**Conversations on Race discussion series**

**Transcript for Friday 11 June 2021**

**Hosted by Helen Mountfield QC, Principal of Mansfield College with Harry Matovu QC, Brick Court Chambers, and Kathleen Russ, Senior Partner at Travers Smith**

Helen Mountfield: Hello and welcome to today’s Conversation on Race. I’m Helen Mountfield, the Principal of Mansfield College here at Oxford University and this conversation is part of the University’s Race Equality Task Force series of conversations in which we intend to learn from other people outside the University, other universities and today, in a different sector. The Race Equality Task Force is currently working on recommendations to be made to the University Council for its meeting this autumn on the cultural practical and institutional steps which we can take as a University to advance racial equality and to build a welcoming and anti-racist environment and to bring and feed into Oxford's next application under the Race Equality Charter. As I say this series of conversations is about learning from other people and today I'm delighted to talk to two people who are real leaders in the sector of commercial law about the sorts of steps that need to be taken, can be taken and are being taken in relation to promoting racial equality in the law. So our first speaker today, or conversationalist is Harry Matovu QC, great to have you here, or back here. Harry is an a very well-known commercial QC at Brick Court Chambers and described in chambers and partners as an advocate you stop and listen to, which is just as well. And our other speaker today is Kathleen Russ who is the managing partner, the first female managing partner at Travers Smith, and she is an alum of Mansfield College and a nice to see you again too. I was going to start with you, Harry, and ask really about your career and why you decided that addressing racial equality and promoting black talent was an important thing to do?

Harry Matovu: Thank you Helen and first of all I am delighted to be invited to participate in this. I hasten to say that I am not an expert on diversity and inclusion. I'm just a barrister who happens to be a black man with black sons and nephews who are just coming out of university or starting in their careers, so that's my background. Helen, I have been at the bar for 30 years practicing commercial law and my experience is that in all the cases I have done I have been the only black face in court apart from recently black court staff who have become more visible in court, but I have always been the only black face in court, in chambers receptions, in solicitors’ receptions and I wondered how is it I am the only person who appears to be qualified to do this sort of work with the skin colour that I have.

Of the 600 people in magic circle, the so-called magic circle barristers’ chambers, the lawyer has identified only five black barristers amongst 600. That simply cannot be right. When I saw that after 30 years, in practice, I thought something has got to be done about this but nobody was doing anything because everybody is scared of talking about race. Everybody is more willing to discuss diversity and inclusion in terms of gender diversity and inclusion, and I thought that that was becoming almost deliberate to avoid talking about race and therefore I had to do something about it. So I thought the best way forward was to take the example of work that had been done on gender diversity and use it as a template for an initiative on race and that led to the charter on which I have been working, because I took as a template the Women in Finance Charter, which has been very, very successful, promoting women in senior positions in the city and other businesses. So that was the basis on which I started and then I went to the bar to see what they were doing about all this. There was a reluctance to talk about race, so I thought if the bar is not really engaging in this discussion, maybe if I'm going to the solicitors who send work to the bar that might encourage progress, so I went to the solicitors and found, again, a nervousness about talking about race, so I thought well let's see who sends work to the solicitors and so it went on. I got into the financial services sector, to the banks, and across the piece I found the same problems about a reluctance to talk about race. And it seemed to me if we're going to break this and move the thing forward, we've got to have an initiative which isn't just warm words without accountability, but something which has got a spine of accountability, of a basis in data, of measurable progress, and of transparency, so that although people say this is a marathon not a sprint, it should be a race to improve in any event and that's how the charter has developed from there.

Helen Mountfield: Thank you, so I failed in my elemental role in this conversation in reminding people they can put questions and answers in the question and answers function as we go along and I will try to weave those questions into the conversation later. Sorry about that. But Harry would you like to tell us a bit more about the charter and how it works?

Harry Matovu: So underlying the charter is the idea that we should use standard business techniques in order to improve recruitment and progression of black people in the sectors of which we are involved. If companies and businesses are well used to using data, measurements and action plans in order to grow revenue and markets, they can actually do the same in order to improve diversity and inclusion. So the charter rather like the Women in Finance Charter requires signatories to pledge to establish data, to track their diversity percentage across their businesses, to then develop an action plan, a firm action plan with really challenging targets, not easy ones, targets which they can miss in order to drive forward improvements in recruitment and progression of black people to senior grades. It's not enough simply to recruit lots of good black students or trainees at the bottom. If there's a glass ceiling low down which will prevent them from ever getting to the top. So you've got to create a pipeline and that is what we're aiming to do. Targets to get black people into senior positions, to build that pipeline, and the charter expressly requires signatories to acknowledge and accept that those targets may be missed, so there must not be a fear of failure if every signatory to the charter expressly acknowledges that it might not meet the target. That way we can move forward to build over time a pipeline of talent from the bottom to the top. And we call it the Charter for Black Talent, Helen, because we are determined that it's not to be a patronising initiative. We say there is black talent there, we are not trying to lower the bar in any way, the talent is there, it wants to be measured on a level playing field and this is about equality of opportunity to allow that talent to progress to the top.

Helen Mountfield: Is this about black talent, or black talent and talent from other ethnic minority groups?

Harry Matovu: We are focussing on black talent. I do so unashamedly because of the stereotyping, and in the sectors of which we are concerned, the white-collar professional sectors, the group to have the most hurdles to jump over is the black community. The stereotype is that black people might be good at jumping and running, but they're not so good at work which requires intellectual activity. An absurd stereotype but one which has been here since the age of the enlightenment, you will see some of the most extraordinary statements coming from those great beacons of the enlightenment, so we say the time has come and the data shows it is necessary to really focus on black talent in these sectors rather than BAME talent.

Helen Mountfield: And your website indeed shows some data that backs up what you are saying in these sectors. Does it matter how the data is collected in a diverse sector? Are you setting out a template so people can compare themselves, because often one bank, one firm, one college is quite a small unit within which to measure this stuff.

Harry Matovu: That's a really good question, to which I don't have an answer. What I do have is a desire to encourage all signatories to focus on data collection and to discuss amongst themselves and indeed the signatories will be having a roundtable in July where that is going to be one of the issues, and it seems to me that this is an area where data scientists and data analysts, which is a new and growing area of work has an enormous amount of value to add, because whether you've got a large dataset or a small dataset, it does need to be interrogated quite carefully, particularly in the area of D&I, because data can be weaponised very quickly and very easily, on both sides it should be said, but particularly by those who don't want to see the status quo change. It's important to have the data in order to move forward and to identify nuances and biases in the data, to allow proper scrutiny. The data discussion is one which needs to continue. I think that is absolutely crucial.

Helen Mountfield: Tell me about the signatory firms, who are they and did you go about getting them to sign?

Harry Matovu: I had to do a lot of road work and it was face-to-face to assemble a group of founder signatories, and the founder signatories were two of the big accountancy firms KPMG and PwC, three of the big city law firms, Herbert Smith, Freshfields and Allen & Overy and Barings one of the top names in asset management. We got those six founder signatories confirmed and businesses, we also have supporters and supporters of firms which will not, or institutions which will not be able to sign the pledge themselves given the nature of what they are, for example, the City of London Corporation. But who will advocate for the charter and we were lucky to get the City of London Corporation as our founding supporter and the big business organisation came in quickly after that and we have grown the supporter base considerably since then, the Bar Council, the Bar Association, have all joined, Innovate Finance, we have developed a very powerful coalition of individual firms on the one hand and then trade associations and regulatory bodies on the other to drive this agenda forward. I think that is beginning to develop considerable momentum.

Helen Mountfield: What does success look like, talking about driving the agenda forward.

Harry Matovu: Success to me is not just getting individual black talent to get into boardrooms or into leading institutions at the top. We don't want individual unicorns grazing in large pastures. Success for me is a pipeline of black talent. It is young, black students going to universities with a hope, a realistic hope that they will be able to make a career wherever they want to end up. The idea that graduates have a genuine hope and enthusiasm of the prospect of getting to the top of that sector, that industry, that firm. Because at the moment they don't. They think if they do make it halfway up or three-quarters of the way up, it will be something of a fluke or miracle and success for me is making it clear that they are just as included as anybody else. It's not just about diversity, Helen. It is fundamentally about inclusion.

Helen Mountfield: A lot of black professionals in the legal profession, which I can speak about of my generation and yours have described sometimes the loneliness of being the diversity pioneer and I just wonder what can we do to make that, you can say we've measured what we need to do, we want to do it, we want a pipeline, there is our direction of travel, what can we do to make it not only diverse but inclusive and with a pipeline that people want to stay in?

Harry Matovu: I think that's something that will take time. The obvious answer is the more people of colour and people of diverse backgrounds that one sees in an environment, the easier it is.

In the early stages, however, it is absolutely important that those in the majority groups must do their bit to make the environment to be inclusive and welcoming as possible. It cannot be the role of, in this case black people, to show the resilience to survive in such an environment.

So the onus is undoubtedly on the majority group to welcome in people from the minority. How does one do that? One needs to have an understanding, a real understanding of where young black come from and what their perspective and understanding of the environment is. It's not enough just to say we are the majority group this is how it's always been, this is what we expect you to accept, when you come into this world. If you don't have a willingness to try to see how they see it when they come into the environment, you are just not going to make an inclusive world for them. I think that is an area where a lot of work needs to be done, to try to understand the perspective of black people, from disadvantaged backgrounds, a lot of black people come from very good comfortable backgrounds with strong families behind them and nevertheless, they have had a world, a lifetime of imposter syndrome possibly or of being the only person in a room and that comes with an enormous amount of baggage. We need to really understand that in order to see the challenges they face.

Helen Mountfield: One of the questions that has come in is whether it matters that the Charter is likely to benefit people from higher socio-economic backgrounds rather than lower socio-economic backgrounds. Do you agree with the premise and if so does it matter?

Harry Matovu: I am not sure I do agree with the premise, but does it matter, I think it's admirable that it should encourage and give sucker to people from comfortable backgrounds. One of the biggest problems with the whole race debate is an assumption that black people all come from a deprived background.

And I think that is in a way demeaning, of course there is a massive intersectionality here. Of course there is a very large number of black people who come from deprived backgrounds. One can go into the socio-economic reasons for that. But it ignores the very large number of black people who come from solid, middle class backgrounds with serious aspiration, whose parents have worked hard to encourage them to be good at school and who want to make a contribution and if they get in one can see perhaps them as the lower hanging fruit, if they get into the universities and then into the white-collar sectors, they are people who are creating a pipeline to which the gifted but socially and economically deprived black students at school can look up and if they can see black faces in these organisations, they can think, well at least there's someone who looks like me in these places, and that will give me the encouragement to try to join them. So I think we should make no apology for the possibility that middle class black people may get into the role.

Helen Mountfield: Kath, turning to the point Harry made, it shouldn't all be for him for advocating for this and setting up the Charter, what do you think is the role of leaders in our sector from the white majority here?

Kathleen Russ: First of all, just to say, Harry, it's absolutely fascinating hearing you speaking and before I move on to that particular question, Helen, I wanted just to talk about the power of reverse mentoring. So I have had the huge benefit of a mentor who is in fact a lady who is black, who works in the disputes resolution team in our firm, and the experiences she talks to me about around feeling isolated in court resonates so much with some of the things that you have said, Harry. I think without understanding better the perspective of those who are black and the experiences that they go through, I don't think you can know how best to be an ally. So I absolutely believe that we have to be involved in understanding better, educating better and for me reverse mentoring has been hugely powerful as part of that.

So with that starting point, what do I believe is the role of allies. Well perhaps I should go backwards and just remind people that I came through a city law firm where at the time there weren't many women in senior positions. I went through therefore an experience where somehow I was as a woman expected to change the gender problem and that always felt totally wrong to me, because going back again to the point that Harry was making, it should be the role of the majority to try to help to change these things, rather than an expectation of the minority to do the changing. So I have always felt that quite powerfully from a personal perspective that it's very important if you are in the majority that you have an absolute role to be an ally. I wanted to use that in the context of what we are discussing here.

So when I first took my role at Travers Smith, a senior partner rather than a managing partner, so when I became senior partner back in 2019, one of the things I wanted to do was to ensure that we did more to try to work on inclusion for the black community within our firm. That started from an acknowledgement that law generally, specifically in the city, has a problem because it does not have enough talented, no that's not true, we have plenty of talented black people, but we are not promoting enough talented black people within law firms. So there is a problem within law firms and my firm is no different from that. I wanted to acknowledge that problem which I did before I took my post as senior partner and then exactly as Harry was saying, need to work out a way in which we could try to improve the position within my firm. For me, improving the position is fundamentally about trying to create a more inclusive culture and to do that, you need allies and you need to make sure people within the organisation know that it's not just a nice to do to be an ally, but it is an absolute responsibility to be an ally and to be brave, because I do believe that there are people in senior leadership who are frightened about this agenda, they are frightened of making mistakes, frightened of using wrong terminology, and they back away from taking the statements and doing the things which are needed in order to make change. I believe good leaders have a responsibility to be allies, rather than just feeling the fear of making mistakes in that role.

Helen Mountfield: There's a question that links to that, which is why do you think there is resistance among members of the white majority to getting involved in talking about race or engaging themselves in tackling racism?

Kathleen Russ: It's a mixture. For most people, I can only speak about my organisation and around city law, I can't talk more generically but for most people there's a genuine passion to want to change but there is a fear about making mistakes and therefore a fear about stepping forward and being an open ally.

Helen Mountfield: I remember Kath, you became senior partner at Travers Smith around the time I was coming to Mansfield and I met you and what you talked about, about how leaders, majority leaders can set a direction and a tone of allyship was really important and influential to me to starting out in this role. Perhaps you can tell us how did you that and spread it throughout the sector.

Kathleen Russ: Yes, for me when you are looking at the question about allyship, you have to try to break this down into what you want to talk about in public statements, externally and internally, and that is I think important as a first principle. It is really important to talk publicly as a senior leader in an organisation about the responsibility that we all have as allies. And that I think is the minimum you have to do, that you have to be talking about why these things are so powerful and why it's so important. But obviously what is so much more important than that is not just talking about it, but it's actually then going ahead and implementing systems and training which facilitate people actually understanding what it is meant, what it means to be an ally. It is too easy to talk about powerful statements like this but not actually put in place the tools that people need in order to be those allies, so the second and very important stage is the training and the encouragement of those right across the firm to really help be those visible allies. And then I think even that isn't enough.

What you have then got to try to do from that, is work out whether that is actually affecting the day-to-day experience of people, because you've got to go to that stage to really understand whether the training that you are giving people to be those visible allies is actually changing people's experiences on the ground. That to me is almost the most important aspect of all of that, to try to understand what really matters to people on the ground. And actually what's interesting about this Helen and you and I have talked about this, what really matters so often is the day-to-day, what might seem small things, which make a huge difference to people's lives. And so it's really focussing on that and listening to that that is so important.

I would also think it's important to emphasise that if you are in a senior leadership role as I am, that it's hugely important to ensure that others across the firm are also visibly allies. It's hugely important that lots of people across the organisation are seen as allies, otherwise it's associated as being a personal thing attracted to a particular person’s leadership style rather than affecting the real feeling for people on the ground and if you can do that, really make lots of people in the organisations including your middle manager layers, the real allies doing things on the ground, that's when you will really make the difference to people.

Helen Mountfield: Harry, go ahead.

Harry Matovu: Thank you Helen. What Kathleen has said has hit the point in so many ways. What I'm really compelled to respond to from Kathleen's comments is the point about the anti-woke agenda, the point about bravery, the point about the need for senior leadership to lead. It mustn't be left to the HR function or the D&I function to do the work in this area. It has got to be the senior executive leadership to do this. How should they do this, in a world where the anti-woke agenda has been increasing, it seems to me that senior leadership has got confused here and it's got to understand what its purpose is and what is the market which it is targeting in this whole debate. The market it seems to me, which senior leadership in your institution, in the bar and in law firms, is targeting other people coming in at the bottom, the younger generation. If one's got a focus on the market that one is targeting, then it doesn't matter if the politician market, the vote-chasing politicians are going for an anti-woke agenda. That is their market to get their vote. But the leadership of our organisation should be saying, what really matters to the younger generation which is our lifeblood and what matters to the younger generation which is our lifeblood is a sense of fairness. I get this from my sons and their friends, a sense of fairness that everybody, their friends as well as they, will be given a fair opportunity to advance as far as possible.

If one has that, then it is I would suggest, Kathleen will say, perhaps easier to lead in this minefield area than some of the law firms have found it.

For example, on the Magdalen MCR picture of the Queen, a ridiculous debate to be having, where politicians deliberately looked out for such an issue, to make a song and dance about it. It's not a political thing. It's a question of what picture goes up in an MCR. I think the President of Magdalen dealt with it perfectly. It is a student MCR, they can put up whatever picture they want. Don’t be distracted.

Helen Mountfield: You talk about the strong sense that we really need fairness and you have talked about the stereotypes that are in place. There's no objective reason why black people should not be as represented as they are in a population in your bit of the legal profession and they are absolutely not. So fairness isn't just saying about can anyone can do this have a go. We need to look at what the barriers are. What practical steps do you think financial institutions, law firms, barristers’ chambers, universities should be taking?

Harry Matovu: The first thing they should do is to think really seriously about the criteria which they supply for recruitment. The bar says we are the most meritocratic organisation, we are the most meritocratic profession there is and you have you have got to survive by your life. Nobody has seriously examined what exactly is it that makes a barrister in a particular field succeed. Of course you have got to have a basic intellectual ability. But most of the people who apply to the bar have that. What is it beyond that? I find that a lot of chambers of the high earning privately funded end of work always insist on a plethora of academic qualifications, when actually one is enough. By demanding ever more an inflation of qualification, one is marginalising or actually getting rid of quite a large section of the population who haven't been able to afford or haven't considered staying in education for as long as others.

What other attribute can they bring to make a good barrister in this case? I think judgment, resilience, all qualities which any member of any population can have, are things that need to be focussed on. Criteria, really analysing and reviewing the criteria for selection is a starting point.

Helen Mountfield: What about the fact that you described about diversity is not enough, inclusion also matters, what steps do you think we professionals can take to make an environment a comfortable and welcoming one for a minority and that is a question to you both?

Kathleen Russ: I think there's a question here about inclusion and there's also a question about people looking upwards, looking at somebody who they feel looks like them. I think I would like to talk briefly about both of those. As well as making people feel that they can do it and trying to set up a structure where people can, which is trying to deal with some of the issues around inclusion and fairness, there's also the question which I think is actually harder for many firms to try to achieve, which is making people want to do it.

I think sometimes, I certainly felt this as a woman for a long while, there's also a question about whether you want to do it, if you don't see other people who look like you at the top of the organisation. That is something which we are battling with a bit at the moment and I think it is going back to your examples Harry before, if you've got senior black people in an organisation, it is so powerful, but many law firms like mine don't yet have that and so then there is a question of what can you do to try to address that issue. And then inclusion, I think there are so many issues around this. It's sometimes the little but hugely powerful things that you can do, so an example, let's say you walk into a drinks evening and you are standing there with a black colleague, and somebody comes along and says oh, what's all this Black Lives Matter thing, surely it's all lives matter that matters, or somebody says well, what's everybody worrying about what's going on in the US for because the UK is a post-racial society and so on, you've got to stand up there as a leader and you have got to be able to counter that yourself, you should never rely on your black colleague doing that. So those small things really matter. But it's also a question of checking the data, it's looking at things all the time, it's looking at why you've got people who are perhaps under-performers, why have they been put into the under-performer category, what is it that’s done that, if you are in situation where more of your black people are in the under-performing category than others.

It is those constant checks to understand it, unpick what's going on as well as trying to deal with the fact that some organisations don't have as many senior leaders at the top who are themselves black.

Harry Matovu: A great driver of that is - you do get the minority not getting the high-profile engagements, then they are never going to get the chance to progress, to show their skills.

Kathleen Russ: That's a great example of something where absolutely people's career are so dependent on what work allocation is given to them. It can go wrong so early in people’s career, if you start to allocate work to somebody who goes off and plays golf with a client endlessly, who happens to be white and then they get all the opportunities to keep progressing up through their career. So a really conscious effort to make sure the work allocation is done fairly is critical, I completely agree with you Harry.

Harry Matovu: And the client engagement is not always golf which not everybody plays.

Kathleen Russ: Absolutely.

Helen Mountfield: Can I build on that, I have a question that has resonance in the legal sector and in the university, which Kath, you have talked about role models, visible role models, and you are right Harry, it shouldn't morally be a black person's job to address racism or a woman's job to always address sexism. Nonetheless with the sorts of things like your charter or of the charters that exist in the higher education sector, it often is women with women's charters or black people with black people's charters who are either asked to take on the load of this, or roped in, or have the interest in doing it and want to be role models and there is this tension that you are in a very competitive world, might be law, might be academia, you need certain individual achievement early on in your career, but there is also the heavy cognitive and practical load of being on the committees, being seen to participate, taking this stuff on. Are there ways that organisations can recognise or reward or remunerate that kind of contribution?

Harry Matovu: I'm looking at Kath on that one.

Kathleen Russ: I think this whole question is really difficult. So we have had long debates within our organisation around whether those people who are black or in the wider minority ethnic community who are asked to take on roles on our diversity and inclusion board how you should deal with that in the context of either remuneration or acknowledgement that that is an important part of their job specification within the firm, and that I think is a really difficult question. I don't it should be the responsibility of anybody who falls within those categories to take on roles of that sort. However, if they should wish to do so, then I think it is very important that that is acknowledged as part of the role that they do within the firm that they are given credit for that. But I think it always has to start from the perspective if that is what people would wish to do rather than expecting an obligation on them to do so.

Harry Matovu: I think speaking from experience, that's absolutely right. I sat for many years on our chambers pupillage committee and I understand why chambers wanted me on the committee because as we have been discussing if one sees oneself reflected in the organisation which trying to recruit, you stand a better chance you will be more interested. But there does come a time when the minority member on a committee is carrying a large enough burden on at least the burden for long enough that they cannot be expected to continue doing it. So I think what Kathleen says is absolutely right and fair.

Helen Mountfield: Can I ask a couple of questions that are coming in from participants. A couple of people have asked about the point you made that gender equality was an earlier focus in many sectors and I think you said in the law, than racial equality. Are there lessons from sorts of inclusion programmes that were put in place in relation to women we can use in the racial sphere or other gender diversity policies that can be translated across, or are there specific different issues we need to think about in relation to race as well?

Harry Matovu: The approach that there are certain learnings to glean from the general approach, the women in finance charter is an example. The 30% club is a similar approach which has been very successful in the city and in getting women on to boards of city businesses. All of that is valuable. The idea of focussing on what the woman's perspective is in order to encourage inclusion, so making policies which are childcare friendly, which are recognised a woman not just career path but her life path, the work that is being done on that is easily translatable in its principles, to understanding and engaging with the life and perspective of people from other minorities. All of that I think is very valuable. But what we need to get away from is the idea that there isn't a different perspective that you need to apply when you are talking race equality and equality for black heritage people. Because that does engage very different considerations both from the majority and minority, because there is a guilt in the majority world view, a very broad generalisation, but there is a centuries old guilt about race, which is not a piece of baggage that attends the discussion of gender. That is a very specific, issue specific not just to race, but to black issues, which needs to be grappled with. The George Floyd murder last year is a debate that ensued from that has brought that I think thankfully right up to the surface.

Helen Mountfield: Is that something, it was definitely a moment wasn't it, that moment and the movement that arose after the George Floyd murder last year, it's interesting why that was the racist murder that touched people, maybe in a moment when ‘I can't breathe’ was such a resonant human phrase, but do you think there's a danger, you talked about the woke agenda, or backlash against it, do you think there's danger that we can't build on that moment to address these things and to have these open discussions, and that it will be seen as virtually signalling and all a bit silly and equality comes through looking for the best people, we do that anyway.

Harry Matovu: There is a real danger in this. That's why, I have thought about it quite a bit and where I am at the moment is that we've got to identify, as I have said just earlier, what it is that we are trying to do in our particular markets and mustn't be distracted by the political agenda of vote-chasing politicians. We don't have to have a woke debate in order to try to recruit black people and encourage equality of opportunity in business. It's not woke to be in favour of equality and opportunity. We mustn't be distracted by a vote action slogan. The real problem we've got, whether it's in academia or in the profession, is that we have been too easily distracted into fusing all these concerns together and therefore being frightened if you want to do good or encouraged in our torpor if we want to encourage the status quo, just not to engage with the anti-woke agenda is not relevant to this issue, it seems to me.

Kathleen Russ: I think the one thing that I would pick up on that in addition is the classic phrases, it's much easier to cry than change. Lots of leaders wanted to talk about being in support of that movement and yet how many people have actually implemented change? For me, you've got to actually do things to take action to change it here. It's not enough just to be sad about what's happening.

Helen Mountfield: It's interesting that you said Harry, we have to just carry on with equality of opportunity. But since I was an undergraduate, never mind when I first came to the bar, people have said to me, equal opportunities is happening, it is trickle through, people say of course we believe in fairness and equality but won't address the things, the barriers, the sub-conscious barriers there are because they think they are too clever to have sub-conscious biases. There's somebody in the Q&A who talked about, you hear people of a student generation talking about micro aggressions and you say really what happens is micro confirmation that people in the in-group very subtly in ways they don't even notice, just confirm one another, it is oh, you went to this, you did this, and that sort of thing, how do we make people understand that, that it is human to have those prejudices and biases and we have to think about them if we want to overcome the accumulation of their consequences?

Harry Matovu: I think the battle is slowly being won, the tanker is being turned. The more one talks about, the more people recognise that confirmation bias is a real thing that unconscious bias does exist and one can see that for example in the backlash of that report now pretty much discredited. That people simply not accepted it, despite the best effort of the government to spin it one way. I think the majority of thinking people have accepted that is just too facile a view to assume, so I am optimistic about that. I think the debate is turning the tide.

Helen Mountfield: You need white people to get comfortable talking about race and looking at the motes in their own eye.

Harry Matovu: It's about looking at the motes in their own eye. The great thing that's happened since the death of George Floyd has been there has been an introspection and there has been a resistance by those who don't want to turn up the stone, but the stone is coming up and they are being forced to look under it. I think that that debate is being won and it is not going off the page. There are issues still, for example, in Oxford itself, there is going to be a continuing debate about the anti-woke agenda, because Oxford by its nature encourages that debate. It is an institution or a collection of institutions which are hidebound in tradition and so one is always going to have a debate as to how traditional institutions like Oxford colleges and the university at large deal with a desire or initiative to change the demographics of that institution and to allow for a more inclusive and modern approach in that traditional setting. I think that the anti-woke agenda, for example, needs to be thought about perhaps in a different way in Oxford from the way it has been thought about at the moment. Nobody, you tell me if I am wrong, I am not aware of anybody who has done some systematic thinking about how tradition can be married with inclusivity in the modern Oxford, whether there should be a working group of heads of house or senior people across the colleges, to sit down and say, we've got all these things coming up, it's not just the picture of the Queen at Magdalen MRC or the statue of Rhodes at Oriel, we are going to have all sorts of issues coming up. We are an educational environment. How do we marry that across all our colleges with a desire for inclusivity? There is a piece of work to be done there for the benefit of all.

Kathleen Russ: One of the things I was thinking about as you were both talking, there is the difference between unconscious bias and positive inclusion. So I think that the terminology so far has been a bit about try to stop showing your unconscious biases whereas I always try to flip it and think about what can you do to positively include other people. That's really picking up a lot of what Harry was talking about there, about how can you try to marry some of the great traditions you have at Oxford, or my law firm, but make sure you are positively including others. And there will be all sorts people from different backgrounds who you need to accommodate when you are doing some of the traditional things that we tend to do it as a firm. If we are going to dinners thinking about alcohol, if you are using nicknames think about whether that creates a club which is excluding other people from the club. Think about making sure that you always use people's names and remember people's names and you don't mispronounce them. There are so many little things like that that can make such a big difference to people in terms of the inclusive atmosphere of any firm or organisation.

Harry Matovu: It goes back to what Kath was saying earlier about bravery. You have to be brave, bravery includes humility and if you ally humility of approach with the bravery to stand up for inclusion, then you have true leadership. The problem is that a lot of people just simply don't have the courage to look at the difficult questions and they don't have the humility to accept they don't yet have all the answers.

Helen Mountfield: Thank you, this has been, for me, really fascinating and thought-provoking conversation with a lot of lessons we can take from some of the changes in one very traditional competitive, quite individual sector, the law, and take to a very successful, as you say, traditional university, which also wants to be a very most leading edge place in terms of diversity of thought and of people. I hope that these conversations, this conversation we have had today will feed into the continuing conversations we are having in the university. So thank you both as university alumni and leading lawyers for sharing those insights with us.

This conversation, if there are people who wanted to come and weren't here will be recorded and put up on YouTube. Please look at the links on the Race Equality Task Force website and share them with your contacts.

The final conversation in this series will be held on Friday 25th at the same time. I hope you will join our guests then. Thank you both very much.

ENDS