Understanding Race and Educational Leadership in Higher Education: Exploring the Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) Experience

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Abstract

The dearth of representation regarding Black and Ethnic Minorities (BME) in senior educational leadership roles within higher education has become a salient issue as egalitarian notions associated with equality and diversity continue to be contradicted by university institutions despite pressure towards greater diversification. Educational leadership in higher education, particularly when aligned to the primacy of race remains oblivious to some of the organizational barriers encountered by BME academics attempting to plot a career trajectory towards senior leadership. The diversification of senior leaders within the Academy has increasingly become an issue that while prevalent has stagnated due to the lack of visible BME senior leaders and penetrative change to address the disparity regarding the recruitment and promotion of more BME academics to leadership hierarchies. This paper will draw on a collective biography methodology which will utilize narratives from three BME academics in senior leadership positions within higher education, in an attempt to illuminate the challenges that saturate the Academy, with regards to leadership opportunities and career pathways for BME academics. The issues drawn upon identify synergies between constructions of race and leadership considering interplay between these two vehicles when situated within a higher education context.

Keywords: Leadership, Race, Diversification, Inclusion, Whiteness, Collective Biography

Introduction

Universities regarded as a site for embracing multi-culturalism and diversity are often conflicted with an enduring legacy of racial inequality (Alexander and Arday, 2015). While widening participation interventions have focused on student recruitment and better representation, inequalities continue persist for academic ethnic minority staff especially at leadership levels (ECU, 2015; Williams, 2013). As a site for social diversity, equity and inclusion universities have a responsibility to incorporate diversity into their organizational structures and cultures (Adserias et al., 2017; Williams, 2013). Presently, there is a growing narrative which recognizes the need for higher education to undergo transformational change in order to reflect shifting demographic trends, which adequately prepare students to undertake their place within society (Mirza, 2017; Shepherd, 2017). The types of leadership that students within higher education are exposed to have a significant bearing on their constructions of leadership, particularly when this is not reflective of the values embodying social and cultural pluralism and equity (Adams, 2017; Aguirre and Martinez, 2006; Chun and Evans, 2009; Williams, 2013).

There is significant under-representation of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)[1] staff at senior levels within the Academy (Ahmed, 2012; Bhopal and Brown, 2016; ECU, 2015; Tate and Bagguley, 2017). A subtle resistance within the sector has begun to emerge which recognizes the need for creating more equitable pathways to leadership tenures within higher education for BME academics (Arday, 2017; Bhopal and Jackson, 2013). The dearth in the trajectory of BME academics to senior levels is exacerbated when we consider that there are only three BME vice-chancellors and 20 UK-born BME deputy or pro vice-chancellors, compared with 530 white ones (Adams, 2017; Singh and Kwahli, 2015).

While university institutions concern themselves with developing tokenistic equality and diversity widening participation interventions, the spiral of inequality which pervades continues to disadvantage potential BME leaders, who continue to experience a paucity of leadership opportunities available to them (Mirza, 2017; Rollock, 2016). The chasm in contemporary research and literature which explores race and leadership within education is discernible, primarily due to the fragility and tensions which often arise when exploring and challenging racialized barriers towards educational leadership for BME individuals (Adams, 2017; Adserias et al., 2017; Alexander, 2017).

Race equality regarding higher education leadership remains problematic and continues to be the clearest indictment that inequitable cultures continue to endure whilst undermining progressive interventions which attempt to create an Academy that is more inclusive and reflective of a multi-cultural society (Mirza, 2017). The role of higher education institutions in promoting race equality in leadership reflects a very slow increase in the recruitment of BME staff to this level (Bhopal and Brown, 2016). While this increase points towards an improved attempt to diversify staff workforces within the Academy many BME staff within the sector remain concentrated at lower grades (ECU, 2015). Within the Academy there remains a paucity of targeted leadership and mentoring programmes for BME staff attempting to navigate a path in higher education leadership. The occupancy of leadership positions in education provides a suitable point of departure to consider the following; the relevance of social justice in advancing educational leadership for ethnic minorities and the implications for educational institutions in facilitating diverse and equitable leadership opportunities in education. This paper will utilize a collective biography of narratives from BME individuals in senior leadership positions within higher education in an attempt to illuminate some of the challenges that saturate higher education, with regards to leadership opportunities and mobilizing career pathways for BME individuals. The issues drawn upon identify synergies between constructions of race and leadership and the interplay between these two vehicles when situated within a higher education context. Considerations within this paper will also address the landscape and enduring legacy of racial inequality within the higher education sector. This paper will argue that universities must prioritize diversifying senior leadership hierarchies within the Academy. Concluding comments advocate that suitable

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[1] Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and Faculty of Colour are used interchangeably throughout this paper to refer individuals experiencing racism or discrimination in the Academy or society. This term is also used to describe individuals from Black, Asian, Middle-Eastern (Asia), Mixed-Heritage or Latin American ethnic backgrounds.

interventions and mentoring opportunities must be provided to better support BME academics wishing to pursue a leadership trajectory in higher education.

Capturing the notion of diversity and leadership

Diversity has become a ubiquitous term within education, often intertwined with inclusion. Frequently this term (inclusion) forms the basis for policy and practice discourses concerned with equity and equality (Law, 2017). Research undertaken by ECU (2015); HESA (2016) and Bhopal and Brown, (2016) based on a combination of survey, focus group and interview data, confirmed the under-representation of BME staff at senior levels, and revealed a number of concerns amongst staff. The findings indicated the subtle silencing of BME staff in cases of discrimination, complacency on equality issues, a minimalist approach to statutory duties (for example simply complying with prohibited conduct on unlawful discrimination), and evidence of nepotism and personal discretion in promotion and employment (Bhopal and Brown, 2016; ECU, 2015). The disruption of these inequitable cultures for BME staff can leave residual effects which affect self-esteem, and leave BME staff open to claims of hyper-sensitivity or trouble-making when challenging racism (Alexander and Arday; 2015; Shephard, 2017). Further, notions of diversity are undermined by a continuous lack of institutional awareness regarding potential difficulties faced by BME staff (Singh and Kwhali, 2015).

Recent research (Bhopal and Brown, 2016; Leadership Foundation, 2015; Mirza, 2017; Shephard, 2017) indicates that BME staff within higher education are less likely to be promoted to leadership positions than their white counterparts. While there have been some mechanisms to evaluate and identify patterns of BME leadership within the sector (HESA, 2016; ECU, 2015; Leadership Foundation, 2015), institutions continue to remain unaccountable for not actively diversifying senior leadership teams within universities (Pilkington, 2013). A significant factor that has facilitated the spiral of racial discrimination is unconscious bias (Jarboe, 2016; Rollock, 2016). Recent literature has espoused that unconscious biases persistently impact on aspects of racial inequality regarding the disparity in BME leadership appointments within higher education (Alexander and Arday, 2015; ECU, 2015; UCU, 2016). Jarboe (2016) states that while few individuals set out to consciously discriminate, we all obtain unconscious biases and preferences that influence our judgements and decision-making. This becomes a powerful indicator of potentially how senior stakeholders within universities appoint and promote candidates or colleagues that resemble tenets of their own cultural, gender, class or racial identity (Jarboe, 2016). The caveat to this particular narrative, is that often many of these circumstances are situated within a dominant White male leadership hierarchy which has traditionally marginalized ethnic minority groups and women (Jarboe, 2016; Leadership Foundation, 2015; Singh and Kwahli, 2015).

The landscape of inequality within the Academy has sought to ensure that BME academics continue to remain on the periphery of leadership opportunities. Often faculty of colour experience difficulties in trying to gain promotion to senior leadership roles, normally punctuated against a backdrop racism discrimination, racist micro-aggressive cultures and inequitable levels of hyper-surveillance which often result in a questioning of professional capabilities (Leathwood et al., 2009; ECU, 2011; Bhopal, 2014; Singh and

Kwahli, 2015). While recent narratives proffer a changing landscape, particularly in reference to the installation of Valarie Amos in 2015 as the first Black female Vice-Chancellor at the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS), this can be misleading and detracts from the wholesale and penetrative change required within the sector to ensure more opportunities are provided to ethnic minority academics to pursue leadership trajectories (Andrews, 2016; Shilliam, 2015).

Racism within the Academy thrives on inequitable cultures (Ahmed, 2012) which normally occur at the expense of ethnic minority academics. In many cases BME academics are often omitted from decision-making processes which influence the types of leaders that reside within the Academy (Mirza, 2017). Entrenched patterns of discrimination often thrive by omitting the voices of the subordinated or oppressed. Alexander (2017) suggests that often BME academics are not in a position to challenge such inequitable cultures or influence decision-making processes because much of their efforts are concentrated towards survival within the Academy. With the focus centered on survival for many BME academics, challenging discrimination becomes difficult due to the expected resistance and historical trivialization of racism within the Academy and society more generally (Avolio et al., 2009). Often the omission of BME academics from the decision-making process portrays a sector which has been inequitable, discriminatory and exclusionary (Law, 2017). This legacy has ensured that among typically White male decision-makers, preferences for a White male leadership hierarchy in higher education go unchallenged, consequently reinforcing a perpetual cycle of hegemony and discrimination which centralizes Whiteness (Ahmed, 2012; Leonardo, 2002; Mirza, 2018; Pilkington, 2011; Pilkington, 2013).

The dearth of ethnic minority leaders has also been compounded by opportunities to access. Bush et al., (2006) suggest that barriers for BME individuals attempting to navigate leadership opportunities are often impacted by the following; gender issues, the lack of BME role models within the sector and low self-esteem against societal and institutional expectations. Further, they assert that potentially early disadvantage with English as an additional language, female tokenism, differing gender values and home expectations impact adversely on leadership career progress for ethnic minorities. Narratives concerning the dearth of BME leaders within the Academy have previously been aligned to 'modest professional ambitions' which sought to facilitate assumptions of limited competence and professional desire (Adserias et al., 2017; Tate and Bagguley, 2017). Adserias et al., (2017) conclude that the pervading discourse facilitates the rhetoric that BME leaders are deemed incapable to successfully lead, strategize and organize. The appetite by senior leaders in universities to dismantle a culture which marginalizes ethnic minorities and women from leadership hierarchies remains questionable. Within higher education there has been evidence (ECU, 2015; ECU, 2016; HESA, 2016) which suggests that higher education institutions have not particularly addressed issues regarding disproportionate levels of ethnic minorities in leadership capacities (Bhopal, 2014). In building strategies for increased diversification amongst staff populations and addressing BME student attainment, the paucity and omission of BME voices in leadership positions contradicts the notion of universities being a site for multi-culturalism and hyper-diversity (Ahmed, 2012; Alexander and Arday, 2015). Additionally, discriminatory and exclusionary cultures within university leadership hierarchies often

fail to acknowledge the importance and value of ethnically diverse leadership in universities (Bhopal and Brown, 2016; Walumbwa et al., 2008). This becomes even more pertinent when considering the plethora of issues that affect and disadvantage BME individuals in higher education (Smith, 2012).

Understanding the landscape of racism in higher education

The centrality of racism within higher education is enduring. The notion of meritocracy becomes fallacy as we continue to observe a culture of ethnic minorities being systematically marginalized within higher education despite being professionally capable (Ashe and Nazroo, 2016). Traditionally, Bhopal (2014) explains that the direction of a university is navigated by senior leadership teams who obtain decision-making powers that often dictate the direction an institution may want to go in and the issues they choose to priorities as a matter of urgency. In this regard, university institutions have failed to acknowledge and embrace the notion that universities must be reflective of a multi-cultural society and this must be mirrored in academic staff appointments and student populations (Singh and Kwahli, 2015). The lack of diversification in leadership teams impacts adversely on wider ranging issues regarding providing culturally diverse curricula which does not resemble dominant Eurocentric canons; developing mentoring interventions which specifically support the professional development of ethnic minority staff; providing interventions to reduce the BME attainment gap and advocating on behalf of the BME student experience at universities (Arday and Mirza, 2018; Bhopal and Brown, 2016; Leadership Foundation, 2015). There is a contradiction which emerges when dominant discourses and commentaries begin to eulogize about universities being a site for equity and social mobility (Ahmed, 2012; Alexander, 2017). The existing and normative inequality which presently transpires within academia continually undermines egalitarian ideals associated with equality, equity and diversity (Shephard, 2017). Such inequalities are reinforced by patriarchal and hierarchical structures which perpetuate the marginalization of ethnic minority participation within the sector (Arday, 2017; Shilliam, 2015). For individuals from ethnic minorities this is often exacerbated by senior leaders and policy-makers that have minimal or no understanding of their racialized plights or experiences (Rollock, 2016; UCU, 2016).

The issues concerning the relative absence of BME individuals in influential positions within the Academy, alongside the direct and indirect discrimination that both BME students and staff encounter are problematic. Within higher education this becomes more concerning when reviewing participation trends regarding BME staff populations within the UK. Data from the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) Statistical Report (2013; 2015); and the HESA Staff in Higher Education Ethnicity Report (2016) continue to reveal a dearth of representation, diversification and visibility, culminating in reduced opportunities for career progression, particularly for BME individuals wishing to pursue a career within academia. Research (Bhopal and Brown, 2016; ECU, 2015; ECU, 2016; HESA, 2016; Shilliam, 2015) suggests that disparities and under-representations exist when it comes to the relative seniority of Black academics in comparison to other ethnicities. When drawing comparisons between UK-national and non-national academics, Shilliam (2015) explains that patterns emerge which indicate that in 2015; 92.39% of professors (15905) in the UK were

white, with only 0.49% (85) professors being Black (HESA, 2016; ECU, 2015). In spite of these disparities many institutions have attempted to develop institutional policy statements, broadly conceived as 'diversity agendas', which aim to signal a commitment towards organizing targeted diversity-related strategies (Anderson, 2008; Iverson 2007, 2008; Kezar and Eckel, 2008; Williams 2013). However, these 'agendas' are not penetrative and at best could be regarded as tokenistic. Adserias et al., (2017) suggest that in attempting to change the landscape of inequality, universities have implemented diversity agendas which aim to advance recommendations which profess a commitment to equal access and inclusivity. However, the disparities regarding BME participation within the Academy speak towards a different rhetoric. Ahmed (2012) explains that universities often contradict their own equality practices resulting in a disconnect between actions and words. This disconnect arises from senior leaders within universities rarely being held accountable for ensuring that these agendas cultivate institutional change which destabilises racist cultures (Anderson, 2008; Iverson, 2008; Williams, 2013).

United Kingdom (UK) Government approaches (Race Relations Act, 1976; The Equality Act, 2010) towards addressing the imbalance of BME career progression within the sector and wider society have often been submersed in tales of rhetoric rather than specific targeted, policy-driven action (Andrews, 2016). The challenging of existing orthodoxies then becomes more difficult with opportunities restricted for aspiring BME academics as they encounter persistent barriers which are firmly entrenched within higher education institutions supposedly tasked with reflecting an inclusive society (Mirza, 2017). Accessing the Academy for aspirational young BME individuals, in particular those who wish to pursue a career in academia becomes even more of a challenge when the current landscape is examined. An aspect which feeds into this landscape of inequality is the centrality and all-encompassing nature of Whiteness particularly as a tool for ensuring BME individuals remain subordinated and excluded from the Academy (Ansley, 1997; Gillborn, 2015; Leonardo, 2016). The normativity of this supremacy has meant that the Academy continues to remain the province of the White Middle classes, often compounded with recruitment processes which reinforce the cycle of discrimination and poor diversification (Alexander and Arday, 2015; ECU, 2015).

Historically, universities have always been tentative when engaging with issues concerning race and, in several cases, simply complacent (Law, 2017; Rollock, 2016). There is still little widespread awareness of the way in which institutional racism affects decisions and policies to disadvantage BME staff and students and while interventions such as the ECU's Race Equality Charter aim to address and challenge the status quo, the emphasis to implement penetrative change is still at the behest of university institution's themselves (Arday, 2017; Gillborn, 2015; Mirza, 2017). Destabilising inequality within the sector is difficult when we observe the absence of BME academics at senior levels when drawing comparisons with White UK-national academics in senior management roles. Shilliam (2015) states that 2.2% of White UK-national academics occupy such roles compared to 1.1% of Black UK-national academics. Further he safely asserts that female BME academics will not comprise a large percentage of this figure, with zero non-Black UK academics occupying such roles. The extreme paucity of Black academic presence at the top; both in terms of

professoriate and senior-management requires systemic transformational change with the central focus for this transformation targeting better diversification and representation particularly at senior levels (Bhopal and Brown, 2016; Shilliam, 2015). Organizational cultures which continue to omit and marginalize the contribution of BME academics, ultimately undermine their own diversity agendas towards challenging racial discrimination and creating inclusive spaces (Ahmed, 2012; Pilkington, 2011). Universities have a responsibility to implement cultural and organizational changes which create inclusive spaces that embrace greater diversification and ethnic difference (UCU, 2016; Williams, 2013).

Methodology

Drawing on Davies and Gannon (2006) this paper utilises a collective biography to explore lived experiences of being a BME senior leader within higher education. For the purpose of the study, a purposeful sample (Patton, 1990) was selected due to dearth of BME senior leaders within the sector to select from that were willing to discuss their experiences. The narratives provided involved each these BME leaders reflecting on and writing about their experiences of negating racism within the Academy. Significantly, this focus group proved to be a cathartic process for the participants who came from three different higher education institutions based within the UK. In providing their experiences of racism within higher education, they reveal their career trajectories and the obstacles they have faced and overcome against a backdrop of exclusion, marginalisation, discrimination and institutional racism. The commonality in their experiences speak to feelings of isolation and vulnerability within their leadership positions where they have always felt under surveillance and continuously undermined by colleagues. Davies and Gannon (2006) recognise that through intense and focused gazes we are able to make meaning of our particular lived experiences in attempting to understand why particular occurrences arise.

In adopting such a reciprocal approach, there was a process of equity which occurred in having three BME senior leaders who could relate to one another's personal experiences of navigating leadership in the Academy. So while drawing on these different biographies and experiences, one of the central aims was to derive commonalities in the narratives illuminated which speak towards the organizational cultures that facilitate racism within higher education and how this has affected them professionally during their careers as senior leaders. Another advantage of collective biography for this particular study is that the process is not reliant on extensive recruitment of research participants that may or may not be willing to talk candidly about their experiences of racism within the Academy for fear of further subordination and or racialization given the ways in which Whiteness works to silence and suppress discussions about racism (Rollock, 2016).

Similar to Davies and Gannon (2006) this process began with collective biographical reflections which charted the career trajectory of the BME senior leaders and their experiences of academia. The reflections were orientated around a series of questions which aimed to illicit three key areas; have you ever experienced racism within higher education? Have you been supported as a BME academic to pursue leadership opportunities within academia? Why does there continue to be a dearth of BME senior leaders within higher

education? Drawing on theoretical literature and commentaries which centre racism, inequality and Whiteness at the core of these discussions, this process aims to understand how racial inequality within higher education continues to disadvantage BME academics; challenge why their continues to remain a dearth of BME academics in university senior leadership hierarchies, and consider what intervention universities have actively implemented for those with ambitions to progress into university senior leadership.

Understanding leadership: The lived experience of BME leaders in the Academy

Contextually understanding the nuances of leadership through a racialized lens is impactful and provides a powerful insight into negating experiences of racism, particularly within higher education. The insights provided are counter-narratives to the dominant discourses which situate racist occurrences as subjective hyper-sensitivity, a narrative that often trivializes racism.

Navigating Racism in Higher Education

> 'It has been very difficult… you actually become paranoid because you realize that everything you do is unfairly scrutinized and your authority is constantly undermined by people around you. This becomes so disheartening particularly in a so-called position of leadership. Higher education is racist, and the type of racism it uses is so insidious and intelligent… the sophistication of racism in the sector now makes it harder to quantify to someone… in particular White people who can sometimes trivialize racism. It benefits White's for there to continue to be a lack of BME leaders within the sector'. (Female, Black, University Senior Leader).

> 'Racism is one of those things in higher education, it becomes an everyday part of life and I am ashamed to say that in my case… I just accept it, learn how to navigate it and focus on what I can change. As a person of colour, I should never admit or even concede this, but the sector just wears you down, so you try and figure out ways to work around racism and reach your desired destination. In my case, I wanted to be leader in higher education from the minute I became a Senior Lecturer because I just felt that I was observing a lot of inequity particularly in terms of how BME students were being treated and I wanted to positively affect change so these students could be better served'. (Male, Asian, University Senior Leader).

> 'In higher education, as a person of colour… disrupting a very White space you are already working in isolation, and at a disadvantage. You are made to feel inferior and this is compounded by staff and student perceptions of you. The majority of your existence is spent encountering racial micro-aggressions and figuring out diplomatic ways to respond to colleagues and to students in a way that does not jeopardize your professionalism. I think the key thing to take away in terms of navigating racism in the Academy is how fluid it is… and how the organizational structures work to marginalize BME academics and obstruct career pathways and trajectories in an attempt to ensure that the Academy and leadership hierarchies remain entirely White'. (Female, Black, University Senior Leader).

These reflections reveal some of the 'internalized problems' that BME university leaders face in dominant White spaces. These racialized experiences point towards recurrent themes for BME academics which often involve issues of hyper-surveillance and encountering racial-micro-aggressions (Sue, 2010; Rollock, 2016). Ahmed (2012) emphasizes that trivializations of racism within the sector have undermined discriminatory occurrences which are often not taken seriously by universities. The reflections provided point towards

managing racism, which seems to have become commonplace for many BME academics working within the sector (Alexander and Arday, 2015; Andrews, 2016). Attempts to circumnavigate organizational structures which obstruct BME academics from pursuing senior leadership pathways also become apparent from these reflections, particularly in the absence of bespoke leadership interventions within our institutions which actively support faculty of colour with aspirations to pursue a trajectory into senior university leadership (Bhopal and Brown, 2016). The narratives provided also speak to racism as something that has been enduring within the Academy. According to Andrews (2016) the dominance and reach of this discrimination has become a feature of the university landscape and resides within a dialogue of Whiteness which facilitates inequitable, organizational cultures. The feelings for normativity that pervade these reflections indicate the difficulties that emerge when attempting to disrupt these types of institutional structures. The narratives above also point towards anti-racist approaches being futile as we continue to observe continuing struggles for BME students and staff in terms of representation, belonging and attainment (Law, 2017). The narratives provided speak to a context which reaffirms that our university institutions are not post-race, and in fact to do so denies racism's contemporary existence whilst relegating the importance of advocating greater diversification within our university system (Rollock, 2016).

Being a BME Senior Leader in Higher Education

'It has been a difficult journey… to become a senior leader in higher education. I think the most difficult thing for me is there was not a blueprint, no rolemodels that look like you that you can turn to and say… how did you get there, what did you do…? That makes a massive difference when you are a minority and more specifically a person of colour'. I think the thing that becomes really apparent as a BME leader in higher education is the perception that you are not as capable or as competent as your White counterparts. You feel as though you are not supported by your White counterparts and in fact… they are doing everything in their power to undermine your leadership because essentially it disrupts their notion of leadership being the province of the White, male and middle-class. Fundamentally, there needs to be more targeted programmes for BME leaders'. (Female, Black, University Senior Leader).

'The job is hard, any leadership role is hard… but it is compounded as a person of colour, where those racialized nuances come into play… you automatically encounter a resistance towards your leadership which undermines everything that you do. You are also seen as inferior to your White counterparts and this plays itself out in meetings where you are sidelined from important discussions or decisions. In a way you are silenced, you have the position, with no power to enforce anything, I guess you could say it just another form of symbolic violence… Because of this of BME colleagues see what you go through and are completely put off pursuing leadership trajectories'. (Male, Asian, University Senior Leader).

'It is very hard to discuss my position as a BME senior leader in a university and not separate the issue of race and gender from my leadership position, because both are interchangeable and both affect me on a daily basis. I am in a position where I manage a large majority of White middle-class men who often remind me through subtle, racial-micro-aggressions that I am not their equal. They are often very quick to undermine me and my authority… often going above my head and discussing issues that should be discussed with me with my line managers who are Deputy Vice-Chancellors. This is exhausting… even more so, when it becomes your daily ritual. For me, I am done… they have won, they have succeeded in what they were attempting to do, because I plan to step down in the next 12 months and leave the Academy completely. I value my sanity and wellbeing. This is what everyday racism eventually does to you, it grinds BME people down'. (Female, Black, University Senior Leader).

Mirza (2018) suggests that often BME academics are required to suppress their suffering whilst remaining stoic and professional in the face of overt racial discrimination. BME academics are often faced with having to confront racism within the Academy and perhaps within a leadership position it becomes even more difficult to evade as the normative landscape of leadership is disrupted (Adserias et al., 2017; Pilkington, 2011). The reflections provided point to feelings of isolation and not being regarded in the same way as other White counterparts who undertake the same leadership roles. The reflections posited also provide a collective undertone which articulate encountering resistance towards their leadership. Alexander (2017) states that often White academics can feel threatened by the presence of a BME academic and particularly those that may have the authority to influence decision-making. These racialized experiences within leadership capacities also provide us with a point of departure which indicates that the role of leadership, particularly for a person of colour is difficult, as they will inevitably endure some form of racial micro-aggression which will undermine their professional competence and leadership capabilities (Smith, 2012; Sue, 2010; Rollock, 2012). The notion of feeling silenced despite the level of seniority occupied by these BME leaders proved to be an important reflection which ultimately conflates aspects of gender and race; and the effect that these continual experiences of racism have on mental health and well-being (Mirza, 2017). Bhopal (2014) explains that for many BME academics the strain of continuously navigating racism within the Academy often result in this particular group of individuals leaving the sector.

Perhaps significantly, these collective biographies reveal the ways in which racialized discourses impact BME senior leaders lives; feelings of remaining on the periphery and never completely feeling as though you have the full support of your White colleagues, which ultimately places many faculty of colour in a position of vulnerability, almost resulting in unfortunately making their position untenable (Bhopal and Brown, 2016). Subtle acts of subordination and resistance towards BME leadership within universities remind us of the centrality of whiteness and how it can be used to reinforce entitlement, power and privilege, whilst undermining notions of greater equity and diversification (Adams, 2017; Singh and Kwahli, 2015). In acknowledging the importance of the egalitarian ideals these reflections indicate that universities are yet to embrace the conception that diverse leadership hierarchies are essential in facilitating multi-cultural student populations.

Conclusion

Strategic agency as well as policy-driven intervention is required if BME academics are gain access and opportunity to senior leadership hierarchies (Shephard, 2017). University diversity agendas and interventions must endeavour to change organizational cultures which exclude BME academics from leadership hierarchies. Further commentaries and research regarding BME participation in HE must focus challenging cultures which continue to represent poor diversification and representation (Law, 2017). Support mechanisms for BME academics wishing to pursue leadership trajectories must be focused on developing mentoring interventions situated within formal and informal capacities at institutional and departmental levels. This type of mentoring must have targeted focus on equipping BME academics with

the necessary tools to navigate senior leadership. (Bhopal and Brown, 2016). For better representation to be achieved particularly at senior leadership levels, affirmative action is required which guarantees a set quota of BME applicants proceeding to shortlisting to ensure that applicants are being selected from a diverse applicant pool. For this process to be effective universities must ensure that BME academics are involved in selection and recruitment processes. It is essential for universities to actively disrupt cycles of unconscious bias that reinforce cloning and perpetuating unequal representation (Gronn and Lacey, 2006). Targeted programmes must provide BME applicants with access to relevant training which focuses on developing leadership capabilities, extending academic networks and engaging in communities of practice with other BME senior leaders within the Academy and beyond. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) within universities must endeavour to engage all senior university leaders and academic staff in compulsory equality and diversity training, with a focus on creating greater awareness of the issues that permeate inequitable cultures (Alexander and Arday, 2015; Bhopal and Brown, 2016; ECU, 2016).

Racism is unlikely to ever go way, due to its penetrative, divisive and persistence nature. However, as custodians of the Academy, the sector can do more to disrupt its dominant and insidious patterns by challenging racism and inequality where prevalent. It is important to acknowledge that these recommendations are not simple remedies to an epidemic that is enduring and widespread throughout society institutionally. Additionally, it is also pertinent to recognise that these recommendations do not deflect from the primary need for significant cultural and attitudinal shifts within higher education, regarding the need for greater diversification and inclusion of BME academics in decision-making processes at senior leadership level (Bhopal and Brown, 2016; Singh and Kwahli, 2015).

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Biography

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