***Faithism* as Racism: Muslim male teachers experiences of progression to educational leadership**

**Key words: Diversity, ethnicity, faith, leadership**

Feminist literature has been highlighting the traditional association of leadership with White male as a feudal patriarchal construction of male power over females, which has been reproducing gender discrimination in the public domain, particularly at senior leadership levels. More recent research unveils another strong equation which is between race/ethnicity and career progression, a manifestation of colonialism, drawing attention to under-representation of people from BME backgrounds in educational leadership roles (Bush, Glover and Sood, 2006; Mackay and Etienne, 2006a, Lumby and Coleman, 2007; Turner, 2006). The interplay of race/ethnicity with career progression is also highlighted by the National Statistics as a barrier to career destinations reflected in lower presence of BME in senior positions. However, there is a noticeable gap in research on the issue of how visible religious affiliations (Home Office, 2001) affect career progressions of people from BME backgrounds. Consequently, positions of leadership in education, as in other sectors, are dominated by White males.

Preponderance of White males in educational leadership roles reminds of Kipling’s poem ‘The White Man's Burden", where he encouraged the American [annexation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annexation) and colonisation of the Philippine Islands (1898). As an [imperialist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperialist) poet, Kipling urges the American reader and listener to take up the enterprise of empire to conquer ‘Half devil and half child.’ Taking a derogatory approach, he argues for imperial conquest as a civilising mission that is a manifestation of the imperial expansion philosophy, portraying the colonised people as uncivilised claiming that White race are divinely destined to "civilise" the brutish, non-white Other who inhabits the barbarous parts of the world. Colonising tools might have become more sophisticated over the period of time but the outcomes are not hugely different; the intention remains marginalisation, suppression and othering of the non-Whites.

Much research (London Leadership Centre, 2002; McKenley, Mayhead and Gordon, 2002; Bush, Glover and Sood, 2006; Mackay and Etienne, 2006; Osler, 2003; Shah, 2010) has been carried out into why BME teachers are not becoming leaders in the respective educational institutions, and into the factors that hinder their career progression and development; however, no research has been carried out specifically on Muslim teachers. There are 1.6 million Muslims in Britain, comprising ‘3 per cent of the total population (National Statistices, 2001). As I argue elsewhere (Shah and Shaikh, 2010), Muslims are the largest faith group in the country after the Christians, and unlike some other faith groups they tend to highlight their religious identity (Brah 1996; Jacobson 1998; Modood et al 1997; Shah, 2012; 2019). Furthermore, the age profile by faith draws attention to another significant detail that 66% of the Muslims are under 35 years while for example, only 39% of Christians fall within this category. Thus, they have the highest youth profile in the UK (National Statistices, 2001), which further underlines the need for appropriate policies and practices to fully avail the potential of this large workforce on the one hand, and on the other hand it justifies the need to investigate the barriers to their career progression, using faith as a category for analysis.

Manifestations and expressions of racism may vary but discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion remain its essential features. Organisational structures, institutional practices, societal assumptions and subscribed concepts impact significantly on individuals’ career aspirations and progression in the field of educational leadership, particularly if those individuals happen to be non-White males. However, research confirms the effect of multiple factors such as gender, race, colour, ethnicity, faith and others in shaping career journeys and destinations, even though the level of significance for these factors may vary in context. However, recent literature subscribes to a stronger equation between race/ethnicity and career aspirations and progression to leadership roles, underlining how leadership is devised within a white male-oriented paradigm (Lumby, 2007), marginalizing non-Whites and non-western contexts (Lumby and Moorosi, 2022). However, a phenomenon which is still relatively under-explored is the challenges to career aspirations and progression of non-White males to educational leadership positions, and the impact of faith on their career journeys, particularly in the case of Muslims (Shah and Shaikh, 2010) , in the present national and international scenario.

This presentation argues that *Faithism* is a manifestation of racism. Racism divides human complexity into binaries, positioning them as ‘us’ and ‘other’ to de-centre and marginalise the ‘other’. Muslims are a large multi-ethnic multi-racial community, comprising of more than a quarter of the world population. In addition to their racial and ethnic diversity, their faith adds to prejudice, discrimination, and even hatred against them and therefore, references to racism with regard to Muslim community would comprise both racial and religious discrimination (Shah, 2016). Vakil argues that in the case of Muslims ‘Religion is “raced”, and Muslims are racialized’ (Sayyid and Vakil 2010, 276). The recent ‘rise of Islamophobia in both Europe and the USA’ (Garner and Selod 2015, 9) is othering and marginalising Muslims through the processes of racism (Abbas, 2006). Garner and Selod (2015) argue that ‘Islamophobia is a form of racism’ (p.11) sharing its core elements of a set of ideas that define a historical power relationship leading to forms of discrimination.

Whether Islamophobia is a form of racism (Garner and Selod, 2015) or whether this kind of discrimination needs new theorising and new labels such as *faithism* or *religionism* is a different debate, but its impact on the lives of Muslims, particularly in educational settings are undeniable. Many studies highlight prejudice and discrimination experienced by Muslim students with specific references to experiences of religious hatred and Islamophobia (Bagguley and Hussain, 2007; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2015; Richardson, 2004; Richardson and Wood, 2004; Sirin and Fine, 2008; Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006; Zine, 2007). This hatred appears to be directed primarily at faith identity, and combined with racial hatred it intensifies the expressions of discrimination. There are numerous examples of such expressions of hatred against Muslims in the literature, media and in everyday life experiences of Muslims in the wider society.

However, to what extent this phenomenon impacts on career aspirations and progression of Muslim male teachers who choose to enter jobs in education is a completely ignored field. The interplay of race and ethnicity is drawing increasing attention but the impact of faith in the case of Muslims, in the current Islamophobic context, on their career journeys and experiences is blindsided. This presentation focuses on barriers to career progression of Muslim teachers, exploring the impact of ethnicity, faith and Muslimness. The paper draws on data generated by ten questionnaires and five ‘follow up’ interviews, in participation with male Muslim teachers of five boroughs in London. The research evidenced that the participating male Muslim teachers experienced diverse barriers and complex expressions of discrimination in their career progression. Although much of the discrimination reported was covert in nature, a lack of understanding of issues relating to diversity, Islamophobia, and teachers’ visible religious/ethnic identity markers were identified as major contributing factors to this discrimination. The presentation will introduce examples of discrimination drawing attention to issues of racism/*faithism* equal opportunities, social justice, and inclusion linked to marginalisation of a particular group of workforce and its impact on individuals’ career journeys as well as its long-term implications for contributions to citizenship and societal cohesion. The discussion not only speaks to the researchers and academic community but also to their work might speak to the policy makers and the wider public regarding how to work towards social change.

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