School leadership and BME career prospects in England: the choice between being a group prototype or deviant head teacher

Abstract

The body of research on the career prospects of Black Minority Ethnic (BME) teachers cites racism as one of the reasons for BME underrepresentation in positions of school leadership in England. Understanding the nature of such discriminatory practices is needed in order to find solutions. It has also been reported that pioneer BME leaders are perceived as role models. Such a claim is mainly based on their appointment rather than their action or inaction in facilitating the career progression of other members of BME staff. To address these gaps, this study draws on electronic survey data of eight respondents out of ten, two of whom provided rich written and interview narratives. The data was analysed under the group-based identity formation framework (Abraham et al. 2008) to suggest that the underrepresentation of BME staff due to racism can be explained by head teachers' prototypicality of group/team values and their failure to deviate from these. That a BME senior leader acted in the same way highlights the following: the dominance of the role of head as a group prototype, the need to challenge deep-seated discrimination, and the view that increased representation needs to be matched with modified school-wide attitude.

Key words: diversity; ethnicity; racism; career progression, school leadership, prototypicality

Introduction

This article uses the social identity perspective on leadership (Abrams et al., 2008; Epitropaki et al., 2017; Fielding & Hogg, 1997; Reicher et al., 2005) to conceptualise the nature of racism as one of the barriers to the prospects of black minority ethnic (BME) staff aspiring to leadership positions in English schools. It begins with a discussion on the perceived contribution that BME leaders would (do) bring to school leadership practice and the barriers they encounter before framing the literature through a sample of published works on the career prospects of BME teachers (professionals) and school leaders in England in order to locate the theoretical contribution of this research. A social identity perspective is then introduced, in order to foreground future analysis of the nature of racism as a barrier faced by BME professionals. After describing the context of the two main participants and the

methodology for the study, the results of an initial survey of BME respondents' impressions of promotion into leadership positions are presented and analysed alongside detailed narratives from two participants.

It is important to note here that all the BME participants (n=8) are not senior leaders but their narratives of the actions of one white head teacher and the inaction of one BME assistant head teachers help to understand the nature of institutional racism against BME staff. The research question that prompted the recollection of the two detailed stories included here was: which experience sums up your chances (or lack of them) to achieve leadership positions as a BME teacher? The analysis of these experiences is followed by a discussion inspired by the theoretical framework that would have already been developed. The major themes ([BME] school leaders' *prototycality*, *false logical narratives* used to justify racism and *restocking* as a coping mechanism) to emerge from this discussion are further summarised as the author makes pertinent recommendations for research and practice in the final part of the article.

The literature on the leadership prospects of BME teaching staff
The case for including BME staff in leadership positions

The growing body of research on the career prospects of BME staff has reported that the BME population is underrepresented in positions of leadership both in non-educational (Singh, 2002) and educational (Bush et al., 2005; 2006; Earley et al., 2002; 2012; McNamara et al., 2009) institutions in England. This is happening despite a growing ethnic minority student population, especially in urban cities such as London, within the backdrop of increased shortage of head teachers (Coleman and Campbell-Stephens, 2010). Schools do not only need more head teachers, there is the realisation that such human capital needs to be well trained (Bush, 2009) and inclusive of the broadly diverse range of the population (Coleman, 2012; Parker, 2005) whose gendered, racial and cultural capital is essential in enhancing the improvement and effectiveness project of leading various institutions (Showunmi et al., 2015) including schools. The appointment of BME school leaders can also serve as role models for BME students and those aspiring to enter the profession as well as use personal experiences to challenge stereotypes (McNamara et al., 2009). For Noon

(2007: 871), the diversity argument, whether in business or schools, focusses more on the individual traits and ignores 'the collective organization of socially disadvantaged groups' that can be helped by focussing instead on the principle of equal opportunity which is a human right.

The barriers

Despite the above advantages, national reports from the English educational sector highlight discrimination against individuals on a variety of reasons including gender (Coleman, 2002; Moreau et al., 2005; Showunmi et al. 2015), religion (Shah and Shaikh, 2010), and sexual orientation (Lugg and Tooms, 2010). Internationally, comparative analyses of trends in English schools and those in countries such as South Africa (Bush and Moloi, 2007) and Jamaica (Miller, 2014) also note the recurrent issues of discrimination that stand in the way of BME staff promotion to positions of leadership in schools. On the question of race-related discrimination of BME staff, this has reportedly been accentuated by additional factors of religion and gender, especially for women (Coleman and Campbell-Stephens, 2010) prompting research that looks at these issues holistically through intersectionality framework, for example, rather than adopt an essentialist approach (Showunmi et al., 2015). Bush et al. (2006) also evoke cases of BME staff being overlooked for promotion; lack of confidence; management, parental and community attitudes as contributing their underrepresentation. This is a non-exhaustive list of barriers creating an 'invisible glass-ceiling' (Pells, 2017) that has arguably prompted national schemes such as the '*Leadership Equality and Diversity Fund'* (NCTL, 2016) and individually-engineered enabling initiatives some of which appear in the sample of literatures discussed below.

Descriptive and explanatory literatures

The way of researching a topic plays a part in resolving some of the issues related to it, race/ethnicity-related barriers to school leadership in this case. More generally, diversity has been researched mainly from either an essentialist (focussing on single issues such as race/ethnicity, gender, religion…) or intersectionality approaches and more remains to be done theoretically and methodologically (Lumby and Coleman, 2010). The literature on leadership and diversity published in this journal is said to have covered two main areas of interest: accessing and practice of educational leadership (Coleman, 2012). With regard to research on BME staff progression to

leadership positions in English schools, the literature can arguably be grouped into two non-exclusive categories of knowledge: more descriptive (Bush et al., 2005, 2006; McNamara et al., 2009; Coleman and Campbell-Stephens, 2010) and more explanatory (Miller, 2016; Showunmi et al. 2015) bodies of qualitative research on the BME.

The descriptive framing the BME

This sample of literature (Bush et al., 2005, 2006; McNamara et al., 2009; Coleman and Campbell-Stephens, 2010) gives us what can be summed up by a word appearing in Bush et al.'s (2006) title: 'a portrait' which does more than highlight and reconfirm, as do Earley et al. (2002: 41; 2012: 41), the fact that BME professionals are underrepresented in school leadership positions in England. This sample lays the foundation by providing a descriptive diagnosis that, among other factors, identifies racism as one of the barriers to positions of leadership for BME staff in English schools. The studies abstract themes from research participants' narratives to develop an enriched description of the exclusion of BME staff. With the exception of Coleman and Campbell-Stephens (2010) whose career progress framework leads to uncovering pertinent diagnostic issues from preparation to later career stages of BME senior leaders, there is a common feature regarding the non-application of a specific theoretical framework on collected data. Covert, overt, and institutional racism, for example, are recurrent descriptions of the struggles faced by the BME staff.

The sample: The email-based responses that constituted Bush et al.'s (2005) study established racism as one of the constraints and also that diversity courses aimed at correcting the problem were deemed either patronising or inappropriate. Through a subsequent publication based on insights from a systematic literature review and a survey of sixty-four BME leaders, senior managers, middle leaders and other leadership posts leading to case study interviews, Bush et al. (2006) still identified continued barriers for BME to leadership positions in English schools. Although 'self-confidence, resilience, perseverance and drawing on the support of family and friends' (Bush et al., 2006, p.299) have helped some BME in leadership positions to overcome marginalisation and indirect racism (Powney et al., 2003), exclusion in informal networks (Harris et al., 2003), isolation (Davison, 1997), the wider

picture is one of under-representation that makes the success stories seem like the exception to the norm.

McNamara et al.'s (2009) research was commissioned by the National Association for Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) and the National College for Schools Leadership (NCSL) and Children's Services. It relied on survey data from 98 respondents who had recently completed a leadership programme with the NCSL and 458 members of the NASUWT, all of whom figured in the data-base of these research funders. Among other findings, the research noted the peripheral role of BME teachers in leadership positions, which is replicated not only in the paucity of research in this area but also in the invisibility of BME academics' voices in the literature focused on this topic. The majority of BME staff remained in the classroom mainly due to self-confidence, discrimination, family responsibilities, qualification, experience, ethnicity, age and institutional racism etc. As well as reversing the above barriers and turning them into enablers alongside access to CPD opportunities and leadership programmes, the authors also recommend further research to establish *the levels* of discrimination in schools. However, what is essential and what this present paper seeks to address is to understand not only *the levels* but also *the nature* of discrimination, in order to comprehend and find solutions to the 'the complex ways in which such institutionalised discrimination operates in militating against the career progression of BME teachers' (McNamara et al., 2009: 81).

Coleman and Campbell-Stephens' (2010) research employed in-depth interviews of 13 deputy and assistant head teachers two years after an 'Investing in Diversity' leadership course that the research participants had followed. The findings of this study reinforce earlier claims by Bush et al. (2006) and McNamara et al. (2009) with regard to entrenched institutional racial barriers that continue to hinder BME staff career progression. Despite the boost that the 'Investing in Diversity' course had, the individual BME leaders' agency to persevere, and the inspiring influence of those BME who were already heads, overt and covert racist incidents and prejudice still interfered with selection processes. Although some found it easy to enter into a (senior) position of leadership, which is not the case for all as some responses from this present study will show, the careers of respondents in Coleman and Campbell-Stephens' study reported the 'stalled' nature of their prospects thereafter.

Overall, BME staff's agency and structural changes/input are thought to be essential in overcoming their underrepresentation in leadership positions in schools. In terms of the levels of discrimination, the adjectival description 'institutional' has been used synonymously to 'widespread' racism as evidenced by Bush et al.'s (2005: 42) conclusion that 'these [meaning cases of racism] are sufficiently widespread to raise concerns about possible institutional racism'.

The explanatory framing of the BME

With the issue of racism identified and its levels described, the next sample of literature (Miller, 2016; Showunmi et al. 2015) more clearly takes an explanatory dimension through the use of theoretical frameworks. Here, structural and agentic enablers are questioned, explained and given theoretical underpinning. In short, what the explanatory body of literature arguably offers is the theorisation and/or explanation on how institutional racism against BME staff maintains itself as well as theoretically based notions that facilitate the inclusion and progression of BME staff.

The sample: Seeing race, ethnicity and other factors as confounded in individuals' identities, Showunmi et al.'s (2015) qualitative study, for example, analyses mixed ethnic sample of British women from a range of sectors including education. Through the lenses of intersectionality and inclusive leadership theories, the above authors highlight how exclusion of women, particularly of BME (women) staff that are the focus here, through notions of '(gender and ethnic) neutrality in leadership' (929). To disrupt that trend, they point to the fact that 'their [BME women in their study] leadership self-constructions were infused with ethnic and cultural references' (929) such as Ubuntu whose attributes of care, humanness, and connecting to others' inner self in a way that brings the genuine best out of them is not only rich but similar to constructs such as authentic leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). As well as stressing the importance for BME staff (women and men) to foreground their ethnicity/race, such foregrounding will not only disrupt institutional racism, it also has the potential to enhance school cultures.

Miller's (2016) study uses the lenses of whiteness and social identity theories to undertake a descriptive and auto-ethnographic analysis of interview data from seven BME academics and eight BME teachers. One of the claims emerging from this study is the concept of 'white sanction' which consists of three elements

(acknowledgement, endorsement and brokerage) needed for BME staff career progression. Despite the moral and human rights issues that can be raised against this practice, the individual BME research participants found it as a way of gaining some form of legitimacy and more enabling in terms of their career progression. I would also argue that the concept of 'white sanction' is not only a window of promotion opportunity for BME staff; it is also a selection process through which the 'widespread' institutional racism maintains itself as an ideology.

Like the above studies, this essentialist (concerned with single issue of race and ethnicity) research (Lumby and Coleman, 2010) that is concerned with how BME access (or not) leadership positions (Coleman, 22012) can be seen as contributing to this explanatory body of literature as it seeks to look at institutional racism not only in its horizontal dimension (how widespread it is across an institution) but also vertically (how it is maintained) through the lens of social identify theoretical framework.

Moving forward: The research question (see introduction and context/methodology sections) is framed to gather data that moves the discussion beyond *levels of* to *the nature* of racism that is undermining greater BME representation, and therefore maintaining institutional racism, in school leadership in England. As well as looking at *the nature* of discrimination, this paper also explores the reported influence of BME role models on other BME aspiring leaders. Much of this inspiration is framed from a distance. Little is known about what those few role models actually do (or not) to facilitate the access, integration, and career progression of other BME teachers. Since 'the habitus tends to adjust to new fields automatically…' (Chandler, 2013: 472), it is unclear if numerical increases of BME leaders represent significant changes in the nature of the barriers that they themselves would be expected to further eliminate once in leadership positions. The theoretical framework discussed hereafter is a helpful tool in conceptualising current practices around the topic of BME underrepresentation in leadership positions in English schools.

Social identity perspective as a theoretical framework for the study

This section explores the social identity perspective on leadership as a way of framing the theoretical assumptions around the continued claims that racism constitutes a barrier to the career prospects of BME aspiring leaders. The focus on leaders' identity is essential as it plays "a significant role in indicating 'who will lead' and 'who will

follow', as well as 'how leaders and followers will influence' and 'be influenced'" (Epitropaki et al., 2017: 104). Epitropaki et al. develop three main categories of the literature on identity formation: intrapersonal, interpersonal and group levels of analysis of identity. The first body of research is concerned with self-views of identity (within person), the second (interpersonal) theorises on the identity dynamics between persons and the third explores group-based identity formation.

With regard to the way the 'self' is conceptualised, the authors outline three corresponding levels: the personal (driven by self-interest), the relational (that emerges as a result of relational interactions with significant others) and the collective self (as the result of group membership). It is also possible to conceptualise the 'self' as a leader's response to either a constraining or enabling (objective or subjective) ontological space. Here, the agency of the 'self' can also take a three-dimensional nature: literal or personal (where the leader acts on the basis of personally accumulated religious, cultural, etc. constructs), the institutional or organisational (where the leader embodies organisational values and seeks to enforce them) and the comparative self (where the leader rises beyond the personal and organisational selves and seeks the best interest of various group members based on knowledge drawn from various sources) (Elonga Mboyo, 2017).

This paper draws from research on social identity of leaders framed as a group-based level of analysis, in order to understand school leaders' behaviours with regard to racism as a barrier to BME career prospects within specific schools or teams within schools. Group-based social identity theory argues that leaders embody the 'group's consensual or prototypical positions' (Abrams et al., 2008: 663). This position emerged as discomfort grew over the view that leaders have some attributes that set them apart from the rest of the group (Reicher et al., 2005), as more research began to demonstrate the effectiveness of leaders who are seen to embody group values (Abrams et al., 2008). However, when the group value is the reported institutional racism that is hindering the progress of BME teachers (Bush et al., 2005, 2006; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; McNamara et al., 2009), then a disruptive leaders' identity that challenges orthodoxy (Eacott, 2013) may be a preferred or desirable attribute of a leader. From a group level of analysis of social identity perspective, the disruptive self of a leader can emerge in so far as the prototypical leader's status affords him or her leverage to deviate from group norms and begin to

define other norms (Abrams et al., 2008 citing Fielding & Hogg, 1997). The conferral of the capability to deviate could be attributed to several factors, including formal position, expertise, information, and charisma, as well as unformalised approaches among the many roles that contemporary head teachers have come to assume (Turner, 2006).

Although widespread institutional racism has been cited as one of the reasons for the peripheral role of BME staff in school leadership positions in England, the above theoretical framework is crucial in that it highlights the particular role that heads (could) play in perpetuating or disrupting any discriminatory practices. The rest of this article begins the reporting of empirical processes on the role that head teachers and senior school leaders play in the career prospects of the BME staff.

Context and methodology

Like the participants, the researcher is a BME teacher and once taught in the same secondary school as some of the participants. A moment of 'togetherness' led to interest in one another's career progress. It was like opening a can of worms dominated by the two poignant experiences that are presented and discussed hereafter, highlighting the urgent need for BME teachers, leaders and the whole education system to engage in an honest and on-going dialogue followed by concrete actions. This is easier said than done; particularly for participants who may have to 'revisit distressing events' (Goodson & Sikes, 2001: 109), they would rather forget. Given the sensitivity of the data shared, the research project was conducted on strict confidentiality clause that would not remotely link participants to schools in question. With this assurance and given the fact that some experiences had taken place some years back and had come to shape participants' perceptions of normality, they did not hesitate to agree to make their experiences a subject of academic study.

From an opportunistic incident a much wider survey tool was developed that was sent to other BME professionals up and down the country. A questionnaire was emailed out, between January and March 2017, to Edmond, Natasha (the two participants whose rich stories are repeated here) and a convenience sample (Coleman, 2012) of BME staff that the author already knew and had either casual conversations with during meetings that had a different focus or had not heard from them in the last 5 years at least. The sample does not cover the full range of BME

categories. Out of the 10 people contacted 8 responded of whom 5 were male, 3 female; 5 Black African, 3 Asian; 4 class teachers and 4 heads of departments/faculties. With the exception of one teacher, who was in her second year of teaching, the others had at least 5 years experience in Science, English and Religious Education departments.

Beyond their brief survey responses that established the above characteristics of the respondents, those who had (or not) expressed an aspiration to leadership also reported on what they felt were the reasons for their promotion or denial of the opportunity to lead. Their selected responses appear under the following names: Sophie, Mercy, Pius, Damien, Paul, and Jason). Two other informants went further to provide rich accounts relating the difficulties they faced as BME staff. These accounts were in response to one of the key survey questions framed as follows: which experience sums up your chances (or lack of them) to leadership positions as a BME teacher? While Edmond (Pseudonym) wrote his response, Natasha (Pseudonym) preferred vocal expression through a face-to-face one-off semi-structured interview that lasted around fifty minutes, followed by informal chats to clarify certain aspects of her account.

Edmond is of Black African origin and has been living in England since the age of twenty-four, first as a student before embracing the teaching profession. He is now in his thirteenth year as a secondary school teacher and decided to share this memorable experience that happened to him almost a decade ago. He briefly held a Key Stage (KS) coordinating role, however, after the incident described below, Edmond put his ambition to progress further on hold to pursue a part-time postgraduate course while teaching. Edmond's experience is set in a secondary school, he had gone for a head of department position. His account describes his coming into contact with an all-white interviewing team.

Natasha is of Asian descent and has been living in England since the age of 1. She is an experienced secondary school teacher with over 10 years of service in different roles, as a KS coordinator and second in the department. Natasha's experience is set in a school that was going through a lot of changes, with high staff turnover following a poor inspection that placed it into special measures. In the wake of the inspection and with the possibility of closure, a culture of distrust and fear set in

across the school and particularly in her department. Despite what she believed to be her experience and quality as a practitioner, Natasha found herself caught up in departmental politics, she was denied permanent roles and ultimately driven out. Her accounts are particularly crucial as they highlight the active involvement, complicity and inaction of other BME senior staff who, in her eyes, could have done more but did not, for reasons that will become the centre of the discussion section of this article.

Findings: Pius, Damien, Paul, Sophie, Mercy, Jason, Edmond and Natasha

Competence before race and vice versa

From the gathered brief responses explaining promotion or lack of it, a mixed picture emerged as a defining theme of the respondents extracts: competence before race and vice versa. With regard to the ease with which respondents were promoted, 50% (n=4) said that the process was a positive one which they credited to their competence, as the following extracts show:

> I would say that my chances of promotion depend on the positions available at my school rather than on anything else. My position as acting head of department is due to my competence and experience. What the school sees that I can do and bring to the school. (Pius)

The above perception was also reinforced by another respondent who stated that:

> My credentials proved that I was the right person for the job. (Damien)

The narrative of having already contributed to the life of the school enabled this BME teacher to access a leadership position in his current school:

> It was because of my leadership qualities promoting certain key spiritual aspects and policies in the school; also excellent exam results for the classes I taught and the experience I gained in training new teachers through schools direct and Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes. (Paul-1)

Despite the above positivity, there was recognition of a certain degree of overlooking of those qualities:

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I have failed in the past to get the position of head of Religious Education but I was successful on my second attempt. Sometimes, people have not recognised my capabilities and talents. (Paul-2)

The above misrecognition is given depth by the other half of respondents who experienced difficulties in getting promoted, which they attributed to race-based discrimination, as the following extract shows:

BME teachers are often seen as inexperienced and best as classroom teachers. Teaching and learning responsibilities are often given to favour the others. I hardly play the race card and have always been favoured for roles as class teacher of science. The progression and taking on additional responsibilities is where most schools draw the line. (Sophie-1)

The drawing of the line on the grounds of race and ethnicity remains a general justification that needs to be understood further in terms of its nature. The stories from Edmond and Natasha hereafter help deepen the understanding of this phenomenon.

Story one - Edmond:

Embedded in the first part of Edmond's story are some extracts from Mercy, Jason and Sophie which, together, highlight themes such as 'the leadership spark' (expression of interest), 'inhibitors' (lack of experience and senior leadership being demanding), 'confidence boost' (being shortlisted), and 'coping mechanism' when opportunities do not materialise. The second part discusses the crux of the story where Edmond narrates the racist incident that resulted in him not being hired.

Leadership spark and inhibitors

Expression of interest: In the case of Edmond, it all seemed to begin with an expression of interest in a leadership post:

Three to four years into my teaching career in the North of England, the natural instinct was to look for opportunities for promotion at least within the department, like a KS coordinator, second in department and even a head of department. (Edmond-1)

The above excerpt may not be representative of all the BME population. For example, two other respondents in this study did not express an interest in leadership positions because of lack of 1) experience:

> I feel that because I only completed my NQT recently, I have not thought about promotions but I would hope that with hard work and experience, I would gain the promotion I want. (Mercy)

And because 2) senior leadership was demanding:

> I have not expressed interest in promotion due to my thinking that senior management leadership positions require a lot more work [than head of department role this respondent was already fulfilling] and I am not currently willing to sacrifice so much. (Jason)

That said, it is important to note the need for that initial trigger, which can be the result of various factors including a personal drive to lead. However, this is only the starting point of the process that depends on other factors along the way, as the next part(s) of Edmond's story demonstrate(s).

Confidence boost

Being shortlisted for interviews was felt as a preliminary seal of approval:

> None of those opportunities (see Edmond-1) were coming up in my school. So, I began to look elsewhere. I was invited for interviews in three different schools for a head of department post which was a boost in itself. (Edmond-2)

Despite stories of 'whitening' applications, where applicants alter their names to sound 'more white' and therefore acceptable, one can only hope that the selection of candidates for interview is on the merit of the initial application. An interview opportunity represents not only a chance for employment but also an endorsement for one's qualities, albeit on paper, so to speak.

Coping mechanism

Edmond developed an interest in doing further studies in the face of what practically seemed like a dead end pursuit of a promotion:

Unfortunately, none of the interviews (see Edmond-2) led to anything in the way of making that break, I mean being appointed. I resorted to doing further studies but one experience that will live with me is the following. (Edmond-3)

People can respond to the 'dead end' or 'stagnancy' in their careers in many ways: accept the underrepresentation as normal and carry on, speculate as to why it is the case or, in this case, compensate by doing something else meaningful like further studies. What is hard to obtain, however, is a first-hand account of the nature of racism that would have turned the 'dead end' into the beginning of a leadership career pathway. What is remarkable with Edmond's account of the interview process below is that it enables you to gain a rare insight into the internal racist wrangling that some could have chosen not to share that the interviewing white head reportedly gave as a justification for not appointing Edmond.

The selection process

I was one of the candidates that had turned up for the recruitment process. We each first had to teach a lesson that was observed by at least two of the three interview panellists (the head teacher himself, the outgoing head of department [female] and an existing member of the department [female]), then the interview itself but we also had informal chats with pupils during the tour of the school and staff at break and lunch times.

I gave it my all and had a pretty good feeling about the process but you never know if the other candidate had just edged you a little.

I was the last to be called in for feedback by the head himself. A decision was made not to appoint any of us. While there was a consensus with regard to the other two candidates, it wasn't so in my case. (Edmond-4)

The self-assessment of one's performance at interview can be perceived as highly subjective if one does not know the criteria involved, although there is a moral obligation to correct BME underrepresentation. The subjectivity may also apply to the suggestion that BME staff's selection conditions are made more difficult at interview.

I actually went interviewing today for a teaching and learning role today at a school around here and typical I didn't get it. White candidate was given higher ability class and myself was given a foundation tier with 20 pupils. Asian candidate was also given foundation group with 20 students. (Sophie-2)

However, these subjective self-reporting stories gain credence of objectivity when triangulated by the accounts of the selection team, as shown below although, they could still be contested as Edmond's personal recollection of events.

Excuses for denying a leadership position to a BME member of *staff*: Edmond paraphrases the interviewing head's feedback in the following words:

We didn't appoint anyone but as far as I'm concerned you [Edmond] should be the one signing an employment contract with us but my other two panellists were vehemently opposed to your appointment.

They gave me reasons like: Edmond's lesson had no objectives clearly stated, his interview was not great; but I said: I was part of the process, I saw lesson objectives and when I asked what wasn't strong about the interview, they could not tell me. (Edmond-5)

Although selection processes are not an exact science for anybody, whether BME or not, the judgement arrived at can be the result of personal baggage rather than the frailties of the BME candidates for promotion. Uncovering and challenging underlying motives may be courageous but strategising to correct these in a definitive way is complex within group identity dynamics, as the following story extracts show.

Naming the real problem

When I [the head] asked them [the other two panellists] 'what's wrong with our school that we cannot employ someone like Edmond?' They then thought I was accusing them of being racist and they stormed out of the interview room. I was then left alone to decide. (Edmond-6)

The head not only summoned the courage to name the real problem but can be admired for sharing the experience with Edmond where others would, under the cover

of 'professionalism', advance some other legitimate response. However, a legitimate reason had to be found to justify the final decision one way or the other.

Justifying the decision

> I, therefore, decided not to offer you the job because doing so was not in your best interest since it would be setting up to fail having to work with colleagues who didn't like you and if it's not in the best interest of our students since your failure would mean their failure. (Edmond-7)

The presumed best intentions that would have motivated the head to arrive at the above decision mask a much bigger question about the extent to which a head can deviate from team values. This point is elaborated on further at the discussion stage. However, if the above narrative fitted the profile of the struggles of BME professionals in the hands of others of a different race (white in this case), the following story from Natasha, which helps to put a BME senior leader's inaction on the spotlight [see Natasha-8], adds a new dimension.

Story two - Natasha: Natasha took or was given the opportunity as a classroom practitioner in a school that was going through a lot of changes following an inspection that saw it placed under special measures:

> I went there for interview because where I had been working someone said, there is an opportunity at school. So I went, I liked the school and said there is an opportunity here and I just got on with the job as normal. (Natasha-1)

Further promotion opportunities opened up while at the school. However, despite multiple attempts to secure a promotion, Natasha was not successful:

> I was a normal teacher, paid in normal pay scale. Then the post of KS4 and lead practitioner come up in the department but I didn't get anything. Yet we had 3 exam boards needing course-work, speaking, listening and moderating and she turned to me nobody else in the department had any experience of different exam boards and those who got the jobs would turn to me and say Natasha I don't know what I'm doing. Yeah because they couldn't do it, and I was already doing it, I was asked if I could do it but only on a temporary basis. (Natasha-2)

A culture of distrust, fear and bullying had set in in this school as a whole and the department in question in particular:

> This is a school that was going through quite a bit of change (special measures), there was a head there but there was this culture, feeling that people were being brought in because of her contacts and who she was…people were getting jobs because they knew her… the old staff felt threatened by the new staff because it was thought that they [new staff] were in to get them [old staff] out…(Natasha-3)

Within her department, Natasha reported practices of bullying and control that applied to all regardless of their backgrounds:

> December of that year [of appointment] our KS4 leader went, our lead practitioner left, our KS3 leader left and people in the department felt quite threatened by our head of department. It became apparent that the old staff felt threatened and rightly so. I saw bullying; I saw rudeness by newer staff to the old ones…And it always worried me. I said: oh my God, when is it going to happen to me? And I always thought, oh no; I will be fine! Just get on with it but some of the things I saw, the way people were being taken out, she was going in observing them, interrogating them, so it's a power thing and this is regardless of creed, colour/race. (Natasha-4)

Natasha is able to recognise some forms of colourless and creedless harsh exercise of power. She is also able to put her own subjectivity as the target and those of others as the source, as well as placing inactive observers of bullying in the frame and asking questions about her prospects as a BME member of staff and what BME senior leaders could do to remedy the situation. She was taken aback not only by the lack of opportunity, as evidenced by her failure to be promoted [see Natasha-2], but also that acts of bullying towards her were actively posed by a BME head of department:

> When I first started in this school, I thought you know what - I think I will be ok [with a head of department who was BME staff like me]. Don't get me wrong, no favours but at least someone who will highlight your strengths and show what you could do to advance. I look back and think, I have taught

for 10 years and I'm not even on Upper Pay Scale (UPS1) and this head of department could have put me on it. But she was threatening. (Natasha-5)

Even with the change of leadership within the department, Natasha's situation escalated on her return after a 2-month period of sick leave. The new head of department [white] demeaned her when she, for example, tried to contribute to a discussion during a departmental meeting:

> Although I had been off sick but we were talking about an area which I had managed. And as I tried to contribute I was told: 'Natasha, just shut up you don't know anything'. I was fuming, stood up, walked out and made sure I slammed the door to let them know how I felt. (Natasha-6)

There was also a degree of towards prospective BME candidates to the school:

> Then, I started hearing people talk negatively when they saw aspiring teachers visiting the school. They would things like: no not another one with a headscarf…The situation got so dire that towards the end of the year a section of the board in the departmental office was created for colleagues to write down what they wanted to get rid of/changing and one morning I saw my name there. (Natasha-7)

Having had enough, Natasha turned to the head [white] and senior leader/assistant head [BME], who was line-managing the department. She could not hide her disappointment over the response she received as the following extract shows:

> I took a picture of what had been written on board [see Natasha-7] and took it to the head [white] and his response was, 'I don't know what to do because I don't know who did it'. I turned to the assistant head (BME line manager) and said we can't go on like this, look this is what is happening to me. And all I got from him was 'why are you letting them win. Go out there and prove them wrong'. On the last day I sat with line manager and said: I had been through hell and back and I came back to work and I thought you'd look after me. I said to him, because the head of department had brought three other members of department with her, you didn't want her to lose otherwise she would have left with those three. So you were quite prepared to sacrifice

me. And all he said was: 'I hear you' and gave me a hug and asked me about how I feel about the new school where I was going… (Natasha-8)

Several points can be made here, ranging from how to promote collaborative culture within a department to conflict management skills of senior leaders. From a BME teacher's point of view, however, the above extract is significant in that the supposed role model and pioneer BME senior leader is not stepping up to 'rescue' another one in a position he/she might have been in in the past. The possible reasons for that failure are discussed in the next section.

Discussion

Considering that BME teachers, according to Sophie in this study, are favoured as classroom teachers only, crossing those red lines into positions of leadership is a counter narrative epitomised by the 50% (n=4) of respondents who, 'against all the odds', made it (Coleman, 2002). While applauding such achievement, the characterisation of these select few as 'exceptional people' (Bush et al., 2006) unintentionally legitimises unjust barriers erected against others, who could arguably be viewed as 'unexceptional' despite their untiring efforts. This could not only create new but also resuscitate old 'black bourgeoisie and black underclass' stratification (Mocombe et al., 2015: 123) and other possible hierarchies within the BME communities. Citing Lumby et al. (2007), Lumby and Morrison (2010: 8) also highlight certain behaviour patterns where 'individual leaders were attempting to minimise their gender or ethnicity by foregrounding other identities, a kind of *psychological misdirection*' that could be used to explain why some BME staff are deemed 'exceptional people' and, therefore, arguably stripping the practice of leadership off the much needed gendered, racial and cultural capital (Showunmi et al., 2015). Racism being an endemically systemic phenomenon in schools (McNamara et al., 2009) maintained through prototypal behaviours as discussed below, the BME stories of successful career progression should instead highlight 'exceptional schools/heads/senior leaders' and not the other way around.

While recognising the talent and perseverance of many BME members of staff, the focus here is on organisational dynamics of racism that hinder their progression to positions of leadership in schools. The shortage of candidates for headship in England

is ongoing (MacBeath, 2011). This is compounded by BME staff who, despite some successes, are still experiencing difficulty in securing middle management positions. One participant, who mentioned senior leadership and possibly headship, still cited workload as the main reason putting him off aspiring to further career progression. For those who managed to secure various middle leadership positions, these successes represent significant personal achievement made possible by candidates' leadership qualities, competence, credentials, good exam results and experience, as well as involvement in the professional development of other staff and promotion of school (spiritual) ethos.

It has been noted in other contexts that new legislation and perhaps positive discrimination has been introduced to increase opportunities for women, for example (Parsaloi and Steyn, 2013). Competence rather than positive discrimination was cited as the main reason for promotion of BME staff here which is consistent with previous studies by Bush et al. (2006) and Coleman and Campbell-Stephens (2010). Whatever the case may be, it can only serve to reinforce the personal motivation or expression of interest that the BME staff in this study have shown. Miller (2016) outlines three types of BME staff responses to challenges of promotion as consisting of *activism* (taking part in public debate through research, seminar and conference participation), *brokerage* (forming/joining professional networks following mentorship by another BME or white staff member) and *acquiescence* (giving up on career progression due to persistent incidents of denial of a promotion). Edmond may have temporarily given up on his ambition to progress (acquiescence) but his dream for promotion one day was still alive during/after the pursuit of his studies which is neither a form of activism nor brokerage in the sense that is used by Miller. I, therefore, want to propose *restocking* to capture (without the efficacy of) Edmond's initiative and many others that arguably define 'self-leaders [who] shape their own personal development over and drive and shape personal growth' (Ross, 2014: 316).

Although essential, these responses, amidst an 'inherent' belief that the field is not level for everyone - meaning, there will always be a race-based preference or that other extra hurdles may still be levelled against BME staff – require that school institutions make the recruitment process as fair as possible. Yet, Sophie [see Sophie-2] in this study has described a scenario in which the conditions of the process towards a leadership role she took part in were not the same as those for a white candidate

who was given a high ability class, while the BME candidates received low ability classes to teach. Edmond was also given a 'reasonable' excuse/justification for a racially motived decision that led to him not being hired. Using the theoretical framework offered in *Africa through Structuration Theory: Outline of the Methodology of Ubuntu* (Elonga Mboyo, 2016), BME staff are arguably caught up in an ontological space where they (as agents) are *fearful* of the impact of racism on their promotion prospects, while white-dominated institutions exercise *high scrutiny* (with a small h and s) through processes that look 'fair', with decisions for not employing BME staff to leadership positions that sound 'legitimate' but, in reality, they only mask racially motivated hindrances.

How is it possible that head teachers and senior leaders let racism take over in a manner that hinders the progression to leadership positions of BME staff? Edmond's story shows that head teachers may be aware of the undercurrent of racism in schools (or teams in schools) that stands in the way, especially at recruitment points. They try and challenge it in words but when faced with the scenario of mass protest(s), the head in this case was forced to adopt the majority's consensus and become a prototype (Abrams et al., 2008) of the interviewing panel's (not to say the school's) values, even if it felt wrong. When the moral obligation of a single case is weighed against a possible loss of one's standing in front of the racially or ethnically disempowering group (school, team, recruitment panel), the head teacher, in Edmond's case, decided to uphold the group's consensus that he tried to justify by giving a 'legitimate' reason, even though he did not agree with it. I would suggest here that, in this instance, a 'false logical narrative' is the façade of internal organisational prototypical positions on racism that some school leaders, especially the one referred to here, willingly or felt compelled to maintain/convey.

The pressure of prototypicality and the maintenance of organisational stability in exchange for personal survival is arguably so intense that even the BME senior leader's inaction, in the case of Natasha, represented a form of collusion. The BME head of department's actions [see Natasha-5] and senior leader's inaction and silence calls for a slight distinction between perceived BME role model leaders (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens 2010; Bush, 2006) with a hoped-for creation of an 'image of inclusive profession' (McNamara et al., 2009: 82) and the actual reality that is captured within prototypicality. The BME senior leader, in this case, wrongly or righty read

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Natasha's ongoing difficulties as further hurdles to be overcome through a show of agency - 'go out there and prove them wrong' [see Natasha-8] - perhaps reflecting his own trajectory and/or suggesting that Natasha still needed to do more to be 'exceptional'.

However, the agency of the head/senior teacher is also brought to the fore here. Both head/senior teachers in the cases of Edmond and Natasha assumed the collective self (Epitropaki et al., 2017) at the expense of the BME member of staff in question. As framed by Elonga Mboyo (2017), the head/senior teachers took on an organisational self, which requires the leader to embody organisational/group values. An ideal scenario for a BME member of staff seeking promotion would be for such leaders to adopt a comparative self that privileges the best interest of group members and, on merit, tries to draw from/bring in different sources/entities. However, even such an argument can be contested on the basis that deviating from group norms can have a negative impact on the students' learning, as the head in the case of Edmond argued [see Edmond-7].

Conclusion and implications

Using group-based level analysis this article sought to understand the nature of racism as a barrier to the career progression of BME staff to leadership positions in English schools. Through brief self-reporting survey responses of eight BME staff, two rich narrative stories of defining events in their career one of which provided a coherent process of prototipicality have led me to suggest that group/team values have an influence on head/senior teachers' decisions on hiring BME staff. The prototype head in a racially systemic organisation/school invokes other 'legitimate' reasons (the false logical narrative) to justify the non-appointment of BME staff to leadership positions. For personal survival and organisational stability reasons, the BME leader who is supposed to act as a role model is, by his/her inaction in this case, also caught up in the group prototype identity framework. More research is needed to account for the action and inaction of the rather few existing BME leaders in enabling or hindering the career progression of BME staff.

There are other implications that could be identified for practice and further research. As well as having a clear vision about the value principles (Northouse, 2013)

that would guide actions, deviation (Abrams et al. 2008; Fielding & Hogg, 1997) and/or subversion (Eacott, 2013) can be achieved by head teachers who take advantage of the different roles they can discreetly introduce to use and avoid racist obstructions. Wang (2016) argues that heads' 'functional roles, such as being a leader, counsellor, mediator, or advocate, exert more influence on principals' consequent performances than their formal positions'. For example, the situation in which one of the heads admission not knowing what to do [see Natasha-8], or the other's direct approach to challenging racism there and then, which put other interview panellists into a defensive mode and caused them to walk out of the interview room [see Edmond-6], could have been dealt with differently by assuming different functional roles during and after those moments to ensure that the BME candidate is not denied a leadership role on racial grounds.

Several factors, including BME staff's agency (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010), can enable their career progression. This study has also highlighted not only the need for experience, leadership qualities, and competence, but also continued expression of interest and self-belief in their ability to lead and *restocking* as an additional behaviour to Miller's (2016) *activism*, *brokerage* and *acquiescence*. Coleman & Campbell-Stephens (2010) also indicate the usefulness of BME-only diversity courses. However, as selection processes are delegated or become a collaborative exercise in the same way that teachers' surveillance has become 'distributed between heads, senior leaders, other teachers, pupils and even visitors' (Page, 2015: 1046), the emergence of more 'exceptional institutions/leaders' that would deviate from assuming the prototypical role of systemic racism calls for the design, delivery and research on the impact of 'diversity courses' for all. Such courses need to be integrated at teacher/headship-training and continuous in-service refreshment stages as:

> Essential elements required to be present and available within all generic,
> mainstream leadership development programmes to make them fit for all
> leaders (regardless of ethnicity, colour or race) working in a multicultural
> society, delivering a culturally diverse curriculum and leading a diverse
> workforce. (Ogunbawo, 2012: 173)

Such professional development is pertinent for all members of institutions/schools whose value shift is needed to rally around prospective exceptionally subversive

leaders and promote the leadership talents of underrepresented BME teachers. It would not have been possible to compile this report, as it is, without the indirect reporting of Edmond's narratives on what the white prototypical head teacher had said to him. This underscores the need for white majority teachers and leaders to be included in this sort of research and willing to candidly talk about their experiences which are crucial in explaining and disrupting racism and perhaps other forms of exclusion militating against BME progression to positions of leadership in schools.

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