

**The Journal  
of Media and  
Diversity**

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# DIVERSITY PRESENT OLOGY

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Charlene White, Kimberly McIntosh, Professor Stuart Hall,  
Kesewa Hennessy, Will Norman, Emma Butt, Dr David Dunkley Gyimah,  
Dr Erica Gillingham, Dr Peter Block, Suchandrika Chakrabarti**

# REPRESENTOLOGY

The Journal of Media and Diversity

## Editorial Mission Statement

**Welcome to Representology**, a journal dedicated to research and best-practice perspectives on how to make the media more representative of all sections of society.

A starting point for effective representation are the “protected characteristics” defined by the Equality Act 2010 including, but not limited to, race, gender, sexuality, and disability, as well as their intersections. We recognise that definitions of diversity and representation are dynamic and constantly evolving and our content will aim to reflect this.

**Representology** is a forum where academic researchers and media industry professionals can come together to pool expertise and experience. We seek to create a better understanding of the current barriers to media participation as well as examine and promote the most effective ways to overcome such barriers. We hope the journal will influence policy and practice in the media industry through a rigorous, evidence-based approach.

Our belief is that a more representative media workforce will enrich and improve media output, enabling media organisations to better serve their audiences, and encourage a more pluralistic and inclusive public discourse. This is vital for a healthy society and well-functioning democracy. We look forward to working with everyone who shares this vision.

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# EDITORIAL

**In the wake of Black Lives Matter, many people at the helm of the UK media industry have rightly been critical of its historic failings around diversity – both in its output and in making sure its workforce mirrors the many shades of modern multicultural Britain.**

But we must remember that this period of self-analysis does not mark a moment – it heralds a movement. In the pages of **Representology** – *the Journal for Media and Diversity* – we hope to build connections between the academy, journalists and broadcasters. Rather than seek piecemeal reform to address the underrepresentation of marginalised voices, we wish to go further and help create a media that reflects the richness of every part of society. Launched as a joint initiative between Birmingham City University and Cardiff University (see back page for comments by their Vice-Chancellors), we want to analyse and work with all areas of media production, commissioning new research and opening meaningful conversations on how to dismantle existing barriers to participation.

This first issue features Sir Lenny Henry and David Olusoga talking frankly about race and stereotyping in the television industry, Charlene White's thoughts on fusing together current affairs and children's programming for 'IRL with Team Charlene', and Dr Peter Block and Emma Butt unveiling their original academic research on the systemic lack of diversity in broadcast regulation and post-production sound recording. We republish Professor Stuart Hall's ferocious television essay 'It Ain't Half Racist, Mum', discover a treasure trove in the Black radio archive, consider cultural depictions of disability and newspaper initiatives to better engage women readers, and navigate the evolving worlds of freelance and political journalism. At the end of each article, you will find a summary of ideas for the industry to act upon.

We are looking to widen the editorial board of **Representology** (see back page for full list) as well as our pool of writers. If you are interested in contributing to this developing project or have feedback and suggestions for future issues, please get in touch: [Representology@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:Representology@bcu.ac.uk)





# LESSONS FROM HISTORY

**Sir Lenny Henry** in conversation with  
historian, broadcaster and film-maker  
**David Olusoga** on media diversity,  
institutional memory and racism in the  
UK television industry.

transcript  
**Marcus Ryder**

**Sir Lenny Henry:**

My colleagues and I set up the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity at Birmingham City University because we had this feeling that the industry often doesn't learn from its mistakes or build on its successes. Why do you think history is so important in achieving media diversity?

**David Olusoga:**

The thing history can bring to the debate about diversity and inclusion is an understanding of where race came from. These ideas are so deep, so ingrained within our society, that when we just talk about structural racism and we don't talk about the historical process of construction, I don't think we land that idea properly. These ideas did not come about of their own volition. This was not accidental. The idea of Black inferiority, Black intellectual inferiority, cognitive inferiority, behavioural inferiority – these things were invented

and they were propagated in our societies for decade after decade by people with vast amounts of money and political power in order to justify slavery, the slave trade and then later, empire. Then they were armoured with pseudo-science.

I think the job of historians is to look at the process of construction and explain what the phrase 'structural racism' means. To make more people understand that this is not an extreme kind of racism that Black people have made up to annoy white people. It's an accurate terminology for an idea that was built and that needs to be deconstructed.

**Sir Lenny Henry:** How much does your background as a historian shape how you view the media, television, film industries?

**David Olusoga:** I think it relates to the previous question. It makes me alert to the way race operates and what the tropes and the stereotypes are. What I see in my career is really nice, good, decent, liberal people acting in ways that reinforce stereotypes because they've never examined their thinking. I'm sure people would say I'm over-alert but I don't believe I am, because actually there's now a young generation who, almost instinctively, seem to be alert to these issues. But I see an industry full of people who've never thought – and get upset when they're asked to think – about how race operates in our interactions with each other, in the ideas that they're comfortable with and the ideas that they're uncomfortable with, or in the positions in which they're perfectly happy to see Black people and the positions where it just feels uncomfortable to see Black people.

**There's something specifically wrong with television and I think it's worse than other industries. It's more insidious, it's more damaging.**

What happens with Black people in the media is there's this slow realisation that it's you and maybe two other people. As I say, nobody's horrible but the status quo is that you guys are on your own.

**Sir Lenny Henry:** And it's damaging to people?

**David Olusoga:** One of the great subconscious biases in our society is a bias against the idea of subconscious bias. Because it's seen to be a slight against people's views and their status as a good person. But if you have a production in a city like London where the population is 48% BAME, and if we believe that ability and intelligence are equally distributed across all races – which we have to believe if we don't believe in racism – then a random recruitment would create something close to the background of the city. And it's

nothing like the background of the city.

**Sir Lenny Henry:** Do you think diversity and inclusion is getting better in the UK film and TV industry?

**David Olusoga:** I think it might be – but because of the past six months, not because of the past 30 years. If you asked me that question in January 2020 before Black Lives Matter, before the murder of George Floyd, I would have said I see very, very little progress. I see some progress in content, I see some progress in youth programming and again there's a problem with seeing Black people and youth as intersecting and overlapping, but I didn't see much progress behind the camera.

That might be about to change. It seems to me that the initiatives do seem of a different order – although who's going to hold people to account is a big question. But the level of urgency seems of a different order, people are saying things they haven't said before. That makes me more hopeful. So, I don't think we have seen change behind the camera but I think we have to hope that we might be about to see that change.

**Sir Lenny Henry:** Yeah. They don't want to have authority wielded over them by somebody that doesn't look like them.

**David Olusoga:** If you look at the attitudinal studies done about race over the years, there seem to be two big fault lines. One is about interracial relationships and the other is about

neighbours and if you would live next to someone. They always missed out the third one because it never seemed a possibility in the 50s when they were asking these attitudinal surveys: would you work for a Black boss?

**Sir Lenny Henry:** Can you imagine that, in post-war Britain?

**David Olusoga:** People were comfortable with Black people driving the buses but they didn't want them as neighbours and they didn't want them going out with their daughter. They never thought about the possibility of saying, you know, I hope he's running the bus company.

**Sir Lenny Henry:** The way to change it is to increase who's running things. It's what we've been saying for years.

**David Olusoga:** I've noticed throughout my career when I've been in positions of authority that some people have really struggled to actually do what I say and to see that my judgement is valuable. I had an experience with an assistant producer: I'd devised a sequence and I'd spoken to a lot of historians and I thought it would work, and I'd asked the assistant producer to go and look into it and find the people and see if we could get access to the locations. And she had gone to my business partner and said, 'David wants to do this, and I don't think it's right or appropriate'.

And my business partner said, 'Well he's written books on slavery and I haven't, and he's been a producer for 20

years, what's the problem?' If that had been the other way around, there's not a chance she'd have come to me and said my business partner has this crazy idea and it's not going to work. And, you know, we made the sequence and it made perfect sense. And it made perfect sense because I'd been making TV programmes since my late 20s... I'm really good at it.

I haven't had that experience writing for newspapers or working for publishers. It's only in television where I feel my confidence chipped away at. There's something specifically wrong with television and I think it's worse than other industries. It's more insidious, it's more damaging. People leave with their personality and their abilities and their sense of self more damaged in this industry than the others I've worked in.

## The game plan

**Sir Lenny Henry:** What lessons in more recent history can we draw upon to understand the situation we're in now?

**David Olusoga:** We need to remember that every Black movement for equality has been demonised. The example I'm fond of is that what's happening to Black Lives Matter is exactly what happened to the African American veterans of the First World War who came back to America in 1919 having fought in the French army. They weren't allowed to fight in the American army because white officers wouldn't lead them into battle. They came back with

medals on their chest having fought in what was called the Great War for civilisation and they began to make demands for equality. They made civil rights demands and their movement was tarred with being Bolshevik. Rather than civil rights in the 1920s, what you got was the Red Summer of 1919 when hundreds of Black people were killed. I think 13 Black soldiers were lynched for wearing their uniforms, returning from the war. You have this unleashed political campaign to say that these demands for Black liberty and equality were radical and dangerous and communist.

And I think we need to realise that this game plan has worked before and it is now being applied to what is actually a movement rather than an organisation – a kind of global uprising against racism. There's a blueprint and it's being applied and we need to watch for the signs of it being applied. Also we need to imagine if it hadn't been applied. Imagine if America had listened to calls for Black equality in 1919 and they'd had civil rights in the 1920s, not the 1960s. America would be 40 years ahead of where it is now. It's a tragedy that appeals for civil rights were tarred with being Bolshevik. It's a tragedy for everybody.

**Sir Lenny Henry:** Could you unpack that... Bolshevik as in having communist leanings, right?

**David Olusoga:** Yeah. They were said to have come back contaminated with the Bolshevism of the trenches. Remember there were

revolutions and uprisings and rises of socialism all over the world and people did come back from the trenches with these ideas. They'd gone to France, they'd been treated too well, they'd been Frenchified, in the phrase of the time, and they'd come back with these uppity ideas of equality – because the French had spoiled them by treating them like human beings.

Exactly that game plan was applied in the days after the murder of George Floyd and if you go back to the newspapers and the discussion programmes, even Newsnight, in the days after George Floyd's murder, one point was made over and over again: 'Surely you're not saying this applies here.'

There was an attempt to suggest that you couldn't make parallels between Britain and America because of the issue of guns. Well, guns weren't involved in the murder of George Floyd or Freddie Gray, or others. There's all these devices used to say that American racism is of such a depth and ferocity that it can't apply, and when Black people see parallels in their lives and the experiences of African Americans, that they're deluding themselves. That it's a form of false consciousness. Well it didn't work this time because it wasn't just Black Britons, it was Black people all over the world, people of other minorities all over the world, in New Zealand and Tasmania, who saw the clear parallels between that situation and their own lives.

## Being a Black boss

**Sir Lenny Henry:** You set up your own company, as did I. Again, bearing in mind everything we've just spoken about, is there anything we can learn from the past about what Black company owners have had to do in order to succeed?

**David Olusoga:** There's a view that the Black community has not set up businesses as readily as some immigrant populations, and I think there's a lot of problems with that. Black people have set up businesses, but also lots of Black people have looked at the society they live in and the level of hostility aimed at them and they've asked, is this a society that is going to treat me fairly as a business owner when it can't treat me fairly as an employee? Is this a society where I want to take a risk with my finances and the financial security of my family? A society that unleashes police forces that are deeply racist, that are exempted from the Race Relations Act, upon our communities.

I think Black people have been less entrepreneurial in Britain because they've made an accurate assessment of the level of hostility aimed against them. And that's been put down to a lack of entrepreneurial spark. Well, look at the entrepreneurialism of Black people all over the world – in Africa, in the Caribbean. Looked what happened after slavery in Jamaica, there was just a rush to become farmers and market gardeners and to become

traders. I come from a town called Ijebu Ode in Nigeria which is infamous for its traders who will bargain you down to your last penny. The stereotype against people from where I'm from in Nigeria is that they're ruthless businessmen! You come to Britain, you're Black British, Black people don't do business.

**Sir Lenny Henry:** The thing we always asked for was some kind of fund to provide a cushion but also to enable people to feel confident in setting up a business. If you feel like there's a direct pipeline to money then it's possible that your business might survive. Absolutely put gatekeepers on that money but have an open pipeline where a conversation can be had about creating something cool or something that not just a Black audience will want. Because we all know that if a person of colour creates something, as Jazze B puts it, the underground very quickly becomes the overground.

We can make things that have a global appeal. We don't just make Black things, we make things that have an overground appeal. And why wouldn't you want to be in on that? So, make some development funds available and have some slots available for that and we can do business. But if we're scrambling, we can't do it... it's very difficult, it's like pushing a boulder uphill.

**David Olusoga:** A lot of Black producers don't have the networks, they don't have the connections with the commissioners. Channel

4's trying to get more companies to know more commissioners, and I think that's sort of a help, but when people have known each other for years, in networks from which Black people have been excluded, the domino effect is that you don't know the people in positions of power. So the number of commissioners that you know, the number of people that you are pitching ideas to... I don't know if any quantitative studies have been done but it seems to me that Black companies don't have that range of 50 commissioners from six broadcasters, that they're targeting with ideas.

## Black history is British history

**Sir Lenny Henry:** How do you think the lack of media diversity shapes the way television approaches history programmes?

**David Olusoga:** There's a huge presumption that the audience is familiar with a small number of historical stories and we just need to keep doing those over and over again. There's a lack of interest in new subjects and the focus of interest is on new approaches to old subjects. Who Do You Think You Are has created an interest in documentary evidence and emotional journeys which I think has the possibility of encountering a broader range of stories.

But, the problem with the way we do Black history is, 'here is a self-contained, hermetically sealed, Black history for the Black people who are watching so we can tick a box' or 'here's the

Black contribution to the stuff that we've done'. Not the story of how the exploitation of Black people through slavery was one of the biggest industries of the 18th century, not how the cotton industry of the 19th century built on the enslavement of African Americans, accounted for 40 per cent of Britain's exports and was the justification and the rationale for the damn civil war. Not the fact that the 'scramble for Africa' was one of the biggest stories of the 19th century that repeatedly almost brought Britain, France and other countries to war.

Black history is British history, it seeps out into everything. We're not marginal. We're not a sidebar, we're not a 'nice to have an additional bit of colour' for Black History Month. This is British history, it's fundamental. Time and time again... and it's not just Black history. Take the story of the Battle of Britain. Tell the stories of the Polish and Czech pilots. They've never bothered to interview them! We don't know about the Indian Army, the biggest volunteer army in the Second World War. The majority of soldiers who fought at Waterloo weren't British. They were Belgian or Dutch or German or they spoke one of the German dialects. It's a European battle, but we don't know that.

The problem is the version of history we've got is bullshit, not that Black history needs to exist alongside this myopic, whitewashed history. It's that history is wrong and it's written out the chapters that explain who the hell we are.

## The infantilisation of Blackness

**Sir Lenny Henry:** That's brilliant. I love to hear you talk about this because I never see you like this on television, you're always so polite and smooth.

**David Olusoga:** Yes, because there's the trope, the angry Black guy.

**Sir Lenny Henry:** You're the Teddy Pendergrass of history, David!!

**David Olusoga:** But it's such a landmine to walk into, the angry Black guy is just... 'There we go. He's angry, he's unreasonable, he's unbalanced. This isn't objective, look at him, he's emotional.' For me to get emotional means I'm operating on the emotional spectrum and not the intellectual one. That would give them what they want.

**Sir Lenny Henry:** People accept youth-skewed images of Black and Asian and working class people of colour, but when we are talking about adult programming, it's a very different matter.

**David Olusoga:** Think about the workings of anti-Black racism and the idea, the fundamental idea, that Black people were childish, that they had a level of mental capacity that was equivalent to that of European children. Lord Lugard, who was a governor of Nigeria, described Nigerians, my ancestors, as attractive children. Generations, from the 1860s until the 1960s of African American men, middle-aged men, elderly men, were called 'boy'. There is an urge within anti-Black racism as it emerged in the new world to call and



to think of Black people as children. As a result, you can see in the way that we approach race that there is a comfort with Black people as children. Youth – I think you can see that in recruitment.

I've been doing this since I was 16. It's an industry full of people who're quite happy to have a junior Black runner who they're instructing and advising but less comfortable when the Black person is their boss. Less comfortable when there's a Black person challenging their ideas. They're

once had a shoot in a church in Jamaica, and I was in the edit and all of the shots they'd used were of the children. Now, this is a church in Jamaica, most people are elderly, they are incredibly well-dressed, they are visually so attractive and appealing. And this is about history, this is about the role of religion in the creation of a moral mission for Britain in the 19th century. Why were the editor and the director more comfortable with the shots of children? This is the way race plays out. These ideas are so deeply ingrained in our society that

**For me to get emotional means I'm operating on the emotional spectrum and not the intellectual one. That would give them what they want.**

comfortable with Black people in performing roles but not in administrative and managerial roles.

But also there's a fundamental willingness in programming to see youth programming and Black programming as almost the same thing. I've heard nice, decent, liberal people in television say, 'If you solve the youth problem, you solve the diversity problem'. And so, the answer to television's lack of focus on Black stories and Black experiences is to have more things like BBC Three and T4 because that's where Black people are because Black people are children. It's deeply, deeply subconscious.

Making programmes about Black history – this is just one example of many – I

we swim in a water that's poisoned by them and we don't see when they operate through us. And the infantilisation of Blackness is one of the big tropes of racism.

## The race/class nexus

**Sir Lenny Henry:** Is there one historical/academic study you want the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity to embark upon? We've got all these academics waiting for David to tell us what to do. What would your recommendation be?

**David Olusoga:** I think we need to be smarter on the nexus between race and class. The thing that's unspoken is how wealth allows people to build TV

careers. It's anecdotal but there's no research. When I was a producer what was said, the truism of the time, was that you had to leave the BBC in order to advance. And the rich kids whose parents had literally bought them a house, could give up a staff job, go and work for the indies for nine months and come back and be my boss. I'd lived through the eighties in the north east where shipyards closed and my mates had to leave school and go and live somewhere else because they couldn't afford the rent on their house. The idea of giving up any form of financial security when I had no safety net at all, was just not a possibility. Just culturally, never mind financially, not a possibility.

It's almost unspoken that those realities are not valid in this discussion. These are the rules, we don't care that they impact on some people differently to others. We don't care that those with wealth and family money and safety nets can get over that hurdle easily – that's just the way it is. And that sort of blindness to the impact of

institutional culture is incredibly damaging.

I was a researcher on a shoot and the production manager was furious with this runner because he didn't want to go and get lunch for the crew. And the reason was because he didn't have the money in his bank account. The presumption is that you've got a couple of grand in your bank account as a float and you can afford to wait six weeks for a crap expenses system to pay you back. This kid's trying to work out whether he can pay his rent or whether he'll be waiting for the money to come back from buying lunch for a cameraman who's making, you know, 900 quid a day. It didn't occur to her. I've seen these things operate, but I've never seen them studied.

**Sir Lenny Henry:** David, thank you.

**This is a transcript of a conversation which took place over Zoom on 16th September 2020, produced and edited by Marcus Ryder.**

## Representology takeaways

### Why historical perspective is important in analysing media diversity efforts

- Racism is "structural", we need to understand the origins of those structures to address current problems.
- Black people are traditionally entrepreneurial - if BAME-led indies are not being set up we need to look at the business environment, not blame Black producers.
- Race and class are not separate issues - there needs to be more analysis of how the two intersect.
- We should seek to expand the range of historical topics we think an audience will find interesting.





# IRL with Team Charlene!

## behind the cameras

**Creating a programme talking honestly to children about race and prejudice was a 'baptism of fire' for broadcast journalist and newsreader Charlene White.**

As Black Lives Matter protests took hold globally, it struck me that children were being left out of the conversation about race, racism and diversity. As someone who'd learnt about racism at an early age, having been a victim of abuse from other children, I feel strongly that children ought to be instrumental in the conversation. Excluding them allows stereotypes and 'othering' to continue for another generation.

Thankfully ITV felt the same when I suggested the idea which became IRL with Team Charlene, a magazine show dealing with racism in the UK, and how it impacts the lives of young people, through a mix of short films, animation and music. I have little to no experience on the programme-making side of television. In all honesty, I wasn't necessarily 'pitching' as such when I spoke to them, but they loved the idea. They saw my passion and immediately agreed that it was something they wanted to be a part of.

And then began the baptism of fire. I had to quickly learn how to realistically put together a new studio-based kids programme, in a way that was engaging, entertaining and informative... during a pandemic. ITV agreed that ITN Productions were best placed to make it alongside ITV News – the company's first children's commission.

I took on my friend Jessica Symons as executive producer of the show, and from the very start we were adamant that we wanted it to be a diverse mix of talent on the team. We were thankfully able to achieve that by using some of ITN's team, and some fantastic young freelancers.

The commissioner, Gemma John-Lewis, helped to bring the idea from an image in my head to what was produced on screen. The passion that Gemma also had for the project was fabulous. Let's not forget that this is something that had never been done before: ITV, ITN Productions and ITV News working on a children's programme together. We really did, together, want to make a difference.

Finding a diverse cast for the show was the easy part. We knew we wanted a recognisable face from CITV, and Kerry Boyne fit the show perfectly. And we wanted a man with us in the studio... but how often do you see Black men in the counsellor role on TV? We wanted to change that, so sought out Rotimi Akinsete who thankfully loved the concept of the show and wanted to be involved.

Once those pieces were in place, we looked for music talent who could lift the show. Scouring social media to find young talent who were doing great things, we found King Caelan and Eva-Marie. At no point did we question whether there was 'too much' Black talent on-screen on one show. We wanted diverse talent, so we looked for it, found it, and used it. This was the same for the production team too and the end credits reflect that.

But working with a team that understands that and recognises the importance of it also made a difference. From the commissioner Gemma to the exec Jess, to me the creator, it was a non-negotiable part of the process of making the show. And that's the key isn't it? Yes, we were making something fun and informative, but we couldn't make a show about race and racism without making a difference behind the scenes too. So, I'm proud of what we achieved, and the way that we did it.

**Charlene White is a journalist and newsreader who has been lead presenter of ITV News London since 2019.**

**IRL with Team Charlene aired on 3rd October 2020 and is available to watch on ITV Hub.**

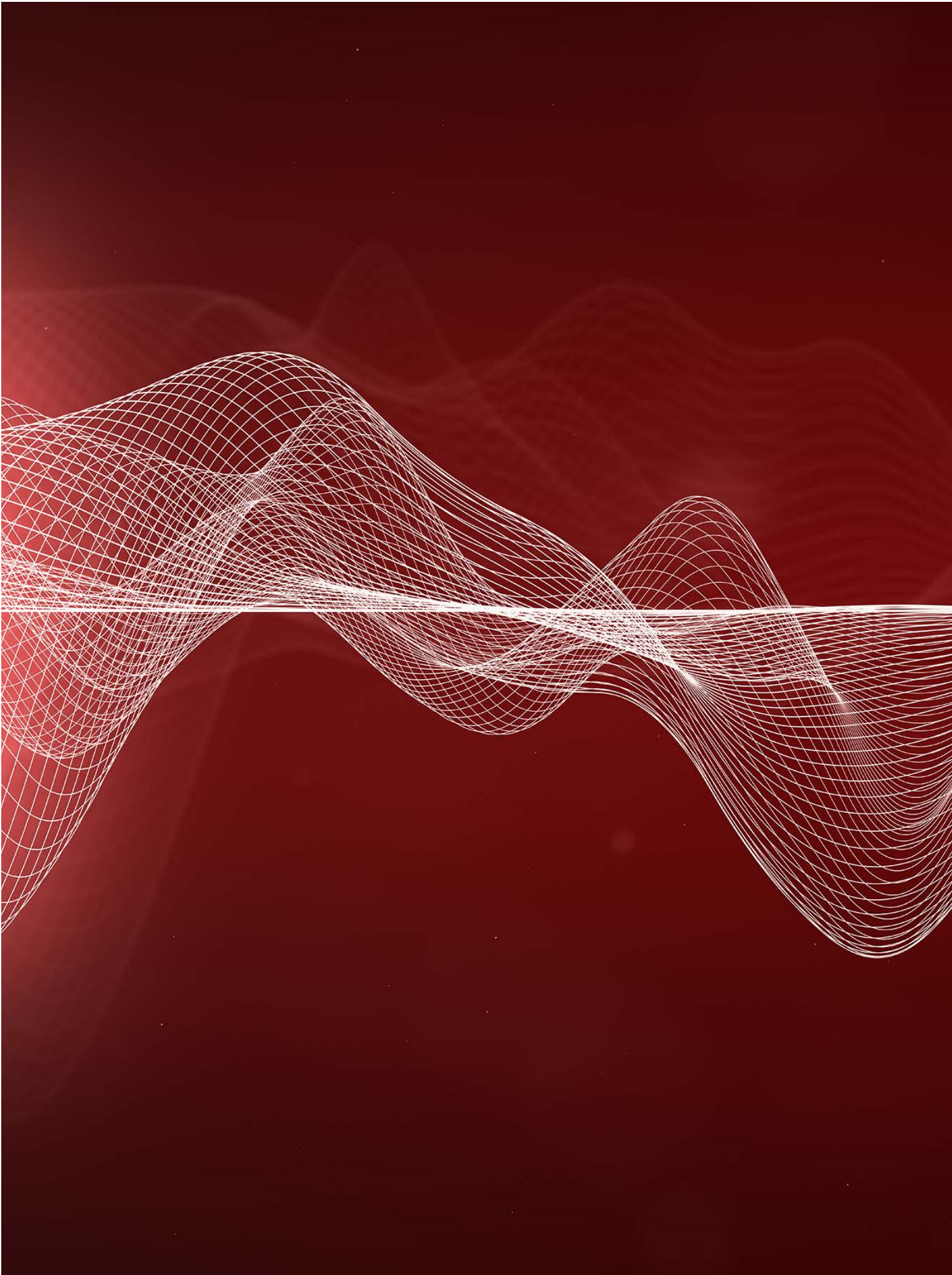
<https://www.itv.com/hub/irl-with-team-charlene/10a0575a0001>

### Representology takeaways

#### How one programme can address industry diversity issues

- Opportunities to address on-screen diversity should also be used to address diversity behind the cameras.
- Traditional production teams can work dynamically alongside freelance staff.
- Social media is an excellent source for locating diverse talent.





# Diversity in Post-Production Sound Roles in UK Television Production

## Emma Butt

**Emma Butt is a sound editor working in television post-production. Her research was commissioned by the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity and supported by Dr Ellie Tomsett of Birmingham City University's School of Media.**

**It is the pilot for a new grant initiative, Practitioners Investigating Media Industry Diversity (PIMID), matching experienced media professionals with academic mentors to conduct short-turnaround research in their own sector. There is information on applying for these grants at the end of this article.**

**Key words:** diversity, post-production, sound, career progression, barrier

### Abstract

This paper analyses research conducted throughout August and September 2020 examining the breakdown of diversity across key post-production sound team roles in the highest rated TV shows broadcast during the Autumn period of 2019 on BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky One. The data was drawn from Broadcast magazine's quarterly reports on the highest rated shows

(published online 15th September 2019), on screen credits and IMDB. This project also included interviews with a range of professionals working in post-production sound to identify barriers to career progression in this area. The research reveals a worrying absence of diversity in post-production sound teams specifically in drama, entertainment and factual.



## Introduction

In 2020 there has been a significant amount of discussion about the lack of racial and gender diversity in the film and TV industry. This has mostly been focused on directors, actors and producers with BAFTA and AMPAS re-evaluating their awards process across all genres of film and TV, and introducing new submission requirements to help address the issue. Conversations have also begun about diversity behind the camera in craft and technical roles, with new schemes and initiatives being set up to help establish a more diverse workforce on set. However, to date this has not included post-production sound.

Post-production sound has two key problem areas in relation to career progression: Mid-career level and the period when people are initially embarking on their careers. Sound professionals at mid-career level, especially freelancers, face some of the same issues that film and TV directors from diverse backgrounds have experienced. They are stuck either working on short form content, independent productions, or in the factual and entertainment world. Very few break through to drama (both recurring and high-end). In addition, whilst this research is focused on television production, feature film production in the UK is also severely lacking in relation to racial diversity (Nwonka 2020) and has even fewer Head of Department roles.

As with TV and film directors, sound professionals find it hard to get drama or feature film work without existing credits in this genre, but to get the credits they need someone to take a chance on them. Very few people are prepared to take chances with their hiring practices due to financial risk. For any sound professionals working as a freelancer, these issues become even more difficult to navigate. Progression within a company can be supported by senior members of staff, training provided, and clients (producers, directors and production companies) made to feel less of a risk is being taken in the appointment of staff. However, currently no schemes or training exist to provide freelancers with the same structure and support that some companies offer, leaving them pigeon-holed in their current professional roles or within specific genres.

At entry level to post-production sound careers, people face the same issues as everyone else trying to break into a creative profession - trying to get a foot in the door of an already very difficult industry. As this research uncovered, people attempting to break into post-production sound may also face racism (through name-based discrimination), sexism and ageism. In addition to this, they face ill-articulated job descriptions which require much more skills and experience than is necessary to fulfil an assistant level role.

When undertaking any research, it is important to acknowledge one's own position in relation to the area of study. As a mixed-race woman who has worked in the industry for over 13 years, I am continually faced with being one of the only women on most sound teams. As a result, I have faced sexism and bullying, and I have struggled to progress into high end drama as a Re-Recording Mixer.

As my ethnic identity is not visually evident, I have not personally faced racism in the workplace, although I have experienced racism in my lifetime.

This research explores the barriers to career progression that relate to women, Black and ethnic minority sound professionals, and whether there are commonalities in experiences. Additionally, this project considers exactly what actions can be taken to remove these barriers to ensure wider inclusion in the post-production sound profession.

of feature films (e.g. Bridget Jones Diary [2001]) and American made shows were omitted from the data. Any shows where the information could not be found for the sound teams involved were also removed from the sample. (Only four shows fell into this category).

Using this information, I found the names of the sound teams involved on the specific episodes. This was achieved through a combination of searching on IMDB and reviewing the end screen credits. As the highest rated shows were from a variety of genres (e.g. drama, entertainment, factual) and the make-up of

**As a mixed-race woman who has worked in the industry for over 13 years, I am continually faced with being one of the only women on most sound teams.**

## Research Methodology

As a starting point, the highest rated UK TV shows across the Autumn period of 2019 were identified. The industry magazine, Broadcast, publishes a quarterly list of the highest rated shows made for and broadcast by BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky One, the date each show aired and the viewing figures.

For the purposes of this research from this list any live sporting events, shows which do not require post-production sound work (e.g. BBC1's Strictly Come Dancing [2004-]), broadcasts

sound teams vary across each genre, I decided to focus on the key common sound roles found in each one. These are: Re-Recording Mixer, Dialogue Editor and Sound Effects Editor.

With drama and feature films production, the roles of Re-Recording Mixer, Dialogue Editor and Sound Effects Editor are covered by different people. In some cases, for example on productions with higher budgets, these roles may be undertaken by multiple people due to the scale of the production. When producing factual and entertainment work, all three roles can be covered by one individual. In order for the



importance of these roles to be fully understood I will briefly set out the key components for each role and the contribution these make to the finished production.

Firstly, the Dialogue Editor, in drama and features, is there to make the dialogue intelligible to the audience. They replace words, sentences and sometimes even syllables which may have been distorted due to background noise. This is achieved through deploying techniques to remove the background noise to make the audio usable, or by editing in audio from alternative takes of the scene. They compose the Automated Dialogue Replacement (ADR) list for both cast and crowd group actors, attend all recording sessions and then integrate the ADR to make it sound seamless, as if that audio was also recorded on set. When Dialogue Editors attend crowd group ADR sessions, they have to direct the actors in what will be needed for the sound from background extras. This process often involves writing lines of dialogue for the supporting actors within the session, and involves ensuring that the language they use will be appropriate for the piece and the accents are accurate. This role is both technical and creative as the Dialogue Editor has a direct impact on who is being heard and what is being said.

Channel 4 drama *Chimerica* (2019) can be used as a recent example of why the identity of the Dialogue Editors can be very important. One of the main characters in this production speaks Mandarin and the show required an experienced Dialogue Editor

fluent in Mandarin. An English-speaking Dialogue Editor, despite perhaps a familiarity with Mandarin as an additional language, would not have been able to replace problematic lines, fit ADR accurately or direct the crowd ADR sessions efficiently.

Secondly, the Sound Effects Editor (who can also be referred to as the Sound Designer) creates the soundscape for the production. All atmospheric noises that help establish the world of the drama's story such as cars, dogs, doors opening and closing, effectively anything you hear on screen, has been placed in by the person in this role. In addition to adding and editing existing sound effects, they also work with a Foley artist to create a list of any additional sounds that need to be created such as footsteps (on specific surfaces), clothing movement, and skin contact sounds etc. Accuracy of the sounds used is hugely important and the role of Sound Effects Editor is vital to the success of a drama production as sound is a significant part of creating and maintaining a believable world for the action to take place.

An obvious example of the significance of the work of Sound Effects Editors is to consider nature documentaries, where the majority of the footage is shot without any sound. In these kinds of productions, the Sound Editor is responsible for finding out not only what the location where footage was shot actually sounds like, but also to edit sounds into footage for any animals featured. Across all forms of production their role has a significant impact on the

believability and accuracy of what audiences hear on a finished production.

Lastly the Re-Recording Mixer balances all the elements together, combining the dialogue, sound effects, ADR and musical score. They add editing effects like reverberation and delay to ensure the separate elements are heard coming from the same physical space as the action. For example, if a scene is shot which includes two people talking in a large room with a lot of echo, that echo would be placed on by the Re-Recording Mixer to mimic the way the sound would act in that specific space. They are responsible for making sure ADR also plays seamlessly and sounds identical to dialogue shot on set. The Re-Recording Mixer works with the director and producers to make the show come to life, in line with their creative vision for how the production should sound. The person in this role is also responsible for the technical aspects of delivering a show, making sure it fulfils delivery requirements from different broadcasters and distributors.

This brief overview of the key roles and their relevance to this study demonstrates clearly the contribution made by sound teams both in terms of their technical expertise and their influence on the creative aspects of the shows.

Once all names of those in the key sound roles covered in the sample had been confirmed, I contacted every person directly to request their age, gender, career level, ethnicity and to ask whether they identified as having a disability, impairment or learning

difference. Out of 60 people working across a total of 36 shows, 55 people responded providing information on their gender identity and ethnicity. Some people chose not to confirm any other details.

Of the 36 shows there were 60 roles that fell into the categories of Dialogue Editor, sound Effects Editor or Re-Recording Mixer. In terms of racial diversity this research found that across all channels, only one mixed-race person was involved in the post-production sound teams for the highest rated shows in the sample and they identified as male. In this instance this person made one show for Channel 4. No other sound team from within the sample included someone from a Black or ethnic minority background of any gender.

In terms of gender diversity, the highest rated shows produced for BBC1 and BBC2 included only three white women. For ITV shows included in the sample, the same individual white woman worked across two separate productions. Channel 4 had no women in their post-production sound teams across any productions. For Channel 5 shows included in the sample there was one white woman who worked on one production. This particular show also represented the only instance where a woman held the role of Re-Recording mixer. Sky One shows indicated only one white woman on a team which worked on two separate productions.

In total six women were included out of the 60 available roles. All other members of the teams identified as white men.

# Interviews

To better understand the barriers people of ethnic or minority backgrounds and women are facing in progressing in their careers, I interviewed five participants: two white women and three men from ethnic minority backgrounds. Each participant was at a different stage in their career and faced different challenges. In the table below (Fig. 1) the ethnic background of participants is intentionally kept general, as to be more specific in an industry where there are so few people from BAME backgrounds would make them identifiable.

Participant	Gender (self-identified)	Ethnicity (self-identified)
1	Woman	White
2	Man	Ethnic minority
3	Woman	White
4	Man	Ethnic minority
5	Man	Ethnic minority

Fig. 1

Participant 1 was a woman still at the early stage of her career, even after eight years working continuously in the television industry. She faced barriers trying to progress from assistant roles to becoming a mixer (progressing to different roles) and then from short form to longform content (progressing between genres of content). Having started out as a runner and working within four different facilities in either runner, machine room or assistant roles over a 3.5-year period, she finally started working as a Re-Recording Mixer. After working as a Re-Recording Mixer on short form content for two years, she wanted to progress into longform content. However, she found her lack of experience in that genre meant people in hiring positions were unwilling to give her a chance, even though she had a proven track record of working

successfully with clients in the same technical role. In order to make that progression into longform she had to go back a step in her career to assistant level where she remains after almost 2 years.

She found that during her early career stages, she was not encouraged or given the opportunity to learn and train while working as a runner. She noted that ‘there was a hierarchy where you had to know your place, keep your head down and if you were allowed into a studio you were lucky’. She also noted that these studios lacked diversity across all aspects of identity. It was not until

she worked for her fourth facility, a working environment where the staff were diverse rather than uniformly white, where she was actively encouraged to enter the studios and learn, which helped her progress.

When asked if she met anyone who looked like her at any point starting out in her career, or whether she had any female role models in the industry, she noted that she met one other woman mixer at the first facility she worked at. Having left that first facility, it was a long time before she worked with any other women. This was an observation also made by Participants 2, 4 and 5. When starting out they encountered no one who looked like them with Participant 2 noting that post-production sound was overwhelmingly a field that employed white men. Since entering the industry in the

UK, he could only think of 4 or 5 people from Black or ethnic minority backgrounds working in post-production sound, who he had met socially and not worked with directly.

Participant 1 noted that in many other companies she worked at ‘the women were in bookings roles’, organising the scheduling for the creative departments, answering client emails, and these were very much administrative roles and not technical ones.

When she made the decision to progress to longform, she noted the biggest barriers were that:

**Short form and longform feel like two separate industries and the worlds never collide, so knowing who the people are was difficult, but also technically you lack some of the skills the longform people have because they’re experiencing something different to you and there’s not any training programmes out there to learn that and learn from people.**

In order for her to overcome these barriers she had to take a step back in her career and decided to become a runner or assistant again. This involved taking a pay cut so she could learn from someone in longform specifically. I asked Participant 1 whether they believed they would have progressed quicker if a scheme had existed where they could shadow a Re-Recording Mixer on a project for a certain amount of time, before taking on a project with their supervision and support. Participant 1 said:

**Yes, it would be a really good way of getting to understand their workflow and not second guessing the way they might want things. You learn on the job, you learn from practically doing it, not reading it from a book.**

Participant 2 was a male in his 40s from an ethnic minority background and had to take a similar approach in taking a career step back in order to progress. This participant had achieved a successful career in a non-sound role in his home country’s film and TV industry. He successfully transitioned into the same role in the UK film and TV industry. Participant 2 then decided to retrain in sound at University and try to develop a career in post-production sound. Finding himself in debt after paying the university fees, he tried to find a staff position to give himself some financial stability, rather than working freelance. He started applying for jobs, emailing and meeting people, but found he was turned down or received no response.

When asked if he felt his name, which is not one that would be considered ‘traditionally white British’, may have played a part in not getting responses he replied ‘yes, the short answer is yes’. Participant 2 did acknowledge that this could only be an assumption on his part, as this bias is something that is hard to prove. He had considered changing his name on his CV but felt he ‘wasn’t prepared to do it’ as ‘that is my identity’.

It is important to note that numerous studies have demonstrated that name based racial discrimination is prevalent in the UK. A summary of the Growth, Equal Opportunities, Migrations and Markets Report, produced by Nuffield College, University of Oxford in 2019, highlighted that recruitment practices still discriminate against ethnic minorities. Researchers sent 3,200 applications to employers,

which were identical in terms of skills and experience, but the researchers had varied the ethnic background of these fictional candidates. The report concluded that:

**On average, nearly one in four applicants from the majority group (24%) received a positive response (i.e. callback) from employers. The job search effort was less successful for ethnic minorities who, despite having identical resumés and cover letters, needed to send 60% more applications in order to receive as many callbacks as the majority group. The discrimination encountered by minorities does not vary by gender.** (Di Stasio and Heath 2019:1)

So, while Participant 2 may not be able to categorically say this was an issue for him in his career, there is certainly sufficient evidence to suggest that he may well be right.

One of the main barriers Participant 2 had experienced as a freelancer was 'finding the work and getting people to trust you who don't know you' as 'they want to work with people they are comfortable with, and that comfort comes from trust and that trust comes from familiarity and similarity'. This was a challenge also faced by Participant 3 with her noting 'There's set people that people like to work with and if it's not broke, don't fix it, so they have their circle of people and the boys they go to the pub with and it's hard to break into that'. She comments that this circle of hiring (a who-you-know approach) is preventing more diversity within post-production sound. She concluded by saying that

'People need to try to hire people who don't look like them a bit more and go a little further and reach a little farther than their circle of friends'.

Ageism was another barrier that Participant 2 identified. Having decided to change career to try and enter post-production sound at a later stage in his life, he was fully prepared to start as a runner and work his way up in order to work on high-end drama. However, what he found was that 'there was certain resentment towards older people'. People working in the industry told him he should not have to start from entry level

**'People need to try to hire people who don't look like them a bit more and go a little further and reach a little farther than their circle of friends'.**

positions due to his age, but took the decision out of his hands by not considering him for these entry level roles, even though he was prepared to work his way up. He has felt his experiences over the last few years have made him reconsider working in this industry. This is evidence that some of these barriers to progression can lead to people leaving the field entirely. This participant's experience highlights the importance of ensuring that 'new entrant' schemes are also inclusive of people from a range of age groups.

Participant 2's reason for taking part in this research was because he was tired of his experiences in the industry and wanted to help

create change. It is important to highlight however, that he was also aware that speaking out about topics such as these can have negative consequences for freelancers. He said that 'I thought if I'm seen to be promoting this [research into diversity], I'm going to get less work, that was my fear but then I thought, what have I got to lose?' Freelancers often have precarious roles in the industry and are officially 'outside' of big production organisations. This means that highlighting issues freelancers face, and advocating for change as an individual, may be difficult.

Participant 3 was a white woman who has worked in sound post-production for over 20 years. She took a traditional route into her career, starting as a runner and progressing through the ranks by working in various companies. This was a successful strategy until redundancies had to be made from an organisation she worked for, and she was forced to go freelance 13 years ago. She identified this move from staff member in a company to freelancer as one of her barriers to career progression. While working in her last facility she was starting to supervise high-end dramas and was building up her CV in a management role. However, once she became a

freelancer the building up of experience in drama became harder to do, and she ended up back working in the factual side of the industry on more independent productions. High-end drama work, although she had some credits, became harder to get as a freelancer. She noted that contacts are a vital part of maintaining a career:

**Part of me knows that if I had of been there a couple of years longer and carried on working on those TV projects, that when I went freelance I would've had more TV contacts and it would have been easier to carry on working in TV.**

She believes her gender also played a part. She remembers a sound supervisor, with whom she was trying to get freelance work, saying to her:

**Well I like you, we get on, but the problem is what if you join our crew and what if two of you started dating and it ended badly, that would disrupt the entire balance of the crew and I'm not sure about taking on that kind of risk.**

Following this exchange, she did not receive any offers of work from this man, arguably due to his sexist and heteronormative assumptions about the role women play in a workplace (i.e. potential sexual partners rather than professionals with skills to offer). She recognises, as with many male dominated professions, that it is difficult to tell most times if her gender prevents her getting work.

Participants 4 and 5 were both men from an ethnic minority background who, after careers in similar industries, decided to try working in post-production sound. Participant 4 started



out by offering to work for little or no pay in order to learn from other people and progressed from there. He said 'It's so hard for anyone to get a break in sound, to get some diversity in [the industry] is going to be a challenge'. He felt this was because 'They set the wall so high to become a sound editor and even when you make it over the wall, it doesn't become much better, to survive in it is a nightmare'. He remembers when he started out, he had to work three simultaneous jobs outside the creative industries whilst trying to get into sound work. He could not get an opportunity or a foot in the door. In order to get any work, he had to set up his own company, something Participant 5 also had to do. The issue of having to undertake unpaid work in order to access a creative career has been identified in many studies as

people's identities may intersect with barriers related to class status too (Khan and Shaheen 2017).

As a company owner, Participant 4 said he is drawn to hiring people from different backgrounds. Their work tends to be for European clients and having staff from different backgrounds and with different views works better for them and makes things more interesting. Participant 4 noted that 'Diverse people are more interesting' and 'It doesn't matter what kind of story you're trying to tell, there's some aspect of human struggle, most drama has a human story behind it and to tell a human story you need some kind of interesting background'.

This participant in their role as a company owner, has set up and run an internal placement scheme, as they recognised that people need to leave the organisation

broadcasters or funders said:

**Your Dialogue Editor, sound supervisor, mixer, whatever, have to be a woman, Black or ethnic minority, that would be money well spent. [...] If the public funding bodies did some positive discrimination then the private funding bodies would be encouraged to do that too.**

Participant 5, after working his way up in various facilities, also decided to set up his own company after experiencing stereotyping from employers where he found himself being given only specific projects based on Black or ethnic themes. He was tasked to work on a drama portraying Africa in an inaccurate way. He thought this was soul-destroying and ignorant and he decided he could not continue working at the facility. After over 20 years working in the industry he said he can recognise now when some conversations take place with clients about an upcoming project, that 'they're trying something out, they're trying to prove something to themselves and they recognise a diversity issue and it can be a diversity hire'. In this way a greater awareness of the need for a diverse workforce has impacted on hiring decisions without the structural issues being addressed.

When hiring for his own teams, Participant 5 chooses to hire people not based on their ethnicity but who he considers 'like-minded people'. He has noticed that most of these people tend to be women who are trying to break into an all-male industry. He said he appreciates the difficulties they face.

He also acknowledges that there have been occasions when, while meeting with new clients about upcoming projects, he has felt it best to bring a white male colleague with him to meetings. He felt that this was necessary just for a white colleague to be present to reassure them, as he knows he will encounter suspicion and resistance, as he is 'entering the lion's den [...] they're going to look at me and think is this person fine, look me up and down 3 or 4 times and I know it's not a conscious decision on their part, it's just part of their programming'. What was particularly notable about this participant's response was their resignation towards having to make these adjustments to their working practices to reassure industry figures about their ability to do the job. This participant felt their skills would be in doubt due to their ethnicity and the fact they were working as an independent organisation. This is unacceptable and needs to be challenged. It certainly should not be accepted as a norm.

The interviews conducted for this research indicate that participants felt gender and racial stereotyping has impacted negatively on their careers. In order to avoid working in organisations that are resistant to their inclusion several had founded their own organisations to gain more control over their careers. The need to work outside big companies, while achieving more control for an individual, may also present new barriers. Working in a freelance capacity within the post-production sound industry can be additionally challenging without a significant amount of industry connections, or

## **Having to undertake unpaid work in order to access a creative career has been identified in many studies as one of the key ways that the creative industries maintain class, racial and gendered barriers.**

one of the key ways that the creative industries maintain class, racial and gendered barriers (Brook, O'Brien, Taylor, 2018 and 2020). Not everyone is in a position to work for free or has the social capital in order to know who to approach for work experience. This is of particular concern when we consider how in the UK Black and minority ethnic

with actual credits in order to progress. Not only does this organisation train up people in a particular skill, whether it is dialogue or Foley sound, but they make sure that each intern leaves having worked on a show. He observed that if broadcasters or funding bodies encouraged positive discrimination when funding a show or film, it would help. He argued that if

without an existing reputation for work in a specific genre. The opportunities to make new connections or transition into different genres will be hampered unless those connections and credits have already been achieved before starting out as a freelancer.

## Analysis of the Continuing Drama Directors Scheme and sound scheme proposal

In May 2014 Directors UK, the professional association of over 7,000 director members working with the moving image in the UK, released a report titled *Who's Calling the Shots* (2014). This report was widely reported in the media at the time, especially in industry circles (see *The European Women's Audiovisual network website* [2014] as an example). The report showed a worrying decrease in the number of women employed over a two-year period specifically in drama, entertainment and comedy. They found women directors were being gender stereotyped with the programmes they were offered to direct, no women had worked on many popular dramas and entertainment shows, and 'fast track credits' which allow progression to high end productions were also, at the time, largely only available to men.

The problems women directors were encountering in 2014 as revealed by the Directors UK report are frustratingly similar to the problems uncovered in this

research relating to the careers of sound professionals. The 2014 report concluded that:

- 1) **Decisions on hiring were influenced by the opinions (or perceived opinions) of commissioners, resulting in the hiring of the same directors.**
- 2) **There is no uniform or consistent monitoring of the freelance workforce throughout the industry. Beyond a trusted few, there is a lack of awareness of a large number of highly qualified and experienced women drama directors.**
- 3) **Gender stereotyping is prevalent when hiring in specific genres in drama, factual and comedy.** (Directors UK 2018)

As a result of the report, the BBC, Screen Skills and Directors UK set up the BBC Continuing Drama Directors' Scheme. The scheme involves shadowing opportunities that result in tangible credits in drama programming. The scheme is described on the Directors UK website and works in the following way:

**As part of their training, each director will observe and participate in the entire production process of an episode of a show, from pre to post-production, and will ultimately take the helm for one full episode to gain a directing credit. The scheme also offers the possibility of employment after training, as there is an ambition for the series to hire directors within nine months for a full directorial commission if the director has shown that they can meet the standards required.**

The scheme has been successful with Directors UK's latest *Who's Calling the Shots* report (2018), showing that *Casualty*, *Holby City* and *Doctors*, had a notable increase in the number of episodes directed by women. The data revealed a 14.8%, 14.4% and 16.2% increase respectively over a three year period. The report concluded that 'running equality interventions on particular shows does produce positive results' but that 'this intervention activity needs to be implemented across other programmes in other genres, to replicate progress towards greater gender equality' (ibid).

As many of the barriers identified in the directing profession have also come to light in this study, I believe this model could work if replicated in a particular way across sound teams on high-end drama. As one of the interviewees for this research emphasised, credits are everything. In order to progress in high-end drama and more high-end work generally, you need to show you are capable of the job through having relevant credits on your CV. The only way to get the credits is by someone giving you an opportunity, but as this research has already shown, there is often a reluctance from people in hiring positions to give new or 'unknown' people a chance.

When budgets are tight, and people are working under pressure, questions such as 'What if they don't understand the workflow?' or 'What if training them eats into already tight deadlines and budgets?' often become relevant to hiring decisions.

The risk needs to be eliminated for both the people in the hiring positions and those participating in the scheme. By following the example of the BBC Continuing Drama Directors' Scheme I believe this could also work to diversify the post-production sound industry.

Let us first consider how this scheme could work for those at mid-career stage. If someone has already been actively working in the post-production sound industry for a certain amount of time, but in another genre (e.g. factual) they would already have most of the transferable knowledge and skills relevant to high-end drama production. The main knowledge they would be lacking is an understanding of the workflow. If a post-production sound scheme followed the BBC director example and enabled someone to shadow the specific role they are interested in for several episodes of a recurring drama (in the role of a Dialogue Editor for example) they would gain an understanding of the workflow. This new knowledge would be developed while they have someone there as a support system; someone to whom they can ask questions or request guidance from. Having completed this phase, and with their new understanding of the workflow, they would then be able to cut a full episode alone which they would receive a full credit for. I believe this approach would help in starting to address the issue of lack of diversity in post-production sound roles across the industry.

If the role of the participant was funded through an independent source, this could eliminate the risk for both sides- the person hiring and the person participating. That way the participant is not risking financial hardship while trying to progress their career; especially when the ability to participate in training without being paid immediately presents barriers to those who are without economic resources to fall back on.



Another advantage is that the person hiring would not feel as if their budget were being negatively impacted in any way. This may put off some companies offering this opportunity. The participant would be supported by their allocated industry mentor. This would allow the production team to feel confident that the participant can achieve the standards required and expected of the show before they take control of an episode.

The same scheme could also be implemented for entry level positions ensuring that the industry has a more diverse workforce progressing for years to come. Currently on bigger budget feature films, the role of assistant still exists. It is where a lot of dialogue and sound effect editors learn their skills when starting out. This scheme could enable new entrants to watch and help more experienced editors, in a supported way, to build up their skills and experience. Currently the only way to learn at entry level is by getting one of the few positions of runner and hoping there are opportunities to progress within the company you are working for, and eventually become an assistant.

The other way is to try and get one of the very limited amount of sound assistant roles on feature films which often still require you to have some experience. We need to create more opportunities at entry level.

## Research implications

This research project has collected data relating to 36 top rated shows across six broadcasters (BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, Sky One) from the Autumn period of 2019. In total, there were 60 available sound roles across these shows and these were undertaken by a total of 55 people. It has found that there is a lack of racial diversity in male post-production sound crew. In this sample only one man identified as mixed-race. The other 46 identified as white. There is a lack of gender diversity in the general post-production sound industry. In this sample six out of 55 people identified as women. There was only one Re-Recording Mixer who identified as a woman. They worked only in factual TV. No women were working as Re-Recording Mixers in Drama.

There are issues with intersectional aspects of identity. In this sample there were no women of colour working in the 60 available sound roles. In the sample of 55 people only three people self-identified as having a disability. None of the identified disabilities required physical adjustments to a workplace.

As with the findings of the Directors UK research into the directorial professions, decisions on hiring are influenced by the opinions, or perceived opinions of people in project management roles. In a risk-averse culture this results in the hiring of the same sound teams without opportunities for new entrants, or later on in mid-career professionals moving between genres.

As a result of the inflexibility of existing hiring practices, people from BAME backgrounds have felt the need to create their own companies in order to progress within the industry. There are no opportunities or schemes currently available for training, or progression for post-production sound freelancers, especially for those moving between short form or factual into drama.

We have to ask why emphasis in recent years has been put on diversity in front of the camera whereas post-production sound, which accounts for 50% of a TV show or film and is an integral part of the storytelling process, is forgotten about? Recently, the UK's Association of Motion Picture Sound Engineers (AMPS) and the US Motion Picture Sound Engineers (MPSE) and

**We have to ask why emphasis in recent years has been put on diversity in front of the camera whereas post-production sound, which accounts for 50% of a TV show or film and is an integral part of the storytelling process, is forgotten about?**

## Conclusions

Having undertaken this research, it feels clear that the same barriers are being faced across the board in the creative industries. More training opportunities need to be provided to people at both entry and mid-career levels in order to ensure a more diverse workforce, and that the industry retains the skills of people who enter it. The responsibility now needs to be placed on broadcasters too, to introduce diversity requirements on all commissions, not just for talent in front of the camera, but in relation to post-production as well.

Cinema Audio Society (CAS) wrote an open letter to Hollywood seeking screen credit changes to reflect parity with other key creative professionals.

Currently sound teams face being placed low down on the end credit roller while positions in picture-related departments appear much higher. Productions such as *Killing Eve* (2018-) and the documentary *100 Vaginas* (2019) are regularly lauded as having diverse teams in terms of gender and ethnicity. On closer inspection that diversity is not achieved with post-production sound teams.

Until vital steps are taken, and hiring practices move beyond simply 'who you know', it is unlikely the participation of women, Black and minority ethnic sound professionals will show any growth and improvement in equality. Furthermore, it is likely that the stories highlighted in this research about the barriers to career progression will remain.

**Emma Butt is a sound editor who lives in London.**

## Representology takeaways

### Bringing greater diversity to post-production sound

- Introduce more opportunities for training, mentoring and cross-genre work experience at both entry level and mid-career.
- Challenge the "who you know" recruitment culture.
- New entrant schemes should welcome people of all ages.
- Broadcasters should insist on diversity targets for post-production as a condition of all new commissions.
- Credits matter – offer shadowing and training opportunities that result in tangible credits.
- Emulate the methodology of tried and tested diversity initiatives such as the Continuing Drama Directors' Scheme.

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## PIMID Grants

### Practitioners Investigating Media Industry Diversity

**The Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity is offering 5 grants of up to £3K each in the current financial year to support short turnaround research. The purpose of the PIMID research grants is to better inform policy and practice that will address diversity deficits across different sectors of the media industry.**

The PIMID grants are open to media practitioners with a minimum of 5 years professional experience who wish to look more closely at the challenges and opportunities in their own sector. Each successful applicant will be teamed with an academic mentor and the research will need to be completed by May 31st 2021.

We would expect the research to take 4 weeks full time or 8-12 weeks part time. The findings would be considered for publication in the journal **Representology**.

**To apply, please email Professor Diane Kemp, Director of the Centre ([diane.kemp@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:diane.kemp@bcu.ac.uk)) with a brief outline of:**

1. The central question you would like to address and evidence of why it is important now
2. The aim and methodology of your proposed research
3. Your current role, your qualifications and experience relevant to the proposal
4. How you hope your research might inform wider and more effective participation in particular roles and sectors of the media industry
5. Two professional referees who may be contacted in relation to your application

The closing date for applications is January 29th 2021.

Your application will be considered by the Board of the Sir Lenny Henry Centre and you can expect a response within 3 weeks of the closing date.



# The future of diversity regulation in the UK broadcast industry - models and ownership





**By Dr Peter L. Block**

**Should Ofcom continue to regulate diversity in the UK broadcast industry?**

In light of growing criticism of Ofcom as a diversity regulator, the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity commissioned Dr Peter Block, a former CEO of the Broadcast Equality & Training Regulator (BETR), to examine Ofcom's history and effectiveness in improving workforce diversity and to consider what alternative models might work better in the future.





## Abstract

**This research, commissioned by the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity, examines the matter of diversity regulation in the UK broadcast industry. The findings are captured in six models of diversity clustered under the three themes of: Ofcom relinquishing the obligation; Ofcom continuing to manage the process or Ofcom devolving the matter to an independent agency. This paper explains the rationale for arriving at these models and what this means for the future of diversity regulation in the UK broadcast industry.**

**Despite a long list of initiatives, projects and incentives devised to improve the diversity of the UK creative industries, the workforce still fails to reflect the diversity of the wider population.**

**Key words:** diversity, Ofcom, regulation, broadcast industry, obligation

## Introduction

Improvement in the diversity of the UK broadcast industry workforce to reflect the communities it serves has been an unwritten target across the sector key for almost 20 years. It was a matter enshrined in law with the Communications Act 2003, later embodied by the establishment of the Broadcast Training & Skills Regulator (BTSR) in 2005 and renamed as the Broadcast Training & Skills Regulator (BETR) in 2009. The BETR was dissolved by Ofcom in 2010. In 2016 the matter of workforce diversity was explicitly written into the renewal of the BBC Charter (DCMS 2016: 7). As part of the Charter renewal, Ofcom became the external regulator of the BBC on all aspects of its work, including matters of diversity (Ofcom 2020a).

This research paper was prompted by Professor David Olusoga's MacTaggart lecture (Olusoga 2020) delivered to the Edinburgh Television Festival in 2020. His criticism of Ofcom provided the inspiration for this research and its terms of reference:

When our industry has made big structural changes in the past its success or failure has been measured and accessed by our industry regulator - Ofcom. But when it comes to diversity Ofcom has a history of giving the broadcasters a clean bill of health, or at worst a cursory note that they could do better, but with no consequences attached or even suggestions as to what better would look like.

Just as there is a historic lack of trust towards the broadcasters, Ofcom, I am sad to say, lacks credibility and trust among many Black and Asian programme makers. If Ofcom is not able or not willing to hold the industry accountable on diversity and inclusion, or able to use its power to set minimum standards, then the DCMS should set up a new body willing to do so (ibid).

Despite a long list of initiatives, projects and incentives devised to improve the diversity of the UK creative industries, the workforce still fails to reflect the diversity of the wider population. As Professor David Olusoga's lecture indicates there is the perception that Ofcom has not been able to successfully regulate the broadcasters when it comes to diversity.

## The legislative framework to monitor diversity

The Communications Act 2003 requires Ofcom:

...to take the steps it considers appropriate to promote equality of opportunity between men and women, people of different racial groups and for disabled people, in relation to employment and training by the television and radio broadcasters it regulates (Ofcom 2019b).

To that end, UK licensed television and radio broadcasters must, as a condition of their licences, make arrangements for promoting equal opportunities and, in making and reviewing those arrangements, must have regard to any relevant guidance published by Ofcom.

The expectation was that by monitoring and collating workforce data on gender, race and disability from the licence holders with more than 20 staff it would shine a light on the lack of diversity within the industry. It was anticipated that reporting on this matter would stimulate change to improve the situation. Ofcom initially reported on the workforce data gathered from the broadcasters. In 2005 Ofcom handed the matter over to the BTSR to monitor the training and skills component. In 2009 the BTSR, renamed BETR when the BTSR picked up the remit of monitoring equal opportunities. It was closed down by Ofcom in 2010 as a consequence of the incoming government.



The model the BETR applied combined quantitative data on the workforce along with a maturity model that captured qualitative data. A maturity model evaluates progress on a hierarchy of statements mapped to a set of attributes. In this case the model mapped 22 attributes of diversity inclusion, training and skills. This approach provided a snapshot of the progress broadcasters were making to improve the diversity of their workforce. It also captured their training and staff development programmes which underpinned their efforts to improve the diversity of that workforce (BETR 2010 & B TSR 2006).

With the incoming Cameron government of 2010, Ofcom closed down the BETR with the expectation that the relevant clauses of the Communications Act 2003 would be revoked. Ofcom took no action on the matter of diversity or training within the UK television and radio industry until 2016. Under pressure from a number of stakeholders Ofcom was obliged to set up some form of diversity monitoring and regulation. In 2016 Ofcom restarted its annual monitoring of diversity in the television and radio industries and to date has published three annual diversity monitoring reports (Ofcom 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019a). The fourth report that amalgamated UK licensed television and radio broadcasters into a single document was published in November 2020. Despite this renewed focus by the regulator on diversity in the industry there have been many critical voices, such as Sir Lenny Henry (Fullerton 2017) and Marcus Ryder, demanding that Ofcom should be more robust on this matter. More recently Professor David Olusoga in his 2020 McTaggart lecture argued that Ofcom needs to do more or allow another organisation to pick up the mantle to hold the industry to account.

## The stakeholders and the policy network

This research interviewed 11 stakeholders and their insights and comments informed the recommended models for diversity regulation presented in this paper. For the purposes of this research those interviewed or contacted for an opinion were classified as incumbents, challengers and independent voices. The incumbents represented Ofcom and the Cultural Diversity Network (CDN), the challengers were drawn from the Campaign for Broadcasting Equality, the BAME TV Task Force, the Coalition for change, the TV Collective along with Professor David Olusoga. The independent sources included representatives from the Employment and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the BETR / B TSR, the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) and CAMEo a media research group at Leicester University. These interviews provided a picture of the diversity policy communities within the UK broadcast industry. The interviews also contributed an understanding of the stance taken by the different interest groups. Although three individuals representing stakeholder organisations declined or did not respond to a request for a call, it made no material impact on the recommendations presented in this paper.<sup>1</sup>

## Terminology and definitions of regulation

The last piece of scene setting concerns matters of terminology, definitions and theory that relate to regulation in general and diversity regulation in particular. Dacko and Hart produced a helpful treatise on media regulation (Dacko & Hart 2005: 2-17). At the time Martin Hart was an employee of Ofcom and their analysis resonates well with this current work. They suggest that there are four archetypal models of regulation. These are: Regulation: 'a state intervention in a private sphere of activity to realize public purposes' (Francis 1993), '...having the components of legislation, enforcement, and adjudication—deciding whether a violation has taken place and imposing an appropriate sanction' (Campbell 1998: 711); Statutory regulation: '... mandated or restricted by government rules, enforced through legal penalties' (Boddewyn 1992); Co-regulation: '...self-regulatory schemes that are backed up by some statutory force' was the model for the B TSR / BETR and self-regulation: '...the voluntary control of business conduct and performance by a business itself' (ibid).

The options ranging from self-regulation to regulation indicate a hierarchy of transfer of the levers of control from internal to external management. All four models require the trust of the stakeholders of any organisation charged with overseeing the process. All parties have to sign up to the process and the models

require codes of practice to be agreed by all parties and the sanctions – from remedial actions, fines and in the final analysis removal of the right to conduct business.

Regulatory models in both theory and practice indicate that a co-regulatory or self-regulatory model can result in greater stakeholder engagement. However, the 'challengers' to the status quo do need some convincing that the process of implied light touch regulation delivers results. BECTU was quite clear in its opposition to co-regulation during the Ofcom consultation on the matter (BECTU 2005). The demise of the BETR was applauded by some as it represented too much of the light touch regulation. The measure of any regulatory system is that it delivers on its vision and targets. Any new or revised system requires time to bed in and gain acceptance. Key to acceptance will be the oversight by a management board to whom the operational team reports, consisting of trusted industry voices. Ofcom indicates that the current approach launched in 2016 to monitoring diversity is a five-year plan. Unfortunately, this is not published as a strategic plan. A model that predominantly relies on data gathering from which recommendations are developed appears on the face of it a passive reactive process.

Whatever form diversity regulation takes, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (DBEIS) states that any regulation should be: transparent, accountable, proportionate, consistent and targeted – only at cases

where action is needed (DBEIS 2020). An approach that is acceptable by all stakeholders needs to be managed and delivered by a skilled team applying justifiable interventions that are based on trust, independence and effective sanctions. It should not be just another 'cost to do business' data gathering exercise. Good regulation should go beyond the notion of the 'stick' but provide a supportive engagement with those being regulated.

The first step in this research was to review the literature that has examined workforce diversity in the broadcast industry and the data models that describe the size and composition of the sector.

## Creative Industries (CI) data matters

The matter of confidence in the industry's data requires particular attention.

Definitive data about the broadcast workforce is essential to enable any meaningful analysis of the industry (Block 2020). Robust, reliable, transparent and consistent data is needed to monitor changes in the industry workforce.

For this review a high-level scan of key data sources was conducted along with papers that have referenced the data. It included:

- The Ofcom dataset 2016/17 to 2019 drawn from its three annual reports and methodology documents on diversity in both television and radio (Ofcom 2019c)

- Ofcom dataset drawn from its 2020 annual report that combined diversity data from television and radio broadcasters with more than 100 full time UK based staff (Ofcom 2020b)
- Project Diamond – the 'three cuts' plus the more detailed analysis released during this research (CDN 2018, 2019, 2020)
- DCMS economic estimates for the Creative Industries up to 2018 along with the use of an economic estimates tool on the DCMS website (DCMS 2019 & 2020)
- BFI Employment in the film industry requests of the ONS and collated in its reports (BFI 2019)
- ScreenSkills, Government Equalities Office and academic research sources
- Various ONS Freedom of Information (FOI) data requests from the Greater London Authority and other independent researchers, of which, the data tables remain in the public domain on the ONS site, and finally,
- Searches using Nomis (Nomis online), the ONS service that provides current UK labour market statistics

The CI data as presented by the agencies cited above gives rise to issues that make it easy to misunderstand, and according to the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), possibly misuse the data (OSR 2018). There is a degree of ambiguity over the composition of the workforce within the creative industries as it comprises those deemed to have a creative job and those who are non-creative.

With the exception of the ONS, the Ofcom dataset should be the most reliable source within the television industry. However, changes in the datasets over the period 2016 -20, and the format and style of presentation makes it difficult for even the informed reader to set each Ofcom report in context with its predecessor. It is argued that there is on the face of it a lack of transparency on the data and the actions taken by Ofcom to engage and challenge individual broadcasters. An integrated database is needed for the independent researcher and analyst to access. Furthermore, there is little to suggest that any changes in gender balance or BAME diversity are as a consequence of any industry wide interventions and not due to individual broadcasters' efforts to change their practices and their support for an individual's development. The data suggests that the television industry is at best just tracking the changes across the wider industrial base.

In its reports Ofcom take as its datum line the national figure of 12% BAME in the UK workforce. In the creative industries (particularly in London) this is closer to 20%. This review of the industry data gives rise to three recommendations for improved reporting. There need to be clearly delineated data models for the creative industries which avoid the ambiguities of the current framework. Defining and reporting on an audio-visual (AV) sector could be a step in the right direction. Secondly, Ofcom in partnership with the ONS should produce an annual definitive industry benchmark dataset for the AV sector overall along with specific data on the Film, TV and Radio workforces. Other reports make similar calls. but further research is required. Thirdly, all research should validate labour market data on the creative industries by triangulating third party findings with ONS data.

## The academic literature

Much has been written about the creative industries workforce; particularly about those working in the film and television industries. This research examined 42 studies and reports from 2005 to 2020 that offer insights into the UK broadcast industry. It covers academic research that is sponsored and independent, independent research groups and think tanks, sector-based organisations, EU regulators and other international comparisons plus third-party research that cite the media sector along with other sectors.

For over 15 years, various academic research groups have examined the matter of inclusion and diversity in the creative industries. The CAMEo Evidence Review (CAMEo 2018) collated 80 research studies on diversity that had examined film, television, animation, video games and visual effects (VFX) industries published between 2012 and 2016. 34 were academic articles, 40 were industry reports and six were a mix of books, book chapters, and other sources. By coincidence, the CAMEo review identified 42 documents that focused on the television industry of which interventions to increase diversity were mentioned by 26 studies. The CAMEo Review noted two forms of interventions discussed in the literature: to empower or transform. Empower was defined enhancing an individual's capacity to enter and progress within existing industry pathways. In this research the efforts of the TV

Collective and Women in Film & Television (WFTV) fall into that category. Transform was defined as sector practice to remove barriers to more equal participation is exemplified by the BFI Diversity standards, Diamond and the work of Ofcom to monitor the sector. The CAMEo recommendations inform the regulatory options put forward in this research.

The academic literature indicates that the industry is data rich but information poor. There has been a great emphasis on monitoring and gathering quantitative data measures but limited focus on practical interventions and qualitative research. Some academic studies have referred to this situation as an empty shell (Block 2017). There is a danger of insufficient information to enable change. The focus on monitoring the industry addresses the what but not enough about the why and how to change it. This is evidenced by the number of initiatives, pledges, guidebooks and projects set up by the industry to address the issues of the lack of diversity. As the CAMEo Review notes 'The UK Screen Sector devotes significant resources to reproducing at best unproven intervention strategies' (CAMEo 2018: 7). However, the broad sweep of findings and recommendations from the academic community have changed little over the period from the earliest reports up to now (Randle & Wing-Fai 2018).

## Regulation in the European Community and a global perspective

By way of comparison, an analysis of EU media regulatory bodies was conducted along with a review of relevant international Public Service Broadcast (PSB) companies. Within the EU Ofcom is the only media regulator with an explicit remit to address diversity and training. On the matter of diversity, the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) and the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) try to avoid any direct overlap. For European regulators, the focus is on gender both on and off screen. France in particular monitors the representation of women.

regulators indicate that this is a national matter and not their role (ERGA 2018). There are a few exceptions with the UK and Ofcom a case in point. The Comisión Nacional de los Mercados y la Competencia (CNMC) in Spain is required to 'adopt all necessary measures so that audio-visual service providers comply with the legal framework'. CNMC publishes an annual report. PSBs across the EU report more 'stringent requirements to improve gender representation' (Jones 2018: 19).

The global perspective is exemplified by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). These are both noteworthy because ABC provides a clear presentation of data and targets, while CBC makes it easy to find all data tables and view progress against plan.

## There is a danger of insufficient information to enable change. The focus on monitoring the industry addresses the what but not enough about the why and how to change it.

The matter of ethnic diversity has much to do with the terms of reference for broadcasting regulators and their perceived competences. The majority of media regulators in Europe are responsible for issues of on-screen representation but not for off-screen diversity issues (Jones 2018). 19 out of 31

In analysing diversity initiatives both home and abroad the conclusion has to be that the industry devotes 'significant resources to unproven strategies' that in the 'majority of cases little real measurement of the effectiveness of these initiatives' is apparent (ibid 24).

## Independent research

A great deal has been written on the issue of diversity and inclusion (D&I) across all the dimensions of workforce inequality and employment sectors in the UK – public and private. This paper shows that the broadcast industry is no exception and has the attention of academics, think tanks and industry insiders. While the moral imperative for tackling D&I is well made, the UK broadcast industry of television and radio, along with its fellow traveller the film industry, still struggles to increase workforce diversity.

**The diversity hub on the Ofcom site is a passive repository of documents with minimal signposting. There is no evidence of its use or of feedback from users.**

The Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) states 'Given all this attention, it is perhaps surprising that we find little discussion of evidence on 'what works' in diversity. Or more precisely, what strategies and practices seem to be the best bet for increasing workplace diversity and inclusion' (CIPD 2019).

*Green Park Leadership 10,000* notes the accidental D&I improvement through company listing changes and concludes that business leaders need to: 'tone down meaningless rhetoric' (Green Park 2018 & 2019).

In the *Parker Review Update* it was noted that the target of 'One by 2021' – one BAME member on a FTSE100 or 250 board was unlikely to be met (Parker 2020). The FT report from 2019, *Striving for Inclusion*, ranks the top 700 European companies. This places Sky as the highest ranked media company at 113, the BBC at 403 and Channel 4 at 409 (Boulton 2019). A reader might be forgiven for concluding that this is not a great testament to change, given the public pronouncements and implied efforts by the two PSB organisations.

## The history of diversity regulation in the UK broadcast industry

### 2003 – 2005: Complying with the Communications Act 2003

Initially Ofcom gathered data and reported in general terms on the composition of the broadcasters. Broadcasters were specifically required to report their training and development priorities and programmes. No-one was happy with the situation. It did not deliver any value to the broadcasters and was not a process to stimulate change in the industry.

Following consultation with the industry, the proposal for a co-regulator embodied in the Broadcast Training and Skills Regulator (BTSR) was accepted by the Ofcom Content Board. It was endorsed by the Main board:

...the BTSR represents an audacious attempt by the Broadcasting industry to keep its advantage. It is audacious because it is a co-regulatory body, designed to bring together training and development expertise from within and outside the industry, and designed to work with the industry in raising its training and development game (BTSR 2006).

### 2005 – 2010: The Broadcast Training & Skills Regulator (BTSR) and the Broadcast Equality & Training Regulator (BETR)

The ambition of the co-regulatory approach was to build a partnership model focusing on development and improvement. The BTSR set up a media national training award, aligned the broadcasters' returns with the 'Investors in People' programme and held an annual conference at BAFTA. The objective of this approach was to use the data gathered as an impetus to stimulate change. Another aim was to share best practice and support broadcasters who were struggling to make a difference. A mentoring scheme was set up based on a portfolio of case studies. Initially the BTSR focused on training & skills (T&S) and in 2009 reported on workforce diversity. The final report from the renamed BETR was published in 2010.

### 2010 – 2016: Ofcom took no action to monitor or issue guidance to broadcasters

During this period, the requirement to take action over diversity was set aside by Ofcom in the expectation the matter would be revoked by the 2010 Cameron Government. The literature review for this project attests



that Ofcom along with most EU media regulators considered equal opportunities (EO) and training & skills (T&S) a national issue. However, campaigns by some of the stakeholders interviewed for this study were making it difficult for Ofcom to continue to ignore the matter (Chapman 2014).

In 2015 Ofcom was obliged to act as the duty to offer guidance on workforce diversity was not removed from the Communications Act 2003 post the BETR closure. The joint project with the EHRC Thinking outside the Box publication, revised in 2019, was considered (certainly by the EHRC) a 'first step' in the process of engaging with the issue of diversity in the sector (EHRC 2019).

### **2016 - 2020: Ofcom (re) launches its diversity monitoring framework**

The intention by Ofcom was to collect a range of information regarding the diversity of people employed by broadcasters:

**Ofcom is to launch an annual monitoring scheme designed to hold broadcasters to account on diversity. The move was announced by Sharon White, the regulator's CEO, speaking in London at a debate on diversity organised by Ofcom and Sky. White said: "We will be looking at diversity data across the broadcasters we regulate helping us to get the most comprehensive picture yet of how well each broadcaster is doing. This is an important step towards greater transparency and greater accountability" (Clarke 2016).**

Ofcom also aimed to examine the steps broadcasters were taking to monitor and improve diversity. The first report was published in 2017.

## **Diversity regulation today**

Turning to the current situation, in 2020 there are three key reporting systems; Diamond, the BFI diversity standards and Ofcom's diversity monitoring annual report. This paper focuses on Ofcom's approach. It is argued as a matter of opinion that an examination of Ofcom's current regulatory framework (2016 - 2019) reveals a lack of transparency. Although the additional data provided by Ofcom to support its 2020 report through the on-line tool (Ofcom 2020c) is very helpful, the matter remains a challenge to unpack. In 2020 only, those broadcasters with over 100 staff were assessed due to the pandemic and the understandable pressures on staff at the smaller companies to submit data to Ofcom.

The complexity of sizing the workforce in the UK broadcast industry has been already highlighted. This raises a number of issues regarding Ofcom's data model. It uses the national Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) figure of 12% BAME as a performance baseline (ONS 2018). Ofcom notes that the London workforce has a minority ethnic group (MEG) of 35% and 31% in Manchester, the two cities where 'most broadcasters are based'.

The ONS data indicates that the creative industries in London have almost 20% of their workforce drawn from the BAME community and this is a more realistic measure. The Ofcom annual data request removed 'board/non-execs (NEDs)' from the job level categories in 2018, 2019 and 2020. It is argued by Ofcom there is insufficient (robust) quantitative data to report on.

Ofcom makes the case that non-executive directors (NEDs) are not 'employed' by the organisation. This should be challenged – or be made a condition to be a NED that the composition in aggregate form is made public. Independent reports such as McGregor-Smith's Race in the Workplace highlight that change at the top is vital (McGregor-Smith 2017). The summary section of the 2020 report notes that 'Broadcasters (TV and Radio combined) appear to be employing a greater proportion of women (48%) minority ethnic people (14%) and disabled people (7%) in the UK than they did last year' (Ofcom 2020b 3). This is a nebulous assertion and hard to validate from the data offered to the reader. There is no clarity on how Project Diamond informs Ofcom's efforts – Ofcom's 2019 report mis-quotes double disability (sic) – not double diversity. There is no detail on how broadcasters' diversity interventions are assessed and validated. This research questions what quantitative measures are used to assess these qualitative interventions. The Ofcom report draws our attention to a diversity advisory panel who were consulted by Sharon White (Ofcom CEO till 2019), and their membership and role are not published. No reference is made to this panel in the 2020 report.

The recommendations of Ofcom's diversity report 2019 do not appear to have been explicitly discussed at the Ofcom Content Board (160 1/10/19) which reported that it had 'updated and discussed a wide range of topics' (Ofcom 2019e). In addition, nothing regarding diversity was carried forward from the Content Board in February 2020 to the Main Board that met in September 2020. The refreshed diversity hub on the Ofcom site is a passive repository of documents with minimal sign-posting. There is no evidence of its use or of feedback from users.

Ofcom argues that the monitoring and the improved dataset are having an impact. This research suggests that any change has tracked the wider industrial landscape reported elsewhere – the cause and effect not due to Ofcom's intervention. An improved or more complete dataset is not necessarily an indicator of change but a greater response from the industry. The improvement by four percentage points(pp) from 2016 to 2019 still leaves 16% unknown or not disclosed, and this still raises questions about the confidence level in the dataset. An inspection of the data drawn from this subset of the UK broadcast industry workforce for the 2020 report still shows 12% not collected not disclosed data gap in the television industry, with 6% for radio. Although the Ofcom 2020 report notes the lack of progress and underrepresentation of those drawn from minority ethnic groups (MEG) to senior management (8%); it does not highlight the significant data gap of 18% not collected, not reported within this senior management cohort.

Furthermore, given that this report is from companies with 100 or more staff, it would be expected that these companies have effective workforce HR systems for data gathering. This matter requires more investigation by Ofcom.

Ofcom has focused on its obligation to monitor diversity but not training & skills. There are numerous reports to indicate that to do the first, you need the second. This is a lost opportunity to encourage, support, and if needed, hold to account the licence holders.

Evaluation is a key enabler to effect change. A matter that Ofcom recognises in its latest report:

**This year, we asked broadcasters to describe how they evaluated their most successful initiatives and actions. We are disappointed that generally broadcasters did not provide a detailed response to this question, beyond noting outcomes against targets. This is a barrier to demonstrating the transparency and accountability which our diversity monitoring and reporting aims to increase (Ofcom 2020b 26).**

There is a need for Ofcom to hold broadcasters to account on the evaluation of their diversity and inclusion programmes. Ofcom asserts that it will 'Take enforcement action against those broadcasters who did not respond to our request for information' (ibid). According to the document linked to the Ofcom 2020 report It would seem that only one company has been put on

notice of the possible imposition of a statutory sanction for breaching its requirement to report on the diversity of its workforce in 2017 and 2018 (Ofcom 2019f 19).

## Findings and regulatory options

### Data models

There need to be clearly delineated data models for the creative industries workforce. The models should avoid the ambiguities of the current framework. Defining and reporting on an audiovisual sector would be a step in the right direction. Ofcom in partnership with the ONS should produce annual definitive industry benchmark datasets for Film, TV, Radio and AV. All research should validate labour market data on the creative industries and sub-sectors by triangulating third party findings with ONS data.

### The future of diversity regulation

The options set out below fall under three themes; (A) Ofcom relinquishes, (B) Ofcom manages or (C) Ofcom devolves. None are mutually exclusive and elements within each could form part of a final proposition.

#### (A) Ofcom relinquishes the obligation

##### 1. The national diversity model

There is a case to be made that despite the Communications Act 2003 and the matter of diversity being written into the BBC Charter that this is not for Ofcom to regulate. However, it is a matter for the

Employment and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to lead as the counterfactual model. In this option regulation is provided by the EHRC based on the public duty requirement that the BBC and the other PSBs implicitly have to comply with. The EHRC could intervene on the basis that the PSBs have a public duty and employ between them the majority of employees in the sector. It could also look at the supply chain of Independent production companies (The 'Indies') and non-qualifying suppliers to the broadcasters. It removes the ambiguity of regulatory ownership, as previously stated an obligation unique to the UK. A team at EHRC could take a watching brief over the UK Broadcast industry and be more robust in following up on the expectations set in the *Thinking Out of the Box* publication.

##### 2. The whistleblower

Although not directly related to this study, interviewees in the challenger group made it clear that many media workers not only feel discriminated against but disenfranchised and unsupported. This is more keenly felt if they are not members of BECTU. Alongside the EHRC role is the need for a media workers ombudsman to protect the whistleblower. This would be set up as an independent arbitrator on matters above and beyond the EHRC remit.

#### (B) Ofcom manages

##### 3. Ofcom 'light touch' Diversity & Inclusion (D&I)

This approach maintains the 'as is' model where Ofcom retains the light touch D&I regulatory function of the annual monitoring process. However, it needs to be more rigorous in following up on its annual reports and to be more robust in requiring compliance from the licence holders with its recommendations and reporting on the matter. A significant aspect of any monitoring system is the skillset of the regulatory team. Ofcom could continue to gather the data but devolve the qualitative evaluation of the broadcasters' efforts to an independent assessment by D&I and Training & Skills specialists. This external team could provide the supportive function to assist organisations in their development of policy to improve diversity and inclusion.

##### 4. Ofcom diversity regulation with a focus on leadership and supply chain

This is as model 3 for data monitoring with the addition of gathering information on training and skills along the lines of the work conducted by the B TSR. Once again, an independent validation and inspection body should be appointed by Ofcom to review and validate the published reports by broadcasters and to follow up on its recommendations to the broadcasters. The focus could be on 'great places to work' using a performance framework similar to the Teaching

Excellence Framework (TEF), there are other models to reference. The key factor is that it is a measure specific to the organisation. The number of poor performers should be published. Data on board composition, NEDs and senior management to be published in the Ofcom report would go some way to address the concerns of some stakeholders and hold the broadcasters to account. Reports across all sectors highlight the need for diverse leadership and that changes at the top of organisations are an indicator of a wider transformation.

### (C) Ofcom devolves

#### 5. Co-regulation redux - beyond compliance

This option is about the development of a diversity regulator as a partnership between broadcasters, Ofcom and EHRC. It will apply an amalgam of quantitative and qualitative measures to fully evaluate the broadcasters. Research shows that monitoring is not sufficient to stimulate and encourage change. Evaluation is the key to encouraging and supporting change. This approach underpinned the BETR model with a National Training Award, alignment with Investors in People and co-mentoring based on a portfolio of case studies. There should be a focused push at the leadership of the industry to be exemplars who demonstrate change. This would be an independent body established by Ofcom to deliver on its remit. It would cover all who broadcast, supply and work to those

companies that have an Ofcom licence. With the fragmentation of the sector there is a case to be made that it should gather evidence from all licence holders and all suppliers who employ 20 or more UK based staff (circa 43 companies) or are subsidiaries of international groups. It would also gather data on the freelancers employed across the sector.

#### 6. The digital media regulator

In a radical shift from the demarcation between the broadcast industry and film this option would establish a single regulator that incorporates all efforts to date from Ofcom, BFI, PACT, and CDN. Bar the incumbents, stakeholders expressed the view that the efforts to date to address the lack of diversity in the sector are in silos. This approach recognises the paradox of fragmentation of the industry while at the same time having concentration of powers. It is an aspirational model for the sector to develop over the next two to three years.

### Indicative cost models

It is not usual to provide a cost model in a study of this nature. However, this project is all about the practical realities of delivering an effective diversity regulator. The staffing and management of this regulatory function are key to its success. The impression gathered in this research is that the current arrangements for diversity regulation as managed by Ofcom are not given sufficient resources.

It does not require a large team to manage and deliver diversity regulation in the UK broadcast industry. What is needed is a supportive board and an advisory panel that can bring expertise to support an effective administrative team. In addition, all models need sufficient funds to call upon the services of qualified contractors at particular periods in the reporting cycle. This would include: a data analyst to interrogate and present the data from the broadcasters whilst cross referencing it with data from the ONS; a small team of D&I specialists who can inspect, validate and assist the efforts of the broadcasters to meet the specific and general recommendations made by the regulator, and workshop facilitators to run developmental workshops possibly in partnership with ScreenSkills and CDN.

With the exception of the first two regulatory models, with Ofcom handing over the remit to a third party and the 'as is' model, the requirement to staff and resource a regulator is broadly the same at about £150,000 per year. Under the co-regulatory model of the BETR the funding was provided by the broadcasters in proportion to their size. The smaller organisations, particularly small radio stations, were not required to contribute.

### Addressing outstanding issues, questions and further research

Whatever the model of diversity regulation to emerge from this current debate, it does need to be framed by a clear set of requirements, tasks and targets. Even if it remains an internal entity within Ofcom it needs to be clearly differentiated from other departments at Ofcom. It needs to operate as a free-standing regulator.

There is a need for Ofcom to demonstrate how it has followed up on its recommendations in its diversity reports to date and develop a quantitative evaluation tool. It is not clear why Ofcom dropped gathering data on training and skills, which would have indicated the action taken by broadcasters to develop their workforce, including explicit actions over diversity and inclusion. It has already been stated that a self-evaluation maturity model can provide an effective quantitative tool to gather qualitative data on an organisation's progress in improving D&I.

Although this research has proposed six regulatory frameworks, there are many matters of scope and powers that require further discussion. For example, should the regulator set targets with each broadcaster?

This also raises the issue about defining diversity within the sector. There is a need for further research on this matter. However, as an interim measure more could be added to the Ofcom document Guidance: Diversity in Broadcasting (Ofcom 2019d).

On data gathering, there is a need to have further research to establish an agreed data model for the sector that can be used by all interested parties. For the regulator, should data on production supply companies, contractors and freelancers be gathered as part of the annual data gathering exercise?



## Closing remarks

There is a view across the UK television and radio industries that Ofcom has not been effective in delivering on its diversity remit. Whilst the greater transparency of the 2020 report is to be welcomed many issues remain unclear, particularly how Ofcom intends to hold the broadcasters to account. There is a need for Ofcom to engage in the D&I agenda proactively and strategically with transparent reporting and engagement with the sector; to go beyond monitoring. It needs to set out clear ambitions for the industry, with KPIs for itself and the broadcasters. It needs to allocate sufficient resources, processes, and systems to encourage change in the industry. This could be achieved through qualitative developmental tools and research. The combination of a D&I maturity model that records progress coupled with targeted evaluation of interventions at the company and sector level would provide a more rounded picture of the industry and stimulate change. This regulatory function should go beyond Ofcom licence holders if it is going to address the many concerns voiced by stakeholders such as Professor David Olusoga and Sir Lenny Henry.

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### Representology takeaways

#### What does a fit media regulator do to improve workforce diversity?

- Defines diversity and identifies what types of under-representation need to be addressed.
- Ensures reliable diversity data collection is standardised across the media industry.
- Sets targets that will effectively address diversity deficits across different jobs and sectors.
- Investigates and holds accountable those media organisations who fail to comply.
- Is itself transparent and publicly accountable.

## Notes

- 1 The complete list is available in the full report on the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity website: <https://bcuassets.blob.core.windows.net/docs/the-future-of-diversity-regulation-in-uk-broadcast-industry-lhc-final-132514701634666207.pdf>

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# The





# importance of archive

**Looking back on his time heading the BBC radio programme Black London in the early 1990s, Dr David Dunkley Gyimah considers how the lack of archives affects the understanding of Black culture and experiences.**

**When the taxi door opens, a lithe man, shorter than I'd imagined, wearing tight trousers, an unbuttoned brightly coloured shirt and a purple faux fur collar cape neck warmer, bounds out. I look to his feet. 'He's wearing Charlie Wote,' I murmur, 'and it's London weather, chilly!'**

'Hello Fela.' His reply is ebullient in his gravelly voice: 'Where are we going man?' I lead the way. We're due to go on air in Studio 2 when Nigeria's most famous and inspiring artist proceeds to light up. It's not a cigarette and it's almost the length of my forearm. Pleading, I coax him not to otherwise I'll get the sack.

On air Fela Kuti is electric. Max Bankole Jarrett, a Liberian-born BBC World Service for Africa producer and presenter, is with me in the studio. Max and I look out for each other, passing on interviews. We're all howling with laughter in what is a no-holds-barred

conversation. Fela talks about taking over a house in Ghana with his 27 wives when he was broke and how each tenant fled because of his antics. He debunks a story that he belittled Nigeria's government by defacing his Mercedes-Benz, the preferred car for ministers. 'I never owned and refused to buy one,' he says. And then this from the maestro, a bombshell: 'Oh Afrobeat. It was a gimmick, a gimmick, man! At that time I was fighting wars, man. There was soul music in Nigeria and I had to fight so I give my own music a name too, Afrobeat. Just a gimmick! And now I've passed that stage and am playing deeper music, more into Africa. It's Africa music.'<sup>2</sup>

We record the best part of an hour with Fela but, because of the programme's format, can only broadcast five minutes. At the end of the show, one of the world's most revered performers asks firstly when we can get something to eat and secondly where we're going clubbing.

Imagine that! Imagine that happening with Jay-Z. Imagine getting to the doors of Gossips<sup>3</sup> and quietly convincing the bouncer that the man in the brightly-coloured garments is Fela Kuti, a world superstar. Jarrett, who would go on to work with Kofi Annan as a director of the African Progress Panel, reminds me we all hopped into my Honda Prelude. He vividly recalls the evening's events with Fela.

The story mainly comes from the archive of Black London, a radio show on BBC Greater London Radio (GLR) serving London's Black listeners. It was 1991, John Major had succeeded Thatcher, a recession was about to take hold of the UK and Britain would soon leave the ERM. The UK's creative media, particularly youth, had been going through a purple patch: The Big Breakfast, The Word, Def II Reportage, and pirate radio in Kiss, LWR and Horizon were the zeitgeist. Rap, Acid Jazz, and Soul were carving the airwaves.

At GLR, new management was seeking a younger audience which valued a pacy speech and current affairs format with less music. Hence Rough Guides to the World journalist Sheryl Simms and I, a former BBC Reportage reporter, were invited to a meeting to launch a new show. This new slot replaced the brilliant Syde

Burke – a stalwart in radio – and his show, Rice and Peas.

My partnership with Sheryl worked well and the programme flourished. Celebrity guests such as singer and actress Eartha Kitt, film-maker Melvin Van Peebles, and novelist Alice Walker were all too happy to come onto the programme. We interviewed young fashion designer Ozwald Boateng who had just been featured in the Independent newspaper for staging an extraordinary fashion shoot in the Ukraine; a former music researcher by the name of Kanya King, who spoke passionately about her plans to set up the Music of Black Origin (Mobo) awards; journalists turned publishers Steve Pope and Dotun Adebayo of X Press, who had just brought out a book called Yardies that a senior Met officer was requesting all police read; and a versatile acting/comedy team consisting of Brian Bovell, Eddie Nestor, Robbie Gee, Roger Griffiths and Gary McDonald – the Posse – who took over Studio 2 with skits and their trademark sign off, 'No Justice, No Peace'.

The Voice newspaper called the programme 'informative, interesting and lively' as it set out to attract a broad audience both Black and white. A rapper, Me Phi Me, who was riding at the height

of his fame, wowed us by creating a jingle on the spot using our names. He called the show 'excellent'. 'Er, thank you,' we spluttered on air. And then, that was it! Our time with the show lasted 18 months, before new talent on a rotating chair was brought in, which included David Upshal and Dotun Adebayo. There's no indexing of those 18 months on the net. No mention, that I can find, in popular academic texts or media programming literature. For the only speech-based programme on the BBC catering for Black people, it's as if it did not exist.

## Why archive?

That was until last month when, during lockdown, I rediscovered in my garage recordings of the programme on cassette and quarter-inch reel. One reads 'Bernie Grant election debate'. As I'm writing this, I'm two hours away from a presentation with an archive specialist to the Fédération Internationale des Archives de Télévision and Save our Archive – organisations involved in retrieving archive. At their online Conference 2020 we're pitching against Albania Media, Zimbabwe and RTI (Radio et Télévision Ivoirienne).<sup>4</sup> We're hopeful, but win or lose the obvious question needs answering: So what? Who cares about a programme from 30 years ago?

Celebrated cultural theorist Stuart Hall provides a tangible framework. 'The most important thing an archive can do,' he says, 'is to ask or allow us to interrogate those moments of transition because they are often also the moment of high creativity. We cannot see from our privileged position where those ruptures are most likely to occur or in what direction they are likely to lead.'<sup>5</sup>

It's long acknowledged how media shapes people's view of the world<sup>6</sup> yet Ayesha Taylor-Camara, currently a PhD student at the University of Nottingham, says that her research has shown how mainstream media has paid scant regard to publicly available Black archives, treating them and their audiences as 'insignificant'.<sup>7</sup> Alongside her PhD research, she's launched the online exhibition *In Safe Hands – The Voices of Black Britain Project*<sup>8</sup> which features Black radio pioneers from the 1920s to the present. 'I wanted this project to highlight and celebrate the contributions Black people have made to the media and creative industries in Britain, while simultaneously commenting on how their work gets left out of this history,' she says.

Taylor-Camara features a broad swathe of pioneers and she's turned out a three-part podcast, the first of which includes historian of Black Britons Stephen Bourne and oboist and music educator Uchenna Ngwe speaking on musical heritage. Taylor-Camara asks me about Black London and reflects on my response that, although we had an editor, we generally had carte blanche in what we produced and presented on the show. As a medium, radio in Britain is particularly interesting, she says, 'because the BBC had a complete monopoly over the airwaves for 50 years'. The onset of commercial and pirate radio ended that, which has provided new contextual layers to be explored. 'There is also something about listening to "old" audio that almost allows you to time travel,' she says. 'Something that newspapers, TV and other forms of media don't do as well.'

'It's a socio-political issue,' says Professor David Hendy, a former BBC journalist and widely respected media historian

and authority on the BBC, whose critical work includes the book *Radio in the Global Age*. Hendy says the lack of archive for programmes like Black London is 'part of a historic bias towards attention to centres of power in BBC, rather than places (wrongly!) seen as marginal'.<sup>9</sup>

Black London circa 1991-93 is by no means alone in this archive anomaly. On Radio 4's flagship Today programme on 28 October 2020, presenter Martha Kearney cued in a report saying: 'Of all the interesting people that have worked at the BBC one deserves wider recognition, Una Marson – the first Black woman broadcaster at the BBC.'<sup>10</sup> The ensuing profile by Radio 1 and 6 Music's Gemma Cairney featured rare archive extracts of Marson's voice. The little you hear, coupled with Cairney's narrative, paints an extraordinarily vivid picture of this pioneer.

'I came across her three or four years ago',<sup>11</sup> Cairney tells me. 'It was her poetry that struck me really because when you hear her she doesn't necessarily sound like all the things she is on paper. When you hear her she doesn't necessarily sound like a Black woman with her RP accent. But it's her poetry where the truth really speaks, with her sense of ostracisation, and at the same time her yearning and belief of nature and love that I see as very Jamaican.'

Cairney is writing a book about exemplary women such as Marson. I ask her what impact Marson and archive has on her and the media as a whole. 'It's a cliché saying but it's a good saying: You can't be what you don't see. I become alarmed when I see how the modern media sets the narrative for people of colour

when there's so much more from what I see. It's really important that we see ourselves and other people of colour who have trod the path before us. It's a truth seeking.'

## Before Black London

Alex Pascall arrived in Britain from Grenada in 1959. His early career was as a musician, and he went on to manage the Notting Hill carnival. In 1974 he created the BBC radio show Black Londoners. In a September 2020 profile for the Guardian titled 'Alex Pascall: the broadcaster who gave a voice to Black Britain – and is now taking on the BBC', Pascall told interviewer Joseph Harker that BBC bosses didn't believe there was an audience for the programme, so at first it only aired once a month. Four years later it was on every day. Pascall, a versatile performer, interviewed A-listers such as Bob Marley and Muhammad Ali and captured race relations at the time in his 1976 reports from the Notting Hill Carnival. There are smatterings of archive online that give you a sense of Pascall's velvety smooth presenting style and a show he says he largely spent his own money funding.<sup>12</sup> He's currently seeking redress from the BBC.

'We trust as much as we hear as we do what we see',<sup>13</sup> says Bernard P Achampong, founder of the innovative indie Unedited and a board member of Audio UK. Achampong, citing the concept of 'Sankofa' which in the Twi language of Ghana equates to 'Go and retrieve from the past', sees radio's heritage as emblematic of the oral traditions of how Black communities learn about



news and storytelling. 'There's something in our ownership of that oral tradition and what we've reinvented,' he says, 'that has a lot more premium, a higher premium than maybe for other communities.'

Achampong sees a link between the dearth of what he refers to as the 'intelligent Black voices of the past', such as Darcus Howe, raising suspicion among the wider populace, and as a result those conversations invariably happen through the inertness in comedy. 'It's important to reclaim this space,' he says. Importantly too, he adds that archive provides a situatedness to re-create stories from the past and also provide a sense of providence for talent now successful. 'Once we have these stories, we're able to link them back to things that have gone on before and how they'll happen again. If we're aware of what happened before, we're more empowered.'

My conversation with Achampong inspires an experiment. Kwame Kwaten and his band are on the retrieved archives from my garage – and he is now one of the UK's most innovative musicians and music executives, managing Shola Ama and Laura Mvula with writing and production credits including Jay-Z, Mick Jagger, Tom Jones and Seal. With the help of a friend, we're brought together on a phone call on a Sunday morning and I play him the segment of his interview down the phone.<sup>14</sup> 'Unbelievable! Wow, wow, wow! It's amazing!' is all Kwaten can say for the first few seconds after the playback.

He finds it illuminating how UK artists had to 'overprove' themselves back then to get

recognition. Kwaten's band D-Influence was one of a handful of acts signed to US major East West Records in which the band were given full creative license. 'We were so confident, in the face of craziness too,' he chuckles. The band held out for months for the right record deal. Then they got the call, which shocks him even now.

'We were supporting Michael Jackson, whatever we thought of the guy. We were playing in front of 100,000 people every day and then coming back and doing a show at WKD which held 200 people. That's quite interesting as well, the determination.'

Kwaten cites another reason for the impact the recordings have on him. Band member Steve Marston, who's on the tape, passed away a decade ago and there are no recordings of this type of interaction with him and band members.

And what about value generally for listeners I delicately ask. 'Tremendous value,' Kwaten reflects. The broadcast takes him back to club culture of the 90s, such as Fresh and Funky and playing on Kiss FM. That's 'proper UK Black memory', he says, assured that there's relatively little documentation of the 90s, compared with the 80s and 70s. 'We were all in the moment. The ethics at the time was, "put your camera away man, just dance at a rave".' Kwaten has requested the audio which he intends to reproduce with photos from that time.

A week after my evening with Fela, I was at Brixton Academy. One of many highlights, saw the tiny suited figure of Seun Kuti (Fela's young son) take to the stage and, to a call and response, energise the crowd. Today

Afrobeat's creativity has transitioned into a mega industry and a new crop of artists, not least Seun and his older brother Femi, who continue to push its form, all gimmicks aside. Archive in a sense is living history. It revitalises a sense of the past, while we live in the present.

**Dr David Dunkley Gyimah is senior lecturer at Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Culture and co-founder of Representology.**

## Representology takeaways

### Archive plays a critical role in cultural memory and also how the future of media could be shaped

- The richness of Black people's experience currently hidden in archives deserves a wider airing.
- The Black pioneers of radio should be given greater recognition.
- Intelligent Black voices are under-represented in British history. Archives can ensure that such voices are not marginalised nor silenced.

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# Strangers in a strange land

**Paralympian Will Norman suggests that disability representation in the media is not the goal, but only a first step towards truly meaningful inclusion.**



**The media landscape in the UK is broader than ever before, but is it any deeper? The digitisation of our media has led to an explosion of channels, stations, streams and platforms, and yet this diversification of modes of delivery does not seem to have led to a consequent diversification of the stories our media are prepared to tell.**

Nowhere is this more true perhaps than in representations of disability, which seem to have changed little despite the blizzard of opportunities afforded by new technologies. To paraphrase Shane Warne's famous comment about Monty Panesar not adapting to the conditions at hand: the media hasn't told 30 stories about disability, just the same story 30 times.

But those who decry representations of disability in the media, including me, make one crucial mistake. All too often we complain that the one story that is told is wrong. We complain that the media reduces our disabilities to a hopelessly simplistic set of stereotypes, which it surely does, and that these stories are therefore pernicious, which they surely aren't. What's pernicious is that these are the only stories that get told. It's not about right or wrong, either/or – it's about more.

**We complain that the media reduces our disabilities to a hopelessly simplistic set of stereotypes, which it surely does, and that these stories are therefore pernicious, which they surely aren't. What's pernicious is that these are the only stories that get told. It's not about right or wrong, either/or – it's about more.**

The release of a new film version of Roald Dahl's *The Witches* recently caused a stir among people living with limb loss, who felt that the representation of the witches' three-fingered hands reinforced a stigma linking their disabilities to dark and untrustworthy characters. While I am in no position as a blind person to critique the feelings of those who found this offensive, I do think that the scale of the response was exaggerated as much by the lack of alternative stories as by the flaws in the Robert Zemeckis film itself. Surely portraying witches as having three fingers is not at all the same thing as saying all people with three fingers are witches. What makes it feel that way is the distinct lack of alternative narratives to provide perspective and balance. This story becomes a monster because it is unchallenged, not because it is inherently monstrous.

Similarly, a common complaint among disabled media commentators is that our disabilities are reduced to a handful of tired old tropes: the villain (Darth Vader, Captain Hook), the victim (Tiny Tim), the superhero (Daredevil). But we mistakenly then assert that this is maleficent. It's not the portrayal of stereotypes that is in itself harmful, it's the fact that these are all we've got. Having a disability does not, after all, exempt you from villainy or heroism. The crime is in reducing the vast glittering tower of lived experience to these few stories.

## Beyond representation

I have three children, so I spend a lot of time watching CBeebies. Children's media has a crucial role to play in shaping how young people begin to think about diversity and difference. CBeebies boasts several shows that are orientated around disability, including *Magic Hands*, *Something Special*, *Melody* and *Pablo*. These latter two are particularly interesting. *Melody* was created in collaboration with the RNIB, and features a visually impaired actor playing Melody, while *Pablo* not only addresses the lived experience of autistic children, it does so using an autistic voice cast and in direct consultation with autistic young people who help to generate the storylines. Both are strong examples of going beyond mere representation of disabled characters – often by non-disabled actors, embracing, as they do, ideas and talent drawn from within the very communities they seek to represent.

This is a welcome step, but it is only one step. There need to be many more, and much faster. In fact, this linear plod needs to be swept away altogether by a powerful torrent of new ideas and diverse thinking. When, for example, will we move away from disability represented by a single disabled character, and see more portrayals of disabled families and even entire communities? All too often it still feels like a tick box exercise. The net effect is that disability appears isolated in our media, a discrete, stand-alone option, it's disconcerting presence safely contained within strict limits, like a tiger at the zoo.

And then there's the question of silos. While *Melody* and *Pablo* are interesting devices, they are self-contained units within an otherwise normalised schedule. Again, to criticise this is not to say it is in itself wrong. There is a place for these kinds of discrete treatments of a single topic, but in order for them to be viewed as beacons rather than silos, they need to be part of a broader and more integrated picture. When will we see a blind Go Jetter, or a deaf Octonaut?

What we see on our screens and hear on our radios is only, of course, the final product, it is not the whole system. The barriers that restrict disabled people's access to the media, and thus restrict the media's ability to represent disability fully, begin in childhood.

My visually impaired son may tune in to *Melody* to see if it speaks to him, but the amount of content that is audio-described for his enjoyment as a visually impaired viewer is limited. Then there are all the apps and web-content that go along with broadcast media these days. It's nice to watch *Melody*, but if the presenters in the CBeebies House are waxing lyrical about a great new app that he as a visually impaired child can't access with a screenreader, then he faces the painful feeling of being put back out in the cold just as soon as he thought he'd been welcomed in to the warm.

And this is far from the only way in which the current media environment thwarts the ambitions of the next generation. To tell the huge variety of nuanced and diverse stories we need to tell we are going to need disabled writers to write them, disabled actors to portray them, disabled directors to present them, and disabled editors to commission them.

Here too the cry is 'More'. Disabled people have long advocated that there should be 'nothing about us without us', whether in public policy, health, education, or culture. It is a betrayal for the majority of storylines about disability to be penned by non-disabled writers and portrayed by non-disabled actors. As a society we are still far more tolerant of this than we would be of, say, a white actor using makeup to portray a Black character.

As well as more disabled characters on-screen, we need more disabled people behind the scenes. Only then will the amount of content that authentically addresses the question of disability with integrity and a rich, deeply nuanced understanding increase massively. Without an increase in the numbers of disabled people working at all levels of our media industries, we will continue to endure the profoundly distressing experience of seeing the story of our lives told, often ham-fistedly, by others.

## Setting diversity free

Several broadcasters, including the BBC and Channel 4, have well-intended projects aimed at increased recruitment from the disabled population, but again, these only address the problem at its final stages. The roots go much deeper. Young people who face prejudice, discrimination or exclusion in their formative years are much less likely to grow up with aspirations of joining a world that they perceive as having shunned them. So they walk away, and with them goes their passion and their insight. If the media industry thinks it can afford to keep losing people before they've even got started, I fear it's very much mistaken.

Change may be discomfiting for those who have done very well out of the existing system, and the task is doubtless a difficult one, but the rewards are there for all, not just the disabled population.

Increased diversity, real diversity not the limited kind we see imprisoned within silos and bolt-on schemes, will enrich the entire industry and breathe new life in to what sometimes seems like a stagnating realm trapped within a hall of mirrors all of its own making.

Maybe the perpetuation of the status quo across the media landscape for many long years, give or take the odd experiment at the fringes, is why our TV channels now seem to have little to show us other than a never-ending cycle of *The Big Bang Theory* and *Murder, She Wrote*.

Ultimately what we're talking about here is a form of oppression, possibly unconscious, certainly very civilised. Limited representation, restricted access and an alienating culture, work in concert to create a world where those with disabilities can still struggle to feel welcome.

Mere inclusion is not enough to resolve this segregation. All inclusion does is let you in to this world, it can't, by itself, make you feel like you belong. You can play a part, but this world is not for you.

The challenge for the media is to set diversity free, embrace difference, and open itself to possibilities it hitherto couldn't have imagined. Such a carnival of creativity has the power to blow through all forms of media, breathing new life into everything we see on our screens and hear on our speakers. Ultimately it may even set our media free from the cycle of rinse and repeat on which it currently seems stuck.

**Will Norman played blind cricket for seven years before switching to football 5-a-side in 2008 and going on to represent England and Great Britain over 25 times in international competitions, including two Paralympics.**

## Representology takeaways

### Going beyond increased disability representation towards richer disability representation

- We need to go past the idea that there is a right or wrong way to represent disability - we need more perspectives.
- Stereotypes are not in themselves harmful - it is the fact that disability representation is often limited to these stereotypes.
- We can move away from disability in media represented by a single disabled character - let us see more portrayals of disabled families and even entire communities.









# Widening perspectives in political journalism

**Leah Cowan** examines the lack of diversity in British political journalism, why it matters, and the multiple challenges faced by 'outsiders' looking to get a foothold

**The stories to which we devote column inches shape the collective imagination. As feminist academic Donna Haraway writes: 'It matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what concepts we think to think other concepts with.'**<sup>1</sup>

The way we present information can never be unbiased; within the copy we file, we make decisions about protagonists and antagonists, beginnings and endings, and rights and wrongs. The media, often inevitably, dance to the beat of political agendas and public appetite. The topics which receive scrutiny and a platform feed into political agendas which spin votes and shape policy. If we recognise this, we should be cognisant of how our fingerprints leave impressions on the clay of our journalistic work. From this viewpoint, the fact that the UK media is 94% white and incredibly monocultural is of deep concern. The 94% of journalists who are white, then, set the standard for what is deemed worth reporting on, and in political journalism, for what counts as 'political'.

In a bid to prove that the BBC's output is impartial, its director general Tim Davie introduced new rules for staff<sup>2</sup> which, it was understood, would effectively ban them from attending Black Lives Matter demonstrations and Pride marches in support of LGBT rights and justice. In response to backlash, this announcement was further clarified<sup>3</sup> as only applying to senior reporters, who are expected to 'take care when making decisions about participating in events' and 'not to take a personal public position ... on public policy issues'. Either way, this milquetoast clutch at 'impartiality' marks a huge betrayal of workers across the BBC at all levels who are themselves queer, trans and people of colour, and whose lives as people living at the

intersection of oppressions based on race, sexuality and gender identity are neither 'impartial' nor remotely up for debate.

There is a tacit assumption in Davie's edict that Black and trans journalists, for example, do not have personal stakes in their own lives, but can somehow split the self, holding their identity at arm's length as 'policy issues' while the journalistic mind observes and comments. This framing tells journalists who are not white, straight, and cis that the burning issue of their very existence must be packed away and put on the shelf in order for them to do the work of objective reporting. The impact of this adherence to narrow-perspective journalism is keenly felt. The slow decline of traditional reporting and print media – national newspaper sales have fallen by nearly two-thirds<sup>4</sup> over the last two decades – runs congruent to the narrow spectrum of perspectives which the industry welcomes. Less money for specialist, careful, time-consuming reporting means that stories that are already marginalised get pushed out of the main picture.

As Malcolm Dean wrote for the Guardian in 2011: 'Papers have shrunk, specialist reporters have been slashed and profits have disappeared. As a result there will be fewer well-informed journalists to analyse and present the increasing amount of data. Fewer specialists also means fewer awkward questions asked in ministerial briefings. Less grit in the democratic oyster means fewer policy pearls.'<sup>5</sup>



## Migrants – a confected crisis

A key example of this is the broad brushstroke and sensationalised media reporting around the ‘migrant crisis’ which peaked in 2015. High numbers of people fled conflicts that Britain had performed a key role in catalysing, which resulted in increased fatalities in the Mediterranean Sea and directly led to the hardening of Britain’s borders. Governments seemingly dodged accountability for the 2,500-5,000 people a year<sup>6</sup> were reported dead or missing after attempting to make the crossing, alongside a 100% spike in racist attacks<sup>7</sup> on people of colour in the UK in the run-up to Brexit. Despite pockets of sensitive reporting, a media industry which is largely monocultural, as well as slashing reporters and budgets to stay afloat, struggled to bring humanity to the public conversation emerging around this issue.

Research conducted by journalist Liz Gerard revealed that between 2010 and 2016, the Daily Express made immigration its leading story 179 times, or approximately twice a month for six years straight. The Daily Mail came a close second, splashing with a story about immigration 122 times in the same time period.<sup>8</sup> The frequent repetition of these messages gave the wholly unfounded impression that Britain was under threat. A fallout of this approach, it could be inferred, was the referendum on Britain’s membership to the EU in

2016 which in reality became a battle for the heart and soul of Britain, and a fight to the death to pull up the drawbridge and curb migration. In this context, based on frequency of Google searches<sup>9</sup> and polls of the key issues<sup>10</sup> informing voters’ decision-making, immigration became a lightning rod issue which swayed the referendum vote. It’s worth considering how these events might have played out differently with sensitive, nuanced reporting delivered by people with a lived experience or informed perspective on migration.

We can draw a connecting line between media reports, and the decision (albeit marginal) to push forward with Brexit, because the more the media talks about borders and migration, whatever the message (and in tabloid newspapers, often the message is sensational and incredibly hostile to migrant communities), the public is left with a sense that the borders are vulnerable. In an article exploring the paradox of border security, social sciences professor Bastian Vollmer explains: ‘Borders are open but secure – a difficult message to bring across an audience that is struggling with an environment increasingly dictated by confusion and ambiguity’.<sup>11</sup> This message is especially difficult to convey if the media industry doing the conveying is so far removed from the realities of its intricacies.

## Structural factors

The dearth of accurate, humanising reporting on these complex issues can be in part attributed to the fact that the people who are best-placed to speak on them are for the most part unable to break into the media industry. At entry level in particular, the industry relies on unpaid and low-paid labour, and often requires workers to check their own lived experiences at the door. My own experiences of trying to enter the media industry are not uncommon among my peers: in my early 20s I was offered an internship at the Guardian as part of their positive action scheme, and upon discovering that the placement was unpaid, I turned it down. The email thread which followed (an exchange between two editors, who were older men) reads like satire. One wrote, of my rejection of the offer, ‘that’s young people for you’. The other replied: ‘I think it wd [sic] be extremely shortsighted of Leah to turn down the chance to spend time at the Guardian ... Does she know what the positive action scheme is? Has she seen our brochure? But it’s her call.’

**... in my early 20s I was offered an internship at the Guardian as part of their positive action scheme, and upon discovering that the placement was unpaid, I turned it down. The email thread which followed ... reads like satire.**

I had seen the brochure, and it was indeed my call. The existence of an unpaid positive action scheme for people of colour pointed to a glaring misunderstanding – that the lack of ‘diversity’ in newsrooms was about Black people needing to just be in the room by any means necessary. My first encounter with the media industry left a bitter taste; I felt that a positive action scheme which seemingly lacked understanding of the barriers and structures that prevents us from being there in the first place was ticking boxes and filling quotas, not doing the work of radical reconfiguration. The reality is that in the UK, communities of colour lag behind white people when it comes to wealth accumulation.<sup>12</sup> This means that we are simply less likely to have the funds available to us to do a week’s unpaid internship, with no concrete prospect of employment at the end.

It appears that the situation doesn't improve as journalists rise up the pecking order, unless they toe the line and absorb and imitate the dominant white culture of newsrooms, or become impartial on their own lives. In July 2019, presenter Naga Munchetty was reprimanded for breaching BBC guidelines for commenting on racist tweets sent by Donald Trump. In response to his online vitriol suggesting that four US congresswomen should 'go back' to where they came from, Munchetty noted that 'Every time I have been told, as a woman of colour, to go back to where I came from, that was embedded in racism'. The BBC responded to Munchetty's comments, stating that her words had gone 'beyond what the guidelines allow for'.<sup>13</sup>

Backlash against the BBC's reprimand resulted in then director general Tony Hall reversing the decision to uphold the complaint against Munchetty's comments, reiterating that the presenter is an 'exceptional' journalist. In an interview with *Vogue* in February 2020, when questioned on whether the BBC was institutionally racist, Munchetty dryly remarked: 'Find me a large organisation, and find me an employee from a minority group who feels they are able to bring their true self to work today. I don't think you'll be able to.'<sup>14</sup>

## The impartiality fallacy

The idea of a presenter being able to make only impartial observations on an incident is comparable to the anthropological practice of (mostly wealthy white men) making distanced observations on situations 'in the field'. This framing within anthropology has been critiqued in-depth by a host of researchers, including feminist anthropologist Tomomi Yamaguchi, whose 2007 study argued that the binary places of 'home' and being 'in the field' were increasingly fluid categories.<sup>15</sup> It might be more useful to accept, with transparency, that the ability for a journalist to step back and interpret an unfolding news story with an impartial eye is a fallacy.

However, another danger faced by people of colour and other marginalised groups entering the media industry is the imperative that we only talk about race. As former *gal-dem* editor Heather Barrett said in an interview in 2017, 'Women of colour basically get commissioned to write about race, to write about their experiences of oppression and things like that, and it's a very limited box'.<sup>16</sup> In step with being forced to chameleon ourselves into the white, monocultural, elite landscape of mainstream media, we can also be expected to mine our own lives for content; we are 'experts by experience' rather than skilled enough to report on any topic. Award-winning essayist and writer Roxane Gay explains on the *Another Round* podcast that Black women are often

expected to cannibalise our experiences, and to lay bare our trauma in exchange for being permitted to write or speak at all.<sup>17</sup>

The issues undergirding the glaring whiteness and same-ness of newsrooms are those which are faced across many industries. It is essential that routes into journalism are made accessible and desirable. Entry level jobs must be secure, contracted, and paid at a living wage, and union organising must be recognised and encouraged. More critical and more difficult to enact, is for some in well-paid positions to give up power. Only top-to-bottom reconfiguration of mainstream media organisations can ensure that a multiplicity of perspectives and experiences are informing journalistic work at all levels – from agenda-setting and commissioning, to writing, editing, presenting and beyond. Without this, any 'diversity' or positive action scheme is merely window dressing; time and time again the affect gets a rebrand but the substance stays the same. It remains to be seen whether media organisations can be courageous enough to centre our voices through meaningful structural change.



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### Representology takeaways

#### Structural barriers stop people from diverse backgrounds working in political journalism

- News outlets need a multiplicity of perspectives and experiences across all roles to improve the accuracy, depth and reach of their journalism.
- We all need to question dominant media narratives and how impartiality is defined today.
- Only a radical overhaul of newsrooms can dismantle the structural barriers to people from under-represented groups getting paid work and career opportunities.





# Freelancing in the media

**From leading online training sessions to joke writing, there is no such thing as an average workday for media freelancer  
Suchandrika Chakrabarti**

**In the week of the US elections, there was a breakthrough in the search for the Covid vaccine, Brexit negotiations continued, and a former Daily Mirror Chicken may have missed out on promotion thanks to an intervention by the Prime Minister's fiancée.**

I spent two days of that tumultuous, news-filled week writing jokes about what's going on in the world for Radio 4's The Now Show. In a writers' room pulled together by a Zoom call, we laughed at the volume of stories we had to work with, and how the tone shifted so abruptly from one news item to the next.

Growing up in the 1990s, writing comedy was a job I didn't know it was possible to have. Even when my dad would suggest I watch *Have I Got News For You* with him, it didn't click. Comedy was just our thing that we enjoyed together. When he insisted that I read the foreign pages of the *Guardian* as well as the rest, before I went to get the school bus in the morning, I got the idea from him that being a good newspaper journalist was something to aim for.

Now, though, writing topical comedy is just one of a couple of jobs I had to juggle this week. Alongside comedy – an industry I decided to get into in January 2020 – I'm also a media trainer and a freelance journalist. Copywriting's there in the mix too. Of course, I'm working on a novel.

All my jobs have two things in common: storytelling, and my overheating laptop. Without the internet, I'm not sure how I would have made any money during the surreal pandemic year of 2020. In fact, I don't know how to work or live without the internet at all, anymore. The analogue era is truly over.

In the 90s, I learned a few things about the world of work that I thought would never change. Firstly, that I would one day have a one-word job title, like my parents (mum: teacher, dad: doctor). Secondly, that work would happen outside of the house, although it could spill over into life a bit, in the form of home visits or marking and class trips. Thirdly, that writing as a career would provide the kind of financially stable adult life that my parents had already figured out before having me.

None of these certainties have turned out to be true. The 90s ended up being completely unrepresentative of the decades that would follow. While the term 'journalist' has covered my role for much of my career, the job itself is subject to constant change. In my last staff position, as editorial trainer at Reach Plc, I delivered training across the company, which meant at the *Daily Mirror* as well as travelling the country to other newsrooms. Additionally, I did shifts on almost every desk at *Mirror Online*. Digital journalism changes quickly, and it's easy to feel rusty on all the various systems and workflows. I had to be on top of all of these jobs, ready to train everyone from a news shifter to a social media editor to a personal finance writer.

One morning in 2017, I was updating a room full of people on how to use Facebook to 'sell' their stories effectively, for maximum audience engagement. One reporter tentatively put his hand up. He was very sorry to tell me that Facebook had changed its algorithm earlier that morning, and so... everything on my slide was wrong. In a digital age, media training is a conversation, not a broadcast. I had to be prepared to be wrong as well as right on any given element of digital storytelling.

The training room is also a confessional. Whether a trainer is in-house or a consultant brought in, we are seen as neutral, and our workshops are safe spaces. Journalists can ask the questions that they feel silly asking of their workmates; let off the steam that they

don't dare to direct at their editors; and ask why digital is, generally, such a step down from the ways of working on a newspaper.

## Gone are the days

In the last few decades of the 20th century, the golden age of papers, newsrooms only really got lively by 10am, with the first big editorial meeting at 11am. A second shift would come in late afternoon to work until the newspaper went off-stone, to the printers, by about 10pm. It could be 11pm or later if there was huge breaking news. There might be days when a journalist did not produce a

of 'fake news' would finish them off.

A digital journalist's day is very different, and involves writing about seven to ten stories per shift. Shifts are generally 7am-3pm or 3-11pm – swapping from mornings to evenings each week – so they're fairly anti-social. Most of the stories will be rewrites of news from other sources, with some scope for original reporting, but rarely enough time. Then there's sourcing pictures, thinking up social headlines, making sure there's a search-friendly headline too, all the while fielding GChat messages from editors and the social media team, and keeping one hand hovering over the

## So my life as a freelancer would have to involve balancing different kinds of jobs, and branching out from pure journalism.

story for print at all, because they were working on something big, or were out interviewing, or investigating.

Tabloid section editors might have a couple of thousand pounds thrown at them of a weekend to generate provocative stories. One example, told to me on my podcast *Freelance Pod*,<sup>1</sup> involved an editor asking one of her reporters to pretend to be a cool, cutting-edge Young British Artist (aka the YBAs), even hiring gallery space. That was the power of newspapers, and that was the luxury of time and money that they could have, pre-internet. Imagine a newspaper pulling a stunt like that now – even if the budget was there, the cries

phone to set up an interview for the next article. If news breaks, there will be a cascade of articles, perhaps a liveblog, and maybe even a very lucky person sent out to get video.

At about 7am on an otherwise normal weekday in May 2016, the Head of Video at *Mirror Online* called me to see if I could get down to a sinkhole in Charlton, near where I lived in Greenwich, south east London, to take some video. This particular sinkhole had made the front page of the *Evening Standard* the night before, as it had opened up underneath a car, which had half-fallen into it. I arrived at a scene that was mostly taped-off for safety reasons. Many journalists had beaten me



there. A lot of them brought impressive broadcast kit from their newsrooms. I was going to use my phone.

One journalist walked past me, saying that he was going to head into the graveyard of the church by the sinkhole, and get better shots from there. I did the same, stepping up onto a small brick wall to take pictures and video inside the hole. I could glimpse what was keeping the car half-out of the sinkhole – a large pipe it was balanced on – and I could also see the shimmering golden colour inside, the surprisingly beautiful shade of the clay soil under the streets of Charlton. I leaned over the graveyard fence and dangled my phone as low as possible to get as much footage as I could.

Other journalists spotted us and started making their way into the graveyard, so the police intervened and bundled us all out, warning that the flooding that had caused the sinkhole also caused regular problems in the churchyard. We could end up finding ourselves ankle-deep in a sodden grave. That was enough to get me to leave, struggling with the 3G that everyone else was using to send my pictures and video into the office.

It was thrilling to actually do some reporting, and to try to beat the other journalists by getting my exclusive multimedia in first. I'd accepted that this kind of thing wouldn't really feature in this job when I took on the role as trainer, but that was still one of the best mornings of my three years at Reach Plc. Imagine how deskbound digital journalists across the nation feel.

I meant to stay in that job for two years before going freelance, but I made it to three before redundancy came for me. After finding it hard to walk away from a salary, in April 2018 I found myself with a generous payout and a laptop. It was finally time to become a freelancer.

## The freelance leap

I had no illusions that writing consumer journalism could bring in enough income to sustain my life in London. Print is generally more lucrative than digital, but print titles are fast disappearing. So my life as a freelancer would have to involve balancing different kinds of jobs, and branching out from pure journalism. The training role really helped my transition into freelancing. As soon as I'd left my job, I had requests come my way, and they've never completely stopped. The early part of the pandemic this year was tough, as we all adjusted to Zoom, but since then, a lot of people have decided that learning media skills – especially podcasting – is a good use of their enforced indoor time.

Alongside training, making a successful podcast in my last role at the *Daily Mirror*, Black Mirror Cracked, played a large part in changing my career. The pod netted 20,000 downloads in its first week (with seven episodes), and 150,000 over the six months I worked on it before I was made redundant (I worked on the first 30 episodes). Those numbers led to me speaking about the podcast at several events over the summer after I'd left it behind at the *Mirror*.

I entered a new world where performance and personality mattered as much as the content, which isn't always so true with writing. I didn't realise that I had started building my personal brand. After speaking at a few conferences, one or two fans of the podcast would come up and chat to me as though they knew me, which showed me the power of audio, and convinced me that I should do more with it. I was asked a number of times if I'd tried stand-up, and a long-buried dream started to look more and more like something I ought to dig up.

We live in a world now where the means of publishing are available to anyone with a decent wifi connection. More and more people look to journalists to teach them how to use digital storytelling tools. This means that marginalised groups can circumvent the traditional gatekeepers to get themselves seen and heard. Lack of diversity in newsrooms and writer's rooms and other rooms that shape how we see ourselves and the world, is hugely problematic. It requires urgent solutions. Training helps open up an otherwise opaque world to aspiring creatives of all backgrounds.

I've given up on having a simple one-word job title like my parents did. Instead, I have freedom beyond their wildest expectations: the freedom to create, but also to fail. Is life better as a freelancer? I do prefer having the ability to mix up careers, and choose the job I take on. I haven't managed a great work-life balance, but then my professional writing is bound up in my personal life – just count the number of times I've used the pronoun 'I' in this essay.

When I write topical comedy now, my late father's love of journalism and politics comes to mind, and all those times he insisted that I watch *Have I Got News For You* with him. It's only recently that I've realised that he might have liked to do my job; but he lived in the wrong time.

In the last decades of the 20th century, the question of why there was no one who looked like him in newsrooms and writer's rooms and all those other rooms where our perception of reality gets made, simply wasn't asked. We've lost generations of talent as a result. We can't let that continue.

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### Representology takeaways

**While providing greater flexibility, freelancing in the media offers few certainties and little financial security. To better support freelancers, the industry should ask itself:**

- Can you help make the working conditions for freelancers more secure?
- Do you share access to information, courses, new technology and practice with freelance staff?
- Is there mentoring or other support available to help freelancers shape their 'brand'?

# THE FINANCIAL TIMES: NEW INITIATIVES TO ENGAGE WOMEN READERS

**K**esewa Hennessy, the *Financial Times*' digital editor for audience engagement, describes the newspaper's past struggles and current successes with understanding its women readers, exploring the benefits of digital tools as well as their limitations.



**The early, unofficial prototypes of the *Financial Times*' women subscribers' engagement projects were inauspicious. They started with women whispering in office kitchens about the urgent need for a more balanced output; with rudimentary spreadsheets comparing the number of women and men featured in bylines and skylines; and a legendary edition of the opinion page on which three of the four writers were white men called David (the fourth was a white man called Michael).**

The hope – back when this was still controversial (hence the kitchen-whispering) – was that data, however elementary, would call attention to the disparity in a way that simply saying that there was a clear imbalance hadn't. The hunch at the outset was that very 'male' coverage would be reflected in the make-up of the audience; and that a more balanced output would help broaden the subscriber base. Five years on, the *FT* has a company-wide goal of increasing women subscribers' engagement championed by editor Roula Khalaf;<sup>1</sup> a growing cluster of well established newsroom projects and processes aimed at doing just that, which I lead; and a steady rise in engagement.

The first official women's engagement experiment was launched in the newsroom in 2017: Project XX (named after the chromosome), where one story a day likely to be read by an above average percentage of our female subscribers was promoted high on the home page. Supportive senior editors, including Khalaf, then deputy editor, made it permanent after a trial showing clear engagement benefits. Our initiatives now range from dedicated promotion channels and targeted products that help ensure relevant content reaches the target audience, to editorial workflow systems and AI tools.

These initiatives, in all their disparate forms, broadly share the same simple goals. They're about increasing the engagement of our women subscribers, currently about 25% of the total – primarily by encouraging changes to both content and newsroom culture that will help the *FT* feel more relevant to a section of the audience who

are already signed up but significantly less engaged than men. In focus groups conducted a few years ago when data first confirmed the disparity, a majority of women explained that they found the tone off-putting. If the *FT* were a person, they said, it would be a man.<sup>2</sup> So we set a goal of changing women subscribers' perceptions — in the long run increasing their engagement and in turn building their loyalty. Internally, we want to learn more about what women subscribers consume and to encourage culture change to help us better meet their demands.

## Collecting the data

The initiatives share a few common features. First, they're all founded on models developed by our data science specialists that, since 2016, have informed us about what women subscribers read. The audience engagement team uses this information to develop and implement initiatives, tailored to *FT* newsroom culture, that help our journalists meet these readers' demands.

Our understanding of women subscribers' distinctive reading patterns is made up of several complementary metrics. More significant than high traffic (although, as with groundbreaking investigations into allegations of sexual misconduct in business like the Presidents Club scandal,<sup>3</sup> that is always welcome) is the percentage of women's page views for an average *FT* story. This gives us a benchmark against which to measure the popularity of topics, sections and, importantly, stories for this smaller section of the audience.

Close monitoring of 'over-indexing' stories (in practice, that's me staring at a dashboard of data every morning), more so than broader categories such as topics, has proved integral to how the projects work. It allows us to spot trends and share the information across the editorial and commercial parts of the business, informing departments from events to marketing. Crucially it also allows us to understand not just what has over-indexed but also to predict with confidence what will. It gives a fairly accurate feel for hard-to-quantify elements such as tone, too.

Within the *FT*, focusing on how individual stories fare means we can swiftly pick up on the distinctive ways women engage with new topics that dominate the headlines, such as coronavirus, the death of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter, and US president-elect Joe Biden and vice-president-elect Kamala Harris. This has practical value: for example, it helps us ensure headlines on these topics include keywords that reflect the aspects women are reading about.

Over the longer term, it helps us correct long standing misconceptions ('women don't read about "core *FT*" subjects'; 'men don't read about "soft" subjects'). We can spot unexpected patterns (the obscure corners of financial regulation that consistently over-index) and pinpoint newer ones (environmental, social and governance investing; the gig economy). It highlights the demand for stories long dismissed as 'niche' (workplace discrimination and diversity, managing childcare, femtech, the menopause) – and that the idea of



‘niche’ is itself a myth (over-indexing stories are always read by more men than women, including those on the beauty industry and, yes, the menopause). All told, this creates a more realistic picture of our audience as a whole.

## Interpreting the patterns

Externally, understanding these patterns helps us to change audience perceptions by promoting more of our relevant content. Alongside Project XX, dedicated promotion channels include Long Story Short, a weekly round-up email of the *FT*’s biggest stories and best reads. It’s curated by women journalists featuring stories popular with women in a format that women told us they liked. Neither the home page slot nor the newsletter is overtly branded ‘women’s content’ – women told us in customer research they didn’t want that – but they both receive above-average engagement from women.

Understanding these patterns means that, as well as changing perceptions through promotion, we can produce more relevant content. It broadens the range of commissioning options for editors and writers, for example. Information on what engages women is also included in the specifications of new editorial products, such as Climate Capital, a platform showcasing the *FT*’s coverage of climate change, business, markets and politics.

All these initiatives bring together expertise from across the business. Take November’s virtual Motherhood, Money and Making Career Moves talk. It’s our second event in partnership with Black Ballad, a British media platform featuring journalism for and by Black women. The project involves the *FT*’s live events specialists and the personal finance and podcast sections, as well as the audience engagement team.

To encourage our fellow journalists to take part in these projects, we emphasise how they help increase their audiences – in particular, the fact that more representative output can make your work more relevant to a wider audience. *FT* analysis shows women are more likely to read stories featuring women.

So, for example, many *FT* teams have volunteered to join the BBC-led 50:50 project, tracking the balance of women and men writers, experts and other contributors in their output. The long-term aim is for each desk to reach a roughly equal monthly ratio. Asking busy journalists to spend extra time filling in spreadsheets for little direct benefit is not the easiest sell. Yet many in editorial and beyond have already signed up – very often because they believe in the principle but also because it can help them reach more readers.

It may also seem counterintuitive to ask colleagues to count imbalances by hand when, like a lot of newsroom processes – including several of our *FT* experiments – this could be automated. Automation has proved useful in providing a macro-level picture of imbalances in output but we’ve also encountered limitations, including in-built bias. The 50:50 project has led a shift back to a more manual approach, closer to the kitchen-whisperers’ basic spreadsheet. This appears more effective as a way to raise journalists’ awareness of imbalances and encourage culture change. It’s easier to ignore a Slack channel quietly pumping out data

than a spreadsheet you fill in by hand after poring over quotes, pictures and bylines in your own stories.

What next? As we learn more about our target audiences, focus on new ones, and this year in particular respond to big news events, the strategy continues to evolve. We are investigating the longer-term effects of the coronavirus pandemic on women’s reading habits. We’ve focused specifically on American women during the election as part of a US growth strategy. And since the killing of George Floyd, plans to move beyond gender as we broaden our audience have gained momentum. I’m looking at what we can transfer from the women’s projects to help build a more ethnically diverse audience – expanding the 50:50 Project,<sup>4</sup> for example, and promoting through specific platforms, like Instagram – while acknowledging that it will inevitably require a significantly different approach.

And what about those who don’t wish to participate in such projects for whatever reason? Experience says time and energy is more efficiently spent working with those who do. Others will often join eventually – when critical mass is reached and/or when the benefits of participating clearly outweigh those of not doing so – and they’re always welcome. At the *FT*, as it turns out, there are enough people willing to take part to make it work.



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Kesewa Hennessy is the Financial Times' digital editor for audience engagement.

### Representology takeaways

#### Engaging with women readers begins with good data

- Don't ask permission, just start collecting data. Tracking by-lines and who is quoted in articles are good ways to get an initial indication of gender imbalances.
- Build momentum for change: harness the demand for more representative output that is likely to arise naturally in younger, more female and perhaps eventually, more racially diverse newsrooms.
- Find a few supportive senior editors willing to champion the cause.
- To build women readers' engagement, establish data models, set measurable company goals and lobby for dedicated newsroom resources, including for new roles.
- Focus on demonstrating, through data and research, the quantifiable costs of not evolving and the business benefits of making your newsroom's output more representative.







# ‘It ain’t half racist, mum’

Introduction by **K Biswas**

**In March 1979, BBC Two broadcast ‘It Ain’t Half Racist, Mum’. Produced for the BBC’s Open Door series, which gave marginalised groups access to the airwaves, it is notable for directly challenging the corporation itself, taking aim at the racism and stereotyping present in its comedy and current affairs programming.**

The half-hour show – made in association with the Campaign Against Racism in the Media – was fronted by cultural theorist Professor Stuart Hall and actor Maggie Steed. Shot like an everyday BBC newscast, the two anchors are sat at a desk speaking directly to camera, their words intercut with footage from popular 1970s television – highlighting the racial slurs concerning Britain’s minority communities present in family sitcoms, and primetime current affairs programmes giving platforms to nativist voices like Enoch Powell as experts in discussions around migration.

The BBC would subsequently apologise for the broadcast, believing the show to have been “injurious” to the “professional integrity” of such corporation heavyweights as Robin Day and Ludovic Kennedy featured in the programme. We include an edited transcript of the television essay here not as a historical artefact but to ask whether contemporary discourse about race in the media has sufficiently moved forward in the intervening four decades.

### Continuity announcer:

You're watching BBC2 and now, *Open Door*, a programme in which the BBC hands over airtime to members of the public to use under their own editorial control. Tonight, a programme made by Campaign Against Racism in the Media.

### Maggie Steed:

Hello. You may not have realised it, but you've just been warned about this programme. When the BBC says a programme like this is outside their control, what they are telling you is that they don't think it's balanced, neutral, or fair. We hope to show you that many of the programmes which are under the editorial control of the BBC, and ITV, are themselves biased and unbalanced – especially in the coverage they give to Britain's Black community. Not only is a lot of this coverage not neutral, it actually reinforces racism.

In the beginning, there was Lord Reith, the first director general of the BBC.

//

### Clip from Lord Reith Looks Back with Malcolm Muggeridge

#### Malcolm Muggeridge:

The interesting point, in terms of social history, is that this particular accent, which the BBC produced, somehow identified the BBC with a certain section of society and certain social trends, so that, to this day, the BBC is thought of as the organ of the – as it were – genteel and respectable elements in society.

#### Lord Reith:

Is there anything wrong with that?

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Clip from *It Ain't Half Hot, Mum*, with dialogue including 'the most awful Black in that village' and 'Get on with that punkah-ing you prize-eating berk'.

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### Stuart Hall:

A typical scene from a well-known comedy series. It's probably also fairly typical of what relationships were like between many white people and Asians during the days of the British Empire. Lazy, skiving natives locked in a deceitful battle of wits against Lord Reith's genteel elements of society.

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Clip from *It Ain't Half Hot, Mum*, in which officers agree not to give a pay rise to the lazy 'punkah wallah' for fear of affecting 'the whole structure of Indian society'.

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### Stuart Hall:

You may think it's a good thing the British are able to laugh at their own past, but the British Empire was no joke for those on the receiving end. It's because of the poverty the empire left behind that so many Asians and West Indians accepted invitations to come here after the war for work. So, it's a bit of a turn-up for the books that one of the commonest jokes about Asians in television comedy today is that they work too hard.

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Clips from *Mind Your Language* and *The Rag Trade* in which immigrant characters refer to working several jobs, being on the dole, and not knowing what unions are.

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### Stuart Hall:

So, stereotypes do affect people's lives. The trouble is that you can laugh at the joke and accept the stereotype at the same time. After all, the media don't only give us information about the world we live in. They also shape our attitudes towards it. And jokes can strengthen our prejudices even while we are laughing at them.

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Clip from *Edinburgh Television Festival Q&A*

### Humphrey Barclay (Head of comedy, London Weekend Television):

I don't think that series [*Mind Your Language*] is socially damaging. I hope it isn't. Otherwise, we really oughtn't to be doing it. But I think that what people get out of that is a lot of enjoyment. I don't think it's at the expense of the characters. I think there is a multi-racial community working in that classroom, at some level, which is enjoyable. Which may make people who are not members of any of those racial minorities friendlier towards the races they see portrayed there, without saying – when they meet an Indian in the street – 'Oh, he always talks like that and he's funny because he wears a turban.

//

### Stuart Hall:

Well, in the cosy atmosphere of Edinburgh, the television professionals may think ethnic humour about Blacks who work too hard, scrounge off the dole and live two families in a room, is just entertainment. The fact remains that, in Britain today, this is what most white people believe about Blacks. The fact that television is always making jokes about it makes them feel justified in despising Black people.



The comedy makes it okay, natural, acceptable. If you think this is an exaggeration, look at the way exactly the same attitudes dominate the outlook of serious television documentary makers when they deal with what they like to call 'racial problems'. For instance, when Philip Tibenham and the Tonight team went down to darkest Blackburn, they made a joke about Blacks and overcrowding the starting point of their investigation.

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Clip from *Tonight*

**Philip Tibenham:** Predictably, the Asian population has drifted into its own ghetto, sprawling on either side of a long road called Whalley Range. The standing local joke is for bus drivers to announce it as the Khyber Pass. But part of the problem in Blackburn is that some immigrants are on the move. This used to be a solid immigrant area, but it's been demolished under a slum clearance programme. That's meant that some Asians have spilt over into adjacent white, working-class areas, and there are those who don't like it one bit.

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### Stuart Hall:

This *Tonight* report and *Mind Your Language* both start from the same assumption: the problem isn't the hostility which Asians face when they move out of the ghetto, but the fact that they are 'spilling out' into adjacent white working-class neighbourhoods. Blackburn's problem is that immigrants are on the move.

//

Clip from *Tonight*

### Philip Tibenham:

In political terms, it led to something quite startling for Blackburn. At the recent local elections in St Thomas's ward – normally regarded as totally safe for Labour – John Kingsley Read, chairman of the ultra-right-wing National Party, came top of the poll.

### Stuart Hall voiceover:

Here comes the John Wayne of racism, striding out of the west.

### Philip Tibenham:

For a man who didn't form his party until earlier this year, Kingsley Read's achievement has been remarkable, and no one questions that the success has been based on his open distaste for the coloured immigrants and his demands for their immediate repatriation

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### Maggie Steed:

When did building up a successful racist party become, in the BBC's language of neutrality, 'a remarkable achievement'? Can you imagine a report describing the rise of the Black Panthers as a remarkable achievement? Still, the cameras don't leave us in much doubt where Blackburn and Mr Read are concerned. Here he is again, shown as a respectable

politician hard at work in his front room, and he has a story to tell our reporter.

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Clip from *Tonight*

### John Kingsley Read:

I've got many, many complaints about immigrants taking the toilets out and actually parcelling up their excreta, et cetera, and sticking it in the back alleys.

//

### Maggie Steed:

Here, the freedom of the air is the freedom to allow unsubstantiated racist slander to pour out from the screen, over the audience. Now Mr Read has the reporter's ear. It's an intimate little scene. The attention he's getting from the reporter lends what he is saying credibility. When last did you see a Black person on television getting this undivided attention? Still, as every good BBC reporter knows, when racist allegations become too strong, even they have to counter them.

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Clip from *Tonight*

### Philip Tibenham:

Now, there are lots of disturbing things about this whole Blackburn situation. For example, we asked the local council if they'd investigate the allegations of smashed toilets, and pipes blocked by offal. And, after a thorough search, the health department came back with the answer that there is not a shred of evidence to support either of the stories.

//

### Stuart Hall:

I suppose, strictly speaking, this is the famous BBC balance and impartiality in action. Current affairs programmes aren't supposed to express a viewpoint. They have to be impartial. And when the allegations in that Blackburn programme got too outrageous, the reporter did tell us there wasn't a shred of evidence to support them. But formal balance is one thing, and the impression that strong images make is another. This isn't an accusation against a particular reporter. It's a question of how the media, as a whole, work; and of how television works on the audience. In those last extracts we had vicious allegations against Blacks made it a confidential and authoritative way, and denials tentatively made later by a reporter stumbling up a backstreet in Blackburn. Which do you think made the stronger, more memorable, impact? Even Philip Tibenham had to admit:

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Clip from *Tonight*

### Philip Tibenham:

The fact is that the Kingsley Read version has already gone into the mythology of Blackburn. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of people actually believe that it's true.

//

### Maggie Steed:

Yes, thanks to such stories, not thousands but millions now believe it – and television helped to make those myths believable.

**Stuart Hall:**

And somehow the myths keep creeping back into the programmes. TV reinforces those myths simply by using them as a colourful lead into the next race story – just ‘good, strong television’. In the next extract, our guide is not a racist politician but an expert, who wrote what is a supposedly impartial report for the police about young Blacks and crime in Birmingham. The expert, inevitably white, is an important figure in television documentary because he isn’t seen to take sides. He has the authority of ‘a man who knows’. The next documentary is from the award-winning *Shades of Grey* – listen to the way the expert’s piece to camera moves from one stereotype to another.

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Clip from *Shades of Grey*

**John Brown:**

Imagine young West Indians, perhaps born in the early 60s, come on to the labour market just at the worst time – a time of high unemployment, particularly for young people. Then they get perhaps involved with the police, in some act of minor delinquency. The police come round. The parents themselves get het up, reject their children, and this act of rejection is very common, in many ways. So, leaving their parents, they go and shack up with others of their kind, in squats or in communes. On the one hand, searching for purpose, searching for identity. On the other hand, perhaps involved more and more in criminality, acts of violence against the old and defenceless. It’s a terrifying scenario.

//

**Stuart Hall:**

It is indeed, but what’s really terrifying is the way the scene is being set. This is the archetypal picture. Black communities seen exclusively in terms of crime, unemployment, family breakdown, and problems. The problems are always explained by white experts.

**Maggie Steed:**

In fact, racism is a white problem. But, from Blackburn to Birmingham to Brent, wherever the television eye turns, it sees the same story.

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Clip from *Race – The Way We Live Now*

**Richard Lindley:**

Brent isn’t notorious for racial trouble like Notting Hill, for instance, though it is probably the Blackest borough in Britain. Of every ten babies born here, four are non-white. Bob Butterick lives on the huge Stonebridge estate. Here, white families are outnumbered three-to-one by Blacks. What is it that really upsets you about this estate?

**Bob Butterick:**

Well, it’s the vandalism, the noise. You come out of your street door, you ask them to be quiet in a nice way, and they just look at you: ‘Go in, you white trash.’

//

**Maggie Steed:**

Blacks may outnumber whites by three-to-one, but the BBC seem to have trouble finding them, since none on the estate are interviewed. The microphone is given to a white resident, and again the reporter lends a sympathetic, professional ear.

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Clip from *Race – The Way We Live Now*

**Bob Butterick:**

Out it comes, and afterwards people just use it as a dust hole.

**Richard Lindley:**

How do you know it’s Black children doing this?

**Bob Butterick:**

Because I look out the door.

//

**Maggie Steed:**

Would you call that convincing evidence? Was it substantiated by any of the Black residents on the estate? It would have been nice to know their view. Instead, we’re given a guided tour of the lift-shaft and more stories of excreta. White citizens though, are given the freedom to air their prejudices.

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Clip from *Race – The Way We Live Now*

**Richard Lindley:**

What’s it like to live here?

**Unnamed Resident 1:**

Absolute hell.

**Unnamed Resident 2:**

Bloody awful.

**Richard Lindley:**

Are whites going?

//

**Maggie Steed:**

This is a programme where the Black majority, who are said to be the problem, are invisible; and the whites, who are having the problem, hold the camera. No one questioned whether you only find run-down condition and social problems on housing estates where Blacks are in the majority. It isn’t only what the media say, it’s what they don’t say but take for granted.

**Stuart Hall:**

Whenever Whenever programmes are made about Blacks, the starting point is always numbers. And there is nothing that factual television loves so much as a good solid number, unless it’s a comparison between two numbers and a bit of zappy graphic work.

//

Clip from *Race – A Question of Numbers*

**Charles Wheeler:**

Because dealing with large figures is notoriously muddling, we’ve devised a way of illustrating numbers. We’re taking Wembley stadium as a symbol to represent 100,000 people. Now, how big is Britain’s non-white population? According to government figures, 1,800,000. That’s the reality.

//

**Maggie Steed:**

So, now it’s not just streets full, or rooms full, of Blacks. They are counting them in stadiums. What other social group would the media dare to count in that way? Jews, Catholics? How many Wembley stadiums of Australians, Canadians, or white Rhodesians do you think there are in Britain today? Of course, a number is a fact, and current affairs



television loves a fact – because you can't quarrel with it. It must be true. Can you remember, as a matter of fact, how many Wembley stadiums the Blacks and Asians filled up?

//

Clip from *Race – A Question of Numbers*

### Charles Wheeler:

Now, for the public perception. Of those in our sample willing to make an estimate, two-thirds thought there were more non-whites in the country than there actually are. As many as 14% overestimated wildly and thought the number of non-whites has reached 10 million or more.

//

### Stuart Hall:

Perhaps we get our numbers wrong because we get a steady diet of documentaries from Blackburn, Birmingham and Brent on the so-called immigration problem. Of course, as soon as you say numbers, it doesn't matter how you wrap it up. There is only one lesson to be drawn: the numbers are growing, there are too many of them. Here's something better than a number: a number plus an expert.

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Clip from *Race – A Question of Numbers*

### Charles Wheeler:

To do this, we've commissioned a special assessment by a man who has no political axe to grind, who is not involved with race relations, or with the government.

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### Maggie Steed:

So, that's real neutrality for you. But what's his story? He's a population statistician.

//

Clip from *Race – A Question of Numbers*

### Professor William Brass:

The fertility consequences can be seen much more clearly if we have a look at the completed family sizes.

//

### Stuart Hall:

But the main reason the fertility expert's on the programme is because he knows how fast people breed. He lends an air of authority to the numbers game and, where Blacks are concerned, the only problem is: how many of them are there going to be?

//

Clip from *Race – A Question of Numbers*

### Charles Wheeler:

Which leaves the major question of Asian fertility.

### Professor William Brass:

The Asians are the significant factor in the future change.

//

### Maggie Steed:

Let's give the media the benefit of the doubt. Just suppose the aim of that programme was to debunk the myth about Black numbers. In fact, if you always only talk about Blacks in relation to numbers, the audience cannot help but think that that must be the problem. The possibility that the problem might lie with white society is never considered. There is only an inch or two of film between those absurdly scientific Wembley stadiums and the emotive

**No one questioned whether you only find run-down condition and social problems on housing estates where Blacks are in the majority. It isn't only what the media say, it's what they don't say but take for granted.**

language of the racists about Britain being swamped by people of an alien culture. And, if numbers is the problem, then repatriation must be the answer.

### Stuart Hall:

Whether you like it or not, that's a racist logic. That's what the emotive language of British racism feeds on: immigrants equal Blacks, equals too many of them, equals send them back. This chain of reasoning has dominated the so-called immigration debate at least since 1968, when Mr Powell first stated the so-called facts and drew the deductions about Black people in Britain. Here he is, being interviewed with great reverence by that well-known Canadian immigrant, Professor Robert McKenzie.

//

Clip from *Race – A Question of Numbers*

### Professor Robert McKenzie:

Mr Powell, we're here in the room in which you made your most famous speech, probably, on immigration in 1968. Now, the campaign to restrict immigration had been under way from the mid-50s...

//

### Maggie Steed:

Now, after a decade of saturation coverage like that, Powell and his views have been made respectable by television. It's not just that, whenever the media debates race, they turn to Powell. The fact is that the debate starts from Powell's racist chain of reasoning..

//

Clip from *Race – A Question of Numbers*

### Enoch Powell:

We'll either have gone, or we'll slip out from under somehow.

### Charles Wheeler:

A harsh prediction from Enoch Powell. Is he right or wrong? And is it a matter of figures? Tonight, we're going to examine the number of non-white...

//

### Maggie Steed:

Powell is now the media's superstar on race, and everybody defers to his opinion as if it were gospel truth. He defines the terms. He sets the agenda. He's helped to ensure that the question is the question of immigration.

//

Clip from *The Question of Immigration* debate, featuring Enoch Powell, and described in Stuart Hall's voice-over as 'the big prestige media production on race relations. For its 90 minutes, it was obsessed by the questions of numbers and repatriation.'

//

### Stuart Hall:

As soon as you start defining Black issues in terms of numbers and repatriation, you play straight into the hands of extremist racist groups with their solution of forced repatriation. And, in recent months, the media's given increasing airtime to these racist groups. This is a change in BBC policy from the days of Sir Hugh Greene. He said the BBC couldn't be neutral between racism and anti-racism. The present chairman of the BBC, Sir Michael Swann, thinks otherwise:

### Voice-over:

'I believe it is vital to display the rhetoric of the National Front ... Who knows, exposure may even persuade them to alter their tune.'

**Stuart Hall:** What he's really saying is that extreme racists have become part of balance – an acceptable point of view within the spectrum of political opinions. Can you imagine the media displaying the rhetoric of, say, Black revolutionaries, on the grounds that exposure may even persuade them to change their tune? Well, displaying the rhetoric of the National Front has now become a respectable studio chat between two white equals, allowing the racists to spell out their propaganda to millions.

//

Clip from *Tonight* interview with Martin Webster

### Ludovic Kennedy:

You have a plan, which you've already mentioned to me – this comes out of your policy document – of advising 'the repatriation' – and I'm quoting now – 'by the most humane means possible, of those coloured immigrants already here, together with their descendants and dependents.' How many people is that?

//

### Maggie Steed:

There was no challenge there on what forcible repatriation actually means. How far away is this from a balanced discussion on whether to repatriate people by air or by sea? That interview continued in the same cosy vein with Webster, of the National Front, reminiscing unchallenged about his Nazi past. This next interview hardly exposes the rhetoric of racism any better. David Duke, of the Ku Klux Klan – wanted by the Home Office and the police as an illegal entrant – is actually in a television studio.

//

Clip from *Tonight*

### Denis Tuohy:

You are reported as having a message for the people of Britain. What is your message to the people of Britain, essentially?

### David Duke:

I think one of the main things is that they are not alone – that there are white people all over the globe that sympathise with them.

//

### Stuart Hall:

When last did you hear a television interviewer say: 'Mr Fidel Castro, I understand you have a message for the British people'? This isn't giving the racists enough rope to hang themselves with. It's allowing them to get away with murder, and all the time in the name of balance and good journalism. In the name of balance, the stronger racism becomes, the more airtime it gets.

### Maggie Steed:

And, in the name of balance – whatever that term may mean – you'd expect them to give equal treatment to the antiracists. So, take a look at these extracts from one of the few reports about the Anti-Nazi League, Britain's biggest anti-racist umbrella organisation.

//

Clip from *Tonight – Anti-Nazi League Report*

### Sally Hardcastle:

Using all the tricks of the advertising trade, the message of the league is: 'Anti-racism is good for you, it's got laughs, it's got style, you can even set it to music.' The league claims a membership of 30,000 and within that a complex network of small groups, actively selling its message. But do they really exist except on days like this, at free concerts? For example, it's difficult to actually meet a skateboarder against racism, or to find really dedicated followers who haven't just added one more protest slogan to a very long list. For the school kids alone, it's the first slogan they've adopted.

//

**Racism has never been put in a critical context by the media in this country. When it comes to fighting racism, the media are part of the problem. They perpetuate myths and stereotypes about Black people.**

### Stuart Hall:

So, fighting racism is seen as a con trick, using gimmicks to seduce naive schoolkids who don't really understand what racism is about. According to the *Tonight* film, the Anti-Nazi League is a cunning, manipulative organisation, little better than the racist forces they oppose. Here's the final message of this programme about people who are fighting racism.



//

Clip from *Tonight – Anti-Nazi League Report*

### **Sally Hardcastle:**

But how effective has the league really been? At a time when electoral support for the National Front has declined, violent racial hatred is increasing. There are daily assaults on Asians in London's East End and, just a few days ago in Bradford, a shotgun attack on an Asian restaurant. The badges and carnivals of the league have made no impact on the growing problem of hidden prejudice which prefers another kind of badge.

//

### **Stuart Hall:**

This film's story works to make the Anti-Nazi League ineffective. And, even with racism on the increase, there is little coverage of any other anti-racist organisations – the ones run by Blacks for themselves, for example.

### **Maggie Steed:**

We'd like to show you one more piece of humbug from the BBC's film about the Anti-Nazi League.

//

Clip from *Tonight – Anti-Nazi League Report*

### **Sally Hardcastle:**

But the league does boast a support we know it doesn't have. Its most controversial campaign is to get the National Front banned from television screens, and the league claims widespread support amongst broadcasting staff.

### **Maggie Steed voice-over:**

As a matter of record, Sally Hardcastle apart, a growing number of media workers are opposed to the National Front getting free airtime. And the report was wrong about the campaign, which is not to keep the National Front off the air, but against the kind of uncritical coverage we've seen earlier.

### **Sally Hardcastle:**

The executive of the National Union of Journalists has come out strongly against the 'Pull the Plugs' campaign, calling it censorship.

//

### **Stuart Hall:**

Well, let's talk about censorship. The BBC have effectively tried to censor the programme we're making today. The corporation's news department has denied us access to any of their material. Independent Television News and many commercial companies have been similarly obstructive. Why this interference? Here's what the BBC's head of news, Alan Protheroe, said about the issue at a committee meeting of news and current affairs editors.

### **Voice-over:**

'Why should an organisation, the Campaign Against Racism in the Media, which might well accuse myself and my staff of racism, be given privileged treatment?'

### **Stuart Hall:** Why indeed?

But is it a privilege to try and deal, in half an hour, with literally thousands of hours of television broadcast each year? And who is really privileged when the news is above criticism? Here's the justification of the ban given us by the BBC's chairman, Sir Michael Swann:

### **Voice-over:**

'We are not prepared to release news film to fulfil an avowedly partial purpose unless we are totally reassured about the context and form in which it is to be used.'

### **Stuart Hall:**

Our concern in this programme is that the unavowedly, but dangerously, partial attitudes of the BBC should not be placed above suspicion. Racism has never been put in a critical context by the media in this country. When it comes to fighting racism, the media are part of the problem. They perpetuate myths and stereotypes about Black people. They lie by omission, distortion and selection. They give racists inflated importance and respectability. In this half-hour programme we haven't even touched on foreign coverage, the whiter-than-white coverage of the police, the employment of Blacks in television, Black culture, or news bias in press and TV. We believe these issues should be raised in mainstream television programmes, but will they be?

## **Representology takeaways**

### **Challenging media output can help to enrich media diversity**

- Revisiting past attempts to analyse media diversity can help us better address the same issue today.
- Questioning who is given a media platform and how their comments can be countered has contemporary resonance.
- It is vital that media organisations continue to broadcast or publish challenges to their own output.







BOOK REVIEW

# How to change it

by  
**Joshua  
Virasami**

**Kimberly McIntosh**  
finds a lot to  
recommend in this  
practical guide to  
protest and  
campaigning written  
by a seasoned Black  
Lives Matter,  
Extinction Rebellion  
and Occupy activist.

**2020 is the year that politics engulfed us – all of us – and not only those whose lives have always had a political edge. For people whose economic precarity has hemmed them in, whose skin colour has marked them out, who have been disabled by their environment rather than their impairments – the sharp end of laws, policies and public attitudes have long-caused pain and injury. But this year, a pandemic came and was experienced by everyone, although it hasn't affected everyone equally.**

This is the field in which the book, *How To Change It: Make a Difference* by Joshua Virasami finds itself landing, as one of a series of 12 pocket-sized, practical guides published by Stormzy's Merky books imprint. Virasami encourages readers to campaign strategically. Across three sections, he calls on us to 'educate, organise, agitate': to educate ourselves on the structural causes of injustice, to map our allies, targets and opposition, and then to deploy the tactics needed to win. Each section comes with a curated playlist to complement the content and contextualise the arguments they make.

Virasami was, and is, part of a number of left-wing groups including Occupy London, Black Lives Matter UK, and the London Renters' Union. As a result, this book is unashamedly left-wing and wears its politics openly. That's not to say it doesn't have range. Virasami uses a diverse set of topics, tactics and places, including the campaign to end the *Sun's* Page Three, Gina Miller's Brexit legal challenge, and the 2011 revolution in Rojava, Northern Syria, to illustrate his points. The research is thorough, with footnotes and call-out boxes used generously to explain theories, ideologies and lesser-known figures. But the movements and thinkers that anchor his arguments – like Frantz Fanon, Paolo Freire, Rosa Luxemburg and Antonio Gramsci – were Marxist theorists. This could be seen as political bias. In actuality, it's an indication and indictment of how little space competing ideologies have given to the global fight for intersectional justice.

'There are no new ideas, just new ways of giving those ideas we cherish breath and power in our own living,' American writer and poet Audre Lorde told an audience at Harvard University in 1982. In *How to Change it*, the importance of learning from the past is central to its thesis. The book is at its strongest when it links historical movements and the tactics they employed to current ones. 'It is mass organising that won many nations' independence from European imperialism in the first half of the twentieth century, just as it is organising that won universal suffrage and the eight-hour working day,' Virasami writes. Lessons from the US Civil Rights movement and the Awami Workers Party in Pakistan become the underpinnings of the London Renters' Union's strategy.

**'When we rage, it's because something we love is being lost. Potential is being lost. Opportunity for joy, for happiness, is being lost. [But] we always need to remember what we love, and to celebrate that, as well as the rage.'**

Change on the scale of say, US civil rights can feel exceptional and thus unattainable. *How to Change it* looks beyond the famous speeches and mass demonstrations, takes a bird's eye view and invites readers to ask: How did that all come together? Ordinary people made it happen. And a strategic confluence of approaches got it done – leaders organised in their communities to mobilise people en masse whilst

advocates pressured the people with power. In the chapter 'Form a Strategy', Virasami uses practical exercises to push two key messages: that successful movements are intentional and well-planned, but we're all capable of creating that strategy for change if we have the right tools.

## Learning from failure

Without strategy, tactics fall flat. But mistakes are where learning happens and *How to Change it* is willing to use examples of where movements didn't get it right. Virasami uses the follies of groups he was part of, such as Occupy London and the London Black Revolutionaries, as cautionary examples of how promising collectives can fizzle out when direct action

is seen as the end instead of the means. This raises an interesting question: what does successful direct action look like? In 'Get Protesting', a Black Lives Matter protest at London City airport is used as an example of a successful action. In September 2016, nine white allies of BLM UK blocked the runway in protest at 'airport expansion, climate crisis, the hostile environment and environmental racism'. The action garnered much media



attention, and '[we] were suddenly an unavoidable topic of conversation on radio shows and TV programmes around the country,' Virasami writes. It was well-received at the time by environmental activists<sup>1</sup> and followers of BLM UK on social media, but not by racial justice campaigner Stafford Scott nor the Black holidaymakers interviewed by the Guardian whose trips were disrupted. It got the issues discussed, but did it advance the aims of the movement? That depends on your aims and intended audience. This tension that exists between passive allies isn't explored.

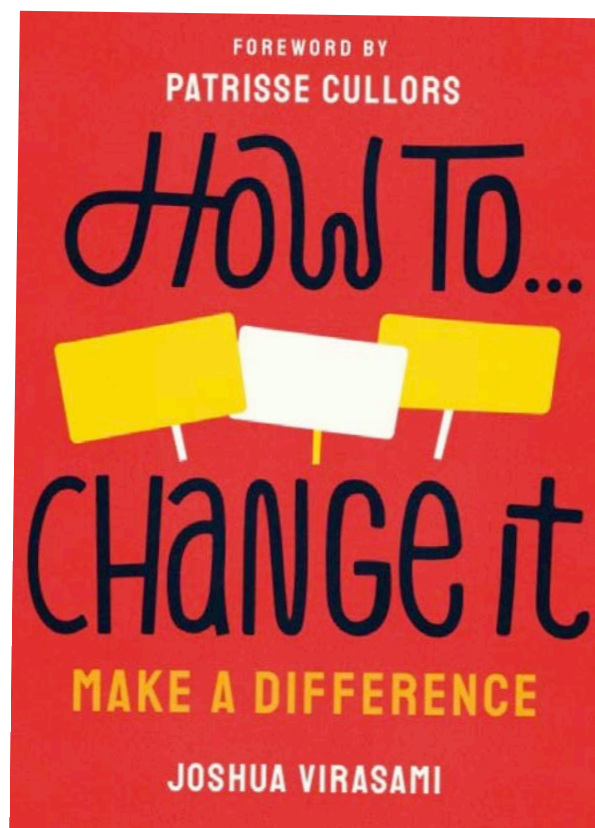
Nevertheless, representing your supporters and starting a high profile conversation in their name matters. Because having the inequity you face affirmed, having the language to describe it and the theory to explain it, is a key access point for organising. Throughout the book, Virasami successfully uses examples from his personal life to illustrate how politics happens to people. He's been paid £3.77 an hour by a company where the CEO made £585,000 a year. He's been racially profiled in school and in shops, stared at in the British countryside, and stopped and searched by the police. These all have historic, structural causes and knowing this can be empowering. How to Change it sees consciousness raising via political education as vital for movement building and societal transformation. 'A political education ... enables the majority of us to read the world for what it is, and call bullshit,' Virasami

writes in chapter 8, 'Get Teaching'. He argues this education does not have to be formal. Film, television and music can all articulate the realities of injustice and its causes. Steve McQueen's BBC miniseries *Small Axe*, love letters to Black resilience and triumph and power of collective struggle, could serve as such an example.

Inequity and injustice has increased in salience. Covid-19 has made the mutuality of our lives clear: we are only as strong as the health and wellbeing of our most vulnerable neighbours. Concern for poverty and inequality in Britain has, according to Ipsos MORI, never been higher.<sup>2</sup> In June, Black Lives Matter protests resurged across the United States and Europe, making the efficacy of mass movements clear. And the slapdash response of many universities to the pandemic has energised students, who are using direct action and even rent strikes to protest their living and working conditions. The time for new visions is now. How to Change it is a useful guide for those new to activism who are interested in channelling their anger and discontent into something meaningful.

'Rage needs to be twinned with love,' Virasami told broadcaster Dotty Charles while discussing the book. 'When we rage, it's because something we love is being lost. Potential is being lost. Opportunity for joy, for happiness, is being lost. [But] we always need to remember what we love, and to celebrate that, as well as the rage.'

In a year that has been bleak for many, let's use rage to fight for a world filled with potential and joy.



**Kimberly McIntosh is a journalist and policy researcher on poverty and race.**


***How To Change It* by Joshua Virasami is out now on Merky Books.**

## References

1. Grierson, Jamie et al (2016) Nine Black Lives Matter protesters arrested after City airport travel chaos, Guardian, 6 September. Available online at <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/sep/06/nine-black-lives-matter-protesters-arrested-amid-city-airport-travel-chaos>, accessed on 30 November 2020
2. Ipsos MORI Research Highlights, 20 November 2020. Available online at <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/ipsos-mori-research-highlights-20-november-2020>







# PROTECT the ones YOU LOVE

**By Dr Erica Gillingham**

I'm going to wear a face mask, so  
I'll make it ice cream patterned.

I'll make it as bold as can be,  
one that screams 'lick' & 'fun'.

I'll make it blue & yellow  
& orange & pink –

all the flavours of bubble gum  
ice cream, the kind I ordered as a kid

at Lorde's Ice Cream Parlour  
before I ate my mom's instead.

I'll make it hot like all the summer  
afternoons spent by the river

at our favourite swimming hole,  
before piling into the back of the truck

to stop by Dotty's for a sweet treat after,  
the whole family taking up the picnic table.

I'll make it bright & sparkling, like all  
times we marked out celebrations:

my brother's graduation,  
the news of an engagement,

a casual stroll with my missus  
through Soho on a Tuesday evening,

before our world turned like an upside-down  
ice cream cone & love alone could not protect us.

Dr Erica Gillingham is a queer poet, writer, and  
bookseller with a PhD in Young Adult Literature.



# REPRESENTOLOGY RECOMMENDS





To round off our inaugural issue, journalist, broadcaster and senior lecturer **Marverine Duffy** picks five things to read, watch or listen to when you are feeling inspired to learn more.

## Read

**The Good Immigrant**, edited by Nikesh Shukla. Although four years old this collection of essays is still relevant (Unbound, 2016).

### **Loud Black Girls: 20 Black Women Writers Ask: What's Next?**

Yomi Adegoke and Elizabeth Uviebinené, authors of the acclaimed *Slay in Your Lane: The Black Girl Bible*, invite the next generation of Black women in Britain – authors, journalists, actors, activists and artists – to explore what it means to them to exist in these turbulent times. With a foreword by Bernardine Evaristo, the 20 essays offer funny, touching and ultimately insightful perspectives on the question of 'What's Next?' (Fourth Estate, 2020)

### **The Digital Lives of Black Women in Britain**

is a new book by Francesca Sobande from Cardiff University. Based on interviews and archival research, it explores accounts of 20th-century activism and television representations, to experiences of YouTube and Twitter. Sobande's analysis traverses tensions between digital culture's communal, counter-cultural and commercial qualities. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)

### **'Representations of British Chinese identities and British television drama: mapping the field'**

is a 2019 article by Simone Knox from the University of Reading. Informed by an understanding of the complexity of the term 'British Chinese', it draws on a database that deploys a range of research, including archive research at the BFI Reuben Library, to map the presence of British Chinese actors in British television drama since 1945. (Journal of British Cinema and Television Vol. 16, Issue 2, 2019. Available online at [eupublishing.com](http://eupublishing.com)).

### **Afropean – Notes from Black Europe**

by Johny Pitts. The television presenter, writer and photographer travels through Europe, exploring the experiences of the African diaspora. Winner of the 2020 Jhalak Prize. (Penguin, 2020)

## Watch

Steve McQueen's highly anticipated **Small Axe** collection of five films hit our screens in Autumn 2020. Set in the late 60s through to the mid-80s amongst the West Indian communities of London, the films are a celebration of Black joy, beauty, love, friendship, family, music and food. Watch on BBC iPlayer.

### **Mission: Accessible.**

Comedian Rosie Jones is on a mission to help disabled people plan fun-filled adventures. With her comedian pals in tow, Jones visits places across the UK to compile a guide to the accessible British vacation. Watch on All 4 or YouTube.

**CripTales:** Launching the series celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Disability Discrimination Act, director and disabled actor Mat Fraser said: 'Disabled voices have been shut out of mainstream TV drama for too long and this is a chance to showcase some of the wonderful, inventive, funny, dramatic, sexy and sobering potential available.' Watch on BBC iPlayer.

Why just read about Charlene White's attempt to tackle racism in children's programming (see page 10) without watching the very show itself: **IRL with Team Charlene** on ITV Hub.

### **Rap Trip: Underground Scenes Uncovered**

is a BBC series looking at where rap music flourishes outside of London. There are episodes on 'The rise of Asian Rap', 'Liverpool Rap, Drill and Trap', and 'The New Wave of Irish Rap'. Watch on iPlayer.

## Listen

**Unchained.** Brenda Birungi, also known as Lady Unchained, is a poet and presenter for the Prison Radio Association. She was nominated in the Best New Voice category in the 2020 Audio Production Awards. The PRA made this documentary for Radio 4 which unlocks untold stories of women in prison, contains research from Women In Prison and is punctuated by Brenda's powerful poetry. Listen on BBC Sounds

BBC Asian Network is bringing back the hilarious podcast, **But Where Are You Really From...?**

There's the whole of series 1 to enjoy as well. Hosts Eshaan Akbar, Nim Odedra and Sunil Patel discover just how 'Desi' their guest are, through funny and revealing stories. Listen on BBC Sounds

**Chinese Chippy Girl** is a podcast about growing up British born Chinese. Dive into some superb episodes discussing growing up. Listen on Spotify or your usual podcast app.

### **Dope Black Dads and Dope Black Mums**

podcast. Marvyn Harrison has created a beautiful thing. What he and his network do in terms of bypassing gatekeepers and creating their own content is indicative of how Black, Asian and minority ethnic people are carving out spaces for their own authentic representation. Listen to Dope Black Dads and Dope Black Mums on Spotify or your usual podcast app.

**Matilda Ibini**, who describes herself as a bionic playwright, wrote one of the CripTales for the BBC, and in episode 9 of the Disability Arts Online and Graeae podcast she is interviewed about her work and storytelling. Listen on Spotify or your usual podcast app.

Marverine Duffy is on the editorial board of Representology.



**BIRMINGHAM CITY**  
University

**Professor Phillip Plowden**  
Vice-Chancellor  
Birmingham City University

Birmingham City University is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion, and we are delighted to be working with our wonderful Chancellor Sir Lenny Henry, and our friends at Cardiff University in launching Representology. 2020 has taught us a lot, not least that achieving and celebrating racial equality is long overdue.

As Lenny often says about his own career: "You can't be what you can't see." It's a hugely valuable principle in holding our own performance up to the light – both in terms of our own organisation, but also the way in which we deploy our expertise. We were founded in 1843 as a School of Design and that creative arts' heritage remains central to our university. And with over 50% of our students drawn from Black and Asian backgrounds across our city and our region, addressing racial imbalance in the arts has to be a key priority for us. This fresh and exciting journal was founded following discussions between BCU and Cardiff around the launch of a new research centre dedicated to

analysing diversity and representation across all forms of media. In March this year, BCU in collaboration with our Chancellor launched the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity.

The Centre believes that accurate representation of all sections of society in all layers of the UK media is vital for the health of the industry. This is crucial in ensuring a functioning democracy and enabling critical human rights issues, such as freedom of expression, to be truly implemented. The Centre aims to critically analyse policies in the media industry with a view to increasing diversity and inclusion, improving policy decisions and spreading best practice.

Inspired by the ethos of the Centre, Representology was born, giving a platform for discussions, research and insights into representation and equality across the sector. The collaborative nature of the project encapsulates the more holistic approach to tackling the problem of diversity in the media. Information, answers and fresh thinking don't belong solely to academia or the media industry. So the journal has

articles and research from both. In the launch edition, for example, there's an original piece of research conducted by a professional sound editor, mentored by an academic at our university.

BCU and Cardiff are passionately committed to making Representology available to a wide readership, so the emphasis is jointly on accuracy and accessibility. Written in plain language, and free to download, we want to open up this conversation to those who are best placed to inform real change.

Universities are a vehicle to enable transformation, and as such, it is our duty and our passion to actively promote social progress through learning, research, innovation and collaboration.





**Professor Colin Riordan**  
Vice-Chancellor  
Cardiff University

As is the case in many areas of society, the mainstream media often inadequately represent the diversity of the society they purport to reflect. Power structures, financial models and appointments to influential management and editorial positions all can and do militate against a representative media industry.

Representology aims to do something about that. Its guiding principles are an excellent model for all writers to follow, not just contributors to the new journal. In an era of profound public mistrust of public information — some of the mistrust well founded and some of it not — using simple, accessible language to reach as wide an audience as possible and attracting writers of proven expertise who use facts and evidence to start a debate or bring a fresh perspective is more important than ever.

The central guiding principle of embracing diversity in all its forms and in everything the journal does is of the utmost consequence. In universities, diversity brings creativity, new knowledge, new perspectives and ultimately new discoveries and fresh thinking. Diversity is nothing less than the driving force of knowledge creation, and new knowledge counts for little if it is not disseminated. Representology, then, captures the essence of what is required to take society forward and make the world a better place.

It's an honour to be able to partner with Birmingham City University in supporting and launching a new journal that tackles such an important topic. Bringing together a group of academics with a shared passion for diversity in the media, Representology marks a welcome new departure which, it is hoped, will find wider resonance throughout our academic disciplines.

This is a groundbreaking project that will celebrate and enrich the cultural industry as a whole, and will give a broader-based platform to a wider range of voices and views than we have seen up to now. In this way Representology addresses a problem that affects not only the media, but all of us, at a time when change is urgently needed.

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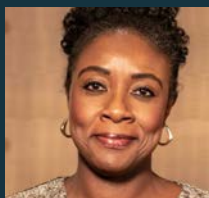
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# SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Article ideas should be submitted to:

**Representology@bcu.ac.uk**

**Please include** a two-line biography, including relevant links to past published work. Academic pieces will be reviewed by relevant experts and assessed by the editorial board.

**Representology** seeks to publish pieces from both academics and media practitioners, exploring complex issues in an accessible way. Before submitting anything for consideration, be sure you are familiar with our mission statement and guiding principles.

**Commissioned journalism pieces** should be between 500 and 2500 words

**Commissioned academic pieces** should be between 4000 and 8000 words

If we are interested in your pitch, we will contact you. Our editorial team is small, and it may take up to a month to receive a reply. Unfortunately, we are unable to reply to every submission. If you do not hear from us within a month, please assume that we have decided not to pursue your proposal this time. That does not mean we don't want to hear from you again in the future.

Articles are read on the understanding that they are solely submitted to **Representology**. Published articles will receive a modest honorarium.

## Five Guiding Principles For Contributions

1. **Clear language**  
Making content as widely accessible as possible, writing should be clear, concise and engaging.
2. **Expertise**  
Contributors are expected to write on subjects for which they have proven expertise.
3. **Supported by facts**  
Articles should be supported by verifiable facts and research-based evidence.
4. **Refresh debate**  
Submissions should seek to enrich current debates or create new ones.
5. **Diversity of perspectives**  
Preference will be given to writers seeking to widen representation and outline new perspectives.

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