

Entrepreneurship Challenges of Black African Caribbean Diaspora (BACD) in the United Kingdom: A Critical Race Theory Approach

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Abstract

There is a paucity of research on the institutionalised racial challenges facing minority entrepreneurs despite their contribution to the economy and society. Thus, the purpose of the study described here was to examine the entrepreneurship challenges faced by the Black, African, and Caribbean Diaspora (BACD) within the UK. Using the lens of critical race theory and the qualitative phenomenological interpretive approach, the data for the study was based on 27 interviews with BACD entrepreneurs to gain a greater understanding of the constraints and challenges they experience. Access to funding remains an issue, and the findings show that although BACD have a greater propensity to become entrepreneurs, they are more likely to be structurally and systemically constrained, perpetuating limited opportunities, social capital, and access to resources. Issues associated with BACD entrepreneurship, including racial discrimination, structural inequalities, institutionalised poverty, and systematic oppression, have significant implications for inclusive policies and practices as well as for recognising diversity. While generalising the findings may be constrained by its limited sample size, this paper provides new empirical insight into the challenges faced by BACD entrepreneurs in the UK and adds to a body of knowledge that can be utilised by entrepreneurs, policymakers, and the government. This is a departure from previous studies within the area of entrepreneurship. It also introduces a new self-contradictory construct now presented as the Race Paradox.

Keywords: *critical race theory; black entrepreneurship; phenomenology; United Kingdom; BACD; QPIA; institutions.*

JEL Classification: *L26; M14; J15.*

Introduction

The terms entrepreneur and entrepreneurship are often conflated and, consequently, there is a lack of an established characterisation, and those definitions that are frequently used are imprecise and often inappropriate (Henrekson and Stenkula, 2009). Definitions of entrepreneurship are frequently entwined between entrepreneurship and self-employment (Ibid.). Currently, a growing number of studies suggest that entrepreneurship – rooted in hard work, collaboration, and shared values – is a viable means to tackle socio-economic, political,

and human problems for a variety of social groups, ethnicities, races, and immigrants (Ullah, Rahman, Smith, and Beloucif, 2016) who are subject to discrimination (Rahman, Ullah, and Thompson, 2018), disadvantage (Davidsson, 2015), poverty (Rahman et al., 2018; Fuentelsaz, Gonzalez, and Maicas, 2019), and other structural inequalities (Fuentelsaz et al., 2019; Gold, 2016). Others differentiate opportunity entrepreneurship – starting a business to take advantage of an entrepreneurial opportunity – from necessity entrepreneurship – starting a business because other employment options are either absent or unsatisfactory (Reynolds et al., 2002). Laman (2014) has argued that there are two types of entrepreneurs, those who become entrepreneurs because they see an opportunity that they want to exploit and those who do it out of necessity to generate an income.

Specifically, as research suggests, Black African Caribbean Diaspora (BACD) people, such as those people of Black origin and background, have been active in entrepreneurial activities in the United Kingdom (McEvoy and Hafeez, 2009). In fact, in a study by Nwankwo (2013), it was found that black entrepreneurship has burgeoned and has contributed significantly to the UK's economic prosperity and development. Ojo, Nwankwo, and Gbadamosi (2013, p. 589) consider this development as consequent upon African (and Black) entrepreneurs in the diaspora 'increasingly leveraging the duality of transnational and intergenerational space to expand economic opportunities in their countries of origin', and the UK by extension. On the other hand, research focusing on ethnic minority entrepreneurs in different countries has found that minority entrepreneurs are also constrained and refused opportunities by a variety of barriers (Ullah et al., 2016; Freeland and Keister, 2016).

At the outset, we need to be clear about the nature of the phenomenon being discussed. This report is therefore a clear and deliberate departure from previous reports where the focus has been entirely through the lens of the homogenised cultural taxonomy often used to investigate different ethnic groups, commonly referred to as Black Asian Minority (BAME). Ethnic minority businesses are a highly heterogeneous group, so to attempt to aggregate comparisons between these diverse groups will be extremely misleading. The utilisation of the BAME terminology is often the preferred research method as it's derived from the UK census characterisation, where combinations of races, ethnicities, and national groups are systematically aggregated into a single entity. Ethnic minority communities are different and have very different lived experiences, and those cultural nuances will be substantial; therefore, they cannot be treated in the same context. Nevertheless, a vast majority of previous studies have focused on entrepreneurs operating in areas with larger ethnic minorities (Zhang, 2015) and have downplayed the challenges encountered by ethnic minority entrepreneurs operating in places and cities with a small co-ethnic community (African and Caribbean) to draw from (Rahman et al., 2018), such as London. Research has shown that ethnic minorities experience a variety of constraints that limit opportunities (see Ojo et al., 2013); however, studies that shed light on how BACD entrepreneurs in the UK are institutionally and structurally disempowered and blocked from similar opportunities to their white counterparts are sparse. While studies by Ojo et al. (2013) and Ekwulugo (2006) unravel African diaspora entrepreneurs and how they navigate entrepreneurial spaces, as well as the role of black Africans in the emergent SME sector in the UK, no current study has used the lens of critical race theory (CRT) to drill down into the mechanisms that frame and sustain this development. Elsewhere (see Briggs, 2018 and Gold, 2016), some studies were undertaken but they represent different settings and do not foreground the structures of consciousness and experience that are central to the tenets of phenomenological enquiry (Smith and Thomasson, 2005; Smith and Osborn, 2003).

Therefore, this paper aims to explore this gap and specifically investigates how the complex interrelationship between historical factors and institutional and socio-economic contexts contributed to shaping the contemporary representation of minority entrepreneurship in Britain. Using this lens, it highlights some of the critical, structural, and institutional developmental challenges and prospects. This intention may be particularly significant at a time when cities

like London are faced with a plethora of challenges against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic (McKinsey, 2020), Brexit pressures, multicultural challenges, and rising inequality. To thus gain a deeper understanding of the multitude of issues facing ethnic minority businesses and how these relate to the institutional, structural, socio-economic, and political milieu in which they operate, the present study adopts a qualitative phenomenological interpretive approach (QPIA) relying on 27 interviews with entrepreneurs in London. The concept of QPIA is critical to understanding the entrepreneurial processes of BACD and brings careful, rigorous explanations for their entrepreneurial transitions. This methodological predilection is new, with possibilities for opening new vistas of knowledge. Prior research (see Nwankwo, 2013) supports the notion that historical antecedents have strong explanatory powers in the construction or reconstruction of entrepreneurial identities of BACD and people of colour. This historical background guides as well as constrains the representation of entrepreneurial choices of current African and Caribbean entrepreneurs. The choice of London is purposeful as well as born out of convenience. However, we acknowledge the limitations of such methodological and geographical dispositions. The businesses represented here include architects, design agencies, surveyors, retail stores, tech companies, and restaurants.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: first, prior relevant literature is reviewed, followed by a description of the methodological design of the study. The findings of the interviews conducted are highlighted in the findings section; that section also considers a wider discussion of the findings regarding extant literature. Following this, the conclusions and contributions of this paper are provided, and finally, the policy implications that can be inferred from the article and its conclusions are delineated.

Literature Review

This section deals with prior relevant literature on the phenomena of entrepreneurship in Britain, the socio-economic, structural, and political landscape of the entrepreneurial quest and entrepreneurship, and breaking the glass ceiling. Also, finally, CRT, the conceptual framework underpinning this study, is delineated.

Britain and entrepreneurship

The increase in new business start-ups has shown no sign of abating (Bounds, 2017). New business formations within the UK up to September 2020 were 9.5 per cent higher than in the same period in 2019 (Centre for Entrepreneurs, 2020). This upsurge has resulted in the creation of 681,704 new businesses during 2019, spread across 700 different industry classifications.

Outside of the USA, the UK is unrivalled in terms of new start-ups (Bounds, 2017). This may be attributed to the macro socio-economic uncertainty of Brexit and/or the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in unprecedented levels of unemployment and therefore the birth of an unparalleled level of entrepreneurs in the UK.

Notwithstanding this surge in new entrepreneurs, there has been a perennial and long-standing debate regarding entrepreneurs and their contribution to the socio-economic growth and development of economies, particularly the UK economy (Carree and Thurik, 2010). Peverelli and Song (2012) argue that entrepreneurs are the catalyst for economic change and development, and in doing so they assume both the risk and the management of the business (Mill, 1848).

Entrepreneurship has been described as the most powerful economic force known to humankind and it can increase and create wealth (Khalil and Olafsen, 2010). While the theme of entrepreneurship has been the subject of much discourse (Daniel, Henley, and Anwar, 2019; Light, 1972), Kloosterman and Rath (2003) contend that entrepreneurship is embedded in

shared values, collaboration, and hard work, and is a feasible way of solving economic problems for a wide range of groups, including immigrants, women, and ethnic minorities who are subject to poverty and discrimination. Others have discussed this in the context of policy, specifically the report of the Department of Business, Innovation, and Skills (DBIS, 2011), which is an example of such discourse.

The socio-economic, structural, and political landscape of the entrepreneurial quest

The social and economic disparities that exist within the UK are captured under the guises of unemployment, education, poverty, housing, and pay; this paper therefore examines the current environment in which BACD entrepreneurs operate within the UK to gain an insight into the socio-economic, structural, and political landscape that may be considered as some of the drivers of necessity. Harrington (2018) stated that ‘the government is continuing to look at new ways to tackle racial inequality in society and make sure that everyone has the same opportunities to progress’; however, it can be argued that the systemic and structural disparities that exist within society at large inhibit its ability to tackle such inequality. According to the ONS (2018), all major minority ethnic groups have an average lower pay than whites, despite higher rates of educational achievement, university degrees, presence in professional fields, and successful businesses. Minor ethnic groups include Asian, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Asian, Black, Mixed, White, White British, White, and others. The *Race Disparity Report* (Cabinet Office, 2017) highlights the social disparities that exist amongst different ethnic groups. Ethnic minorities, including BACD households, were more likely to be poor and were the most likely to be defined as being in persistent poverty.

According to the Department of Business (2018), BAME (including BACD) employees are often not able to progress in the traditional work environment as institutionally framed, so they opt to start their own businesses. The data presented in the *Race Disparity Report* (Cabinet Office, 2017) highlights that these systemic disparities exist and are pervasive. Consequently, this would suggest that ethnic minority communities are unconsciously forced to embark on entrepreneurship out of necessity (Laman, 2014) rather than opportunity, and this is particularly prevalent amongst BACD business owners. According to the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB, 2020), structural inequalities exist in the UK, and ethnic minority entrepreneurs at times face discrimination during different stages of their business lifecycle and development. Smallbone, Bertotti, and Ekanem (2005, p. 43) have argued that ethnic minority owners are ‘different’ from the rest of the small business community in terms of their behavioural characteristics and concerning the types of problems that they encounter (Arday, 2021; Ekwulugo, 2006).

Entrepreneurship and breaking the glass ceiling

According to the FSB (2020), a prosperous economy needs to actively involve all communities irrespective of ethnic heritage, race, religion, or nationality to maximise its full growth potential. During the past three decades, there has been a consistent rise in the number of UK-based ethnic minority businesses, and this has seen a corresponding increase in the number of BACD entrepreneurs (Nwankwo, 2013). The Minority Supplier Development UK report (MSDUK, 2017) indicated that there were over 300,000 ethnic minority-owned businesses in the UK, representing over seven per cent of the total SME population within the UK economy. The UK government Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG, 2013) report suggests that there is an extraordinary appetite and aspiration for start-up businesses amongst Black and ethnic minority groups within the UK, most notably amongst Black Africans (35 percent) and Black Caribbean (28 percent) groups, contrasted with 10 per cent for their White British counterparts. Holland (2001) also made a similar assertion when he noted that

entrepreneurship has remained an influential (if unfulfilled) goal for considerable parts of the Black community from the late 1800s until the present day.

Despite the appetite and desire to start businesses, ethnic minority entrepreneurs will often encounter more difficulties than their white counterparts, as unquestionable barriers limit access to capital and markets, as well as to skills and work experience that would enable appropriate business development and sustainability (Dandridge, 2010). This was further acknowledged by the Department for Business (2018), with the introduction of start-up loans for the BAME community to tackle the structural inequalities in society in order to redress the inherent imbalance that the BAME communities encounter in gaining access to finance. There has been notable interest in the economic contributions that ethnic minorities have made within the countries in which they reside (Nwankwo, 2013). In support, Dandridge (2010) suggests that ethnic minority businesses are highly successful as they contribute in the region of £25 billion per annum to the UK economy. It was also noted within the IPA (2012) report on multicultural Britain that Black Minority Ethnic (BME) communities also contribute through their significant purchasing power as they have a collective disposable income of circa £300 billion. Despite this, some ethnic minorities, particularly the BACD, are underrepresented in this success, and the question is why is that the case? What are the underlying and universal challenges that exist that inhibit Black entrepreneurs from taking a greater share of the national purse, which would enable them to garner the economic prosperity that is enjoyed by other communities? This may be because of the perceived structural systemic disparities that exist within industry and society at large.

Sunak (2014) has taken this contention to another level as he asserts that, from a political viewpoint, there has been very limited effort to properly understand 'Britain's minority communities' and there is a predisposition by the media to homogenise all BME communities as a standardised singular political entity as if all ethnic minorities hold similar views and have lived similar experiences. Correspondingly, DiAngelo (2018) argues that identity politics is the inherent barrier that a specific group will encounter in their quest for equality. Sunak (2014) further highlights the fact that BME people now make up a significant and fastest-growing part of the population, and the understanding of these communities has not kept up with their rising importance. This would suggest a cause for concern, as noted by the Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (DBEIS). Baroness McGregor, in her report on *Race in the Workplace* (McGregor-Smith, 2017), was commented on by the Business Minister, Margot James, who was quoted as saying that 'It is very wrong that so many barriers lie in the way of people from ethnic minority backgrounds.' DiAngelo (2018) supports this assertion when she contends that implicit bias is always at play, because all human beings have a bias, and inequity can occur because of homogenisation. Nevertheless, the BACD entrepreneurs' journey continues to be the subject of debate, with an increasing emphasis on the need for further research to deal with the broader economic, social, and ethical disparities of business practice (Gereffi and Lee, 2012). In contrast, New (1997) argues that researchers have a responsibility to undertake a wider examination of Black entrepreneurs, as it will have greater social, economic, and ethical ramifications, and that it is, therefore, imperative and incumbent upon researchers to adopt a broad standpoint when addressing this subject area. Nwankwo (2013) goes further to suggest that an accurate picture of the landscape of ethnic minority-led business activity in the UK requires urgent attention as a result of the changing socio-economic, political, and structural environment of this often-ignored section of the small business community.

Conceptual framework – critical race theory and entrepreneurship

This paper examines CRT and then seeks to understand the role that race plays within entrepreneurship. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) posit that CRT highlights the relationship between power and the construction of social roles, as well as the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination. To

operationalise this intention, this paper employs CRT to understand in a nuanced way the broad church of views of BACD entrepreneurs experiencing entrepreneurship challenges. CRT evolved out of critical legal scholarship and radical feminism during the late 1970s (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). The underlying premise of CRT suggests that racism is pervasive, institutional, and systemic, advancing a narrative of supremacy, inequality, and discriminatory practices (Valdés, Culp, and Harris, 2002). Critical race theorists expose institutions for their complicity in reproducing a racist social order (Briggs, 2018; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). Additionally, CRT encompasses systemic racism, an enduring, all-encompassing, and ubiquitous system of white supremacy and racial oppression, which perpetuates the pessimistic probability of economic advancement of Black and other ethnic minority communities (Gold, 2016). This is akin to differential racialisation, where the dominant ethnic group within society racialises diverse minority groups during different periods, in reaction to ever-changing needs within markets (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). It is also posited that different races are treated differently intergenerationally, despite the dynamic socio-economic environmental landscape (Ibid.).

Accordingly, following a discussion on factors that limit BACD entrepreneurs' opportunities arising from the primary data, this paper argues that the critical race view of the dynamics of entrepreneurship in the UK provides the most convincing elucidation for the BACD's limited entrepreneurial success. This perspective is supported by Gold's (2016) research. Granted, there is no single, monolithic theoretical framework that can embrace the socio-economic, political, and ideological totality of the phenomena of entrepreneurship challenges; however, as will be demonstrated, CRT helps to unravel in detail BACD entrepreneurs' condition. Likewise, it can facilitate an explanation of how, although this phenomenon can be explained from the prism of the ethnic or cultural groups, it is framed more by racialisation, which is steeped in institutionalised processes and institutions that pose constraints on a race (Briggs, 2018). At a rudimentary level, there are postulations that racialisation is pervasive within society with regard to racial inequality and that it is even acknowledged as normal, even by members of the ethnic minority groups that are being oppressed (Ford and Airhihenbuwa, 2010). For example, as opined by Giddens (1984), normalising unjust practices or systems such as institutionalised discrimination (as seen with the BACD experience) starts with institutionalisation and subsequent legitimisation and adoption in society. Thus, CRT helps in exposing the legitimisation and further normalisation of unequal social structures and institutions that frame and perpetuate invisible practices militating against BACD business owners.

There is a body of literature that suggests that entrepreneurship is embedded within the philosophy of having shared values, cooperation, and industriousness, and as a consequence, it is considered a method of solving economic problems for a variety of different socio-economic groups, which includes immigrants, women, and ethnic minorities, who are more likely to be exposed and subjected to discrimination and poverty, along with other disadvantages (Briggs, 2018; Portes, 2010). Gold (2016) asserts that Black entrepreneurs are disadvantaged because of their race and, consequently, they have difficulty gaining access to finance (Gold, 2016).

Coate and Tennyson (1992) argue that the poor employment environment, which may be based on discrimination, can push minorities who are less fortunate in society to establish businesses in order to survive. This dichotomous position presents a fiscal challenge, as the perception of lower quality will be perceived as high risk by credit/financial agencies, and as a result, they increase the interest rates charged to mitigate any perceived risk of lending to minorities. This then makes borrowing prohibitive and means it is more expensive to service the debt, which has a corresponding negative effect on BACD businesses, thus playing into the complicity of propagating a racist social order (Briggs, 2018).

Research Methodology: Method, Data, and Analysis Framework

Scholars (e.g. Bateman, Collins, and Cunningham, 2016) have called for qualitative research in entrepreneurship scholarship and related phenomena to enable a more nuanced understanding of human experience, and it is this that QPIA enables, permitting new insights.

Given the dearth of research on the entrepreneurial challenges of BACD entrepreneurs in the UK, an inductive process was applied (Saunders, Phillip, and Thornhill, 2012; Silverman, 2006), as well as the qualitative phenomenological interpretive approach (QPIA). As contended by Silverman (2006), the interpretive process facilitates representing people's viewpoints about a phenomenon such as the challenges of BACD entrepreneurs more accurately, as it takes into consideration sociocultural and historically situated interpretations of the real world observed by participants (Patton, 2015). The QPIA also aligns with this methodological predilection (Smith and Osborn, 2015). The interpretive process is traditionally employed in understanding and interpreting people's perspectives about an issue and/or phenomenon; it is also steeped in the rationality that reality is not objectively determined; it is socially constructed (Saunders et al., 2012).

Sampling included male and female participants who are entrepreneurs in the UK – particularly in London. This study acknowledges the potential limitation of this research choice and sample size. The target population included entrepreneurs in five main boroughs in London (Lambeth, Southwark, Brent, Hackney, and Waltham Forest). A key criterion for eligibility when selecting participants was that they were entrepreneurs or current business owners as well as having the prerequisite knowledge of how BACD entrepreneurs and other people of colour are entrepreneurially challenged in the UK. Therefore, the interviewees were remarkably familiar with the phenomenon of Black entrepreneurship in the UK. Participants were contacted via personal contacts, following a snowballing technique involving judgemental/purposive sampling (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This is a non-probability sampling based on gaining in-depth knowledge of the issue. Patton (2015) notes that the rationality of purposive sampling is predicated on the assumption that a researcher has a clear understanding of what sample size to use, and subsequently approaches potential participants. Purposive sampling entails selecting case participants who would best make it possible to achieve the study's overriding objectives (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006) and for 'information, rich' sampling aiding 'data saturation' (Guest et al., 2006).

Specifically, 27 semi-structured interviews were undertaken between June and September 2020. The semi-structured interview facilitates flexibility and the identification of voice inflections, body language, and emotion. Interviews lasted between 38 and 43 minutes. They involved 27 previous and current entrepreneurs (11 men and 16 women) who have been in business for over 12 years (See Table 1 for participants' details). The purpose of the sample size was to effectively analyse collected data rather than needlessly collect a large sample size (Guest et al., 2006). The demographic disparity is because there are more female entrepreneurs than males in the UK.

In operationalising QPIA, the research is not interested in uncovering a single 'truth'; rather, the intention was to develop an understanding of a variety of situational realities from the entrepreneurs through their lived experience, which is the tenet of QPIA (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). Moreover, this approach aided the social construction of meaning out of social realities about the institutional embeddedness of entrepreneurial challenges as well as their historical, socio-economic, and sociocultural basis. The process enabled rigorous interpretation of participants' perspectives in order to develop 'thick descriptions' (Saunders et al., 2012) about the entrepreneurial challenges of BACD business owners in the UK, thereby enabling an extension of theory on the issue being investigated (Patton, 2015). Additionally, all interviews were undertaken in the participants' work environment, facilitating ecological validity and contextualisation of the findings (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Interviews were recorded with the

participants' consent. Anonymity was also assured for ethical reasons, and the research aim was explained. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Table 1. List of interviewees

Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Business	Years in Business
Mark	44	M	OS quantity surveyor	11
Ojo	51	M	Architect	16
Goddy	55	F	Groceries	14
Vali	48	F	Restaurant	4
Mini	66	M	Retail Store	23
Maureen	39	F	Graphic Designer	5
Ama	55	F	Restaurant	2
Martha	48	F	Convenience Store	4
Chucky	67	F	Groceries	31
Sarah	47	M	Convenience Store	5
Emma	55	F	Media Agency	14
Kunle	42	F	Groceries	6
George	38	M	Convenience Store	1
Nina	55	M	Groceries	12
Nicola	49	F	Hairdresser	11
Lincoln	56	M	Bakers	20
Tony	41	F	Convenience Store	11
Gregory	62	M	Groceries	23
Sunny	54	F	Bakery	17
Boro	44	M	Groceries	6
Tete	63	F	Restaurant	24
Zoro	43	M	Convenience Store	7
Femi	55	F	Groceries	16
Noro	37	F	Health food store	3
Nze	62	F	Groceries	18
Choku	60	M	PR and Media	23
Lono	58	F	Consultancy agency	20

Source: Author.

Data analysis framework

In analysing data, this paper adopted thematic textual analysis (TTA). This is an analytical and methodological process for identifying and reporting key themes (recurring patterns) in the dataset and/or text corpus (Hulme and Menter, 2011). A theme elucidates a form of patterned meaning within a text corpus. TTA is analogous to 'thematic thinking', which illuminates the relationships between different phenomena that are externally associated by co-occurring in disparate time and space (Braun and Clarke, 2006). After data was collected, the next process involved transcription, leading to the rereading of texts via oscillating between theories and interview texts to locate associations (Hulme and Menter, 2011). The next step comprised annotating central thoughts and closely examining texts about emerging themes and research objectives.

This process further materialised into codes, aided by open coding of texts revealing new information and sub-themes (Silverman, 2006). By combining codes with analogous essential ideas, three main themes were identified: the Race Paradox, 'suffering and smiling' syndrome, and the part representing the whole, which will be discussed in the next section. This process also resonated with an intertextual reading of the text for coherence and congruence, which implies the convergence of themes (Saunders et al., 2012). Kristeva (1980) has identified such a procedure as intertextuality, which is a situation in which comparable ideas and thoughts are echoed across text corpora over time and space (interviews undertaken). Furthermore, given the

potential limitations of qualitative methodology, parameters were set to fully understand the emerging themes (Silverman, 2006). Parameters comprised: (a) what kinds of themes are to be extracted from the text? (b) how do themes help in the framing of entrepreneurial challenges? (c) are there connections between the themes and the paper's key objective? In the next section, the findings and discussion are presented.

Findings and Discussion

As stated above, this paper has identified three main themes: the Race Paradox and silencing of voice, a legitimised institutional glass ceiling, and a hierarchical, centralised culture of engagement. Analysis and discussion starts with the Race Paradox.

Race Paradox and silencing of voice

A key theme emerging from the findings is the Race Paradox (see Figure 1). In the context of this research, this means a set of complex interconnected constructs that gives an organisation or individuals the unconscious illusion of inclusion. The Race Paradox conveys an illusory, deceptive appearance of racial cohesion and equitable coexistence (Martin, 2005). It is a process of describing certain socio-economic and political inequalities and how they are reproduced through colour blindness.

There is often an irreconcilable contradiction between the values an organisation purports to embody and its reality. The evidence continues to suggest that the socio-economic landscape has/does not fundamentally change in real terms when contextualised within areas such as employment, corporate social responsibility, access to finance, social capital, purchasing social responsibility, and within senior leadership teams.

Most of the participants agreed that this situation is prevalent in the UK entrepreneurial landscape, as exemplified in the following cluster of interviewees' opinions:

In my opinion, we have a culture that enables acceptance of virtually anything discriminatory allowing tolerance of inequalities even though these things do not seem right ... This is sad for a nation that professes otherwise in supporting business owners. (Mark)

There is a façade that makes you think everything is fine in terms of race and mutual tolerance but beyond this level, there are palpable forms of exclusion and discriminatory practices that affect our business growth and sustainability. (Nina)

It seems no one takes issues that concern us to the table ... we need these kinds of discussions for our business to grow and for the right access to capital and support ... It's a serious issue and calls for a rethink of the entire system and institutions that enable and support entrepreneurial engagement in the UK ... (Choku)

In taking the above views further, Zoro, Sunny, and Maureen explained how the above entrepreneurial landscape creates and sustains disempowerment, lack of inclusion, low commitment, and frustration for BACD business owners, 'triggering quitting business venturing' (Tony). The perspectives above demonstrate that UK entrepreneurs undergo various forms of unethical and unacceptable situations that negatively impact their capacity to start, run, and sustain their businesses in a system where certain races, including BACD entrepreneurs, are ignored, looked down upon, and marginalised in a seemingly racially tolerant society (Nwankwo, 2013; Coate and Tennyson, 1992).

What is more, the paradox of the race phenomenon narrative continues to be perpetuated under the pretext of policies and procedures (Martin, 2005). Thus, evidence continues to suggest that the socio-economic landscape has not fundamentally changed in real terms when contextualised

within areas such as employment, access to finance, social capital, and within the senior leadership teams in organisations and/or institutions that make and enforce policies about entrepreneurial support, access, and opportunities (Nwankwo, 2013). For example, some of the interviewees (Sarah, Maku, and Lono) agree with this situation. These findings align with the research by Arday (2021) and Ojo et al. (2013) that shed light on the structural and systemic disconnect in the perception of what an organisation does when benchmarked against its stated key objectives, values, and beliefs.

These structures appear to be deeply entrenched and pervasive within the inner sanctum of the organisational culture and the leadership teams, which continue to perpetuate and reinforce the notion of the Race Paradox, which stifles diversity engagement and prevents the inclusion, integration, and advancement of BACD (and BAME) entrepreneurs. Additionally, the views of respondents are supported by the work of Nwankwo (2013), which empirically unveils the challenges faced by minority ethnic groups in the institutionalised racial dynamics of the UK entrepreneurial system and culture.

Most corporations are stuck in the 'Race Paradox', talking the talk of Diversity and Inclusion, but failing to achieve true engagement and culture change.

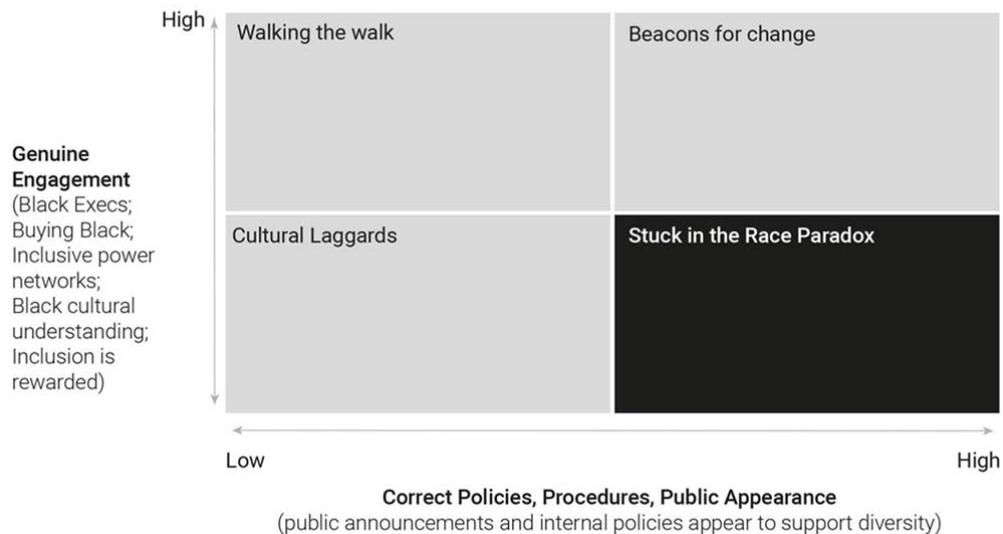


Fig. 1. The Race Paradox

Source: Author.

Cultural laggards

These are the institutions and corporations that still haven't put diversity and inclusion (D&I) on the radar. They neither talk the talk nor walk the walk. They will likely only change when forced – either by increasingly vociferous public protest or through legislation. At best, their focus is simply on other issues. At worst, they actively resist surrendering the power inequities which have helped them to flourish in the past. It is becoming increasingly hard for publicly listed companies to languish in this part of the matrix.

Walking the walk

Above the cultural laggards in the group are those companies who are truly walking the walk of inclusion. They may not have all the 'bells and whistles' of policies and they may not see public advocacy as part of their role, but in their day-to-day operations, they are diverse and inclusive. You walk into their offices, their procurement or recruitment events and see faces of every

colour, of every age and seniority. You talk to the marketers, and they understand the language they need to appeal to diverse communities. In this box, we may find diverse businesses that are already operating successfully across the borders of the majority culture and their own sub-cultures. This is also the box where we see multiple diversities, and heartfelt engagement with communities comes effortlessly. This box may also include new-generation start-ups. Particularly with the rise of technology and the democratisation of the media, there is far more scope for inclusive businesses to be created from inception. These businesses may be too busy growing to be creating official policies or taking an active role in advocacy. But they all provide a role model for how inclusion can work. They have managed to navigate a sustainable pathway in ways that those in the next category have failed to do.

Stuck in the Race Paradox

This box, 'high on talk, low on walk', is unfortunately where most major corporations sit today. All have D&I policies. All do their best to say the right things in tweets (though occasionally cultural blindness or ignorance is revealed, resulting in the scramble to apologise). Most donate to or sponsor diverse events. Most now have diverse actors in their adverts. Yet if you walk inside the institution, it feels like their D&I efforts are sometimes a mirage. Black representation on boards and in senior management and the supply chain is low. Recruiters will try to recruit talented Black employees but will not have the knowledge and emotional and cultural intelligence to know where to find them and how to appeal to them. Key performance indicators are not ambitious, true resources are not pushed into achieving them, nor are there consequences for missing them. It is important to note that while some of the corporations and institutions that fall within this category are consciously just 'ticking the box' or paying lip service to diversity ideals, many are making sincere efforts. Cultural, systemic, and structural barriers are inhibiting change. They are trying to turn a very heavy tanker, and many are not sure how to do it successfully.

Beacons for change

Those organisations that have succeeded in creating truly inclusive environments while also modelling change through effective policies and public advocacy can be seen as true beacons for change. This is not impossible to achieve, but for those many corporations currently stuck in the Race Paradox, it will take fundamental action to lift themselves to this new status. Race Paradox organisations need to persevere, be courageous, and seek help from organisations in the top half of this matrix to learn how to truly engage with Black talent, Black communities, and Black businesses. They need to take concrete action to drive progress. The next section focuses on what this action needs to be.

The Race Paradox is correlated with the silencing of entrepreneurs' voices (and power), as seen in the below excerpts:

The system abhors giving us the energy to be part of decisions affecting business.
(Tony)

We're at the lowest rung. ... Anything that we say does not matter when making decisions ...! (Vali)

The above insights continue here: 'Here's the deal ... no input from us ... this is crippling, and our business is suffering ... we don't have any voice mate' (Ali). These observations emphasise that the current system and institutional arrangements frustrate entrepreneurs' voices from being heard, which is tantamount to powerlessness and lack of influence in the decision-making processes. In reframing power arrangements and centralised authority, scholars have argued for the primacy of stakeholder involvement as a means to enable power dispersion and subsequent empowerment (Foucault, 1980). This thesis chimes with the Foucauldian theorisation of power and voice articulation. For scholars on the notion of power, reworking power along the axis of

stakeholder input can potentially lead to a genuinely democratised debate and dialogue that celebrates collective goal attainment, equitable race relations, and shared leadership, as well as questioning the hegemonic, hierarchical system in the UK's business environment (Ekwulugo, 2006). This conceptualisation suggests that power circulates and functions as a chain in which stakeholders (BACD entrepreneurs) are its conduits, not its points of application (Foucault, 1980). Regrettably, this is not the case in the UK, where various engagement agencies and systems largely marginalise minorities' views, triggering a lack of opportunities, access to capital, and support for these people (Nwankwo, 2013). These findings are consistent with Briggs's (2018) work in Canada.

Legitimised institutional glass ceiling

Another theme emerging from the data is that of a legitimised glass ceiling, which refers to the institutionalised barriers that are legitimised and further naturalised, making them appear normal (Suchman, 1995). Such a legitimisation process facilitates the normalising of BACD entrepreneurs' challenges and makes restrictions to various forms of capital normal and acceptable. Accordingly, Giddens (1984) notes that one of the mechanisms for legitimising social (and entrepreneurial) practice is institutions, which may be formal or informal (Kibler, Kautonen, and Fink, 2014). While formal institutions are documented, informal institutions are enshrined in value systems, culture, and social behaviours that are socially acceptable, thereby deepening inequality and what Eagly and Carli (2007) identified as an absolute barrier that cannot be penetrated by the marginalised. Some excerpts will corroborate this finding:

The policy mechanism and various instruments that help sanction social practices make it appear right when we don't get access or support unlike other people. (Mini)

We're talking about a system that allows the correctness of discrimination and other forms of practices that negatively impact our business growth. (Ojo)

An analogous opinion is articulated by Kunle: '... this time I am considering giving up on my dream of becoming a successful business owner in the UK ... because of how the system supports our effort and disempowerment'. This perspective echoes the views expressed by all participants, in particular George, Goddy, and Noro. These findings are in agreement with Dandridge's (2010) study where black entrepreneurs face incalculable challenges in accessing social capital and related phenomena that are legitimised by institutional arrangements prevalent in the UK (Arday, 2021).

As has been highlighted by Sunak (2014), racial institutions are central to the advancement of minority businesses. Some of the participants' views will further help substantiate the centrality of institutions in enabling or disabling opportunities, development, and growth of BACD business owners:

There's no doubt that institutions are at the heart of the way MINORITY entrepreneurs are treated and considered here in the UK. (Kongo)

Beyond the above, Sunny stated that institutions are contributory to the challenges faced by minority entrepreneurs: '... nothing is more important than institutionalised practice, culture and ways of perceiving us ... this is detrimental to our progress ... if you ask me ...'. As can be gleaned from these excerpts, the legitimised institutional glass ceiling plays a fundamental role in the development and prosperity of minority businesses in the UK (Eagly and Carli, 2007).

From the foregoing, there is a substantial body of research that suggests legitimised institutional practices play a crucial role in shaping the path businesses take as well as shaping access to loans, social capital, and the support required for entrepreneurial success in minority businesses in the UK and beyond (Gold, 2016). For instance, using the lens of critical race theory, in the US context, the study by Gold (2016) lends support to the entrepreneurial difficulties faced by African Americans as they strive to better their lives through the entrepreneurial venture. He

argues persuasively that these difficulties are born out of racialised institutions that disable African Americans from developing an 'ethnic economy' (Gold, 2016, p. 1676), thus stifling business opportunities for these people on the premise of racial group, not ethnic or cultural group. In support, the works of Briggs (2018) and Ojo et al. (2013) reinforce this logic.

Furthermore, the racialised entrepreneurial environment prevalent in the UK makes BACD business owners co-collaborators in their own disempowerment and progress. According to Giddens (1984), institutionalisation and perpetuation of an unjust order is tantamount to those who have been negatively affected by this system being collaborators in their own peril. For example, both Lono and Martha concur with the notion that since BACD entrepreneurs cannot change the system, they thus suffer in silence. Specifically, for Tete, this is a case of 'suffering and smiling', which has become the norm to eke a living and survive in the discriminatory climate in UK entrepreneurship. This reality is instantiated in detail here:

...100%, taking things as they have become a way to manage the frustration that we're meted in a society that should be cosmopolitan, inclusive, and mutually helpful We go through some unprintable hindrances in the supposedly multicultural Britain that inhibits our business growth and acceleration. (Mark)

Accordingly, Nze and Boro, both in the groceries business, as well as Vali, who runs a restaurant, and Zoro, a convenience store owner, all agree that the UK's 'business institutions' 'naturalise certain walls that frustrate business here' (Tete). These views are consistent with Gregory's observation: 'There's no doubt that we're up against some business walls.' In sum, racialised institutions play a vital role in the development as well as the support of minority businesses. This contention builds on the dialectics of 'capitalism's inequitable class relations that impact business development' as well as the 'tenet of differentiated racialisation', which grants material and socio-economic advantages to 'the majority race' (Briggs, 2018, p. 537), even in the UK (Mark, Emma, and Chucky).

Hierarchical, centralised culture of engagement

This theme looks at the unequal nature of engagement between BACD entrepreneurs, the government, and relevant agencies for inclusion and race relations in the UK. Studies (see Nwankwo, 2013) suggest that the platforms and agencies through which minority business owners engage with relevant stakeholders and the government are rather hierarchical and centralised. Some participants' views will help shed light on this context:

Nobody regards our opinions here in terms of how policies affect our business. It's a serious issue ... these calls for a rethink on policies, platforms, and agencies ...! (Min)

...some of the members of the trustees responsible for inclusion include minorities for mere tokenism ... just to make the platforms of engagement appear ... but nothing really happens in terms of their input in the decision affecting our business ... (Maureen)

Rather than being mere isolated opinions, both Kunle and Choku agreed with the points raised above. Additionally, Boro averred that 'No communication goes up here. Everything comes from the top... this is frustrating'. As can be gleaned from these findings, there is an apparent lack of horizontal communication, which is the catalyst for engagement and dialogue (Morsing and Schultz, 2006) and constitutes one of the channels that can trigger improved race relations and be a springboard for 'dismantling institutional racism' (Griffith et al., 2007, p. 381) for inclusive rhetoric (The Ubele Initiative, 2021). Morsing and Schultz (2006) have argued that communication can be horizontal or vertical. The former is democratic, participatory, and bidirectional, while the latter is authoritarian and unidirectional. The opinions of the interviewees highlighted above suggest that the form of communication manifesting in these regulatory and engagement agencies dovetails with the latter: non-participatory engagement.

This entrepreneurial landscape precipitates what Hofstede (1980) refers to as a power distance, which makes race relations and its associated issues problematic, disempowering, and non-participatory, and by crippling business efforts of minorities, it can be considered as institutional myopia.

In addition, according to the extant literature, less than 7 per cent of trustees on the boards of these agencies are from black communities, and about 79 per cent of senior leadership teams have no people of colour (McVeigh, 2018). It is further noted that these boards and decision-makers create language, including 'BAME', which groups cultures, races, and ethnicities together, thereby creating a culture of difference, inequality, hierarchy, and White supremacy that disadvantages people of colour (Briggs, 2018). As argued by Dunbar (2008), placing race and ethnicity at the centre of the issue distracts attention from class analysis, which CRT frowns on (Gold, 2016). Therefore, most BACD entrepreneurs feel that they have been subjected to a negative experience in their entrepreneurial quest owing to their ethnicity, background, and/or race (Arday, 2021; Ojo et al., 2013). Consequently, most of the interviewees felt that overcoming this unpleasant and frustrating business atmosphere for minorities in the UK would amount to creating systems change premised on 'institutional reform' (Kongo) and 'strategies that allow for' BACD entrepreneurs 'to thrive' (Nze). Ballard and Seibold (2006) have observed that communication is central to managing relationships effectively and limiting conflict and dissatisfaction. They further argued that decentralised, empowering communication is vital for sustainable relationships. This argument is in parallel with the position taken by Ade-Serrano, Nkansa-Dwamena, and McIntosh (2017) in their timely piece, *Race, Culture, and Diversity*, which places communication and engagement at the centre of sustainable relationship management.

We next present the conclusions, implications, and limitations of this paper and recommendations for further research.

Conclusions

According to the FSB (2020), structural inequalities exist for Black entrepreneurs within the UK, and Deaton (2013) asserts that there is a need to understand the realities of inequalities; if one is deprived of any understanding of causation, one will be deficient in guiding policy and in one's capacity to make any ethical judgements. This study was prompted to explore the entrepreneurship challenges and inequities faced by BACD in the UK. This was operationalised by leveraging the CRT approach and QPIA to obtain a more nuanced understanding of these challenges by those affected. The data for the study was based on 27 interviews with BACD entrepreneurs to gain a greater understanding of their challenges in London and its environs.

Part of the findings of this research is that UK society suffers from institutionalised racial, discriminatory practices and inequalities as well as legitimised unequal relations amongst races, entrepreneurs, and the agencies that make business policies. The study further found that BACD business owners undergo work-life balance challenges shaped and sustained by institutions and sociocultural realities. Through the analysis undertaken, it has been established that BACD entrepreneurs go through incalculable challenges stemming from institutionalised racism, normalised practices, and other forms of discriminatory practice that negate their business success and development as well as blocking opportunities and access to capital. As can be gleaned from the findings and analysis undertaken, the current business landscape in the UK is shaped and sustained by such 'normalised' socio-economic, political, and ideological practices and institutions, making these issues appear natural (Giddens, 1984). However, the CRT approach can be one of the strongest methodologies to critique and unearth the injustices, inequalities, and lack of inclusiveness that beset such practices (Arday, 2021). This

argumentation resonates with the body of literature on these phenomena, which the present paper extends.

As a result, this study responds to the growing discourse on race relations, minority entrepreneurship, and business institutions (Ullah et al., 2016; Nwankwo, 2013), which is understudied. Rahman et al. (2018) maintain that there is an ascendancy that mainstreams the entrepreneurial challenges of dominant ethnic groups at the expense of minority races and ethnicities. The illumination presented here can help to explain and reconfigure this mainstreaming as well as to redesign the roadmap of race relations, institutionalised practices, and socio-economic issues that buffet UK society, and specifically the business world, for a better, fairer, and more inclusive society (Sunak, 2014). On this strength, policymakers, managers, and government can benefit from this research in the sense that the insights highlighted here could facilitate policy change and practices that would contribute to a better and more inclusive UK society and business enterprise environment. According to Bowles (1998), public policy can transform attitudes within society in a progressive manner, to such an extent that it normalises attitudes and creates cultural structures within society. Thus in turn increases the probability of accelerating institutional change that becomes ubiquitous, which means that it is likely to affect organisational norms and practices.

Building on existing research and insights, the present study departs from existing literature by leveraging the triangulation of the CRT approach and QPIA in the context of the UK, which, to the best knowledge of the researcher, is understudied and at best has sparse scholarship (Rahman et al., 2018) and thus needs expanding for a broader knowledge of these phenomena.

Policy approach

While there is no universal antidote to stimulate entrepreneurial activity (Henrekson and Stenkula, 2010), public policy provides a strategic framework for implementing real change. However, the area of policy change must be clear, as it can also be counterintuitive and counterproductive if the policies are incongruent, with policies directed towards small and medium enterprises (SME) contrasted with policies geared towards entrepreneurship itself. SME policy involves policies directed specifically at supporting SMEs (including self-employment), whereas entrepreneurship policy is designed to support an economic system that cultivates socially productive entrepreneurial activity (Ibid.).

However, contingent on the political climate and timeline, different policies may prove optimal in different socio-economic environments.

Various perspectives can distort the discourse surrounding entrepreneurship policy and the entrepreneur's journey (Henrekson and Stenkula, 2009); however, Baumol, Litan, and Schramm (2007) contend that four primary tenets underpin an entrepreneurial economy:

1. Ease of starting and growing a business.
2. Generous rewards for productive entrepreneurial activity.
3. Disincentives for unproductive activity.
4. Incentives to keep the winners on their toes.

This paper contends that policies that are interconnected within the categorisation of 'ease of doing business' are critical components associated with entrepreneurial success. Entrepreneurs' inability to gain access to capital and cash will not be an unsurprising constraint. Entrepreneurial activity centres on the ability to access and raise capital (Parker, 2004). Others argue that access to capital is the most significant obstacle for many businesses, and Gold (2016) maintains that Black entrepreneurs particularly are disadvantaged because of their race and, consequently, they have difficulty in gaining access to finance. This supports the notion that policy intervention will play a critical role, as posited by (Henrekson and Stenkula 2009), who suggest that the basic premise of entrepreneurship policy aims to reinforce socially productive entrepreneurial endeavours.

Facilitating formalisation

While previous studies (see Ullah et al., 2016; Nwankwo, 2013; Ojo et al., 2013) have comparable focus, the present research draws from the institution-based view of entrepreneurship practice and a CRT approach, as well as how institutions frame challenges for minority business owners, a subject that lacks deeper, empirical exploration. Therefore, this paper epitomises one of the few empirical studies to examine the institutionally framed challenges facing minority businesses in the UK in a purportedly multicultural society.

This mode of inquiry can help challenge and expose some of the taken-for-granted assumptions (Giddens, 1984) about the UK's society and business world. The paper thus responds to wider calls to broaden insights on the institution-based view of entrepreneurship (Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2019) and society in general (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This paper is, nevertheless, potentially limited. As qualitative research, generalising the findings might be limited (Silverman, 2006).

This paper has notable implications for future research on the topic of BACD entrepreneurship and sets out a clear agenda for the empirical research now required before further development and formalisation of policy can be pursued as a means of tackling systemic and structural inequalities within the BACD entrepreneur community. Thus, there is a need to undertake additional research through different theoretical lenses and/or methodologies to gain more insights into BACD entrepreneurship, the institutions that frame business in the UK, and race relations. Additionally, further studies could employ comparative analysis of different countries and/or quantitative methods for the generalisability of findings.

What is evident is that there is a disparity between BACD entrepreneurs and other ethnic groups within the UK, and BACD have a greater propensity to become entrepreneurs. However, they are more likely to encounter structural and systemic constraints, which inhibits opportunities, access to finance, and social networks. This important aspect of Black, African, and Caribbean diaspora entrepreneurship can no longer be ignored as some minor inconvenience or trivialised structural racism that has little or no importance.

I fervently hope that this paper will stimulate more research that not only continues the discourse but also identifies the obstacles and inherent barriers faced by BACD, female entrepreneurs, as they represent the largest and fastest-growing segment within the BACD entrepreneur population. If this paper stimulates such research, then it will have accomplished its purpose.

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