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Racism, zero-hours contracts and complicity in higher education

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ABSTRACT

The use of zero-hours contracts (ZHCs) has been associated with the transfer of risk away from corporate employers and towards individual employees. In universities increasing numbers of teaching staff are employed on such contracts. Academics from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds (BME) are disproportionately more likely to be employed on ZHCs. This article draws on the accounts of 21 BME academics to explore their personal experiences of ZHCs. The research identified a broad range of inequalities fostered by a lack of collegiality on the part of permanently contracted colleagues that materialized at the local, departmental level. Using the concepts of 'risk', 'risk culture' and 'White *habitus*', this article explores the extent to which race and racism are a feature of collective departmental strategies to manage risk.

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Introduction

A noticeable feature of UK Higher Education (HE)has been the increasing numbers of academics employed on precarious terms commonly referred to as zero-hour contracts (ZHCs) rather than permanent contracts (UCU 2016; Read and Leathwood 2020). This article explores the experiences of Black and Minority ethnic (BME[1]) academics who are more likely to be employed on ZHCs than White academics reflecting patterns of structural racism within academia. The research explores how BME academics perceived ZHCs were used to limit their opportunities whilst protecting the security of White academics. It explores how White *habitus* emerges as a shared collective trait within university departments to manage risks associated with precarity. It argues that whilst precarity is understood as a structural condition of academia this should not disguise evidence of individual White academics acting collectively to manage the risks of precarity through collective and individual racisms.

The prevalence of precarious contracts are widely explained as a symptom of neoliberal educational economies and cultures of managerialism (Courtois and O'Keefe 2015; Smithers et al. 2021). This analysis attributes responsibility for precarity, and consequent detrimental impacts, towards a nebulous, largely anonymous clique of senior university managers, policy-makers and corporate bodies. In this research, participants on ZHCs tended not to

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identify structural concerns as the most detrimental experiences in their academic lives. Instead they highlighted the actions of individuals and collective groups of individuals who are not directly responsible for making university policy from high-ranking positions in the management chain, (i.e. who are *not* senior managers, human resources directors, Vice Chancellors or pension fund managers), as complicit in the generation of social injustices. This article argues that despite the ready identification of neoliberalism as a holistic cause of academic precarity adversely affecting the working conditions of all academics; individual and collective strategies towards managing its risks should also be understood to reinforce inequalities at a local level. In particular it argues that neoliberalism has a normalising impact on everyday inequalities, such as those associated with race and racism, in which individual action and structural inequality are simply re-entrenched within racist practice that is the 'usual way society does business' (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 7). This article explores how, against a backdrop of structural inequalities, at the more local, departmental level the persistence of individual racist behaviours contributes to maintaining a *status quo* in which White groups work to retain their personal dominance.

Zero-hours contracts in education

There is no legal definition for the term 'zero-hours contract'; it is simply 'a colloquial term for a contract of service under which the worker is not guaranteed work and is paid only for work carried out' (Pyper and Dar 2015, 3). This is mirrored by the Higher Education Statistics Association (HESA) definition of, 'a contract between an employer and a worker where the employer is not obliged to provide any minimum working hours, and the worker is not obliged to accept any work offered' (HESA 2021). Brinkley notes a noticeable increase in the casualisation of the labour force takes place,

> …against a background of falling real wages, high levels of workplace fear of the consequences of redundancy and unfair treatment for a significant minority, and an employment recovery where permanent employee jobs have been in a minority. (2013, 26)

There has been widespread attention about ZHCs in the media (*Telegraph* 2015; *Daily Mail* 2015) and concerns have been expressed about their increased use in universities (*Guardian* 2016; Baker 2019). Media and political attention to some extent misunderstands ZHCs as a definable legal and regulatable phenomenon that is better understood as 'a convenient shorthand for masking the explosive growth of precarious work for a highly fragmented workforce' (Adams, Freedland and Prassl 2015, 2). Analysing Labour Force Survey (LFS) and The Office for National Statistics (ONS) statistics, Pyper and Dar (2015) note that whilst it is difficult to establish precise numbers of employees contracted under ZHCs there has been a substantial recent increase. The LFS data for the October-December quarters for 2013 and 2014 suggests those employed on ZHCs increased from 586,000 to 697,000, an increase of 1.9% to 2.3% of people in employment (ONS 2015). Hopkins and Fairfoul (2014) suggest such statistics over-state the numbers of zero-hours contracted employees and argue there is a media and political bias against the use of ZHCs.

Universities use a variety of nomenclature to describe their relationship to such staff including zero-hours contracts, hourly paid lecturers, visiting lecturers, short-term staff and hours bank staff (UCU 2013). Education is the second highest sector in the UK employment market using ZHCs (Pyper and Dar 2015) however hard data of numbers employed

on such contracts is unavailable. The LFS suggests a figure of 27% in 2014 (ONS 2015), whilst the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), which surveyed larger UK organisations, found over 38% of staff employed in education were on ZHCs (CIPD 2013). The scale of ZHCs being used by universities and further education colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland has also been raised as an area of significant concern by the University and College Union (UCU) (UCU 2013, 2015). The UCU conducted a substantial amount of quantitative analysis on the basis of freedom of information requests to universities and further education colleges (UCU 2013). This evidenced the widespread adoption of ZHCs and identified at least 24,000 staff employed on this basis across 142 universities in 2013 (UCU 2013). Furthermore, 46% of institutions were employing 200 or more staff on such contracts and five institutions employed more than 1000. The UCU research highlighted that the majority of ZHCs were teaching only contracts and most prevalent in traditional, pre-1992 universities employing PhD students to teach (UCU 2016). Although HESA compile data on the contractual arrangements of academic staff, these obscure the true numbers employed on ZHCs or similar by excluding 'atypical staff', this cohort of academics being those most likely to be employed on such contracts (HESA 2021). Similarly the HESA data does not provide useful statistics for the ethnicity of staff employed on ZHCs and consequently evidence of BME over-representation has tended to be identified anecdotally and through the alternative data collection such as freedom of information requests (Blackham 2020) or through evidence of BME staff over-representation amongst other forms of less secure contacts (Joseph-Salisbury et al. 2020). In the United States similar ambiguities emerge within the data, however it is possible to piece together a picture in which more marginalized groups of academics (by gender or race) are more likely to be employed on less secure contractual terms such as ZHCs (Navarro 2017; Cottom 2014).

Casualisation in UK universities has been shaped by specific national contexts including the expansion and widening of student participation, an increasingly equitable ratio of female to male academics but overt inequality in the employment of BME academics (Lopes and Dewan 2014; Bhopal 2018). Chen and Lopes (2015) note disparities between hourly rates of pay at different institutions. They also describe how hourly rates for teaching either do not include, or include at unrealistic level, time for preparation and marking. The correlation between hourly paid lecturing, stress and fears about risks associated with job insecurity are consistently identified across all types of university (Lopes and Dewan 2014; UCU 2015; Chen and Lopes 2015).

Race, racism and zero-hours contracts

Despite widespread evidence racism is a significant problem in UK Universities (Bhopal 2018; EHRC 2019; UUK/NUS 2019), evidence of such racism is often denied or downplayed (Bhopal and Henderson 2021; Pilkington 2011). Diversity work and institutional commitments that ostensibly challenge racism, in practice deliver little change and are identified as a means of demonstrating commitment without engaging in material practice (Ahmed 2007). Similar performance of diversity is also evident in the promotional material of universities (Bhopal, Myers, and Pitkin 2020). University diversity policies often make substantial claims that equality is at the heart of their institutional cultures but do 'not specify how success would be defined and assessed' (Khan et al. 2019; see also Bhopal and Pitkin

2020). Racism in HE materializes within a complex pattern of activities and outcomes including students being disadvantaged when accessing elite universities, experiences of racism, an ethnocentric White curriculum, a BME attainment gap and transitions from HE into the labour market (Bhopal 2018; Bhopal, Myers, and Pitkin 2020; Pilkington 2013; UUK/NUS 2019). Academic experiences include experiences of racism, an assumption that 'race work' is the responsibility of BME staff, less likelihood of promotion to senior roles and the work of BME staff less valued compared to their White peers or seen as 'personal research' (Bhopal 2015). BME academics are more likely to be employed on ZHCs than their White peers (AdvanceHE 2020).

Whilst this article is specifically interested in how race and racism are significant factors in the experiences of BME academics working on ZHCs; the centrality of racism within HE (Ahmed 2012; Ladson-Billings 1998,) suggests this particular practice should be understood within broader contexts of racism and inequality (Housee 2018; Pilkington 2013). Critical Race Theorists (CRT) argue racism is central to the lives of BME people; an everyday part of life in which the assumptions of Whiteness and White privilege are part of political, legal and educational structures (Delgado 1995; Bell 1992; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). Racism is identified as the social reproduction of inequalities understood as 'any program or practice of discrimination, segregation, persecution, or mistreatment based on membership in a race or ethnic group' (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 183). 'Race' in this context is understood to be a form of difference that is socially constructed in different ways and at different times but always as a means of distinguishing a White dominant group from an other, non-White subordinate group (Tate 1997; Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Gillborn 2015).

In the UK, CRT theorists have explored how policy making is intentionally designed to disadvantage BME groups (Gillborn 2005; Bhopal and Pitkin 2020). Gillborn goes further to argue that structural processes work to perpetuate Whiteness that continue to oppress and marginalize BME groups. Within this process, individual White groups are complicit in maintaining a system, which benefits their own positions. Gillborn states, 'Whiteness matters. CRT does not assume that all White people are the same…but CRT does argue that *all* White people are implicated in White supremacy' (Gillborn 2008, 84, my emphasis).

Neoliberalism, precarity and racism in higher education

Precarious contractual arrangement such as ZHCs are often contextualized within educational economies characterized by global shifts towards neoliberalism (Hill 2005; Courtois and O'Keefe 2015; Hall 2018). ZHCs benefit universities' employment practice being 'framed by an increasingly corporate business model of education, which seeks to maximize profit and relies on worker insecurity and exploitation to achieve this aim' (Lopes and Dewan 2014, 39). Neoliberalism in HE has been identified within both institutional privatisation and an ideological foreclosure of the means to challenge its subsuming economies associated with public goods. Giroux notes that, 'neoliberalism empties the public treasury, hollows out public services, and limits the vocabulary and imagery available to recognize noncommercialized public space, antidemocratic forms of power, and narrow models of individual agency' (Giroux 2002, 429). Similarly Evans, drawing on Foucault's (1980) conceptualization of disciplinary power, notes that features of neoliberalism such as marketisation, credentialization and audit cultures are themselves, 'experienced as forms of disciplinary power shaping what can and cannot be done' (2021, 576). Ball (2016) takes the Foucauldian

conception further by identifying subjectivity as a site of resistance to neoliberalism drawing a distinction between governmentality being both the application and vehicle of power; and, the individual body as a site in which power can be 'enacted or resisted/refused' (Ball 2016, 1131). Ball notes this relationship between individuals and governance is a messy, difficult space and despite the semantic optimism of *resisting/refusing* governance, this is conducted in terms of being, 'incited, hailed, to recognise ourselves in their terms' (2016, 1131). This highlights the significance of understanding the relational framing of individual practice within structural forms of governance. Drawing on sociological and economic analysis Holmwood and Servós delineate the relationship between marketisation and the production of new forms of precarity within universities that reproduces, 'an established elite with characteristics skewed in the expected ways by age, gender, race and ethnicity. At the same time, a stratification emerges among universities with favourable working conditions concentrated at elite institutions that are already dominated by individuals from socially restricted backgrounds' (2019, 317).

One potential consequence of the marketization of HE within neoliberal economies has been an extension of proletarianization within academic work. This is neither a new nor exceptional circumstance but rather, drawing on Marxist economic theory, the repeated experience of professional classes of workers faced by economic and technological changes that undermine their agency and status (Oppenheimer 1972; Derber 1983; McKinlay and Arches 1985; Navarro 1988; Evans 2020). In UK HE since the 1990s this argument identifies the emergence of an increasingly deprofessionalised or proletarianised academic workforce in response to increasing managerialism and universities reimagined as commercial enterprises rather than for the public good (Wilson 1991; Gay and Salaman 1992; Willmott 1995; Parker and Jary 1995).

Whilst the emergence of structural inequalities such as those around race or class are readily understood as inevitable consequences, it often appears that the specific relations between individuals stratified into new hierarchies are less well explored. Accounts of academic proletarianization readily ascribed to the collective woes of academics have only more recently been linked specifically to the contractual conditions of an academic precariat (and in some respects this is a discourse which manages to justify a broad sense of hardship amongst *all* academics by freely drawing upon the particular economic precarity of *some* academics[2]). Similarly, whilst there are many accounts of structural racism within universities (Ahmed 2007; Pilkington 2013; Bhopal 2020) there is less work that explores the persistence of racism from individual academics; it could be argued the evidential identification of structural racism in some ways shifts focus away from individual racists or specific instances of racist behavior towards institutional failings.

The social phenomena of precarity in the HE landscape as, 'characterised by a mutual relationship of social structures and social actors' (Allmer 2018, 383), is forged within individual actions cognizant of structural constraints. The analysis of precarity as bound by structural outcomes over-simplifies the active involvement of individual social actors and their daily, routine behaviours. Giddens (1981) argues that the routine behaviours of 'social actors appear as but dull automata, moving mindlessly through the contexts of their daily lives. On the contrary, the prevalance of the routine or taken-for-granted rests precisely upon the casually employed but very complex skills whereby social actors draw upon and reconstitute the practices layered into institutions in deep time-space' (1981, 65). In his earliest work Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1962; Bourdieu and Sayad 1964) sketched out the

conceptual basis of what would become understood as *habitus* (Lane 2000) in the context of colonial subjugation; unpacking the 'function of racism', within the same relational space between social agents and structure being to, 'to provide a rationalization of the existing state of affairs so as to make it appear to be a lawfully instituted order' (1962, 133).

Zero-hours contracts, risk, habitus

The claim that ZHC's are characteristic of economies and corporate practice driven by marketisation flags their relationship to forms of risk management symptomatic of Ulrich Beck's description of 'Risk Society' (1992a; 1992b). Beck identifies economies in which the management of 'risk' that increasingly transcends the borders of nation states is also related to the emergence of self-reflexive individuals who are expected to deploy greater responsibility managing the risk to their individual economic security. Consequently ZHCs defray some of the risk of employment in an insecure economy away from institutions towards individuals. The engagement of the individual in reflexive risk management has a number of implications, including how collective groups might seek to protect their interests.

UK Universities face a range of specific risks including their positioning within global rankings and domestic measures of such success (e.g. the Research Exercise Framework (REF),[3] National Student Survey (NSS)[4] or Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF[5]). These institutional risks materialize between departments in the competition for internal status and security. Inevitably, there are also individualized risks; these might include the inability to publish or poor teaching scores. The competitive relational spaces in which global, institutional, departmental and individual perceptions and management of risk mirror Bourdieu's account of interlocking 'fields' in which institutions and their agents compete for capitals (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). These are also the spaces in which habitus, individual dispositions and characteristics shaped by prior experience emerge. For Bourdieu habitus is an unthought set of practices, it is as 'cognition without consciousness, intentionality without intention, and a practical mastery of the world's regularities' (Bourdieu 1990, 12); dynamic dispositions dependent on the relation between the individual, the local field and competition for scarce capitals. For Beck the management of risk by reflexive individuals is the internalisation of 'cosmopolitanization' when 'Issues of global concern are becoming part of the everyday local experiences and the "moral life-worlds" of the people' (Beck 2002, 17). UK academics positioned within a discourse of neoliberalisation as the dominant means of understanding educational economies may recognize their local struggles within a global context; or more likely within the competitive spaces of precarious employment simply demonstrate Bourdieu's 'practical mastery' of the employment conditions. Lash (2000) questions how such individual flexibility in relation to risk might materialize in his description of 'risk *cultures*'. Unlike Beck's description of an over-arching rule-bound and hierarchical societal organization, Lash considers the 'horizontal disordering' amongst groups of people working against the institutionalization of 'risk society' whose, 'fluid quasi-membership is as likely to be collective as individual, and their concern is less with utilitarian interests than the fostering of the good life' (2000, 47).

Lash (1994, 2000) argues that, whilst risk is identifiably increasing, the understanding of such risk is only ever subjective; it is a combination of '"reflexive" judgments which include apart from a mental, reflexive, conceptualization, also affective, embodied and habitual notions of taste' (2000, 52). When Bourdieu refers to *habitus* he describes

characteristics and traits embodied within individuals rather than collectives. In the context of Lash's 'risk culture' what might be understood, would be a set of shared characteristics and traits more akin to a collective *habitus*, relationally produced in order to maintain and compete for capitals, but identifiable within parts of an organization (e.g. a department, school or faculty within a university). Such shared forms of *habitus* have previously been identified in universities in terms of institutional *habitus* that impacts on student choice and experience of university dependent on their class background (Reay, David, and Ball 2005; Reay, Crozier, and Clayton 2010). Collective *habitus* has also been identified in racial terms as 'White habitus' (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006). This racialized *habitus* delineated as shared behaviours that ensure social closure in which 'one group monopolizes advantages by closing off opportunities to another group of outsiders beneath it which it determines as inferior' (Murphy 1988, 8). Bonilla-Silva characterises White *habitus* as the 'racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and creates whites' racial tastes, perceptions, feelings, and emotions and their views on racial matters' (Bonilla-Silva 2006, 104). White *habitus* 'does not determine action, it orients action. Thus, people observe and participate in social closure but tend not to see it as problematic as it resonates with their *habitus*. The *habitus* helps normalize and legitimate social closure' (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006, 233). A *habitus* of the collective may represent a successful strategy for maintaining cohesion and security within the collective in the face of wider institutional and global risk.

The emergence of forms of habitus that embody racial identities sits closely within Bourdieu's analysis of the relationship between structure and agency, the interplay between his conceptual tools of field, capitals and habitus, and mirror the nuances of racialized identities present within his analysis of relationships between dominant and subordinate ethnic groups within colonialism (Bourdieu 1962; Bourdieu and Sayad 1964; Go 2013). Inevitably, bearing in mind Bourdieu's overarching theoretical project, the micro analysis of racisms are subsumed within the dynamics of macro structural processes. Shaped by experience, *habitus* is integral to maintaining security and minimizing personal risks such as threats to financial security or status within the realities of institutional life (Bourdieu 1977) and potentially racialized within an unspoken, unacknowledged framing of a White collective investment in White interests.

Methodology

The research was conducted with BME academics employed on ZHCs at three UK universities (BTOWN, ATOWN and CTOWN) selected because they broadly reflected elements of the UK HE sector. BTOWN is a redbrick university[6] in a large city in the south east of England. It primarily recruits local undergraduate students but, draws on wider national and global locations to recruit postgraduates. ATOWN is a post-1992 university[7] also in the Southeast of England; it recruits largely from its own city location and the wider Southeast. CTOWN is a Russell Group university.[8] Unlike the other two universities it attracts undergraduates from across the country and globally. It also has higher entry qualifications compared to BTOWN and ATOWN.

Higher status and 'selective' universities such as the Russell Group employ more staff on ZHCs, often reflecting a specific relationship between their use of doctoral students for teaching (Chakrabortty and Weale 2016). The research purposively selected academics who

were broadly reliant on ZHCs as their sole or primary income rather than doctoral students. Participants were contacted via personal contacts, special interest groups and a snowball sample. There are advantages and disadvantages associated with using snowball sampling (Sarantakos 2005). It was used as the best method to recruit participants from BME backgrounds, as respondents were able to recommend others who identified as BME. All respondents self-identified as BME and were from a diverse range of backgrounds in terms of age, gender, class and career trajectories. The nomenclature of participants' contracts included 'Zero-hours Contracts', 'Hourly Paid' and 'Bank Staff'. However, all respondents recognised the terminology 'Zero-hours Contracts' encompassed their contractual arrangements; and ZHCs is used throughout this research to identify the range of these practices.

The research was designed to explore the perceptions and experiences of BME academics employed on ZHCs in universities and examine the extent to which race and racism were significant factors within such experiences. The main aims of the study were,

- To examine the experiences of BME academics on ZHCs (satisfaction/dissatisfaction),
- To explore the impact of ZHCs on relationships with colleagues (status/conflicts) and
- To analyse the impact of race and racism on ZHCs (individual/structural).

Ethical clearance was obtained from the participating university and in line with British Educational Research Association's (BERA 2018) ethical guidelines. All respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality and given a participant information sheet and signed a consent form. They were informed they could withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty. Twenty-one BME academics participated in semi-structured interviews. All of the interviews were digitally recorded and the data transcribed. Data was analysed using grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967) in order to develop theoretical understandings of BME academics. Initial coding based upon the research questions were expanded as emergent themes emerged which explored the interview data including conceptual codes such as 'risk culture' and 'white habitus', 'emotion', 'career progression' and 'belonging/not belonging'.

The experience of zero-hours contracts: limited economic rewards and limited career opportunities

Only 2 participants expressed complete satisfaction with their employment on ZHCs. This reflected patterns of ZHCs being attractive to employees whose financial security was not reliant on this income stream rather than arguments that the flexibility of ZHCs was an attractive option (Brinkley 2013; Hopkins and Fairfoul 2014). Eric (Black South African, PTWON) was 58 and previously accepted an early retirement package from another university and since moved home to PTOWN, described how he enjoyed teaching but had no interest in a full-time post

> It's the ramifications of being an academic now. I do not want to fill in a personal development form or sit in a meeting to discuss the future of our department.

Another participant, Alisha (British Indian), explained her family moved to CTOWN following her husband's appointment to a senior academic position. She described the casual

teaching as a 'stop-gap' arrangement whilst she looked for a more permanent role in a local university. Both Eric and Alisha contextualized their satisfaction with their contractual terms in relation to individual and family decisions underpinned by economic security. Other participants tended to highlight financial difficulties associated with ZHCs. Millie (Ugandan Asian) had completed her PhD at CTOWN two years previously, since when she secured short-term contracts for teaching and research work at the same university.

> It's stressful. I enjoy teaching here but there is always a nagging worry that the money won't be enough. That next month the car breaks down. Or worse next month someone says we're really sorry Millie but we don't have any more hours.

Millie reflected a common theme that ZHCs were financially restrictive and consequently also placed restrictions on her individual agency. Tessa (Black British, BTOWN) for example noted she was happy teaching at BTOWN, but was less likely to move to change employment because of the demands of her current role. She explained she had neither the time nor the energy to pursue activities such as publishing or even searching for jobs, that might result in her finding a better, permanent job. This partly related to fears that her current role would be at risk if she did not act immediately on all its demands and she noted 'all my time is invested in teaching now'. In stark contrast to Eric and Alisha, other participants identified their financial dependency on ZHCs; the risks associated with losing work were substantial and if they became dissatisfied with their working conditions they could not stop working.

Departmental relationships: economies of 'high-pitched' feelings

Apart from concerns about financial security, participants described dissatisfaction in terms of local management styles, disagreements with colleagues and concerns about career progression. In addition to detailing poor employment conditions they identified practice designed to be emotionally hurtful was commonplace; in which economies of feeling circulated in order to draw collective groups together whilst demarcating some individuals as not belonging (Ahmed 2004). Participants identified these affective processes as underpinning demarcations based around unspoken attitudes toward race and racism.

Naveen (British Asian/Pakistani, ATOWN) described how other, permanent colleagues consistently made her feel either unwanted or incompetent. This happened in, 'the things they say. Also its how we have to work'. She recalled hearing permanent members of staff describing the room used by ZHCs as 'the broom cupboard',

> It's a horrible room. There's no windows and they just dump any crap they have in the room. There's always rubbish piled up on the desks.

Naveen spoke to a union representative about the room who was sympathetic but nothing changed and, according to Naveen, this was a discussion she believed filtered into departmental perceptions about her, 'they all talk, gossip about everything. Even [union representative]'. Naveen's colleague Patrick (Black British) worked in the same department,

> It's very clear we are not second class citizens. We are third, fourth class. There's always a new problem. Our passes stop opening doors. Our library access is restricted. When I have a conversation with [manager] she say's to my face, 'it's just the way it is'. She said to me 'ATOWN

> has a reputation for treating casuals badly' but I'm thinking, it's not the university. It's you. You are treating me like this and you don't care.

Patrick and Naveen both emphasized how poor personal relationships fostered by departmental colleagues were 'upsetting' features of their working lives that undermined their feelings of self-worth. They both maintained suspicions this was associated with their race but that,

> …its impossible to pin down. Sometimes I think its White people just sort of laughing at me. Almost saying get back in that cupboard girl. (Naveen)

Iris (British Chinese) described similar patterns of behavior from her colleagues and also identified the impact her ethnicity played more directly,

> They have six lecturers they can draw on. It's a big department so quite often we get a sudden change. X is sick can you cover? Can you do these dissertations? I get asked to do something and it's always Iris if you can't say yes to this now I will ask someone else. It's always done in an unreasonable rather than a reasonable way. It doesn't help I'm just a little Chinese woman and sometimes they assume that means something. I'm the little Chinese girl. I get told what to do. There's two White women and they just seem to be best buddies with everybody.

Steve (Black British, CTOWN) also described specific actions of colleagues impacting on him,

> I felt I was being messed around by one of the module leaders. I was supposed to teach five weeks of her module. It was pretty straight forward stuff for first years. But, she changed the weeks round at short notice. I said I would need more time. More hours. If they changed again and the next thing I'm invited into a meeting to discuss any issues I have working at CTOWN. The Head suggests I need to be more careful how I speak to people that I can be a bit intimidating. I have nothing to say. They are clearly intimidating me by suggesting if I don't want to do as I'm told I should leave.

When asked to expand on the reasons Steve might be described as 'intimidating' Steve said,

> …its shorthand for saying I'm Black. They pin a macho thing on being male that gets blown up because of my skin colour. So it's like those conversations in the corridor, 'you know Steve, he can be a bit intimidating sometimes…'

ZHCs played a significant role in providing economic security for most participants. However, the financial rewards were limited (in comparison to permanent colleagues) and also framed within often very difficult working conditions. It was noticeable that participants understood ZHCs as features of local, departmental relations rather than the consequence of national or global understandings of educational economies. The 'risks' associated with ZHCs invariably centred around personal micro-management of contracted hours and working conditions in the context of personal relationships with departmental colleagues rather than contractual relations with the institution. Unlike Beck's (1992b) account of self-reflexive individuals framing their lives in relation to global risks, BME academics on ZHCs were engaged in highly localized practices that restricted their resources and limited their individual ability to move into more secure forms of employment. Often these local relationships were described in difficult terms that participants found emotionally draining; Naveen described how 'every conversation, everything is high-pitched here'. Whilst

the practice of teaching hours was understood as a feature of 21st century HE economies; its practice was framed within the local register of an economy of feelings (Ahmed 2004). Collective behaviours delineated differences between the permanent academics and those on ZHCs often within a range of negative emotions felt by participants. In the accounts of Iris and Steve, racism plays a significant leveraging role to ramp up the emotional register in which their personal standing in the department is undermined because of their race. In this sense, departmental racism was an 'ordinary' feature of institutional life and a 'common, everyday experience' (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 3) and one that would be anticipated to emerge in the management of ZHCs. The next section explores the impact of such 'ordinary', personal racism in more detail.

Race, racism and zero-hours contracts: the value of BME identities

Many participants made direct references to racism in relation to their experiences of ZHCs. Accounts of the heightened emotional register in which they were positioned as 'outsiders' because of impermanent contractual status were identified as empowering and legitimizing White colleagues' racism. If as Gillborn (2008) argues, structural processes adapt to maintain institutional forms of racism, at a time when there is greater precarity within universities it is likely ZHCs will be deployed as a means to maintain a racist *status quo*. Whilst structural change to global educational economies might be understood in terms of neoliberalism or emergent national managerial cultures what was striking in participants accounts was the departmental management of risks associated with precarity in relation to individuals and collective groups. Two academics at BTOWN, David and Bernie, both identified concerns over poor career progression that they believed related to their ethnicity.

David, a Sociology lecturer was teaching sociology as maternity cover at BTOWN and fitted this work around another short-term, part-time contract. He expressed concerns that his Black, working-class identity did not 'fit' with the department. Despite this he had been employed on zero-hours or short term contracts on and off for around five years at BTOWN. David expressed mixed feelings about his current teaching on a 'race and community' module explaining it was his 'ideal job'. However, two years previously he had applied unsuccessfully for a permanent sociology lectureship at BTOWN whilst teaching (on a ZHC) in the same department,

> At that time I was shocked. It felt very unfair. The job specification mirrored my cv. They employed this White girl instead. She finished her PhD here and now she has a job here. All her work is on gender and work. Without casting aspersions this department is full of people doing gender they never needed another person to teach gender. She was a natural fit though.

David discussed his feeling that a mixture of his race, gender and working class background contributed to not 'fitting in' with the department but acknowledged the difficulty of pinning this down. He suggested that he had more in common with the students attending the university, not least because he was from the local area, than he had with departmental colleagues who,

> They get off the tube. Heads down and straight into the department. They don't make eye contact with people on the street here. Literally they don't know how to look Black people, poor people, anybody in the eye.

David characterized the department as being 'White, middle-class, mostly women' and at odds with the local characteristics of undergraduates who were mostly local, working-class and from multiple different ethnic backgrounds. In essence David identified a set of institutional traits and characteristics (specifically race and class) that set him apart from the collective identity of his sociology department. Problematically (and as identified by David), the claim that his personal *habitus*, shaped by characteristics ill-fitted to his department had a causal impact on his lack of career progression is hard to substantiate. This is a common feature of institutional practice that does not openly state its racism and to a certain extent can be countered by drawing upon CRT (Gillborn 2008) approaches and a willingness to value personal testimony. In the context of universities corporate management of risk the relationship between collective forms of *habitus* similar to that suggested by Lash's (2000) account of *risk cultures* in which collective identities coalesce to protect a range of shared interests. This in turn can be understood within the collective accounts of *White habitus* (Bonilla-Silva 2006) as a set of processes in which the collective interests of White people emerge as dominant whilst maintaining a veil over the racism underpinning their ascendancy.

One of the ironies noted by David was that his value to the department was often framed in terms of his 'local, Black, working-class' identity in conjunction with his ability to teach race and ethnicity. He suggested the department believed it was useful to have a lecturer with an 'affinity for the local kids'; this affinity however was also the marker of the differences between David and his permanent colleagues. A relationship between ethnicity and subject areas being taught was also highlighted by Bernie who described her ethnicity as 'English Gypsy' and taught on a youth work module in the Education department,

> I was open about who I am. That was probably obvious just because of how I got into academia. How I ended up teaching what I teach.

She also described applying unsuccessfully for permanent jobs at BTOWN. Bernie suggested her ethnicity held a particular form of value,

> I've been in meetings where something gets said. Usually along the lines of how great it is to have Bernie's experiences for the youth work modules. What that means. Obviously what it means is that we love having the label of a Gypsy here. It makes them look good and probably it makes them feel good. Last year the head of department started telling me how well I had done to get here and I'm thinking you know nothing about me. They just like how that label, my label, makes them feel progressive.

Carol (Black British) identified a similar valuing of her Black identity as discrete from how she was valued as an academic. She was on a bank of staff who could be offered casual hours to teach at ATOWN. Carol described how she had encountered 'lots of problems' with practical arrangements for her teaching,

> I was told one thing about how many hours we would be paid for preparation, teaching, marking and meetings. That was undermined very quickly because we found out that another guy on the bank was being paid for more hours for preparation and there was a big argument.

In discussion with her department, Carol was told this simply reflected individual module leaders negotiating different arrangements for their individual work requirements. However, Carol identified that she and two other BME colleagues on casual contracts worked to the same contractual terms and the only person given preferential terms was the only White

man on the bank staff. Despite being valued less in economic terms, Carol was seemingly valued in other ways,

> The next thing that happens is I'm looking on the School website and there's my photograph. On the front page I'm there smiling away with some students. It's a very White department, I teach two hours a week, but they managed to get a photograph of me teaching. It's not a coincidence it's that they need those Black faces to say look how diverse we are. It's the same with the students. It's all photos of Black students and Asian students.

Carol identified her value was both less than White colleagues because of their ethnicity and simultaneously aspects of her ethnicity that held other types of value were taken away from her. The presentation of racialized identities as well-represented within the departmental promotional materials is indicative of the collective management of a specific risk (being identified as an all-White department in a time of diversity for example) whilst still maintaining segregated working practices that benefit the collective interests of White people. Whilst Carol might well have experienced racism working on a permanent contract at ATOWN, ZHCs played a significant role in both legitimizing her devalued status and limiting her potential to challenge the *status quo*. Carol noted for example that she was angry her photograph was being used but felt it would be counterproductive to raise the issue,

> Anything I say will just be evidence of my lack of collegiality. It will just be another reason not to give me some hours in the future.

For Carol and other academics on ZHCs it often appeared that permanently contracted academics were framed within a collective logic; their behaviours aligned within a common purpose that included the protection of their shared interests. The intensity of some of these behaviours possibly indicative of deep-seated awareness of the underlying precarity of life in the Academy. Ahmed argues emotions mold the relationships between individuals and 'are crucial to the way in which bodies surface in relation to other bodies, a surfacing that produces the very effect of collectives' (2004, 39). The relationship between academics on ZHCs and permanent contracts emerged in this research as one in which heightened emotions appear a normal way to delineate differences between a subordinate group of ZHC academic and a dominant collective of permanent academics. The intensity of emotions mirroring the scale of collective anxieties about the security shared by permanent members of staff. With many universities unable to address racism at institutional levels, including recruitment procedures, many departments are characteristically predominantly White.

In the context of universities and departments where Whiteness is the norm the collective logic shaping a collective *habitus* emerges as a process of reproducing and reinforcing the status of its dominant White groups. Drawing on Bonilla-Silva's concept of White habitus, Mueller (2017) notes that 'strong institutionalization propels reproduction of white power and privilege today in ways that are largely covert' (2017, 220). Whereas Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick (2006) suggest White *habitus* operates unconsciously to orientate collective behaviours rather than to specifically direct individual actions, the narratives in this research hint at local, departmental actions in which individuals, despite not overtly stating their racist inclinations, are complicit in performing everyday racisms in seemingly overt ways. It could be argued, participants in this research were complicit in their institutional racisms (e.g. in the Bourdieusian sense of being compilict within the rules of any given field

(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992); but this ignores the coercive nature of precarious educational economies in which the centrality of institutional racism does not outweigh individual risks. In other words, the choices available to participants about how to pay their rent or put food on the table were very limited. Academics on permanent contracts had more agency when managing risk and seemed able to disguise aspects of their complicity with overt racist behaviours. The heightened emotional pitch of relations indicative of individuals and collectives distancing themselves from personal awareness their management of risk, including the risk of White people losing access to their personal security, was conducted on racialized lines. Normal daily work tasks such as allocating teaching hours, when conducted within 'ordinary' racist behaviours, are perhaps mitigated in the eye of the racist if they can be performed in a register of intense emotional discontent that wrongly identified BME academics on ZHCs as unworthy, unreliable outsiders. This mirrors process by which White people learn to articulate the rhetoric of anti-racism whilst both engaging in racist actions and also promoting a discourse in which their racisms carry less weight (Myers and Bhopal 2017; Ahmed 2007). Whereas these behaviours are often institutionally led; participants in this research described more individual and local activity indicative of the transfer of risk from institution to individual.

Conclusions

This research identified variations in the types of relationships that exist between casual lecturers and academic departments. Some participants found ZHCs a useful means of aligning working lives with their personal circumstances, but most described unsatisfactory contractual arrangements that afforded little security. One interpretation, that the risks of insecure HE economies had been institutionally transferred to individuals, did not quite map the experiences of participants in this research. They tended to describe more collectively shaped risk management strategies in the relationships they experienced with their colleagues on a day-to-day, face-to-face level. Often these experiences were informed by race and racism. Inherent patterns of racism within universities having largely privileged White collectives; the risk management of these collectives included the protection of their White interests. In an economic sector that has become increasingly insecure, White academics were active in protecting their own security.

Whilst risks always have and always will exist, Douglas and Wildavsky argue the 'perception of risk is a social process' (1983, 6) with different societies choosing to highlight particular risks and ignoring others, reflecting their social customs. Lash (drawing heavily on Kant) is interested in this as a means of,

> …'reflexive' judgements which include apart from a mental, reflective, conceptualization also affective, embodied and habitual notions of taste. (Lash 2000, 52)

Within university departments the 'horizontal disordering' of Lash's (2020) risk cultures, *habitus* that might more naturally be anticipated as an individual property materializes as a shared, collective *habitus,* determined by affective responses such as feelings and emotions towards risks encountered in daily lives. In the context of the risks of economic insecurity effectively transferred from institutions to individuals, individual fears appeared collectively embodied as affective traits and characteristics, in which collective groups seek to maintain their position and access to a better life. Strategies to maintain collective security were often

premised on disordering practices. These include ZHCs managed in ways that undermine their potential value; providing short-term security or a stepping-stone towards a permanent career for example.

Collective *habitus* provides an effective protective defence towards 'risk' generated beyond the immediate influence of the local *field* of an academic department. A reflexive understanding of risk generates a collective set of behaviours that draws upon prior experience, personal characteristics and access to capitals in order to deploy a collective *habitus* to maintain the security offered by the *status quo*. The racialization of *habitus* as 'White habitus' (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006) as a means of social closure to protect a dominant collective's interests indicates the significance of reflexivity in this process. The reflexive permanent academic understanding how their interests align in times of precarity and perhaps most significantly identifying they align most closely with other academics just like themselves.

Whereas it is relatively easy to make broad brush claims that universities are institutionally racist, it often appears to be regarded as an inconvenient truth that universities are quite likely therefore to be full of individuals who are themselves racists. White habitus goes a long way to providing an explanation for the apparent ease with which racism persists amongst individuals and collective groups, none of whom can be openly identified as racists. Gillborn notes that, 'Racism cannot be understood adequately by a perspective that focuses only on the separate beliefs, actions, and fears of individual social actors, but neither is racism purely a facet of a depersonalized system; racism is remarkably resilient because it is both systemic and shaped by individual agency' (2018, 67). One consequence of the legitimate desire to address structural racism within HE is that to some extent this excuses or ignores individual racists and their actions by fostering the conditions in which persistent evidence of racist outcomes is ascribed to an overarching systemic set of practices that can be universally deplored as beyond any individual's responsibility. Within HE economies where the risks of economic decline are transferred from the institution to individuals, greater agency is a marker of individuals better positioned to transfer economic, social and cultural capitals to preserve their own security. In this research, it was clear that both ZHCs and being from a BME background, individually or in conjunction, were markers of lesser agency.

Notes

1. Black and minority ethnic is a term used in the UK to describe those from Black, Asian and other ethnic minority backgrounds. There are however, differences in experiences between the ethnic groups.
2. The UCU Four Fights campaign for example includes 'casualisation' as its fourth campaigning strand after 'pay', 'workload' and 'equality'; the overarching interests of all academics readily amalgamated into a single thematic struggle that disguises different interest groups.
3. The REF is the system for assessing the quality of research in UK universities.
4. The NSS is an annual survey of final year undergraduate students' experience of universities.
5. The TEF is a government assessment of the quality of undergraduate teaching in English HE institutions.
6. Redbrick universities are a group of universities created in major cities in 19th century.
7. Post-1992 universities are former polytechnics which were given university status after the Further and Higher Education Act (HMSO 1992).
8. Russell Group universities are a group of 24 research intensive, selective universities.

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