Professional and Personal Experiences as Leverage for Learning

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The current transnational climate (British Council, 2014) in Europe is likely to continue to generate institutional and classroom situations which dictate that difference and otherness be the norm rather than the exception. Unfortunately, in the 1960's, Black and minority ethnic (BME) migrants from the former British colonies had less-than-favorable educational experiences in Britain due to prejudice and stereotyping mainly arising from cultural differences. Since then there have been a plethora of studies, policies, and reports regarding the perpetuation of discrimination in educational institutions. Today, British higher educational institutions have finally begun to recognize the need to reduce progression and attainment gaps. However, their focus tends to only consider the student "Black and Minority Ethnic attainment gap" with almost no attention being given to educators', or more specifically there is a distinctive lack of thought given to the female BME educators' progression and attainment in British HEIs. As such, this paper draws theoretically and conceptually on critical cultural autoethnography, to illustrate the value of conducting research into a female's BME educators' personal and professional experiences, and "gives voice to previously silenced and marginalized experiences" (Boylorn and Orbe, 2014, p. 15). In doing so, I highlight how higher educational institutions underutilisation of such competencies and contributions have and continue to perpetuate BME underachievement. I conclude the paper by questioning the accountability of providing support for BME educators progression and attainment, challenge educational leaders to consider the value and utilization of cultural knowledge, and implore all educators to reflect on how their personal experiences influence their professional identity.

Keywords: cultural critical autoethnography, cultural knowledge, personal and professional identity, critical reflection, educational leadership

INTRODUCTION

Diversity and inclusion are increasingly becoming important topics in higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Britain and the current transnational climate (British Council, 2014) is likely to continue to generate institutional and classroom situations which dictate that difference and otherness be the norm rather than the exception. This paper stems from my doctoral thesis in which I explored the experiences of Black female educators in higher educational institutions (Kappert, 2018), eluding to the metaphor of being seen but not heard and demonstrating ways in which British HEIs have systematically failed the female BME student cum educator.

In this paper, I offer critical reflections of my own personal and professional experiences via the use of stories, to illustrate how cultural—critical autoethnography can be used to reflect on professional and personal experiences as leverage for learning. Narrated by the autoethnographic child and a matriarchal fish, these life-stories are to be viewed as data, scaffolded within a framework of Black feminist methodologies (Nixon and King, 2013) and Caribbean colonial and postcolonial histories and conditions (Tong, 1989; Collins, 1990; Hooks et al., 1994).

Notably, I have chosen not to explain any of the stories (Ellis, 2004), but as Clough (2002) suggests I have made contextual, analytical, and critical discussions fit around them. It is hoped that this will create verisimilitude (Oddie, 1986; Niiniluoto, 1987) and *"to not only guide* [your] *life narratives up to the present but to direct them into the future"* (Bruner, 1987, p. 31). Similarly, instead of presenting findings, I conclude the paper with critical insights gleaned from the research process (Chang, 2008). In doing this, I invite you the reader to switch roles and functions with me throughout my autoethnographic journey, as a means of understanding your own behavior derived from internalizing a perception of mine.

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

According to the story told (Norman, 1968), Christopher Columbus first arrived in 1492 on one of the Jamaica's most beautiful beaches: Puerto Seco in St. Ann. Consequently, the area is also known as Discovery Bay. Upon arrival, he was met by the Taínos, more commonly known as the Arawak Indians. They were simple folk who fed on maize, fish, and root vegetables; many of these vegetables still make up the Jamaican staple diet. Columbus and his men turned these early inhabitants into slaves, and eventually all 60,000 are believed to have died out.

"The Innocent Simpleton!"

  Fish: *Blub blub. Hey, you up there, what year are we in?*
Child: *1948*
  Fish: *Well I never, time has literally flown. You see, child, I have been down here a while saw some terrible things and decided to lie low. What did you say? Who am I? Blub!*

Well, I go by the name of Miss Arowana. I don't really belong here: I am originally from Africa. Well, let's just say I got caught up; as luck would have it, I escaped too and just decided to hang around here at the beach. I do miss home, though, but I don't really have the energy to go all the way back, plus they have probably killed off all my friends and family by now. I would feel like a fish out of water get it? Blub blub!

I have made a few friends over the years. Well, first came those fish-eating monsters called the Taínos. I had many narrow escapes with them, but, eventually, when they found out that I could help them to catch the pesky rat-bats that were eating their maize, we developed a sort of understanding. I even nicknamed them after myself:

Ara-wak get it? Blub blub!

As they say, every fish has its day, and one morning whilst I was going about my own business, I saw something that sent chills up my gills. I wondered to myself what those crazy Arawak Indians were up to by putting cloth on poles and sticking them on their canoes. Now, I am not one to poke my nose where it's not wanted, so I bunkered down in the sand to keep an eye on things.

Then I heard such a racket, so I peeped up to see, and, Lord have mercy, it was pure chaos! The sand was stained red and my friends were being chased by a gang of hooligans. Starfish, who is very bright, later informed me that the ringleader was called "the admiral" or something just as fool. Child, you can imagine my fear when she happened to mention that they were from Spain, which is near enough to Africa. I thought that they had come to take me home the African government had caught up with me and I would be deported!

Say, child, what do they call this place now?

Child: *Puerto Seco*
  Fish: *Puerto Seco! Blub, still like it here, though: the water is so clear and the sand... well, the same color as me, I guess?*

"Jacmandora mi nuh choose none!"

In 1655, the British captured the island from the Spanish and Jamaica became profitable through its sugar plantations, leading to the development of the transatlantic slave trade; Jamaica was the final destination for 37% of all the slave ships to the region (Watts, 1987). The island experienced over 300 years of British control, however the slaves fought hard for their independence, resulting in the official ending of slavery in 1834, with Jamaica becoming a colony until the Union Jack was finally lowered, and the Jamaican flag unveiled in 1962.

Retribution

Child: *Miss Arowana, Miss Arowana?*
  Fish: *What is it, child?*
Child: *Are you still there?*
  Fish: *Well, where else would I be? Blub!*
Child: *What happened next?*
  Fish: *Retribution.*
Child: *Retri- what?*

  Fish: *What's wrong with you, child? All this patois affecting your English? Anyway, as I said, I decided to lie low, but, here in the underworld, you hear things. Parrotfish told me that he remembers his grandfather telling me that more ships came, and they got bigger and bigger.*

I am not sure his-story is true, though, as they didn't stop here. They sailed on past Ocho Rios and up the coast; I still think that's a silly name for a place that doesn't have eight

rivers, but then the Spanish were not the brightest.

Anyway, parrotfish said that there were 38 in total, carrying some 9,000 men. Let's see, it must have been around 1,655 that Pen and Vegetables were sent by Olive Crumb, well, to drive the Spanish out. Would have loved to have seen it what a massacre, blub!

Child: *Miss Arowana, don't you mean, Lord Oliver Cromwell, Admiral Penn, and General Venables?*

Fish: *Well, child, if you know so much, why are you asking me? What do you want with all these stories anyway?*

Child: *I need to write them down.*

Fish: *Write them down? Blub, whatever for?*

Child: *So that they don't get lost or forgotten.*

Fish: *Lost, forgotten? Blub blub; well I never! What are you saying? I'll be here to tell your grandchildren about your shenanigans. I will bathe in the cool crystal waters of the Caribbean Sea and frolic in the warm sunshine watching, listening, and remembering. No, child, I will never leave Jamaica, and Jamaica will never leave me, blub blub blub!*

"Jacmandora mi nuh choose none!"

THE COLONIAL LEGACY

In 1948 Britain passed a nationality act, which gave all colonists the right to live and work in Britain. This resulted in the renowned docking of the Empire Windrush in Tilbury with shiploads of migrants arriving in the *"motherland"* (Sewell, 1998). Many were led to believe that the streets of London were paved with gold (Williams, 1985; Levy, 2004; Chambers, 2017). Wambu (1998) echoes their expectations and aspirations: *"We came in awe and in search of a missing part of ourselves, which we believed had been stolen. We came all this way only to find ourselves"* (p. 71).

In 1951, the UK census showed that there were 17,000 Caribbean migrants living in Britain. The subsequent census showed an increase of 601,237 Jamaican adults alone (Davison, 1962, p. 8). By 1960, migrant children of all nationalities made up 2% of the English school population (Phillips and Phillips, 1998). What many of these children found in Britain was sharply at variance with what they were accustomed to; for they were not all, as historical photographs would have us believe, *"country bumpkins"* or, as Hall (1984, p. 4) eloquently puts it, *"the innocent simpleton too slow for the fast ways of the advanced modern world."* The reality is that many were from *"a city, like Kingston, as big and swinging in its poverty and style as any small colonial capital"* (Hall, 1984).

Furthermore, many saw themselves as British citizens and knew more about English culture than the English themselves (McMillan, 2009), yet, in Britain, they experienced a vastly different type of education than those who remained in the Caribbean. Whilst the region has produced several Nobel Prize winners and Musgrave medallists and continues to enrich the world's cultures through literature, music, and art (Chamberlain, 1998), many migrant children became scholars of educationally subnormal (ESN) schools designed for, *"Pupils who, by reason*

of limited ability or other conditions resulting in education retardation, required some specialized form of education wholly or partly in substitution for the education normally given in ordinary schools" (Gulliford, 1971, p. 68).

In the 1960's and 1970's, tests such as the Vineland Social Maturity Scale and the IQ tests of Jensen and Eysenck were used to determine migrant children's educational levels; by 1968, there were ~16,500 migrants between the ages of seven and 16 in ESN schools (Coard, 1971). Migrant students who made it into other types of schools often felt alienated, developed adjustment problems, and suffered psychologically due to institutional discrimination (Kiev, 1965; Bhatnagar, 1970; Lamur and Speckmann, 1975; Phillips and Phillips, 1998).

There is an old African proverb: *"It takes a village to raise a child."* However, this was not what the UK demonstrated when opening its doors to its colonies. In contrast to assimilation theories, which suggest that when people move to another land they steadily learn, absorb, and adopt the language, culture, values, and behavioral patterns of the receiving society and reject those of the homeland (Farley and Alba, 2002; Kasinitz et al., 2004; Thomson and Crul, 2007), Jamaicans found themselves subjected to discrimination, mainly due to their skin color, and at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

To try to improve educational conditions for their children, Jamaicans set up Saturday and Sunday schools. They established markets to import and sell West Indian produce, and they sought solace in their own churches because *"although Black people of all shades, cultural backgrounds, etc. have sought to participate in all aspects of the nation's life, they do so against a background of majority White hostility, sanctioned by the state and justified on the basis of apparent racial or color difference"* (Goulbourne, 1990, p. 6).

For other Jamaicans, it was the dream of saving up enough money to return home, placing them in a constant mode of *"fight or flight."* They invested in land and businesses in Jamaica and made regular trips there to visit their families (Foner, 2001). Many had needed to leave their children behind in Jamaica, intending to send for them at a later date, creating *"barrel pickney syndrome"* (Brown, 2012), which in turn added extra pressure of the expectation to send barrels of goods back home. This was compounded by the knowledge that they could not return without being *"a piece beta"* (Bennett, 1966), hence many never did. Stein (2004), in *"Crossing a Notion,"* describes this as the *"(im)possibility of returning"* syndrome.

All of this would have caused mental and physical hardships, placing the Jamaican migrant population in a perpetual state of flux, to paraphrase (Mitchell, 1997); being related to and yet not originating from Britain. It would have become difficult for the majority to form fixed identities, and, as a result, many young Jamaican migrants began to experiment with culture, which produced syncretic forms of expression and multi-vocal narratives: forms of *"conceptual muddling"* (Vertovec, 2007, p. 2).

This said, it is becoming increasingly difficult for researchers to ignore the experiences of the select few Jamaicans who did make it home, as statistics reveal the size of the British Caribbean-born population in Britain has begun to show a rapid decline,

attributed to mortality and return migration (Peach, 1991). Unfortunately, there is still very little known about other former colonists who migrated to further European lands after Britain, creating third-time migrants or a third diaspora. However, we do know that they include writers like George Lamming, E. R. Braithwaite, and Samuel Selvon, all who left Great Britain and began writing from elsewhere.

However, to date, research has indicated that the descendants of these former migrants still do not perform as well as other nationalities do, are more likely to underachieve, experience higher levels of unemployment, are overrepresented in the prison system, and have higher levels of poor mental and physical health (Gillborn and Gipps, 1996; Chamberlain, 1998; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Lindsay et al., 2006; Wright, 2013). Many explanations for this poor performance have been suggested: educators having lower expectations of their academic ability, the school curriculum lacking culturally relevant material, racist school practices (Sewell, 1997; Chamberlain, 1998; Blair, 2001; Wright, 2013), and a distinctive lack of Black role models. These issues are inevitably confounded with other factors known to have an impact on educational attainment, such as slavery, colonization, parental education, socio-economic status, and gender differences.

BME'S LIVING IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST AND IN THE SHADOWS OF AN IVORY TOWER

Having described the average Jamaican BME student's trajectory in the UK, in the rest of this paper I will discuss the personal and professional experiences of the female BME educator and include a summation of the reasons they themselves give for their marginalization from within the "Ivory Tower" (Shapin, 2012, p. 1). Pertinently,

> "There never was an Ivory Tower. It was always a figure of speech. There are towers and there is ivory, both quite real; it is their combination in the idea of an Ivory Tower which is both imaginary and consequential" (Shapin, 2012, p. 1).

In 2011, there were 14,000 professors in HEIs in the UK. Fifty of them were classed as BME, with only 10 of them being women. There were no BME vice-chancellors (Shepherd, 2011). A year later, a study conducted by University College London, "The Position of Women and BME Staff in Professorial Roles in UK HEIs" (2012), highlighted the historical discrepancies regarding the representation of BME professional staff from 2001 to 2011 via a Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) staff report. The study further highlighted that BME professors earned 9.4% less than their White counterparts (p. 1) and that White applicants were three times more likely to be successful in securing a professorial role than their BME colleagues were (p. 12).

In the same year, the University and College Union confirmed that only 1.1% of academic staff were Black and only 0.4% were Black British-born professors. In 2013, the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) spoke out about the harmful racial/gender

Ethnicity	Professors		Non-professors	
	No.	%	No.	%
White	13270	92.7	105345	91.6
Black	70	0.5	1480	1.3
Asian	430	3.0	3955	3.4
Chinese	235	1.6	1440	1.3
Mixed	135	1.0	1610	1.4
Other	180	1.3	1155	1.0

FIGURE 1 | UK academic staff by professorial category and ethnic group (Source: Unit, 2015).

stereotypes that are held against isolated Black academics by mostly White senior colleagues and managers, expressed through implicit biases (ECU, 2013). In 2014, the HESA confirmed that out of a total of 17,880 professors, 950 were Asian, 85 were Black, 365 were "other" (including "mixed") and the rest (15,200) were White.

In 2015, an ECU statistical report was published, highlighting the statistics detailed in **Figure 1**:

If we sail forward to 2017, The Guardian newspaper led with the following headline: "British Universities Employ No Black Academics in Top Roles" (Adams, 2017). The article further revealed that British universities employed more Black staff as cleaners, receptionists, and porters than as lecturers or professors. In February of the same year, Iyiola Solanke from the University of Leeds compiled a review of BME female professors who were or had been employed on a full-time, permanent basis in a UK HEI. Her findings revealed that there were 54 (including four emeritus) BME female professors engaged across 17 disciplines in 34 of the 164 UK's HEIs, with only four in education departments (Solanke, 2017).

Tate and Gabriel (2017, p. 54–55) describe the statistics in UK HEIs as evidence of "racism without racists," and Leonardo (2004) defines HEIs as spaces where, "color-blind ideologies are normalized and where racism and racialization are developed, maintained, reinforced, and embedded in curricula, policies, and practices (p. 6). We are further reminded that even after gaining a professorship it does not mean that the BME educators" struggles are over (Mirza, 2009); there are reports of fewer opportunities to develop and enhance their promotion prospects (Jones, 2006); experiences of invisibility, isolation, and marginalization (Carter et al., 1999; Deem et al., 2005; Mirza, 2006, 2009); and they are often given disproportionate workloads.

Unfortunately, far too little research has been conducted into why this is so, and the studies that do exist tend to take a statistical approach, as per those conducted by the HESA. Once again, very few have considered historical factors or daily experiences, and all of them group anybody who is not White, despite their experiences, in the same research cohort: BME. Bensimon

and Malcom-Piquex (2014) suggests that the inadequacies and distinct underrepresentation of BME educators have persisted because of the learning problem of institutions. In accordance, Dr. Nicola Rollock, lead author of the award-winning book *"The Color of Class: The Educational Strategies of the Black Middle Classes"* (Rollock et al., 2015), eludes that the situation exists because there is still no single initiative that specifically seeks to support BME academics in their career progression. A more recent study conducted by The European University Association (EUA) and the European Universities Continuing Education Network (EUCEN) with support from the European Students Union (ESU) also confirms this. They conducted a survey at 156 HEIs in the attempted to identify the strategies and approaches being employed in regard to equity, diversity, and inclusion (2018–2020) and concluded that giving priority to diversity, equity, and inclusion was a strategic choice, often driven by the central leadership of the institutions,

> *"Often the direct and explicit support of the rector or a vice rector has been a turning point in developing strategic aims. It is the support of institutional leadership that allow experiences and practices from bottom-up initiatives to become policies and lead to cultural and structural changes"* (p. 3).

They also claimed that such policies were driven by societal developments, legal obligations, funding (Claeys-Kulik and Estermann, 2015), or linked to an internationalization agenda such as quotas for students and staff from diverse backgrounds (Sursock, 2015).

Unfortunately, as with previous reports there was a distinctive variance between measures addressing students vs. those addressing faculty and staff, and those that did tended only to focus on gender equality (p. 16). However, when asked about the top three success factors for their institutional strategies and activities, 76% of their respondents indicated leadership commitment as being essential, followed by direct involvement of the target group(s) and the involvement of the entire university community in developing and implementing strategies and activities (p. 24). In accordance Leonardo (2004) claims that the starting point for understanding such oppression should be a critical analysis of BME experiences, and Reynolds (2006) argues that a shift toward knowledge of cultural factors and structural constraints is vital to understanding the diverse ways in which different ethnic groups develop, sustain, and access social capital, yet the cause or culpability for many of these trajectories often remains unexplored.

In their book aptly titled, *"Inside the Ivory Tower: Narratives of Women of Color Surviving and Thriving in British Academia"* the authors (Tate and Gabriel, 2017) discuss how racism manifests itself in day-to-day experiences in HEIs, metaphorically dubbing this as being *"inside the ivory tower"* (Tate and Gabriel, 2017). Similarly, Dr. Kwhali, patron of the organization Black British Academics, discusses her difficulties associated with maintaining Black values in a White context. She clarifies that this is not necessarily related to race but rather to history and culture (Kwhali, 2017, p. 5). She recalls her early educational experiences of never having seen a Black teacher; in fact, she claims that she was never taught about a single Black historian, scientist,

inventor, or even writer. She implies that the only inclusion in her curriculum pertaining to Black people was in the context of either slavery or colonialism. She puts forth:

> *"Whilst individual liberal teachers were reassuring me that color doesn't matter, the hidden curriculum was telling me that it mattered a great deal. It had its roots in slavery, colonialism, and imperialism, which had helped to inform attitudes toward Black people. When teachers asserted that they treated all children the same, I came to understand that this meant White"* (p. 8).

Such sentiments have also been echoed by the Lisbon-born BME psychologist, writer, and university lecturer Grada Kilomba. In her book *"Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism"* (Kilomba, 2008, p. 31), she describes her experiences relating to voice and being silenced: *"Black writers often get told that their work is interesting but not scientific enough and the White majority label the Black minority as lacking in knowledge."* She, as others have (Hernandez et al., 2015; Pillay et al., 2016), acknowledges that for postcolonial intellectuals, there is no place to speak. She writes about collective secrets: of slavery and the continued colonization of racism. She describes her daily experiences with racism, *"A shock or violent scene which places the Black subject back at the colonial scene where they are once again imprisoned as the subordinate, the exotic, the other,"* (p. 13).

Professor Cecile Wright, in an article published by Times Higher Education, *"Distinct Lack of Ebony in the Ivory Towers"* (2004), talks about her experiences as a professor in a British university and confesses that she has had to get used to overt racism from colleagues during her academic career. The article quotes her as saying:

> *"The situation in academia with regard to race is absolutely disgusting and shocking. This is the one area of British cultural life where institutions are able to discriminate with impunity. In the health service or in schools, it would not be allowed to happen because there is more scrutiny. Universities are able to hide away because they are seen as liberal institutions"* (p. 4).

Whilst it may be easy for some to dismiss the experiences of UK BME educators in HEIs by contextualizing them and arguing that such experiences mirror the society in which we live, King (1988), in *"Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology,"* reminds us of the commonalities all Black women share,

> *"The experience of Black women is apparently assumed, though never explicitly stated, to be synonymous with that of either Black males or White females; and since the experiences of both are equivalent a discussion of Black women in particular is superfluous"* (p. 45).

Bhopal (2018) also reminds us that such commonalities reach further than our own local communities and, indicatively, uses an intersectional lens to analyse the ways in which Black people experience education in both the UK and the USA. Similarly, in *"Problematizing Authentic Leadership: A Collaborative Autoethnography of Immigrant Women of Color Leaders in Higher Education"* (Ngunjiri and Hernandez, 2017)

the authors illustrate the underrepresented of Black women as leaders in American universities, by citing, *"Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics indicated that as of 2013, Black women held 3.7% of tenure track positions and 2.2% of tenured positions within the U.S. academy"* (p. 394).

Associate Professor, Adah Ward Randolph from Ohio University, College of Education, whilst acknowledging that *"work in academia requires some disentanglement of knots— especially those that result from the permanence of racism and gender inequities"* (cited in Cobb-Roberts and Agosto, 2011, p. 262), attempts to move the discussion on as she asks the question, *"what does racism look like?"* (Cobb-Roberts and Agosto, 2011). I take the liberty to rephrase the Professor's question and ask, "what does it mean to experience racism and how does this affect one's teaching and learning?" and as if in response she writes,

> *"Many of these women scholars are taxed professionally and emotionally so as to induce stress which can create health problems or exacerbate pre-existing conditions that can negatively impact performance. Although each scholar appears to have overcome many setbacks, which is to be applauded, they provoke us to ask whether we too often suffer in silence"* (Cobb-Roberts and Agosto, 2011, p. 262).

In sum, whilst some educators blame their experiences on their inability to conform to the dominant or normative conception of an academic (Puwar, 2004; Wright et al., 2007; Tate and Gabriel, 2017) others cite hyper-surveillance, being *"othered,"* neutralized ethnicity, subjective bias (Bhopal and Jackson, 2013), and colonization as reasons for their marginalization.

> *Colonization in reverse*
> *"Wat a joyful news, Miss Mattie,*
> *I feel like me heart gwine burs*
> *Jamaica people colonisin*
> *Englan in Reverse*
> *By the hundred, be de tousan*
> *From country and from town,*
> *By de shipload, be the plane load*
> *Jamaica is Englan boun…"*

Fish: *Hey, what's all that noise about?*

Child: *Sorry, Miss Arowana, I didn't mean to wake you, but I am practicing for a festival.*

Fish: *FESTIVAL, FESTIVAL, "I feel like my heart gwine burs," blub blub!*

Child: *Miss Arowana, whatever is the matter?*

Fish: *Don't you know what dem do with FESTIVAL?*

Child: *Well yes, it is the national salute to all things Jamaican and aims to visualize our history and our culture. It also marks the day when we became independent from the British.*

Fish: *No, no, child, here on de beach dem eat FESTIVAL wid fish!*

Child: *Ah, Miss Arowana, it's not that kind of festival. These celebrations have been around since 1963, and we have the National Song Competition and Miss Jamaica Festival Queen, and at school we get to compete with poetry, dance, and music. If we are really good, then we get to go to Kingston for the finals.*

Fish: *OK, OK, I better help you fix that poem then. Did you write it?*

Child: *Ha, no, no, it was written by Miss Lou.*

Fish: *Miss Lou?*

Child: *Yes, the Right Honorable Louise Bennett-Coverley.*

Fish: *Oh, yes, the one who wrote "Cuss Cuss," "Noh Lickle Twang," and that one poem that reminds me of you.*

Child: *Me? Which one?*

Fish: *"Mout-Amassi," blub blub!*

Child: *Ok, Miss Arowana, I take your point and better get back to practice…*
> *"Oonoo see how life is funny*
> *Oonoo see de tunabout,*
> *Jamaica live fi box bread…"*

Fish: *WAIT, WAIT, what did you say, child, BREAD…?*
> *"Jacmandora mi nuh choose none!"*

In sum, whilst the academic milieu may seem to have become saturated with the rehashing of history, memory, and guilt surrounding slavery and colonization, it has neglected to fully consider the effect that the legacy may have on today's society. For example, in a written declaration to the European Parliament in 2013, a group of British Members of Parliament called for a European Remembrance Day to be dedicated to the victims of colonization and slavery. Such a move not only reopened the debate regarding truth and reconciliation but also repositioned the legacy of slavery from being a quintessential problem of individual former colonialist countries to become a part of a European past and consequently a part of the collective European memory. Despite this call, to date, there has been little more than a cursory nod given by the European Parliament to acknowledge or consider that the legacy of slavery may also hold some culpability regarding current educational attainment gaps in European countries.

Similarly, there are many Jamaicans and their descendants would like to forget the past and move on, others call for a truth and reconciliation committee to be set up to right the wrongs made against their ancestors, like those in Canada, Australia, and, more recently, South Africa. Unfortunately, neither of these can be achieved without due consideration being given to the way in which we [Jamaicans] experience our legacies: the memories, the daily reminders, new stereotypical and racist experiences, and the perpetuation of colonization which still stifles cultural syncretism needed as a creative defense against today's economic circumstances and class positioning. Hence, in this paper, as per my thesis (Kappert, 2018) I suggest, that perhaps if we start to collect and analyse each other's stories we will begin to see and understand the diasporic world much better; through the eyes and experiences of the other, we can find solutions for emergent problems by comparing the issues.

THE METHODOLOGY: *CRITIQUES, CRITICISMS, AND THE DEFENSE OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHY*

In the penultimate section of this paper, I critically discuss the methodology I used to explore my experiences as a female BME student cum educator in British HEIs. This will be followed by a brief introduction to the research design and some critical insights gleaned from my thesis.

Autoethnography is a qualitative method (Mizzi, 2010; Starr, 2010) that has emerged from a postmodern philosophy (Clifford, 1988; Behar and Gordon, 1995; Wall, 2008) and the need to resist colonialists' impulses and the guise of conducting research by entering a culture, exploiting its members and then writing about it for personal or professional gain (Conquergood, 1991; Riedmann, 1993; Ellis, 2007). The term itself is not new but only began gaining academic recognition when the cultural anthropologist David Hayano published his book *"Poker Faces"* (Hayano, 1982), wherein he detailed his experiences as a semi-professional player in public poker clubs in California. As such, autoethnographies tend to be highly personalized stories that draw upon the experience of the researcher to extend the understanding of the self: in social contexts (Reed-Danahay, 1997), in relation to the *"other"* (Pratt, 1992), to explain the self to others, to explain the *"othering"* of the self or rather how the self is *"othered"* (Sparkes, 2002) and *"to discover the culture of self, and of others through self-reflection"* (Ricci, 2003, p. 593).

Subsequently, autoethnographies are seen to *"provide a means to legitimize personal experience as a knowledge source"* (Struthers, 2012, p. 20) and various related intellectual traditions have emerged, including critical autoethnography (Boylorn and Orbe, 2014), analytical autoethnography (Murphy, 1987; Anderson, 2006, 2011), evocative autoethnography (Denzin, 1989; Pelias, 2004; Sparkes, 2007; Ellis, 2009a,b; Spry, 2009), and transpersonal autoethnography (Raab, 2013).

However, autoethnography has also been described as a philosophy rather than a well-defined method, *"enabling creative latitude in the production of an autoethnographic text"* (Wall, 2008, p. 39). According to Stivers (1993), despite them being entertaining and even edifying, they fail to qualify as useful knowledge because they are not logical or scientific. Other criticisms refer to their generalisability, reliability, validity, authenticity, exposure, indulgence, self as data, objectivity, data quality, legitimacy, ethics, memory, and use of fiction (Atkinson, 1997; Coffey, 1999; Holt, 2003). Such discourse, contributes to the complexity of their construction and acceptability, and throughout my thesis I felt compelled to defend the use of autoethnography from inside the field, as summated below.

In Defense of Autoethnography's Subjectivity

It has been put forth that all research has some element of subjectivity, and there are those who solidly contest the assumption that objectivity is at all possible in research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1999). Others argue that the methods and procedures employed in research are ultimately and inextricably tied to the values and subjectivities of the researcher, therefore finding it futile to debate whether autoethnography is a valid research process or product (Bochner, 2000; Ellis, 2009a). In concurrence, Sutton-Smith (1986) offers two emerging perspectives for analyzing subjective narratives, which also reflect Bruner's (1986) two modes of cognition: paradigmatic and narrative. The first follows a textual or structural form of analysis whereby stories are analyzed for criteria that would place them in one or the other category and thus reinforce a hypothesis.

The second perspective embraces (Ellis, 2009b) autoethnographic view to a certain extent: *"To understand the meaning of stories to those who use them, rather than some truth they tell us, we must study them in their contexts of use"* (Sutton-Smith, 1986, p. 68).

In Defense of Autoethnography's Accuracy

Rather than being preoccupied with accuracy, autoethnographers put forth that when applied to their craft, the context, meaning and utility of such terms are altered (Holman Jones, 2005). By example, through the term *"generalisability"*, autoethnography shifts the focus from the researcher to the reader; the reader determines if a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know (Bochner, 2000; Ellis and Ellingson, 2000; Pillemer, 2001).

In Defense of Autoethnography's Vulnerability

When Behar (1996) discussed the idea of vulnerability in her writing, she indicated that it did not mean that any or all information may or should be shared with the reader; rather, to her it meant *"opening Pandora's box"* (p. 19) to expose a deeper self so that transformation and growth could take place. This she claims affords the researcher some emotional distance and provides a more helpful and healthy perspective for the reader and the researcher to learn from.

In Defense of Autoethnography's Reliability

Autoethnographers also maintain that reliability is intended to be tested by the reader, who is expected to ask questions pertaining to the credibility of the researcher: *"Could the researcher have had the experiences described, do they believe that this is actually what happened?"* (Bochner, 2002, p. 86).

In Defense of Autoethnography's Validity

In terms of validity, there is the assumption that the story being told is coherent and, *"enables the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller to see the world from her or his point of view"* (Plummer, 2001, p. 401). Ellis (2000) further defines validity as work that improves or broadens the life of the participant and reader by seeking verisimilitude. She describes autoethnographic stories as, *"lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true. The story is coherent. It connects readers to writers and provides continuity in their lives"* (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 282).

Most autoethnographers are aware of the critiques of their work, from those mentioned above to it being insufficiently rigorous, theoretical and analytical, or too aesthetic, emotional, and therapeutic (Hooks et al., 1994; Keller, 1995; Ellis, 2009b). They have also been criticized for doing too little fieldwork and for observing too few cultural members (Buzard, 2003; Fine, 2003; Delamont, 2009). In defense, (Richardson, 2000, p. 254) suggests that (auto)ethnography is both a science and an art and proposes five criteria against which it can be evaluated: substantive contribution, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, the impact the narrative has on the reader and how much the narrative expresses a reality.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

As mentioned at the onset, I chose to use cultural critical autoethnography for my thesis. Prior to discussing my research design, I will briefly outline links between critical autoethnography, critical theory, cultural analysis and critical reflection. By definition, critical autoethnography is a qualitative research tool concerned with connecting the interpersonal experiences of race, gender, sexuality and ability to larger systems of power, social privilege, and oppression (Boylorn and Orbe, 2014). Potter (2015) adds to this definition by alluding that there are relationships amongst critical autoethnographies, identity and power. He claims that they,

> "offer an excellent opportunity for critical theorists to move beyond discussing the forces of power in the socio-political landscape—they give us the tools to dismantle the very system that has created the power structure" (p. 1,436).

Adams (2017, p. 79) ascertains that there are vital and often unforeseen connections between personal experiences and cultural experiences, and by consensus (Boylorn and Orbe, 2017), identify manifestations of power and privilege in everyday practices and discern social injustices and inequities.

Synonymous with the genre, there are variations in critical autoethnography's interpretation and usage. For example, in *"Re-telling Our Stories: Critical Autoethnographic Narratives,"* authors Tilley-Lubbs and Calva (2016) use critical autoethnography as a methodological approach to problematise individual experiences through the combined lenses of critical pedagogy and autoethnography. Whilst, in his article *"Critical Autoethnography, Education, and a Call for Forgiveness,"* Adams (2017) states,

> "Critical autoethnographies should also describe how to live with others who have enacted or perpetuated personal/cultural offenses, as well as consider how people carry memories and scars of offenses across the lifespan" (p. 79).

Similarly, Critical theory attempts to reveal and deconstruct the power structures that become exposed during the research process and as a consequence of having conducted the research. Aptly, other critical autoethnographies in support of this include *"Re-assembly Required: Critical Autoethnography and Spiritual Discovery"* by Tilley-Lubbs (2017), *"Critical Autoethnography: Intersecting Cultural Identities in Everyday Life,"* edited by Boylorn and Orbe (2014). And *"Living Bodies of Thought: The 'Critical' in Critical Autoethnography"* by Holman Jones (2016). It is the latter who alerts us to the *"critical"* in *"critical autoethnography"* and reminds us that *"theory is not a static or autonomous set of ideas, objects, or practices"* (Holman Jones, 2016, p. 228).

Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal further discusses both the subject of cultural analysis (Bal et al., 1996) and the practice of cultural analysis (Bal, 2012) and reminds us that it is impossible to conduct the former without clarifying what extent and what conditions the writings are irremediably bound. Such writings not only offer credence to the first section of this paper in which I describe the cultural context and the experience of the female BME student cum educator at length, but also serves to reminded us of how critical autoethnographies call attention to harmful cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, social class, and colonialism.

The Reflective Process and Data Generation

Throughout my thesis, I chose to engage in both critical reflection (Dewey, 1902, 1933; Freire, 1998, 2000; Mezirow, 2000) and structured reflection (Johns, 1994). White et al. (2006, p. 12) discuss the benefit of critical reflection in the deconstruction and reconstruction of power, privilege, personal beliefs, and practices. However, they also warn against partaking in any form of reflective process without being clear about the specific purpose and process of reflection in relation to the particular context (White et al., 2006). Hence, in keeping with the methodology, I utilized a cyclical structure of context, reflection, and story for my thesis as illustrated below.

Unlike some traditional research, the research design, and methodology of the thesis started with the inaugural chapter; as such, it immediately began to generate data for reflection, which I collected in a reflective journal. Initially, I found reflection difficult, and writing in my journal at regular intervals often fell secondary to my busy schedule. I was embarrassed about some of my entries and my *"ramblings,"* which ironically in hindsight turned out to be some of my more-poignant reflections. I was also reassured by the literature:

> *"There are no rules, no right or wrong ways of journaling; people just tell their stories the best they can."* (Cox et al., 1991, p. 379) and *"Do not disdain the idle nonsensical or shocking thoughts which the mind throws up. Hold them. Look at them. Play with them. See where they lead..."* (Okri, 1998, p. 22).

I kept a reflective journal for seven years, which included entries pertaining to the development of my research, insights that came whilst reading and attending multiple conferences, frustrations, and hopes, daily experiences, and journeys; in the autoethnographic literature, these are formally referred to as *"mind notes"* and are used as a precursor to the writing process (Chang, 2008; Emerson et al., 2011). In total, there were 433 entries. I used open coding to gain an understanding of my teaching and learning. The main aim here was to see if a pattern or trend emerged that suggested underlying beliefs and commitments about knowledge, learning, and my role as an educator.

Similarly, I kept a memory box which represented the tin cans and the little private boxes that slaves used to carry around with them; they held remnants of their ancestors: totems, charms, trinkets, and a swath of their mother's hair (Machiorlatti, 2005, p. 101). Mine also held remnants of past generations, for I do not have a solid lineage that can be traced. All I have, as many other Jamaican descendants have, are scraps of memories and the old and crumbling themes of the past (Du Bois, 1996). Consequently, my tin can held family memorabilia,

images, newspaper clippings, school reports, transcripts, letters of recommendation, and references. Although not included in this paper, I used them throughout the thesis to provide validation, to assist with memory generation and at times to engage with the reader. I chose pertinent images to complement the stories, mainly to help to illustrate how the stories came about and to embrace the assumption that there is a story to be told and that the narrator is a part of this story (Cavarero, 2000).

According to Davies and Harré (1990), such viewings enable narrators to position and locate themselves in the stories by bringing together subjective lived histories with symbolic interrelations of the self and the context. As such, they facilitated dissemination by being non-restrictive: independent of context and language. It is for this reason and to distance aesthetic and semantic expectations that I hereafter utilize the term *"visual manifestations,"* rather than *"visual storytelling"* or *"visual narratives."*

The practice of visualization was also useful during the narrative process, as I used family images to transport me back to lived experiences. I also used images to explain innermost feelings when I could not find the words and to document and generate memories of my teaching and learning experiences. Pink (2006) confirms the value of using reflexive representations of knowledge and experience in combination with written theoretical, descriptive, pedagogical, and applied anthropological narratives. This is confirmed by O'Neill and Harindranath (2006) in their investigation of the representation of life history narratives in imagery, poetry, and creative writing, which produce alternative ways of representing, *"narratives of self-making, fostering ethical communication, producing counter-hegemonic discourses and critical texts that may mobilize change"* (p. 51).

In sum, my research question was the anchor for my literature review, whereby I utilized several secondary resources, namely university reading lists, journals, displays, conference notes, researcher networks, newspapers, websites, visuals, and literary recollections. As such, the literature review and theoretical framework provided a point of departure for the exploration of my own educational journey to probe contemporary issues such as bureaucratic failings, class tensions, and racial misunderstandings. This was also construed through other BME educators' differing but relevant perspectives as they narrated their own educational journeys, which I used as a secondary source of data to support the philosophical underpinnings of my thesis (Andrei, 1945; Dewey, 1958, 1988; Fanon, 1963; Freire, 1998, 2000). Their stories and narratives provide a structure to help us understand the world.

By adopting such a stance, I was able to draw from a framework of studies, namely Black feminist methodologies, Caribbean colonial and postcolonial histories and conditions (Tong, 1989; Collins, 1990; Hooks et al., 1994), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2008; Bhopal, 2018) and critical race theory, as defined by Yosso (2005). The latter reminds us that although race is a significant factor in understanding some of the experiences of BME educators, *"focus should also be placed on the array of cultural knowledge, skills,*

abilities, and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged" (p. 69).

It is hoped that such a framework will enable you to reflect on and understand how I internalize my daily experiences, and thus gain insights into, *"the inside ideas that allow Black women to cope with and, in most cases, transcend the confines of race, class, and gender oppression"* (Collins, 1990, p. 93). This said, we are also reminded by Kwhali (2017) that, ultimately, we each have our own stories and cannot really know what it is to be another color or gender and cannot have the exact experiences that *"the other"* may have:

> *"Yet, I also know that my story will find resonance in the stories of sisters and brothers of different skin shades, ages, and genders. That is because my story is also their story in its context if not in its detail. I can tell my story because I stand on the shoulders of generations of Black people who have sacrificed their lives, freedoms and opportunities to secure the advancements I now enjoy"* (pg 22).

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL INSIGHTS

Rather than findings, Chang (2008) uses the term "insights" to describe the self-understanding articulated from an autoethnography and the autoethnographic process. The experiences detailed in the contextual section of this paper; the arrival of the former colonists to Britain and the female BME educators in *"the ivory tower,"* mirror my experiences both personally and professionally. By critically reflecting on these experiences, I have gained valuable insights into who I am as a female BME educator. In turn these insights form the crux of the recommendations on ways educators, educational leaders, and academic researchers can help improve conditions for the BME community as leverage for learning. Notably, by conducting your own autoethnography, you will gain a different set of insights as you give meaning to your own experiences.

Reflective Insight 1: Life Stories

Life stories are universal forms by which people interpret their experiences, verify their identities, justify their actions and myths, give meaning to memories and events, and make forecasts about how situations will evolve. There are many reasons to explore educator's stories, firstly, such narratives offer a rich platform from which to reflect on and explore educational practices in relation to history and culture from several theoretical perspectives: as an embodied practice, as a performance of spectacle, and as an expression of identity. However, as per the Igbo proverb, *"Until the lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt will always end in favor of the hunters"* (Anon). Here we are reminded that a large percentage of storymakers and storytellers have been silenced and that the stories passed down through the generations maybe biased, one-sided, and even lack validity. Essentially, according to the Igbo feminist author (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 2009), all stories are defined by the principle of *"nkali,"* which is the power in how they are told, who gets to tell

them, when they are told, and how many are told. She reminds us that there is danger in a single story: it creates stereotypes and makes the story become the only story. As such, there should never be a single story about any place or anyone.

Yet it is the American mythologist Joseph Campbell who adds that regardless of their origin or time of creation, a common pattern exists beneath all narratives. He is credited with having coined the concept of the *"monomyth,"* which refers to the theory that all mythic narratives are variations of a single great story, and perhaps one of his most widely cited pieces of work demonstrating this is *"The Hero with a Thousand Faces"* (Campbell, 1949). Here, he uses myths, stories, and metaphors to illustrate how the heroic self can overcome struggles to gain invaluable knowledge.

Practitioners of Caribbean literature will further testify that such literary devices have always been used within the region as a forum to engage wide and non-literary audiences with social and political issues; they are a source of historical and cultural remembering (Machiorlatti, 2005) and are often an expression of regional peculiarities. An example of the latter is the popular Jamaican myth of "*Jackmandora,*" who is the keeper of stories, and the phrase "*Jackmandora mi nu choose nun*" is always used by the narrator to signify the end of the story. Literally translated, the phrase means: *"I have told you this story the way I received it; as such, I am but the messenger and not responsible for its content".*

For me as a female BME educator the creation and reflection on my personal and professional lived stories has provided continuity and integration of my past, present, and foreseeable future experiences. However, by critically analyzing the experiences and achievement of other female BME educators, I have also come to realize that personal and professional stories have the ability to create change or entrench positive of negative perceptions of the self within educational institutions. Both scenarios raise questions as to who should give value and meaning to narratives in our HEIs? Ultimately, educational leaders need to create spaces for all educator's life stories to be used as a source of data and to be told by the people who have experienced them, for as we are reminded by Mirza (2017), *"we must tell our stories, or others will tell them for us… our stories must be told"* (p. 41).

Reflective Insight 2: Ways of Knowing

Based on the previous insight, we see that experiences are carried forward and influence future experiences, and as such both positive and negative traits, and ideologies maybe passed down from one generation to the next. Hence, as a female BME student cum educator many of my understandings have been built on the remnants of slavery and colonization. This ultimately has an impact on my judgements and the perceptions upon which these judgements are made. As a consequence, negative practices, and experiences may require a process of historical transformation and some recognition of injustice and repair.

Admittedly, this cannot only be addressed from an educational perspective, since such a climate was created from political and social injustices and the majority of the Black community is still waiting for at least the acknowledgment that

such oppression was wrong. However, the effects of slavery and colonization are proliferated with the perpetuation of privileging certain ways of knowing or undervaluing and underutilising Black cultural capital (Vincent, 1996; Crozier, 2001) in educational settings. As such, HEI's must endorses that the BME populace possesses great amounts of cultural capital, contrary to the dominant view of what is considered knowledge (Tate and Gabriel, 2017, p. 28). Further, they must make usage of cultural markers and dominant and non-dominant cultural capital to advantage BME groups (Carter, 2005).

By conducting my autoethnography, I have come to embrace other forms of knowledge, been encouraged to develop new ways of thinking (Walby, 2007), and have come to understand how broader social forces influence schooling and the curriculum. Consequentially, I have come to make the needs and interests of migrant and oppressed people central to my teaching practice. In doing so, I continuously reflect on the notion that a "one-size-fits-all" education system is no longer applicable, and embrace the value to be gained by exploring alterity or, as Hall suggests, the *"recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity: by a conception of identity that lives with and through as process, the idea of difference; by hybridity"* (Hall, 1993, p. 395).

Reflective Insight 3: It Takes a Village

Educational experience is not confined to a classroom but extends to include personal and professional contexts, backgrounds, and histories. It is reliant on perceptions and conceptions which affect everyday thoughts and actions. As such, social well-being must be the guiding principal in educational institutions and values, beliefs, feelings, interests, and desires should be studied in close relation with objects, events, and persons or rather in their genetic and causal sequences. More specifically, consideration needs to be given to the cohesion between BME educators' home/work environments and the work itself and BME identity constructs need to be reflected in the HEI's core value system.

This insight also builds on the previous, in that it calls on all educators to gain knowledge of the communities in which they work, the school setting, specific students, and of students' backgrounds, families, particular strengths, weaknesses, and interests, and to design their curricular accordingly. By analyzing my lessons as part of my research process, I have come to realize the importance of knowing who my students are and have a heightened awareness of the multiple ethical paradigms of justice, critique, care, and the profession' (Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2011) in their preparation and delivery.

Reflective Insight 4: Epistemic Messages

Our value process is the result of ongoing transactions between the self and the environment; it starts with knowing and understanding ourselves and only then can we begin to understand "others," which in turn leads to the formation of a sense of identity, self-esteem, self-worth, and self-confidence, as well as a genuine respect for others. Once again, this insight builds on the previous insight to remind educators that every statement they make in the classroom is value- laden and somehow connected to their own ideas about the purpose of

education. As such epistemic messages are embedded in their teaching methods, interpretation of subject content and their choice of pedagogical tools: textbooks, stories, visuals, and even in metaphors they use to explain specific concepts. Perhaps even more important is that students interpret these messages based on their own values, beliefs, and experiences, which can either act as positive reinforcement or deterrent to their educational attainment.

Hence, by applying culture to my critical autoethnography, I have come to understand how it can be used to illuminate other cultures (Ellis and Bochner, 1996), uncovered critical issues relating to fellow female BME educators and have come to realize that, because HEIs have not kept pace with shifts in educators' daily realities, they have made it difficult for many of their BME educators to succeed in their profession.

As I conclude this section, I am reminded that, for centuries, Jamaicans have expressed themselves through narratives not simply for the sake of telling them but with a social function in mind. As a female BME student, educator, and migrant, by offering insight into my personal and professional experiences, I hope to have once again highlighted the plight of the female BME educator, and if only by its design, it will reach a wider and more culturally diverse audience than traditional research may have, and someone will listen. However, despite the positive and optimistic personal and professional insights offered, I am also aware that Britain, like the rest of the world, still lives with the consequences of its greed with multiple legacies of race, class, slavery (Rediker, 2007), colonization and diaspora, and whilst *the slaver remains a ghost ship sailing on the edges of modern consciousness*" (Sayer, 1987, p. 434), I bellow the words of Chief Tacky: *"I'm tired of being a slave*!" (Norman, 1967).

Traveling Shoes

Child: *Miss Arowana, Miss Arowana?*

 Fish: *What is it, child?*

Child: *Are you still there?*

 Fish: *Not if you are going to ask the same fool questions! Blub!*

Child: *I've learned something.*

 Fish: *Well, go on, child, spit it out!*

Child: *I reopened my reflective journal to make a final entry. I had been accepted to present my autoethnography at a teachers' conference in Lisbon. Initially, I was thrilled, but as the day drew closer, doubts began to creep in: would it be good enough, would anyone come to listen to me for a whole hour, would I be able to do it, and, most of all, would anyone get it? I recalled Carolyn Ellis writing about her discomfort when presenting a paper at a communication conference:*

> *"My voice cracks. A wave of emotion courses through my body. I stumble in my speech… although the audience's response is warm and generous… I feel pummel. My body, eyes, head, and heart, all ache"* (Ellis, 2004, p. 143).

My paper was on the second day of the conference. As I sat through other papers and workshops, I began to consciously assess mine against them. I changed, readjusted, added, subtracted, and

remained concerned. On the day, I walked into an empty room, set up my presentation, and waited. Finally, two women who I had previously met came in, followed by two others, then the latter realized they were at the wrong presentation but stayed anyway. Then a former work colleague came in. With my heart in my shoes, I decided to start, then the door opened and about 20 people walked in!

At one stage during the presentation, I glanced up to see some members of the audience with glazed looks on their faces. Having been given the after-lunch slot, I put it down to boredom or an afternoon dip, but I soldiered on. As I reached the section about my dad, I felt my voice quiver, but then it was almost as if he were there pushing me on, encouraging me, and giving me the confidence to go on. Close to the end, feeling like a teacher who had lost her class, I stopped reading and decided to just explain my motivation for the presentation and my hopes as an educator, apologizing for the weight and length of the paper. I looked up and, to my dismay, several people were crying.

I asked if there were any questions or feedback. In a stunned voice, my former colleague commented that my presentation was a clear indication that, as educators, we really need to spend more time on reflection. Later, he, being a historian, questioned me about the difficulty I must have in forming a family tree. One woman came up and put her arm around me: she had just adopted a small African boy and was now concerned for his future. One of the women who had been crying told me that she was from Liverpool and had recently lost her dad; another had been battling with race in her classroom. Others commented on the style of presentation and the relevance of the methodology to their own work.

Later that evening, one lady, as she commended me on my presentation, mentioned how much she liked my shoes; at the time, I felt slightly bemused, but today as I look down at my shiny blue shoes, I think of how far I have come and recall Maya Angelo's book "All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes" (2010). Only now do I realize and truly value the work of (Denzin, 1989, p. 124), who uses autoethnography to "elicit emotional identification and understanding," and Ellis (1998, p. 4), who aims through her work to "bring life to research and research to life."

Child: *Miss Arowana, Miss Arowana?*

 Fish: *What is it now, child?*

Child: *Are you still there?*

 Fish: *Yes, child.*

Child: *Well, what do you think?*

 Fish: *Blub blub. What did your father say before you left Jamaica?*

Child: *"If dis a foot nuh find it, dis one will!"*

 Fish: *Spoken like a true Jamaican! Yes, child, you have learned. Say child, what year is it?*

Child: *2020.*

 "Jackmandora mi nuh choose none!"

CONCLUSION AND BROADER IMPLICATIONS

This paper has highlighted the power of autoethnography by examining the personal and professional experiences of female BME educators' in HEI, wherein they are underrepresented, and account for a small minority of those in receipt of professorship or leadership roles. Through this cultural- critical

autoethnography, I have illustrated the complexity of issues, explored relational personal experiences, and in this section will attempt to present a way forward to resolving them. Regrettably, there are no quick fix solutions and whilst there are some who are resigned to accept "*the near impossibility of reconciling the personal with the HEI sector due to the epistemology of Whiteness, maleness and class divisions*" (Kwhali, 2017, p. 5), in this concluding section I attempt to offer potential ways forward; supported by the reflection of personal and professional stories and narratives to create an understanding of everyday experiences, and thus a harbinger for change.

As illustrated throughout this paper, there are many reasons to explore educators' stories, firstly, such narratives offer a rich platform from which to reflect on and explore educational practices in relation to history and culture from several theoretical perspectives: as an embodied practice, as a performance of spectacle, and as an expression of identity. For educational leaders, the ability to manage any form of knowledge is essential to improving professional development and teaching practices. More specifically, when that knowledge is informed by culture, perception, historical and daily experiences, and our relationship with others it can lead to a better understanding of our own personal and professional identities.

However, whilst acknowledging that people growing up in a similar social environment, positioned in a similar way within a social space, and following similar life trajectories will ultimately share similar experiences, I do not suggest that the experiences or the impacts of these experiences are entirely exclusive to any one ethnic group. Neither do I suggest that all Black people have the same personal or professional experiences. I acknowledge that the ways in which people's experiences intersect may vary based on the individual choices they make, the opportunities they seize, and their perceptions of these experiences.

This said, educators themselves must be held accountable for; practicing effective elements of caring and concern, reflecting on the role of their institution's climate and on society's role in education, and for critically examining the underlying curriculum in order to identify stereotypes and biases often demonstrated through educator's narratives and storytelling (Taggart et al., 2005). Unfortunately, in the community of academia, there are too few Black authors or educators to address the everyday life experiences or perceptions of racism on academic educational attainment. Davies and Harré (1990) address the historical absenteeism and "voicelessness" of critical and creative texts written by Caribbean female writers, which she attributes to sexism, Euro-centricity, and colonialism. I surmise that there is also the dilemma of not being heard, and rather than shouting and getting angry, resulting in "racial battle fatigue" (Smith, 2004) perhaps BME educators must consider that maybe we are speaking to the wrong people, and therefore since women in general are at a disadvantage in the HEI system, these conversations need to be had with the dominant group; White males.

Furthermore, the few female BME educators who have gained the coveted positions in HEI's may unwittingly be contributing to the own demise, by continuing to explore stereotypical diaspora subject positions in their writing and in the stories, they tell themselves, about themselves. Hence, there needs to be more research by BME communities, focusing on other markers than just race, we must encourage new ways of thinking (Walby, 2007), and expand the ways that we analyse our oppression (Brown and William-White, 2010). Furthermore, it is of very little use, to conduct research, if the people it was meant to help, they themselves have no access to it. As such, Gordon and Anderson in *The African Diaspora: Toward an Ethnography of Diasporic Identification* (1999) call for "an ethnography of diaspora" that includes new forms of diasporic politics and identification; "*to express individual and collective identity through patterns of consumption, style and everyday cultural exchange*" (p. 1).

To reiterate, although the legacy of slavery is historically entrenched in education, society, and family lives, and thus holds some accountability for the negative educational achievement of BME educators and students in HEIs, there needs to be a global collaboration of BME educators, scholars, and practitioners working toward educational equity. Big questions need to be asked and more research needs to be conducted into why the BME populace do not excelled as well as their White counterparts in general. Autoethnographic research into these domains may well be productive in not only producing theoretical and empirical findings but also in presenting possibilities for understanding the impact of these historical and cultural experiences, the impact of governmental and educational policies, and the persistent negative images and experiences of BME individuals in education.

Now that I have raised a number of wider issues and implications regarding the experience of BME educators and their students, in order to invoke change it is important to build and sustain a community of practice (Wenger, 2000) around the change process. By identifying and involving key participants from within the field it is hoped that it will help to drive the process forward. Hence, in **Figure 2**, and based on the insights gleaned through the research process (Kappert, 2018), I suggest some activities and procedures needed to implement and sustain new practice whist making recommendations as to where the onus may be placed; *What can be done?* (Arday and Mirza, 2018).

In sum, throughout this paper I have sought to demonstrate why personal identity and social identity constructs must be a central part of educators' professional development; in turn, their identity constructs must somehow be reflected in the institution's in which they work, core value system (Korthagen, 2004; Lopes et al., 2004; Sachs, 2005; Connelly and Clandinin, 2006). In doing so, I hope to have reinforced the need for all educators to understand how broader social forces influence schooling and the curriculum and to make the needs and interests of migrant and oppressed people central to their teaching practice (McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2001).

What can be done?	Educational Leaders	Educators	Academic Researchers
Use multiple sources of evidence to support personal opinion, and of hard evidence to support soft impressions.			√
Wider use of and provision for practice-based inquiries and reflection in the professional development of all educators	√		
Large-scale research conducted at universities and institutes of higher learning to gain a better understanding of issues that cause; or are perceived as, discrimination.	√		√
Consideration of individual epistemic beliefs when planning lessons, in order to help to close the alleged educational attainment gap in educational institutions in Britain.	√		
Move beyond discussing representation, interpretation, and dissemination of narratives, which only determine what can and cannot be said, heard or publicly asked (Hackett and Rolston, 2009: 357).			√
Wider use and provision of practice-based inquiries and reflection in the professional development of educators and educator education programmes.	√		
Development of an agreed autoethnographic analytic structure in order to fulfil academic and Doctoral criteria.			√
Reflection on the impact of personal experiences on career progression and reconsideration of methods, stories, and images used in class.	√		
Conduct more research into the historical factors, which bear relation to the low educational attainment of Black professionals in academia.			√
Investment in areas such as curriculum development and the writing of new syllabi aimed at increasing migrant students' educational attainment.	√		
Conduct more research into tracing ancestral roots and the creation of spaces in which trans medial narratives can be viewed, experienced and shared.			√
Provision of professional development initiatives that target the enhancement of transnational's effectiveness through the utilization of personal beliefs, values, attitudes and intercultural behaviour in education.		√	
Conduct more research into the value of interdisciplinary practice: what may be lost and what is to be gained from such borrowings?			√
Conduct more research into to understanding why BME students and educators underachieve in education, by using personal experiences and narratives			√

FIGURE 2 | Learning from the story (Source: Kappert, 2018).

As such, it is hoped that this paper has contributed both in terms of its methodology and in terms of its content to a wider more inclusive form of knowledge. Autoethnography has historically been underutilized in the field of education and there has been very little documented as to its potential in gaining insights into the teaching and learning process. By example, most of the research regarding personal epistemology relates to university and college students and more could be done to acknowledge that a link may exist between students' intellectual development and their educators' knowledge, which according to Siping (2010) eventually decides on how effectively educators teach and how well students learn. In contrast, the narrative is at the core of pedagogy, with educators divulging knowledge by the means of the known to the unknown and as such through personal stories. Both provide rich sources of data, requiring further interdisciplinary research into their usage and dissemination.

My own personal and professional insights from conducting this autoethnography are two-fold; as a BME learner and as a BME educator. From both sets, I am able to conclude that more research needs to be conducted into how negative educational trajectories have been created and experienced across generations in order to develop understanding and to offer a definitive attempt to prevent their future continuum. And, although I had no eureka moment of radical transformation whilst conducting this autoethnography: the cycle of writing, reflecting and interpreting data, has taught me new things about myself as an educator, and even more so as a learner. I have become better able to confirm things I already knew about myself and of the context in which I have written my stories. I find myself no longer jumping to conclusions but rather applying a more rational approach as to how I perceive new experiences and eventually am able to link them to broader social implications and contexts. This sense of connectedness according to (Chang, 2008) minimizes cultural misunderstandings, heightens an awareness

of cultural sensitivity and thus leads to self-reflection, self-discovery, and self-transformation.

I hope to use the knowledge gathered to help other educators reflect on the consequences of passing on their norms values and epistemic beliefs to their students, for parents to consider the criteria by which they select their children's schools, for students to use their personal experiences as leverage for learning and for school leaders to consider the various institutional forms by which culture is passed on particularly in school practices; to advance understanding of the factors that shape the educational life course of migrants and highlight links between everyday experiences and teaching, in order to improve academic success.

Finally, I urge all educational leaders and their faculty to work together to evaluate practice; influence curriculum (re)design, systems, and processes, encourage experimentation, and create nodes for knowledge diffusion. Lasley (1992) puts forward that educators are accountable for; practicing effective elements of caring and concern, reflecting on the role of the school climate and on society's role in education, and for critically examining the underlying curriculum in order to identify stereotypes and biases often demonstrated through educator's narratives and storytelling.

"Autoethnography opened my eyes to see who I am. Autoethnography opened my mind to realize who I am. Autoethnography opened my soul to understand what I am doing and what I need to do" (Belbase et al., 2008, p. 9).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets generated for this study are available on request to the corresponding author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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