

Structural racism in UK newsrooms

Research and fieldwork conducted by the
Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) January – July 2022

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Foreword

This report should be about hope, achievement, opportunities, success. Instead, this analysis of the experiences of Black people in journalism has heard mostly of exclusion, marginalisation and stagnation. It's a shocking expose on the lack of progress on diversity in the media profession – despite the fact we've known about institutional racism for over 20 years, and that all organisations claim to be against discrimination.

Like myself when I entered the profession four decades ago, Black journalists are noticing the negative stereotypes and assumptions commonly made about their communities, and trying to do what they can to change the narrative. They want to tell new stories: to make their readers, listeners and viewers better informed about multicultural Britain.

Instead, for the most part, the experiences of Black journalists seem to be: enter the workplace; feel alone and unsupported; have your ideas rejected; be made to feel you don't belong; and to have no one in a senior position you can share your story with. As one person told this study: "I feel like I am a shadow of myself in the newsroom. I don't show my personality. I am anxious about how I am perceived whether as loud or rowdy."

Then there are the microaggressions: one woman told a researcher: "I remember there was one day I cried my eyes out because I was mistaken for three Black women in one day."

Worse, a culture of fear operates whereby people feel that if they speak up they risk losing their job. This is a recipe for disillusion and failure: if senior leadership don't hear these stories they'll see no need to change, to become more inclusive, or to give Black staff the encouragement and understanding required to thrive. Eventually those staff will leave.

Yes, there have been positive stories, and in some organisations managers have given genuine support and reaped the rewards of having motivated journalists bringing all their diversity of thought. But these examples are too rare.

And though there have been signs of renewed efforts to improve diversity since the death of George Floyd and the prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement, we had a similar national racism-awareness moment in 1999, after the Macpherson inquiry identified institutional discrimination. Back then, there was a flutter of activity, and some mostly small changes were made, but there was seldom any follow-through and the gains were, over time, reversed. Today's media leaders should take heed of those lessons, and do everything they can to ensure we're not heading for a repeat.

Joseph Harker
Senior Editor (Diversity and Development)
The Guardian

Background

In February 2021, the Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) was awarded funding from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, through their Power and Accountability programme, to fund a project to identify and begin to address structural racism in UK journalism. Furthermore, the research aimed to understand how this is impacting on the development of more accountable news content that can work to overcome systematic racism in structures and society.

The project set out to:

- To reinforce the importance of ethical standards in journalism and media organisations;
- To establish a baseline understanding of representation in newsrooms and newsroom policies in the United Kingdom;
- To develop a series of recommendations and guidelines for the news media industry and their staff which will in turn serve as a benchmark for future work and outputs in this area;
- To begin to build the capacity of journalists and media organisations to develop a more strategic approach to dealing with structural racism in the newsroom;
- To provide practical support to journalists and media organisations to enable them to establish best practices to contest structural racism.

The Ethical Journalism Network

The Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) is founded in the underlying belief that ethics and respect for human rights, particularly freedom of expression, are core elements of democracy. The EJN exists to promote high ethical standards in journalism. Those ethical standards are reflected in the principles for journalists of reporting:

- With accuracy and based upon facts
- Independently
- Impartially
- With humanity and respect for others, and
- Responsibly and with accountability.

What we do

- Networking: We connect and support a network of diverse media and civil society organisations who are united through a commitment to the five core principles of ethical journalism and the conviction that they are central to democracy and human rights.
- Education: We support and enable journalists and media practitioners to share expertise and develop their skills to uphold ethical standards and equip them to understand and overcome challenges they may face in doing so.
- Facilitation: We support and strengthen media organisations to embed ethical practices.
- Research: We publish useful research to highlight and increase understanding of ethical challenges facing journalists today and to increase understanding of the consequences of journalism which does not uphold ethical standards.

- Amplify: We support and encourage efforts by the media development and press freedom community to create at all levels a safe, secure, and professional environment to undertake independent journalism.

Strategic priorities

The work of the EJN is guided by the following strategic priorities:

- To strengthen the craft of journalism by increasing skill levels and improving the knowledge of ethical principles within the media.
- To promote respect for the status of journalism and raise awareness of current ethical challenges affecting the work of journalists including the importance of ethics, human rights, and good governance both in the exercise of journalism and in the administration of news media.
- To build a strong and supportive global network to strengthen cooperation between media professional groups at national and international levels, including regional affiliations.
- To encourage dialogue and collaborative working between the media community, civil society, and policy makers to raise awareness of the value of informed, ethical journalism in advancing human rights, conflict resolution and the promotion of racial tolerance, equality, and diversity.

Executive summary

This policy report provides an overview of the challenges that Black journalists are facing in the British news media. It is based on 27 in-depth interviews that took place with Black journalists and stakeholders who have worked or are currently working in national mainstream media newsrooms, across print, online and broadcast media. The report finds that the impact of structural and systemic racism in the UK news media has become all the more complex in the last few years. Although the proportion of Black African and Caribbean journalists has increased in recent years and there is a heightened sense of possibility for change in 2020 with the increased momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement, Black journalists interviewed confirmed that newsroom processes continued to be exclusionary and racism was commonplace. The news media landscape in the United Kingdom is dominated by white editors and white senior management and this is impacting on the representation of Black people in the media industry and in content. Narratives, framing, and practices are enacted by senior managers who are resistant to change or to the inclusion of alternative perspectives and voices. This is having a profound effect on the experiences of Black journalists, many of whom describe a pervasive uneasiness and discomfort which prevents them from feeling truly included, and consequently on the content and outputs of the media. It is also contributing to the wider issues brought about by systemic racism in the UK.

The report draws the following conclusions:

- Racial stereotypes of Black people are informing shared newsroom attitudes towards Black journalists. Black journalists report feeling, at best, pigeon-holed into covering certain topics solely on the basis of their visual identity. At worst, there is a shared experience of trauma associated with racist attitudes which is perpetuating a culture of fear amongst many Black journalists. There is a frustration with being expected to represent or be the voice of Black African and Caribbean people as though all experiences are shared.
- The sense that Black journalists are interchangeable is pervasive. Racial microaggressions are commonplace and further entrench feelings of trauma that many Black journalists are facing. There is also an overwhelming agreement that bigotry is not taken seriously in the newsroom.
- The challenges that Black journalists are facing are multifaceted. Socio-economic class, gender, geography and sexuality are all affecting the lived experiences of journalists. Black working-class women journalists from outside of London and the South of England feel more alienated by the system than the Black middle class men that were interviewed. Most however point to the lack of a meritocracy in journalism and the unfounded assumptions amongst their white colleagues that the UK news media is meritocratic.
- Feedback and appraisal systems need to be addressed and made more transparent for Black journalists to feel confident that they are being recognised based on professional skills and journalism. The same is required of recruitment processes.
- Imposter syndrome, and feelings of self-doubt, are common amongst Black journalists. However, for many, feeling like an outsider is not just a perception coming from a lack of self-confidence or belief. It is the result of structural bias and exclusionary practices which are holding Black journalists back. Black journalists are experiencing racism, discrimination and feel that there is a lack of support
- Black journalists are becoming frustrated with being asked to action or support

diversity schemes when their white colleagues are not expected to take on this type of work. They feel that this has an impact on their already restricted chances for success as they have less time to focus on career progression.

- There is a sense that the work of individual Black journalists is being co-opted so that media organisations can appear to be championing diversity. At the same time, conventional approaches which are implemented under the umbrella of 'diversity and inclusion' are not seen to be working.
- There are mixed feelings about collegiality amongst journalists of colour. Some feel supported by networks for journalists of colour, although those that are considered successful are mainly informal. Others feel that the competitive nature of the industry can prevent official and institutional networks from being effective.
- Representation of minoritised communities is weak in the UK news media. When race or racism is covered in the UK media there is limited nuance and minimal reference to the deeper issues of institutional racism or to the development of solutions. Voices and work by Black-led media organisations such as gal-dem, The Voice, and Black Ballad should be uplifted and sustained by the mainstream media. The roles of race and community affairs correspondents need to be made more prominent and sustained within their media organisations.

Introduction

The following report will examine the impact of institutional and structural racism in UK newsrooms. Based on interviews with Black African and Caribbean journalists and editors from across the mainstream media industry in the UK, it will provide an assessment of the current conditions for Black journalists who are working in the media and the barriers to their inclusion. It will include an assessment of the representation of race and racism in news media content through a discourse analysis of news media content at selected periods of time. This report will argue strongly that traditional approaches to "diversity and inclusion" are not working in the UK news media because they ignore the wider environment where institutional racism is becoming so deeply embedded that it is often unseen and unheard. The application of a one-size-fits-all attitude is reductive and often disrespectful.

In the month of September 2022, there were a number of incidents where the news media coverage of Black people was questioned. On Monday 10th September 2022, a Sky News presenter mistakenly took a protest following the killing of Chris Kaba for royal mourners and the news segment was subsequently accused of racial bias. While there is no evidence to suggest the mistake was not plain human error rather than explicit bias, it raises questions about the omission of coverage of the protests in the first place. Ofcom received 598 complaints with regards to a breach of regulations around due accuracy which suggests that audiences were also concerned with the coverage.

This report will consider the relationship between the representation of Black journalists in UK newsrooms and the outputs of those newsrooms. As a way of understanding the impact of structural racism, it will also consider some of the core arguments and frameworks developed by critical race theorists.

On Monday 19th September 2022, the *Times* published a piece entitled "Why the hate for Meghan during mourning period, asks America.' The piece cited articles from the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Magazine*, and the *New York Times* which all referenced campaigns of hate and racial abuse on social media aimed at Markle. One article described the British media's treatment of Markle as "garden-variety racism", a claim which Markle herself has levelled at the British tabloid press.

On Saturday 1st October 2022, the *Mirror* published a story on its website with the headline "Kwasi Kwarteng says he had to do 'something different' with mini-budget" and a picture of a Black man holding a briefcase, supposedly Kwarteng. The picture was in fact of another Black man published under a banner reading "Black History is Our History. Explore Black History and celebrate Black Culture". Shaun Bailey, former journalist and politician, shared a tweet of the picture with the caption, "For a second I thought this was me, then I remembered we don't all look the same". The *Mirror* subsequently apologised for the error and tweeted, "The *Mirror* has a long history of working against racism and we will redouble our efforts on this".

These are not isolated incidents from just one month. Different forms of racism and discrimination have been recorded in the UK media for decades. From Stuart Hall's writing on racism in the UK media from the 1970s to the allegations made by Markle, the debates around racism in the UK media continue to be contested. This report will consider the relationship between the representation of Black journalists in UK newsrooms and the outputs of those newsrooms. As a way of understanding the impact

of structural racism, it will also consider some of the core arguments and frameworks developed by critical race theorists.

Following Meghan Markle's allegations in March 2021 of bigotry in the UK media, the Society of Editors (SoE), a membership body which claims to protect the freedom of the news media, published a statement which dismissed her claims outright. In the same month, a report issued by the government's Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities rejected the concept of structural or institutional racism arguing that Britain was no longer a "system deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities". Many civil society leaders and policy makers who criticised the report for being disjointed and for its lack of a coherent argument were then accused of "wokedom" by the *Daily Express*, and their arguments described as "baseless" by *The Telegraph*. Discussions about racism in the UK media at this point were feeding into debates about institutional racism in our wider society.

Institutional racism was termed by Black Power activists Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton in their 1967 book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* to highlight its "less overt" nature and origins in the establishments which constitute our society, as opposed to racism as a sole act performed by individuals. In the UK, Sir William Macpherson used the term in the 1999 Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report. It was used to describe the behaviour and "collective failure" of the British police force as an organisation. In the report, Macpherson called for reform of the police force and other British institutions.

More recent examples of institutional racism can be found within the Home Office, notably in its handling of the Windrush scandal, the medical industry and its pathologisation of Black and ethnically diverse communities during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the stop and search laws that ultimately led to the killing of Chris Kaba.

While the terms institutional racism and structural racism are often used interchangeably, structural racism is broader. It includes political, economic and social hindrances that affect people of colour, which are enacted through the institutions which are supposed to include all members of our society. A 2021 Civil Society Report to the United Nations by the Runnymede Trust, which provided evidence from over 150 UK civil society organisations (CSOs), found that racism was systemic in the United Kingdom and that "it impacts Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups" enjoyment of rights. Legislation, institutional practices and society's customs continue to combine to harm BME groups."

Our report calls for greater accountability and transparency at an institutional level in the processes of recruitment and retention, as well as editorial practices. It recommends that Black people are better represented, made more prominent in the media, and given a greater role in political and economic reporting, as journalists and as experts and sources. It also recommends that Black-led media, civil society organisations and networks are included in all industry debates and bodies that are meant to support greater freedom in the media. The wider issue of protection for those who experience racism or trauma from racial bias in the media needs to also be addressed.

Methodology

The research and evaluation of structural racism in UK newsrooms presented in this document are based on research and fieldwork conducted by the Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) between January – July 2022. It has been produced as part of a project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) which aims to explore the conditions – and identify the needs of Black journalists – and how these conditions are impacting on the development of more accountable news content that can work to overcome systemic racism in the United Kingdom. The EJN chose to focus on Black African and Caribbean journalists following the resurgence of the Black Lives Movement (BLM) movement in relation to ongoing deaths of Black people in the West. It was felt that increased awareness of the challenges that Black people face could increase the effectiveness and relevance of any policy work and recommendations emerging from this research. It was also decided that the research would focus on journalists who are working in the national mainstream news media, mainly in the interests of time and resource.

This research study sets out to explore these factors, challenges and opportunities. Its goal is to develop a set of clear and actionable recommendations for media organisations and policy makers to take forward in relation to the recruitment, retention and representation of Black journalists.

The main objectives of the research were identified as the following:

- Assess the status and representation of Black African and Caribbean journalists in UK newsrooms
- Categorise the main challenges to the professional development and inclusion of Black African and Caribbean journalists
- Consider the relationship between diverse newsroom representation and content outputs
- Identify the gaps, needs and opportunities in this space, as well as the main impediments to racial equality in the UK news industry

The research framework guiding this paper was centred on the following key questions:

- What are the main factors undermining racial equality in the United Kingdom and how is this manifesting itself in the UK news media?
- What are the main challenges to Black African and Caribbean journalists working with the UK news industry, focusing on aspects emerging from the structural conditions of racism in the industry?
- How are Black people represented in media content? How does this correlate with the representation of Black journalists within the industry?
- Where are the opportunities for the media to play a role creating a more inclusive environment which can encourage the promotion of Black voices and Black journalists?

The study used the following combined methods for data collection:

Desk Research: A thorough analysis and interrogation of existing literature including an assessment of available quantitative, qualitative, academic and policy-related research pertaining to the UK media industry, racism-related initiatives, relevant studies and needs assessments were conducted. This included research work by Dr Omega Douglas at Goldsmiths University, BECTU, Birmingham City University Media Diversity Centre, City University, the International News Safety Institute (INSI), the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ), the Reuters Institute at the University of Oxford, and the Women in Journalism (WIJ) initiative on the lack of diversity in the media amongst others.

Data and evidence collected through desk research were used to fulfil a number of objectives. Firstly, it validated the EJN's initial hypothesis that, while some work was being done to address issues of racial diversity in the UK media as a whole, there has been very little specific focus on newsroom representation and practices. It also provided empirical data on which to develop research protocols for the qualitative research methods described below. Finally, it has been used to verify qualitative findings from both the key informant interviews and discourse analysis.

In-depth structured and semi-structured interviews: The EJN mapped and identified key informants and stakeholders. Interviews were conducted with Black African and Caribbean journalists from across print, online and broadcast media. Interviews were chosen to reflect gender, age, class, and geographical diversity. In total, the EJN were able to conduct semi-structured interviews with 21 people. The focus was on assessing the key challenges that they faced based on their recall of their experiences in the newsroom. In addition, interviews were also conducted with 6 additional Black media experts, academics and journalists. The International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ) provided transcription support for all of the interviews conducted.

The EJN tried to include a broad spectrum of views and opinions from across the news media sector. However, conditions emerged which meant that many stakeholders we approached were unavailable for interviews or comment. Many responded to the initial approach for interview with positive comments about the aims of the project, but were apologetic that they could not commit the time to being interviewed. One person commented "The struggle is real" alluding to the lack of resources made available to Black journalists in their workplace and beyond. This could be seen to be a direct outcome of more widespread structural conditions which impact on the socio-economic status of minority communities, including women.

This also speaks to some of the findings of this paper, including the frustration felt by some Black journalists when asked to action or support diversity schemes while their white colleagues were not expected to take on such additional work outside of their job remit. They felt that this also had an impact on their chances for success, leaving them with even less time to focus on career progression. Having to represent or be the voice of Black people was also a source of frustration.

Discourse analysis: A piece of discourse analysis was undertaken with support from City University Department of Journalism to examine the coverage of race and racism in the UK news.[1] The initial objective of the discourse analysis was to provide data which could help to inform the interviews conducted for the research report. The EJN established a relationship with the Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM) who have produced a comprehensive research report which examines the British media's reporting of Islam

[1] Discourse analysis is a qualitative research method which analyses the use of language beyond words and sentences. It takes into consideration the use of language and the exercise of power, for example representation and identity as well as the context within which language is being used.

and Muslims. The EJN partnered with the CfMM to reproduce their methodology of monitoring and analysis of the British media using key words, and metrics such as association with negative aspects or behaviour, misrepresentation, generalisations, lack of due prominence to voice or identity, issues with imagery or headlines. British mainstream media news channels and online media were monitored using key chosen words which included the following:

- Black people
- Black communities
- Ethnic minorities
- Afro-Caribbean
- BAME
- Minoritised communities
- Racial
- Race
- Ethnicity
- African
- Caribbean
- Black nurses
- Black doctors
- Black medical professionals
- Black patients
- Race review
- Government race review
- Racism
- Ethnic
- Minorities
- Black men
- Black women

The project's limited resources required it to focus its discourse analysis on a particular event in the news reporting cycle. Analysis was therefore conducted on the print online media coverage of the controversial report from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) report into racial and ethnic disparities in the UK during March 2021. This event was chosen due to its nature as a key event in 2021 during which race and racism were covered in the UK media.

Unfortunately, retrospective access to broadcast media was unavailable due to the limited nature of media monitoring and tracking tools. Therefore, further discourse analysis using broadcast media focused more broadly on the coverage of topics related to race in the months where content was available, December 2021 and January 2022.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT:

Setting the scene

In March 2021, a report into racism and ethnic inequalities in the United Kingdom was released by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED). CRED was established by the government following the Black Lives Matter protests in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in June 2021. The report was accused of downplaying the role that institutional or systemic racism played in inequalities in the UK. It was subsequently condemned by a wide range of civil society groups, charitable foundations, and those working to challenge racial discrimination and injustice across the country. A group of UN human rights experts also strongly rejected the report, claiming that it was misleading, falsified historical facts and data and could further perpetuate racism and discrimination.

The publication of the CRED report shortly followed a series of events – including Covid-19, allegations made by Meghan Markle about the UK media and the royal family, and the Windrush Scandal – which many say have further confirmed the existence of structural racism and revealed its implications in the UK. It also followed the publication of reports on racism in the UK's core institutions for example schools, the police, the justice system, the health service and in the sports industry. Nonetheless, the report chose to ignore the data and evidence from these events and reports. The government continues to defend its position that there is no evidence of institutional racism. The then Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, whose sustained use of discriminatory and offensive language towards Black people and Muslims has been widely reported, described the report as "set(ting) a positive agenda for change".

What ensued in 2021 – 2022, and over the course of the period during which this research was conducted, were a further series of events which exposed racism in institutions across the UK. These included allegations of racism at Yorkshire County Cricket Club, and the killing of Chris Kaba by the Metropolitan police. In a letter to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner in October 2022 concerning the review of culture and standards within the Metropolitan Police, due to be released in February 2023, the review's chair Baroness Casey said they had already identified "racial disparity throughout the Met's misconduct system" as a key issue.

There is considerable evidence of a culture of impunity for bad actors, bigots, and racists in many sectors of British society. Over 100,000 racist hate crimes were recorded between April 2021 and March 2022 across England and Wales, only 8% of which resulted in a charge or summons, according to home office data released in October 2022. According to civil society organisation, Stop Hate UK, racism is the highest reported motivation for hate crimes. This is being reflected in the digital sphere and on social media platforms in particular as racist abuse and hate speech has become more apparent. High-profile activists and members of the Black African and Caribbean population, from Diane Abbott to Marcus Rashford, have spoken about the pressure and impact of racist online abuse that they have received.

While any proposals to deal with structural racism in the UK media should begin by addressing the immediate experiences and needs of Black journalists, they are unlikely to be sustainable without consideration of the wider context and institutions that constitute our society. This is particularly relevant with proposals for news media reform. The news media reports on society, its economic and political processes, supposedly with the aim of providing the public with the information they require to make decisions and fully participate in social and political processes.

Without greater reflection on structural and institutional racism at a wider societal level and concrete action and reform, the news media industry will continue to perpetuate the status quo. The interviews conducted for this research confirmed that the structural conditions of the news media, and, by default, its outputs, are arguably reinforcing the wider racialised prejudices evident in British society. This means that if we believe that there is a role for the media in shaping social attitudes and opinions, in order for significant change to be sustainable, it needs to do much work both internally and externally.

Challenges for Black journalists in UK newsrooms

The following section is informed by data collected through interviews conducted with Black journalists throughout 2022 as well as discourse analysis looking at coverage of issues related to race and racism. The findings demonstrate that **mainstream UK newsrooms are often unwelcoming for Black journalists, and the situation is having an impact on practices and outputs**. Black journalists are dealing with a number of challenges and barriers to entry, racial microaggressions once in the newsroom and, ultimately, the exclusion of their own voices and other Black people within and outside Britain. Racist attitudes and behaviours have become engrained, whether consciously or otherwise, structurally within news organisations, and there is seemingly a lack of will to fully address systemic issues at their core. Representations of Black people and coverage of issues related to race are problematic and exclusionary. Black journalists are relying on personal and collective coping mechanisms which need to be better supported as do Black-led media initiatives and platforms, in both creation and sustainability. Without a greater reflexivity at all levels on the question of diversity and inclusion, current approaches will not work. The findings below are consistent with some of the key arguments put forward by critical race theorists.[2] This assessment will consider these principles throughout, to help us understand where the possibilities for change might be located.

It's a white man's game

A March 2022 report from the Reuters Institute entitled Race and Leadership in the News Media 2022: Evidence from Five Markets assessed the percentage of non-white[3] top editors in Brazil, Germany, South Africa, the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) from a sample of 100 major news platforms. The study found that in the UK, no mainstream media platform had a non-white top editor, noting that the Financial Times, where Roula Khalaf is editor, and CNBC where John Casey is MD, were not included in the sample as outlets were selected according to the highest consumption figures. The report notes that this is highly problematic given that the roles of editor-chief, executive editor, or head of news are the main gatekeepers for news and content and often decision-makers in recruitment and retention processes. Research has also

[2] Critical Race Theory is an important and useful framework which examines how structural and institutional racism is entrenching patterns of behaviour that further disadvantage people based on their racial identity. Critical race theorists mostly agree on the following abridged common assumptions: firstly, that racism is a common everyday occurrence in the lives of people of colour; secondly, that because racism serve the interests of many sections of society, there is often little motivation to deal with it; third, race is a social construct; fourth, intersectionality is key; fifth, the importance of story-telling and counter-storytelling by people of colour. This fifth component is often a particularly important motive for Black journalists, and will be looked at in more detail further into the report. See Delgado, R., Stefancic, J., & HARRIS, A. (2012). *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Second Edition. NYU Press.

[3] The report explains its use of the classification of non-white as follows. 'We... deploy a simple and reductionist, but hopefully still illuminating and relevant, binary, and code each top editor as white or non-white. Non-white is in no way meant to suggest a negative identity, an identity in itself, or an homogeneous group, given the great diversity and complexity of people's identities, but it provides a way to categorise otherwise very different people who come from institutionally dominated ethnic and racial groups. It helps us point to a dimension of inequality in representation at a macro level.'

shown that leaders are more likely to recruit in their own image, immediately limiting entry of Black people into the media industry.

This sentiment is confirmed in data collected and reported by the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ), Diversity in Journalism: An update on the characteristics of journalists, which found that 14% of journalists in the UK came from non-white groups compared to 10% of editors, revealing a disparity in representation in more senior positions. While the NCTJ study notes an increase in ethnic diversity in the last two years, not only does this become less noticeable in senior positions, socio-economic status figures reveal that journalism is on the whole a middle and upper class profession.

A report published by AKAS in November 2022. 'From Outrage to Opportunity', which looked at the presence of women of colour in leadership positions and in news content within news media organisations in a number of countries including the UK found that, in the UK, no people of colour occupy the most senior editorial decision-making positions across politics and health news beats, and that there were no women of colour in the most senior editorial positions covering foreign affairs.

> **Where Black people continue to be marginalised in terms of race, class and lack of agency, there is an argument that in order to compensate, a big increase in representation (and in some cases overrepresentation) is needed in public facing areas like the media.**

The journalists interviewed for this report all echoed these findings. Newsrooms across the country were seen as unrepresentative, by which it's meant they were predominantly white, male and middle – even upper – class. Recognising that the UK is a majority-white society is important when it comes to issues of representation. Yet where Black people continue to be marginalised in terms of race, class and lack of agency, there is an argument that in order to compensate, a big increase in representation (and in some cases overrepresentation) is needed in public-facing areas like the media. However, most of the interviewees did acknowledge that things had improved in recent years in terms of representation, particularly since the activism of social movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) had raised awareness of institutional racism across both sides of the Atlantic.

Stakeholders who had been working in the industry for a few years recognised that things had improved in terms of newsroom ethnicity and diversity, and there was a shared experience that this had become more heightened in 2020 and 2021. Many referred to experiences as 'before' and 'after' BLM and/or the murder of George Floyd in order to situate their experiences historically, but also in terms of institutional behaviour. Journalists noted a change in language used in the newsroom, in news story selection and in their own interactions with senior colleagues and editors in particular. However, there was a shared sense that momentum for change was waning amongst those who might be considered to be allies, and that more had to be done to support Black journalists who were entering the journalistic field.

Working twice as hard

All of the journalists interviewed discussed having to work hard to get into the media. Tenacity, dedication and drive were all clearly present but most prominent was the autonomous nature of their motivation. Culture-related experiences and factors were key influences in their decision to study or work in the media and for many, coming from collectivist type cultures, family played an important part. For some, it was in the form of encouragement to work hard because "I am a Black woman", in this case referencing an awareness of structural racism and the need to work twice as hard to

gain the same access as white peers. For others, socio-economic class played a role. The media industry would have been prohibitive for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds without paid bursaries, apprentices, internships, and financial support made available through schemes such as Creative Access, the Scott Trust at the Guardian, the Journalism Diversity Fund (NCTJ), and other positive action schemes.

In July 2022, the Barbara Blake-Hannah Award, a British journalism prize which was established for Black journalists in August 2020 following the BLM protests, was withdrawn by the Press Gazette allegedly because they decided to start supporting a broader range of diversity. The withdrawal of the prize was seen by many Black journalists as an indication of the industry's lack of commitment to supporting and recognising Black talent. As one stakeholder noted, "diversity initiatives are always amongst the first to be cut". This form of racial colour-blindness which stems from systemic and structural issues is in fact ignoring the problem of racism. Reni Eddo-Lodge explores the problems with colour-blindness in her seminal book, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, arguing that "Indulging in the myth that we are all equal denies the economic, political and social legacy of a British society that has historically been organised by race... It is fraught with racism, racist stereotyping, and for women, racialised misogyny."[4] The cyclical nature of colour-blindness means patterns of behaviour become repetitive, in this case what is seen to be an ongoing lack of support for specifically race focussed diversity initiatives.

Story-telling and role models

Black journalists who chose journalism as a profession were in the main driven by two very different, indeed contrasting, factors. One was a desire to tell stories, a common trait amongst all journalists. For some, this meant a love of writing, for others visual storytelling. This reveals to some extent the lack of different stories being told as many spoke of finding their voice and the potential opportunities they saw in bringing about change through storytelling. Journalism was seen as an outlet for social and political change. As noted earlier, critical race theorists, for example Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (1993), foreground the notion of storytelling as a powerful tool with which to counter untruths. The concept of counter-storytelling becomes integral in contexts and institutional settings where discrimination and unfairness are presented. A perceived desire to "change the narrative" around Black people was commonplace, a narrative which is informed by negative stereotypes of and assumptions about Black African and Caribbean people. Many recounted stories from their youth of inaccurate and biased coverage of events that they had witnessed, and the apparent lack of voices from those most affected by those events. This speaks to the wider issues of structural racism in UK society and the lack of diversity and representation. Perceptions of the media and journalists amongst minoritised people who are more likely to be excluded from content are then shaped by their exclusion. Many of the journalists interviewed spoke of wanting to break that perpetual cycle.

> **If they don't see us as people, how can they tell our stories? Because we were grieving. We were a community that was grieving for a child for our friend (following a fatal shooting). Instead of coming to us and talking to us about the fact that we were grieving, they were asking us about semantics and everything else that's going on. And they were fearing us. I decided that I wanted to change that narrative and I didn't see people who looked like me or who were doing the type of things I was doing represented in the media.**

[4] Eddo-Lodge, Reni (2017). *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*. Bloomsbury: London. pg 83.

The second factor impelling many Black journalists to choose a career in journalism was the presence of other Black journalists in mainstream media profession. Seeing Black journalists on screen, ranging from Trevor McDonald and Moira Stewart to Charlene White, and reading their work, from Afua Hirsch to Darren Lewis, motivated people and gave them hope that the news media could offer them avenues for career and personal development. According to the stakeholders in this research, the important function of role models as behavioural influencers cannot be understated. Not only do they open up a world of possibility, young aspiring Black journalists felt able to connect directly with Black role models for career advice and support despite having no previous acquaintance. More crucially, Black role models were unanimously more willing to engage with and act as mentors than their white peers.

> **XX shared a link to the Scott Bursary scheme offering help. So, I reached out to her, and she was really helpful, with the application and even afterwards when I wasn't successful. It's great because you now have a contact with more people like you, we have that common ground. Going back on my experience in the newsroom, a lot of people were in their fifties and white, so it felt like they were from a completely different generation.**

Recruitment and retention

> ***When you walk into a newsroom it is like apartheid. You are instantly categorised by the colour of your skin.***

Without Black journalists in news organisations, in senior and public-facing roles, the chances for better inclusion were seen to be limited. This was clear at the point of entry but was also evident in the news production process. From ideation through to production, the presence of Black journalists at all levels of seniority was considered to be integral to the functioning of the media ecosystem and providing a diverse public with accurate and important information as well as ensuring that representation is fair and equitable in news media coverage.

> ***When I first started at the XX, I was pitching Black stories and some of them weren't being commissioned. I think that's because the editors couldn't relate to them. Maybe, they felt a bit scared to cover them and, also, they didn't know how to cover them. The editors have all the power. They're the ones that commission. Working in a space now where I am constantly doing Black stories and I know loads about this audience, it's a win-win. The teams are really committed. It's fun. It's shared experiences that you don't have to persuade and convince someone to commission.***

The above story outlines the completely different experience felt by a journalist who has worked in both predominantly white and Black media spaces. The sentiment is further confirmed below.

> ***I've noticed a lot of the time, actually it is quite often, when we're interviewing people from my community, that stuff would get chucked out which was really good. It's like, yeah, but can we understand them? I'm just like really? We did a piece about Boris Johnson and the Tories and, we had a guy, he was great. He was speaking street language, although it wasn't anything that the average person wouldn't be able work out what he meant. It wasn't anything too sort of 'Jamaican'! I'd given it back to the guys back at the news desk and I was waiting to see the piece to see if they had put it in. Because you tell people, "You're going to be on tonight at 6 p.m." I watched it and nothing was in there. I just thought – are you joking? I had gone out and purposely tried to pick diverse people again and nothing.***

There was a common perception that in order to enter and succeed in the industry, as one stakeholder put it, "someone needs to have your back". While the 'someones' in this case were in the main senior Black journalists, there was also some comment on the role of senior white managers and journalists in promoting and upholding the work of younger Black colleagues. Many also found the role of white managers to have been invaluable in their career progression and, in some cases, there was a sense that things would have been much more challenging without their support. With so much power resting in the hands of white managers, there is plenty of evidence that supportive and curious management reaps improvements and benefits for all. However, the few Black journalists who had experience of reporting into a Black manager related significant differences to how their story pitches were received and resourced. There was a common agreement that white colleagues, peers, managers, editors were less likely to fully comprehend the struggles of Black journalists. Many interviewees reported of incidents where white colleagues' ignorance and hostility to Black people's lived experience can become a trauma, undermining confidence, and performance.

> *There are times where I think stories are really important issues, like abuses in the police or issues around race, that they'll just be like, no, not for us. And I think one of the sorts of crutches they lean on is that it wouldn't do well, it wouldn't get numbers because of our readership...So I think, yeah, there are, there are different times where I don't feel heard... There was another piece I remember pitching, which was about a contractor across these London boroughs who was double charging councils for collecting parking fines. And I remember pitching that and just not getting a response. And that's the sort of thing you think if a white person came forward with that, you do wonder, would they get heard?*

This speaks again to the significance of newsroom diversity at all levels over what might be seen as the tokenistic inclusion of Black people in the media that is often referred to as a "diversity hire". Some of the interviewees recognised that diversity recruitment quotas were at times integral to ensuring a more diverse workforce. However, for many the term has become negatively loaded because it has been usurped by many to invalidate the talents and skills of Black journalists. This negates the effectiveness of hiring more people from minoritised groups unless steps are also taken to provide and guarantee an inclusive work culture and ecosystem. There was a call for greater transparency and accountability around recruitment processes with candidates and with prospective teams in order to avoid misconceptions which can often lead to micro- or even macroaggressions in an already competitive industry. Stakeholders also commented on the lack of job stability with an overwhelming sense that Black journalists were more likely to be given fixed term rather than permanent contracts. Although there appears no available quantitative data to back up this theory, with little feedback on how and why decisions are taken, trust becomes broken and it is possible for negative assumptions to be made.

> *Once you have more people and more people who are just out there being good journalists, the less likely people are going to just assume that you were there to tick some box or as part of a scheme.*
>
> *I do think there's something about our industry, which is about – Are they hungry enough? Do they want it enough? Outside of race. It's all like, how much do you want it? How far are you going to go to get this story? Because you're competing with each other at other organisations and you're also competing internally to get scoops, to get the front page, to get this source to you. So it becomes a very individualised, very competitive industry.*

In her work, The media diversity and inclusion paradox: Experiences of black and brown journalists in mainstream British news institutions, Dr Omega Douglas argues that not only ethical but also economic reasons reinforce the presence, or lack, of journalists from ethnic minoritised communities in UK news. Douglas notes that the tendency for economic rationales to dominate decision-making in media institutions contributes to the challenges of diversity and inclusion. This finding is confirmed by the data collected for this report. The competitive nature of the media industry and limited number of opportunities for promotion not only means that opportunities are limited for journalists but also encourages what might be described as a form of race-related resentment from white peers and colleagues towards those who are able to move forward in their careers.

> *I remember when I was in my 20s and a producer who went for my job and didn't get it said to me ' Oh so you are replacing XX' who was another Black presenter. I kind of got what he meant and I didn't really challenge him but what he essentially meant was that they had brought in another Black person to replace a Black person because he was white and didn't get the job. That hurt because rather than thinking I got here for my talent and being better than him I got here because I am Black.*
>
> *I would hear younger white journalists in informal settings saying things like, 'Did you hear that so-and-so has got that job? I mean, obviously it's because, you know, we've got a diversity problem and I think that's great. But that's clearly why they got the job over me.' They would frame it as that they are really supportive of these efforts, 'Yeah, that, that's definitely why that person got that job or that person's being hired' and not realise that that's racist and rude and doing it in this kind of well-meaning way.*
>
> *When covering stories like the death of Jamal Edwards, there was often talk of whether it was safe to send a team to the vigil. This event was never going to be violent or dangerous but rhetoric like this shines a light on the simmering racism still existing in newsrooms today.*

Clearly, the competitive nature of the industry affects all journalists. However, the commodification of diversity has made racial diversity appear superficial and tokenistic. This means that those employed as journalists, who represent that 'diversity', not only have a more challenging time accessing the industry, but also experience an additional set of challenges once they are in the industry where their presence is viewed by some colleagues as tokenistic, rather than based on merit. Douglas argues that the focus on economic rationalities fuels resentment as presence can then be linked to box-ticking and audience ratings, rather than professionalism.

> *For Black and other minority journalists, too often, but particularly when economic rationalities are centred, visible markers of your identity are attached to how you're valued and thus positioned in the industry.*[5]

The practice of Othering

These experiences speak to what critical race theorists see as the self-interest of racism, and how racism, in language and practices, has become ingrained in the thought patterns of many media practitioners as a result of structural conditions. Racism has become a part of the daily lives and routines of newsrooms – and subconscious choices are being made which fuel racism. Black journalists all spoke of being defined by racist tropes and negative stereotypes based on their cultural and visual identity. More often than not this resulted in a positioning of Black journalists as less qualified or skilled to perform their roles in comparison their white peers.

[5] Douglas, Omega (2022). Interview with author.

> *In the newsroom I'd hear stuff like, 'Oh, you're from XX. Why haven't you been shot yet?' That kind, that kind of thing. You know, people would be like, 'Oh, I'm going to XX. Do I need security knowing that I'm from that place'... just not taking me seriously or not thinking that I can do the work or just literally not giving me anything to do because it wasn't about how good I was. It was about my aesthetic.*

One journalist described the situation as one where "people feel emboldened enough to use language that is inadvertently racist". Another discussed "ingrained perceptions of my intelligence" based on race. These quotations show how Black journalists are continually judged, marginalised, or even excluded from their colleagues, from opportunities and from covering the topics and stories they feel are important, whether consciously or unconsciously by their white colleagues and white senior management. Many spoke of instances where they had pitched ideas for stories which had been rejected by their teams and seniors for being "unnewsworthy" or "irrelevant".

Although the situation has changed in two years since BLM and George Floyd, there are still key issues with diversity. Numbers and representation of Black people have increased but as one person put it, "We now have three people instead of just one in a newsroom of over 100 people". One of the key issues with diversity strategies is their cyclical nature, whereby a shocking or large scale event will force those in positions of power to commit to change. However, that commitment is often short lived, a point confirmed by the Black journalists interviewed.

There was also a common perception that numbers of Black people had increased mainly in roles that were considered to be "behind the scenes" i.e., in the case of broadcast media, researchers or associate producers rather than presenters.[6] Most spoke about feelings of imposter syndrome as a result of race but also, for many, this was also about class. It should also be noted that, although media organisations were seen to be championing different diversity schemes, it was a commonly held belief that many of these are not really working as they do little to address the structural issues in the industry or indeed society at large.

The news media industry was seen by the Black journalists who were interviewed to comprise mainly of white Oxbridge graduates, mainly men, with little in common with many Black journalists. Working class Black journalists interviewed for this study were all concerned that without mechanisms to address class structures in the media industry there would be little improvement in conditions for marginalised Black groups. Even those journalists who did not identify as working class expressed their awareness of the place of privilege that socio-economic status and education can provide. This raises a question around whether diversity opportunities should include an intersectional consideration of people from minority backgrounds in order to genuinely address equality of opportunity in entering the industry.

> *If we are going to have a conversation about diversity and we ignore class then we might as well not have the conversation at all.*
>
> *If you have a Black middle class person coming into a newsroom who is really interested in Black middle class stories, which I have seen, then they're going to still be missing that big swathe of the most marginalised voices in their coverage.*

Although class was the most dominant factor in determining different levels of experience, gender also played a role for many Black women journalists. All of the Black women interviewed recalled incidents of being confused with other Black women colleagues, some repeatedly and on numerous occasions.

[6] Unfortunately, there is no data available to verify this claim.

> *I remember there was one day I cried my eyes out because I was mistaken for three Black women in one day. That was something I never expected to happen. First time I was like, okay, then second time – and it happened to be that it was all in one day – and then the third time I just burst into tears and just walked out of the office. I can't imagine that happening to another white journalist.*
>
> *I've been confused with a colleague who is Black Asian and looks nothing like me. Even my tutor at the NCTJ confused me with another colleague who was Ethiopian so looks nothing me.*
>
> *For the first year of being there, people confused me for the trainee. They would literally call me (her name) every time. They'd be like, when they saw her, 'Oh, I've seen you on the telly. Congratulations.' We look nothing alike. We are not the same skin tone. We've not got the same hair... We literally look nothing alike. And in the first year they confused me with her, there was just no care in thinking that I was a person or different from anyone else. And that really affected how people looked at me, because I was a journalist but they treated me like I was the trainee. And they still do. They still do.*

These experiences which are classified as racial microaggressions are commonplace amongst Black journalists. A microaggression is defined by Yomi Adegoke, in *Slay in Your Lane: The Black Girl Bible*, as a statement, action, or incident that is an "instance of indirect, subtle or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalised group", which communicates aggressive negative racial messages and suppositions.[7] They can even be positioned as well meaning – from "Your parents must be so proud", or "Are you here on work experience" to "You don't sound Black"' and "Is English your first language?". These are all examples of common microaggressions which were recalled by the stakeholders interviewed.

It needs to be recognised that such racist microaggressions are rooted in racist attitudes which have long been acceptable social norms within British society. Underpinning these attitudes are legislation and institutions which continue to privilege white people within British society, particularly those from the middle and upper classes.

Black stories versus Black teams

> *I think it can be really difficult to do Black stories well and do them justice because a lot of Black stories are very nuanced. So, when we have had backing from, let's say, the owners or from the government, and it's about the government trying to target certain communities like a Black community or something in a positive way or even in a negative way – because they've said Black people are more likely to have diabetes or something like that or how Black people were really hit hard by COVID during the pandemic – then those stories will be commissioned and they'll be done.*
>
> *I think that pitching stories that are specifically Black stories is a real thought process for me. You think about it, you go through two or three possible answers before you can get it. And you try to have answered all of those questions that might come up before you pitch. The thing is, when you pitch those stories, you have to be the complete expert. You can't just start a story in the newsroom and hope that it gets produced.*
>
> *From very early on I realised that as a young Black mixed race woman I was going to be asked to write and concentrate my work around specific areas that I didn't actually necessarily have any expertise in.*

[7] Adegoke, Yomi and Uviebinené, Elizabeth (2018). Slay in Your Lane. Fourth Estate: London.

The pigeonholing of Black journalists becomes further complicated when it comes to coverage of race or what are considered to be Black stories.[8] Black journalists, like any journalist, want to be journalists and be able to report on any issue, topic, place or group that they are interested in. This may include reporting on race-related issues, but it also may not. When Black journalists want to report on race-related issues, these should not be viewed as niche but as universal issues that affect all of society in different ways. It is also important that people with lived experience of any issue or aspect of identity where there is a history of misreporting are the best placed to report on stories where those issues are central. Lived experience and understanding that informs reporting will ultimately contribute to less misrepresentation in the media. Equally, being equipped to report on those issues should not exclude you from reporting on other topics.

On the other hand, many spoke to the problematic nature of being chosen to cover certain topics and events. Black journalists noted being called upon by white editors to cover race-related issues and events that are deemed to have news value, based on the white editor's notion of the kind of story featuring Black people which has news value. This is often revealing of the racist assumptions of those editors rather than the reality on the ground. One journalist recalled being asked to work with a team of white colleagues on a story about Notting Hill Carnival. It eventually transpired that the story involved focusing on security aspects related to the Carnival and the journalist felt that what they wanted was "my face to justify what was essentially a hit job on Carnival". Others discussed being only asked to cover news from areas associated with Black communities, but always alongside a white team, producer, or editor. The dichotomy between the lack of opportunities and wanting to cover relevant stories sees these silos remain.

> *When I got to an assistant producer role, they would only give me the jobs about Black people. It was like, 'Oh, you can only be an assistant producer on Black jobs. ' You know what though I wanted to do it. I wanted to be an assistant producer on this piece that they were doing. Then they were like, 'Oh, you're not good enough to self-shoot that. You're not good enough to do that. You're not ready.' Then they did this another piece and again, 'Oh, you're not ready for that.' The people that they would choose would be posh white girls to do the jobs. But then, 'Oh, I'm doing something on Windrush. Oh, yeah, that's you.' Oh, I'm doing something on Black history or Black topics. You can be in control. You can do everything.'*

Once again, the issue comes down to the lack of diverse representation across newsrooms at all levels. A more diverse and inclusive environment would mean that more content would be covered, edited and produced by Black-led teams and would be more likely to be inclusive and representative of Black people in the UK. This issue also speaks to the hierarchy of news and how stories are privileged over others. As noted previously, many Black journalists spoke about pitching their own stories only for them to be rejected for reasons which were not clear. Stories of sources being cut out of pieces were also commonplace.

One area which was of particular concern for many Black journalists was the newsroom approach to risk assessments and security when it came to covering news from predominantly Black areas. There appears to be an overriding perception amongst white editors and producers that high-level security is required when entering areas which are predominantly Black, whatever the story. This perpetuates racist stereotypes of violence which are often propagated in relation to Black people. It is also further marginalising Black employees in their team and workplace.

[8] 'Black stories' refers to those stories told by Black people and which centre Black people, lives, culture and identity.

These conditions are in stark contrast to the feedback from journalists working in Black-led teams and with Black editors and managers. Stories were more likely to be commissioned without the need for extensive justification. Voices were more likely to be heard from diverse sources. According to Black journalists interviewed, the environment felt more inclusive and supportive. In addition, public interest content was being created that serves a wider audience. Many of the journalists spoke of the positive feedback received from audiences from different racial and ethnic backgrounds in this regard. While Black-led teams are not the only solution to improving and increasing the production of public interest content, nor does having a Black manager always guarantee that stories will be selected, there was a clear difference in approach in many cases where teams were Black-led.

There was a unanimously positive response to the creation of roles such as community affairs and race correspondents at a number of media organisations, including the *Guardian*, the *Independent* and ITN. These roles were seen as integral to ensuring that the issues of structural racism in society are critically analysed for audiences. Creating and sustaining specialised roles which cover race issues could be more sustainable, and more enabling, in the eyes of the stakeholders. In some cases, there was a concern that such positions might have closed following the departure of particular employees. In others, the issue of the mental health impact on those covering trauma associated with race and racism was also a concern. Aamna Mohdin, a community affairs correspondent at *The Guardian*, eloquently talked about her role, being pigeon-holed and the importance of reporting on race, saying,

> *I thought I was scared of being pigeonholed when I was 21. But my fears then came from the racist notion that the stories of people of colour mattered less than our white counterparts ... By covering community affair stories, I've been able to keep my finger on the pulse on the issues driving the national agenda. My beat largely focuses on the impact of Westminster policies on the most marginalised communities, but sometimes my stories bring me to the heart of government. When Samuel Kasumu, No 10's former race adviser, resigned, I got the exclusive interview. It was an important one, with Kasumu warning of another Stephen Lawrence-style tragedy if members of the government continue to inflame the culture wars gripping parts of the nation.*
>
> *But it's the more mundane, everyday stories that I find myself most proud of ... I saw that the stories told of ethnic minorities were ones of endless pain and suffering. But we know our lives have always been about much more than that. It's about balance. So reporting on racial inequality has to go hand in hand with more joyful things, whether that's writing about the viral Somali TikTok song dominating streaming platforms or people's deep attachment to the Notting Hill carnival.*[9]

Coping mechanisms

> *I came in, I was like, 'I'm at the XX and I'm just going to accept the fact that I should be grateful to be here. I should be grateful to have a job here. There aren't many other options.'*
>
> *I never said to anyone, 'You have just given this to me because I'm the Black guy.' Because I wanted the job, man. As a young greenhorn, to get an opportunity to work in the most prestigious newsroom in the country with a global reputation, you do anything, don't you?*
>
> *I always have a realisation that people are speaking to me differently or conversations are happening when I am not around because I am Black.*

[9] https://www.theguardian.com/membership/2021/nov/22/community-reporting-these-stories-are-at-the-heart-of-modern-britain

As noted earlier in this report, Black journalists are often silenced by the lack of opportunities made available to them and general conditions in the newsroom. What this has created is a sense of fear amongst Black journalists, with many frightened of speaking out, worried about harassment and intimidation, and ultimately scared of losing their jobs.

In their book, *Access All Areas*, Lenny Henry writes about the concern that Marcus Ryder felt when speaking in front of the Parliamentary Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee about a proposal to increase ethnic diversity in the television industry. The reason that Ryder was 'scared', outlined in the chapter of the same name, was down to his employment at the BBC at the time and concern for a reaction from his senior management if he was seen to be criticising existing policy and diversity schemes.

> *It is scary for any of us to speak uncomfortable truth to our bosses. For people from diverse backgrounds – women, disabled people, Black and Asian people – it is particularly difficult. Study after study has shown that women and people of colour pay a huge price for promoting diversity.*[10]

This experience and sentiment was echoed by all of the stakeholders interviewed. Everyone discussed what many referred to as "code-switching" to not only fit in but also as a survival technique to protect themselves from the feelings of anxiety and isolation that they felt as a result of being Black in predominantly white spaces.

> *I and many people I know have code-switched for different reasons: surviving, thriving and sometimes creating a comfortable environment for others.*
>
> *I realised that I developed this really posh phone voice and that's a kind of code-switching basically. The newsroom was not a place where it felt like I could be myself. It felt like I was trying to be someone else.*

Many of the journalists interviewed spoke of adapting their behaviour and personalities in order to conform to the dominant norms. One example was of a young Black woman journalist who felt obliged to silence herself after accusations from colleagues that she was aggressive and "just did not fit into the team" when she pointed out unfair or biased treatment. For many this was contrasted with their white peers who felt able and unthreatened when speaking out. This type of Othering, positioning people as not belonging to the group, is common in societies where systemic issues of race are present.

> *I was the arsehole for standing up for myself. I was the arsehole, and I was the one who had to apologise to somebody who was really horrible and entitled because I'm a Black woman, so I'm seen as threatening.*
>
> *I feel like I am a shadow of myself in the newsroom. I don't show my personality. I am anxious about how I am perceived whether as loud or rowdy. No one has said that but I come into the newsroom and have that in my mind as most Black people do.*
>
> *Someone I actually went to college with...ended up coming to our department. He was in our meetings and also pitching and trying to get involved. And it was interesting because we came from the same college, he didn't also have a background in journalism. It was interesting seeing us two coming from similar backgrounds but how different the support we're given was. He was an Irish white man.*

Many commented on the number of Black colleagues who chose to leave because of the lack of support they received from their colleagues and the racist conditions underpinning their experiences in the newsroom. Although many commented on workplace support

[10] Henry, Lenny and Ryder, Marcus (2021). *Access All Areas: The Diversity Manifesto for TV and Beyond*. Faber and Faber: London. Pg. 69.

schemes, there were few that stood out as effective at dealing with the mental health impact and trauma that Black journalists are facing. Media organisations that did offer counselling and support services were more likely to use white counsellors which is inconsistent with the needs of many Black journalists in this regard. One organisation, Black Minds Matter, was lauded for its outstanding work connecting Black people with professional Black therapists to support their mental health.

Black journalists are becoming frustrated with being asked to action or support diversity schemes when their white colleagues are not expected to take on additional work outside of their job remit. They feel that this has an impact on their already restricted chances for success as they have less time to focus on career progression. There is a sense that the work that individuals are doing is being co-opted so that media organisations appear to be championing diversity.

At the same time, conventional approaches which are implemented under the umbrella "diversity and inclusion", which mainly focus on achieving entry-level targets, are not working and rarely take into consideration the day-to-day experiences of Black journalists in newsrooms. In the absence of truly representative and inclusive options for support at an institutional level, Black journalists are turning to informal groups and networks of support. In many cases, unofficial Black mentors provide help and advice. Many also spoke of WhatsApp groups which had been created as means of sharing experiences and messages of support amongst Black colleagues.

The organisation, We are Black Journos, a community platform celebrating and connecting Black journalists and those aspiring to work in journalism, was also mentioned by many for its excellent work in promoting the work and experiences of Black journalists across the media industry. For all of those interviewed, they found that their most important allies were their Black colleagues. For the journalist who was previously quoted as having been mistaken for 3 other Black women in one day, this was clearly the case.

> ***XX, the presenter, he is a Black guy. He's in a meeting and he literally goes, 'Can we just go back to the whole confusing XX for XX thing at this point?' After that meeting, I cried. I actually cried because I'd never had somebody who had had my back like that in the industry.***

It is worth noting that there were mixed feelings about the lack of collegiality amongst journalists of colour. Some felt supported by networks for journalists of colour. Others felt that the competitive nature of the industry, and lack of practical sustainable support for more grassroots solutions to inclusion, often prevent these networks from being effective. One journalist pointed out that it was hard to discuss issues around recruitment and promotion options in such groups when the limited options for and pigeon-holing of Black journalists meant they were often competing for the same roles.

The impact on content

> *I remember I was sitting on the news desk and the senior editor bounded over and he was like, 'This is just coming through on the news wire. This girl's young, she's pretty, she's middle class, she's white. We've got to cover her. Got to cover her right now.' Like get it on kind of thing, guys. And it just really struck me because even though I wasn't (covering) these types of stories, I just remember just being so shocked that he would say it so overtly. Like this is why we are covering this girl. She's young and she's pretty and she's middle class and she's white. He said those things out loud. That just blew my mind.*

The impact of this is clearly exemplified in news values and news selection. In some cases, stories are hierarchised according to race, according to the Black journalists interviewed and according to some academic research.[11] It is often assumed that greater staff diversity might lead to more diverse content. What this research has shown is that, in an environment such as that described by the Black journalists interviewed for this report – one where Black voices are silenced, edited out, or excluded as well as one where the political economy of the media industry can inform its news selection and content – ensuring that diversity strategies are effective and impactful requires a more nuanced approach that incorporates the lived experiences of those journalists whose presence may make organisations appear to be more diverse.

Discourse Analysis Case Study

In order to gain further insight into news coverage of topics related to race, discourse analyses of print, broadcast and online content from the mainstream media in the UK were conducted. The focus was on assessing the impact that the lack of representation of Black journalists in the newsrooms, plus the issues related to narrating Black stories outlined in the sections above, has on outputs. Platforms analysed included: the BBC, Channel 4, *The Guardian*, *Independent*, ITV, The *Daily Mail*, *The Mirror*, Sky, and *The Telegraph*.

The print media

The first piece of discourse analysis focused on news coverage of the March 2021 report into racial and ethnic disparities in the UK by the government-appointed Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) in print publications. The main findings from this research were as follows:

The Telegraph and *The Daily Mail* used their white political and Whitehall editors to cover the report. Sources and experts used in their coverage came entirely from government and the CRED itself. The two publications were more likely to associate negative aspects and behaviour with Black and ethnic minority communities – for example violence. Coverage of the report is in the main uncritical, which is classified by the Centre for Media Monitoring methodology as revealing 'antagonistic bias' towards Black and ethnic minority communities.

Coverage in *The Telegraph* overwhelmingly concurs with the Commission's report findings that institutional racism does not exist. This is affirmed through interviews with Sir Tony Sewell the report's author and Kemi Badenoch, MP who was the equalities minister in government at the time. The Telegraph was most likely to requote sources from other

[11] Saha, Anamik (2021). *Race Culture and Media*. Sage: London.

publications, namely *The Daily Mail* and the *Times*. No reference was made to sources who were critical of the report.

The Mail's coverage generally avoided condoning or criticising the findings of the report. Its coverage relied largely on sources from government as well as the Labour Party, and referred to the fury of 'left-wing politicians' about the findings of the report. Race discourse is portrayed as an issue dominated by left-wing activists. In one headline in the *Mail*, the word 'racism' is misspelled to appear as 'cacism.'

Media organisations with in-house community affairs and race correspondents who were leading the main coverage and analysis of the findings of the report, such as *The Guardian* and *Independent*, provided more diverse coverage. In addition to sources from the government and the CRED report itself, they drew upon experts and sources who were independent representatives from the main communities covered in the report, namely Black and ethnic minority groups, as well as civil society organisations (CSOs) who were working on diversity, inclusion and race in the United Kingdom.

Such sources included David Lammy MP, Halima Begum from the race equality think-tank, the Runnymede Trust, the then shadow women and equalities secretary, Marsha De Cordova, and Rehana Azam, the GMB Union national secretary for public services. Black and ethnic minority members of the public were also included for comment, particularly from the younger generations who shared their lived experiences of structural racism in the UK. The same was observed in the coverage by the *Mirror* which was mainly led by a senior Black journalist and other Black commentators in opinion pieces.

Coverage in *The Guardian*, *Independent* and *Mirror* was openly critical of the findings of the CRED report. Language used to describe the report include repeated use of the following words and phrases: offensive, upsetting, exhausting, damaging, controversial, divisive, failed, gaslighting, disrespecting, contentious, disturbing. In discourse analytical terms defined by the Centre for Media Monitoring methodology used in this research (See Methodoloy section), this is categorised as "supportive bias" towards Black and ethnic minority communities.

All of the headlines in news coverage of the report confirmed the bias in the newspaper articles whether this was supportive or antagonistic bias. The Independent newspaper was the most likely to display impartiality in its reporting by giving due prominence to sources from both sides of the debate.

Broadcast media

A second piece of discourse analysis was conducted on broadcast media between December 2021 and January 2022. This period was chosen based on the availability of clips from mainstream broadcasters – BBC, Channel 4, ITV and Sky. In order to understand how and when race and racism was covered in the broadcast media, the set of keywords referenced in the Methodology section was applied to coverage during this period. The main findings from this research were as follows:

In December, there were no specific broadcasts on race or racism. Coverage which included elements on ethnicity and race focussed solely on Covid-19, the outbreak of the Omicron strain of the virus, the booster vaccine roll-out programme, and South Africa and the Omicron variant.

There was largely no evidence of stereotypical representations of Black people in the imagery used, headlines and framing of stories. There was one exception to this. A BBC World News story about Omicron in South Africa on the 21 December was framed in such terms as "crowded" areas, "1 in 4 people with HIV", "Africa home to the world's biggest HIV epidemic" and was accompanied by images of shanty towns. This positioned

South Africa as a place of HIV, poverty, and now Covid-19. This description contrasted with other coverage by the BBC on the positive action that South Africa had taken to deal with the Covid-19/Omicron pandemic.

One trend seen in most of the coverage was that very few people of colour were used as sources in stories on Covid-19. The clips show a bias towards white men and women professionals who were given prominence in the stories on the basis of their expertise. London Mayor Sadiq Khan was the most prominent person of colour in news excerpts.

In January, content related to race and racism focused on the publication of the report on racism in cricket and in particular Azeem Rafiq's testimony to parliament. Most of the broadcasts were based on Azeem Rafiq's testimony alone; he was the main source – either as protagonist or victim – portrayed in all of the broadcasts. With the exception of ITV and Channel 4, broadcasters did not quote Rafiq directly, but used clips of his testimony to parliament. The coverage by the broadcast media predominantly confined the framing of the issue as one for Yorkshire Cricket Club specifically, and included the club's denial that there was institutional racism or that Rafiq Azeem was a victim of racial discrimination.

With exception of Channel 4, no reference was made to the wider question of institutional racism at the national level or within in cricket/sport more generally. Channel 4 did refer to the wider national political and economic context in its coverage on racism in cricket. They also referred to the Covid-19 pandemic, included footage of BLM protestors and the race report which it noted was 'widely condemned.' Its reporting also referenced the Duke and Duchess of Sussex and their allegations of racism, and racism against English football players such as Marcus Rashford.

The BBC, Sky and ITV all fielded their white Sports Correspondents to cover the story. Channel 4 used a number of different journalists in each broadcast, including Black and ethnic minority presenters and journalists. Channel 4 and ITV were the only broadcasters to interview Rafiq Azeem personally and provide his first-hand account of racism at the Yorkshire County Cricket Club.

The case of Ukraine

The war in Ukraine began dominating the headlines in the UK media in February 2022. The impact of an event such as this, with such significant implications for security, the economy and migration, will be felt globally and should of course be a leading story. However, coverage of the Ukraine war has been condemned for its biased language and racialised narratives which continue to preserve stereotypes of countries largely in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. There was also criticism of the amount of coverage dedicated to the crisis in Ukraine in comparison to other ongoing crises in countries such as Yemen, Syria, and Eritrea for example.

> *An issue that I had was with the Ukraine war. For the first couple of days, I literally could not, as a journalist, as a person, engage with the Ukraine war. And the reason why I couldn't engage is because I'm an immigrant. I see how immigrants are treated on every level. We didn't have this for the people from Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria. There was no help, there was no humanity, there was no support. It literally hurt my heart. Even talking about it gets me upset. To see the outpouring – not that they absolutely don't deserve it – it hurt my heart to see the outpouring of support, knowing that if it was my family, that wouldn't be the same for me.*

Some of the criticism stemmed from coverage in United States and other countries. February 26 2022, provided two examples of racialised commentary. A CBS correspondent Charlie D'Agata's commented that Kiev "isn't a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan that has seen conflict raging for decades. This is a relatively civilised, relatively European – I have to choose my words carefully here – city". Similarly, when reporting on people fleeing Ukraine, the NBC News reporter Kelly Cobiella's commented that, "These are not refugees from Syria. These are Christians or white".

The UK news media also displayed highly problematic coverage of the crisis. In the *Daily Telegraph* on the same day, in an article entitled "Vladimir Putin's monstrous attack is an attack on civilisation itself", Daniel Hannan wrote, "They seem so like us. That is what makes it so shocking. War is no longer something visited upon by impoverished or remote populations. It can happen to anyone".'

On the 27th February 2022, when the BBC interviewed Ukraine's Deputy Chief Prosecutor, David Sakvarelidze, who said live on air "It is very emotional for me because I see European people with blue eyes and blond hair being killed", the presenter replied, "I understand and respect the emotion".

On the same day, Al Jazeera English presenter Peter Dobbie described Ukrainians fleeing the war as "prosperous, middle-class people" who "are not obviously refugees trying to get away from areas in the Middle East that are still in a big state of war; these are not people trying to get away from areas in North Africa, they look like any European family that you would live next door to."

Again, on the same day, a report by Lucy Watson at ITV News stated that "now the unthinkable has happened to them. And this is not a developing third-world nation. This is Europe!".

On March 4th Sky News included a video of Ukrainians in the city of Dnipro making Molotov cocktails to resist the invasion in stark contrast to similar coverage from Afghanistan, Palestine or South Africa over the years being labelled as acts of terrorism.

A report published by Asylum Access looked at the implications of the language used by the US and European media when reporting on the Ukraine crisis. It found that it not only reflects racism against non-European refugees but is also impacting and informing discriminatory migration and foreign policies. The report notes that:

> ***Journalism plays a huge role in telling the story and forming perceptions and terms that the world uses about refugees. Therefore, reporters have the responsibility to become advocates for the human rights of all refugees and make sure that the suffering of people is communicated and reflected equally. Additionally, journalists have a responsibility to report the discrimination they might witness against refugees without using terms that devalue them as humans.***

The Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists' Association (AMEJA) released a statement in which they warned news organisations of coverage which attributes "more importance to some victims of war over others". This raises questions around impartiality and due prominence in news selection and reporting. Writing in March 20222 on Open Democracy, Marcus Ryder, the former BBC journalist now Visiting Professor at the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity at Birmingham City University, argues that "Racist war reporting undermines trust in the media" and "will have viewers switching off". Ryder notes that journalists often conflate the importance of a particular conflict with the degree of sympathy that is attributed to its victims:

> ***This all matters not simply because journalists should adhere to principles of equality and anti-racism, but – possibly more importantly – because statements like these undermine the very trust people of colour have in mainstream news outlets and, in turn, increases the probability they will turn to other news sources.***

Trust in the news is already at an all-time low. According to a report published by Reuters Institute in June 2022, people are selectively avoiding news stories, including coverage of the war and crisis in Ukraine. As a result, people are consuming news via platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and increasingly TikTok, although some of this is information generated by the mainstream news organisations.

The importance of inclusive and accurate journalism is becoming more widely recognised as integral to the development of a responsible and full-functioning media ecosystem that serves the interests of all citizens. The case studies outlined above – the reporting on CRED, the Ukraine war and race-related reporting – demonstrate that inclusive journalism is still limited as is accurate reporting on race-related topics. They also show that without a wider look at the inclusion of Black journalists within the media ecosystem, the possibilities for inclusive journalism will remain severely restricted.

Conclusions and recommendations

This report has presented a bleak picture of the impact of structural racism on and in the UK news media. Drawing from the direct experiences of Black journalists in the UK, it highlights how Black journalists are undermined, harassed and excluded from newsroom processes and content.

In a milieu where government and industry leaders continue to deny the existence of structural racism, this is hardly surprising. Senior management and editors across newsrooms are predominantly white and there are limited opportunities for Black journalists from marginalised socio-economic backgrounds to enter the profession. This not only restricts the number of Black people in the newsrooms across all levels but then impacts on the exclusionary experiences of those who do make it in. British news media content is often seen to be non-representative of the needs of Black African and Caribbean people who are largely excluded from debates and narratives.

The experiences of Black journalists clearly demonstrate that current approaches to diversity and inclusion are not delivering change across the industry. In their absence, coping strategies are informal and instigated by Black journalists and initiatives rather than media institutions themselves. These coping strategies are also limited in their effectiveness in the absence of safe spaces in the newsroom.

Black-led media initiatives, content platforms and support groups have been working in order to fill information gaps and give voice to and deal with the issues that Black people and Black journalists are facing. A large part of the problem is that people in positions of power in majority-white countries, who are largely white middle and upper class, don't act upon findings and recommendations from these initiatives. There are greater possibilities to give prominence to the work of these initiatives by helping them to sustain and develop further so that they might contribute to a better-informed public and begin to address the entrenched issues brought about by systemic racism.

With this in mind, this report draws the following conclusions based on the interviews conducted with Black journalists in order to inform the development of interventions to support Black journalists in the UK news media:

1. Structural racism in the news media does not exist in isolation. There is work in the wider media and creative industries devoted to addressing diversity issues and racism. There is an opportunity for news managers and editors to become more involved in such initiatives. Examples include the work of the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Diversity at Birmingham City University on legislative reform, as well as the work of BECTU to create an independent racism reporting body. Black journalists need to also be a part of these conversations and initiatives.

2. Senior leadership needs to change its racial make-up in order to reflect the improvements in diversity at entry level and better reflect the ethnic make-up of the wider UK society. If hard or soft targets are necessary in the first instance at board level, then they should be introduced and the rationale for them should be

clearly explained. However, targets should be seen as a quick fix and not used in isolation from more substantive and longer-term work to remove the barriers that prevent Black journalists from entering into senior positions. There is evidence that the number of Black journalists is increasing at entry level, but a deeper look at recruitment and promotion processes is vital to understanding why representation remains limited at top levels.

3. There is a need to create and enable safe spaces for Black journalists in UK newsrooms. This will necessitate a deeper dialogue with Black journalists and at a management level that requires honesty and a better understanding of context and conditions. Again, key to the success of this will be listening to the needs and experiences of Black journalists and ensuring ongoing debates and issues are continually addressed.

4. Further work at an organisational level to incentivise media managers to recruit and promote Black journalists to management positions and also report on a wider range of topics is essential to complement existing diversity programmes. The career progress of senior management should be predicated, in part at least, on the proven success of developing, including and promoting Black people in leadership roles – and indeed in content.

5. It is useful to apply an intersectional lens to recruitment, retention, and training policies which include race, class, age, disability status amongst other criteria. Larger organisations should begin by examining their employment data and by gathering qualitative feedback during recruitment and training processes.

6. Greater transparency in decision-making in all aspects of the news-making process is required. This begins with transparency in recruitment and promotion processes in order that all staff are clear on how and why choices are made. There should also be greater transparency regarding news selection, hierarchies, and sources.

7. The positions of community affairs and race correspondents need to be more widespread and sustained throughout the journalism profession. Reporting on race and racism requires specialist knowledge and skill which should be supported across all news media organisations in the same way that migration, political affairs, and gender have become recognised areas of expertise.

8. Further news reporting on racism and structural racism is one way to draw public attention to the problem. Reporting on the lack of official responses to the situation as well as the culture of impunity that exists will encourage greater accountability from those in positions of power.

9. Black-led organisations and initiatives should be uplifted and sustained. We are Black Journos and Black Minds Matter can offer direct support to Black journalists. Media organisations such as gal-dem and Black Ballad are just two examples of independent Black organisations which are providing an alternative narrative to that which is prevalent in the mainstream media. Funding for these initiatives is however limited and many struggle to sustain themselves financially. The media industry has a responsibility to find ways to support and include them.

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