Balancing Act: Lenny Henry and Clive Myrie on the BBC & public broadcasting | Maya Goodfellow and Alexandria Innes on Migration narratives in the news | Gaza: Doctors Under Attack producer Ben de Pear's Five Lessons for Broadcasters | Yvonne Singh on feminist pioneer Una Marson | Colin McFarlane's Windrush campaign | Eid Live | Discrimination in Post Production Sound & Screen Relationships with Higher Education | Ryan Gilbey on queer Black cinema | British Asian documentary futures | How to Stop Harassment in TV | Cultural highlights from Leo Robson & a short story from Brennig Davies

The Journal of Media and Diversity

Issue 08 Summer 2025

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.

BIRMINGHAM CITY University



Representology is a collaboration between Birmingham City University and Cardiff University

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to Issue Eight of Representology: The Journal of Media and Diversity.

A public conversation about the future of the BBC has begun. With the corporation's charter due for renewal in 2027, James Harding - ex Times editor, now 'editor-in-chief' at the Observer, and a former director of BBC news - delivered the MacTaggart lecture at August's Edinburgh television festival, calling for the broadcaster to be freed from political interference and emerge as a 'People's Platform'.

As "the most important source of information in this country", an editorially independent BBC is paramount, though this should go beyond the questions of "truth and accuracy, diversity of opinion and fair treatment of people in the news" that Harding mentions - additionally, we must ask which demographics get to make BBC shows and if Britain's diverse communities are sufficiently catered for

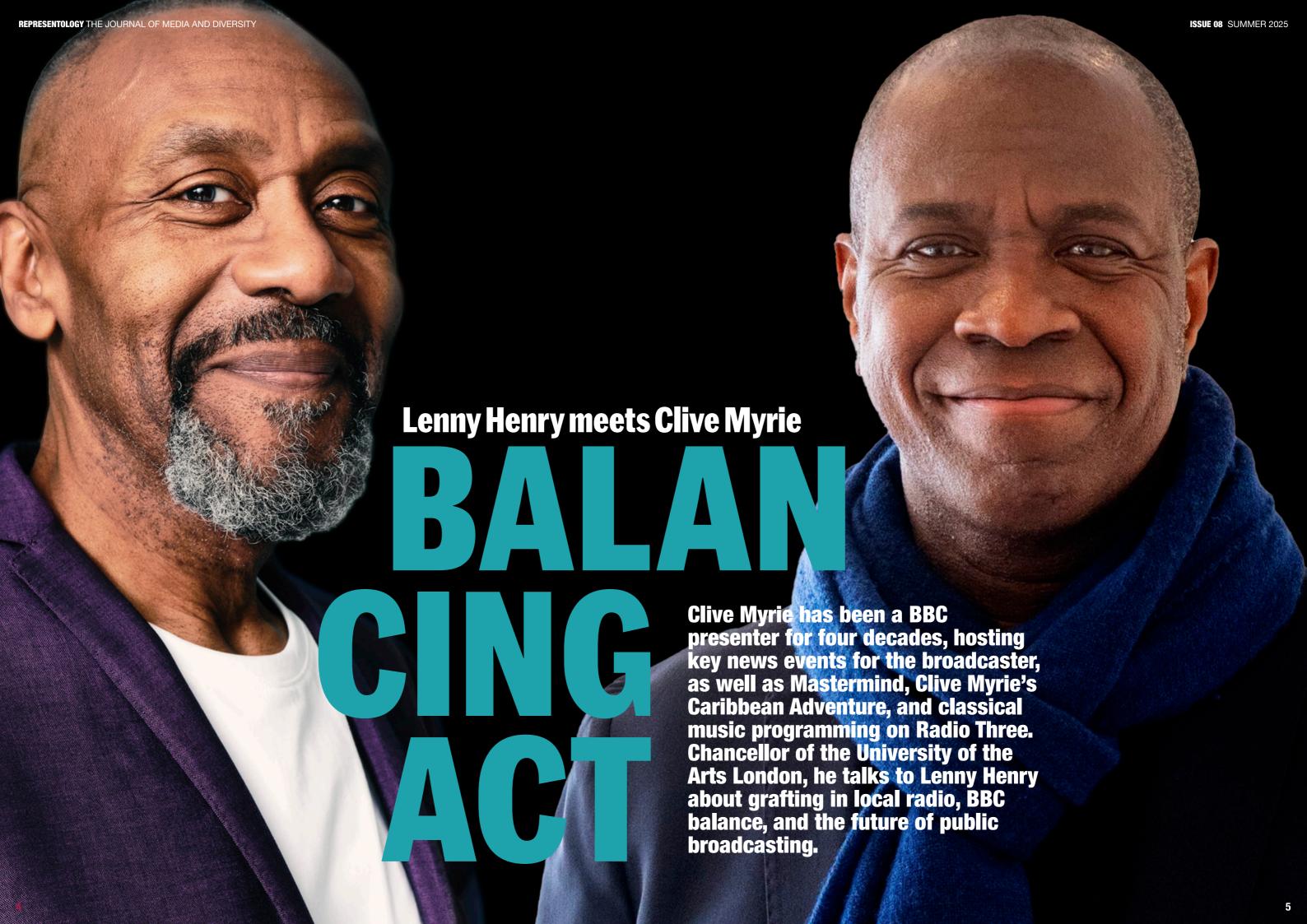
In this edition of Representology, Lenny Henry and Clive Myrie share with us what they feel 'BBC balance' really means; Yvonne Singh profiles the trailblazing Una Marson, the first Black woman employed at the broadcaster; Ben de Pear, whose documentary Gaza: Doctors Under Attack was shelved by the BBC before being broadcast on Channel 4, writes powerfully about coverage of the war in Gaza; while Aaqil Ahmed gives an account of how Eid prayers came to be transmitted from his local mosque in Bradford.

Elsewhere, we feature research around migration narratives, discrimination in post production sound and the screen industry's relationship with higher education, plus campaigns to stop harassment in television and find justice for the Windrush generation, as well as myriad creative offerings from the worlds of documentary film, queer cinema and narrative fiction.

While recognising that we cannot cover every argument and counterargument around media diversity in a single issue, Representology would like to commission as wide a range of viewpoints as possible. With this in mind, if you have any ideas for future articles, please email us at:

representologyiournal@gmail.com

K Biswas Editor



Lenny:

Growing up in Bolton - what was that like for you?

Clive:

Looking back on it, it was wonderful on many, many levels. I came from a loving family - strict dad, as West Indian dads are, and a mother who very much felt that if we were going to progress in this world, we had to knuckle down, study, work hard. You've got to be twice as good as the next white person, all that kind of stuff.

Lenny:

What did your dad do? What did your mum do?

Clive:

My dad worked in the local car factory making batteries He made batteries for British Leyland vehicles, and the factory was literally at the end of the road, so you'd hear the klaxon go off at six in the morning, and that was an extra alarm clock, with the one that was on the bedside table. Mum was a seamstress - a brilliant maker of all things. She made miniskirts for Mary Quant, shirts for Marks and Spencer. She made gabardine raincoats, the ones that Harold Wilson wore.

Lenny:

No way!

Clive:

She probably made Harold Wilson's, that's what I like to think. And the miniskirts Mary Quant herself wore.

Lenny:

Your mum sounds like a legend. My dad worked on a conveyor belt, I think, in a factory. Never talked about it when he came home.

Clive:

My dad did a little bit, you know. He talked about the other Black guys who were there who resented the fact that he knuckled down and worked. They saw him as a bit of a sellout.

Lenny:

My dad was a fast worker and he had a similar thing. "Why are you working so hard? Why are you going so quickly? You're making us look bad". So, when you were a kid, what were you enjoying in terms of television and radio? Did you listen to the radio in your house?

Clive:

The radio less - television, absolutely. So, it would be the news.

Lenny:

Get out of here! You were watching Thunderbirds like the rest of us, Clive.

Clive:

I watched all that too. I loved Sesame Street. I watched the news because we had to. Dad would be there at 10 o'clock - had to watch it and it was Ten O'Clock News on ITV, not the Nine O'Clock News on the BBC. BBC - bit posh, bit distant, bit not for us. It was, it was Alastair Burnett, it was Sandy Gall, it was Trevor McDonald. It was those guys.

Lenny:

Reginald Bosanquet. How old do you think you were when you were sat there watching the news with your family?

Clive:

Seven, eight, nine, ten.

Lenny:

Did your mum and dad explain stuff to you?

Clive:

There was a lot of commentary. And he'd rant a little bit, and I have found myself doing a similar sort of thing sometimes. I'll be sitting at home watching the TV now and I'll be ranting along just like my dad.

Lenny

What was your first job in journalism?

Clive:

The first job in journalism was writing little articles for a magazine called Black Beauty and Hair. It was at a time when you'd have all the fashion stuff - all the Black beauty and all the hair - but every now and again, they'd have a hard hitting look at student life in Brighton for Black people. Or the latest on SUS laws, and I would do the odd contribution to that. I was also working free of charge for BBC Radio Brighton, as it was then - a contact programme between the University of Sussex, where I studied, and the BBC. A show called Turn It Up, looking at student news, bands, issues with unemployment - the kind of thing that young people might be interested in.

Lenny:

When you were starting out, did you experience diversity in news and current affairs programming, or see anybody else that looked like you when you were working?

Clive:

I won't say no one, but very, very few. But my whole life had been, up to university, existing in that kind of dynamic. I went to a very old-fashioned grammar school Most of the other Black people who were there were my brothers and sisters, which was interesting.

Lenny:

You don't mean that in a 'right on' sense. You mean, literally, they were your family,

Clive:

There were others too. I mean, I exaggerate, but it was a very small coterie of Black people. There were more brown people - the big Black population in the 70s and 80s in the northwest wasn't in Bolton - this little, you know, mill town. It was across the way, in Moss Side, in Manchester. Yeah. Do you think so? So I grew up in an atmosphere surrounded by mainly white people.

Lenny:

I remember going to work at the BBC - I was 16 in 1975/76 – and literally, there were, like, two or three people who looked like me working there. Do you think more diverse faces on television directly contributes to less racism in Britain? If I'm young, watching you on Mastermind, on the news and in your documentaries, there's a reassuring thing about you doing those shows.

Clive

I hope so. I haven't looked into it, but I'd like to think that there is a correlation. When you were on the box when I was a young man, I was looking at you and Trevor. You'd like to think that would suggest that we are part of the fabric of society - that there's nothing to be scared of or worry about.

Lenny

When I was on Three of a Kind, we did a nativity play, and somebody wrote to the producer and said an offensive thing about me - as a Black person, satirising the story of Jesus and nativity. Very innocent sketch. The producer wouldn't show it to me because we had quite a good run where there was very little stuff about being Black.

Clive:

How did you feel about that?

Lennv:

I was upset that he'd received an offensive letter but, in the end, we were getting eight/nine million viewers a week and we were just winning. So it felt like that was in a minority, but it did hurt me - sometimes these things hit you from the side.

Clive:

That's so true and I've felt the same way. There's the odd email, the odd letter that comes in and gets past the BBC vetting system, and I open it and it's a card with a gorilla on or whatever. I used to get angry. I used to feel very down about it.

Lenny:

I wouldn't know you were angry. When I've interviewed you, I get a sense of a very strong man who knows what his job is - you know what your career is, and you know what you're trying to achieve, and you wouldn't let your personal anger get in the way.

Clive

Not get in the way of the story but, at the same time, racism and the issue of perceived superiority from one race to another and the sense that Black people might be looked down upon is not my problem. It's what Toni Morrison says about

willing to allow the level of melanin in my skin to affect the way that you think about me - that's your issue, not mine. As I've got older, the racism that I get - the small amount that I get - it bounces off a little bit more quickly than it used to as a young guy.

Lenny:

Good. What key changes have you seen taking place at the BBC over the past three decades or so?

Clive:

In thirty plus years, with no more than eighteen months outside the BBC, I've always seen the BBC try to appeal to mass audiences and give the public not just what it

was looking at you and Trevor McDonald. You'd like to think that would suggest that we are part of the fabric of society - that there's nothing to be scared of or worry about.

white America needing one huge 'shrink session', you know what I mean?

I just happened to be born Black. If you've got a problem with me, that's your problem, not my problem. I shouldn't even worry about it. I shouldn't let it grate on me. It is your problem. It's your headspace that needs sorting out, not mine. Now, it can become a problem if society takes on racist attitudes and discriminates and whatever. That's how it becomes a problem for me and for other Black people.

But, ultimately, if you are

wants, but also what, one might argue, society needs.

Lenny:

Reithian values.

Clive:

Values - and some can argue that those are liberal values; some can argue that they might be 'small c' conservative values. but that sense that the BBC is for everyone, and that we're all human beings on this planet, just trying to make a buck and just trying to survive. And, you know, the first gay kiss on television - BBC, Eastenders. The next day, it

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was the popular press that said it was a disgrace. Now, we've got gay marriage, more Black representation, more women in positions of influence. The wholesale presentation of women's sports, the importance of getting the Euros out there as well as the men's Euros - and it's why some in the right-wing press don't like it.

Charter renewal 2027. What's the role going forward that public broadcasting can play in modern Britain?

It's even more vital now than ever. In a world of fragmented media, where people can get their own points of views reinforced, where they're not challenged, where they can be comfortable in their silos, an organisation - a media entity that is trying to duly report, impartially, what is going on in the world is more vital than ever. At the same time, we are existing in a media ecosystem where people can also buy what they want. And there's a sense that, well, if you're having to pay a licence fee for this service, why is that still allowed to happen? In an age where you can get Netflix - get this, that and the other - why is it you're being forced to pay this tax. I can see the BBC trying to move to different subscription model ways for certain bits of the output. Already, I think we've just announced that you're going to have to pay for iPlayer if you're living in the US. That kind of thing I can see developing a little bit more. However, I think the role of the BBC is now more vital than ever in an age of disinformation and downright lies.

Lenny:

How do you catch those eyeballs? It seems to me a reengagement with young people needs to happen. Possibly the only way to do that is to engage in the digital space, rather than in the linear space.

Clive:

Yeah, that's absolutely right. And the BBC is making efforts to do that with the iPlayer, with BBC News on demand on your phone, smart speaker, tablets, all that kind of stuff. But the thing is, it's a universal tax, the licence fee - everybody pays it, so you can't just reach out to young people and forget the oldies, because they're all paying taxes, and that's the problem.

One thing that marks the BBC out as an amazing organisation in terms of its media output and its programming is Radio Three. You're going to be challenged on your classical music loves. You're going to be given new ideas about classical music, not just the traditional sort of stuff that you might get on other broadcasters. There is a need for that. I think that our horizons are broadened and that our minds are opened up a little bit, and the BBC can offer that, as well as Strictly, as well as Mastermind, as well as all the other popular stuff.

Lenny:

I see you plugged your own thing there, I'm pretty sure you've got your eyes on Strictly - I've seen you dancing. Now, you anchored election night coverage in both the UK and US elections - in a polarised world, do you feel under more pressure than ever to cover politics in a balanced way?

Clive:

No. It's not more pressure than ever, because it's what we've always done. The fact is, the BBC hasn't changed - it's the whole of the rest of the world that has changed, in terms of how you get your news and what the news provides. That's what's really interesting and the BBC, frankly, it looks anachronistic. "Balance. what's that?" It's like wearing flares from the 1970s, it's like wearing kipper ties. It's old-fashioned.

Lenny:

Particularly with American news, or subscriber-led news, this idea that 'news' should be inflected with the opinions of the broadcasters. Whereas, actually, the idea of trying to be balanced, it does look old-fashioned.

Clive:

Absolutely, it's incredibly old-fashioned. What we do is look at the evidence. We talk to both sides. We give due impartiality so it's not just 50-50. It's giving the right amount of weight to the argument, and putting those points of view across.

Lenny:

So that you can make up your own mind.

Clive:

And you're fully informed, and you're listening to other arguments. You're not just wandering around in your own silo. And that's the thing - it's the rest of the world that has revolved around the BBC and moved around the BBC. The BBC hasn't changed. I don't feel any more pressure than I did when I joined the BBC 30 years ago. Our role has become even more important because the world has changed so much.

Lenny:

Do you think the BBC has a mission to reclaim trust from its audiences?

Clive:

Yeah, I think so. Look, if you're on one side of a debate and you feel passionately about that, you don't want to hear the other side. No matter how valid their argument might be in the abstract, you don't want to hear it because you've got your point of view, and you can go to any website that gives you that point of view again and again and again and again. You do not want impartiality. Lots of people today aren't interested in impartiality. They might arque, in the abstract, that they do, but they don't. They want propaganda. They want their own point of view pushed forward. It's the same on the right, the left, Israel. Palestine. Russia. Ukraine. They want their own point of view. They don't want impartiality.

I remember I was covering the 2019 election, and I travelled all over the country for the Six and Ten O'Clock News talking to ordinary people, ordinary voters. It was a bit of a shock to me how many people on the left were very happy if they got an equivalent of MSNBC in this country, not just people on the right, who'd have been happy to get Fox News. That's the world we live in and an organisation like the BBC a lot of people don't like because of that. They don't like it because they're not given their point of view.

Lenny:

Both in your travelogue mode and also in your news mode - when you're interviewing people abroad, do you think the BBC brand still carries weight?

Clive:

Yeah, massively - much more so abroad than it does here in some households, to be honest with you. I go reporting from Africa - the idea that you're the guy from the BBC and you're not white, that's incredible. People are so proud.

Lenny:

But why the slim-down of the World Service? When I do Comic Relief, and I go

You do not want impartiality. Lots of people today aren't interested in impartiality. They might argue, in the abstract, that they do, but they don't. They want propaganda. They want their own point of view pushed forward.

wherever, the World Service seems to be incredibly important to everybody will a slimmed down budget significantly affect Britain's soft power on the world stage, do you think?

Clive:

I think there is a sense that soft power isn't as important as it should be, or as it's been held up to be by people of my generation and perhaps your generation. The creative industries, for instance, how we can influence the world globally in terms of art, music, culture - it's seen as not as important as maths, science, coding, all that kind of stuff. Soft power is incredibly important and the BBC embodies that in an incredibly efficient, costefficient way. Those three little letters - BBC - carry so much weight around the world, and we're in danger of throwing all that away.

Lenny:

You're such a stalwart of broadcasting now - you've got that BBC thing where we trust you. You're also Chancellor of the University of the Arts London. What do you think could be achieved in academic spaces to help produce better public media? Because I know that with

the Lenny Henry Centre and Representology, we want to help the press and broadcasters better reflect diverse communities. Is there one bit of Clive Myrie-esque advice that you would give to students from historically marginalised communities hoping to start a career in journalism - what can we learn from your years of experience in this game? Because it's tough out there.

It is tough out there. Do not

expect anyone to give you

anything for free and work

Clive:

your butt off. I remember when I started in local radio. My first job after my training course at the BBC - I would be making packages for the local breakfast show. Roger Bennett's Breakfast Show on Radio Bristol. I would do the late shift from about six o'clock, seven o'clock. I would still be there, trying to make these packages sound amazing at three, four in the morning, because I knew everyone listened to the breakfast show. Everyone from the bosses all the way down, so I made sure my packages were crafted to within an inch of their lives. would leave at four, four thirty in the morning. The breakfast shift would get in at five, but everyone would hear what I did, and they'd hear the effort that had been put into it, the craft that had been put into it.

It's about working your socks off. It is what my mum said, "you're gonna have to work twice as hard to be noticed because you are a person of colour". I think that still holds true. No matter

what diversity programme is out there, no matter what sense of equality the boss class of the company where you're working has, you've still got to be able to do the job. You've got to be brilliant, and that is as true for any Black person as it is for any white person, anyone who's gay, anyone who's a woman - you've got to be able to do

Lenny:

So, what can we do in the academic space to help produce better public media?

Clive:

I think university spaces public spaces - are for everyone to get together and have a dialogue. At the moment, there's just not enough dialogue. Don't go in with a closed mind - you've got to be open to what's going on around you.

So, use university as a place where you can talk. Where you can boil and stew and fricassée new ideas. Listen to other people's point of view. Don't get stuck in your own trench. Discover some other trenches to discover. Have an open mind and talk to people.

Clive:

Yeah, talk to people.

Clive Myrie's African Adventures will be broadcast on BBC Two and iPlayer in 2026

Lenny Henry is currently starring in Every Brilliant Thing in the West End: https://everybrilliantthing. com/



The former Editor of Channel 4 News - whose documentary Gaza: Doctors Under Attack was commissioned then shelved by the BBC - writes for Representology on what can be learned from the corporation's coverage of the war.

Palestinians in Gaza are being killed by Israeli weaponry from air, land and sea.

They are also at immediate risk of death by starvation, dehydration and disease as a result of the ongoing siege by Israel, the destruction of Palestinian towns, the insufficient aid being allowed through to the Palestinian population, and the impossibility of distributing this limited aid while bombs fall.

This conduct renders essentials to life unobtainable.

The passages to the left, which are now hard to contest (Israeli cabinet ministers have repeatedly boasted about the destruction being wrought by their military on Palestinian civilians in Gaza, as well as promises to starve them) are from South Africa's opening statement on January 11th 2024, in its genocide case against Israel at The Hague. The statement was delivered by their lead advocate Adila Hassim, only 96 days after the horrific October 7th massacres, which sparked Israel's overwhelming and relentless response. By that point, she added 'the level of Israel's killing is so extensive that nowhere is safe in Gaza. As I stand before you today, 23,210 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces during the sustained attacks over the last three months, at least 70 percent of whom are believed to be women and children'. Such was the overwhelming and indiscriminate scale of Israel's onslaught in Gaza, that South Africa argued that a genocide had already started. If you've been watching; and it was possible to watch almost all of this assault from the very beginning, almost nothing was spared.

The state of South Africa, whose epic struggle with apartheid defined the end of the 20th century, went to The Hague and accused what it sees as another apartheid state, Israel, of committing a genocide on the Palestinian people in Gaza. South Africa effectively stood in front of the world, in its highest court, on a global platform and yelled 'J'accuse'.

Except not everyone could hear it. Some were not listening, others did not want to hear it. or want it to be heard. I know because I was outside the court and protestors from both sides drowned out the sound of the broadcast being relaved from inside; so in order to see and hear history, I rushed back to my hotel room to watch it on the BBC. But it wasn't showing this historic moment. The prosecution case alleging genocide would not be televised - a Gil Scott-Heron riff you could argue the BBC has repeated since October 7th until the last two months - but the next day, Israel's counter defence was aired by them.

To ignore or misreport

something on the scale of

Israel's assault on Gaza takes some effort. How has the BBC's coverage of Gaza failed so badly? I never thought I would write an article like this, or that I would need to; I grew up on the BBC, it inspired me to be a journalist. With its funding, training and brilliant journalists it should be the world's greatest news broadcaster and it still can be. It is certainly the most important, or it was. I have been asked to write this from my own experience working on a film for the BBC about attacks on medics in Gaza during the last year, and as an editor of a national news service for a decade. I have only agreed to do so because the BBC has suspended all the normal rules of journalism in its coverage of Gaza and Israel since the October 7th attacks, rendering it not only unrecognisable but also highly compromised, and because it is so important it reverts to those rules.

This is not to say there haven't been brilliant and searing reports on the BBC; but they were the exception rather than the rule through most of this period. Things have finally started to change but only in the last few weeks. This is apparently a result of the hardening of the UK government's stance, the bosses being shamed by the ridicule heaped upon them by the media industry, and an internal revolt where BBC news staff just stopped listening to their bosses. You can measure the scale of their failure by the marked difference in their coverage two months ago and now, and by speaking to people

To ignore or misreport something on the scale of Israel's assault on Gaza takes some effort. How has the BBC's coverage of Gaza failed so badly?

inside the BBC and close watchers, including the Centre for Media Monitoring¹. It started to turn when David Lammy changed the UK's government's tone on Israel in parliament; and then it did a handbrake turn after the BBC failed to run our film, which Channel 4 subsequently broadcast.

For most of the last 22 months, the BBC has failed to report and describe accurately what was happening in Gaza; familiar and trusted voices seemed unable, or unwilling, to say what the rest of the world could see; they spoke in strangely constructed sentences, using strangled

Reference

Centre for Media Monitoring:
 https://cfmm.org.uk/

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phraseology, and there was no proper interrogation or analysis of the mounting number of allegations of Israeli war crimes, which were crimes against humanity and genocide. The word 'genocide' was reportedly banned, and clips of panicky news presenters interrupting guests who might mention the concept went viral on social media. even as the world's highest court voted 14-1 that there was a credible case to consider that Israel was committing it. However, on the BBC there could be no discussion about the possibility it might be happening, despite decades of debate on the broadcaster in relation to previous cases in Rwanda, Bosnia, and even on Russia in Ukraine.

A false equivalence was constructed and maintained. the Israeli government and the IDF's position was repeated at great length, even when clearly disprovable, and the BBC video output edited out of bulletins what we could see for ourselves on social media. As images of hundreds of white body shrouds filled the screen, as an unprecedented number of dead children were buried by their parents, little of this was seen on the BBC's News coverage. For over a year, depiction of civilian deaths in Gaza, which were rising in unprecedented numbers every week, would be counterbalanced in its almost exact duration with a hostage family story, as if this somehow created 'balance' - in fact, it was false equivalence. It was as if covering the thousands of Palestinian deaths was somehow disrespectful to those who were killed in Israel on October 7th. As the Head of BBC News famously

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told staff early on in this crisis, 'may I remind you this all started on October 7th', the decisions made by management also implied that it sort of stopped on October 8th. Journalists, social media activists. organisations, such as the Centre for Media Monitoring (whose report here details how Israeli deaths garnered more than 33 times the coverage given to the deaths of Palestinians), and much of the world was shocked and stopped watching. Obsessively, I continued watching the BBC, in particular listening to its main radio programmes, and watching its main news programmes.

Before I set out my five

lessons, disclaimers are

required - people may say I am a former editor who misses the influence his position held, who made mistakes himself, that news is a very difficult industry. This is partly true; the failing coverage of Gaza has, for the first time, made me wish I was still in a newsroom and had influence. For decades, I produced foreign news coverage, both in the field and then leading a newsroom. This is the first big international crisis when I have not been working on a daily news programme in over 25 years, and to be a viewer on a story that you've covered for years has been a very strange feeling. However, you also get to take a backseat and watch the coverage of this conflict, night after night as a viewer. I am proud to have worked at Channel 4 News for so many years, and I am watching their output now, and that of other broadcasters, including ITV and Sky News, who have also done really robust reporting.

So much of the BBC coverage has been misleading and inaccurate, however, that I am not so much angry as frightened as to the precedent that this has established, and sometimes, when listening to certain programmes on BBC radio, I have been shocked. Having worked inside the corporation for a year making Gaza: Doctors Under Attack, I also have direct experience of the editorial anomalies, the suspension of normal practice, and mistakes being made there. We argued for months over compliance points with the BBC, and pointed out the repeated OFCOM principles they had suspended - and

insights and support. In the end, we were able to prise our film out of the BBC and see it run on Channel 4 in exactly the same form as that in which the BBC had told us it had been approved; but there are other films on the same issue still trapped inside

Secondly, I have worked extensively in both Israel and Gaza and have an understanding of this conflict, and I have a deep sense of the context of this round of the conflict, compared to previous rounds, as well as its coverage. In terms of the killing, of the numbers of dead, of the destruction,

... the failing coverage of Gaza has, for the first time, made me wish I was still in a newsroom and had influence.

even broken. At many points, from years of direct experience, it felt like we were dealing with the Israeli government itself, rather than the BBC, such is their lobby's infiltration of senior management. Almost everyone at the BBC said at some point, 'what will CAMERA (a pro-Israel media monitoring organisation), David Collier, or Danny Cohen say about this?' I have also worked directly alongside shocked BBC staffers, endlessly discussed it with dozens of BBC insiders at every level, who have supported us speaking out. Much of what I write here comes from them, and I thank them for their advice,

they are off the scale, and yet the reporting has not reflected this reality. To measure the scale, you need to look at the story over time and in context, as well as the extraordinary lobbying that you face - more on that below.

The most frightening summer of my life was spent in Jerusalem on 'terror watch', when I worked at Sky News, at the height of the Hamas suicide attacks in the 2nd intifada in 2002. I reported on the many Israelis, including children, who were torn apart on buses, in cafés, and in the street. Hamas engaged in a campaign that terrorised the

civilian population, and it was terrifying to live in Jerusalem at that time. As a consequence. Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2006 and I also covered this. staying both in settlements inside Gaza, and in the kibbutzes along the border. in which so much killing took place on October 7th. In Nir Oz, where hundreds were subsequently killed, most people seemed strongly in favour of the Israeli withdrawal, and to have sympathy for the plight of people in Gaza.

I also spent weeks on multiple trips to Gaza - a small strip of land where entry and exit is controlled by Israel; where Palestinians have no control over their future and drones fly overhead. The terror experienced there has been almost constant for decades. I have seen many more children and civilians killed there than in Israel. The conflict has always been asymmetric; amongst journalists covering the many rounds of conflict a terrible death ratio was discussed, somewhere near 10:1 - 10 Palestinians would be killed for every 1 Israeli. Over time, this ratio grew, but I also saw Hamas grow from a militant group planting improvised explosives in gas canisters and relying on suicide bombers, to one with a far more sophisticated arsenal.

In 2014, in the last major war in Gaza, which lasted for seven weeks between June and August, at least 2000 Palestinians were killed but. notably, it was the killing of 500 children that shocked the world and brought Western pressure on the Israelis to ultimately stop the war. When Jon Snow, then the main presenter of Channel 4 News, returned

from Gaza to the London studio, he made an emotionally charged presentation in which he recounted how seeing these dead and injured children had affected him. Jon and many others felt that, with the killing of so many children, a line had been crossed. The coverage was direct, emotional, it described what it was, and there was little false equivalence. Reporters were allowed to report.

The massacres of October 7th and the killing of 1200 Israelis were shocking because of the speed with which they happened and the disregard for civilians. That so many were killed at a rave on Gaza's borders also made it relatable to Westerners, especially Europeans still reeling from ISIS attacks, such as at the Bataclan in Paris in November 2015.

The media's free access to

the survivors and their families made the coverage personally tinged and sympathetic. Within a few days the killing in Gaza had surpassed that in Israel, but a lack of access and a downgrading of the status of Palestinian reporters meant very little was heard directly from inside. After the BBC's correspondent got out, the BBC did not use agency reporters and all voices would be introduced with so many caveats, such as 'the BBC cannot verify' or 'Hamas controls the Gaza strip' that the guest would be traduced before they could utter a word. Often. they were asked to condemn the October 7th killings as if it were presumed that they were personally involved.

the poison of the allegation of 'anti-semitism'. an allegation that is blunted by over-use, set against the facts of the killing, and by spokespeople who are weak compared to those of other conflicts, such as Mark Regev. However, in the case of much of the media. especially the BBC, it has been incredibly effective.

Israel has now killed at least

amongst the 60,000 total of

thousands more have been

relentless killing spree which

was sporadically reported.

Per capita, there are more

used to be dealt with: robust

arguments, face-to-face in

Israel, on the phone in the

changed like the government

UK. The lobbying has

in Israel - it is vehement,

personal, and tipped with

injured. It didn't happen

overnight, but through a

18.000 children in Gaza.

deaths, and tens of

I believe the equivocation of the BBC's coverage, and that of much of the rest of the media, has contributed to the war's continuation. I believe the BBC is meant to speak truth to power, to show the people of the UK and the world what is going on. At times it is meant to shock it into action, as in Ethiopia in 1984 which resulted in Live Aid. However, there has been a lack of feeling, of clarity, of meaning. So much of their TV news coverage has failed to show this and, crucially, has also failed to look at the question of accountability and how systematically so much of the killing has been carried out. It has failed to show what politicians have been saying in Israel, what Israeli soldiers have been posting from inside, and what Palestinians themselves have been saying. Such is the scale of the disaster in Gaza, and thanks to the incredible Palestinian journalists who have managed to cover this conflict despite living through it themselves, you can't avoid it. You can watch the relentless killing on social media apps in the palm of your hand; and you can also see the destruction from space. How could anyone have missed it?

child amputees in Gaza than anywhere else on earth, and many children have lost all their family members. A shocking new acronym was coined by medics in Gaza after October 7th, 'wounded child no surviving family' (WCNSF), and there is no end in sight. The ratio of Israel's killing is now somewhere near 60:1, and probably far more - Israel has, as it promised. 'unleashed the gates of hell'. Nothing has stopped the killing of children, the targeting of hospitals, schools, universities, the destruction of housing, agriculture, even cemeteries. The UN estimates that an average of a class full of children has been slaughtered every day of the conflict, yet the BBC may go days without reporting on it on either of their flagship shows - those that start and end the day, the Today Programme, and the Ten O'Clock News. Producers on both have told me how hard it was to get serious reports running on either show. I have also experienced the extraordinary pressure this story brings on editors from the Israeli lobby, one of the world's most powerful there is a Palestinian lobby, but it is essentially on social media - but also how that

Five lessons for the BBC

1

Context can be nothing

Dead children are an aberration in war as they are in life. They always have been. Images of their lifeless bodies are a barometer of how cruel and barbaric any conflict is. They shock the viewer and make them hold their children closer, making them automatically sympathise with the parents grieving over those bodies on screen. They form a bond of sympathy and understanding that needs little context or explanation. The language of pain is universal, and there is no justification for the killing of innocent non-combatants.

Never in history has there been a conflict with more imagery of dead children than Gaza; mostly because the scale of killing of the young in such a small space and time period has been so intense, and also because everyone can now record everything that happens everywhere on their phone and post it to anyone who cares to see it. Yet, for the majority of this war, the BBC has chosen not to show the worst of these images, and not show them on a daily basis on their main flagship programmes, and when it did, it more often than not attempted to qualify the images with whatever Israel said had actually happened - that it was investigating, that Hamas were the target. No matter what it says, dead children are dead children - don't qualify their images with statements you know not to be provable.



2 Context can be everything

There is a concept in TV news of 'compassion fatigue' - that endless pictures of dead children make the viewer look away or become immune to the horror. I always believed we did not have the power to make that choice - we should show the worst and if people wanted to turn away that was their choice.

'Compassion fatigue' also leads to an inversion of the normal rules of journalism and history. The higher the body count, the bigger the story. Yet, in the BBC's case, editors argued that they could not keep showing dead children's bodies, so they did not do so on a daily basis. As the body count climbed, the story count dropped but, by so doing, and by not reporting the number killed on a particular day, the audience was stripped of context - it was not told that this is really, really bad, that this is unprecedented.

Furthermore, by adding the prefix 'Hamas-run' to death figures, even though for years all media did not use that, it questioned the figures. Context is everything.

In the wake of the Second World War, and based on the endless work of two Jewish legal scholars, rules were adopted for wars by which they could be judged and their participants held to account, namely around 'Crimes Against Humanity' and 'Genocide'. Both of these legal frameworks were largely ignored by the BBC, with orders apparently coming from the top.

If you have endless images of dead children, they should be seen so that the viewer can be shocked. By not showing them, you are hiding the truth from the viewer and you are also preventing a feedback loop by which democracies function. For 21 months, the BBC selectively and deliberately prevented most of these pictures from being seen.

3

OFCOM regulates on two principles - fairness and accuracy. The BBC is regulated by three principles, the third being politics

OFCOM works as a regulator, which is why, in normal times, British TV news is at such a high standard. It was the most feared body at Channel 4 News. In my decade there, we had three findings against us, all for accuracy - one was a terrible mistake which led to months of sleepless nights and disciplinary action. We had no finding that related to balance, the other criteria by which we were regulated.

The BBC tells itself it is regulated to a higher standard, but because of the overarching presence of 'Editorial Policy', it is actually regulated to a far lower one because, from our experience and that of most other people we spoke to, at the BBC Ed Pol is really there to represent the interests of the BBC, which is always under attack. It is there to prevent anything that might bring political heat, controversy, or difficulty for the bosses. Instead of lawyers making decisions, the Ed Pol people do - and they told us that the UN could not be trusted as an independent organisation, nor could Amnesty, and that we should try to use interviews with prisoners who were clearly under duress. I was able - as a former editor, and by hiring

our own experienced compliance lawyer - to stop these elements going in.

They were obsessed with CAMERA and the Israeli lobby, and for lengthy rights to reply - which did not specifically answer the direct allegations made - to go in. Again, however, context is everything - the Israeli lobby is the most organised and powerful lobby in the world. It was formed from a defensive mindset, which was understandable given the Holocaust, but it is now controlled by a settler government which has made its intentions clear in repeated statements. It is a different lobby representing a different Israel.

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- and they told us that the UN

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4

Manage down not up; don't shoot your messengers, avoid being a clique

From early on in the war, a delegation of shocked, concerned and angry senior journalists regularly met with the BBC leadership to complain and discuss specific examples of bias and misreporting. The BBC has the world's most experienced journalists when it comes to this story. The BBC bosses and, in particular, Tim Davie, have no experience of it. This group of experienced journalists should have been respected, listened to, cherished. Whilst they initially felt they were listened to, nothing changed and, in fact, things became worse over time. It was clear

to them that they were not

being listened to - that nothing was changing. Some of them thought the bosses they were lobbying were intellectually incapable of processing what they were saying - that they were institutionally racist and uneducated. Others thought they were somehow in thrall to the Israeli lobby, obsessed with their career paths and their next jobs. The presence of certain individuals on the BBC board and their influence over editorial dictats sent down to newsrooms was also continually cited as unprecedented, with referral up required unlike almost any other story in recent memory. No-one knew for sure, but they certainly felt the leadership was acting as a clique - that PR and politics, rather than journalism, were framing the decisions.

Within 18 months of these meetings, three of the group's leading people had left the BBC - all experienced journalists, some very senior, all from diverse backgrounds. The group continued to meet but nothing changed - the BBC bosses were managing up to the political and lobbying level, not listening down to experience and to the cries from Gaza.

5

Journalism is not PR

The BBC has managed this story as an exercise in PR - but what Israel says is not 'journalism'. Journalism is not PR. Journalism is reporting what has happened, what is happening, not what people say is happening if it is provably and palpably untrue.

I thought I would end with four lines of WH Auden, from September 1st 1939, because I rarely remember poems, but I remember these lines, and as the sentiment is true of so many conflicts, they should always be kept in mind when covering them.

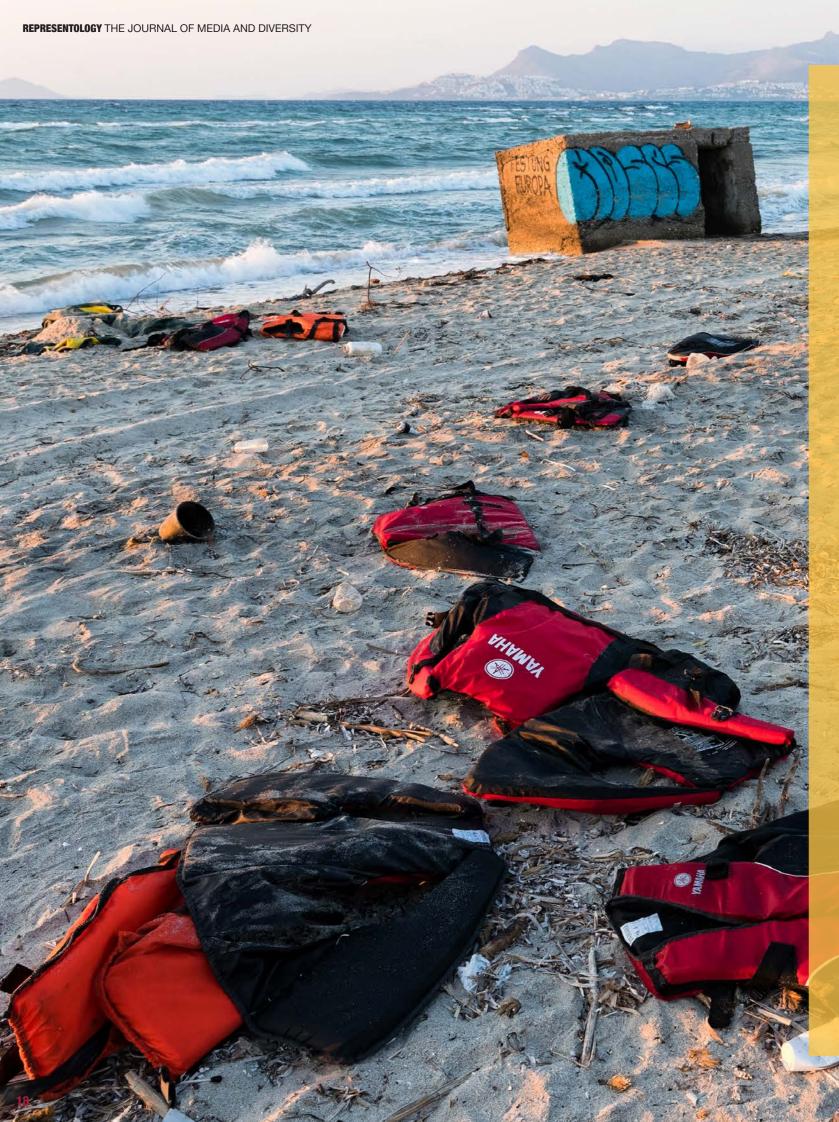
I and the public know What all schoolchildren learn,

Those to whom evil is done

Do evil in return.

Ben de Pear is the founder of Basement Films and an award-winning former Editor of Channel 4 News

Gaza: Doctors Under Attack can be watched on All 4: https://www.channel4.com/ programmes/gaza-doctorsunder-attack



Sianger E 13nget the need to reframe the immigration narrative.

Maya Goodfellow and Alexandria Innes

Participatory Action Research Hub for Migration and Border Violence City St George's, University of London

On the 12th May 2025, Sir Keir Starmer spoke at a press conference for the government's new White Paper on immigration: "we will take back control of our borders," he promised. He then warned that, without this, the country risked becoming an "island of strangers".

Much media attention focused on this phrase and its alarming echoes of Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech. But there was another theme that saturated Starmer's speech: one of fairness. Control, on these terms, is supposedly essential to protect British citizens. It is the right, just direction for policy. The basis for this logic is that migrants are to blame for economic inequality, NHS waiting lists, falling apprenticeship opportunities and a lack of social mobility for young people, rising rents and scarce social housing. It endorses the idea that Britons cannot have what they rightly deserve because immigration is too high. This language of justice and fairness is inherently racialising. It draws hard lines of 'deservingness' and creates a national inheritance that one earns innately, by birthright and, with this, the visible markers of who deserves that birthright are implied.

In the previous issue of Representology, the Migrants' Rights Network described the problem with Starmer's acknowledgement of so-called 'legitimate concerns' about immigration in the aftermath of the far-right riots in the summer of 2024. The social problems that are often referenced in the context of immigration are real: NHS waiting lists are historically high, there is a lack of social housing, the higher education sector is failing, the job market increasingly erodes workers rights by leaning into zero hours contracts and the gig economy, inequality has been rising since the 1970s, rents and housing prices are increasing at a pace far faster than that of income, and the cost of living has, in

general, increased, meaning real wages have decreased. These are genuine and often brutal problems, but none of them caused by immigration. There is no decisive evidenced relationship of harm to the economy caused by immigration. Studies have periodically researched this and concluded that measurable effects of immigration are positive: recent research published in the Journal of International Migration and Integration in 2024 found that immigration had a positive effect on wages. A systematic review published in the Journal of Economics. Race and Policy highlighted the positive effect immigration has had on innovation, with associated positive economic outcomes. And an article in the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies showed

correlation between increased immigration into a country and rising support for anti-immigrant parties, as well as lower support for economic redistribution. This, though, does not happen in a vacuum: it is a socio-political effect that is driven by the negative ways immigration has long been positioned in public discourse.

Why, then, is immigration an easy scapegoat? One answer is the democratic deficit. While the post Enlightenment Western world has endorsed the principles of democracy, human rights, and individual freedoms, access is not determined by humanity, but by birthright. In almost every democracy, democratic participation is limited to citizens – and even then, not all citizens are allowed to

Immigrants are cast as a threat, coming to take something they do not deserve from the British people – whether that's space, money, or the less definable 'culture.'

that immigration brought similar innovation in the arts and popular culture. Peoples' economic, cultural, or any other form of contribution, should not be the basis on which they are 'allowed' into the country. Yet it is telling that although most of the available academic evidence finds immigration to be beneficial over all, immigration continues to be linked to political backlash. There is a

vote (for example, people in prison), and there have been efforts to circumscribe access to voting even when it is a legal right, such as by requiring voter ID and linking the electoral register to residential address, with additional steps needed for people in insecure or temporary accommodation. There is no direct relationship of accountability between the policy makers

making exclusionary rules and the people most directly affected by them immigrants and potential immigrants. This means they are easier to mistreat.

However, the democratic

deficit can only explain so

much. The lack of any

meaningful opposition to immigration policies evidences the framing of immigration as a security issue, as an existential threat to the country. In democratic states, there is a tacit agreement that the government will protect the physical territory of the country and the society that it holds. The government is trusted to carry out this function: during times when the country is seen as being under threat, the government has the capacity to enact security measures without full democratic scrutiny (for example, this is upheld in legislation such as the Official Secrets Act 1989, or the National Security Act 2023). The framing of immigration as an existential threat permits the most extreme enforcement mechanisms available to protect the security of the country.

Immigrants are cast as a threat, coming to take something they do not deserve from the British people - whether that's space, money, or the less definable 'culture.' Once that rendering of threat has been firmly established (and this does not coincide only with the Tory 'hostile environment' era but predates it by decades), it becomes almost impossible to offer any type of policy that does not defer to so-called security needs, that does not acknowledge a threat and offer some means to protect against it. In other

words, any type of immigration policy that's offered, before being able to target the needs and interests of immigrants, must explain why this policy will not pose a threat to the wellbeing of the country. Given the expansive collection of issues that immigrants are 'blamed' for, immigration policy is held to a standard of solving the problems created by neoliberal economic policy before any immigration policy change can be

considered.

The assumption that

immigration needs to be

controlled is obviously dangerous because it relies on racialisation: the control of immigration reinforces the construction of nationality into an innate and inheritable characteristic that marks a group of people as being essentially the same in some way. It marks a point of difference from outsiders and valorises that difference. And this very real differentiation and racialisation is apparent in the devaluing of migrants to the extent where they are excluded from the basic protections states are supposed to offer. For example, domestic violence refuge protection is not extended to migrant victims of domestic abuse, immigration status is requested from victims of crime, and healthcare providers ask about immigration status in order to levy charges for services delivered. It is wellevidenced that these forms of bordering prevent immigrants from seeking needed healthcare, reporting crimes, and leaving abusive partners. Violence against migrant bodies is actively accepted by current policies

that are not just made in the immigration control sector, but in policies that deliver crucial social services to the population.

Thereby stands the question what can we do?

One approach might be to

look at shared

characteristics to produce solidarity and use commonalities to develop non-discriminatory policies on the basis of belonging: abused migrant women are not migrants, but victims of domestic abuse. Migrant victims of crime are victims of crime rather than migrants. Migrant hospital admittees are patients, not migrants. However, this work only goes so far. Shifting away from the language of 'migrant' to focus instead on shared characteristics of vulnerability still suggests that the strong, healthy migrant is an inherently threatening character. The security narrative that constructs migrants as a threat remains the default. It is necessary to change that narrative, so that we acknowledge those commonalities without being forced to buy into language that demonises migrants, that seeks to control immigration, and that only accepts people because of explicit, perceived vulnerability. This is the task in front of us and it must be confronted head on.

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Una Marson:

Life at the BBC

Yvonne Singh

Una Marson was a poet, playwright, editor and broadcaster born in Jamaica, who became the first Black woman to be employed by the BBC, during the Second World War. Yvonne Singh writes about the pioneering feminist cultural icon, who arrived in London in 1932, and her time at the corporation.

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London Calling

In 1938, Una Marson was interviewed about television at the annual radio exhibition, Radiolympia. Marson's broadcast impressed and, on the back of it, she was offered freelance work by the BBC producer Cecil Madden on *Picture Page*.

Earlier in the decade, Marson had encountered a vibrant Black London, with hostels, coffee shops and bars that buzzed with promise. Now, with war on the horizon, the population of Black London had thinned. Universities had evacuated and some people had enlisted or retreated overseas, while friends such as Jomo Kenyatta (anticolonial activist who would become the Prime Minister of Kenya between 1963 and 1964, then President until his death in 1978) had relocated to the coast.

Work was sporadic, but
Marson was an excellent
networker and kept in touch
with Madden, advising him
on West Indian broadcasts.
He received her counsel
gratefully, writing that
improvements to the service
were 'with Una Marson's
help as she is very
intelligent' and praising her
unrivalled local knowledge.

The West Indies received few BBC broadcasts, compared to other British colonies. Now that the broadcaster was under the aegis of the Ministry of Information, it was necessary for programme content to remain neutral and the recent unrest in the Caribbean had shown there was much anti-colonial sentiment in the region.

The Guyanese musician and journalist Rudolph Dunbar was the Ministry of Information's West Indian press officer and had been lobbying it for a weekly feature in which the five hundred West Indian troops based in the UK could send messages home.

Meanwhile, Marson continually reminded the BBC higher-ups (through Madden) that such a programme could act as a morale booster for West Indians at home and abroad. Her impressive journalistic career and contacts book also meant that she could bring in a substantive Caribbean audience. The pressure paid off and Marson was invited to front a series of programmes, illustrating the Caribbean's contribution to the war effort: The Empire at War and the Colonies went out on 1st April 1940 and West Indians' Part in the War later that month. Marson was a hit and she was also an able researcher, tracking down and interviewing West Indian cricketers and musicians, such as Ken 'Snakehips' Johnson, who was tragically killed in a bombing raid while performing at London's Café de Paris in March 1941.

In Hello! West Indies (a rare surviving broadcast produced in 1942–43 by the Ministry of Information), she hosts the programme dressed in a mid-length white lace dress and matching jacket, a floral corsage pinned to her lapel and her hair styled in fashionable victory rolls.

She looks stylish, slightly nervous and watchful. To a mixed crowd of army and navy personnel, who are drinking and dancing together to an Al Jennings' score, Marson introduces with clipped tones the contribution of the West Indians to the war effort. The programme not only covers pilots, navigators, wireless and switchboard operators,

air gunners and ground staff, but also the substantial numbers of West Indian women in the Wrens and Auxiliary Territorial Service.

On face value, this film is propaganda, produced to encourage military recruitment in the Caribbean colonies as the war rumbled on, as well as promote a patriotic view of a wartime Empire pulling together regardless of race or creed.

Yet it reveals several startling truths about the significant contribution of the West Indies to the war effort, a fact that today has been almost airbrushed out of history. In this way, Marson's work (much like Dusé Mohamed Ali's use of the African Times and Orient Review to consistently flag the contribution of India, Africa and other colonies to the First World War) is extremely valuable.

Marson was enjoying life at this point. She was living in an unkempt flat in Mill Lane, Hampstead, with Jamaican student Linda Edwards and, after the parties in BBC studios, she would invite the West Indian servicemen (whom she nicknamed 'her chicks') back for dinner parties (rustled up from rations) and singalongs.

Serviceman Thomas Wright said: 'Una spent enormous amounts of time and a good deal of her own slender resources in helping West Indians ... when they got into some sort of jam, which was often ... all of us had a deep affection for her'. It wasn't all chat and fun, though. The trade unionist and activist Maida Springer recalled: 'Una was very selective

about the people she invited ... these were men who had a vision of the future, and they were looking forward to the day when they were going to have a country, not a colonial dependency. So it was very good talk ... Very explosive talk! Had they been heard, they would have all been court martialed'. Springer credits both Marson and George Padmore (radical Trinidadian journalist whose life in London overlapped with Marson) for encouraging her later activism.

On 3 March 1941, graft,

research and freelance work with Madden paid off, and Marson was appointed full-time programme assistant on the Empire Service on a starting salary of £480 plus allowances p.a., which was higher than the national average. (In the background the BBC were 'debating employing coloured staff ' and had extended the probationary period for Marson's post.) Operating out of a tiny office in Bedford College, Regent's Park, which was later destroyed by a German bomb, she hosted and produced a set of programmes entitled Calling the West Indies, again publicising the African and Caribbean contribution to the war effort, as well as the activities of British feminists. Her work would bring her into contact with George Orwell, who was the radio producer for the Overseas Eastern Service, and in 1942 she contributed twice to his six-part radio magazine Voice.

A month after her appointment Marson claimed she was being 'bullied on stage' by Dunbar and his choir, who were 'trying to interfere with her role as compère'. Dunbar made clear in a letter that he felt Marson was meddling with his choir's musical material. The situation came to a head with both artists threatening to 'down tools'. Madden acknowledged Dunbar was difficult but stated that Marson 'deliberately antagonises him to test her own strength'. This ugly power struggle at the heart of the new programming schedule threatened to derail it completely. To compound matters, Joan Gilbert, Madden's production assistant, who had initially worked well with Marson when she was employed as a freelancer, accused her of being rude. She stated in avowedly racist terms: 'Since Una Marson joined the staff she seems to have got an exaggerated idea of her own position and her authority ... consequently at the slightest opposition she becomes extremely rude. Quite frankly, I wouldn't let anyone speak to me in the way Una does, and certainly not a coloured woman'.

It is impossible to know what Marson felt about these rows – roles as a compère and as a producer demanded a close working relationship with support staff, and fissures had started to appear almost immediately.

Her biographer Delia Jarrett- Macauley reported a strange incident where she accused a fellow co-worker of rifling through her bag when she was absent from the room. With the attacks on her personality becoming more intense, she was becoming distrustful and paranoid.

Marson was an intensely private person, but her biographer states that she was having affairs. An unsuitable suitor was an Austrian named Rosenstein who lived nearby in Mill Lane.

Her work would bring her into contact with George Orwell, who was the radio producer for the Overseas Eastern Service.

This romantic liaison, like others, fizzled out, but in 1941 she fell hard for Dudley Thompson, a fellow Jamaican and RAF officer who served in Europe as a flight lieutenant in Bomber Command. The couple spent two intense years

together, attending nightclubs and dinner dances, and Thompson was a regular at Marson's parties. Marson would send him neatly written poems on violet paper almost daily, but the affair ended abruptly, leaving Marson distraught. A year later, Thompson married Genevieve Hannah Cezair, explaining that he lost touch with Marson, whom he thought 'had been very disappointed that we did not marry'. He also mentioned his political leanings towards the end of the war; he became drawn to the Pan-African

He stated that these accusations included questions about the suitability of a woman for such a position and slanderous accusations about her sexuality

movement, spending more time with Kenyatta, Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah (Ghanaian politician who would serve as Prime Minister between 1952 and 1957, and President from 1957 and 1966) and attending the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester. Whether this facilitated the break from Marson is unclear. He distinguished Marson as a 'literary' artist from the mostly male Pan-Africanists but in

his autobiography, his only, rather condescending, reference to her is that she was a secretary to Haile Selassie (the Emperor of Ethiopia for whom she once worked, attending the League of Nations in 1936 when he spoke against the fascist aggression of Mussolini's Italy). What is evident is that the 38-year-old Marson was inconsolable following the breakdown of their relationship.

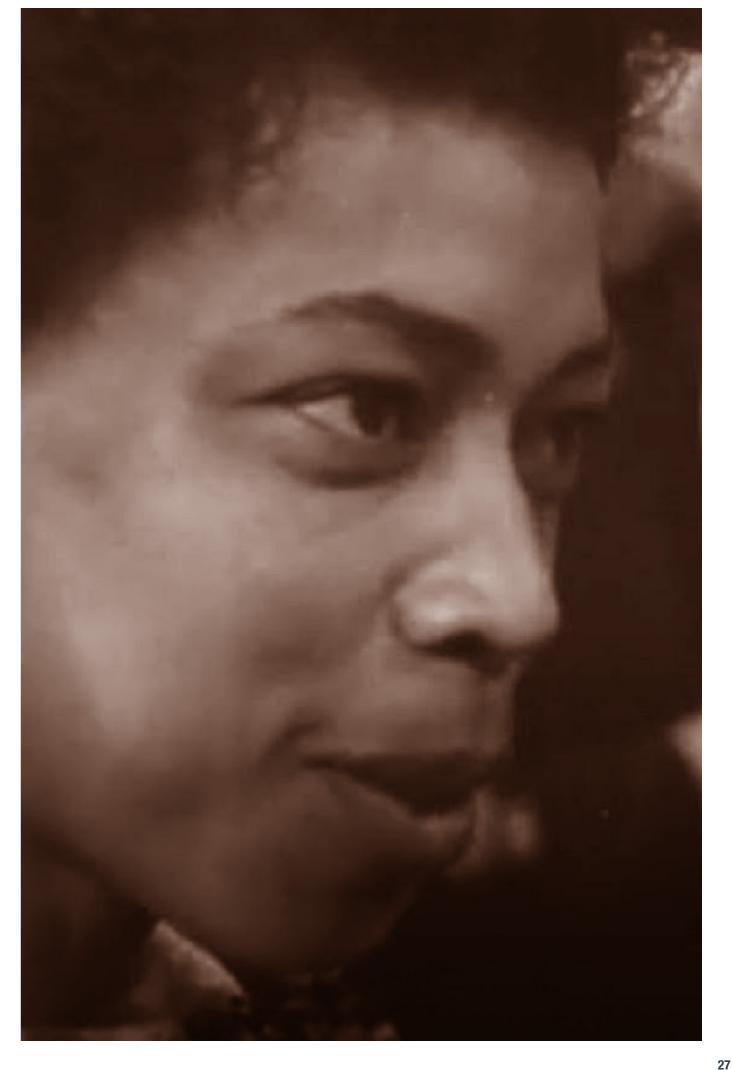
The relationship with
Thompson had mitigated
some of the toxicity and
prejudices that she
experienced in her new post.
John Grenfell Williams,
director of African services,
praised Marson's work,
vaunting her 'admirable
success' and 'incredible
results' in 1942.

Nevertheless, tensions continued to mount, this time from external forces. Marson's representation of West Indian interests was being criticised by two opposing parties: Lady Davson of the West India Committee, which represented the white elite and their commercial interests, was not pleased with Marson's coverage, citing lack of racial representation; while a group of Caribbean radicals from Aggrey House (the Londonbased hostel which she had once considered working for as social secretary) was questioning Marson's suitability to represent the Caribbean, arguing that her supposed focus on Jamaica marginalised other territories. The vicious assaults stung a sensitive Marson, with fellow workers noting that she looked drawn. War was also wearing her down: fear

punctuated the lives of London civilians and Marson was no exception. She wrote in the 1960s of the craters and battle-scarred buildings: 'Those of us who witnessed the devastation could not help feeling that within our own hearts there were scars of loss and sorrow that would live on with us long after the physical scars were repaired'.

Grenfell Williams, her staunchest ally at the BBC, said in March 1942 that the Aggrey House group was 'out to get Miss Marson and anyone who protected her ... at all costs' and were collecting 'ammunition' in the form of the 'foulest' allegations. He stated that these accusations included questions about the suitability of a woman for such a position and slanderous accusations about her sexuality.

On 1st October 1944. Marson launched the programme Caribbean Voices, although she was suffering from nervous exhaustion. That spring she had taken four weeks' sick leave for what her doctor described as 'nervous debility, insomnia, indigestion and general lassitude'. Caribbean Voices was a wonderful concept, a twenty-minute on-air creative writing workshop that launched the careers of Nobel Prize winners Derek Walcott of St Lucia. Trinidadian V.S. Naipaul and many other Caribbean writers, including Sam Selvon and Andrew Salkey. Braithwaite would later state, 'it was the single most important literary catalyst for Caribbean creative and critical writing in English'.



Marson was too ill to develop her programme, leaving the Irish producer Henry Swanzy to nurture it to maturity. In the summer of 1944, moves were afoot to place her in a more behindthe-scenes role at the BBC. She went on paid holiday to Jamaica, ostensibly for research purposes, but fearing for her position she travelled miles, visiting four Caribbean islands, frantically collecting scripts for her new programme.

She returned to London on 18th December 1945 in 'a serious mental state', refusing food and locking herself in her Hampstead flat

Research by James Procter for Small Axe has found that Marson was encouraged to see a specialist at Middlesex Hospital, where electric or insulin shock therapy was recommended as a cure. Marson did not undergo this treatment voluntarily and had to be certified. On 13th March 1946, she was transferred to St Andrews Hospital in Northampton where, despite insulin shock therapy, her prospects for recovery remained uncertain, with doctors concerned about 'delusions' and paranoia she was experiencing. Her contract with the BBC was terminated in October 1946. It was a desperately sad end for the BBC's first Black radio producer and Marson's mental health never fully recovered.

In April 1946, her friend, the poet J.E. Clare McFarlane, offered to take her back to Jamaica but a comedy of errors ensued on the journey to Swansea docks. First, the group had to be split into two cabs because of luggage: McFarlane in one cab and his wife, daughter and Marson in the other. Unbeknownst to McFarlane, Marson became obstructive, causing her vehicle to break down, and McFarlane was forced to board the boat without his family. Several frantic phone calls from the boat deck later, an alternative vehicle was found to transport McFarlane's wife and daughter and Marson to the docks, where the ship had already departed. The ship was forced to drop anchor and the late passengers were taken to it by pilot boat. Marson was protesting all the while as she was pushed up the rope ladder to get on board.

Marson's spirit was broken. On her return to Kingston, she was admitted to Bellevue Hospital for rest and observation. The admission to a psychiatric hospital of one of Jamaica's most prominent artists and journalists carried considerable stigma and she dropped out of view for several years. In a final ignominy, her poem *Towards* the Stars was aired on Caribbean Voices without attribution, simply stated as the work of a Jamaican poet, not a former producer. The eponymous collection was published by the University of London Press in 1945.

When she got better, Marson kept in touch with Grenfell Williams, T.S. Eliot, Orwell and Swanzy. In a letter to BBC features producer Laurence Gilliam on 6th March 1957, Marson reflected: 'My years at the BBC now seem like a dream
– an exciting dream which
ended in a nightmare when I
got ill. But it is the happy
things that I constantly recall
and the wonderful people
with whom I was
associated'.

In 1949 she became organising secretary for Pioneer Press, the book publishing arm of Jamaica's *Gleaner* newspaper. Here she nurtured the careers of writers such as Salkey, who found her 'generous, gracious and supportive', and her contacts on the English literary scene proved indispensable.

In her mid-50s, she outgrew Jamaica yet again, visiting cousins in Brooklyn, New York, and settling in Washington to write a book on everyday life on the island. The segregation and distinct racial hierarchy that existed in the city derailed Marson. She 'got a rude shock' when denied admission to the cinema, struggled to find restaurants that would serve her and was even barred from places of worship, where she was told to seek out 'coloured churches'. A brief, ill-fated marriage to the American dentist Peter Staples followed. There is little in the archive about the marriage breakdown, but Marson's mental health had again taken a turn for the worst.

Back in Jamaica and living with her sister Ethel, Marson was delighted to receive an invitation from Israel's Foreign Minister Golda Meir to attend a seminar for female leaders in Jerusalem in October 1964. She had resumed her work with

Jamsave - the Jamaican Save the Children Association which Marson had launched before her broadcasting career - and was also working to combat discrimination among Jamaica's Rastafari community.

Following her trip to Israel, she visited England on a stopover, attending many of her old haunts and noting that a new generation of Caribbean artists, such as Kamau Braithwaite, Salkey and Wilson Harris, who had got their breaks on Voices, were now forging their careers in the capital.

She would not live to see their Caribbean Artists Movement, the foundations of which she had nurtured, flourish. The following year Marson was admitted to Kingston Hospital, suffering from severe depression and high blood pressure. She suffered a heart attack and died in hospital on 6th May 1965 at the age of 60. Her sister Ethel sadly recalled 'her heart gave out'.

'Little brown girl in a white, white city'

For several years, Marson's contribution as a journalist, radio producer and feminist was erased from history. She is curiously absent from Peter Fryer's otherwise authoritative *Staying Power*, for example. And the Irish producer Swanzy was largely credited with the establishment of *Caribbean Voices*, which provided a launch pad for the careers of so many Caribbean artists.

A talented and versatile journalist and editor, Marson used *The Keys* (which she

had edited between 1933 and 1935) to highlight the local and international issues facing people of colour as the Second World War loomed. Her intelligence and activism brought her to the centre of the world stage at a time of unceasing turbulence, as the League of Nations sacrificed the small African nation of Abyssinia on the altar of Fascist appeasement.

Marson was bold in her

focus on women's rights and keen for cross-border co-operation between international feminist groups working to elevate women from their status as secondclass citizens. Her work and that of Ashwood Garvey was pioneering in this regard. This torch would be passed on to Claudia Jones, whose publication along with Edward Scobie's Flamingo, elevated the work of those Caribbean artists Marson worked so hard to promote at the BBC. Finally, Marson's plays and her poetry stand as startling testimony to what it was like to be a person of colour at that time how racial difference could generate subservience and abuse.

issues may be the reason she was airbrushed from history. Unlike Padmore and CLR James (radical Trinidadian writer and historian - see Representology Issue 05), she was not operating on the fringes: her work took her to the heart of the establishment, that of the Ministry of Information and the BBC. Operating inside establishment confines brought significant

Marson's mental health

pressures. She was forced to be Janus-faced, glossing over the colour bar that she experienced personally, and promoting an image of a united, colour-blind Empire, proud to fight for 'the Mother country' during the Second World War. It was a position that would alienate her peers, and set her up for criticism from both the white West Indian elite and Black Londoners, who thought she should use her position to promote more diversity. The lack of allies in a warravaged London must have been particularly hard, and was exacerbated following the breakdown of her relationship with Thompson.

As the only Black woman

producer, Marson's behaviour was constantly viewed in racial terms and she was always having to adapt her behaviour to that which was 'expected' of a woman of colour. This was the universal lens under which she was scrutinised, from petty work disputes to contract and salary expectations, and the inherent pressures and racism she endured from her co-workers undoubtedly had an adverse effect on her mental health. A twenty-first century report links such racism to an increased likelihood of depression; hallucinations and delusions. But unfortunately for Marson, understanding of mental health conditions in the early twentieth century was often wanting.

In her most famous play Pocomania (which translates as 'a little madness'):
Marson touched on how society's norms promote refinement and decorum and conformity when in reality one wants to scream, shout and beat a drum at the unfairness of it all. In England, Marson suffered her own 'little madness', which pushed her considerable legacy into the shadows, but really who can blame her?

Her poems often revealed her most honest thoughts, free from editorial censure. In Black Burden, Marson summed up the pressures facing a person of colour in a position of white predominance:

'I am black/And so I must be/More clever than white folk/More wise than white folk,/ More discreet than white folk/More courageous than white folk'.

In truth, she strove to be.

Yvonne Singh is a journalist, writer and editor. Her work has appeared in The Guardian, The Observer, The Mirror, The London Evening Standard and the BBC. Her new book INK!: From the Age of Empire to Black Power, the Journalists who Transformed Britain (The History Press), from which this article is an extract, is out on 16th October: https://www. waterstones.com/book/ink/ vvonnesingh/9781803998091



JUSTICE 4 THE WINDRUSH GENERATION': CULTURAL PRESSURE TO CREATE A JUST WORLD

British actor Colin McFarlane writes on how creativity can help spark social change and his own campaigning work with Justice 4 Windrush

"If we can move the crowd, we can move the law".

Wise words from the late, great Benjamin Zephaniah but, right now, most of the crowd doesn't even know that the 'Home Office scandal' affecting the Windrush generation exists or thinks it's ancient history. It's not.

This is a scandal that's still ruining lives. Quietly. Systematically. Brutally. So, why isn't everyone talking about it? That's where we come in. *Justice 4* is a social and racial justice charity I co-founded alongside the singer Annie Lennox (yes, that Annie Lennox of Eurythmics fame). Our first mission: *Justice 4 Windrush*.

Our job is to make this scandal impossible to ignore. Not with dry reports or petitions but with stories. Real ones, told through music, video, social media, press and on TV, because when people hear a story that hits them in the gut, they don't forget and they act.

What is 'Windrush'?

Amazingly, we have found that very few people know about the issue or its depth. A taxi driver asked me about it recently, so I broke it down. After WWII. Britain needed help rebuilding. The country was massively short of workers, so it invited citizens from the Caribbean, islands that were then British colonies, to come and help. In 1948, one of the first ships to arrive was the Empire Windrush. That ship came to symbolise a whole generation of people who arrived here between 1948 and the early 1970s - to build the NHS, to

work in the transport system, and to power the economy.

They were British citizens. They came because they wanted to help the 'mother country' but instead many were met with racism and hostility. The betrayal began in 1948 and continued for decades with regular changes to immigration and citizenship legislation. It was covert, hidden and it only came to the public's attention in 2018 when the accumulation of hostile government policies meant people who had lived here for 40 or 50 years were suddenly told they didn't belong. They lost jobs, pensions. They were denied healthcare. Some were detained. Others were deported. All because they weren't recognised as British citizens, as Home Office officials, unaware of colonial history, wrongly assumed they were illegal immigrants.

But isn't this old news?

That's the con. Governments have managed to make people believe that this issue is "sorted". 'Windrush Day' was introduced in 2019, but it's mostly about celebration rather than education and has unwittingly helped shape that misleading narrative.

Meanwhile, victims are still suffering and waiting for compensation. 53 people have died waiting. Many don't know how to claim or have given up trying.

The media moved on, but we haven't, because the scandal isn't over. There are at least 15,000 victims who need our help. When my Jamaican father, 90 year old ex RAF officer Sidney McFarlane MBE, was interviewed about it in the Daily Mirror, in 2023, he said something heartbreaking: "I think they're waiting for us to die out, to avoid paying the money." I posted that online, and the first person to reach out was Annie Lennox, who said, "How can I be of service?" That's how Justice 4 Windrush began.

raising awareness, educating and changing hearts and minds. That's what happened in Lincolnshire, where we filmed a group of white women who knew nothing about 'Windrush'. After watching our lecture and meeting a Windrush victim, their emotions changed immediately. They were shocked, angry, tearful, and they concluded: 'once you know, you care'. They wrote to MPs. They wanted to help. "If the whole country knew what you've taught us", one said, "you'd have your 'Post Office scandal' moment".

Our campaign is about

That's exactly the impact we're aiming for. Remember *Mr Bates vs The Post Office?* That TV show changed everything. It forced politicians to act. It did it by showing the emotional cost of injustice - one family, one face, one heartbreak at a time. We're building our own version of that with a TV drama and a Netflix documentary both in development. In addition,

concerts, campus campaigns (Windrush ambassadors in every UK university), legal support from top law firms like Clifford Chance. The Windrush compensation scheme has no legal aid - our award-winning pro bono lawyer, Pauline Campbell, has given over 300 hours of free support (worth around £90,000). We're building a cultural movement from young to old.

Our campaign video, with Annie Lennox's re-recording of her song Why, reached hundreds of thousands. It featured victims and allies and well-known faces, and drew praise from politicians - David Lammy to Sadiq Khan to Lord Adebowale. We followed up that film with viral clips and a collaboration with Led By Donkeys, seen by over a million people. This is about pressure - on Parliament, on the media, on public opinion.

Teaching our history

Most British schools don't teach colonial history, slavery or the Windrush story. So many people don't realise that the Caribbean arrivals were already British citizens. They came to the 'mother country' with hopes and dreams, and it betrayed them. Most people, even those who've heard of the scandal, can't answer basic historical questions: What was the Middle Passage? What were the 1919 race riots? What was Operation Westward Ho? What years did Britain rule Jamaica?

After Guardian journalist
Amelia Gentleman exposed
the Home Office scandal in
2018, public awareness of
the historic roots of the issue
increased. By September
2024, even the Home Office,
in an independent report now
posted on the Government's
own website, concluded that:

1

The Windrush Scandal was caused by a failure to recognise that changes in immigration and citizenship law in Britain since 1948 had affected black people in the UK differently than they had other racial and ethnic groups. As a result, the experiences of Britain's black communities of the Home Office, of the law, and of life in the UK have been fundamentally different from those of white communities.

12

Major immigration legislation in 1962, 1968 and 1971 was designed to reduce the proportion of people living in the United Kingdom who did not have white skin.

The relationship between the Home Office and organisations set up to deal with race relations was dysfunctional in the second half of the twentieth century. The work of various governmental bodies in combatting discrimination in the UK was separate from the task given to the Home Office to reduce immigration. This led to a paradoxical situation in which immigration policy assumed that too many immigrants from a minority ethnic background were bad

'Windrush' isn't just about history. It's about now. It's about what kind of country we want to be.

relations policy promoted

the idea of racial equality.

for society, but race

The same attitudes that created this scandal haven't disappeared. Back in 1919, Black and Asian war veterans were attacked in port cities by white mobs. The state deported the victims. Now, in 2025, asylum seekers are targeted outside hotels as we

blame the 'foreigner' and deportations are once again mentioned as the solution. Although the issues should not be conflated as these refugees are not British citizens, there is an underlying racism behind the treatment of both. The Home Office spends billions housing them with no long-term plan, no positive end game. What if we treated them with respect, and spent some of that money on wider education, training, integration? What if we gave them a chance to contribute? I'm sure arms firms making billions a day from wars that are exacerbating this situation could make a contribution too. The public

realm would benefit instantly.

and energy wanting to be part of something meaningful.

When enough people involve themselves, we *will* get our Post Office moment, and we will get change and justice. Mission Possible? 100%. But only if we move the crowd.

When my Jamaican father was interviewed in the Daily Mirror, in 2023, he said something heartbreaking: "I think they're waiting for us to die out, to avoid paying the money."

Moving the crowd

The 'Windrush Generation' is elderly and time is running out. Our movement - which has support from artists like AJ Tracey, Aisling Bea, Eddie Marsan, Hannah Waddingham, Danny Sapani, Adrian Lester, Paterson Joseph, and campaigners like Doreen Lawrence and Leroy Logan - must make people feel something, enough to act quickly. When a well-known face says they care, the public listens. They can plant a seed. However, to make it grow we need empathy and engagement from audiences - artists, activists, anyone with ideas

Colin McFarlane is a British actor who has appeared in numerous television shows - from *The Fast Show* to *Doctor Who* - and films such as Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* (2005) and *The Dark Knight* (2008).

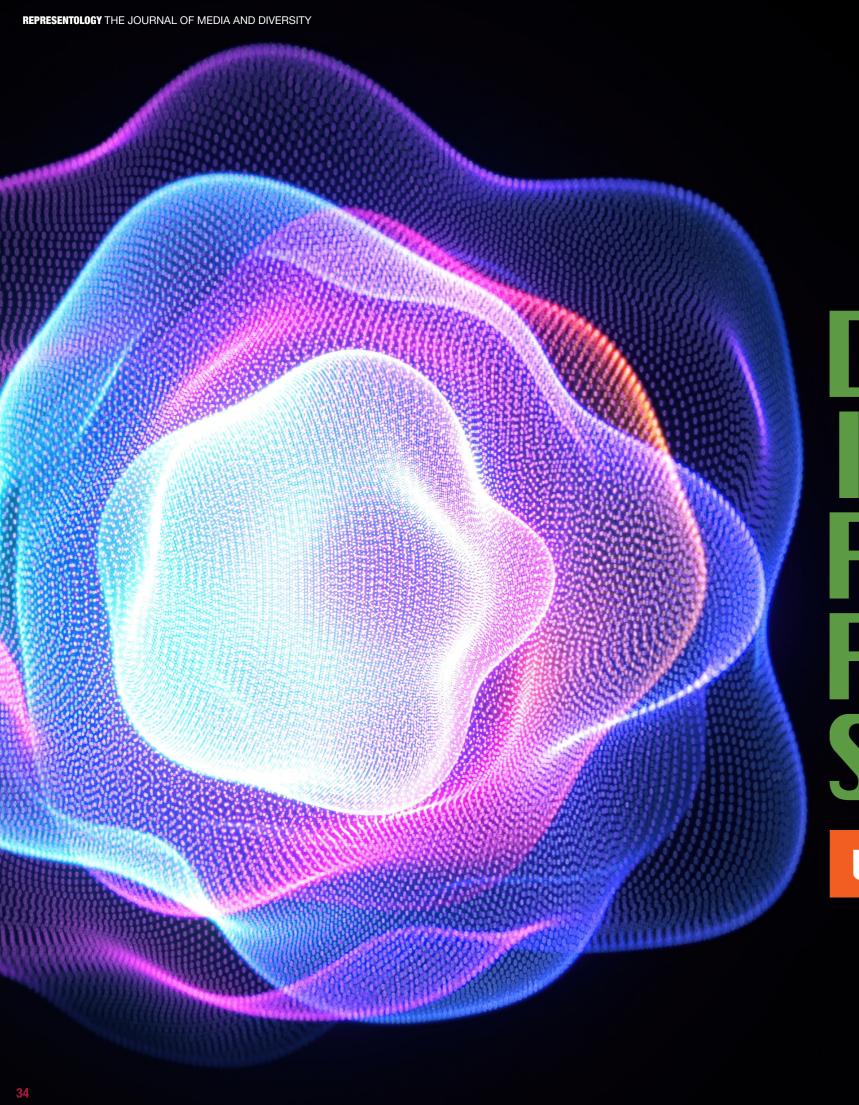
Find out more about

Justice 4 Windrush: https://
justice4windrush.org/

eference

 The Historical Roots of the Windrush Scandal: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-historical-roots-of-the-windrush-scandal





DIUERSITY INUK POSTPRODUCTION SOUND Emma Butt Dr Ellie Tomsett

UPDATE 2025

Foreword

This research, conducted throughout August 2024 to January 2025, is a follow up to the Diversity in **UK** post-production Sound report published in 2020, funded by the Sir **Lenny Henry Centre** for Media Diversity. The aim of repeating this research process is to see whether the industry has achieved progress, stayed the same, or regressed in terms of the diversity of the post-production sound workforce.

In order to get a sense of the wider landscape, the research examined the top 15 highest rated UK TV shows (with post-production sound based in the UK) on BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky One, each month across a 3 month period (August, September and October 2024) to identify the gender. racial and class diversity across the key postproduction sound team roles. This initial data was accessed from Broadcast magazine's 28-day consolidated genre overview tables on highest rated shows (published online 2024), on screen credits, and IMDB. This research also involved interviews with a diverse range of professionals working in post-production sound in the UK to identify barriers to career progression in this area. This research evidences a worrying absence of diversity in post-production sound teams.

This research was undertaken by Emma Butt an experienced post-production sound professional and Ellie Tomsett a media researcher based at Birmingham City University.

Executive Summary

The following data relates to the top 15 highest rated shows, each month, across 6 UK broadcasters (BBC1, BBC2. ITV. Channel 4. Channel 5, Sky One) from a three month period (August - October of 2024) resulting in 32 shows total; after shows without postproduction sound were removed from the sample. There were 67 available sound roles across these shows, these were undertaken by a total of 57 people. It is worth noting that some people from the data set worked on more than one show.

Out of those 57 people, 32 people responded to requests to confirm their identity in relation to gender, race and class.

- 24 people identified as men (75%).
- Only eight people identified as women. This is a small increase (an extra two women) from the 2020 research.
- Only two people identified as being from an underrepresented racial background (6%). This is an increase of one person since the 2020 research.
- Five people identified as having a non-physical disability. An increase of four people since the 2020 research.

captured and nine people identified as coming from a working-class background. This evidences the importance of class when considering barriers to entering a career in

post-production sound.

Class diversity was

- The sample of job roles included 13 Dubbing Mixers, 11 Sound Effects Editors, seven Dialogue Editors and one allrounder. The previous report identified only one woman in a dubbing/ re-recording mixer role, in this data collection three were identified
- The interview stage of this research, conducted with 8 post-production sound professionals, highlighted the following:
- Instances of racism and racial insensitivity are experienced by people of colour working in the industry.
- Harassment and inappropriate behaviour has been, and continues to be, experienced by women in the industry.
- The informal hiring practices of postproduction sound create barriers to increasing diversity.

Introduction

In 2019 we undertook initial research into why the industry, UK film and television production, had such difficulty attracting and retaining diverse staff into postproduction sound roles. The report that came from that research, published in 2020, was written in the context of a significant amount of discussion about the lack of racial and gender diversity in the UK film and TV industry, as detailed in the work of Henry and Ryder (2021). This was observed as an issue both in front of, and behind the camera, and new schemes and initiatives were being set up to help establish a more diverse workforce. These included Channel 4's "Black to Front",1 ITV's Diversity Acceleration Plan,² and Netflix's commitment of \$5 million globally for Black not for profits, creators and Business.3 These initiatives, however, rarely (if ever) included post-production teams in their remit.

The 2020 report concluded that, out of a sample of 55 people who worked in postproduction sound on the top rated shows of the previous quarter, there was a lack of gender and racial diversity in the industry. That report concluded that only six out of 55 people identified as women and shockingly all but one of the people were white. Three people out of the 55 self identified as having a disability. 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 within the 2020 sample.

In 2024, four years on from the initial report, and an upswing in public discourse about racial and gender discrimination in the wake of Black Lives Matter protests, we wanted to understand whether the issues identified previously had been addressed? Is there now more support for diverse post-production talent to enter the industry, or once in a post-production career, progress in their chosen field? Are we seeing more people from diverse backgrounds progress to Head of Department (HOD) roles, or are there barriers still holding them back? Crucially, has any tangible progress been made since the initial report and is this evident in the data?

As with the first report, it is

important to acknowledge

researcher positioning in relation to the area of study. As a mixed-race woman who has worked in the industry for over 17 years, Emma is still continually faced with being one of the only women on most sound teams and often the only woman on the whole post team. Emma has personally experienced sexism and bullying and struggled for years to progress into high end drama as a Re-Recording Mixer, before pivoting to a Dialogue Editor role, when someone took a "risk" on hiring her. As Emma's ethnic identity is not visually evident, she has not personally faced racism in the workplace (although she has experienced racism in her lifetime). Emma's positioning as an insider within both the industry and cultural contexts under analysis was central to this

qualitative methods were used simultaneously to understand the numerical and experiential position of post-production sound workers within the current UK industry. As, subsequent to the 2020 report, the author

A mixture of quantitative and

Emma Butt has been asked to talk publicly about the issues with diversity in the industry this may have coloured the judgement of people being asked to participate this time round. This is because the impact of the first report was significant, and as such potential interviewees may have been concerned that they would be identifiable if from a minority group and being critical of the industry that employs them. Ethical approval was sought and granted (by Birmingham City University) for this project. All participants have been pseudonymised, and given the opportunity to read, reflect and amend or withdraw their contribution before publication.

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Three people out of the 55 self

identified as having a disability.

This research explores the barriers to career progression that relate to women and those who come from an underrepresented background, and whether there are commonalities in experiences. Additionally, this research considers exactly what actions can be taken to remove these barriers to ensure wider inclusion in the post-production sound profession.

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Diversity of workforce on highest rated shows

In order to understand the wider landscape of the diversity of the postproduction sound workforce the highest rated UK TV shows across a 3 month period of 2024 were identified. The industry magazine, Broadcast, publicly publishes a 28 day consolidated genre overview table of the highest rated shows across 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 any live sporting events, shows which do not require post-production sound work (e.g. BBC1's Strictly Come Dancing [2004-]), and duplicates were omitted from the data, this left 32 shows in total.

Once the relevant highest rated shows had been identified we 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 sound teams vary across each genre, we decided to focus on the key common sound roles found in each one. These are as follows; Re-Recording Mixer, Dialogue Editor and Sound Effects editor.

With TV drama 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. Conversely, when producing factual and entertainment work, all three roles can be covered by one individual. Both of these kinds of programming and levels of participation in the post-production sound process was evident in this data sample.

Once all names of those in

the key sound roles covered in the sample had been confirmed, we personally contacted every person directly via email to request their age, gender, career level, ethnicity and to ask whether they identified as having a disability, impairment or learning difference. We also asked them to identify their class background using standard class indirect indicator questions about education level and background. It was necessary to contact people individually so that people could self-identify against these identity categories. We provided a consent form and an information sheet about the project, and its data handling protocols as part of this process. It was made clear that data would not be attributed to individual respondents but presented as percentages for the whole

A summary of the findings from this aspect of the data collection can be found in the table below (Table 1). Some categories have been conflated to ensure individuals cannot be identified.

Table 1. Summary of respondents identity characteristics (self-identified)

Identified as	% (n)
Male	75% (n=24)
Female	25% (n=8)
White	94% (n=30)
Global majority racial identity	6% (n=2)
Disabled	16% (n=5)
Working class	28% (n =9)

The resulting data provides insight into the post-production sound workforce diversity in 2024. Out of 57 people working across a total of 32 shows, 32 people responded providing information on their gender, identity, ethnicity, class, sound role and if they identified as having a disability. Some people responded and chose not to confirm any details, others did not reply. It should also be noted that dissimilarly to the last round of research, when Emma Butt's advocacy was not widely known, some people approached for this aspect of the research responded in an openly hostile manner, objecting to this research taking place, and making it clear that they felt this research was unnecessary. Some people were not contacted as contact details for them were unable to be found.

Interviews

The numbers from the quantitative research are of course shocking, but numbers alone do not provide the explanation as to why we are still seeing such a disparity in the participation of women and global majority people when compared to their white male counterparts.

To better understand the barriers women and people from underrepresented backgrounds are facing in progressing in their careers, we interviewed 8 men and women from underrepresented backgrounds (including a white man who identifies as working-class). Each participant was at a different stage in their career and faced different challenges. In the table below (Table 2.) the ethnic background of participants is intentionally kept general, as to be more specific in an industry where there are so few people from underrepresented backgrounds could make participants identifiable. It was not possible, simply based on who volunteered to participate in an interview to include disabled people for this part of the research - as the industry is relatively small it would also have been very difficult to ensure anonymity of disabled participants. Interviews for this report took place in the Summer of 2024 and we interviewed everyone who volunteered to participate. Closer to publication in early 2025, one participant chose to withdraw their consent due to fear of repercussions.

This was in part related to the changing attitude towards Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) within the film and TV industry, as evidenced by the erasure of DEI roles across broadcasters and streamers. Finding participants to take part in this report had already been challenging as there are so few people from underrepresented backgrounds working within the post-production sound sector.

The interview data was coded into themes based on commonalities in discussions with participants. We present findings below in relation to 1) Working culture, 2) Isolation, 3) Sexism and parenthood, 4) Abuses of power, 5) Training and career support.

Table 2. Summary of interviewees identity characteristics (self-identified)

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity
Cathal	Man	Underrepresented background
Siobhan	Woman	White
Niamh	Woman	White
Mikey	Man	Underrepresented background
Mikey Annabel	Man Woman	•
		background

Working Culture

There were common themes among the participants' responses with regards to finding and keeping work. Cathal, Siobhan and Niamh all commented about the drinking culture they faced at the start of their careers.

Siobhan commented: "There was so much pressure to be one of the boys, to earn your respect. Many times I drank myself under the table because people would go to the pub at lunch and they wouldn't go back to work."

When asked about whether this felt optional, Siobhan talked about how "there was a pressure to drink and [...] not just to have a drink, but a pressure to get drunk". They remembered feeling like they "wanted to impress, but then also feeling so out of control of the whole situation". Siobhan made it clear that their participation in this drinking culture was not because they wanted to, but because they believed there would be career consequences if they did not. They said "Not that anyone explicitly said it, but it was yeah, [...] you were either the unlikable one, or you went out and you matched everybody else". Both Siobhan and Niamh highlighted that this was also an environment where they were often the only woman. This speaks directly to the pressure on women to assimilate into existing male dominated work cultures and the importance of these 'informal reputation economies' (Gill, 2014: 519) for finding and retaining work in the industry.

Niamh also reflected on the way certain behaviours can alienate women when entering the industry. She said that "the biggest issue was you had to be part of the boys' club. If they did the long lunches, you have to go out for the long lunch". This was seen as vital because "That's when you heard about other jobs. That's when you had to make them [the hiring manager] like you [...]. At those lunches is when you would find out whether they were going to hire you again"

They spoke about the extreme informality of these hiring practices noting that "there would be no kind of like bringing you in, sitting you down, talking about it", thus her employment rested solely on her attendance and participation in these social gatherings.

Most interviewees expressed feeling pressure to go out and drink in order to progress, even if financially (especially when in junior roles) it was difficult. Cathal, who identifies as being from a working-class background, spoke of their experience when first starting out and working as a runner within a facility. He commented that "I often wouldn't go out for Friday drinks and stuff because I couldn't afford to [...] but then that became like almost an offence to some of the other runners, including the head runner". This testimony demonstrates how specific working cultures can feel discriminative in an intersectional manner, both along gender and class lines in these instances. The issue here is not socialising with

backgrounds as, unlike many of their more economically privileged contemporaries, they do not arrive into the industry with existing contacts or potential sponsors/ mentors. As Sam Friedman and Daniel Laurison identify in their book The Class Ceiling: Why it Pays to be Privileged (2019), in the contemporary UK context 'important progression opportunities in many elite occupations do not just rest on competence but also a 'looking glass' version of 'merit' and class-cultural similarity' (Friedman and Lauirson. 2019: 111). Thus, the importance of engaging with working cultures and networking is clear.

"there was a pressure to drink and [...] not just to have a drink, but a pressure to get drunk". They remembered feeling like they "wanted to impress, but then also feeling so out of control of the whole situation"

colleagues, the issue is the pressure to do so, and work being contingent upon this socialisation. This is consistent with what was discovered in our 2020 report which illuminated the informality of hiring practices in post-production sound as well as wider research into the UK Cultural Industries (for example Culture is Bad for You: Inequality in the Cultural and Creative Industries, Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020). This need to socialise and to make connections may be particularly important to those from working class

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REPRESENTOLOGY THE JOURNAL OF MEDIA AND DIVERSITY ISSUE 08 SUMMER 2025

Isolation

Although there has been significant discourse about how to ensure gender and ethnic minority diversity in the industry, as well as talk about supporting women if they choose to become parents, in practice not a lot has been done to support this in post-production. Commissioning guidelines across the broadcasters to support better diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) on and off screen rarely if ever cover post-production.4 At most the only role ever mentioned in guidelines is "Lead Editor" which is not a common role across all genres. Sound as a specific area is never mentioned.

Isolation (being the only one of a specific identity on a team) obviously works across multiple aspects of personal identity but perhaps is most notable in post-production sound with race and gender. This was evident in the data collected from the top-rated shows which highlighted how few women and global majority people are working in this area. Several of the women who were interviewed for this research mentioned how regularly they would be the only woman working in the post-production sound team.

This isolation becomes problematic in various ways For example, in relation to racial identity, Cathal spoke about an experience of working on a production which included triggering racist content and being the only person of colour there. The post producer on the project was considerate enough to warn Cathal about the content before they began work on the project and gave them the opportunity to decide if they wanted to work on it, which they decided to do. However,

during a viewing of the project, the client asked for focus to be put on a specific racial slur for dramatic effect, and Cathal recalled that he:

"Had to just switch my emotions off and [...], just be matter of fact. The person that I was working with [...] then said, yeah, 'turn the [racist slur] up'. I remember turning, and the director winced as well. He was a white guy."

Cathal noted that there was no diversity amonast the production team and "There were certain discussions that were being had around the storytelling [...] [when] there was no diversity on the project." They noted that this wasn't an unusual experience and that they often found

iust left. I just left the space. I feel like I've got to leave the situation immediately because of [my racial identity] in this situation. And that's going to be the thing that's going to make things potentially a thing, make things plausible or make a story from it."

The experience that Cathal shared in the interview highlighted the complexities of working in overwhelmingly white spaces and how this can result in racial ignorance and a hostile working environment. This particular instance shows the problematic nature of banter that makes light of rape culture and how this can be particularly difficult for men of colour due to racial stereotypes.

The most worrying encounter **Cathal spoke about was having a** conversation and joking with a white female colleague one day when, while joking around, she started screaming rape "as a ioke."

themselves to be part of an all-white team, commenting that on bigger jobs "security and cleaners" would be the only people of colour they

The most worrving encounter Cathal spoke about was having a conversation and joking with a white female colleague one day when, while joking around, she started screaming rape "as a joke." He commented that:

"Someone else saw it. There were two other people in the room as well. [...] She was just like, no, I'm joking [...]. I

Sexism and parenthood

Most of the women interviewed highlighted a concern about whether choosing to start a family (or indeed already having one) would impact their ability to be hired, continue working, or prevent progress to senior supervising roles. This was an issue that also came out in the findings of the 2020 report. Age is obviously a factor for this particular barrier. As women progress to the stage in their career where they may look to a HOD role, this can coincide

would have to leave the industry, or they would have to sacrifice ever being a HOD or sound supervisor. Niamh provided an example

with a time when they may

Contributors to this report

detailed being told that if they

wanted to have a family, they

want to start a family.

of this issue of parenthood playing out. She recalled that:

"I was told on my first job, if I want to have kids, [I'm] never going to work again in the industry. And the evidence was there [...] because the only women I had as examples, had kids and left the industry."

Interviewees highlighted the importance of finding the right hiring managers to enable working mothers to stay in the industry. Niamh commented that "I've got to find reasonable enough supervisors, I still get the job done, I just don't want conventional hours. I still have to put my kids first, but your job will get done" and this flexibility is not always accommodated.

Niamh also felt that this was a gendered issue in that it was mostly male colleagues implying that she could not be both a mother and have a successful career in postproduction sound. She identified that often "men who had children, [said] you will never work in this industry. And they had a valid point because they don't foster an environment where you can."

However, not all of the participants felt their gender had a negative impact on their career, when speaking with Annabel about their treatment by male colleagues, they felt any mistreatment or sexism had been minimal. They said "I feel sometimes a little bit like I just maybe don't notice

these things. Or maybe, I'm not as subject to them as some others." They did go on to acknowledge that sometimes subtle things may occur due to their gender, for example while in a studio environment with a male colleague, the client would direct all notes to the male colleague and would barely look at them. Annabel's testimony evidences that it is possible to navigate a career without experiencing overt sexism, and in fact be championed by male colleagues, however this was the minority experience of our interviewees. Sexism remains an enduring issue across many industries, so it is not surprising that it endures in post-production sound too.

Abuses of power

Although in 2016 #MeToo shone a light on some of the workplace issues impacting women in creative and entertainment industries (Boyle, 2018), and there was a hope this new openness would limit inappropriate encounters in the workplace for women, interviewees discussed concerning stories regarding instances of abuses of power.

One participant, Niamh, described how, after being professional and friendly to a male client (as is expected in any job role while working as an assistant at a junior level), the client contacted her manager asking for her personal mobile number. It was made clear to her manager this was not for work related purposes.

After she declined this request, the manager ignored her wishes and gave her number out anyway. This resulted in repeated unwanted phone calls and texts that made her feel uncomfortable. She said:

"I got so many calls and messages [....] and I was made to feel like I had to keep him happy [as he was still a client]. But this is part of the issue with all of these producers, directors, [...] it's why Me Too was so important because no one can say no to them and they [facilities] don't want to lose them [as clients]."

Fundamentally from Niamh's perspective, it was clear that her safety and wishes were not the priority, commenting that "you want to keep the client happy, and it doesn't matter if you make a [junior member of staff] unhappy." In this particular case, there was someone else in the company she could report this too, however nothing was done. This illustrates how harassment can be ignored, or as was the case here, facilitated, by those in positions of power within post-production. The current economic context means that the need to attract and retain clients can be used as an excuse to not take concerns about personal safety seriously.

Training and career development support

All participants spoke about a lack of training opportunities both as freelancers and staff. Mikey being at the beginning of their career spoke of the difficulty they found entering the industry after leaving university. Although they applied for multiple entry level positions at facilities and got to the interview stage, they never progressed. They found training schemes available for location sound but none for post-production sound, which was their target role, commenting that "I think post-production would benefit from a training scheme."

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Even sound professionals who work in house within a facility structure face a similar challenge. They can, however, be supported by senior members of staff and have some training provided, and as a result clients (producers, directors and production companies) can be made to feel that less of a risk is being taken in the appointment of staff within that context. In reality the workload for sound professionals at the start of their career often means there is not enough time for that training to happen. Also, now that in-house teams are so small due to the same financial constraints that productions face, facilities often do not have the financial means to progress a member of staff and hire someone new to replace them.

Lack of training was a common theme amonast all of the participants with Catherine and Oisin both highlighting lack of training from their employers. Oisin felt they had to train themselves and Catherine also stated that a lack of training resulted in jobs taking longer for them to complete than necessary. However. Catherine has never been given any extra time to compensate for the lack of training from their employers. As a result of this situation, the pressure felt so much that they contemplated leaving the industry multiple times as "I was like. I don't know if this is for me. I was [...] annoyed because I tried so hard [...] [it's] taking me ages to get here, and now I'm just not happy."

Even though Catherine was only given little training by their employers, when a new employee started in their department, she was expected to train the new

member of staff in the job role. She commented that "I was more or less training them [...] I was getting to grips with it [the job role myself], I wasn't really in a position where I should have been doing that." This issue was compounded by the fact they were also not being paid appropriately to undertake this additional workload. "there were a lot of conversations along the way about I'd been hired on a junior salary as well, but then [I'm] running projects."

Although lack of training may impact all entrants into the post-production sound industry, it has specific consequences for those from minority backgrounds. When people of colour are put in the position of having

When asked if they felt there was anywhere to get additional support as a freelancer, they said no. They felt that although schemes existed, they are rarely run by people from an underrepresented background who understood the challenges they faced, and that they always focused on shadowing opportunities. He commented that on previous schemes the focus had been on career advice but not actual experience. saying:

"Let's be honest, I want a job. I don't need to keep sitting down here and hearing the same advice. It almost makes me feel sometimes like I don't know what I'm doing, but I do."

Working under an "assistant" or "junior" title they were being tasked with carrying out much more senior work but not getting any financial uplift . . .

insufficient time to train, they can feel additional pressure as they are often the only person of their race on a team. When I asked Cathal if they felt extra pressure being the only person of colour on a sound team they said:

"Yeah. It felt like extra pressure [...] But then I looked back and realized up to this point, I've had very little support [...] in terms of actually someone teaching me how to do this. But then I realized that unlike some of my other counterparts, I haven't had any formal training."

This reinforces how even if the advice given by training schemes is helpful, advice alone does not address what is really needed, the chance to build up credits and evidence experience. Those who had worked as staff spoke about "broken promises" of career development and training. While they were working under an "assistant" or "junior" title they were being tasked with carrying out much more senior work but not getting any financial uplift or receiving fair credit for their work.

Because of the freelance nature of much of the industry, sound professionals often act up and cover aspects of a more senior role (for ease, convenience or necessity) without this work being formally recognised. Sound professionals are struggling to move from assistant or junior levels to higher roles even when they have five or more years of work and training, and have often been doing the job of a more senior professional without the pay level or credit.

Siobhan recalled starting with a company on what was originally only a sixmonth contract:

"I thought I would just do this for six months and that would be it. [...] it became very hard to get out because of all the false promises that I realized, eventually were false promises."

Cathal also had experienced being misled by employers stating that "It's just like the amount of empty promises that you get given and how normalised empty promises are." After asking to move from documentary to scripted, which was agreed with their management, he found that while the company they worked for would schedule them to work on scripted jobs, a day or two before starting, their schedule would be changed removing them from the promised work. As a result of these shifting schedules they felt their career was being played with and asked to speak to management about what was happening. They discovered that another colleague in the current department they were trying to leave, was intervening and stopping them from progressing and:

"They were just like, this person has stopped you from

doing this job because they needed you here because you make more money for them here. We've been trying our best to move you across, but they keep sending off like emails complaining that they need you."

In order for Cathal to progress in the area they wanted to work in, they had to leave the company.

These comments reflect the findings of the 2020 report, which found that if schemes do exist, they focus only on shadowing or mentoring but people need credits to progress. People will not hire someone based on how many times they have sat in the back of a room watching how a job is done, they hire based on how many times that person has actually done the job. But if no one is willing to let them do the job, how can they get any further in their career?

One of the key problem areas identified both in the 2020 and 2024 interviews was in relation to career progression, especially at mid-career level. Sound professionals in the middle of their career (so not just starting out but having not progressed to a senior or head role), especially freelancers, face some of the same issues that other professionals from diverse backgrounds across the industry have experienced. For example, if they would like to pursue a career in High End TV (HETV) but come from a short form content, documentary, or factual and entertainment background they are often deemed to "not have the right type of credits" by hiring managers. They are therefore instantly ruled out of prospective job roles in areas they are interested in pursuing.

It is still the case that without

genre people can't progress, but to get the credits they need someone to take a chance on them. Due to the current state of the UK TV industry, with tightened and stretched budgets, and fewer shows being commissioned (as a result of over commissioning happening during the Covid pandemic, the writers and actors strike in the US during 2023, and the economic downturn facing the UK which resulted in less advertisement revenue), even fewer hiring managers are willing to take on anyone they don't know, or those without what they perceive to be existing relevant credits.

While mid-career

development schemes now

existing credits in a specific

exist which allow people from the post-production sector to take part (such as the Film Forward or Make a Move schemes with Screen Skills.5 or the Women in Film and TV Mentor scheme⁶), there is no industry financed training or scheme. This is with the exception of 4PP (Channel 4, 2023),7 a scheme that was developed by the author Emma Butt, as a direct response to the 2020 report. This initiative exists to help mid-career post-production talent progress by means of training, mentorship, and paid placements on productions where they receive a full credit at the end, the key to them progressing onto another job. 4PP directly targets people from underrepresented backgrounds. Crucially, all participants are being placed on a production in their chosen job role and genre, and this is fully paid by the scheme. This means the production faces no additional financial "risk" at taking on someone unknown to them, but the participant is also not expected to work for free in order to progress their career. This scheme is the first of its kind for UK post-production and is still ongoing with placements being arranged. It is similar in structure to the BBC's Continuing Drama New Directors Scheme,⁸ which no longer runs, but has proven to increase diversity across directors. The hope is that the same can be achieved through 4PP.

Overall, from the interview stage of this research it became clear that participants felt that gender stereotyping has impacted negatively on their careers, and that being a racial minority in the industry requires additional labour to get in and get on. Even after industry interventions, post-production sound is still behind in relation to diversity and inclusion. Training and career development support is drastically needed to help progress those struggling to advance to HOD roles, but also to support those who choose to have a family. Understanding and flexible working conditions are needed to retain highly skilled women within the sector.

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Conclusions

As a result of analysing data from top rated shows and speaking directly with people working in post-production sound, it is clear there is still a lot of work to be done for the industry to become more inclusive. Practical training opportunities for people at all levels in post-production sound require more investment, both in relation to freelance and staff roles.

On screen credits are the only way for people to progress, especially with hiring managers who select staff for projects often coming from non-technical and sometimes non post-production backgrounds. For this to happen, there are two solutions:

1

Wider availability of training schemes is necessary, where participants don't just shadow experienced people, but fully take on the job role, in a supported way, so they have a chance to succeed. This training also needs to cover the living wage for participants, otherwise it creates a barrier of entry to working class people.

2.

Practical experience needs to take priority over having the "right type of credits." Preventing someone from being hired for a job due to coming from a documentary background into HETV drama, or stepping up from an assistant role, is regressive and will contribute to the sector's already problematic skills gap. There is a need to look beyond the credits and instead judge candidates on their years of experience, demonstrated knowledge of technology, equipment, and workflows. If a candidate is less experienced in any of these

areas, the question should be asked as to whether they can still be hired but supported in a practical way to help them progress.

In addition to rethinking training and experience, when junior team members are hired, a realistic expectation of their skill level needs to be considered. A formal training structure needs to be implemented, and support given. If people start to take on responsibilities outside of their original job specification, financial compensation needs to be forthcoming as well as a change in their job title.

Importantly, commissioning guidelines need to be re-written to explicitly include

In terms of fostering a safe environment in postproduction sound, anonymous reporting structures need to be put in place at either company or broadcast level to allow staff and freelancers to report any sexual harassment, bullying or inappropriate behaviour. There is a fear of repercussions to careers if people speak up. Anonymous reporting is the only way to create a safe working environment, as recently evidenced by Knotts' (2024) report for the TV Industry Human Rights Forum.

Crucially, more formalised hiring practices need to be introduced across the sector. "Word of Mouth" or "down the pub" hiring approaches

Importantly, commissioning guidelines need to be re-written to explicitly include sound roles in the list of departments needing to address diversity and inclusion.

sound roles in the list of departments needing to address diversity and inclusion. As well as consideration of getting into the industry, an intervention is needed to help people from underrepresented backgrounds to progress to HOD roles. The talent is there but they are struggling to progress. Inclusion of sound roles within commissioning quidelines would create a greater need for underrepresented talent at HOD level.

creates a barrier to those from underrepresented backgrounds. We need a system that creates an equal opportunity for all people to apply for available positions.

A diverse and inclusive environment within post-production sound benefits everyone, individuals and productions alike. We hope the findings and recommendations of this report can be used to make sorely needed tangible changes for those working in post-production sound in the UK.

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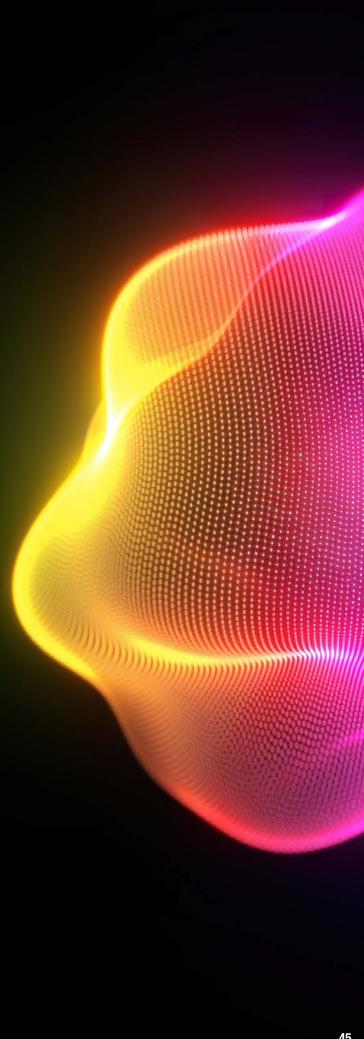
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In March 2025, the BBC broadcast Eid prayers live from Bradford Central Mosque. Former BBC Head of Religion Aaqil Ahmed reports on how his adopted hometown became the setting for a terrestrial television first.

On my numerous walks during the Covid lockdown I was confronted with a dilemma: how will I and my fellow Muslims pray Eid prayers? They are congregational and I'm not sure that there was any other time in history when they couldn't happen as normal. What did I do? I prayed with the family in the garden and downloaded information on how to lead the prayer. What I also did was start, during those long walks, to plan a series of things that would need to be put in place in case a lockdown happened again.

Big congregational open air prayers had become a thing. Tens of thousands praying together in parks and, during Ramadan, people breaking fasts in large numbers at iconic locations. I tried to mix the two and convinced the English Cricket Board that Lords or Headingley might be great locations for prayers to be televised. In principle, they agreed and I went to talk to a broadcaster.

If I am honest, the only

serious broadcast conversation I had was with the BBC. In mid-2024. I started talking with Daisy Scalchi, the Head of Commissioning for Religion. TV. We discussed demographics, the 2021 census figures, and then I asked a simple question when will over four million people get programmes for them, rather than programmes about them? I know I had grappled with this question when I was the Head of Religion at the BBC. but the latest data had made it less of a philosophical question and more real. Daisy would also have been grappling with this, and she said fairly early on that she wanted to do it.

At this point, I was talking to the BBC as the broadcast consultant for the 2025 UK City of Culture. Bradford. Daisv asked the right question - shouldn't we be doing it there? The answer was: "Yes, of course we should". Demographically, it was the right place, in terms of being one of the top five locations for Muslim populations in the country. In 2025, it was the obvious place to mark Eid prayers, to be shown live for the first time on a UK terrestrial broadcaster.

I teamed up with Firecracker Films to work together as co-producers. We developed two programmes for the BBC: live prayers in the morning and a celebratory show in the evening. Instead of an international cricket venue, we landed at the Central Mosque in Bradford. Partly, this was because it was my personal 'go-to' mosque in Bradford, its unique central location, its history and, because Zulfi Karim, one of the most influential people in the city and a stalwart of the mosque, made me feel that we could work together. He simply said, "I trust you", and a special relationship with the mosque, its leadership and congregation began.

We had around three months to pull off my favourite thing - being the first to do something. We would have to invent ways of working and editorial content that had never been seen before. Of course, during my career I had been in charge of the Pope's visit, Christmas services etc, so covering a religious ceremony was not new to me and most of the crew but, believe me, it was a first - for the team, the mosque and the BBC.

The imam is a young man. following in the footsteps of his departed, much loved and respected father. If I had any doubts about him, they lasted less than a nanosecond. Zulfi and I would sit with him and go through his sermon -- even what he should wear -- and he was collegiate throughout. It helped that in the month of Ramadan (Eid following the last day of that month), he and his team were living in the mosque for days on end, so I could very easily pop in and annoy them.

I recorded the imam's first attempt at a sermon, then we analysed it and worked on his delivery, which wouldn't just be for the mosque's congregation but also for any non-Muslim audiences watching at home. Getting that balance right and doing it in English were tasks he relished and he delivered the sermon perfectly.

Alongside all the work with the mosque, we had another show to produce, one that was now called *Celebrity Eid*. My co-executive producer Jes Wilkins from Firecracker, the senior producer (a 'Bradford lass') Farah Qayum, and Producer-Director Ahmed Peerbux took on a lot of the organising while I was in Bradford.

With a few weeks to go, we were all working across both shows and, by then, had Jason Mohamed on board as presenter. As a team, we really wanted Jason to host and, luckily for us, both he and the BBC were committed to it too. Jason is better known in Wales as a radio host and, across the rest of the UK, he's a BBC Sports guy. To me, he is a popular presenter, he's mainstream and a Muslim, and would appeal to both Muslim and

non-Muslim audiences alike (plus he's a fun guy).

We talk more about sport, Britpop and Adidas trainers than we do theology - why should everything to do with Islam have to be fronted by a news journalist? Doesn't that immediately mark it down as a subject that is serious? Yes, there is a time and place for that, but does it so often need to be the default position?

On the day, everything went well because we had a top-notch team, all with impeccable track records in delivering world-class outside broadcasts, varying from Royal Weddings to other major events. We also knew and talked about the fact that we had a huge responsibility to get this right. We had the BBC's reputation to uphold, we had the trust of the mosque and everyone involved with it, and we had the audience to think of - Muslims wanting to be portrayed properly and see themselves on screen as equals within Britain, and for non-Muslims to get an opportunity to see what happens inside a mosque and what exactly Eid is.

own in terms of viewing figures, the evening show being the top show in its timeslot. Yes, I would do things differently having now experienced doing it for the first time. Will we do it again? Well, my company kind of owns the IP on televised Eid here, so, yes, I'd like to do it again - in another city, and with a different kind of congregation in terms of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. I would like this to be an annual 'returner' since, as the Muslim communities grow, it just feels right. What I also know

The two shows held their

now, but hadn't thought about at the time, is that people prayed along to the TV broadcast (I've already pitched a pray-along!) - what better public service can you get?

Four years from the initial ponderings while out walking to the first ever live Muslim prayers on BBC One. As an old friend said to me in a text on the day of the broadcast, "Your Dad would have been proud". I cried a bit when I read it, but she was right: he would have been proud and he would also have said, "Good, now what's next?" Well, Eid Live has shown that

Aaqil Ahmed is Professor of Media at the University of Bolton and the former Head of Religion and Ethics at both Channel 4 and the BBC.

We had the BBC's reputation to uphold, we had the trust of the mosque and everyone involved with it, and we had the audience to think of . . .

true public service in a changing demographic landscape is possible. It's a full-on mainstream show confident enough to say, "This is us. Take it or leave it". Going forward, for many communities it will be the benchmark as they ask, "How do we get ourselves on air in a way that we own - that is for us, not just about us? It may seem like a simple show, but it is way more important than that.

and convinced the English Cricket Board that Lords or Headingley might be great locations for prayers to be televised.

Tens of thousands praying

in large numbers at iconic

together in parks and, during

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locations. I tried to mix the two

Mythbusting:

Diversity and
Higher Education's
relationship to
UK screen

Richard Wallis and Christa van Raalte

Is Higher Education an obstacle to diversity in the UK screen industries? **Recent discussions** of apprenticeships and other nondegree routes for young people from non-traditional backgrounds might lead you to think so.1 But the reality is that the evidence suggests otherwise. We need to take care that less privileged new entrants to the industry do not experience additional disadvantages because of poor career advice.

In our recent article Higher Education and the screen industries in the UK: the need for authentic collaboration for student progression and the talent pipeline, we argue that the relationship between HE and industry, and much of the discussion around that relationship, has been distorted by six myths some of which, if allowed to go unchallenged, could have decidedly negative implications for equality, diversity and inclusivity in the screen workforce.

Myth 1:

'Universities exist primarily to serve the needs of employers'

Whatever politicians like to tell us, this is not the case! Universities serve a range of stakeholders. Employers are certainly among them but, rightly or wrongly, the UK has adopted a model of Higher Education that prioritises the fee-paying student as a kind of 'customer'. This means that a University's first responsibility is to determine what is in the best interests of that student, whatever their background or previous life experience. If that student intends to forge a career in the screen industries, where work is based on contingent and individualised arrangements, where employers will not be investing in their career, and where no mutual loyalty is expected, then the responsibility of educators is to prepare them for managing this kind of self-directed, independent career², not to mould them into entry-level workers for an industry that is notorious for treating such workers as disposable commodities, to be discarded at the first sign of economic adversity (Wallis 2021). Of course, there is an overlap of interests here. It's

in the interests of media students that their courses provide them with skills they can offer potential employers. However, HEIs must prioritise the immediate and long-term interests of their individual students, not simply the short-term 'needs of the employer'.

Myth 2:

'The screen industries do not require a graduate workforce'

Again, this is not borne out

very few jobs in production

by the evidence. It is true that

demand a formal qualification. It is true that most of us know someone who's 'made it' in the industry, without a degree. However, the fact remains that 72% of screen industry workers are graduates - this is a very high proportion, and a proportion that rises among the younger cohorts.3 So whatever people say about not needing a degree, the reality is that - in the main - employers hire graduates. This is an industry where the characteristics of what used to be called 'graduateness' are still very much in demand.4 In other words, as articulated in a recent report commissioned by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Creative Diversity: 'Put simply, a degree will not quarantee an individual a job in the creative industries; but an individual is unlikely to get a creative industries job without a degree.' (Comunian, Dent, et al., 2023, 7). So why do people continue to insist that you don't need a degree to work in the screen industries? We think there are three reasons: firstly, it has become a way to emphasise the non-academic nature of many of the generic skills that are considered essential (ScreenSkills 2019a, 2).

Secondly, it supports (and is supported by) the deeply embedded culture of 'paying one's dues' - the idea that new entrants, irrespective of their qualifications, must prove themselves in menial roles before they can progress. The third reason relates directly to EDI: an argument has developed that the industry can tackle the longstanding lack of diversity in its workforce by a fasttrack approach to particular roles – in other words, by circumventing the need for university education. This is a rather dubious strategy, given the contingent nature of screen work, and the fact that the greatest challenge for new entrants is not so much about getting in as it is about getting on (Lee, et al. 2024), - which is to say opportunities for development and promotion (notoriously less accessible to people from diverse backgrounds) and retention (another area where women, people of colour and disabled people fare less well

Myth 3:

in the long term.)

'Media work requires media graduates'

While it is true that media employers chiefly employ graduates, it is not the case that these graduates are necessarily drawn from media courses. Graduates who work within the screen industries are drawn from the full gamut of science, social science and humanities degree programmes. We know that 'hard to fill' vacancies across the industry typically include roles like accountants and lawyers, as well as non-graduate roles, such as carpenters and electricians.5 This is not to arque that specialist or 'vocational' degrees have no value: on the contrary, they

provide a route into the industry for many graduates and bring their own distinctive value to employers. But given actual hiring practices, it's difficult to support any argument based on the idea that a media degree is a necessary (or even expected) prerequisite for work in the screen sector. Media degrees, then, play an important part within a wider Higher Education landscape that serves to provide a wide range of opportunities to a wide range of students and graduates.

Myth 4:

'The value of a media degree is determined by how well it prepares students for entry-level media jobs'

This is the assumption that

underpins a succession of

accreditation schemes but,

again, it's difficult to support,

given that graduates working in the screen industries are not drawn in any systematic way from media courses. We are not suggesting that 'practical', 'vocational' or 'industry-oriented' courses don't have a distinctive value for employers. On the contrary, with the erosion of employer-led entry-level training provision, subjectspecific knowledge and practical media skills provide a valuable grounding for many industry roles. Also, given the extent to which media work is now integral to a whole range of sectors, media graduates can - and most likely will - leverage their skillsets to access a much wider range of career opportunities.6 However, it's by no means clear that students are best served by courses that set out to be exclusively 'specialist' in terms of current occupations

Reference

- The recent BFI report A
 Sustainable Future for Skills
 (2023) is just one example.
- 2. As argued in Wallis, 2021
- These statistics are based upon the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Annual Population Survey (APS) in 2020 and were gathered by SIC code.
- 4. 'Graduateness' is the term that the Higher Education Quality Council ((HEQC 1996) used to use to refer to those generic skills that define the graduate beyond simply subject knowledge. In recent years 'graduateness' has been largely displaced by the more instrumental notion of 'employability'. For a fuller discussion of the origin and function of the idea of employability, see Wallis, 2021.
- As listed in successive Screenskills reports, for example.
- As discussed in Stuart
 Cunningham's work (2011 and onwards)

within the screen industries alone, particularly given that these are under the constant threat of obsolescence.

Myth 5:

'Practice-based and "practical" courses exist primarily to produce "set-ready" graduates for specific industry roles'

This is the pitch that many universities make to potential students - often the reason students will give when asked why they chose a particular course. Again, however, this is a myth. It is an idea that fails to recognise either the complexity of student motivations, or the critical purpose that practice plays within pedagogy. As we discovered in one of our earliest graduate studies, many students who choose to enrol on these kinds of 'practical' courses identify themselves as practical people who learn in a practical way.7 For students like this, such courses provide a pathway through HE that would otherwise be unavailable to them. The real value of courses that foreground 'practice' is that they open the doors of higher education to a far wider constituency of students than might otherwise benefit. As a result, they serve to increase the diversity of the graduate body and they offer employers a richer diversity

of talent from which to draw. University-based media practice is a means to education, not a means to a job based on the implausible idea that graduates should, or could, be presented to industry "set-ready" (Carey, Crowley, et al. 2017, 30).

Myth 6:

'Universities are a barrier to industry diversity'

In the UK context, at least, this is disingenuous.
Universities certainly face many challenges around recruiting, retaining and supporting a diverse student body. However, the greatest challenges for aspiring graduates from minoritised groups are their lower employment prospects on leaving university.⁸ The

conspicuous lack of diversity within the UK screen industries has been well documented and, under current economic pressures, is currently deteriorating further (despite numerous initiatives and interventions). A more diverse industry is clearly an important goal towards which greater HEI-industry partnership and collaboration should be focused, but this is unlikely to happen if the idea prevails that universities are the principal barrier.

Beyond the Mythos

We would argue that these six myths, while collectively incoherent, have nevertheless distracted us from making progress towards meaningful collaboration between HE and industry. We would also argue that they are positively dangerous to diversity in the industries. Instead, what we need is a more nuanced and respectful conversation about how we might develop authentic HEI-industry relationships that are in the interests of both the sector and our students - a conversation that is honest about the role played by each sector in limiting the opportunities for diverse talent in the UK screen industries - and about the nature of the obstacles that remain to achieving equity in education and industry alike.

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- 7. For graduate reflections to this effect, see Wallis, van Raalte and Allegrini. 2020
- As discussed at some length in the Making the Creative Majority Report, Comunian et al 2023.



Campbell X's 2012 debut film Stud Life shows every sign initially of being a love story between JJ (T'Nia Miller), a masc lesbian photographer, and Elle (Robyn Kerr), a femme sex worker.

Where it begins, though, and where its heart lies, is with JJ and her gay best friend, Seb (Kyle Treslove). The first sound heard on-screen is an alarm going off. JJ sits up in bed and starts snapping away, only to be appalled that Seb, snoozing next to her, has made a tent out of the duvet with his morning wood.

'Look, I used to share beds with my gay men friends and that's what would happen,' says Campbell. 'Seb doesn't desire JJ but they're close. It's a closeness I found with gav men but which I never saw represented in anything, and still don't. Straight women are always the ones shown with gav men shopping together, the whole Sex and the City thing. But you don't see the social relationships between queer people. I didn't write Stud Life as a "lesbian film". It was written as a story of friendship between a gay man and a stud.'

Any film that begins with an alarm going off must fancy itself as a wake-up call. 'You got it,' he says. 'It's a wake-up call to say: these are people carving out their own lives within a structure that has not made space for them. Seb is white and Jewish; JJ is Black and Caribbean. London is rich with people who live on the edges like they do, but they've formed a bond. People tend to look at JJ and Elle as the focus of Stud Life - they're on the poster - but that was about marketing, capitalism, categorising. It's actually about JJ and Seb.'

The gay/stud dynamic shown in *Stud Life* is one Campbell knows intimately, having come out around gay men in the 1990s. 'Gay men have always been my fortress. I didn't find lesbians

interesting until I met radical dykes. I identified with the clarity and power of gay men's desire and friendship: they educated me, showed me films I'd never seen. Some of them were much older, some my peers, which is important. I mixed with people twenty or thirty years older than me when I was in my twenties. They told me who went before, so I had an idea of lineage'.

He also became an expert reader of body language. 'I think as queers we had to. Maybe that skill is being lost now with apps because we don't have to walk the streets and check out bodies in the way we did before. Back then, we were very aware of surroundings and looks and how somebody holds a stare. Also as younger queers we had to check people's body language to know about safety – is this person safe to come out to? It's how we learned'

There is an unusual tension in the film between the confident intimacy of JJ's vlogs and the often guarded or fearful nature of her interactions with Elle. 'That's the paradox of studness in a way', Campbell explains. 'There's a fear of vulnerability that might bring out the woman, the female, the feminine side. It's so complicated in terms of gender. Also, if you are a feminine performer, as T'Nia is, the question is how to overcome the fear of masculinity, which is perceived as ugly in women and unmarketable in actresses. That's why I had to work very hard with her to embody the part of JJ. To inhabit the stud role - which did not bring her approval as she walked the streets - she had to get that into her body in some way, leaning into that particular kind of masculinity,

which is scary. T'Nia said it made her think of her son, and what he goes through as a young Black man. Because that's what she was read as when she was out on the streets: a young Black man'.

It still happens to Campbell

todav. 'I get a lot of homophobic abuse on the street. It's because I refuse to accept the cultural norms of cis-het manhood. I wear certain clothes, behave a certain way that's perceived as "gay". But at the same time, when I'm on the Tube and there are white gay men around, they look at me with fear because they see a Black man who they think might beat them up. Those are two sides of the coin: who are you recognised by, and what are you recognised for? So they're recognising my manhood but they are ascribing certain qualities to it that don't apply.'

No wonder photography is a central component of the plot. JJ earns her living as a wedding snapper, which nudges the audience to consider who is behind the camera, whose point of view we are seeing, where the power usually lies – and where it is now, when a gender non-conforming director is wielding the lens.

Scattered among the cast as walk-on parts or background performers are a collection of queer Black British artists: the poets Dean Atta and Jay Bernard, the filmmaker Topher Campbell, the musician David McAlmont. 'It's a way of saying: we are here. We show up for each other. Putting that on film is a statement of pride.' Among the film's producers is Lulu Belliveau, one of the former editors of the sex-positive lesbian magazine Quim; JJ and Seb preface a night on the town by chopping out

lines of coke on the cover of one of its back issues. 'It's all part of the archive. I don't want us to forget. People are already forgetting figures from the 1980s: Frankie Goes to Hollywood, the Communards. These people were out. They weren't hiding in the closet'.

Stud Life took two years to make from start to first screening. 'Bam! Done! I didn't have to go through any gatekeepers because the gatekeepers had said: "Fuck off". I sent the script to Film London, which was then the BFI place you went to for London funding, and they rejected it because they couldn't see an audience for the film'. Did he know they were wrong? 'Yeah,' he smiles. 'They were right in one way, though, because they hadn't seen anything like that before. Usually they ask you to compare it to something but it's always got to relate back to the gatekeeper, who wants to somehow see themselves or somebody they know in the product. Stud Life represents a specific queerness that even some queer people don't have access to'.

There has been far-reaching approval for *Stud Life*. Jenni Olson and Caden Mark Gardner selected it as part of their 2023 Criterion Channel series 'Masc', alongside other films about butch dyke, AFAB (assigned female at birth) and gender nonconforming characters.

Yet there has not been a pronounced or widespread Stud Life effect in British cinema, and it has taken twelve years for Campbell to make his follow-up, Low Rider, a road-trip movie about a Black queer femme Londoner of mixed parentage searching for her absent father through the Western Cape in South Africa with a

local Black trans man. 'It's because of the cis-normative patriarchy', Campbell says. 'In terms of gender nonconforming people, that's the biggest head-fuck because they aren't slotted into any binary. When you're gender non-conforming, people are like: "What are you? Why can't you just make my life easier"? He gives a little growl to mimic their irritation. 'I don't see butch actors. I see trans actors, non-binary actors, but I'm not hearing about butch actors and femme actors. Bull-daggers and butches. Effeminate gay men - where are they? If we're talking only about trans and non-binary, then how is that helping actors who aren't that? They may be cis but resolutely non-genderconforming. This is the challenge for us as creators when it comes to casting and storytelling: who am I - who are we - leaving out of the story? Because there's

The image Stud Life presents is one of magnificent flux: no one is fixed in their identity; everything is fluid and liberated. 'We all change,' Campbell says. 'We change our minds back and forth. and that's allowed.' The array of queerness, too, is diverse, Elle refers to 'the lesbian buffet', but the film represents more of a queer food court. 'I used to go to parties with queers, trans people and sex workers,' Campbell recalls. 'I never felt any separatism or separation. That's why I made Elle a sex worker in the film - because we are part of that world. Queers are sex workers and vice versa. That always gets forgotten in the march to respectability and homonormativity - a wife and two children, a husband and two children, all that'.

always someone'.

Then he stops, leans closer to the screen and squints at me.

'Oh my God. Have you got a husband and children? You have, don't you? You have!'

Suddenly I realise how a counterfeit note must feel when it is held up to the light.

'Sort of,' I tell him.

'See? You are the problem!'
He shakes his head in mock
dismay. 'Well, I hope you
guys are still cruising on
Hampstead Heath.'

I'm eager not to seem like a square or a stiff in front of Campbell; I don't want to be the wrong sort of gay. It used to be that we had to channel our energy into pretending to be straight. Now there is pressure to shrug off the disguise we've spent our whole lives perfecting, or else risk looking like the clot who showed up at the party not knowing it was fancy-dress You've married your boyfriend but are you sleeping around? Seeing other people? Are you truly

'We're keeping it lively', I reply at last, leaving the details vague but wearing what I hope is a knowing, even devilish, expression. 'Don't you worry about that.'

He nods approvingly. 'That's the thing', he says. 'We've participated in the structure, but we've found a way to bring queerness into it, haven't we? A lot of my friends who are married still have open lives, and I think that's beautiful. How can we bring that in so people don't feel locked down into the binary of "this is what marriage looks like"? Something's missing. We're being straitjacketed'.

Stud Life itself is anything but. 'The challenge of that film is it's got lesbians in it, bisexuals, queer and trans people, whereas the marketing was like. "Two lesbians. The end." But you know what? The world has caught up with Stud Life. Now we're all talking about polyamory and trans people, aren't we? Gender nonconformity, sex work, bam-bam-bam. In 2012, that wasn't the dominant conversation, even among queers.'

Not that he thinks the quality of representation is anything to write home about. 'What we see are blanched-out. blanded-out versions of ourselves. And then people are faced with the reality, and they become hostile to that. I don't recognise us. I'm seeing candy-coloured versions which are safe. I don't see our Ugly, our Banal, our Flawed. If we don't show our best versions, we are punished. Straight people can be anything on film, but we always have to be respectable, high-value citizens or else we're not allowed to exist. There's even a ridiculous discourse now: No Kink in Pride. It's like. what are you talking about? Who do you think rioted and fought for us to live our best lives all those years ago'?

Ryan Gilbey is an awardwinning journalist who has written extensively about film for the New Statesman and the Guardian. He is the author of It Used to Be Witches: Under the Spell of Queer Cinema (Faber, 2025) from which this article is an extract.

Stud Life (2012) is available on BFI Player

people carving out their own lives within a structure that has not made space for them.

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A BBC report in July upheld 45 complaints made against MasterChef presenter Gregg Wallace, leading to the broadcaster ending its association with him. Marcus Ryder, Representology board member and CEO of the Film and TV Charity, outlines substantial steps productions can take to oust harmful behaviours from the industry while protecting and nurturing talent.

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The recent reports into Grega Wallace's behaviour on MasterChef is a sobering reminder of the toxic undercurrents that still run through the film and television industry. With 45 substantiated allegations, ranging from inappropriate sexual language and humour to unwanted physical contact, the findings are disturbing. What is more troubling, however, is that this isn't an isolated incident. Wallace is not an anomaly; he is a symptom of a much deeper, systemic problem.

Behind the headlines lies a culture that continues to tolerate, excuse and perpetuate bullying, harassment, and discrimination. While these behaviours affect many, they disproportionately impact people from underrepresented groups: women, people of colour, religious minorities, and freelancers thus creating a "leaky bucket" in our diversity efforts. We may be attracting diverse talent into the industry, but we are failing to retain them.

A Culture of Silence and Fear

According to the Film and TV Charity's Looking Glass Survey, 41% of people working behind the scenes in film and TV have experienced bullying, harassment or discrimination. Even more alarming is the fact that over half of them - 53% - did not report it. Among those who did, 21% said the situation worsened after reporting, and 27% didn't even know how to report such behaviour.

For freelancers, the situation is even more precarious. 61% feared they wouldn't get work again if they spoke up.

The freelance model, with its short-term contracts and informal hiring practices, creates a perfect storm of vulnerability. Power imbalances on set and a lack of formal HR structures on some productions mean that many suffer in silence.

The headlines and reports around Wallace laid bare these dynamics.

For far too many people who speak to the Film and TV Charity and use our services, many incidents of bullying, harassment or discrimination occur in environments with inadequate complaints procedures. Inappropriate comments are all too often brushed off or laughed at. Freelancers hesitate to complain, fearing retaliation or blacklisting. This is not about one or two high-profile "bad apples" who misbehave and make the headlines due to their celebrity status, it's a systemic failure to protect the workforce.

The Diversity Disparity

While the overall statistics are grim, they become even more stark when broken down by identity. The Film and TV Charity's data reveals that:

45% of women have experienced bullying and harassment, compared to **33%** of men.

49% of Black people and a staggering **63%** of people of Middle Eastern background have faced such behaviour, compared to **39%** of white people.

A majority of Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus report experiencing bullying and harassment, versus 41% of the general film and TV workforce. These figures are not just numbers. They represent real people whose careers and wellbeing are being compromised. They also highlight a critical flaw in our diversity strategies: we are focusing on recruitment without addressing retention. We are pouring talent into the industry, only to watch it drain away through a culture that fails to support them.

The Cost of Inaction

The consequences of this "leaky bucket" are profound. Talented individuals from under-represented backgrounds are leaving the industry in greater numbers, disillusioned and demoralised.

50% of production staff of Middle Eastern background had taken serious steps to leave the industry in the last 12 months, compared to 31% of their white counterparts. Black and Asian workers were also disproportionately considering leaving the screen sector, compared to the general workforce.

This not only undermines the moral imperative of equity and inclusion but also weakens the creative potential of the industry. Diverse teams produce richer, more innovative storytelling. When we lose these voices, we all lose.

What can we do?

The Film and TV Charity believes that we can address these problems but they require us to go "upstream" and look at how productions are set up at the very start. The charity has a range of tools to help productions do this, and these are now used by numerous production teams making films for the BBC, Channel 4, Apple TV and more. The most notable of these tools is our 'Whole

Picture Toolkit'. The Looking Glass Survey found that productions using this toolkit reported measurably better mental health outcomes, less bullying, harassment and discrimination and fewer people wanting to leave the industry. This shows that change is possible when we take a proactive, structured approach.

Effective as the toolkit is, however, and while it is heartening that more productions for the PSBs and streamers are using it, culture is not changed by policy alone. It is shaped by everyday behaviours, by those who hold power, and how that power is exercised.

We need leadership that is willing to challenge the status quo. We need to embed equity and safety into the DNA of every production - from the first day of preproduction to the final day of post-production. This means clear reporting mechanisms, accountability at all levels, and a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment.

A Call to Action

The Gregg Wallace case should be a wake-up call. However, it must not be just another headline that fades away. It should galvanise us into action to build an industry where everyone, regardless of their background or contract status, feels safe, respected, and valued.

The Film and TV Charity is playing a key role in this transformation. Through its mental health services, financial grants, its 'Bullying Advice Service', and the 'Whole Picture Toolkit', it is helping to provide the support and resources needed to create lasting change.

The responsibility doesn't lie with one organisation alone. It lies with all of us: producers, directors, commissioners, crew members, and executives. We must commit not simply to 'welcoming' diverse talent into the industry, but to nurturing and protecting them once they're here.

Until we fix the leaks in our bucket, we will never truly be able to fill it.

Marcus Ryder is CEO of the Film and TV Charity. He was previously Head of External Consultancies at the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity and his book The Big Payback: The Case for Reparations for Slavery and How They Would Work, co-authored with Lenny Henry (Faber) is published later this year.

The Film and TV Charity's Whole Picture Toolkit can be found here: https://filmtvcharity.org.uk/get-support/support-fororganisations/the-whole-picture-toolkit/

50% of production staff of Middle Eastern background had taken serious steps to leave the industry in the last 12 months, compared to 31% of their white counterparts.



Ash and the man were sitting in a bar.

Ash had taken the train into Cardiff, and was worried that he was sweating through his shirt. It was loud around them, all the music and chatter: they kept having to lean closer towards each other to hear what the other was saying. 'I am definitely sweating through this shirt', Ash thought, but the blonde man opposite him didn't seem to notice, or at least made no show of noticing. Their drinks, when the waiter brought them over, billowed vapour. It made the blonde man gasp.

'I never know how it works', the blonde man said, staring at it. 'Something to do with chemistry, I guess. Like, reactions and stuff. I don't know. Do I sound thick as shit when I say that'?

Ash laughed. He said, 'I've no idea either'.

It didn't take long, anyway, before the vapour disappeared and the drinks were just normal drinks again. It was a short-lived magic; like most magic, Ash supposed, it was gone just as soon as you noticed it.

'I'm glad you were free to meet', said the blonde man — Rob, it had read on his profile. On the profile there had been pictures of him with neon face paint at a festival, a bottle of Corona in his hand as he sat on a hill with mown hay. He wasn't wearing neon face paint now. 'It's so much easier getting to know someone face-to-face rather than, you know, over messages'.

'Yeah', Ash agreed, though he didn't always mind the messages. He felt that he could be better, funnier, when he didn't have to meet the other person's eye. He said, 'It's not so easy to get ghosted in person, for one thing'.

'You never know', Rob said.
'Perhaps I just won't come
back from the bathroom'. He
took a sip of his drink. 'Do
you have a lot of experience
with ghosts'?

'Well, some. Same as everyone. I've even been the ghost myself in the past'.

'Bold thing to admit on a first date', Rob laughed. Ash thought, 'Already I've fucked it'. But Rob nodded and said, 'I know what you mean. It can be tough. I was in a pretty long-term relationship until, like, six months ago, and when it ended, I was like, 'Rob, you're not going back on the Apps' but, of course, I caved. It's just a shame sometimes, isn't it, that it's like the only way to meet people these days. I didn't imagine it like this when I was a kid. I thought I'd just randomly meet the love of my life in a coffee shop one day...'

'...hands touching as you both reached for a croissant...', Ash supplied, and Rob laughed again — he had a bright laugh — and said, 'Yeah, exactly! I thought I was, like, Meg Ryan. But I'm not Meg Ryan'.

'A tough pill to swallow'.

'Always. I don't know if that kind of thing even happens anymore, the whirlwind coffee shop stuff. I guess for some people it does. But I can't really imagine it somehow'.

Ash nodded. He'd met his ex, Chloe, when they were at school together, and when he thought about it there'd been no great story there, no sweeping romance to tell the kids they never had. He couldn't imagine telling these never-had kids about following her on Instagram, then copping off behind a rugby club at a sixth form party and Chloe telling him 'You're not a very good kisser, I'll have to teach you', the words slurring with vodka cranberry, and him just beaming at the suggestion that they'd do it again. It felt more sad than romantic. looking back. But maybe so did all love stories.

'This is nice anyway', Ash said, trying to force his brain back into this room. 'Nice to speak to someone new, face to face'.

Rob said, 'It is, yeah. Excuse me for a minute, I'm gonna nip to the loo'.

'If you're more than half an hour, I'll take the hint'.

'I promise I'll come back', he said, placing a hand briefly on Ash's shoulder before he walked away.

Ash did not know at what point being touched by a man like this had come to mean something more to him, something he'd never thought it would mean; whether it was a recent thing, stealing over him, or a thing that had always been there, a sleeping dog he'd stumbled over one day, only for its yelp to rip through him as a shockwave. He couldn't imagine how it felt, to kiss a man, but he got surprising pleasure from trying to imagine it. The hardness of a body beneath hands used to softness.

In the bar, many men and women were sitting close together on their high chairs, in pairs, leaning in to hear each other speak. Waiting staff flitted about like flies: carrying trays, taking orders, mixing drinks; clearing glasses from tables, as if erasing any trace of the last people who'd sat there, laughing, cheersing, checking their phones, just like everybody else.

Rob sat back down. Ash said, 'You were quick', and Rob said, 'Bathroom window was tiny. I got an ankle through before I thought 'Fuck it".

'Well, I'm glad you stayed'.

They talked about work, and family, and travelling; Ash told Rob he looked vaguely Scandinavian, and Rob made a joke about wishing he had some Viking in him. Then Rob started talking about coming out. 'It wasn't too bad', he said, 'all things considered, cos my parents are Christians. Like tub-thump, street-preach Christian. They didn't love it, obviously, but they didn't stop speaking to me. It made me feel kind of silly in a way. Don't get me wrong, I was pleased, but I just thought about all the years when I didn't say anything to them because I thought they'd kick me out and never want me. I used to be so scared about that. I used to lie awake thinking about it but, in the end, they were more worried about AIDS and stuff, and when I said, 'Not every gay person gets Aids, and you can treat it now anyway', they just made their peace with it. And all those years I thought that couldn't happen. And I can't ask for those years back now. Or, if I did ask, no one could give them to me'.

Ash looked at him. He looked a bit like a little boy again, sitting opposite. As if his legs were bare and dangling from the chair, as if his teeth were still falling out and growing back better. It was like sunlight between trees: the ghost of the little boy peeking out through the face of the man. Ash thought about the kind of child he'd been, and stopped thinking very quickly. It hurt to think about the plastic teacups, the liberal slather of suncream; holding his mother as a tiny thing that she might absorb again.

'I'm not out yet', Ash said. 'To anyone'.

For a beat, Rob processed this. 'Do you think anyone suspects?'

'I don't know. Maybe? I've only ever had girlfriends before'.

'As beards?'

'I don't know. I think as in bisexual. I haven't worked it all out vet'.

'Of course, sorry. And I'm sorry for bringing it all up. Trauma dumping on the first date'.

Ash smiled. He'd said 'first date'. As if there'd be more.

Glasses were being cleared and tables wiped down, by a girl who looked only about sixteen, but who must have been older. Her brown ponytail swished around at the back of her head as she moved. The men's knees touched beneath the table.

'Feel free to say no to this', Rob said, 'but do you want to go somewhere else? I'm meant to meet some friends of mine in town, and they want to go dancing'.

The chatter had started dying around them as people had left, including a middle-aged couple who'd been kissing in the corner. They couldn't keep their hands off each other, and now they were no longer there. There was just empty space where they'd been.

'I'll come', Ash said, 'but I might leave early'.

Rob grinned. 'C'mon then', he said, and they put on their jackets and walked out. The waitress took their glasses and wiped their table.

Within twenty minutes there were two other people, two entirely different people, sitting exactly where they'd been. The waiter brought them out two drinks, billowing vapour, and both new people gasped.

Brennig Davies is a writer from the Vale of Glamorgan, South Wales. He was the winner of the first BBC Young Writers Award, and his work has been published in the London Magazine, Poetry Wales, and broadcast on BBC Radio 4. His debut short story collection Dogs in a Storm is forthcoming from Parthian in 2026.

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REPRESENTOLOGY THE JOURNAL OF MEDIA AND DIVERSITY

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Notes on British Asian Filmmaking

Rajesh Thind

In July, I found myself sitting under the bright lights at the BFI Southbank as part of a panel for the London Indian Film Festival. The subject: the future of British Asian filmmaking.

These things can sometimes feel like déjà vu – the same questions, the same polite prescriptions about 'needing more representation' or 'finding our voices'. This time, however, the mood was different.

The sense from the filmmakers on the panel and from those showing work in the short films programme immediately afterwards was that we're turning a corner. We're past the stage of having to endlessly explain the basics of 'our culture' to audiences who might be mystified by the sight of a samosa. We're also past being asked to make work that ticks boxes or stand in for an entire community. What filmmakers are now saying is, 'we want to get straight into the real stuff' the nuance, the complexity, the specificity of lives as they are actually lived, with all their contradictions and messy emotions.

Last year, the highest-grossing theatrical documentary in America wasn't an urgent climate change exposé or a vérité portrait of a community in struggle. It was 'Am I Racist?', an 'anti-DEI', alt-right polemic designed to inflame rather than inform

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That is a huge shift.

It means filmmakers can spend less energy justifying their existence and more time honing their craft. It means the story doesn't have to pause for a cultural footnote. It means artists can speak for themselves as artists – not as spokespeople carrying the weight of 'representation' on their shoulders. Nobody asks Shane Meadows to represent every white, working-class man in Britain. Why should every Asian filmmaker carry that kind of burden?

That was the liberating theme of the afternoon - that we might finally be reaching a stage where the quality of the storytelling takes precedence over the politics of representation. That's exciting, as it frees filmmakers to experiment, to take risks, to stop second-guessing how 'authentic' something will seem to a commissioning editor who once went to Brick Lane for a curry.

From Southbank to Sussex

A couple of weeks later, over the first weekend in August, I was in a different setting - in a field full of tents and compost loos near Lewes in Sussex. I'd been invited to give a workshop at Otherfield, a small film festival that sits at a different end of the spectrum from the BFI and the industry circuit. If the Southbank is where the players gather to debate the future. Otherfield is where the renegades pitch up to keep the flame alive.

And, honestly, it felt like stepping into another world.

In this age of 'big data' and streaming, everything can feel filtered through corporate logic.

Commissioning decisions aren't just about creativity anymore - they're also about what the algorithm says will

hold attention, what the data predicts will 'travel'. You feel it in every pitch meeting: this quiet, unspoken pressure to translate your story into something that fits the tried and tested mould.

At Otherfield, however, none

of that exists. It's a space where artists, filmmakers, activists and media-makers gather far from the technocapitalist, mainstream media glare. A space where ideas get swapped not over Zoom calls but in circles around campfires. A space where the question isn't 'will this sell?' but 'what are we trying to say?'

And what struck me most was that these other filmmaking traditions - community-focused, radical, formally innovative work - are not only still alive, but feel as vibrant and relevant today as they ever have. They are being handed down from one generation of filmmakers to the next and, while they might not dominate Netflix's homepage or get a prime slot at multiplexes, they're here like flickering flames keeping alternative ways of seeing alive, even amidst the hurricanes of change.

Who Owns Documentary Now?

Being at Otherfield also made me think particularly about the documentary form – where it stands in our current moment. For decades, documentary has been seen - at least in progressive circles - as a tool for truth-telling, for challenging power, for giving voice to the marginalised.

We're now in a 'post-liberal' moment in which those same techniques are being used by forces that want the opposite. Last year, the highest-grossing theatrical documentary in America wasn't an urgent climate change exposé or a vérité portrait of a community in struggle. It was 'Am I Racist?', an 'anti-DEI', alt-right polemic designed to inflame rather than inform.

The irony is painful. Many of the techniques that contemporary documentary film - and much right-wing content online - relies on were pioneered by progressive filmmakers in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. The raw, handheld aesthetic. The straight-to-camera address. The DIY immediacy of a 'selfie' video. Back then, it felt subversive - a way of breaking down barriers between audience and filmmaker. Now it's the lingua franca of populist politicians and culture war provocateurs.

So, where does that leave those of us who still believe in documentary as a space for radical imagination, empathy, and truth? The ground feels contested in a way it hasn't for years. On one hand, streaming platforms increasingly treat documentary as just another genre box to be filled. On the other, reactionary voices are co-opting its forms to push a politics of fear and resentment.

In that context, places like Otherfield feel vital. Not because those gathered are going to produce the next box office hit, but because they hold space for filmmakers to rethink what documentary can be and who it can serve.

Two Worlds, One Conversation

Looking back, what connects the panel at the BFI and the fireside chats in Sussex is a shared desire to move past old arguments.

For the British Asian filmmakers at Southbank, it's about being free to focus on craft without having to justify their existence. For the Otherfield crowd, it's about holding onto spaces where art isn't swallowed by corporate logic. Both are, in their own ways, pushing against a system that wants to flatten creativity into something predictable, palatable, and easy to categorise.

That, to me, is the real 'state of the industry'. It's not just a tug-of-war over representation or resources. It's a deeper question: can filmmaking in Britain remain a space of genuine artistic expression, or will it get smoothed out by the combined pressures of identity politics on one side and algorithmic capitalism on the other?

The answer, I suspect, lies somewhere in the messy middle – in the interplay between the BFI and the bonfire. We need the platforms and infrastructure that the industry provides, but we also need the radical, unruly spaces that remind us why we tell stories in the first place.

Whether you're a South Asian filmmaker tired of being a spokesperson, or a documentary maker trying to wrestle your form back from the populists, the same truth applies: filmmaking is at its best when it refuses to be boxed in. Rajesh Thind is a filmmaker who produced and directed Defiance: Fighting the Far Right: https://www.channel4.com/programmes/defiance-fighting-the-farright

REPRESENTOLOGY RECOMMENDS



Leo Robson

Leo Robson is an award-winning critic, who has published articles in the New Yorker, New Statesman, and Harper's. He is Senior Editor at *Literary Review*, a presenter of the Granta podcast, and his debut novel *The Boys* (Riverrun) was released this year.

Read

Second Novels

As I'm vaguely working on my second novel, I have, rather literal-mindedly, been looking at second novels by other people, or at least the second novels they published. Sometimes they're a breakthrough (Penelope Fitzgerald's *The Bookshop*, Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*), sometimes they're an aberration (Muriel Spark's *Robinson*, Jay McInerney's *Ransom*). I haven't yet decided which my own will be.

Ralph Ellison

Ralph Ellison may be the most famous case of someone who failed to produce a second novel. After writing *Invisible* Man, winner of the 1952 National Book Award for Fiction, and a candidate for the title of best American novel of the twentieth century, he spent the next forty-plus years - he died in 1994 - not finishing the manuscript that posthumously appeared under the title Juneteenth. He certainly toiled away on it but he also published hundreds of extraordinarily dense essays - some, though by no means all, concerned with aspects of his debut. They're available in a vast paperback. I've been reading them closely for a while now.

Lamorna Ash (Bloomsbury)

Don't Forget We're Here Forever

Not a second novel but a second book. Lamorna Ash, contributor to these pages and the author of a previous work of memoiristic anthropology *Dark Salt Clear*, about fishing in Cornwall, has now published *Don't Forget We're Here Forever*, a book-length inquiry into the widespread modern yearning for faith, which started as a *Guardian Long Read* about two young men switching from stand-up comedy to the priesthood.

Sam Sussman (Atlantic Books) Boy from the North Country

Sam Sussman, a youngish American writer with impressive hair, has also produced a beautiful, personal book based on a celebrated piece of journalism – an essay in the American magazine Harper's about his relationship with his mother and her relationship, primarily in the mid-1970s, with the singer Bob Dylan. (She's depicted in Tangled up in Blue). Boy from the North Country is a work of fiction, written in the first person from the perspective of a young man and his mother in a lilting, open-hearted style.

Critical Dispatches

I am still addicted to reading reviews and especially love the critic equivalents of correspondents, someone who provides regular dispatches. Most of the time, I have to turn to collections to get my fix, things like Hot Seat, Frank Rich's New York Times theatre reviews, or Robert Hughes's Time art columns, Nothing If Not Critical, or all my Pauline Kael books, but I always look forward to Alexis Petridis's album of the week in The Guardian and view Michael Cox and Jonathan Nunn as doing something similar in their writing on football (for The Athletic) and food (in his online, and now print, magazine Vittles). See The Big Picture opposite.



Watch

Pavements

I recently watched twice, virtually back-to-back, the experimental film portrait Pavements, about the 1990s band Pavement. It's made up of archival footage, a parody Oscar-bait music biopic (and parody on-set, DVD-extras behind-the-scenes material), scenes from a jukebox-style musical which was devised for the film. but was actually staged and might be called a sincere joke, and scenes of a museum show which was pretty much fake. It's very engaging and revealing and, if not totally original, then taking its cue only from great things like the movies of Todd Haynes.

Summer Blockbusters

In the summer, I watch blockbusters at the cinema, out of a feeling of obligation which by this point in the history of Hollywood - and my career as a film critic - is pretty baseless. It's been tiresome, though I sort of enjoyed F1 and thoroughly enjoyed bits of Jurassic World Rebirth, though I recognise that I'm heavily invested in that franchise. Final Destination Bloodlines may not quite qualify but it was terrific.

The Shrouds

I loved the glazed and spectral tone of David Cronenberg's latest — and it feels very 'late' — film *The Shrouds*, about technology and grief. It feels both valedictory and sort of self-vindicating, Cronenberg making a topical film as a reminder of how prophetic his earlier work managed to be. It's about an immigrant with a grand vision of commemorative or funerary art who misses his wife, and Guy Pearce steals the show playing a madman — but it's infinitely better than *The Brutalist*.

Glastonbury

I watched dozens of hours of the recent Glastonbury - Olivia Rodrigo and Doechii were highlights - and I have more to catch up on, though they only have the licence for thirty days, which brings an element of urgency to consumption.

Old Movies

I've given up on TV, supposedly going through its fifth 'golden age', and have reverted to watching old movies. sometimes at the cinema. The Prince Charles Cinema has a good selection but the ICA's is a little more off-trail. They recently did a nine-day festival based – a bit confusingly – on their Celluloid Sunday strand, which showed some early films by the leading figures of late-twentieth-century Taiwanese cinema, Edward Yang's The Terrorizer - the subject of an amazing essay by Fredric Jameson, 'Remapping Taipei' - and Hou Hsaio-Hsien's A Summer at Grandpa's. Apart from the Close-Up Film Centre, which is very small and harder for me to get to, the ICA is the only place you can count on to show that kind of thing. It's also been described as an unbeatable date spot.

Listen

Stereolab

I haven't got much to say about Stereolab's new album *Instant Holograms on Metal Film*, which came out in May, except that the songs have interesting, strange titles (*Vermona F Transistor, Esemplastic Creeping Eruption*) and it seems as rich - as seductive, romantic, cerebral, engaged - as anything this thirty-five-year old Anglo-French sort of pop group has ever done.

Audible

I am a subscriber to the audiobook service Audible and find that I either listen to about three in a week or my credits rack up. Out of all my thousands of hours of listening, I'd probably single out Also A Poet, Ada Calhoun's account of being the daughter of the art critic Peter Schjeldahl, and of his long-abandoned effort to write a biography of the poet Frank O'Hara. It's

not only read by Calhoun but features excerpts from the interviews that Schjeldahl conducted in the 1970s with O'Hara's friends and acquaintances like Willem de Kooning.

Bandsplain

I love the music history (music appreciation?) podcast Bandsplain, presented by the great Yasi Salek, which concerns bands, and occasionally solo acts, and tells their story in several-hours'-worth of detail that somehow leaves you wanting more. There have been hundreds of episodes and it always works. Her guest experts have included Ann Powers (on Kate Bush and PJ Harvey), Jessica Hopper (on Jane's Addiction and Joni Mitchell), and Hanif Abdurraqib (on The Cure, Soundgarden, and My Chemical Romance). I have to confess Bandsplain has got me through a lot - a lot of household chores and driving, though not exclusively.

The Big Picture

Closely allied to *Bandsplain* - as it's under the same umbrella, the online magazine and content provider *The Ringer* - is *The Big Picture*, in which Sean Fennessey and Amanda Dobbins review new films and interview directors (Fennessey usually conducts these). It manages to cross-breed old-fashioned auteurist cinephilia with populist auditorium chat and gossip and rumour-reading (though concerned with trailers, festival line-ups and release dates, not romance or breakdowns).

Football Clichés

My taste for listening to football talk has diminished slightly, maybe because of a dull Premier League season or just due to the general taint of greed and corruption and the endless gussied-up excitement. But I'll never grow bored of Football Clichés, presented by Adam Hurrey, which offers first-rate analysis of lore and language.

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Representology is a hybrid journal at the intersection of industry practices, academic research and policy

We welcome both non-academic and academic authors who would like to contribute thoughts. perspectives, analyses and research findings that help to foster diversity in the media and strengthen the media in diversity.

All ideas, abstracts and full manuscripts should be sent to Representology@bcu.ac.uk

The journal accepts contributions in two strands: journalistic and academic, each with a different review and decision-making process. Please understand the differences between the two strands when preparing and submitting your pitches, abstracts and manuscripts.

Journalistic articles

Journalistic articles should be between 1.000 and 3,000 words, and can take one of the following forms

- feature stories
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- expert Q&As
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Potential contributors must pitch their ideas to the iournal in the first instance. Please include a two-line biography, including relevant links to past published

Commission decisions will be based on evaluation by the editor in consultation with the editorial board.

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Full articles will then be assessed by members of the editorial board. All articles will be read on the understanding that they are solely submitted to Representology, and published articles will receive a

modest honorarium.

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Academic articles can take one of the following forms:

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The abstract should make clear which of the above academic paper forms the article belongs to.

Abstracts should be sent, together with biographies of no more than 100 words per author, to

Representology@bcu.ac.uk

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Making content as widely accessible as possible, writing should be clear, concise and engaging.

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Contributors are expected to write on subjects for which they have proven expertise.

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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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