very diverse multicultural community. And so seeing leadership opportunities as a student was not uncommon, right. And being able to grow in that through elementary school, through high school, and then coming into university and entering the teaching profession. Teaching, I say, can be a very isolating reality because it's you in your classroom, right, and you're very connected with your students and the families, if you want to be, but not always necessarily within the broader group. It can be completely the opposite. And then coming into a position now where I'm working with folks in more formalized positions of leadership, really starting to understand what it is to be typecast, if you wanna put it that way, right. When you walk into a space and people assume that they know who you are and what you are and what you can bring to the table and what your capacity and capability is. So how do you work around that? And I was very lucky. I spoke about the school working in a school space earlier. The school space that I was in was one in which I did very much feel a sense of community. I'm now in a position where I walk into different school spaces and I'm living the reality of what I've heard. So many of my colleagues say, particularly occasional teachers right, around you're nobody unless you have a title attached to you. And it's fascinating to walk into different spaces and introduce myself. Sometimes I share that I at the moment have a title in the school board that I'm in and sometimes I don't, and sometimes I wait a bit and maybe bring it up later where people have this moment. You can see the shift in, it's almost like at times it is visible right in how you are received in a space. So, I think about credentialing and how that is a strategy that sometimes is necessary, sometimes we use. I think about leaning on others, right? Who do I have relationship capital with in a space and who do I have actual genuine relationality with in a space where I can trust that, one, I'm safe, two, my thinking and ideas and work will be used and useful, and credited back to me and made use of to support students. And, when interrogated or questioned or critiqued as they should be, done so from a space of we're doing this for the greater good, not as an expression of resentment that you are in this space. I think [this] is something that I didn't necessarily expect as I moved into different spaces that my very presence in a space might trigger resentment. And so I think about how when we talk about how we lead through everyday practice, I think about all of those different types of strategies that so many of us use to operate and to make the work happen. And sometimes that means amplifying or credentialing ourselves, amplifying ourselves through others, and sometimes it means completely erasing ourselves from work because we do the work and we give it to someone else. And we say, okay, I need you to put this forward because I know how it's going to be received coming from me, but coming from you, it will be heard. And just in thinking about this question of every day, leading through invisibility on an everyday basis, but that's some of what was coming forward for me. This is why I was so taken with what Cristina said about moving to just futures, when we

rely on others it is truly relational and reciprocal, and we are safe and valued fully for who we are. I love that, Cristina, thank you for framing it that way.

Vidya Shah (00:24:44):

Thank you so much, Rizwana. I think there's such power in what you're saying that challenges this notion of leadership that resides in one individual. And instead, sees leadership as a community, as a collective of different people enacting leadership in different ways, at different times to buffer against this invisibility, but to also make spaces for visibility. Thank you so much for sharing that, that was really beautiful. Muna, welcome.

Muna Saleh (00:25:14):

Thank you so much, already Cristina, Rizwana, I resonated with both of you so much and what you've had to share. And as I think about how to lead through invisibility and what I've done so interesting because immediately I felt attention like, but I'm not, I wasn't really leading in my opinion. And then I have to remind myself, hello, yes, you were in different ways, of course. It's that the positional leadership, this idea that once you, I've never really been a Curriculum Coordinator or an Assistant principal or held any of those titles in education system. And so, that tension that I can't claim that, right, but then it's just so interesting that idea that to have a title is the be all and end all, this is what grants you legitimacy. When really, the best leaders, in my opinion, throughout my life, from my grandmother, Ali Hamma to some of my colleagues have always been those without a title, have always been the people who say and do things that are the most unpopular and risky, potentially, that rally the collective that builds solidarities. It's just really interesting when my initial reaction that tension tells me that it still lives in me that that story of positional leadership in some ways. I just really wanna also give a nod to what Harpreet said about, and he quoted my favourite author and poet of all time, Nayyirah Waheed, and when he said the greatest teacher will send you back to yourself. I have to take a breath, I need to sit with that for a bit. And because so much of my work is about intergenerational, it's so interesting because I do talk about the intergenerational trauma of Sittee Allah yirhama, my Palestinian grandmother. She lived with a bullet in her back as she was escaping Palestine because they were forcibly removed from our village in Palestine. People talk a lot about intergenerational transmission of trauma, but I've really been thinking about the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, of strength, the intergenerational transmission of wisdom that she rooted and planted in us. And not just her, my mom, my dad, my aunts, my uncles, I lived in a large multigenerational household and people coming and going because, you know, it's just the way we live. And when I think about bringing you back to yourself, I always think about my faith, of course, not just Palestinian, but, you know, as a Muslim woman in hijab as well. I think about how also that's been silenced in a different way because there's the stories of who I am, what I can do, what I believe. And it's interesting because I think of the Prophet, there's a Hadith, which is the saying of the Prophet Muhammad, Salawat & Salam. I would never have said this and shared this in a public space, by the way not too long ago, because that's for when I'm with other Muslims, right, because then people will think I'm trying to convert them if I mention part of my faith. But it's so interesting because one of the wisdoms that I'm always thinking about is this Hadith that if you see an injustice, you change it with your hand and if not, then with your tongue. So basically you speak out, either you act, if you can't do that, then you speak out, and if you can't even do that, then at the very least, you hate it with your heart. You just basically resist internalizing that injustice in any way shape or form as much as possible, and that is the least of faith. So that's the least you can do is not like the injustice basically. I always think about how within my very faith and just like I was saying, this is part of my faith is to be in solidarity and to try to uplift others as much as possible, but do it as a collective.

I've been really thinking with a lot already, and I just really wanted to share what I was thinking with as I heard the other amazing humans on this panel.

Vidya Shah (00:29:40):

Muna, thank you so much, and I appreciate you bringing in this intergenerational notion of leadership as well. That what gets transmitted yes, is the trauma, but is also everything else. The wisdom, the joy, the knowledge and how beautiful that is to think about leadership as passing through families, as passing through lineages, as passing through communities from generation to generation. Gen Ling, welcome. We'd love to hear your thoughts on this question.

Gen Ling Chang (00:30:09):

Thank you, Vidya. Listening to Rizwana, Cristina, and Muna makes me think that so often the temptation is to interpret each of our experiences as leaders of colour as monolithic. But yet, when I listen to them, it's so complex and nuanced. However, brought together, they show a clear pattern of racialization and the challenges we have. So when the question asks, what does leading to invisibility look like in everyday practices? It looks like in very simple words, my visibility is used to make my leadership invisible and being a leader is a lifelong thing from teacher preparation to whatever positional leader you might hold. And I want to recollect a very story that encapsulates that. I did the PQP [Principal Qualification Program] cause at the kind mentorship of a principal I had. And yes, you all know PQP cause we have gurus, we have the Fullans and the Leithwoods as models. That is one form of making, I'm not saying the word is not good, but there's a diversity of educators there where models of leadership come as Muna says through intergenerational, through our community, through our culture, but that was not considered, but more traumatic experience I had was in PQP courses. We always put in teamwork and I was in a group where there was one individual that decided to be self-appointed leader of the group. And I, over time, became silenced because whatever I said was marginal, was not the main, was the side dish, never the main dish, not even the appetizer. When the course ended, she appointed herself to give each of us a gift at the closing, the public, the entire course group. So when she went up to speak on behalf of our course she took up this eraser and she gave every member in the group an eraser and came to me. I was the last, and she said, this eraser is very special because it describes Gen Ling as a dinosaur. That says it all. I realized that my visibility of how I look when we talk about how you would like to identify yourself, the colour of my eyes, the colour of my hair, my skin colour, my accent, my name was used to Other. And my notions of leadership is dated, is dinosaur, is not part of what is considered now. So replicate this metaphor to students in our classroom, students who believe where there's clubs and activities, they never could consider themselves to be the president or the vice president. They might think, I might be good as a secretary or the treasurer, or I might be good as a committee member. It starts, as Harpreet says, with our students, and it goes all the way up to adults. Leading through invisibility is I would like to take Vidya's, she is very visionary when she make in hyphen visibility, it just caught my eye. I am visible, but those who choose to be around and in education, choose to make those who are visible, invisible in their contributions, in their work, in their genius, in their creativity and in the intellectualism because they feel threatened and therefore, the need to other. I will stop here.

Vidya Shah (00:34:39):

Oh, Gen Ling, thank you so much. Thank you for sharing this beautiful story, painful story, but beautiful in that it captures so precisely this notion of coloniality, that there is only one knowledge system, that there's only one main dish at the table, and that everybody else, as you said, is simply a side dish not even an appetizer. I question what it would take to remove main dishes from the table, and instead to center a number of side dishes or maybe just a number of main dishes. I thank you for that, I thank you

for that. I want to ensure that I'm not contributing to invisibility name that this notion of in hyphen visibility was first introduced to me by one of my mentors, Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya and she is currently in the College of Education at University of Florida. Shoutout to her for her tremendous work and for helping me to think about challenging this binary between visibility and invisibility. Rizwana, jump in.

Rizwana Kaderdina (00:35:52):

I just wanted to pick up on this metaphor that has been introduced around side dishes, and it's such a powerful one. I had a conversation actually with a colleague literally last week, Friday and Gen Ling, I know you've used the metaphor of food so many times in so many beautiful ways before. And this colleague said to me, we're partnering on something, and she said, I prefer to be the sidekick. That's not how I operate and I don't want to be the main dish. I'll be the peas and the bowl on the side. And I said, well, in my family we don't cook food like that, where we have food on the side so I don't know what that means. And so, Gen Ling and Vidya, your metaphors of the dishes and the food that we eat and how that we decolonize even just how we think about that. Right. I felt like I needed to share that because it was just so powerful the way that we were able to have that dialogue through that metaphor of food.

Gen Ling Chang (00:36:59):

Because if you look at menus, look at communities where the menu is community-eating. There's no appetizer, there's no side dish. There's no beans as a dish or potatoes, a side dish, and this is your entrée. It's community eating. You sit in a circle.

Vidya Shah (00:37:18):

I just love this. Come for an UnLeading podcast and get a brand new family recipe book. This is how we do things, folx, this is how we do things. This is so great. And you know, it makes me think about these are such wonderful conversations and provocations that we're leading ourselves into. It makes me think about the second question that we have, and the second question's really around, what are we leading against or through when we think about leading through invisibility? What are the normative ideas of schooling and leadership that we're actually challenging by leading through invisibility? And, simultaneously what are some of the challenges that we need to bump up against as we do that? I'd love to hear, I'd love to hear from folx. Let's start with Muna on this question.

Muna Saleh (00:38:12):

Thank you, Vidya. Yeah, I think for me it depends on the context, of course. I mean, right now I'm in the post-secondary institution and setting. I think about how we taught, I was just on a panel about decolonizing curriculum a couple of weeks ago for the Canadian Association of Curriculum Studies. I had prearranged remarks that I ditched last minute. I said, nope, gonna speak from the heart of this one because I was angry. I find that when I'm angry, I'm able to articulate why I'm angry better than later on when I've calmed down because I don't know about anybody else, but I feel like I gaslight myself quite often. You try to give people the benefit of the doubt, maybe it wasn't that bad, but in the moment is when I'm probably the most truthful when I'm angry, to be honest. So, I just allowed myself to feel that and to say what I felt needed to be said in that moment because we talk a lot about decolonization, we talk a lot about solidarity, we talk a lot about anti-racism in all of these spaces, but yet here I am on Treaty Six. I'm a settler, although yes, I'm Palestinian, we're stateless as of the moment, but you know, child of refugees, but at the same point, we are on these colonized lands and I'm in these colonized colonial institutions. I'm part of how these systems reproduce themselves. If I can't name that and we can't be honest about it, what are we doing? We're part of this institution, educational systems from K to

post secondary that also prioritizes numbers. It is incredibly ableist. Can we talk about that? Can we talk about how my nine year old autistic daughter is constantly trying to be, they're trying to constantly push her out of public system into a special program. Why don't we see more disabled adults in post secondary? Can we talk about these things without people getting offended that you're saying this, and especially as again, as a Muslim Palestinian woman in hijab, you should be grateful, how dare you. "Try Going back home and see how you're treated there." There is the response that I often get, even in not so subtle ways in post-secondary environments. As I talk about leading through invisibility and what are the ways, it's so complex, it's so complex how the different systemic forms of racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian racism, all of these different forms, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Asian racism, all of the different forms of racism, how they come together to create those experiences as Kimberle Crenshaw says. But I find that education to be honest is one of the biggest contributors and the ways that these systems are perpetuated. Because before we started recording, we talked about who are the leaders who look like us and these systems, where are they? We've known this as an issue for over for decades now, where are they? And the thing is though, the reason why a lot, and I don't know this for sure, I'm willing to bet quite a bit on this, if we were allowed to bet as Muslims, but I think it's because people in power are so busy congratulating themselves for being "inclusive" just for having you there, let alone being able to make any actual decisions, that you being there is their metric. That's the ceiling. So that when you start to talk about, okay, why don't we see people in positional leadership who look like this? Who maybe, Palestinian Muslim woman in hijab, where are they? I've never seen somebody who looks like me in any way in these systems and that actually has ability to empower, to make these decisions. There's a lot of us in education, to be honest. What is it that is stopping us? It's the fact that people are so busy being so self-congratulatory that we're just there at this point. Maybe we need another couple of decades or a hundred years to actually move forward, I don't know, but it's the hypocrisy for me in education. We talk about we want our kids to see themselves, people say no, the things to say, but how is it being lived? Because even in post secondary we talk about decolonization, yet people were having conferences in Hawaii. When people in Hawaii, Indigenous people in Hawaii were saying, stop coming. It's the hypocrisy for me, it's the ability to know, it's the tokenism, the hypocrisy, knowing what to say, knowing not to put it out on the Internet cause they're gonna get slammed, but they're doing it quietly regardless. So that's for me, how do I not be cynical because you go back to being, this is all curriculum violence and Stephanie Jones, I'm sorry, I'm not gonna take too much longer. I really highly recommend her article, but Stephanie Jones talks about curriculum violence and that there's some really upfront extreme cases of this, but curriculum violence, I think is also when you aren't able to see yourself reflected in any way when you're, like we said, invisibilized and it's purposeful. It's a lot of the times too because I don't wanna be "controversial," and I'm speaking specifically about Palestinian students and families. So, how do you maintain the hope because yes, there's the violence, but where's the room for healing? Where's the room for joy? Where's the room for imagining forward?

Vidya Shah (00:44:45):

Thank you so much and you know, your comments are making me think about what if educators and school leaders and school district leaders were to ask themselves what does anti-Asian racism look like in our school? What does anti-Palestinian racism look like in our school? What do intersections of various forms of racism and cisheteronormativity look like in our schools. And to start with the assumption that it's there and to actually map out what it looks like and how do we actually address this. It's also making me think about another version of invisibility, all the ways in which racist, sexist, classist beliefs get invisibilized and protected. A very different take on this notion of invisibility, but intentional invisibility to

protect those in power. Hmm. So much here, so much here. Thank you for sharing your thoughts. Gen Ling would love to hear from you.

Gen Ling Chang (00:45:47):

When I look at the second question and listening to what Muna has said is when you have to lead through invisibility and against invisibility, it requires not only cognitive energy, it requires emotional energy. Educators and leaders of colour have a double task. You have the professional stresses and you also have the emotional stresses, the emotional stresses that tries to make the good, what you do, the excellent, what you do invisible. That is when they say, oh, this is team effort or this has to go to a certain channel. Those are different ways of metaphors of watching down to the common denominator, and what is the common denominator? The common denominator is the dominant group and I'm talking about in the education system. The second way of making leaders of colour that were invisible is disinformation. That is brutal, is savage because in this deconstruction of a person's potential to be a leader, and I have seen it and experienced it and know what it means. The more excellent you are, the more creative, the more amazing leader you are, that visibility becomes a threat. There are people who will want to make that invisible and that is very, very sad. Where people begin to deconstruct potential leaders of colour so that they continue to maintain what I call structural systemic racism, where as Muna says, where do you see the leaders in education? Where is hijab? Where do you see the leaders in education that is coming from middle Asia, from south Asia, from the African continent, from the Latin America? Why not? So, we occupy a space to me is an advantage, we occupy a space of diversity because many of us have experienced racism, but we also with that, has a danger of internalizing it. When you internalize racism, you begin to put your head down and do the good work and be quiet. And by being quiet, we are complicit. So the harm we experience could potentially become the harm, can cause harm and that is a key stress and toll for leaders of colours, for having to lead through invisibility at the same time of leading through visibility. Rizwana talked about navigating and that navigating, I'm trying to name it and call it out until we name and call it out. People is going to see it as something ambiguous, is a smoke, but they will not put the finger to eat. I want to lead to the position where we have to recognize, name it, say it, speak it up. And I was just reading, Vidya the Critical Race Theory [that was] published in The Conversation. The critical race theory is so important and yet now, what is the disinformation and deconstruction? So there you are, is not only just deconstructing people, is deconstructing models of decolonizing learning, of making learning more equitable, of curriculum being more meaningful, and mirroring our students by saying it's invalid. These people are threats to the Canadian society, whatever Canadian are we not Canadians? That's why I said, I am here. I am in the visible, but there are attempts to make me invisible. Theories, critical race theory, equity work conversations about the Palestinian, we have seen it been played out in our district school boards. The attempts to make it invalid by using actually policy and security and safety and community arguments to silence. That is a challenge for leaders of colour to lead against both of navigating this space, of occupying this space of visible and invisible. I think this podcast and more series should really bring out and challenge and say, you know, what is under siege? Are kids getting one kind of curriculum where they're not mirrored in it? That should be under siege, not critical race theory, not CRRP [Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy], not certain topics. Take the Ukraine crisis. I walk into the schools where I'm doing workshops and I see all this fundraising for the Ukraine crimes. I'm totally with that, but do I see that for the Yemen, for the Syrians and so on and so forth? And what about children? Why isn't there a counterbalance that was so quick to push back about for children who are from Russia that are Canadians now? That voice has been definitely silent. What is the harm we are doing? As we cry out about harm, how are we perpetuating harm? As Harpreet brought to our attention, the world is in Canada. Let's not forget the only people that belong to this is the First Nations people. We are all settlers

and immigrants. So how are they using settler colonialism to marginalize one group, but at the same time, they are making the cry that we are trying to be inclusive of a group, yet some other group is being marginalized. That is leading that calls upon our work. I see possibilities there, I see possibilities of seeing not opposition, but possibilities of how we can work together, how we can grow leadership that is of a different nature.

Vidya Shah (00:53:03):

Gen Ling, I have to say, I'm hearing this fire and it's just taking me back to today's and teaching and learning where I would love when you would, when the fire would burn. And we would be listening and enthralled in what you were saying. Thank you, thank you for sharing. And I wanna raise up this idea that the disinformation campaign, the intentional silencing and invisibilizing is a paid, networked, planned, organized way of trying to shut down and shut out all forms of difference that challenge this notion of Canada as white and as settler, and as benevolent and all inclusive. And so I wanna just name it's more important than ever than that we are coming together that we are in solidarity with each other, that we are thinking about how to challenge this again, very planned paid for campaign campaigns, plural that are intentionally trying to change information, shut down information, shut down people, cancel people even though they claim to be against "cancel culture". It's fascinating, it's fascinating. Thank you so much for sharing that. I'd love to hear from Cristina on this question.

Cristina Guerrero (00:54:26):

Sure, thanks so much. And thank you, Muna and Gen Ling because these very points are exactly things that we need to ignite, right. Ignite individually and ignite collectively. You know, and despite that discourse of change and the so-called progress towards inclusivity, we know that the more things change, the more things actually remain the same, right. That reminds me of a chapter written by Ruben Gaztembide-Fernandez, and Gillian Parekh a couple years back. And, you know, when it comes to leading through and against invisibility, we absolutely, just like Muna was talking about when it comes to that notion of decolonizing, right? What is it that we're saying, do we mean it, what are the ways in which it operationalizes or not, right like that comment about talking about decolonization and holding conferences in Hawaii. I mean, that's just such a big statement in itself of the whole institution's lack of caring, lack of understanding or that hypocrisy just to borrow again from Muna's words. And I think that, you know, I think each and every one of us individually and collectively can speak to different experiences where we know and we can say that we've gone through schooling as a violent neoliberal system in itself. We talk a lot about improvement through numbers, but at what cost, right? Like the EQAO for example, the OSSLT. A lot of leadership positions even are dangling like a carrot, like help me get my school to this level and you will be promoted X and Y. I mean, data is super important, but what comes, what comes with that data, right? In what ways are we being complicit in the very practices that we seek to get rid of, to abolish? So it becomes this double edge sort of hypocritical sword in which we're seeing that we're trying to improve, but we're just doing the same colonial old, just giving it a different face. But when it comes to leading you know, I do have to say, it's, for me personally it's not a comfortable process. It has been very scary at times where being subjected to different forms of violence, right? Whether we're talking about the microaggressions, I remember being an instructional leader of equity and entering a school with another colleague of mine and people would turn to us as people of colour be like, oh, well, you must be the equity police. And it's like, you invited us here, right. It's just to check something off your list. A lot of people are saying the right things, they're checking the right things off their list, but again, nothing has been changing. And again, for me, like personally, when it comes to navigation it's been like a tenuous dance of sorts, right? Who do you trust? What do you do? What do you say? What do you record? And I think one thing that I've learned as a leader, particularly

female of colour is that even though we may have been or be in positions of leadership, we are surveilled as well in ways that are different, right? Like whether that's about our calendars being more closely scrutinized, I'm not speaking about all my superiors because I've had amazing mentors, but once in a while, you'll have one that will show up to check in on you, but just only you because they can't trust exactly what it is that you're going to say and who it is that you might make angry. And that leading through invisibility, just taking back from what Gen Ling was saying, right, we are in a space, okay. We are in a space where we are invisible when it's convenient, but then we become hypervisible sometimes in a way that can sometimes push us to the side and make our work a whole lot difficult. I'll end that by saying that idea of people of colour in leadership positions being seen as a threat. And oftentimes that's because we are speaking back to that white supremacist system, we are refusing to conform and we're finding other people and making our circle larger so that we can get out of that.

Vidya Shah (00:59:07):

Thank you so much, Cristina. I love that you name at the end here, this idea that so many of us who have been invisibilized in these systems are intentionally choosing to make visible the ways in which we have experienced the hands of racism, white supremacy, other forms of oppression and speaking back and resisting to that. I think it's such an important acknowledgement of part of the labour, but also part of the freedom that is so encapsulated in this work. Thank you so much for sharing that. Rizwana, we'd love to hear your thoughts on this question.

Rizwana Kaderdina (00:59:44):

You know, I was thinking about the pieces around what is normative and normative practice and what is taken for granted or assumed to be normal or normative. I was thinking about the navigation pieces picking up on what Cristina talked about and the thinking around individualism and competitiveness in this work and how surprising it is for people when they realize that many of us have these sort of underground collectives. There are relationships that we build as a result of being invisibilized because again, that is how we have to navigate. And if we build those collectives and they have to be hidden, then they have to be hidden, although it would be so much nicer if we could just work in collective openly. I was also thinking about you know, in terms of the assumptions that are made, going back to your point, Vidya, about how power is also invisibilized. One of the things that has really been sitting with me over the last few, the last couple of months is the concept of social capital and cultural capital and how invisible those are in navigating space and navigating and trying to get access. And being able to have success as much as possible when the spaces that you're in are set up for you to have to engage in that double consciousness or code switch in order to be able to be successful. And that multiple levels of work that Gen Ling was speaking to those aspects of capital become really important. And I think that there are often assumptions made about what different types of cultural capital folk come into spaces with. If your cultural capital doesn't line up with what is dominant, then there are assumptions that you don't understand how things work, but really things have been designed to work so that they are only understood in a very narrow, particular way. So when I think about challenging normative practice, that is some of what comes to mind for me. I also think about, you know, we're able to talk about marginalized groups of people. I don't know that we're yet at a point where we're talking about marginalities that exist within marginalities and what happens as we try to work together in those and how we might have to challenge ourselves as well in thinking about how might I be invisibilizing someone else, right? What erasures might I be committing? And knowing that even in the naming of that, to do it publicly, then plays into a narrative of, okay, well, see you do it too, right? This isn't about white supremacy. Well, let's think about that. And then I think the final thing that I would just want to bring up is and so when I think about that reality of feeling that I would rather be invisible than

demonized, I think about what impact that has had on my own sense of safety and unsafety in being in different spaces. And I think about what that might mean for students and for others as well, right? And I think about the choices that we have to make sometimes or feel that we have to make that are imposed upon us, the degree to which this demonization is normalized. So that folks don't even necessarily realize they're enacting in my case, Islamophobia, you know, when it's occurring and in these leadership spaces. Sometimes the choices are hard and sometimes they're untenable. I think it's important for folks to be aware of that and to be aware that we're not just talking about representation, we're not just talking about being present. We're talking about ensuring that there is understanding of histories and lived realities that walk into rooms with people that have been imposed upon us. I didn't choose to carry this demonization with me, but it follows me wherever I go. And so I think it's just another one of those nuances that we need to pay attention to as we engage in this thinking.

Vidya Shah (01:04:27):

Thank you for sharing those pieces, this notion of underground collectives, just makes me think about how we live in this world that's extremely individual and all of this competition and wanting to hide and wanting to put someone down so we could be up. And all this nonsense comes from this individualistic, hyper-individualistic sense of the world where we don't see ourselves as extensions of the other, that we see ourselves as completely separate from one another, and which is the breeding ground for competition, which is the breeding ground for all these sorts of forms of harm against one another. I just wanna thank you for naming that and holding that up. Folx, what an amazing conversation. This is fire after fire, after fire. It's so beautiful and as we come to a close here, I'd love to hear just a couple of thoughts from each of you, as we think about the possibilities of leading through invisibility. What are the possibilities that emerge here, and what do you hope that listeners will take away from this conversation? We'll just have each person share sort of their final thoughts here. Gen Ling, we'll start with you.

Gen Ling Chang (01:05:42):

I think one of the most important things I learned and using a term that Gholdy Muhammad uses, criticality. I think to unlearn racism, to unlearn internalized racism, I learn it's essential for me to read the world and the text and images within the world. To read the world, to identify the injustices that lies between lines of silence, lines of unspoken, but actually those silence and unspoken lines reaches infrastructures of power and oppression. For example, they create fear. They talk about trust, but the other side of the coin of trust is fear. Fear can be intentionally created by delegitimizing an individual or a community, and then labeling them as a threat, especially threat to other people's safety. So one class example is Islamophobia after 9/11. People begin to see a free Muslim is a terrorist. Terrorism is associated with Muslim. That other ring of creating and delegitimizing an entire group is extreme, and we need to have the criticality among leaders and our young people to read the world and detect them. I think that is very central to education and to our own self education and in leadership education and then name it and call it up. And then, when it's exercised on an individual, take the case of somebody speaking about the Palestinian issue and that is equated to being anti-Semitism. That is delegitimizing by using, turning the individual into a threat. That is a worst form of othering because it is the polarization of entire community and organization. And that poor individual is caught there as others watch on and they're fearful and they become silenced. And then we move into what Rizwana called, underground collectives and underground affinities. We should not have underground collectives if this is truly Canada. Underground collectives is an indicator, is consequence of invisibilizing, is a consequence of racialization, is a consequence of politics of hate.

Vidya Shah (01:08:45):

Thank you for naming that as much as I love my underground collectives, it absolutely is an expression of what happens when we are made to be invisible. Thank you for naming that, thank you so much. Rizwana, we'd love to hear your final words.

Rizwana Kaderdina (01:09:00):

I have to pick up on some of the points that Gen Ling made cause they were just so powerful, and speaking to the Muslim identity in particular at this time, right. We're speaking here about visibility and invisibility and Vidya, earlier in the introduction you spoke about hypervisibility. The reality is that for some communities being visible isn't enough because the ways in which we have been made visible has been problematic. And I remember a time when I felt like well, I wish we could be invisible again, right? Because I would much rather, and I'll be very honest here personally and speaking only for myself, I would much rather be invisible than be demonized. And so when I think about that reality of feeling that I would rather be invisible than demonized, I think about what impact that has had on my own sense of safety and unsafety in being in different spaces. I think about what that might mean for students and for others as well, right? I think about the choices that we have to make sometimes or feel that we have to make that are imposed upon us, the degree to which this demonization is normalized, so that folks don't even necessarily realize they're enacting, in my case, Islamophobia, when it's occurring and in these leadership spaces. Sometimes the choices are hard and sometimes they're untenable. And I think it's important for folks to be aware of that and to be aware that we're not just talking about representation, we're not just talking about being present. We're talking about ensuring that there is understanding of histories and lived realities that walk into rooms with people that have been imposed upon us. I didn't choose to carry this demonization with me, but it follows me wherever I go. And I think it's just another one of those nuances that we need to pay attention to as we engage in this thinking.

Vidya Shah (01:11:16):

So beautiful Rizwana, thank you, thank you so much for sharing that. Muna, we'd love to hear your final thoughts on this question.

Muna Saleh (01:11:23):

Thank you so much, and my goodness, Gen Ling, Cristina, Rizwana, I just wanna say this was phenomenal. Harpreet, of course, Jocelyn, Vidya, thank you. I don't have very much to add, to be honest, I think Gen Ling and Rizwana have really brought so much power and beauty to this last part. I think for me, I'm gonna end with a question I always just pose to my pre-service teacher candidate students to really think about. I draw upon a lot of the time Dr. Dwayne Donald's work of we need a new story to guide us. This idea that he draws on Thomas King's notion of how the truth about stories is that that's all we are. What are the stories we're living? What are the stories that have been planted in us that we might need to weed out or maybe alternatively, we can really nurture and help to grow? What new stories might we wanna plant? And I really challenge anybody who's listening, specifically education, those who have power and educational institutions, what are the stories you're living that really think about the racist, capitalist, heteronormative systems that education is very much part of. What are the stories that you're living and how can we live differently in the world? What different stories, what stories that are more sustaining stories might we be able to live?

Vidya Shah (01:12:57):

Just love that Muna, let's restore ourselves. Hmm. Love that, love that. And Cristina, final thoughts on this question.

Cristina Guerrero (01:13:06):

Thank you so much everyone. I'm in complete and absolute awe, so much to think about on a personal level, definitely take away for me. I'll begin with hopes and dreams for a more just future, hopes and dreams for love, like true love, love of one's self, love of each other. And I mean that on such deep levels from a humanistic level. We're not talking about the social media likes and hearts, although those are nice too, but really taking that deep opportunity to ask ourselves and each other, what is it that I can do for you and for myself today, tomorrow, next week? You know, and also that idea of our own self-determination as communities. We have become visible and oftentimes that visibility was not on our own terms. We've been made visible for whatever way that it is that other people have read us. And it is time for us to take that back and determine in our own words and on our own terms what that means. And we get to move forward and create our own futures together like that. As a final thought, a suggestion to everyone who's listening today, tomorrow, whenever that might be is to really, going back to Muna, your ideas about restoring and the stories that we are, and that we tell, there's such a deep truth to that. And when we're telling our stories, it's important to also think about what stories are we telling, how safe do we feel to tell particular stories, are the conditions being made so that we can tell our truths and be listened to? I think only from there when people take our stories seriously is when things will begin to change, we'll move away from a tokenistic checkmark. And from there we can engage with that process, Vidya, you said it as well, that process of restoring.

Vidya Shah (01:15:28):

Cristina, thank you so much. Thank you to all of you for this really beautiful discussion. I wanted to come back and invite Harpreet to share some final thoughts that he has. He's been listening to all of us in conversation, and Harpreet, I'd love to hear your final takeaways from today's conversation.

Harpreet Ghuman (01:15:49):

Thank you so much Vidya and everybody, and as Cristina was just sharing. I'm sure everybody listening in myself included, just in absolute awe of the profound stories that were told this evening by all of you. And there's so many gems and beautiful moments and stories that I've heard. I wish I could capture all of them, but I just wanna highlight something that each of you shared that really stuck with me. I'll start with Cristina, just asking us the question, who is the leader and what do those just futures of solidarity look like? How are people and leaders of colour, how do they pose a threat to systems of white supremacy and specifically in the education system? I wanna thank Muna for introducing a really inspiring concept around intersectional transmission of knowledge and wisdom, and honouring the stories of our ancestors, generation past and also how the education systems that many of us serve in reproduce the inequities that continue to exist and the urgency of the work that we all need to do to center those who are feeling perhaps invisible or unheard. I wanna speak to a couple of comments by Rizwana around us being typecast. She spoke about what that's like when you walk into a space and being typecast without a title, and how does the response of those we are interacting with change when they see the title, do they start to see us more? Do we matter more? She also spoke about the capital that we carry, that we know all of our students bring into classrooms. Does that have currency? What currency does that have to those leading them. Gen Ling, brought lots of fire and shared some really amazing questions and provocations around some of the painful silencing that she experienced herself but also reminding all of us that she sees herself as visible. She is visible. It is others who choose to perhaps not see that brilliance, that intellect that she and others bring into this space. She also

cautioned us, many of us who could be people of colour, who occupy spaces of leadership or spaces of diversity, and what is the harm caused, how do we perpetuate the harm when we remain silent? I wanted to talk about this notion of our collective solidarity, our racial solidarity, and many other intersections of our identities. In our solidarity with one another, how do we fight? How do we push back the massive coordinated efforts to delegitimize or silence when those on the margins make even a slight shift to the center or even the silencing of a classroom conversation. And to end, I just wanna share a few words around, what are the circles of trust? What are the affinity spaces for Muna when she brings her authentic self to the space? What does that look like for Cristina? When she centers who she is and what does that mean to students and all those they lead seeing them? What is the impact of Rizwana and Gen Ling being their full, authentic self, bringing who they are to the space, what is the impact on those they lead? I will close with a brief passage from a piece that I had written a while ago called, "When You See Me" that goes: And now I'm found, and we reclaim more than identity, more than a name. May those listening this evening take a new learning perhaps and further continued commitment to centering voices of students, identities, groups, communities not often seen, heard or ever acknowledged. We hope that from hearing such a panel this evening inspires us all to not only do this important work, but to hold one another accountable for doing so. We are all connected in this work. This is for students sitting somewhere in a classroom and their family. When we do so their humanity is further honoured and recognized. And to students everywhere, may you see yourself always.

Vidya Shah (01:20:20):

So powerful, Harpreet, thank you so much. Thank you for summarizing our conversation. Thank you for sharing from your own writing and songwriting. And thank you to all of you for showing up today, for allowing us this space to show up in our fullness, to inviting us into your own stories, your own thinking, your own aspirations for what education can be, for the kinds of communities that we can create. A deep bow of gratitude to all of you, for all of you, for the tremendous work that you're doing. And to say that we see you and we love you, and we are cheering you on. To all of our listeners, we wanna thank you so much for hearing us, for hearing yourself as you hear us, inviting you to think about what's being undone in you, as you hear these podcasts. I think that's been one of my greatest gifts moderating these podcasts is that I feel like I'm continuously being undone. Truly our hope is that we can create a world that can mirror back to us who we are and who we wanna be and all of our glory and all of our humanity in all of our messiness. Thank you for listening. This is another episode of the UnLeading podcast. We're so grateful you've joined us. Much love.