Paper 6

Introduction: Widening ethnic diversity in journalism

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6.1: Introduction

Minority ethnic groups in Britain, as in other parts of the world, face barriers to participation in the mainstream media and are often excluded from the critical conversations that society has with itself. This is reflected in – and in part a result of – the lack of visibility of such groups in mainstream journalism and in the ranks of managers and policymakers who set the news agendas and determine how people are portrayed.

The important consequences of such a deficit in a diverse society were dramatically highlighted as long ago as 1968 when the Kerner Report from the USA's National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders warned in its fifth paragraph: 'This is our basic conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white - separate and unequal' (Kerner, 1988). In exploring the causes of 150 riots which had erupted in dozens of American cities in 1967, the commission found that the news media had historically failed to report on the lives of African Americans. Through such neglect, as well as distortion, it had left the majority white population with little understanding of both the pervasive nature and the effects of longstanding discrimination or the smouldering rage that was building within African American communities, and black people distrusted and disliked ''the White press'' (Kerner 1988: 374).

Among the report's recommendations were that news organisations should hire more black journalists and promote black journalists to decision-making roles (Kerner, 1988: 385). Since then, some American media organisations have recorded and published the make-up of their workforces. But revisiting American journalism 40 years after Kerner, Carolyn Byerly and Clint Wilson pointed to 'a thread of continuity found in omission or misrepresentation that still marks most American journalism as a domain of whiteness' (2009: 214).

Britain is a different country, a different society, with a different history, but there have been noticeable parallels between America and Britain in regard to the media and minorities. Strong evidence suggests that a deficiency in diversity in mainstream news rooms corresponds with misrepresentation and under-representation of minority ethnic groups such as Blacks and Asians in the news (Cottle 2000; Poole 2002; Poole and Richardson 2006).

Riots broke out in May 2001 in the English towns of Oldham and Leeds, Burnley and Bradford which have large minority populations of South Asian origin. Journalists in Oldham and Leeds were attacked by youths protesting that Asian communities were unfairly represented in the local press. The offices of one paper, the *Oldham Chronicle*, were petrol-bombed. Its editor, Jim Williams, said later:

> The balance of our reporting in terms of what is going on in Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities has been somewhat skewed. When we report activities on the mainly white estates, they tend to be offset by ordinary good news stories. We did not run sufficient good news stories from the Asian communities and it could have appeared that the only thing going on was Asian attacks on whites, and that was a flaw (Jones 2001: 20).

This brief incident in a small town in Britain might seem to be a minor event, but it is not without significance. The editor's comments point not simply to a lack of coverage, but a lack of contact between two communities: a lack of interest, of understanding, of empathy – a nation 'moving toward two societies'.

Three years before these incidents, Beulah Ainley's research published as *Black journalists, white media*, revealed that of 3,000 journalists working on national newspapers in Britain, 'there are between 12 and 20 black journalists employed at any time'. And of the 8,000 journalists then on provincial papers, there were only 15 (Ainley 1998: 1). Remarkably, the work remains the most comprehensive study of the ethnic composition of journalists in Britain, which focused on the recruitment, retention rates, training, and socialisation into

the profession. Four months before the riots, Greg Dyke, director general of the BBC had remarked that the corporation was 'hideously white' (BBC 2001).

Did these reflections prompt changes in the industry? The BBC did look seriously at its reflection of the society which owns it and pays for it through an annual 'licence fee levy', although these efforts have met with mixed success[1]. Four years after the Oldham riots, after Williams's *mea culpa*, Britain's Society of Editors found that newspapers serving areas with high minority ethnic communities had few, or no, minority journalists and highlighted to its members both a social and commercial imperative better to reflect the diverse communities they served (Cole 2004: 9). Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) chair Trevor Phillips argued that the lack of ethnic minority journalists had led to false and misleading assumptions by white reporters about the Asian community after the 7 July bombings in 2005 (*Guardian* 2005).

The British social mobility foundation, the Sutton Trust, researched the educational backgrounds of leading journalists in June 2006 (Sutton Trust 2006). The trust found that 54 per cent of the top 100 journalists were privately educated, a rise from 49 per cent in 1986. Moreover, 45 per cent of today's leading journalists attended Oxbridge (56 per cent of those who went to university). The survey discovered that among current journalists and editors, the most recent recruits to the national news media were even more likely to come from privileged backgrounds than those of previous generations. A number of reasons were cited: insecurity, low pay at junior levels, increasing costs of postgraduate courses, high costs of living in London, stronger skills and self-confidence believed to be exhibited by those from private schools, and favouritism towards those with family or personal connections within an informal recruitment process.

But the collection of data on media workforce diversity is partial and problematic. In May 2012, a UK government report on Social Mobility reported: 'Journalism, with some honourable exceptions, does not seem to take the issue of fair access seriously.' It found the 'lack of collection and publication of both diversity and socio-economic data is an impediment on making progress'. And it noted: 'Responses to the call for evidence provided us with little information on efforts to improve in-work progression' (Milburn 2012: 54).

It was, in part, this persistent lack of transparency in the news industry and its general reluctance to collect and publish diversity data which gave rise to the seminar series on *Widening ethnic diversity in journalism: Towards solutions,* from which this collection of chapters emerged. The series, funded by Britain's Economic and Social Research Council, took place over two years, from January 2010 to September 2011, at six universities in England and Wales[2]. The aim was to facilitate collaboration in finding ways to increase the ethnic diversity of the media industries and disseminate best practice. The series was unique in bringing together academics, journalism educators, members of minority communities senior executives and working journalists from both the mainstream and minority ethnic media industry in Britain and from the USA, South Africa, Hungary and Rumania as well as the Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

It generated discussion between representatives from organisations that form the key policy-makers in the news media sector, including the broadcasters the BBC, ITV and Chanel 4; the National Union of Journalists, Bectu (the Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union) Skillset, the Society of Editors and the IFJ. This collection of essays reflects the diversity of contributors to the series.

The seminar series coincided with a crisis within some sections of the news industry, in particular the mainstream press, in Britain, the USA and mainland Europe. This crisis has been, and continues to be, marked by abruptly collapsing revenues, audience share and deep job cuts as media organisations face major transformations along commercial, but also along social, cultural and technological trajectories. In Britain, the press is facing in 2011/12 a further crisis, one of trust, following revelations of unethical behaviour such as the hacking of private telephone accounts and bribery of public officials and undue, hidden, influence on the political process which prompted in 2012 a far-reaching inquiry into media ethics led by a High Court judge, Lord Justice Leveson. But far-reaching as this inquiry is, it is not concerned with the demographic of the media workforce and whether that workforce reflects, and can be said fully to understand the increasingly complex society for which, and on which, it is reporting.

Of course, there are grave dangers in conceptualising both minority and majority groups within society as homogenous communities in themselves. Many contributors to the seminar series explored the different dynamics of and tensions between the development of collective and individual identities. While this seminar series focused on ethnic diversity, many contributors contextualised their exploration of these issues in a 'cultural', rather than 'racial' perspective. And they explored these processes within wider fields of difference arising out of religion, gender, sexuality, age, and class and so on: markers of diversity which overlap and transect each other in multiple ways. But it remains the case that in particular contexts, Cornell West's observation retains its force and critical centrality to these analyses: *'Race matters'*, a point made forcefully by Pamela Newkirk's paper in this volume.

It is also an oversimplification to assume that creating a more diverse media workforce will inevitably generate a greater cultural awareness in the processes, production and outputs of the media. Simon Cottle has highlighted the dangers of addressing those concerns which were central to this seminar series from an overly-simple perspective: focused solely on tendencies to generate 'demeaning stereotypes, discourses of denigration and symbolic annihilation' (Cottle 2007: 34). Despite its failings, the mainstream news industry does at times exercise an ability to give voice to the voiceless and empower the powerless. This complexity of approach was exemplified by many of our participants throughout the series and the tone was set in the opening seminar at Newcastle University in January 2010 by Peter Oborne, chief political correspondent of the (right wing) British newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*, whose presentation included his investigations which exposed in print and on television the British media's prejudicial reporting on Muslims and the complicity of elements of the establishment in these misrepresentations and mistreatments (Oborne and Jones 2008).

It has become apparent from the wealth of evidence emerging from the Leveson inquiry[3], that much of what happens in some newsrooms is taken for granted, it falls under the blanket of hegemonic norms (Gramsci 1971) and critical reflection on many aspects of

professional practice by journalists and executives is uncommon in the tabloid newspaper sector in particular. Such practices as paying for stories involving the bedroom secrets of celebrities and notions of what makes a 'good story' are often taken for granted.

Such taken-for-granted practices and concepts have been exposed to uncomfortable analysis under forensic questioning at the Leveson inquiry. In this collection, Pamela Newkirk points to African American journalists who challenged and questioned from within, the hegemonic assumptions about society by mainstream newsrooms, and a minority African American press which challenged the mainstream from without. It is a struggle that can take a heavy toll on individuals who in a minority, sometimes of one, are seen to be 'different' within newsrooms. Some journalists from minority backgrounds walk away; others negotiate their way and achieve success and recognition within long-established and slow-to-change cultures of media production. And they can help, as Liz Poole highlights, to generate that reflexive, critical approach that helps a news organisation better to address the complexities of an increasingly diverse society.

It is in the acceptance, embracing of and engagement with difference and diversity that matters: the disruption of heterogeneity, rather than the precise nature of the particular diverse mix that exists in any single organisation. But the case that a diverse media industry workforce is a good thing does not rest solely on the performance of the media. It is also right that there should be equality of opportunity within the media sector.

The low levels of recruitment, retention and promotion of ethnic minority journalists across the media industry are confirmed by the Society of Editors' training committee report of 2004, *Diversity in the newsroom: Employment of minority ethnic journalists in newspapers* and by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) report: *Why ethnic minority workers leave London's print journalism sector* (CRE 2005). The 2004 Labour Force survey (Office for National Statistics 2004) also bears out this disparity, revealing that the labour force in print and publishing industries is overwhelmingly white, with only 5.4 per cent of workers from ethnic minority groups. The ONS uses six principal categories of ethnicity: white, mixed, Asian or Asian British, Chinese and other ethnic group. In the higher status

profession of journalism, the number of ethnic minorities is so small as to fail to register within the data (CRE 2005)

The professional studies are highly informative but necessarily small-scale and/or narrowly focused. For example, the Society of Editors study involved interviews with editors and publishers but not with ethnic minority journalists. Small numbers of newspapers have taken positive steps to recruit from minority communities, but the report emphasises that the issue is being taken seriously at the highest level by publishers across the mainstream newspaper industry, regionally and nationally. It notes that some editors and publishers are engaging in initiatives such as school visits, special work experience schemes, targeted bursaries and working with communities to increase minority ethnic employment in the industry. However, it comments that more needs to be done and recommends that the newspaper industry instigate a scheme akin to the Cultural Diversity Network (since renamed the Creative Diversity Network) in the broadcasting industry[4]. It also recommends that editors build closer links with their minority communities to encourage interest in employment in journalism and calls on colleges and universities to examine their marketing and recruitment practices to attract more ethnic minority students on to journalism courses.

The report indicates that editors rarely advertise for editorial staff and that the interview process is typically informal. Vacancies tend to be filled by individuals with experience in national newspapers who are known to editors. It implies a systematic bias towards those from privileged backgrounds at the point of entry. Since job opportunities at senior levels of the national news media are scarce, this bias at the point of entry is of critical significance.

Although the CRE report focused only on London and why ethnic minority journalists *leave* the profession, it identified several issues requiring further research, which were addressed by contributors to this seminar series. These included the increasing insecurity of the industry; structural and cultural norms acting as an obstacle to equal participation; a work environment which could be unwelcoming of people viewed as different.

The report discovered that ethnic minority journalists were pressured to move away into freelance, charity or self-employed work despite these being high risk alternatives. Within an industry highly dependent on contacts, ethnic minorities felt isolated and believed their progression to be disadvantaged by lack of social background and educational privileged ties. Poor work-life balance was perceived to be a particular feature of the profession that created a burden for women, yet there is evidence that women from ethnic minorities are faring better than their male counterparts (this is verified elsewhere: see Chambers et al 2004). In 2009, 40.25 per cent of the NUJ's total membership of 37,759 were listed as freelance (Baines and Kennedy 2010: 103). Since then, NUJ membership has declined as a result of the crisis in the industry, and many formerly employed member s are working freelance. The head of Oxford University's Institute for the Study of Journalism states that this reliance on freelancers in the newspaper industry favours those who are confident and who can rely on support during lean times (Elliot Major 2006).

While these studies confirm that ethnic minorities are marginalised in the newspaper industry, there has been no in-depth investigation of the industry's recognition of and response to under-recruitment.

6.1.1: Summary of papers

Jim Boumelha, president of the International Federation of Journalists, argues in Chapter 1 that second- and third-generation black and minority ethnic Britons are growing up with the impression that mainstream news organisations perceive them as outsiders. And he finds that their broad accusation that newsrooms remain entirely white and do not reflect the diversity of 21st century Britain is fairly accurate. Boumelha examines strategies adopted in Britain and across mainland Europe which have attempted to address this deficit and highlights examples of good practice which need to be emulated by less progressive parts of the industry. But he finds a lack of true commitment to diversity in many sectors of the industry. He warns that the failure by many newspaper employers in particular to take the critical step of monitoring the ethnicity of their workforce is holding back progress in that sector.

In Chapter 2, Lynette Steenveld analysis the processes of transformation which took place, and continue to take place, in the South African news media following the collapse of apartheid and white minority rule in that country. Steenveld examines the manner in which the so-called 'free media' was complicit with the apartheid state and analyses arguments that the contemporary structures of media ownership in that country promote the reproduction of its history of news values, routines and practices. Steenveld explores how these structures compromise the media's ability to serve the interests of the new democracy and probes conceptions of media accountability which are at the heart of government-media relations.

Shenaz Bunglawala, in Chapter 3, analyses the strategies of the ENGAGE organisation, of which she is Research Director, to enhance critical media literacy in British society in general and specifically to encourage Muslims, particularly young Muslims, to engage vigorously and critically with mainstream media, civic society, the political process and wider community life. The chapter examines the social and political imperatives which are driving this enterprise and concludes with several illuminating observations on diversity and press regulation in the light of matters which have been emerging through the Leveson Inquiry into media ethics.

In Chapter 4, Liz Poole offers further insights into this field following upon these perspectives in her paper reporting on a research project that aimed to explore the role of Muslims in media production in the UK in a range of media contexts. Poole explores the ways in which Muslims negotiate their identities in various media environments in order to create a space in which to construct their own narratives and the challenges they face in doing so. Much has been written about changes to media production brought about by a wide range of phenomena including technological developments and processes of globalisation. These have had an impact on both professional practices and media content and Poole's inquiries contextualise these trends against the background of transnational migration which is increasing cultural diversity across Europe.

In Chapter 5, academic and journalist Connie St Louis argues that the focus on the recruitment of minority ethnic journalists into many media organizations has distracted from the fact that once they are employed, many are leaving. St Louis reports on a research project on BAME retention in Britain's BBC and Channel 4 broadcasters. She concludes that urgent change is needed to improve the retention of these journalists and puts forward a series of findings to inform the development of human relations policy and support effective retention strategies in major organisations.

Chapter 7, by Jo Welch, outlines the role of Creative Skillset in promoting equality and diversity in the creative industries. She highlights the occupational imbalances and high numbers of freelance workers within this rapidly changing sector. Welch describes the wide range of initiatives introduced by Creative Skillset, such as the Creative and Digital Media Apprenticeship that feed into successful training schemes and accredited courses to increase diversity in the media and creative industries.

In Chapter 8, Bob Satchwell, addresses the response from Britain's newspaper industry to the Journalism Training Forum report (2002) which confirmed that print journalists are predominantly white. He summarises the action taken by the Society of Editors and the National Council for the Training of Journalists to create a more ethnically diverse workforce. Demonstrating the commercial and ethical benefits of greater diversity in newsrooms, the Journalism Diversity Fund aimed to increase minority ethnic representation by offering training bursaries to those from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Focusing on Romania and Hungary, Chapter 9 by Liviu Popoviciu and Petru Weber examines minority rights agendas in Eastern Europe, and assesses them in relation to Western media policies on minority journalists. The establishment of separate media organisations for minority ethnic groups has preserved linguistic and cultural identities in parts of Eastern Europe. However, as a consequence, mainstream media now lacks minority journalists and misrepresents the lives and experiences of minority groups. The

authors explain how this poses difficulties in challenging racism and advancing multiculturalism and the media careers of people from minority ethnic groups.

Jake Bowers is one of Britain's few Romany journalists. In Chapter 10, he examines the ways in which the British media systematically misrepresent the lives and cultures of Britain's 300,000 Irish Travellers and Romany Gypsies, often for the sake of sensationalism, entertainment and high TV ratings. Bowers identifies key examples such as the television series, *My big fat Gypsy weddings*, which he refers to as a 'mockumentary' to highlight its absurd inaccuracies about Gypsy lives. Bowers argues that Gypsies will continue to be misrepresented and misunderstood until more are recruited as journalists, or take control themselves: 'In order to challenge the media; you have to be the media.'

In Chapter 11, Kerry Moore and John Jewel, of Cardiff University, address the ways in which the news media in Britain represents Black young men and boys by assessing the effectiveness of using 'role models'. Their study was in response to the Reach Report (2007) which suggested that negative media images of Black men are likely to impact upon the aspirations and achievement levels of Black youth. Moore and Jewel conclude that 'role models' are entirely inadequate; either for understanding the complex career trajectories and experiences of Black and Asian journalists or as a solution to their under-recruitment and misrepresentation.

In Chapter 12, Barnie Choudry and David Baines assess the effectiveness of a mentoring project established between third-year journalism undergraduates at Lincoln University and early-career media workers. They consider whether the practice of mentors 'championing' mentees has the potential to extend workforce diversity in journalism by targeting minority groups normally excluded from the social networks that help to gain access. The authors consider the value of past media industry mentoring schemes and evaluate the current project to pinpoint best practice. They identify the obligations and risks as well as enhanced work experience of the Lincoln scheme.

Pamela Newkirk, in Chapter 13, offers a critical historical perspective of this debate contextualised by the experience of African American journalists, and the dynamics of diversity following the election of President Barak Obama. Media diversity was thrust forcefully on to the national political agenda in the USA in 1969 by President Lyndon B. Johnson's National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. It issued an excoriating report on the media's failure adequately to represent the lives of African Americans. Newkirk finds that despite more than 40 years of critical self-reflection by the industry, and close attention from civil society, mainstream media has failed to address many of the failings identified in 1968. But she does find grounds for optimism that those who have historically been on the margins will in the future be among the industry leaders who will create the kind of principled journalism that a multifaceted nation deserves. This is a transcript of her presentation to the seminar at City University, London[5] and is followed by an edited selection from the lively Q&A which followed her paper.

6.1.2: And finally…

The speakers who presented at the seminars, were practitioners, academics, policy-makers and members of many communities who brought a remarkable range of expertise and insight. Many began with variations on the phrase: 'why are we *still* discussing this? It is not rocket science!' Pamela Newkirk (chapter 13) warns that the discussion is being forced off the table by the other crises on which key sectors of the media industries are focusing. She is referring in particular to the impacts of financial and technological changes that are slicing into traditional business models, forcing closures, spilling jobs by the thousands.

We would argue, as many have done in this series, that this is nevertheless a time for optimism. The media world is changing dramatically and the dynamics of those transformations are rooted in social and cultural factors as much as in economic and technological developments. Cottle (2007) points to the greater and growing fluidity of the politics of representation. Choudhury and Baines (chapter 12) also point to the greater fluidity in the working lives of all media people and the ways in which these careers can be supported by the development of social capital and the building of diverse networks.

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Bowers (chapter 10) points to the ways in which Roma people are attempting to take control of their media presence. Bunglawala (chapter 3) and Poole (chapter 4) point to the ways in which young Muslims are engaging and challenging mainstream media, Muslim media workers are creating spaces within the media in which to construct their own narratives and minority media are diversifying the range of sources on which the mainstream draw. As Newkirk says in the conclusion to chapter 13:

> It is possible for some of those who have been on the margins to create media that neither assume nor require a dominant racial hierarchy in its management structure, news values or orientation. It is possible for those who have historically been on the margins to be among the industry leaders who will create the kind of principled, fair and balanced journalism that a multifaceted nation deserves.

Notes

[1] For a summary of BBC policy and initiatives on expanding diversity, see: http://www.media4diversity.eu/en/content/bbc-initiatives, accessed on 12 July 2012

[2] Economic and Social Research Council Award (Deborah Chambers, David Baines and Liviu Popoviciu), RES-451-26-0770, January 2010 to January 2012. The seminars were conducted at five universities: Cardiff University, City University, London, Newcastle University; Sheffield University, Sunderland University, University of West of England. See dedicated website on the seminar series at http://media.ncl.ac.uk/diversity/

[3] The Leveson Inquiry (2012) Culture, Practice and Ethics of the Press. Official site available at http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/, accessed on 13 July 2012

[4] See http://www.creativediversitynetwork.org/

[5] Newkirk's paper was delivered on January 18, 2011

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