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Do Black Employees’ Rights Matter? The Lived Experience of BAME Staff in UK Academic Libraries

Keywords: racism, ethnicity, discrimination, equality, diversity, librarianship

By Mohammed Ishaq and Asifa Maaria Hussain

Introduction

The theme of this book is timely given the emergence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the United States. Although originating in America, the movement has struck a chord with Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities in other Anglophone countries such as the United Kingdom. Whilst the BLM movement was initially a response to police brutality and racial violence against Black people, it has helped to generate a wider debate about the need to advance racial diversity and fight racial inequalities faced by BAME people. More pertinently in the context of this book, the movement has placed the experience of BAME employees under greater scrutiny and initiated difficult but necessary conversations in organisations and workplaces about what employers are doing or should be doing to advance the rights of BAME workers.

This chapter’s particular contribution is to focus on the academic library sector which has been under researched in relation to race equality. The authors argue that if successful decolonisation of libraries is to be achieved, then it is important to understand and reflect on the ‘lived’ experience of BAME staff currently working in academic and research libraries across the UK. The research reported in this chapter represents part of a wider project established to investigate aspects of developing the workforce and fostering diversity across the library sector (Ishaq and Hussain, 2019). It is hoped that the outcomes from the research will allow the leadership and management of academic libraries to take stock of where they are in relation to their race equality agenda and where they ought to be to ensure that they demonstrate their commitment to the effective decolonising of libraries.

Summarising BAME employees’ work experience in UK organisations: evidence from the literature

Literature documenting the work experience of BAME staff in the academic and non-academic library sectors is virtually non-existent. The closest is research conducted in the United States which centred on the issue of racial microaggression in academic libraries (Alabi, 2015) and the existence of racism and a culture of whiteness in US academic libraries (Brook, Ellenwood and Lazzaro (2015). In the context of the UK, there is a small-scale qualitative study exploring the low representation of BAME staff in the library and information science profession in London (Williams and Nicholas, 2009). However, there is a body of knowledge on the contemporary workplace experience of BAME employees in various sectors of the UK economy. Overall, these experiences reveal common issues and challenges encountered by Black workers. These are presented in this section of the chapter drawing on examples from a range of professions within the public sector as reported in academic literature and documentary sources.

Workplace racism and discrimination

Racism and racial discrimination in the form of physical and verbal abuse have been experienced by BAME staff in the workplace. In the NHS, BAME staff have reported instances
of bullying and discrimination from white colleagues as well as from service users (Chand, 2018). A similar picture emerges in the Metropolitan Police where BAME officers have complained of a toxic culture of bullying and harassment in the workplace (Warren, 2020). It appears that the use of inappropriate language, including racial microaggression and stereotypical views, pervade some of the UK’s biggest public sector organisations. What has been more concerning is that such behaviours have not been adequately addressed, with organisational approaches to tackling racial discrimination lacking effectiveness and willpower.

**BAME employees undervalued and on lower pay**

Evidence suggests that whilst there has been a narrowing of pay differentials between ethnic groups in recent years, marked differences still exist for some ethnic minority groups (EHRC, 2017). The EHRC study revealed that BAME workers earned less than their white counterparts. This was especially the experience among men of BAME origin. The low pay among BAME employees was attributed to a combination of factors such as discrimination and social disadvantage including horizontal segregation - the over representation of BAME people in specific low paid sectors and occupations. This included jobs that are insecure, involving zero-hours contracts. The consequences on BAME communities of this type of structural racism has been profound and according to the Living Wage Foundation (2020) has affected the physical and mental health of BAME individuals.

**Occupational segregation**

The vertical segregation of BAME workers with little opportunity for promotion and representation in leadership roles and horizontal segregation - overrepresentation in specific occupational sectors where pay is typically low and opportunities for career progression and promotion opportunities are limited - is a hallmark of the UK labour market (Kirton and Greene, 2016). Horizontal segregation on the lines of ethnicity and race in the UK reveals that many people from ethnic minority backgrounds are concentrated in lower status occupations in the hotel, restaurant and distribution industry (McIntrye, Mohdin and Thomas, 2020). Interestingly, during the current economic crisis generated by Covid-19, these are the very sectors that have been among the hardest hit with redundancies.

Vertical segregation on ethnic lines is a feature of the leadership and management in a number of key public sector employers in the UK including the NHS (Randhawa, 2018), universities (ECU, 2017; Khan, 2017), and local government (The Global Recruiter, 2018). Studies show that systemic barriers within organisations mean that BAME employees become stuck at lower levels of the organisational ladder. The work of Miller (2019) has revealed a significant lack of racial diversity at the top of big UK organisations as a consequence of racial inequalities in career progression.

Linked to vertical segregation or the glass ceiling, another prominent theme emerging from the extant literature is the lack of opportunities for BAME employees to carve out a clear pathway to progressing their career including being overlooked for promotion, with many feeling that their career progression has failed to meet their expectations (Miller, 2019). Research has revealed that ethnic minorities are less likely to get top jobs in the UK public sector than they are in some of the biggest private sector companies (Ramesh, 2014). A further connection to the theme of career progression is lack of access to resources including lack of access to training
opportunities. A study by the CIPD (2017) revealed a perception among BAME workers that they were not given adequate opportunities to access training to help them to conduct their job effectively and to further their career.

*Lack of workplace diversity*

Many organisations in the UK public sector fail to have workforces that reflect the communities they serve. Despite the three-pillar framework advanced by Dickens (1999) emphasising the legal, social justice and business cases for advancing equality and diversity in organisations, the reality is different. Studies show that some of the most powerful UK public sector employers do not have ethnically representative workforces. These include the armed forces, the police and judiciary whom research by Duncan, Dodd and Madsen (2018) noted were “decades away from becoming as ethnically diverse as the population they serve”. A small scale study of the library sector focusing on London revealed that even the UK’s biggest and most ethnically diverse city has been grappling with the issue of low representation of BAME staff in the library and information science sector (Williams and Nicholas, 2009).

The literature referenced in this section highlights that discrimination and disadvantage are characteristics of the UK labour market encountered by BAME people. BAME employees experience lack of opportunities and poorer outcomes in their workplace in relation to a number of variables such as career progression, promotion, training, salary, and treatment from white co-workers.

**Methodology**

*Research design and approach*

The research reported in this chapter was essentially qualitative in nature involving a focus group and a series of interviews with BAME staff working in academic and research libraries across the UK that are members of SCONUL (Ishaq and Hussain, 2019). The recruitment of participants for the study was aided by a questionnaire conducted to gather some demographic data on BAME employees employed in the academic library sector. The questionnaire gave respondents the opportunity to indicate interest in taking part in the qualitative stage of the research. This allowed the authors to generate a sample of BAME staff interested in participating in the focus group and in the series of interviews. The focus group represented stage one of the qualitative research and was aimed at extracting the views of BAME staff in relation to key themes agreed between the research team. Emerging themes from the analysis of the focus group subsequently helped inform the construction of an interview schedule that served as the basis for the series of one-to-one interviews with BAME staff, representing stage two of the qualitative research.

*Research participants*

Ethical approval was obtained for all stages of the data collection process from the authors’ institutions. The ethical approval process took full cognizance of issues such as confidentiality, anonymity, data protection and consent. All participants who indicated their willingness to participate in the research were asked to sign a consent form. In total 9 participants took part in the focus group which was hosted by a university and moderated by the authors whilst the in-depth interviewees were conducted via phone from the premises of the authors. In total 16 interviewees participated in the interview stage.
Findings

In this section, some of the key findings from the focus group and in-depth interviews are presented to shed light on the ‘lived’ experience of BAME staff. Details of the wider study conducted from which the findings have been extracted can be found in the full report (Ishaq and Hussain, 2019). To comply with the ethical requirements of the research and maintain the anonymity of individuals, those participants to whom quotes have been attributed have been assigned either a letter or numeral to differentiate between them. The findings reveal a plethora of issues faced by library staff from a BAME background.

Self-identity: awareness of ethnicity and impact on workplace experience

Those BAME staff whose ethnicity was particularly marked were more conscious of this and it appeared to have an impact on how they felt they were treated in the workplace. The lack of diversity among library staff perpetuated the feeling of belonging to an ethnic minority group. This further created a sense of being monitored and singled out. These perceptions are highlighted in the following comments:

It’s just sometimes you feel that you don’t have the face that fits (Interviewee J).

....as a BAME member of staff, I tend to keep myself to myself...because I don’t trust them fundamentally. So, they may have views of the fact that I keep myself to myself (Interviewee H).

I don’t know if we are more closely monitored but I definitely feel that I have to get recognition. I feel that I have had to work harder than my white colleagues (Interviewee K).

.... when I talk with a couple of my colleagues, and one of them who’s been giving me really superb off the record mentoring, like really has helped me....I’ve really benefited from that kind of advice...., every time she and I would have a meet by our desks or around the library… when one of the heads of service would go past they would make eye’s like this [makes staring gesture]. Like, ‘oh the brown people are talking. I wonder what they’re plotting’ and that kind of reverberated attitude....It made me feel watched. It made me feel like someone’s observing you, someone’s expecting me to plot something horrific (Focus group participant 7).

I think it kind of puts a lot of pressure on you if there’s very few ethnic minorities represented in the staff….I’m a perfectionist but I feel that I have to try that bit harder because I feel that not only am I representing myself as a member of staff and doing things to the best of my ability, I’m also in some way representing how white people are gonna see every [reference to participant’s nationality] person from hereon in because they might not see another [reference to participant’s nationality] person for a very long time. So, you do feel that extra, you know, pressure of representing not just your profession but your race as well (Focus group participant 4).

Existence and manifestation of racism in the workplace

The research also explored whether BAME staff had experienced racism in their job. The findings reveal that whilst racism was not rampant it did exist and manifests itself through the use of inappropriate language and ignorance about cultural issues in the workplace, including what would be classed as racial microaggression.

I have had instances with colleagues who keep getting my name wrong and I don’t think my first name is that difficult. Maybe it is some sort of unconscious bias. I have people make comments about the fact that you know, I’m vegetarian and it’s because I’m a Hindu. ....I had a colleague who on multiple occasions said ‘is it okay if I talk about meat in front you’?. And then I’ve had a supervisor in a previous job that during Ramadan she just turned around and said “why aren’t you fasting”? And made an
assumption that I was Muslim. And then I had to say I’m not, then she said ‘oh well what are you then’? And it was just the phrasing of it, just quite confrontational and abrupt (Interviewee K).

People making comments about travellers and thinking it is okay to do it and because everyone knows travellers are not good people because what you see on TV is the negative side of it. I have experienced this at School and here at the University (Interviewee I).

For some reason we seem to get each other’s emails. There is another colleague called ****. Or people call as each other’s names. They are totally different names aren’t they and we don’t look alike and we don’t work closely at all so why does this keep happening? (Interviewee J).

Well it tends to be comments. So, for example a while ago it was the supervisor. Another colleague had made a comment. I think it was something like he was arguing with another colleague about religion or about belief in God. I was sat at a different desk but he walked over and said ‘what about Islam what kind of religion is that’? And I said ‘sorry what was that’? He said ‘oh nothing’ (Interviewee M).

You have a sense of the fact that somebody is not treating you or treating someone else in a way that they ought to or that they’re not giving people perhaps the opportunity that they ought to give them. But it’s often at times difficult to pin that, that is exactly what is happening and to prove it. And this isn’t uncommon for, for any type of institution, this is true, libraries are no different. So…I, I think that we do, I think we have issues at the point of co-workers that I have some lovely people that I work with. Really, you know, great people that I work with and who are particularly supportive. Probably the best that I’ve had is right now. But I have some that I know are just seeking to put a dagger in (Focus group participant 2).

What was concerning based on the views of research participants was the fact that libraries were not viewed as having systems and procedures to deal effectively with complaints of racism raised by staff. A fundamental problem was the belief among some participants that there was a lack of appetite and willpower among management and HR departments to address the issue:

Like we’ve just introduced a sexual harassment, you know, online reporting system but there’s not one for racism (Interviewee C).

What I think is the ineffectiveness of the personnel department. There is a lack of willingness to be sued or to take it anywhere. So anything potentially negative happens, personnel will do everything in their power, as far as I’m concerned, to mitigate the circumstance. So you will lose because they will not support you (Focus group respondent 3).

I think sometimes they’re afraid to do some things because students pay x amount of money for an academic library. You know, they don’t wanna take it further, you know… (Focus group participant 6).

There was a feeling that BAME employees lacked voice and adequate representation in the employment relationship and there was lack of trust in trade unions who were viewed as unhelpful when BAME employees raise concerns:

….the unions are useless….I wouldn’t join a union…Unions were formed to keep Black people out of work anyway. I’ve never had a positive or constructive engagement with a union. I don’t see what the unions do in a way to make my experience as a BAME person any better within the organisation and I’d be loath to give them my money…(Interviewee H).

Disproportionate impact of training and development opportunities on BAME staff

Whilst training and development opportunities were viewed as generally adequate, BAME staff were however negatively impacted as such opportunities were less for those at the lower end of the job spectrum such as library assistants and it is at the lower end where BAME staff were over represented. Lack of funding was seen as a further threat and a fear that lack of training and development opportunities would hinder attempts to get more BAME staff into management and leadership thereby failing to break the glass ceiling.
If you have got a lack of BAME people in management you are basically saying to them you can’t have those equal opportunities of training. You know you are creating a barrier that should not exist and you should instead offer it to them much more to give them that thing (Interviewee C).

I think that’s interesting (the lack of training opportunities) because when I was working as a library assistant there were very few opportunities beyond the mandatory training for me, whereas as a librarian, they’re a bit more sort of open to suggestions and allowed me to go to any events or training that I’ve asked for…If you are sort of higher level the training opportunities are potentially greater (Interviewee K).

**Occupational structure and limited opportunities for promotion**

The nature of the job structure in academic libraries is such that opportunities for promotion are limited. However, as noted in relation to training and development above, the impact on BAME staff is considerably more detrimental as they are already under represented at higher levels and the lack of promotion opportunities hinders the possibility of addressing the lack of racial diversity at senior level:

I think the promotion opportunities are limited unless I think my director dies there is very limited experience for promotion within the library services (Interviewee H).

I would say that they [promotion opportunities] are pretty limited. That’s my personal experience as well as a kind of general sentiment that I hear quite a lot from people (Interviewee O).

I think the highest grade that you’ll see a person of colour would be librarian grade. You wouldn’t see anything higher up than that. I mean in terms of like promotion (Focus group participant 7).

A further obstacle faced by BAME library staff was the perception that line managers did not actively encourage BAME employees to pursue the limited promotion opportunities that arose:

….my experience has been I will go around that [my line manager] because I don’t feel as though somebody’s actually looking for me, to take me up. So, I have to find a path, another path. We are always looking to find other ways to, to move around the system to get up because actually even if you are performing well, it’s very hard to get somebody to acknowledge it (Focus group participant 2).

I’ve asked my line manager about it. You know, what are the opportunities for progression and I wouldn’t say she was overly enthusiastic (Interviewee D).

**Ethnic diversity of the library workforce**

There was a strong sentiment that greater racial diversity of the library workforce was required both from a business case perspective and social justice standpoint. Concerns centring on the overall lack of diversity among the workforce of libraries as well as the failure of the workforce to reflect its user base were noted by participants:

I do enjoy it but because I am such a minority there is a subconscious feeling that you are not part of the whole big library team. You feel that there is some sort of subconscious racism there (Interviewee J).

It’s essential especially for my current workplace. I would probably say 80 to 90% of students are from an ethnic minority background…the workforce does not reflect the student demographic (Interviewee E).

There is a whiteness in libraries that certainly where, the University I’m working at is not reflected in our, in our student cohort (Focus group participant 3).

I think an ethnically diverse workforce is really important. You are able to experience different things from a diverse workforce. A diverse workforce is more successful. They are more innovative and more creative. I am the only BAME person among around 90 library staff (Interviewee H).
Disquiet about the lack of ethnic diversity among the workforce of academic libraries extended to the upper layers of the job hierarchy with perceptions that senior roles in the library profession were dominated by white individuals. There was a feeling that institutional barriers hinder progression of BAME staff. BAME staff were perceived as experiencing a glass ceiling.

It’s incredibly important. You know as I mentioned before. There is no people of colour in our senior leadership team….there is a concentration of Black staff members in the lower grades. People that use the library…we don’t reflect that. We live in London and we don’t reflect the London communities (Interviewee O).

The top layers definitely [lack diversity] because they are only white managers in the library and there have been where I’ve worked. And we’ve never had somebody who isn’t white in a management position. So, I think the same is replicated you know in like CILIP and other organisations (Interviewee C).

Suggestions on how academic libraries can advance equality and diversity

Participants offered a basket of recommendations as to how academic libraries can advance equality and diversity ranging from increasing the diversity of staff, making it a strategic priority to educating the essentially ‘white’ leadership about equality and diversity issues:

Increasing the number of staff, the diverse workforce you have and it needs to be prioritised as a key strategic area. It is not seen as a priority and it keeps getting mentioned and then forgotten about and nothing is being done about it really (Interview J).

I think it would be first of all to educate themselves cause I think almost exclusively they (the management and leadership) will all be white would be my guess (Interviewee C).

Awareness is fundamental, I mean there are some people who are probably not even aware what these things [equality and diversity] mean (Interviewee N).

Discussion

This section of the chapter considers the research findings holistically with focus on how they should be interpreted and the extent to which some of the concepts and theories provide context and explanation for the experiences reported by BAME staff. The interpretation of the findings will also help in constructing recommendations to address the issues that have emerged.

This research has demonstrated that the issues faced by BAME library staff are not endemic to the academic library sector. The behaviours, attitudes and practices experienced by BAME staff in academic libraries are typical of many workplaces in the UK as highlighted in the review of literature. The ‘lived’ experiences of BAME library staff reported in this chapter therefore resonate with those in numerous other sectors and professions within the UK (see CIPD, 2017; Chand, 2018; Rollock, 2019). Lack of racial diversity among the workforce, failure of leadership and management to reflect racial diversity, lack of opportunities for training and career progression for BAME staff, the existence and persistence of racism and discrimination including verbal bullying, harassment and microaggression are some of the key findings in this research. The research findings provide further validity to the concepts of vertical and horizontal segregation which explain the lack of diversity in the leadership of organisations and the over representation of minority groups in specific occupations and roles (see Kirton and Greene, 2016). The findings also suggest the existence of a ‘canteen culture’
where inappropriate behaviours, attitudes and prejudice against diverse and minority groups are demonstrated by employees. The term ‘canteen culture’ was used in the late 1980s to refer to the organisational culture present in police forces that was characterised as discriminatory initially in relation to women but later also towards ethnic minorities (Bennetto, 1998). The term is now applied to any organisation or profession where discriminatory views and attitudes are shared by employees.

There are a number of theories and frameworks which provide some foundation and explanation for the origins and causes of racial inequalities experienced by BAME people both in society and in employment. These theories are rooted in multiple disciplines such as sociology, cultural psychology, socio-economics, politics, history, legal studies, management, and philosophy. Although a detailed explanation and debate on the causes and origins of racial inequalities is not the main purpose of this chapter, it is nevertheless useful to note the experience of BAME library staff as being rooted in theories and racial discourse.

Proponents of Critical Race Theory (CRT) would argue that the existence of racial inequalities is not unexpected given that race is a socially constructed concept that is used by white people to advance their economic and political interests at the expense of non-white people (Delgado and Stefancic, 1998). Inspired by the likes of, amongst others, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, CRT focuses on the attempts of white people to continue their historical advantages over non-white people. Because supporters of CRT argue that the social constructed view of race means that ‘whiteness’ is seen as the norm and white is seen as being dominant, this would then aid our understanding of the discrimination and inequalities experienced by BAME staff reported in this research.

Further concepts that may aid our understanding of racist and discriminatory behaviour both in society and the workplace include the theory of social constructionism which stresses the way in which individuals and society make sense of the world around them and how differing perceptions lead to differing views of people and hence their treatment (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). The following extract from the work of Salter, Adams and Perez (2018) captures how the principles of CRT and social constructionism support our understanding of resultant racism and racial inequalities:

…racism is also systemic, existing in the advantages and disadvantages imprinted in cultural artifacts, ideological discourse and institutional realities that work together with individual biases….historically derived ideas and cultural patterns that maintain present-day racial inequalities…..through our preferences and selections, we maintain racialised contexts in everyday action…..we inhabit cultural worlds that in turn promote racialized ways of seeing, being in and acting in the world (p. 150).

Neoclassical and labour market segmentation theories provide a socio-economic explanation for the existence of occupational segregation – both vertical and horizontal (see Watts and Rich, 1993; Beardwell and Thompson, 2014). Acker’s concept of inequality regime defined as “loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations” (2006, 43) makes a significant contribution in aiding our understanding of the unequal treatment and experience of BAME employees in organisational settings including those in academic libraries reported in this research. Acker’s work conceptualises how inequality regimes perpetuate inequalities in organisational settings.
Recommendations

The main contribution of this research is practical rather than theoretical, therefore it is only logical to consider possible recommendations for the academic library sector to consider based on the main research outcomes that could help improve BAME staff experience in the workplace.

Some BAME staff are made to feel self-conscious about their identity. This creates a sense that they are being monitored. The lack of ethnic diversity among the workforce accentuates those feelings. Academic libraries need to take steps to create a positive climate for diversity in the work environment. This can be facilitated by instigating measures to recruit more racially diverse staff and reassuring BAME staff that there is a zero-tolerance approach to racism and prejudice.

In this research, racism, primarily verbal, appears to be a concern for some BAME staff. In particular, racial microaggression seems to be a feature of workplace experience. The leadership of academic libraries and the wider institutions within which they operate must ensure that as well as taking a zero-tolerance approach to unacceptable behaviour there is a robust race awareness training programme in place. Such training should particularly target unconscious or implicit bias. This would help address racial microaggression including inappropriate and derogatory language, cultural ignorance and challenge stereotypical views that some BAME staff have experienced. Training should be conducted in an environment that allows participants to engage in constructive dialogue and reflective conversations, providing an opportunity for difficult but necessary debate and discussion that challenges inappropriate and unacceptable co-worker behaviour.

At present there is a lack of trust among BAME staff about the effectiveness of processes and procedures designed to deal with complaints of workplace racism. There is a need therefore to revaluate current systems to ensure that they are effective. The human resources function in particular can lead on implementing a more effective system of reporting racial discrimination that instills confidence and trust among those experiencing workplace racism. This is especially critical given the perception among BAME staff that there is a lack of adequate mechanisms for employee voice that cater for the unique challenges experienced by BAME employees.

Academic libraries in unison with the wider institutions within which they are embedded should sign up to the Race at Work Charter, which is evidence based and would demonstrate both that equality and diversity is valued and that there is commitment to practicing and implementing equality of opportunity in the workplace (BITC, 2020). Academic libraries should target approaches that help to dismantle the structures that are perpetuating racism and discrimination. Many organisations across both the UK public and private sectors are already signatories to the Charter (BITC, 2020), including a number of higher education institutions. In addition to the Race at Work Charter, academic libraries should also consider the Race Equality Charter which is more specific to the Higher Education Sector, and which is aimed at improving the representation, progression and success of ethnic minority staff and students within higher education (AdvanceHE, 2020).
Academic libraries should do more outreach work in line with other public sector institutions such as the uniformed services to promote the library profession as a career option to the BAME community. This endeavour should also take the opportunity to showcase current BAME staff in the academic library sector as role models. The BAME staff who participated in this research stressed that such an approach would send out a positive message to members of the BAME community considering a career in academic libraries. Police Forces across England have stepped up outreach work in recent years to deal with the lack of ethnic diversity on their workforce (see Bury et al., 2018).

The leadership of libraries need to lead from the top and champion equality and diversity. They should demonstrate that they view equality and diversity as a strategic priority rather than a peripheral endeavour. This will prevent the marginalisation of the equality and diversity agenda and allow adequate financial resources to be set aside to protect the agenda from current and future financial pressures. The powerful role of leadership in advancing the cause of equality and diversity in organisations cannot be understated. A case in point is the role of leadership in changing the fortunes of armed forces in Anglophone countries including the UK and Canada where senior leaders have championed the cause of diversity and have not been afraid to tackle the male white dominated culture that led to accusations of racism, sexism and homophobia for decades (Hussain and Ishaq, 2016). One way of ensuring universal buy-in from all organisational stakeholders is to elevate the business case for diversity and the merits associated with it (Dickens, 1999). Managers and leaders are responsible for navigating resistance from white colleagues to any approaches for advancing the equality and diversity agenda. This would ensure that the agenda can be successfully implemented.

Concerns about lack of career progression and promotion opportunities were highlighted by several BAME staff who took part in this research. There was also a view that internal recruitment practices need to be reviewed to allow BAME staff to take advantage of promotion opportunities that arose. This suggests the need for managers to take action including ensuring that they identify BAME staff with managerial potential and encourage line managers to engage in conversations with those staff during performance appraisals. This would allow BAME staff to have a trajectory towards career progression. Furthermore, consideration should be given to a coaching and/or mentoring programme to develop BAME staff especially at the lower levels to prepare them for managerial or other senior roles thus creating a talent pipeline. Academic libraries should contemplate approaches similar to those adopted by other big public sector organisations such as the BBC who have developed a number of trainee and leadership programmes to improve diversity among the Corporation (BBC, 2018). Similar approaches have been noted in the Civil Service (Ethnic Dimension, 2015-).

Whilst higher education institutions do monitor the ethnicity of their employees, there is no ethnic monitoring across the academic library sector and SCONUL does not collect data on the ethnic make-up of the academic library workforce (Ishaq and Hussain, 2019). This has to be addressed because without monitoring it is difficult to track the career development and progression of BAME staff. Moreover, ethnic monitoring data can provide a further evidence base and help in assessing the impact of policies and practices and identify gaps.

The authors feel that the aforementioned recommendations represent reasonable and realistic approaches in the light of the research findings. They would help build trust and confidence among BAME staff and generate collateral benefits such as greater employee engagement,
loyalty and identity with the organisation. Whilst measures to improve BAME staff experience and tackle workplace racial inequalities should not rule out the need to take into account the unique circumstances prevalent within individual sectors and organisations, there is merit in having a coordinated approach across the public sector given the homogeneity of experience and issues faced by BAME employees in other organisations.

Although it is worth considering the lessons that can be learned from the response of those sectors and organisations that face similar issues, there is less evidence available presently on the success or otherwise of policy approaches adopted by academic libraries. If academic libraries implement a successful programme of recommendations, they can become effective agents of change and therefore make the successful transition - using Kirton and Greene’s adaptation of Healey’s typology of equality opportunity organisation (2016, 214) - from merely being classed as ‘compliant’ organisations to ‘comprehensive proactive’ organisations when it comes to equality and diversity. Neither the liberal or radical approaches to equality have been wholly successful. However their successor – diversity management – despite having its critics, incorporates an important characteristic that if realised in practice can make the difference, which is the need for transformation of organisational cultures (Kirton and Greene, 2016, 130).

**Conclusion**

The findings reported shed light on the real-life experience of BAME staff engaged in the execution of their duties in academic and research libraries and previously reported in the research commissioned by SCONUL (Ishaq and Hussain, 2019). They reveal that academic and research libraries have some way to go in addressing institutional, structural and systemic bias against BAME staff which manifests itself in a variety of ways. The main theme of this book centres on the decolonisation of libraries. This chapter argues that the effective decolonisation of libraries will remain a myth until BAME staff employed in academic libraries experience fair treatment, equal opportunities for career progression and promotion and are viewed as a valuable human resource. Reflecting on the negative perceptions expressed by BAME staff about their workplace and starting the process of addressing these perceptions must be an integral part of the decolonising of libraries agenda.

Whilst decolonisation remains a controversial and contested term, even in librarianship, there is no doubt that its intentions are credible (EARLL, 2020). It can play a role in seeking to address the disadvantage and discrimination faced by BAME employees by critically reflecting on and influencing and shaping organisational culture, values, and attitudes that reflect a modern and diverse society, where there is zero tolerance for inequality, discrimination and prejudice.

Despite the existence of racism and unequal opportunities, the majority of BAME staff in this research did not reveal an inclination to exit the profession and there is little evidence of large-scale flight from the profession. Rather BAME staff expressed resilience and a desire to fight for their rights in a profession that they appear to cherish. If academic libraries are willing to implement strategies to address the challenges faced by BAME staff, then they would go some way towards rewarding that loyalty. Challenging organisational culture, structures and processes that perpetuate and sustain racial inequality would be a good starting point in moving the decolonisation or similar agenda forward and being able to answer in the affirmative: do Black employees’ rights matter?
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