

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Diversity and inclusion in the BBC

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The views and perspectives of minority ethnic staff working in the UK radio industry are very rarely heard. It is not surprising given that the UK radio industry has a low representation of staff from minority ethnic backgrounds. This book examines the BBC Asian Network, a national digital ethnic radio station, which is offered by a public service broadcaster. This chapter offers an overview of what the stations aims and goals, a rationale for this study and how the study was completed. The interview material reveals there are different viewpoints among the staff hired on how best to serve the core audience – whoever that maybe.

Introduction

Despite the existence of diversity strategies, initiatives, and targets to improve the number of ethnic producers, presenters, journalists, writers and editors across all broadcast media, the UK radio industry continues to fail to reflect the breadth and range of communities living in the UK (Ofcom, 2019). The damning findings from the Office for Communications (Ofcom), the UK government-approved regulatory and competition authority, come during a period of sustained activity within media organisations pertaining to diversity and inclusion initiatives. All broadcasters have set themselves targets to enhance the on-air reflection of minority groups: disabled, ethnic, LGBT and correspondingly, the recruitment of staff from these groups. The assumption being that to create high-quality programmes that reflect the diverse lives of people living in Great Britain that the media workforce also ought to be drawn from a range of ethnic and social classes (Ofcom, 2019b, p. 4). Media organisations have been compelled to scrutinise the representation of their audiences because they need to remain relevant in response to strong competition from streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon. It is also morally the right thing to do - to acknowledge and represent the lives of people who consume radio and television in the UK. The BBC has made a concerted effort behind the scenes to enhance media content depicting minority ethnic communities, their lives and their concerns. Furthermore, as a public funded organisation, with a public service remit, the BBC has been

forced to demonstrate that it creates content for *all* audiences and that minority ethnic listeners consume its output.

Research about ethnic media has tended to focus on how the media serve their audience and what role they perform whereas less is known about the conditions ethnic media producers labour under, their careers trajectories and the politics of representation (Cottle, 2000; Husband, 2005). This book aims to provide an understanding of how minority ethnic journalists create media content featuring diverse audiences whilst working to a public service remit and tries to offer the voice of primarily ethnic staff working in radio production at the BBC Asian Network, (a digital ethnic specific radio station). The following chapters focus on how the work by this group of staff contributes to the construction of a distinctive ethnic audience for the BBC, and the challenges, barriers and conflicts that have emerged as a consequence of the BBC's strategic attempts to make the BBC Asian Network relevant for young British Asian listeners. Studying the media production of ethnic staff is important because it offers an alternative lens through which to view the production process which is often structured to cater for a wide general population. Through in-depth interviews, BBC staff outlined the difficulties and challenges they face producing content for their target listener, and they offer an insight into the internal production culture within BBC Radio. The interviews also reveal how the gatekeeping system limits the dissemination of original journalism about the British Asian communities because the BBC ignores or marginalises the expertise of minority ethnic journalists working at the BBC Asian Network. Instead, journalists find that content that emphasises difference or focuses upon the Muslim communities in the UK is more likely to be cherry-picked by other teams to air on other BBC programmes. What also emerged is that although the radio station was established 16 years old in 2002, there is confusion and resistance among some staff to serve third and fourth generation British Asian listeners as directed by senior management.

The material for this study was gathered through in-depth interviews with a range of BBC employees: editors, producers, and presenters, who either work at or previously were employed at the BBC Asian Network. The data collection took place between December 2014 and March 2016. A production studies approach combined with a grounded theory framework was applied for the analysis. This method presents an insight into the internal production and decision-making process within the BBC and offers an understanding of how the BBC as a public service broadcaster tries to articulate and manage issues pertaining to race and ethnicity at a time when

diversity and inclusion is at the top of the agenda. Production studies have tended to focus upon the film and television sectors as opposed to radio which is a ubiquitous medium but is often overlooked within media research. Moreover, there are few studies that specifically focus upon the experiences of minority ethnic media workers, in this instance, British Asian producers, editors and presenters. There are some exceptions, Simon Cottle's (1997) seminal study of ethnic employees working in the BBC television found that minority programme producers worked within staid, unadventurous, hierarchical, and bureaucratic constraints and that minority staff appeared to have wholeheartedly embraced BBC conventions of creating programmes with high production values that offered a mainstream framing of ethnicity and race as opposed to producing programmes solely directed at minority audiences. His interviews with producers illustrated how in the 1990s BBC management were already questioning if British Asians required separate specific content or if they were an integral part of British life and history under the umbrella notion of 'multiculturalism'. Cottle's work offers a critical insight into programme making within the BBC.

Similarly, this book utilises the testimonies of ethnic staff and examines how they try to create and entice an 'imagined community' of listeners to the BBC, and it looks at the differences between the staff in how they conceptualise and visualise British Asian identity (Anderson, 2012). The interview material revealed a divide between two groups of minority ethnic staff at the BBC Asian Network, some of the older British Asian staff members believe the BBC should focus on older listeners and offer a more robust and authentic articulation of British Asian identity. In contrast, younger staff comprised of third or fourth generation British Asians born and raised in Britain appeared at ease focusing on a younger listener and articulating a more ambiguous vision of British Asian identity.

The BBC annually spends around 7.3 million pounds on entry level talent schemes which seek to place people into roles in TV/Radio production, national and local journalism, engineering, software engineering, business management and legal, to broaden the representation of minority groups they employ (BBC, 2018, p. 4). However, the BBC radio workforce is comprised of just nine per cent of minority ethnic staff (Ofcom 2019b, p. 8). Previous research into the ethnic composition of the media workforce has questioned the emphasis upon targets and numbers suggesting they give an illusion of change as opposed to enacting actual change because such figures can often include non-production roles (Campion, 2005). Thirty years after Cottle's

work, and thirteen years after Campion's study of ethnic producers, this study looks at contemporary diversity and inclusion strategies in the BBC and the structural inequalities, gatekeeping, and internal cultures from the point of view of the staff experiencing them.

The BBC Asian Network

The BBC Asian Network is the only digital radio station within the BBC that specifically caters for British Asians and as such, plays a significant role in the mixed radio ecology in the UK. The station is directed to appeal to British Asian listeners (people with South Asian roots/heritage such as Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan communities), through the provision of speech and music. A BBC review in 2015 indicated that the station reached 15.1 per cent of the UK's Asian adults per week thus, indicating that the BBC Asian Network plays a key role in attracting and driving minority audiences to the wider BBC (BBC Trust, 2015, p. 18). The broadcaster struggles to attract Black, Asian and minority ethnic viewers and listeners to its main output. BBC 1 and BBC 2 tend to attract white middle-class viewers with ABC1¹ profiles, at 54 per cent and 57 per cent respectively (Ofcom, 2019c, p. 31). Analysis of BBC Asian Network listeners shows that they are primarily aged between 25 and 44 years of age and tend to be male (Barratt 2017, p. 2). An earlier listener analysis conducted in 2016 demonstrated that the BBC Asian Network had a record reach among C2² profiles, a group comprised of skilled manual labourers (Eustace, 2016, p. 2). Therefore, the social origins of BBC Asian Network listeners is summarised as primarily C2DE, which refers to those working in either skilled or unskilled roles, retired, casual or unemployed, although there is an acknowledgement that people from other social groups also listen, particularly those in AB (professional groups).

The BBC Asian Network originated from minority radio programming created by BBC Local Radio to cater for the UK's Asian communities in both Leicester and Birmingham in the late 1970 and 1980s. The programmes were later constructed into a regional radio service for the Midlands on AM frequency in 1988, which was later broadcast nationally via the Sky satellite. In 2002, the station was re-launched as a national digital radio station alongside 1Xtra and 6 Music.

¹ NRS social grades are a system of demographic classification used in the United Kingdom.

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Director General, Greg Dyke, directed 1Xtra and the BBC Asian Network to appeal to audiences who felt underserved by the BBC's existing services (Gardem, 2004). 1Xtra, was initially conceived as being a service for black British youth, however, the station which emphasises urban music, also has a strong appeal among non-minority listeners (BBC Trust, 2015, p. 10). The BBC Asian Network has a unique remit within the BBC's portfolio of radio stations because it offers an equal split of speech and music at 50/50. The BBC's other national radio stations are either speech-based, such as 5 Live and Radio 4, or a mixture of speech and music, such as Radio 2 and Radio 1. The speech content on the BBC Asian Network includes news bulletins, documentaries and phone-in/debate programme. In this manner the station offers a unique national platform for minority voices to articulate their concerns. Their voices and viewpoints are given prominence on the station and often a story may emerge on the BBC Asian Network but may be shared with other BBC programmes as part of institutional efforts to make diverse journalism central to the core business of the BBC. The remit set by the former BBC Trust emphasizes:

A strong focus on accurate, impartial, and independent news and current affairs, together with debate, entertainment, and culture relevant for a modern British Asian audience. The music played should include a broad range of South Asian-influenced music, with a particular emphasis on new and live music and British Asian artists. During the day an extensive playlist should form the backbone of the schedule, while weekend programmes should focus on more specialised areas. (BBC Trust, 2016, p. 2)

The Service Licence promotes the idea that the station can appeal widely to all British Asians through information and music. No other BBC station is as explicitly defined by the target audience, for example, explicit Asian programming for British Asian listeners. The station is also encouraged to enable listeners to “interact and communicate with each other and the station” in order to create a community of listeners (BBC Trust, 2016, p. 2). A similar public service broadcaster (PSB) is SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) Radio in Australia, which produces audio content in 74 languages aimed at non-English speaking communities and CBC Radio in Canada, which offers programming in both English and French plus eight other indigenous languages. These services target several minority communities, whereas the BBC Asian Network is specifically tasked with serving the British Asian population in the UK. a

The BBC has a history of producing content in non-English for people living abroad through the Empire Service and Overseas Service. Khamkar (2017) has noted that although the BBC historically produced Asian language radio through the World Service, it was only in the late 1960s that it began to create content aimed at the Asian migrant community in the UK. Early programmes for immigrants from South Asia included on BBC 1 "*In Logon Se Miliye*" 1965, translated as "Let me introduce you to these people" and "*Apna Hi Ghar Samajhiye*" 1967 (Make Yourself at Home) and *Nai Zindagi Naya Jeevan* 1968 – 1982 (New life). These programmes were broadcast in Hindustani³ by volunteers or presenters who migrated to the UK and sought to appeal to both Indian and Pakistani viewers in equal measure. The programmes are described by Malik (2002, p. 57) as "classic public service broadcasts" because they tried to integrate newly arrived Asian immigrants into Britain with practical advice, education, and some entertainment. In keeping with the PSB ethos the goal was to educate the audience in conversational English which the BBC recognised as being a challenging task. Programme editor of *Make Yourself at Home*, David Gretton, described the Indian and Pakistani industrial immigrants as "illiterate" in an interview about the new programme (Gretton, 1965). Malik (2002) has argued that the BBC thought South Asians required guidance on how to integrate due to greater cultural differences with the majority population. In contrast, African and Caribbean migrants were considered to have traditions and customs which were closer to 'English' culture. Media historian, David Hendy, has studied BBC archives to document 100 years of the broadcaster's existence. He suggests that Asian content was purposely "ghettoised on the schedules" because it was broadcast at times when the majority audience were less likely to listen or watch TV (Hendy, n.d.). Meaning immigrant audiences were treated by the broadcaster as being separate and distinct from the majority audience. The fact that the early programming on ITV and BBC situated minorities as immigrants become problematic in the 70s and 80s when increasingly the second and third generation of British Asians were increasingly born in Britain.

Unlike the early integration programmes, The BBC Asian Network is aimed at British Asians who are born and raised in the UK. The presentation is largely in English, the music is a mix of foreign language Bollywood, Bhangra and classical music alongside urban and British Asian music featuring British Asian artists. The remit places a strong emphasis upon news and

³ Hindustani is the dialect of Hindi used in Delhi and is the lingua franca throughout India

current affairs involving and pertaining to Britain's minority communities and music. Stories about the British Asian communities are also shared with other programmes within the BBC to help them to enhance their reflection of British Asian audiences. Therefore, the emphasis upon news and speech about the British Asian communities ought to make the station strategically significant within the BBC's portfolio of radio stations. However, in its eighteen-year history as a national BBC radio station, it has faced a proposed closure in the 2010 and enacted a few editorial strategies to evolve the output to remain relevant to the changing British Asian listener. Equally, listener figures have fluctuated, due in part, to the different strategies enacted by BBC management, and the external press coverage related to the proposed closure in 2010. Since 2018 listener figures have dipped to 519,000 Rajar⁴ (Q4, 2019). One challenge is attracting third and fourth generation listeners in the digital media era, where fewer young people listen to radio combined with the popularity of streaming services such as Spotify (Ofcom, 2019c). In 2010 the BBC recommended the closure of the BBC Asian Network due to the high production cost contrasted with low listener figures in 2009/10. The BBC argued that the money saved could be reinvested to produce and deliver content to Asian audiences through a range of BBC television and radio services. 6 Music was also selected for closure as part of a cost saving exercise that was enacted due to a Government imposed freeze on the Licence Fee in 2008. The recommendation to close the BBC Asian Network was rejected by the BBC Executive in 2011 because a review of the station recognised the service attracted diverse South Asian listeners who are "typically less well served by other BBC radio services" and that the music and original news and speech programming were "highly valued" by listeners (BBC Trust 2012, p. 3). The BBC Trust noted that the BBC Asian Network made a strong contribution to help deliver the BBC's public purposes (see Royal Charter, 2016).

In 2011 the station was reprieved but was forced to reduce running costs by cutting staff and presenters and offering longer shows on the station. Listeners emphasised they wanted the BBC to provide a radio station aimed specifically at British Asian audiences (BBC Trust 2012, p. 3). In 2012 a new reduced schedule and presenter line-up was unveiled. The aim was to provide fewer but longer programmes, especially in off-peak periods. Distinctive content including the

⁴ Radio Joint Audience Research Limited was established in 1992 to operate a single audience measurement system for the radio industry in the United Kingdom. Its fieldwork operations in 2020 were delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic so this book uses data primarily from 2019.

religious programming and drama were axed, because these genres were considered to appeal to a limited number of listeners and had a greater production cost attached to them. The review also enabled the BBC Asian Network to focus upon listeners aged 25 to 45 years of age and retain its ‘friend of the family’ editorial strategy, which sought to appeal the average Asian household. In 2016 the remit for the BBC Asian Network was further amended to allow the station to focus specifically upon younger listeners, third and fourth generation British Asians. The various editorial strategies are examined in Chapter 5 in further depth.

Ethnic media

Although the BBC was the first public service provider to include programming for British Asian audiences, Channel 4 also focused on the same diaspora when it was first established. In 1982, Channel 4 included magazine programmes such as *Eastern Eye* and *Black on Black* in the main schedule, these historic programmes offered explicit recognition of the existence of minorities communities in the UK. The growth in Asian radio services in the UK has been incremental due in part, to the regulation of broadcasting in the UK. Commercial or independent radio was not permitted until 1973. The early radio stations emphasised geographical communities as opposed to communities of interest, or minority communities. The first Asian station was Sunrise Radio in London established in 1989 on medium wave, it later began broadcasting nationally across the UK via DAB⁵. Sunrise was the first 24-hour Asian radio station, and continues to offer music, news, and entertainment from South Asia, broadcasting in English, Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi. It is signed up to Rajar and is the most listened to Asian radio station in London, with 318,000 listeners (Rajar, Q4 2019). Other notable Asian radio stations include, Sabras Radio in Leicester, launched in 1995, Asian Sound Radio, in Manchester, and Radio XL, in Birmingham.

Alongside Asian radio there exists ethnic television and print media which cater specifically for British Asians. Lay and Thomas (2012) mapped ethnic media in London. They found that 175 media organisations catered for minority communities, 49 exclusively focused on

⁵ DAB is digital the standard way to broadcast digital radio services in many countries around the world, especially in the EU.

the Asian communities, reflecting the different languages spoken by Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan and Tamil communities. Their study also found that clear generational differences exist, some services were aimed at second- and third generation whose interests differ to their parents and grandparents who may have migrated to the UK. Minority editors or publishers, explained their role is to offer an alternative to mainstream media and to also foster “cultural unity and identity” (Lay and Thomas 2012, p. 376). Ethnic media offer minority communities the provision of information and news in a range of languages and connections to culture, music and arts. Yu and Matsaganis (2019, p. 24) suggest that ethnic media contribute the construction of communities, through the prominence upon culture and thus they work to strengthen people’s cultural and ethnic identities.

Ethnic media, is broadly defined as media produced by minority staff specifically for a racial or linguistic community, and it tends to emerge when a community requires a “voice” (Matsaganis, Katz & Ball-Rokeach 2011, p. 76). There are many variations of ethnic media organisations, some hire staff who are members of the ethnic community living in a town or city serving local communities, whilst others belong to larger worldwide media organisation serving an audience living in different parts of the world. Ethnic producers tend to have expert knowledge about the audience they serve, and in theory, are better equipped to voice the concerns of minority communities with authority. On occasions this representation can highlight the parallel existence of minorities living in cities or countries. Ethnic media are able to provide new groups with information to support their settlement and articulate experiences of inequality or injustice which adversely impact minority communities. However, Yu (2019) has highlighted the unique paradox faced by ethnic media; if they publish or broadcast in non-English these media are unable to access mainstream audiences and consequently, they are also not heard by the majority audience. This means a number of services can exist in a silo and that the needs of their listeners/viewers are not understood by the majority population.

Whilst careers in mainstream media can be described as relatively stable, ethnic media is characterised by change, and as such, the sector heavily relies upon volunteers and low paid staff who are willing to work long hours to produce information (Brown 2005). Sreberny (2005, p. 446) has suggested that ethnic media organisations in the UK enable minority audiences “to direct the gaze backwards, inwards and all around,” because these services acknowledge the

history of migrant communities, their interests, music, cultures and allow people to possess a space outside of the public sphere.

In contrast, mainstream media is defined as media produced by and produced for the majority or mainstream population. In the UK this refers to organisations such as ITV, Sky, Bauer Media, Global media group and the BBC. They are all expected to reflect minority communities both on-air and within their workforce. Bauer media has been urged by Ofcom to “urgently address” the lack of diversity among its workforce, where just 3 per cent of staff are from minority ethnic backgrounds (Ofcom 2019b, p. 24). Although the BBC fares better, Ofcom found just 9 per cent of the 34 million people who listen to BBC radio each week are from a minority ethnic background (Ofcom 2019b, p. 4). The British Asian population in the UK is estimated to be approximately 3.7 million, making it by far the largest ethnic group in the country. Within, this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that a publicly funded radio service exists specifically for South Asian audiences. This also makes the BBC Asian Network unique; an ethnic specific service that operates within the parameters of the BBC public service remit.

British Asian communities

A considerable number of British Asians migrated to the UK from South Asia in the post-war years for largely economic reasons following the formal decolonisation of British India and latterly in the 1970s from East Africa. In Britain, the term ‘Asian’ refers explicitly to people whose families migrated from countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka or those who have mixed race heritages pertaining to these countries. There exists a number of differences within and among each of these groups, and there are also differences that exist between them and the majority population of the UK. Although the terminology ‘Asian’ implies homogeneity it is in fact a contested term. The construction of ‘British Asian’ as a singular identity, means that the media and politicians have created and defined Asian identity to label groups of different people together. Shohat and Stam (2014, p. 10) argue terminology such as Black or Asian works to privilege ‘Whiteness,’ because it centres the group making thus making everyone else the “rest” and therefore, implicitly, inferior. Furthermore, the identity that is envisaged is frequently constructed through a Eurocentric lens and preserves historical stereotypes. It is argued that because British Asian communities have membership of former

colonised countries, the media, state and education system depict stereotypes, prejudices, and racism as an outcome of the post-colonial experience (Brunt & Cere, 2010). This means minority communities are narrowly showcased by the media and imagined through restricted out of date parameters. Ali et al. (2000, p. 7) argued that 'British Asian' connotes participation within a culture that is "static, patriarchal and authoritarian, in contrast to British/Western culture, with its gleaming (post) modernity." Meaning, that British Asians are considered collectively to be traditional or old-fashioned. Kaur and Kalra (in Sharma et al., 1996, p. 219) argue that British Asian is "over-used and poorly defined" and seeks to represent an arguably large ethnic cultural category in Britain. The use of terms such as Black, Asian or BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) are used in post-colonial societies to convey notions of shared cultures but the terms also encompass difference and otherness (Gillespie, 1995).

Through the in-depth interviews ethnic staff explained how they create a distinctive minority audience for the BBC Asian Network. Fitzgerald and Housely (2007) suggest that audiences are imagined by the media because the programme makers work to unite disparate groups of people on the basis that they share similar concerns or interests. Moreover, Ang (1999, p. 28) suggests that public service broadcasters have a different relationship with their audience compared to commercial media because, the relationship is characterised by a "pervasive sense of cultural responsibility and social accountability." This perspective is somewhat idealistic as increasingly the BBC is under pressure to justify the licence fee, its existence in both economic and social terms and improve the representation of minority staff within the institution.

The BBC

The sheer scope and size and history of the BBC means it plays a unique role in the cultural and public life of Britain. As an organisation the BBC is considered to be the best funded model of PSB (Freedman et al., 2018). The BBC's public service role commitments makes the broadcaster distinct. In this book public service broadcasting (PSB) is understood as the goal to deliver high quality programme content for all citizens, impartial news provision alongside information, educational programming, entertainment within a mixed schedule. Lowe and Martin (2013, p. 20) define public service broadcasting as a means to provide "services" "to groups that are not attractive in commercial terms." In other words, public service broadcasting is expected to

provide ‘niche market failure’ content for minority audiences alongside popular programmes. There are three significant perspectives in the debate about the need for public service broadcasting: first, within a neo-liberal society public service broadcasting is unnecessary and unwelcome; second, that there is a need for PSB to provide niche content for unserved or unprofitable audiences; and third, that there is a duty to provide broadcasting free from the desire for profit that focuses on providing audiences with information for the society and culture in which they live. The BBC embodies the third approach: independent from the state, but publicly funded to provide a range of high-quality programmes for all audiences. PSB also situates the audience as ‘citizens’ as opposed to consumers, because citizens have rights and obligations, including the right to representation and inclusion within society, whereas consumers have interests and needs which the media can monetise. However, as an institution the BBC is also inherently associated with promoting British culture, values, and norms (Creeber, 2004). Lotz (in Freedman et al., 2018, p. 46) believes this poses the greatest challenge for the BBC because it is expected to “serve the full citizenry of a diverse nation while simultaneously creating a common culture.” BBC employees are likely to be middle class and consequently the BBC is criticised for largely catering for middle-class audiences at the expense of young people and minority ethnic audiences (Hesmondhalgh, in Deery and Press, 2017; Lacey, 2018). Mills (2016, p. 33) has argued that the prospective employees’ class and educational background influences their chances of employment in the BBC. In fact, a number of scholars have argued that as an institution the BBC has struggled to evolve from its historical goals that portrayed a singular image of the nation (Carter and McKinlay, 2013; Creeber, 2004; Malik, 2013).

The BBC has a public purpose to serve, reflect and represent diverse communities in the UK and their way of life to its audience (*Royal Charter*, 2016). The expectation is that the BBC offers an accurate reflection of communities and recruits’ people from ethnically diverse and other minority backgrounds. Consequently, since the publication of the 2016 *Royal Charter*, issues relating to diversity and inclusion within programme making and recruitment have gained greater agency within the BBC. However, commercial media and other critics portray the BBC as being an exception to business norms due to the secure funding which allows the organisation to grow in influence and size (De Bens, 2007). The Royal Charter sets out the scope and scale of the broadcaster and is the constitutional means by which the institution is granted power editorial independence from the Government.

The charter renewal process in 2016 embraced criticisms of the organisation including that the BBC has “special privileges” and set out new public purposes and emphasised ‘distinctiveness’ in terms of programme output (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016, p. 28). The former culture secretary John Whittingdale was described during the negotiations as being hostile to the BBC and the licence fee (Nickerson, 2016). The BBC is the largest radio operator in the UK and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has noted that its strength in radio lies in the “editorial quality” (Gardem, 2004, p. 35). The 2016 Royal Charter also introduced a new governance structure and replaced the BBC Trust with a Unitary Board, onto which the government can appoint four non-executives directly. The Unitary Board has an oversight of the BBC’s mission and public purposes as outlined in the Charter. This allows the state to exert indirect influence and, consequently, it is unrealistic to believe the BBC is completely free from the influence of politics and, inevitably, business interests.

To continue to be successful in the future, and to merit its special privileges and substantial public funding, the BBC needs to stand apart from other broadcasters, distinguishing itself from the market. This will become increasingly important as choice and competition continue to proliferate, viewing habits evolve, audiences’ fragment, and consumer and citizen expectations expand. The government will therefore: embed distinctiveness in the BBC’s overall mission (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016, p. 28)

It is notable that the Government considers the Licence Fee and a mandate to serve all audiences to equate to ‘special privileges,’ and it is implied that the BBC should be grateful for this. There is also an expectation on part of the Government and commercial media, that public service content ought to be worthy and attract niche audiences who are unserved by commercial media. This is also referred to the ‘market failure’ model, which forces public service providers to serve audiences that commercial media deems as not profitable and are considered less worthy. The White Paper outlined that the BBC needs to ensure that it produces material for diverse communities and clarified that being ‘served’ does not simply mean that people consume content, but that they get value from the BBC (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016, p. 29). Distinctiveness and its definition is vague. The White Paper sets out that it ought to mean every service within the BBC (online, radio and TV) should be “substantially different to other

providers” in terms of genre, the quality, level of innovation and risk taking and creative ambition (Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, 2016, p. 32). However, when public service creates an innovative and popular programme, for example *The Great British Bake Off*, it is expected to relinquish the format to commercial media. This contradiction is specific to public service broadcasting; commercial operators do not face similar criticisms.

In 2018 the BBC ran a series of focus groups to better understand the internal culture within the BBC pertaining to race and ethnicity and the impact this has on the career progression of ethnic minority employees. It is acknowledged that whilst number of new ethnic employees hired is around 14 per cent each year, on average 15 per cent of ethnic minority staff leave the organisation, making these figures above the BBC Radio average (Ofcom 2019b, p. 8). Employees from minority ethnic groups are under-represented across all roles within BBC Radio (Ofcom, 2019b, p. 8). Across the BBC (TV and Radio) the thirteen per cent of the workforce is classed as being Black, Asian or from a minority ethnic group. Whilst the representation of minority staff within the BBC is broadly in keeping with the ethnic composition of the UK population, in regional television and radio newsrooms located in ethnically diverse cities and regions have low numbers of minority ethnic staff.

labour studies in media

It is suggested that successive Governments have advantaged the cultural or creative industries and positioned it as significant to the UK to create jobs and wealth (Mayer, 2011). Initially, the terminology creative was used to describe artistic activities such as furniture making, theatre and dance alongside newer digital technology roles. Thirteen sectors including advertising, the arts, crafts, fashion and television and radio are included as comprising the ‘creative industries.’ As a result, cultural workers have been situated as being not only highly skilled but also possessing collaborative and economic skills. However, most of these industries remain largely dominated by white middle-class employees (Hesmondhalgh and Saha, 2013; O’Brien et al.).

Hesmondhalgh (2019) has argued that the ideological and structural framework of the creative industries enables inequality within employment to exist. He suggests the sector is characterised by insecurity, freelancing, project-based work and people are often recruited due to their social networks which reinforces class, gender, and ethnic hierarchies. There is a significant under-

representation of people from working class origins working in the creative industries due in part to a high number of short-term contract roles, an emphasis upon freelance work, and low or no salary (O'Brien et al., 2016, p. 117). The impact of these normative entry methods means only people with financial resources or a wealthy family who can support them can enter the media industries (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011, p. 116).

This study examines specifically the conditions in which ethnic staff work to a public service remit in the BBC. Similar work by Campion (2005) who interviewed one hundred programme makers across the broadcast industry revealed there was an emphasis upon staff to accentuate the “strangeness” of minority communities in order make programmes appealing for general or mainstream audiences (Campion 2005, p. 27). Saha (2018) has strongly argued that ethnic employees are hired by media organisations to fulfil diversity targets and address their coverage of minority issues. However, his work finds that ethnic staff are forced to conform to methods of production that work to commoditise diversity and depict ethnic communities using stereotypes or as ‘other.’ Moreover, he contends that diversity schemes contribute to the maintenance of “institutional whiteness” in the media because, minorities are recruited specifically to increase the visibility of minorities, but they can be placed onto fixed term contracts or posts where they are unlikely to be promoted (Saha, 2018, p. 18). In this way, according to Hall (in Morely & Chen, 1996, p. 471) they are a “segregated visibility”, present and visible but not part of the principal decision-making.

Research on media production has called for the fair representation of minority ethnic staff in organisations because historically they have lacked opportunities to work in the media sector. It is also assumed that the participation of employees from a range of backgrounds will positively influence the representation on screen of minority communities. When minority staff are able to produce content that enables them to articulate their histories and lived experiences this is referred to as “intraculture” and the broadcaster becomes the platform for deliberation (Butsch, cited in Ross and Nightingale, 2003, p. 117).

Data collection

Thirty former and current BBC employees were interviewed between December 2014 and February 2016: fifteen women and fifteen men. At the time of the interviews, half of

employees occupied senior roles within the BBC, such as editors, heads, or senior journalists. The other fifteen were in junior or entry level roles such as broadcast journalists, producers and some were talent - on-air presenters. Twenty-three of the interviewees were British Asian and were either first, second or third generation. All the interviewees had experience of producing media content for British Asian listeners meaning they were all “grounded” in the production process (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Interviewing was used as the research method to examine BBC staff’s personal and professional experiences of producing and delivering content for minority audiences whilst working within the parameters of a public service remit. Some interviewees were contacted via email and others via social media. Their perspectives illuminate the internal culture at the BBC Asian Network and reveals how minority staff negotiate external forces: political, social and economic to produce material for and represent of British Asian listeners. Similar studies of production also use in-depth interviews as the primary research method, because this technique contributes to the development of a description of a social group, institution, and the culture or way of life (see Campion, 2005; Cottle 1997; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; Matsaganis and Katz, 2014; Saha, 2018). The voices and perspectives of the BBC staff offer the opportunity to “thicken” the description or knowledge of institutions. A semi-structured approach was selected because it allowed different questions to be posed to staff who occupied different roles within the BBC.

My previous roles as broadcast journalist within the BBC between 2004 and 2012 meant I was knowledgeable about some of the working practices at the BBC Asian Network and had an understanding of the listener they are trying to serve. Ganga and Scott (2006, p. 2) define ‘insider’ research as “social interviews conducted between researchers and participants who share a similar cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national and religious heritage”. For this study the insider was connected by shared knowledge of journalism practices and ethnically to some of the interviewees. This extra knowledge meant I could probe and ask questions that someone else may not. There was also a need to be objective and to leave my individual experiences to one side, because what the researcher brings to the study can influence what is seen (Charmaz, 2014). Significant changes had taken place at the BBC and the BBC Asian Network since my departure. Primarily, after the station was saved from closure the budget was reduced and staff headcount was halved meaning longer shows, shared programming and a new editorial strategy. This offered the starting point for the interviews.

All interviewees were offered the option of anonymity, enabling them to talk openly and freely, however, most interviewees occupying senior roles authorised the use of their names and titles. Some of the latter interviews took place during the highly controversial Charter Renewal process in 2015 and 2016 and, as such, some interviewees were worried about their jobs. Anonymised interviewees, have been given a generic South Asian pseudonym and a vague job title to conceal their identity. Their quotes used throughout the book have been carefully evaluated in order to avoid revealing people's real identity, thus specific situations or references to stories that may identify them have been removed.

Purpose of this book

This book examines the experiences of minority staff within BBC and looks at how they work to create and construct a distinctive minority community of listeners for the BBC. Chapter 2 concentrates on the BBC and looks at the principal goals of public service broadcasting to see how they underpin the delivery of the BBC Asian Network output. The chapter questions if the structures of the institution, missions and culture within the BBC influence how ethnic viewpoints are showcased by the BBC. The chapter specifically explores how British Asian identity is envisaged by the BBC, and correspondingly, how programme producers represent this community back to the audience. Notions of framing, stereotyping and Eurocentrism are examined with reference to programme making. In particular, the issue of universality is critically examined in light of the BBC mandate to serve ethnic and regional audiences whilst also showcasing a common British culture.

Chapter 3 seeks to critically evaluate the premise that British Asians are reflected in the media and the press through notions of difference and otherness. A number of scholars have argued that minority ethnic communities are showcased in the media with an emphasis upon their difference (Campion, 2005; Moylan, 2013; Saha, 2018). This chapter focuses on the growing significance of the British Asian community in the UK and their increasing importance to the BBC and other media organisations as a potential audience. In addition, there is examination about why some British Asian communities are depicted more favourably than others – for example Muslim communities are more likely to be showcased negatively compared Indian Sikh and Hindu communities in the UK.

The career progression and retention of ethnic minority media workers is examined in Chapter 4. Utilising interview material gathered for this study alongside the BBC's key findings from internal focus groups, its socio-economic survey combined with the BBC's diversity data, the chapter illuminates some of the issues ethnic staff face. The interviews reveal differences exist between the older and young ethnic staff due to their generation, education and level of integration into British life. Increasingly, ethnic journalists who are recruited tend to be 'integrated' and whilst this is not problematic for the BBC some older ethnic staff find it challenging, because these journalists can lack sufficient knowledge about the communities they will serve. It is unclear if ethnic journalists must possess specialist cultural knowledge alongside their practical journalism skills to gain employment at the BBC Asian Network or if knowledge pertaining to British Asian communities is in fact secondary.

The station was established to combat the chronic lack of British Asian representation across the BBC, but it has struggled to secure the intended listening community due to fierce competition within the Asian radio sector. Chapter 5 offers an overview of three different editorial strategies enacted at the station and takes a close look at the proposed closure of the BBC Asian Network in 2010. What emerges is that a singular service for all British Asians is unable to entice some of the target listening community because it is too simplistic to expect Asian people to listen to the station simply because they are Asian. Some of the interviewees called for a deeper nuanced understanding of Asian communities so that programme content can be shaped accordingly.

Normative journalism practices and gatekeeping are scrutinised in Chapter 6. BBC staff describe how they experience the gatekeepers and commissioners and adapt their ideas and pitches accordingly. Their perspectives reveal the complex challenges and tensions that have been created through an organisational pressure on ethnic journalists to share their 'diverse' journalism across BBC programmes and platforms. The producers are keenly aware that content pertaining to Muslim communities in the UK is more likely to be selected by story commissioners across the BBC because issues relating to race, ethnicity and religion are understood and showcased within a restricted framework which tacitly promotes 'otherness', conflict and terrorism (Flood et al., 2011).

What underlies this study is that British Asian identity is continuously evolving and adapting. In response to the changing Asian community the BBC has revolutionised how it

frames ethnic content, which was historically referred to as ‘immigrant programmes’ (Hendy, n.d.). Therefore Chapter 7 looks at how the BBC has revolved the language offer on the Asian Network by introducing blended language, (a hybrid of English and a South Asian language such as Hindi) presentation for specific linguistic programmes. In addition, there is a focus upon how the senior leadership in the BBC perceive the target listener; “the common denominator is Britishness, not Asian-ness, its Britishness” (Former Controller, Bob Shennan, 2015). The BBC Asian Network does not aim to promote Asian culture and instead, concentrates upon trying to depict on-air a British Asian lifestyle, whilst also trying to connect distinctive religious and community groups who share a similar colonial history and the experiences of living in Britain into a distinct community of listeners.

Chapter 8 concentrates upon the music policies at the BBC Asian Network and assesses how the station playlist has adapted in response to changing tastes among the target listeners. The station is tasked with finding and nurturing new and emerging British Asian artists and although this is clearly defined in the station’s remit some staff have strong opinions over what music genres deserve airtime. The former head of programmes, Mark Strippel highlighted that the station should not be stereotyped as simply offering Bhangra and Bollywood music. There is an examination of how normative BBC music policies enable the marginalisation of specialist and ‘foreign music’ and how British Asian artists are relegated to the BBC Asian Network (Wall & Dubber, 2009; Saha, 2012). BBC staff also raise their concerns about the genres that selected for the playlist within the context of wider challenges facing the radio industry, reducing listening hours among younger listeners, competition from streaming and podcast services and difficulties in matching the context to the target audience.

Chapter 9 looks at the future prospects of the Asian Network and outlines the BBC’s new diversity and inclusion strategies for radio and television. Contemporary developments in broadcasting and changes within the BBC are assessed with reference to changing audience habits. The chapter concludes by summarising the key findings from the study.

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