Abstract

'Educated and Educating as a Black woman'- **An auto/biographical reflection on my grandmother's influence on my academic and professional outcomes**

Adopting an Auto/Biographical approach, I discuss the impact my grandmother, Nana Elizabeth (Lizbet) Beyie had on the academic and career outcomes of myself and other female descendants. The paper begins with an exploration of Lizbet's biography and how she overcame struggles in terms of ensuring my mother's education in an era and context where female education was not prioritised. Following this, the paper moves to a focus on my continuation of Lizbet's legacy though my work in academia. I reflect on my career journey and positive and challenging experiences, as a Black female academic. I discuss the value of an auto/biographical approach to exploring these issues, since it enables reflections on the relationships between structural issues (e.g. racism/sexism; the education system; Ghanaian/British society) and personal experience/action as a result, not least our decision to help educate the next generations) and allows for the voices of marginalised groups (including Black women) to be heard.

Key words: emotional labour; culturally relevant support; academic legacies

Introduction

In this auto/biographical paper I reflect on my grandmother, Madam 'Lizbet' Beyie life and her quest to ensure that my mother and other female descendants obtained educational and career opportunities. I also tell the story of how I have continued her legacy through my work as an academic. Despite living in different times and contexts, there are commonalities in terms of how, as Black women, we have been regarded, and resonances in terms of our approaches to helping people around us.

'The life and times of Lizbet Beyie' provides insights into my grandmother's early life experiences and her battle to provide my mother and other family members with an education and career prospects, during the late 1940s/-early 50s in Adumasa, a rural village in South Eastern Ghana.

As one of the one percent of Black British academics, I chart some of my journey towards my current position as programme leader and senior lecturer in Sociology. I highlight issues faced along the way, including low expectations from teachers in school, then, critically reflect on my experience one of few Black female academics in my faculty.

Auto/Biography and its relevance to this account

Auto/Biography, is a 'process of writing the self, of telling the story of the self through a written text.'(Usher 1995:1). It incorporates elements of other sociological methods, including ethnography (specifically participant observation) (Friedman 1990). The ethnographical aspect results from the fact that we are 'objects of examination' (Usher 1995:ibid) and 'examination' involves critically analysing our past and present life experiences. Thus, it is current and/or retrospective. My account is a mixture of the two in that I discuss the past, specifically, my grandmother's life in Ghana, and her influence on my career/life choices. I also reflect on my own past encounters of racism from teachers, as a sixth form student and consider how this has shaped the way I support my students, and undertake other aspects of my work presently. Sociological auto/biography is also valuable because

> …the more Everyman/Everywoman status can often be an asset, for it might
> make his/her recollected experiences more similar to most other people's…
> (Friedman 1990:61)

Letherby (2014), arguing for a feminist auto/biography, comments on the significance or 'nature and value of knowledge' (2014:1), and the importance of reflecting how knowledge is produced and used. More importantly, impacts of this knowledge on peoples everyday /'real' lives. Auto/Biographies enable acknowledgment that 'political complexities of [our] subjectivities' (ibid) shape how we work/engage in the education system. My identity as a Black British African working class woman, invariably impacts on my experience in academia and my approach to work. Thus auto/biography allows exploration of these issues, from my perspectives and experiences. Auto/Biographies also entail reflections on our relations with others' biographies and in turn, how we 'reflect upon our own autobiographies' (Letherby 2014:2). It is a cyclical process, whereby 'in writing another's life we also re-write our own lives' (Morgan 1998:655).

This approach also encourages analysis of power and experiences within academia (Letherby 2014: Smith and Watson 1998), specifically here, those existing between myself, students, management and peers. Elsewhere in a paper on the experiences of Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students in Higher education, I reflect on how power relationships 'bring with them their positions in hierarchies that order the world including those based on race, gender, class and sexual orientation' (Johnson and Cervero 1998:389). These complex identities intersect and have considerable bearing on my interactions with the aforementioned groups.

Auto/Biographical writing entails working from the self to the 'other' and back again (Letherby 2014). This resonates with Mills' (1959) argument, urging us critically analyse intersections between our social environments, or in his words, 'mileus' and social and historical contexts/ structures. He advocates examining the past as it allows 'understand [ings] [of] the larger historical scene in terms of the meaning of the inner life and external career of a variety of individuals'. (Mills 1959:5-6). Thus critically reflecting on my experiences as a Black female academic and what made me enter this career represents the 'working from myself'. The 'other' indicates contexts/structures I have been working in. 'Coming back again' represents how the institution and my experiences within it have shaped me, who I am and how I work.

Previously, the biographies/voices of particular groups (e.g. the 'rich and powerful) were prioritised over other groups, including BAME women, whose voices were often negated or silenced, because race and gender often 'rendered us invisible' (Mabokela and Green 2001:69). When we are acknowledged, 'preconceived notions [exist about] what [we] should be talking about' and who we are. Shifting towards a 'narrative turn in sociology', however, means that the marginalised groups' voices are heard:

> …autobiographical narratives have been taken as a way to create the selves
> for those – most importantly people of colour – to whom selfhood has been
> denied…(Zussman 2000:6)

Articulating our experiences through spoken/written auto/biographies, also enables resistance against the aforementioned notions, and enhanced knowledge about our identities and capabilities (Mabokela and Green 2001).

The life and times of Lizbet Beyie

Lizbet was born in Adumasa, then, a rural close knit community located in the Ashanti region of South Eastern Ghana. In the early twentieth century, Adumasa lacked basic amenities including electricity water, hospitals and schools, though things improved from the 1950s onwards. Adumasa's economy was primarily agricultural, and largely remains so, as 66% of the inhabitants make their livelihoods this way. That said, Adumasa now has greater economic diversity, due to growth in commerce and service industries (http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/2010_District_Report/Ashanti).

Familial accounts vary as to when Lizbet's birth year was. This was unsurprising because in rural areas of Africa, during the early colonial era, Black Africans were not covered by civil registration laws. Birth and death records were not kept (International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics 1988). When I visited Adumasa in 2008, family elders suggested that she was born around 1895, yet my mother remembered Lizbet saying she was 40 when she birthed her. My mother was born in 1945, and by then births and deaths were registered, so Lizbet's birth could have been in 1904 or 1905.

Lizbet had a 'good family set up', with three sisters of a similar age, whom she was extremely close to, and a large extended family, who lived nearby. As a child, Lizbet, received no formal schooling. This was not attributable to a lack of institutions, because during her childhood, missionaries established several schools in larger towns such as Kumasi, which was then becoming the commercial, cultural and industrial capital of the Ashanti area. Konongo, another town close by, had several schools and a growing economy based on gold mining. My great-grandparents could have let Lizbet be educated in these towns. Unfortunately, in that space and time, women were regarded as 'marginal and subordinate, [which] begins from birth' (Obeng 2002:17). Effectively, girls were less likely than boys to be sent to school, hence Lizbet's lack of education. Even if she had attended school, education for females was primarily a 'vehicle for promoting domesticity' (Obeng 2002:19), offering limited scope for anything else.

Life in Adumasa, however, enabled Lizbet to acquire several skills, including resource and people management, through running her family's farms. She was also a wily market trader, selling food and vegetables from the land. Lizbet and other relatives of that generation were very enterprising, which proved beneficial in later life when she developed her Ghana cloth business, which funded her children's education.

As mentioned girls in that context were expected to marry and have children, sometimes at a young age. Lizbet married a local man in her teens. According to my mother, they were very happy together for almost 20 years. The one thing that marred their joy was their inability to conceive. This eventually led to their divorce, enforced by family and community elders. Lizbet, however, was seen as responsible, echoing Van Balen and Inhorn's observations that: 'women worldwide appear to bear the major burden of infertility, in terms of blame for the reproductive failing' (2002:7-8)

In the early 1940s, Lizbet met and eventually married my grandfather, Kofi Adunah, a trader/business man. He empathised with my grandmother's reproductive experience and divorce. Together they moved to Bekwai, developed their trade in nearby towns, and became reasonably secure financially. As my mother says, 'life has a funny way of turning around when you least expect it' because in July 1944, Lizbet became pregnant. She gave birth to my mother in April 1945 in Konongo. Shortly after, three sons followed, the last one arriving when she was nearly 50.

Eventually, Lizbet returned to Adumasa, where Kofi had a flourishing shop, which she helped expand. Throughout the late 1940s/early 50s, Lizbet rebuilt her life and community links in Adumasa. During this period, Ghana was moving towards independence. With that came development in areas including health, welfare and education. In 1951, the government increased primary, secondary and technical education through the Accelerated Development Plan (Kadingi 2006). Lizbet saw the Plan's impacts, since new schools were established in Adumasa, Konongo and Bekwai. She wanted her children to benefit from an education, given her own illiteracy. Thus she made the following statement that which had implications for future generations: 'Because I can't read or write, or speak any English, you are going to be able to, so you are *all* going to school!' My clearest memories of Lizbet included her gruff voice, and brusque nature, common traits amongst Ghanaian market women, especially from rural areas, which are quite funny. It was thus amusing to imagine Lizbet informing her children about their impending registration at school.

Unlike previous generations, Lizbet recognised the importance of educating females, which perhaps resulted from her own experience of being denied an education due to her sex. Lizbet's views resonated with Kwegir Aggrey's, a Ghanaian educationalist, who advocated that 'if you educate a man, you educate a whole person; however, if you educate a woman you educate the whole family' (Aggrey 1923, in Obeng 2002:21). Clearly, Lizbet wanted educated descendants and believed sending my mother to school would ensure this. Kofi shared this view, which was unusual, since several fathers (and mothers) continued to deny daughters an education. Kofi was however, a powerful, well respected member of the community, thus, disapproval of my mother's education would not have been openly expressed. My grandparents also maintained that their children should receive excellent schooling. Thus, with help from contacts in Konongo and Kumasi, they identified fee paying institutions with sound reputations, to which my mother and her siblings went. In their own ways, my grandparents' actions represented a 'struggle against injustice, that gave [them] the resources to build more just worlds' (Ahmed 2018:30) in a context in which there was/is longstanding gender inequalities. Sending my mother to school, despite social disapproval also demonstrated a 'certain willingness to cause trouble' and disrupt dominant narratives about educating females, which helped bring about 'change in their locale'

Feminist research examining divisions of labour in households recognises 'practical, educational and emotional work' that women undertake when raising their children (Reay 2004:59). Practical support can refer to the 'provision of advice and skills' (Owusu-Kwarteng 2011:198), enhancing academic and social development. Bourdieu also highlights the impact of resources, particularly cultural capital for positive educational outcomes. However, this is often 'theorised in ungendered ways' (Reay 2006:60), although Bourdieu recognised women's devotion and emotional work in supporting their children.

Bourdieu's concept of capitals, was expanded by Nowotny (1981) to include 'emotional capital', an alternative form of 'social capital', mainly manifested within the home and the family, and often provided by women. This includes:

> …knowledge contacts and relations as well as access to emotionally valued
> skills and assets which hold within any social network characterised at least
> partly by affective ties… (Nowotny 1981:148).

Allatt (1993:143) extends Nowotny's definition to include 'emotionally valued assets and skills, love and affection, expenditure and time, care and concern'. These ideas encapsulate the support that my mother and her brothers received throughout their education.

Lizbet was illiterate, and could not provide her children with practical academic skills, though she tried. Despite being in her 40s, she enrolled in a primary school, to develop her literacy, and speak some English, to support her children academically. Although she did not complete her education, she devoted much time, care and concern to ensure that her children were healthy, well rounded and achieved well at school. Reay (2004:62) notes that mothers' anxieties regarding their child's education can 'produce an intense involvement in their child's schooling which communicates to the child the importance of educational success and led to educational progress', which reflects Lizbet's involvement in my mother's education. Lizbet regularly saw my mother's teachers, to check her progress. Furthermore, like many African families, she regarded teachers as 'third parents' [who] have their children's interests at heart' (Demie and Mc Clean 2007:424).

Lizbet also used her 'knowledge, contacts and relations' (Reay 2006:ibid) and/or social capital to identify highly literate community members to support her children academically. Ghanaian communities, 'back home' and in Britain, often adopt similar approaches especially if they are not affluent. British-Ghanaian participants in my doctoral research, for instance, described how their parents used informal contacts to enhance their educational/career prospects. Putnam (2000:95) also recognises the importance of such networks: 'in everyday life, friendship and other informal types of sociability provide crucial support'. Although it is suggested that the most effective form of social capital is that which elite classes possess, informal types such as that Lizbet and others used should not be regarded as any less valuable.

If there were any extra-curricular activities, which could enhance her children's skills, Lizbet encouraged her children's participation. For instance, my mother was a girl guide, and attended music lessons and choir practice with church and school. By engaging my mother in these activities, Lizbet was also ensuring that she 'visibly invested in the life of the school', (Kaufman 2004: 146), effectively facilitating her academic attainment. My mother captures Lizbet's devotion to her children and their educational success in the following quote:

> She did lots of things to help us and in the way that she knew how. She'd take care of us by getting us up in the morning and making sure that we were well dressed and went to school on time. If we came home for dinner, she made sure that we were well fed, so that we could concentrate. When we came home at night, she saw that we did our homework. All through this, she really encouraged us.

My mother recalled Ghana becoming from British rule on 6th March 1957. She remembered the inaugural speech made by Kwame Nkrumah, then Ghana's president, and instrumental in bringing about independence from colonial rule. Nkrumah espoused visions of a strong, self-reliant society, with a highly developed, and diverse economy that would enable Ghanaians' socio-economic mobility. He aimed to do this by 'shifting Ghana from a primarily agricultural economy to a mixed agricultural-industrial one' (Areetey and Fenny 2014:89). My grandparents saw potential opportunities arising from these developments, and wanted to ensure that my mother and her siblings put their education to good use. Lizbet was adamant that my mother would have a career.

Around the same time, my mother became reacquainted with my father. As children they were playmates, due to their fathers' friendship. However, their paths diverged because they were educated in different locations. Nevertheless, they began a relationship in the early 1960s, then married. They also decided to move to England, because despite Kwame Nkrumah's Independence declarations, in the 1960s, the Ghanaian economy was declining. Nkrumah borrowed heavily for the economic development, which he believed would generate income, and repay debts. Sadly, however,

his plans did not work as envisaged, partly, because they were overambitious and cost more than anticipated. Thus projects were left incomplete, and loans went unpaid, leaving Ghana financially ruined. Given this situation, Lizbet, accepted my parents decision to leave, though it was probably difficult as she would be 3,000 miles away from her only daughter.

Interestingly, my mother was unclear about her career path, despite Lizbet's insistence that she had one. Eventually, she chose nursing, because as she explained: 'At the time nursing was considered a 'good' career. It was solid and there was always work'. Nursing definitely meant higher status and better pay than the manual work she might have been doing, if she had no qualifications. Yet, like many other Black nurses she started as an auxiliary. Not for long, though, because in the mid-1960s, she became a registered general nurse, specialised in midwifery and qualified in 1970. I really admired my mother's determination to succeed amidst financial difficulties, getting to grips with nursing and becoming a mother of two. Her achievements were partly attributable much support from my father, yet Lizbet's efforts, and their impacts on my mother's success must be acknowledged. It was not just her encouragement, but also the discipline and strong work ethic she instilled in her children from an early age.

My mother, sister, niece, and I reflected on our lives; specifically whether we have achieved our academic/career ambitions, and impacts of Lizbet's efforts on our generation. My sister, niece and I recognised that we were born and raised in times and places which afforded us more opportunities and choices than Lizbet, and to an extent my mother had. This was partly because in our era, feminists agitated for gender equality in work and education. Since the 1970s, partly due to feminist movements, there are far more successful female role models in many areas, which has encouraged 'ordinary' women to broaden their career horizons. Moreover, we belong to generations, which as Giddens (1991) explains encourage greater reflexivity when making life choices and constructing our identities. However, we understood that if Lizbet and Kofi had adopted the attitudes of some of their contemporaries, and denied my mother an education, our lives could have been different.

Thankfully, we have pursued professional careers, and have inherited Lizbet's stubborn determination to succeed, but in ways reflecting our personalities. For example, it was hoped my sister would become a physiotherapist, but she decided that this was not for her. Instead, she followed in my mothers' footsteps, became a midwife and eventually, a matron. In 2016, however, she decided to pursue her true passion - music. She has quite a following countrywide.

My parents hoped that I would become a medic, but I hated science. Nursing was not appealing either, following my experience as a care assistant in 1992, which was physically and mentally draining. Instead, I studied Sociology at GCSE, A'Level, undergraduate and postgraduate levels. I am the first of Lizbet's granddaughters to receive a doctorate degree and I am an academic in Sociology. The journey has been rewarding, although not straightforward, as I detail shortly. My niece is currently undertaking a degree in Business and Sociology, and is considering a career in human rights.

Louise's story… Being one of the one in one (percent) a continuation of Lizbet's legacy

The title of this section '*Being one of the one in one(percent)'* is adapted from UB40'S 1981 hit '*I am the one in ten'.* This song refers to the fact that, 10% of people in the UK were unemployed and claiming dole money, during 1981, which is a significant number. The 'one in ten' also highlights how they were regarded as anonymous statistics, rather than as people. Although the song does not specify this, a notable number of the 'one in ten' were BAME young people (Runnymede Trust 2014). We

remain under represented in certain areas, including academia. Currently one percent of academics (including myself) are Black-British, hence the title 'being one of the one in one'

I was not always an academic. However, I often worked in areas involving education/mentoring for people from socially disadvantaged groups. My first position involved supporting inner city youth at risk of school exclusion, or who possessed no qualifications on leaving school. This job was challenging, especially since students were from extremely poor families, whose main priority was day-to-day survival. However, there were rewards, because some succeeded, by pursuing their education and/or careers reflecting their talents. Another job entailed providing work experience with local politicians for immigrants in Oxfordshire. I also taught English in Madrid for two years to obtain teaching experience, so I could undertake lectures/seminars, during my PhD and beyond.

I want to ensure that Lizbet's legacy continues into the next generation. Alongside providing academic, practical and emotional support to the next generation of 'Beyies', I seek to do this with my students. My role entails much 'nurturing' and pastoral support. I am also often seen as a role model for students from BAME backgrounds (on my programme there are a considerable number). Given low numbers of BAME academic staff across the institution, provision of 'culturally relevant support' (Avari 1997:unpaginated) is required for BAME students (and frequently, those from White working class backgrounds). I also observe implicit expectations from BAME students, senior management and non BAME staff that 'culturally relevant support' is provided during their journey through university. Jones (2006:153) agrees that BAME staff 'act as informal support and counselling services to Black students'. Williams-June (2015: unpaginated) reiterates this, emphasising the *willingness* of BAME academics to offer it:

> The 'hands on' attention that many minority professors willingly provide is a linchpin on institutional efforts to create all-inclusive learning and to keep students enrolled. This contributes to pressure for BME staff members to serve as role models, mentors and even 'surrogate parents' to the students

Williams-June's (2015) point resonates with my views concerning the provision of this type of support. I willingly give it, especially to those who are struggling because I want to get them back on track. Although 'Lizbet' was not an academic, there are resonances with the kind of 'hands on' support she gave and what I am currently doing. We both gave direct practical help to those we were responsible for, albeit in different ways. My students receive academic assistance, through a range of levels including lectures, individual and small group tutorials for specific pieces of work/general wellbeing and progress reviews at the start and end of each year, enabling students to reflect and identify areas for future improvement. Wherever possible, I also speak with other tutors to gauge the progress of my students, and consider ways to enhance their work.

With regards to 'informal support and counselling services' – in my experience, this partly stems from the fact that some BAME students often relate more to staff who 'look like them' (Avari 1997). BAME students repeatedly indicate that support is often limited, and at times, feel under confident about their academic abilities, but cannot express this to White tutors. Others sense that some lecturers have low expectations of their academic outcomes, due to their ethnicity. Even if this is not out rightly conveyed, it is insinuated. BAME students recognise that these notions are based on societal expectations. This is illustrated in a quote from a student participating in research I conducted on BAME student experience:

> Sometimes I feel like though I'm trying hard, certain lecturers don't think that I can achieve much. I can't quite prove it, but I think this is because of

> my ethnicity and also my religion. I don't know. I think those ideas are from how society influences how they think [1]

The vignette reiterates implicit assumptions made by some White lecturers about BAME students. Low expectations about the students' academic abilities stem from perceptions that they are 'less able' than White students to obtain a 1st or upper second class degree[2]. These issues are highlighted in research exploring lecturers' academic expectations and attitudes towards BAME students in HE (see for example Cotton *et al* 2013). Merton's (1948) perspectives on low expectations can be applied in understanding this issue further. He explains that low expectations are often false definitions of a situation, which if constantly reiterated may be internalised, and negatively affect peoples' actions. This, sometimes applies to BAME students. Misconceptions about their academic abilities, undermines the possibility of recognising positive attainment. Yet these views are perpetuated within wider society, the media, policy makers and educationalists, and are subsequently internalised by educators – including academic tutors. As Cotton *et al* (2013), explain, this often creates barriers to positive academic outcomes for BAME students, because not acknowledging their potential means that they are not encouraged to fulfil it.

Incidentally, my participant's comments also reflect Gardner's (2008:6) observations that BAME students feel unable to 'prove' racist experiences:

> There is no substantial evidence that there is racism, because nothing is clearly stated; it is left to implication and innuendo. Trying to prove that someone has been racist can be like trying to kick a paper bag in the wind. However, the effect on minority ethnic students of implied racism can be as damaging to their confidence and psychological security as a more blatant racist attack

I explore these issues in greater detail elsewhere (see Footnote 1). They also underpin much of my research around race and educational experience. Understanding these issues through research is useful in terms of enabling us to find ways to support BAME students, as well as informing University policy.

Marginalisation of students is another factor – more specifically, limited understanding around diverse BAME cultures, religions and languages, failure to ensure that the curriculum includes content which analyses varied social groups and their experiences, and opportunities for students to express their views on these issues and their own encounters. Instead, students are frequently expected to assimilate, and their lived experiences are negated. As one lecturer in Avari *et al's* research (1997:unpaginated) suggested: 'they [BAME students] should be treated like any other students, so as to avoid creating resentment where none previously existed'. Such a comment might suggest that not all staff members feel/want to take responsibility for responding to the needs of BAME and other marginalised groups. That said, some lecturers are keen to ensure that courses are more 'radically pluralist', and that addressing other aspects of student experience is done in a way, which reduces BAME students' marginalisation (Avari *et al* 1997 unpaginated). Yet there is some way to go, because these students are conscious that their educational experiences are frequently characterised by a lack

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[1] Excerpt from my forthcoming research paper 'Great Expectations' A Case study exploration of attainment and impacts on employability levels of Black and Minority ethnic students in a post 1992 University (2018)
[2] Attaining 1st/2.1 significantly impact on representation of the subject area, university and students' graduate employability, which also bears on a University/Programme's league table place

of 'quality treatment or equality of treatment'(Avari *et al* 1997:unpaginated) at an institutional level, which reinforces their marginalisation (Gardner 2008).

When I hear about BAME students' negative experiences through informal conversations, research or in group tutorials, it concerns me. Although I avoid differential treatment of my students, I am also conscious that those from BAME backgrounds are more susceptible to discrimination, due to my work, observations, and personal experiences at school, an example of which follows.

At my school, we had to attend a yearly careers guidance interview to discuss our progress, and future plans. I went to one of these meetings in January 1993. I was then a 17 year old A'Level student, who aspired to go to university. Admittedly, I struggled transitioning from GCSE to A'Level, as did most of my cohort, which was attributable to poor teaching, and to some extent, my mechanical approach to learning, yet I strongly believed that I would overcome these issues. I was, however, concerned about seeing the careers adviser, since I had heard that other sixth formers who met with him received racist and sexist comments. A British-Indian girl, for example, who excelled in Biology, and sought a career in genetics, was 'advised' to open a business, because of her ethnicity.

On arriving at the meeting, I was informed that my GCSE grades 'weren't that good'. I had re-taken some and obtained 7 A-C grades, which was above average at the time (the base standard was 4-5 GCSES). When asked of my plans after the 6th form, I said that I was going to university, but was told in a dismissive tone that I should 'consider quitting my A'Levels to go into factory work, where few qualifications were required, or work as an auxiliary nurse'. I was supposedly suited to nursing because I am Black. At the end of this diatribe, the advisor 'magnanimously' added that if I 'really' wanted to go to university, I should find somewhere which could take me with the lowest UCAS points. As John (2008) noted, such experiences can result in alienation from learning and eventually, education. Thankfully, this did not happen to me, as I continued my education. My positionality as a Black woman and direct experience of racism has however heightened my sensitivity to it. If I hear that students experience any form of discrimination, I redouble my efforts to support them, encourage them to challenge it, and pursue their goals.

It is my sense that other programme leaders are aware of racism/marginalisation faced by BAME students, not least because of university wide initiatives that have been implemented. I have been involved in many myself. I currently co-convene a Faculty BAME student project, analysing factors affecting their attainment levels and student experience. Outcomes have included research and recommended actions which were disseminated within the institution. Alongside my line manager, who is also a Black female, we have raised these issues at senior management meetings and awareness raising events –including 4 symposia (in all of which there was student participation, emphasis on their experiences, and what they would like to see changed). Some senior management team members attended, and there was considerable discussion as to how to improve the student experience. Staff also sought advice around how to engage their students in similar events. While these things represent positive steps, there is still some way to go in terms of change.

Growing awareness of students' difficulties, reinforces the necessity of offering encouragement to all students via many other channels, including addressing issues undermining their day to day teaching and learning experiences. Written and verbal feedback is often a concern raised by students, especially those from BAME backgrounds. Students have described the quality as 'disheartening', with no guidance for improvement, echoing findings from the NUS Race for Equality research (2011:77):

> Respondents pointed to a lack of support and constructive feedback,
> providing examples of instances where they believed their teachers were
> willing to help other students, but were apathetic when they requested it

I am mindful of students' views in this respect, and ensure that feedback is encouraging and highlights the positives, but also provides specific guidance in terms of what/how to improve. This takes time, especially in one-to-one sessions. However, students, colleagues and external examiners have commended my efforts.

When students experience other issues outside university, which could hamper their progress, and require emotional support, some feel that it is not always forthcoming. BAME students are often more likely to express this view: 'students were highly critical of the lack of support offered to them, particularly the lack of individual time with academic staff' (Stevenson 2012:14)

Being a programme leader, awareness of these issues and provision of the necessary emotional support and guidance is a, to me, a key facet of my role, especially if students perceive that it will not come from elsewhere. During classes I ask students about how they are progressing. I also host large/small group tutorials over coffee and cake, which enhances bonding and encourages them to open up, and they appreciate this. I am, effectively, striving to adhere to advice given by Ahmed in her reflections on marginalised women's experiences in academia (2018:30), which is that:

> We have to do what we can, when we can, to use Audre Lorde's words to be
> vigilant for the smallest opportunity to make a change

Providing this kind of pastoral support, 'guidance and informal counselling', also demonstrates what Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006:1) describe as 'enacting caring teaching'. In this respect, again, there are parallels between the kind of support offered to my students, and that given by Lizbet. As indicated, she was very supportive to my mother and her brothers, and offered as much guidance as she could. In the process, Lizbet would have invested a great deal of emotional labour, which paid off. Lizbet thus remains a role model for me, especially during more challenging times, so I keep a picture of her in my office as inspiration.

In my experience 'caring teaching' results in mixed experiences. Sometimes, these are positive, - for instance when students are engaged in my classes, and/or have achieved what they want to in assessments/degree outcomes, especially if they experienced manifold personal struggles. Yet, occasionally, my work is emotionally challenging, particularly when attempting to balance heavy workloads (e.g admin, teaching, research etc) and providing good student support. Moreover, if students share traumatic experiences, which I do not have the skills/capacity to support, this can also be difficult to deal with.

Despite tough situations, I manage and regulate my emotions when I interact with my students – particularly when they are in a distressed state, and need calm reassurance. This constitutes part of what Hochschild (1983) calls 'emotional labour'. Essentially, it is the management of our emotions and feelings, so as to fulfil emotional requirements of specific jobs. What Hochschild (1983) also describes as 'surface acting' (e.g suppression of undesired emotions) is required in these instances. This reflects the 'implicit rules' around the display of emotions during our interactions with students (Keller, Chang *et al* 2014:3), which are especially necessary when they are experiencing anxiety, or when management, students and colleagues place multiple demands on us.

Performing emotional labour stems from other aspects associated with teaching. Lecturers often have to maintain an 'idealised image' (Keller, Chang et al 2014:4), by 'displaying high levels of commitment

and passion' in interactions with students', and 'enthusiasm about subject material and activities' (Hort, Barratt and Fulop 2001:5). These attributes are also facets of 'good quality teaching'. While we must all embody 'good teaching' arguably, these pressures are to an extent, raced and gendered. That is, there are different expectations of tutors based on their gender and race. White middle class males are often regarded more favourably than BAME females, as they are 'likely beginning from a position of assumed and automatically accepted authority and respect' (Messner 2000:460). Contrastingly women, especially those from BAME backgrounds are rated less positively, and are more likely to be subjected to harsher criticism from White students (Essed 2000). Awareness of these issues can result in BAME staff feeling that they have to moderate their teaching styles, given the possibility of negative repercussions. Doing this also means that BAME lecturers have to engage in higher levels of impression management, which as Ahmed (2018:30) suggests contributes to us 'not being us'. It also requires greater levels of emotion management, especially during difficult situations, for instance being undermined by students and colleagues. I concur that my positionality certainly influences how I teach and undertake other aspects of my job, and I am particularly mindful of how I may be perceived, as a result, so, I endeavour to teach and support in way that includes all students. This involves much impression management. That said, I would also find it difficult to completely negate 'me' and work in ways which fully downplay my personality, as it would undermine myself and the quality of my work.

Emotional labour and enhancing student experience

As indicated, currently academics face pressures to ensure a positive 'student experience' while at university. This incorporates a number of areas, such as monitoring academic, social and personal wellbeing (www.improving the student experience.co.uk). As indicated previously, this is something that I endeavour to do, largely due to my predisposition to support people, which is, I believe, a characteristic inherited from, or shared with Lizbet. This is a core aspect of programme leadership.

'Student experience' has also become a central feature of higher education, resulting in students having greater expectations from lecturers, due to high tuition fees. Understandably, they will seek value for their money, invariably contributing to the 'rebadging of students as consumers' (Willmott and Crossley 2003:123).

The quality of students' experiences inform National Student Survey (NSS) scores, in turn determine university league table places, likelihood of students attending institutions, and enrolment on our programmes. Taken together, these factors 'feed into the creation of market like mechanisms and increased competition between institutions in England' (Temple, Callender *et al* HEA 2014:4) Such pressures associated with working in a 'shifting, changing and fluid Higher Educational landscape' is challenging for those within it, especially professionals (e.g administrative staff) and academics, since we are 'frontline' staff and deal with students on a daily basis. Being a programme leader and senior lecturer, I can attest that this is the case, and as noted above, the role entails the investment of a great deal of emotional labour, partly to achieve 'dual outcomes of customer' and 'student satisfaction (Willmott and Crossley 2003:ibid).

Being one of few BAME female staff members, in a middle management position, also lends a different dimension to this situation. It creates additional, unspoken pressures to facilitate recruitment and positive student experience, but also means ensuring retention. The latter is of great importance in relation to BAME students, because although they are overrepresented in higher education, they are also at the greatest risk of dropping out (Williams June 2015; Stephenson 2012). Furthermore, despite disproportionate numbers of BAME staff to students, as noted, those who are there frequently provide 'culturally relevant support' (Avari *et al* 1997), helping to reduce their drop-out rates

(Williams-June 2015). Many of us successfully achieve these goals. For instance, together with my team I have contributed to the fact that we have strong rates of student retention. Moreover, our students consistently exceed our institutions Key Performance Indicators (KPIS) in terms of the number of students obtaining 2.1/1st class degrees. In the past few years, the majority of BAME students on our programme have achieved these grades, and have sometimes been amongst the highest achievers on the programme, department and faculty. Moreover, we have seen a considerable rise in our position in university subject league tables over the past two years. We now sit within the top 60 in the UK and in the top 5 in London (Guardian league tables 2016&17. www.guardian.co.uk). In 2017, our programme was also rated highest for student experience in London, and second in the South East. Moreover, I have received faculty and Student Led Teaching awards for my contributions to student experience and personal tutoring. I was also nominated for awards for inspirational teaching and 'going the extra mile'. In April this year, I also received an award from the International Conference of Nigerian Students (a national organisation for African students) for 'Altruistic Endeavours and Inspirational Impact', and in July, nominated for the Vice Chancellor's award for Staff Member of the Year. Nevertheless, occasionally, our efforts and successes are negated and/or downplayed.

As Mirza (2015) notes, there is a tendency to negatively view and even 'infantilise' BAME academics (especially females), including those in management positions. This again corresponds to the point made previously that professionalism is primarily accorded to White middle class males (Messner 2000), and that we are somehow less capable (Mirza 2015). Sadly, and as shown above this is something I have experienced at points in my educational and professional journey. Although I have always worked hard to challenge these assumptions, and have largely been successful, there is still an implicit requirement to 'prove [my] academic [and professional] credentials' (Jones 2006:15). Moreover 'being the other' in academia means that as a 'representative of a people thought to be incompetent and undisciplined, you must remain vigilant not to reinforce ugly stereotypes….' (Jones 2006:154) as well as 'having to cope simultaneously with the anxieties and vulnerabilities common to minority faculty [staff] and students situated in an academic setting' (Takara 2016: unpaginated).

Ahmed (2018:28) refers to the consequences of these issues as the 'feminist snap'. Effectively, sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination, can lead to 'snapping', due to continual 'struggle[s] to expose [this type of] violence' (ibid). Yet expressing dissatisfaction of such treatment can be difficult, because 'sexism and racism can make it costly to name sexism and racism' (ibid). In order to deal with these issues, and avoid representing negative labels attributed to us, including the 'angry Black woman' or as 'aggressive, and immoral' (Takara 2016: unpaginated), again, greater levels of impression management become necessary. This entails presenting ourselves as being 'sweet tempered and smiling'. (Irvin -Painter 1997 in Jones 2006:154), and 'concealing understandable feelings of frustration and annoyance that result' (Harvey Wingfield 2015 unpaginated). Yet, as Ahmed comments, this can result in 'reach[ing] a point, when you just can't take it anymore', but pressure not to 'snap can be hard work' (ibid).

Thus, Harris (2017:131) observes that 'the very act of being a Black female academic…is a metaphysical dilemma', and that the type of performance and impression management' that we have to undertake 'like all those which are complex and layered feel [s] just as much like exhausting physical labour as emotional labour' (Harris 2017:134).

Concluding reflections

My experience as a Black female in academia resonates with that of Maylor (2009:60), as it is 'fused with happiness and sadness'. Happiness stems from the positive relationships that I have with many of my students, regardless of their social backgrounds/ethnicity, the fact that they feel able to come to me if they are facing issues, and from working together to find viable solutions. Moreover, when I give students' classes, or present papers at conferences which are well received, I am pleased. The sense that I am continuing Lizbet's legacy, despite struggles along the way, also greatly motivates me.

A further positive is the valuable support networks that I have been able to establish along my journey in academia. For instance, I have joined an excellent international Facebook group specifically for female academics (Women in Academia Support Network). I have, through connections made in person and online been invited to participate/advise on research collaborations, or present at conferences, review journal articles, and act as an external examiner.

Within my institution, I also have a core group of wonderful colleagues, including a highly supportive line manager, research mentor, head and deputy head of school, and co lecturer all of whom provide excellent guidance when I struggle. My Faculty Pro Vice chancellor is also valuable source of support, as he continually highlights my successes, and encourages my progression.

I also share Maylor's sentiments about 'sadness' resulting from having to continually challenge longstanding deep seated stereotypes, and the exertion of 'complex and layered' emotional labour required to do this. Limited amounts of recognition, and constantly being required to prove myself, are subtle forms of racism. This occasionally results in self-doubt concerning my abilities, which is difficult to contend with. Thus, Yosso (2005), stresses the importance of examining and 'calling out' oppression such as this, but also identifying and adopting constructive ways to resist it. Although it is problematic to be continually proving oneself, identifying innovative approaches to support my students in their education so as to ensure success and achieving it, can be a powerful, satisfying form of resistance. It is even more so when the success goes beyond expectations. For instance, I have been commended by external examiners and students being innovative and framing course content around students' social experiences/identities, and encouraging them to go as far as they wish in exploring particular areas, in discussions and assessments. This approach has contributed to a substantial improvement in grades and resulted in my courses exceeding university benchmarks, of 75% students attaining 2.1/1st class grades.

A further example is of how, despite initial doubts expressed about my ability to be a programme leader, I have contributed to the improvement of the status of our degree, student retention and general experience within it. In some ways this resonates with Lizbet's experiences, because although she 'transgressed' societal 'norms' to provide an education for her children, the excellent outcomes of my mother and her siblings, which exceeded the expectations of her community is a testimony to her efforts.

Challenging low expectations, is, in my view more effective when undertaken in a low key manner, as positive outcomes often shock those holding negative perceptions. While some may refuse to acknowledge our successes, on some level, it can also force a re-evaluation of how we and/or our abilities are regarded, albeit grudgingly. This is something that perhaps Lizbet faced in her endeavours and I have certainly experienced throughout my academic and professional journey.

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