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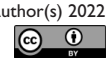

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The Trouble with Diversity: The Cultural Sector and Ethnic Inequality

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Abstract

Diversity has increasingly become coveted in the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs), with a significant presence in institutional and policy vocabularies. The concern to employ diverse staff and cater to diverse audiences is driven by socio-economic rationales and in terms of ethnicity, the focus of this article, is justified by the levels of ethnic inequality within CCIs. This article argues that the painfully slow progress in advancing ethnic equality in CCIs pertains to the discursive conceptualisation of diversity, which translates into practices lacking in efficacy and legacy. It traces the evolution of the diversity discourse in CCIs from impassioned calls against racial inequality to a less politically conscious multicultural vision of society, and shifts to a discourse on creative diversity. Focusing on the production of, rather than representation in, culture, the article draws uniquely on an intensive institutional ethnography and interviews in two organisations in the museum and TV production sectors, both of which had committed to diversifying their workforce and practice. With a recognition of the historical and contextual differences in the two sectors' approaches to diversity, we present an analysis of the micro institutional ways in which diversity is performed as a way of understanding the macro workings of diversity in CCIs at large. Our empirical discussion examines Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy as one of the more institutionally entrenched and visible practices of diversity and explores diversity schemes as a 'quick fix' that cultural organisations have increasingly pursued. While examining these practices, we centre the experiences of ethnically diverse cultural workers as the bearers of diversity work in the context of what we term *white institutional benevolence*. Those accounts reveal a complex web of intersecting institutional and socio-cultural barriers that need to be urgently addressed for a future cultural sector that is purposely anti-racist, equal and representative.

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Introduction

It has become commonplace for diversity, whilst rarely defined, to be seen as an inherent 'good' and for institutions within the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs) to recognise that they should be employing diverse staff and catering to diverse audiences. This is a recognition of the levels of inequality within the cultural sector (Brook et al., 2020; Oman, 2019; Malik and Shankley, 2020). Arts Council England launched the 'Creative Case for Diversity' in 2011, emphasising the importance of diversity in the arts and its significance in enriching artistic practice, leadership and audiences, and leading broadcasters including the BBC and Channel 4 have ramped up efforts to increase diversity. The BBC, for example, has pledged £100m over the next five years to create 'diverse content' (BBC, 2020), an initiative criticised for lacking a definition of what diversity meant. The Museums Association similarly launched a number of campaigns to increase diversity in the sector stating that 'Museums and galleries in the UK would be better, richer and more engaging places if our audiences and workforce were more representative of the communities that we strive to serve' (Museums Association, 2020). Yet the term diversity is unsettled, used in different ways in different contexts, whilst generally taken to allude to the presence of people with different positionalities of race, ethnicity, gender, language, sexuality, disability, region, and class. In this article, we maintain a focus on the experience of Black, Asian and ethnically diverse[1] people, yet we also argue that the very slippery-ness of the term contributes both to its ubiquity of use and inefficacy of purpose.

Arguments for diversity have particular weight in the creative and cultural sector given the influence and power of cultural representation. Key cultural institutions such as the BBC and other television channels; museums; art galleries; theatres and national newspapers play an important role in narrating the nation as well as making race (Hall, 1999; Littler and Naidoo, 2005; Macdonald, 2006; Saha, 2018). The narratives produced can be important mechanisms for both classed and raced exclusions as well as the means to retell the nation and culture in more complicated and inclusive ways. Yet, access to CCIs is not equal for all. In fact, cultural occupations can be unwelcoming and, in some cases, hostile for particular social groups. Brook et al. (2020) show how advantages in the creative labour market are not purely a consequence of talent or hard work, but are given to people who have economic, social and cultural resources or capital. A culture of 'unpaid internships, work placements, closed social networks and falling levels of pay' (Neelands et al., 2015: 48) limits access for ethnically diverse creatives and cultural workers and fosters ethnic and racial inequality, as will be discussed further later. This article explores how issues of race and ethnic inequality have been problematised in cultural production within the debates of representation in the TV industry and decolonisation in the museum sectors. We build on critiques of the treatment of racial inequality in public and policy debates as a form of racial 'governmentality' (Gray, 2016; Nwonka, 2015; Saha, 2018) that conveys a false postracial society. We then locate these discourses

within the daily practices of cultural institutions and interrogate diversity from the perspective and experience of ethnically diverse cultural workers.

The concept of diversity has come under criticism from both academics and practitioners: Gloria Anzaldua argues that diversity is 'treated as a superficial over-lay that does not disrupt any comfort zones' (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2009). Others have noted the failure of diversity policies over the last 20 years to achieve the stated aims within CCIs. The actor and campaigner Lenny Henry pointed out:

> In the last four years the percentage of BAME people in the highest leadership positions has increased from 7.01% to 7.14% in 2019. That's right, despite all the money that has gone into leadership schemes it has increased by nought point one three percentage points! We haven't got the new census data yet for the UK population [. . .] but most people think it hasn't even kept up with population growth. (quoted in Ryder, 2020)

This article argues that the painfully slow progress in advancing ethnic equality in CCIs pertains to the discursive conceptualisation of diversity, which translates into practices lacking in efficacy and legacy. Research has already engaged extensively with the policy discourse of diversity in CCIs, instrumentalised as a soft depoliticised tool to obscure racial inequality (Malik, 2013; Nwonka, 2015), while in fact race continues to be crucial in determining representation in and ownership and valuation of cultural production (Erigha, 2021; Gray, 2016; Saha, 2018). Our research builds on this rich theoretical framework and situates it within the daily practices of cultural institutions to investigate both how institutions, and more crucially, racialised cultural workers, respond and are affected by the evolving diversity discourse. We draw on a long-term and intensive institutional ethnography and qualitative interviews primarily focused on two organisations in the museum and TV production sectors, both of which had committed to diversifying their workforce and cultural practice. With a recognition of the historical and contextual differences in the two sectors' approaches to diversity, we question how diversity is differently framed within the TV sector (through representational and production politics) and the museum sector (through decolonisation politics) and we explore how diversity travels through the organisation and what work it purports to do in contrast with what actually gets done. Our empirical discussion examines Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy as one of the more institutionally entrenched and visible practices of diversity, and explores diversity schemes as a 'quick fix' that cultural organisations have increasingly pursued. Our unique contribution is evident in two ways: methodologically through conducting an intensive institutional ethnography, rarely employed in cultural industries settings in pursuit of understanding 'diversity' as evolving discourse and practice; and empirically in presenting first-person accounts of the experience of minoritised workers, on whom diversity is practised.

This article offers unique ethnographical insights into the operationalisation of diversity in cultural institutions that can purposely or inadvertently obfuscate anti-racism. Institutional ethnography is a significant methodology that is complex and challenging to establish, thus rarely employed when investigating ethnic inequality and 'diversity' solutions to it, but which also offers unique understandings. Through our extensive research in two organisations in the museum and TV production sectors, we present an

analysis of the micro institutional ways in which diversity is performed as a way of understanding the macro workings of diversity in CCIs at large. It is important to note here that in the public and policy discourse on CCIs, there is a tendency to conceive of the cultural sector as a homogenous entity, whereas in fact there are structural and operational differences that distinguish different sectors and industries.[2] These differences then impact how inequality is produced and should be considered both in policy responses and theoretical framing of the issue. Our research shows how diversity is understood and practised in different sectors: there are markedly contrasting economic drivers, institutional thinking and governing practices that shape diversity in the TV and museum sectors, for example. This analysis enables the bridging of the gap between theoretical and critical analysis of diversity and the ways institutions mediate and implement diversity through their policies and practices. At the same time, we centre the experiences of ethnically diverse cultural workers at the two institutions to evidence successes and failures of institutional diversity efforts and highlight additional factors that impede ethnic equality in the sector more broadly.

Ethnic Inequality in the Cultural Sector

As discussed in the Introduction, there have been a number of initiatives seeking to increase diversity within the cultural sector, as these alone are problematically seen to address the issue of ethnic inequality. These initiatives, however, arise in a context of stark structural inequalities. Brook et al. argue that 'cultural occupations have a "somatic norm" of White, male, middle classness. Social mobility, along with diversity and inclusion, policies have not addressed this structural problem' (2020: 22). Although there is a considerable amount of data on diversity in the broad UK creative economy from sources such as the DCMS, the Arts Councils and Project Diamond, and Labour Force Survey (analysed in Brook et al., 2020), aggregated detailed data on ethnic representation including contract type and seniority in CCIs are not readily available. Furthermore, as the recent Creative Majority Report shows 'there is no central hub for this data and no clear indication if diversity across the sector is getting better or worse' (Wreyford et al., 2021; see also Oman, 2019).

Malik and Shankley (2020) point out that various reports show an increase in the ethnic diversity of the workforce in CCIs in recent years. They caution, however, that a closer look at the figures shows disparities of representation in different cultural and creative fields, rank and contract. Individual sectors in the cultural economy have very different proportions of ethnically diverse workers, ranging from 34.3% in IT, software and computer services in 2015 to 12.4% in film, TV, video, radio and photography and 5.2% in museums, galleries and libraries (DCMS, 2016). This observation is further supported by analysis conducted by Brook et al. of the 2019 Labour Force Survey data in which they find IT to have a relatively good representation of ethnically diverse cultural workers, but 'key arts occupations are not ethnically diverse' with about 87% of the overall workforce being White (2020: 58). Lack of ethnic representation is starker in leadership and managerial positions. The Arts Council England (ACE) 2019 report shows a bleak picture where the percentage of Black and ethnically diverse workforce in funded organisations was just 5% in its major partner museums and 3% in leadership

positions. In TV, a report from communications regulator Ofcom showed that ethnic minorities were also considerably underrepresented. It highlighted that '8% of those employed by TV broadcasters in senior management roles are from a Minority Ethnic Group (MEG) compared with a national workforce average of 12% (which increases to 35% in London and 31% in Manchester)' (Ofcom, 2020). There is clearly a need for increased representation of ethnic diverse workers in CCIs at all levels of seniority; however, before addressing the impact of institutional policies, the next section will trace where the discourse came from, how it became a ubiquitous 'good' and what other understandings of inequality within the sector it might have displaced or replaced.

Shifting Discourses of Diversity

Nwonka (2015: 73) dates the turn to 'diversity' within the UK cultural sector to the New Labour government, in which the multicultural policies of the 1980s and 1990s evolved into a focus on 'social cohesion' and 'equality of opportunity'. These developments were in part sparked by responses to the Macphearson Report (Macphearson, 1999) and the recognition of institutional racism and were also part of a broader shift away from policies of multiculturalism towards social cohesion (Malik, 2013). For New Labour, a key route to tackling social exclusion was through the use of culture and sport and the broadening of access – shifting focus away from social inequality (Littler and Naidoo, 2005; Nwonka, 2015: 77). Malik (2013: 228) argues that in the context of public service broadcasting (and in the wider UK arts sector), approaches to race can be mapped onto three distinct phases: multiculturalism, cultural diversity and creative diversity, 'each indicating an incremental depoliticization of race'. For Malik (2013), creative diversity 'signifies a postmulticulturalist, falsely postracial understanding' and foregrounds questions of creativity rather than more structural considerations of inequality. This ideological displacement can also be seen in the shift from the calls for diversity of people to 'diversity of thought'.[3]

At the same time, the move from multiculturalism towards diversity signalled a move from explicitly looking at race to a more diffuse sense of a multiplicity of social categories of exclusion (Saha, 2018: 87). Within this context, discussions of class, which has important, often compounding, intersections with race in reproducing inequality is complex and can be overlooked in discourses about 'diversity'. Class is not included as a 'protected characteristic' (see later in this article) and is not as visible as race – nor is it easily counted, with little consensus on its definition (Brook et al., 2020: 16).

In examining the flow of diversity language[4] through an institution, its policies and practices, it is worth being mindful of what this displaces or obscures. Herman Gray asks: 'why diversity not (in)equality?' (2016: 243). In addition, in the context of race, we might ask: Why diversity not anti-racism? In the UK, and particularly within EDI policies, diversity is often used to collate four of the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics (race, disability, sex and sexual orientation). Whilst inequalities based on these social categories are all important, using umbrella terms such as diversity undermines the complexities of addressing different and intersecting inequalities and, in the context of race and ethnicity, can depoliticise the issue of racial discrimination. At the same time, Saha (2018) argues that whilst the shift to creative diversity potentially diminishes the

focus on the importance of racial equality, it nonetheless functions as a technique of power *making* race in particular ways.

One feature of race-making through diversity policies is linked to the changes in the rationale from arguments around the politics of recognition or justice to commercial imperatives to capture market niches represented by different groups (Hall, 1997; Saha, 2018). Thus, diversity is sought to widen markets for both private and public sector institutions through the commodification of race and difference. Underrepresentation was seen as 'bad for business' (Neelands et al., 2015: 21; see also Robinson and Dechant, 1997: 25–27). The business case for diversity has been taken up enthusiastically in CCIs as evident in the 2017 Creative Industries Federations report and initiatives such as 'the Creative Case for diversity' by ACE, both emphasising that diversity has become essential for business in order to meet the changing demands of the progressively diverse demographic. However, Zanoni et al. (2010) find that promoting the business case for diversity does not ultimately lead to a fair representation of, or equal rights for minorities because it fails to address the reduced access to resources that minorities encounter, and the existing unequal power relations within organisations, which hinder efforts to challenge these inequalities and might 'even contribute to their reproduction' (2010: 19). Diversity discourses, often conceived within a productivity paradigm, 'clearly reflect existing power relations between management and employees in the organization' (Zanoni and Janssens, 2004: 71). Furthermore, as the business case for diversity is contingent on improving business interests, it can conversely be abandoned or even argued against when these interests are not realised (Noon, 2007). Erigha exposes the racialised economic evaluation of risk and profit in cultural production – particularly in Hollywood. Erigha argues that race 'is employed as a judgment device to confer status, to signal potential for economic gain or loss, and to make selection decisions' (2021: 396) where Black cultural production is associated with 'high risk and expectations of failure', while White cultural production is linked to low risk and success. This in turn influences promotion and distribution strategies and ultimately success, thus reproducing racial inequality. Diversity in these settings becomes a way of governing race, editing and moderating racial cultural production to fit the racialised expectations of what would sell (Saha, 2018).

Focusing on cultural production rather than representation, this article asks how ethnic inequalities are produced within cultural institutions and how diversity policy addresses (or fails to address) those inequalities. This ethnographic micro-institutional examination goes beyond static consideration of data and numerical count of diverse bodies within CCIs to achieve a richer understanding of institutional policy and practice and the impact of both on ethnically diverse workers who have managed to access jobs within the sector.

Methodology

Exploring ethnic inequality in CCIs, our research project ran for two and half years from July 2018 to December 2020. In examining the role of diversity in making race, we followed Herman Gray on the need to 'identify sites, discourses, and practices of producing difference and to study race-making practices as power/knowledge that operates as a

logic of production' (2016: 249). We deployed institutional ethnography as the main method of enquiry which 'uses interviews, observations and document analysis to investigate how work done with texts in organisations coordinates local, lived experiences' (Walby, 2013). Institutional ethnography was particularly suited to exploring how diversity manifests, shifts and ultimately mitigates or reproduces ethnic inequality within the cultural sector (Gray, 2016). As a method, institutional ethnography offers 'a knowledge resource for people who want to work towards a more equitable society. Its politics are built into its mode of inquiry' (Campbell and Gregor, 2002: 103).

As researchers, our starting position follows Dorothy Smith's problematisation of the positivist view of the knowledge producer as articulated outside 'his or her local actualities' (2005: 28). Smith argues for making the 'skills as sociologists useful and relevant' (2005) to the people and field of investigation. To that end, it is important to acknowledge the positionality of the researchers: the project was led by Bridget Byrne, a White senior researcher; and Roaa Ali, an ethnically diverse early career researcher. The composition of the team (in terms of different seniority and ethnicity) played a part in both facilitating institutional access and enabling relatability in interviewing ethnically diverse staff. We approached the institutions with an offer of partnership, where we might also provide them them with the possibility of reflecting on their own practice and a space for discussion.

Our main sites of investigation were Manchester Museum and Factual Media[5] TV production company in Manchester. Manchester Museum was selected as it represented a cultural institution that was reimagining its relationship with its locality and diverse communities. The Museum has been undergoing structural changes with a £13.5 million 'hello future' project that aims to transform the Museum to become 'more inclusive, imaginative and relevant to the diverse communities we serve' (Manchester Museum, n.d.). Factual Media was chosen as a regional TV production company that navigates the regional–national divide in producing content for the main British broadcasting organisations, and for employing a diverse workforce. Both organisations have different employment structures. Out of the 13 employees working in Factual Media at the time of the research, six were from ethnically diverse backgrounds with some at relatively senior levels. However, as with much of the TV production sector, there were few permanent contracts with most on rolling or short-term contracts. The Museum employed 79 people at the time of the research with 14% from BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) groups. However, the ethnically diverse employees were clustered in front of house and lower-level service roles: although a third of the Museum employees were at a university grade 6 or above, none of those from an ethnically diverse background were in this pay category.

The modalities of work are markedly different between the TV production and museum sectors enabling the examination of how diversity plays out in very different cultural sectors with different relationships to audience and funding structures. While museums could offer more permanent and secure careers (although there were also some shorter-term contracts, particularly on project-based work), the TV production industry operates on a completely different model with rolling contracts on fast-paced projects as standard practice (Hesmondhalgh, 2010). As Factual Media was a small company with a

limited number of rotating staff, we also conducted interviews with a limited number of other respondents working in the factual TV production sector.

Through the two-and-half-year period of research, we observed institutional activities such as staff meetings, recruitment processes, and strategy planning. At Manchester Museum, we also followed a process of co-curation with community members for a new 'South Asia Gallery' venue and exhibition funded by the 'hello future' project, as part of a large redevelopment of the museum. Throughout the period of research, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 40 staff members across both organisations, reviewed institutional documents on policy, recruitment and funding strategies, and reviewed previous reports and literature on diversity. We have fully anonymised the names and job titles of the interviewees. For this article, we employed discourse analysis and thematic analysis to explore the language and practice of diversity and how they manifest and get subsumed in institutions of the CCIs.

In order to protect anonymity we have changed the name of the TV company, but it was deemed impossible to sufficiently obscure the anonymity of Manchester Museum, as was explained to participants at the time of the fieldwork.[6] Conducting research in organisations with very small numbers of ethnic minority staff raises particular ethical dilemmas where research participants could easily be made identifiable by precise recording of job position, ethnicity, gender, religion or even at times which organisation they work for. In order to preserve anonymity in this context we have been less precise in our reporting of this information, not supplying it where it is not necessary or would identify individuals.

Diversity in TV Production and Museum Sectors

Both the TV and the museum sectors are employed in nation-making (Hall, 1999; Macdonald, 2006; Saha, 2018), and are called upon, in public discourse, to represent the diversity of the nation. There are, however, fundamental differences in the way race is understood, produced and reproduced in the two sectors. Consequently, diversity as a language and practice differs in the temporal and spatial contexts of both sectors. These differences stem from the conditions of cultural production, financing models, and the historical contexts of both the TV and museum sectors.

One of the main differences in the two sectors lies in how they are financed. The TV sector largely operates as a business generating its own capital, while the museum sector is heavily subsidised by Arts Councils and The National Lottery Heritage Fund. This divergence renders the TV sector a risk-averse environment, while allowing the museum sector to be potentially more amenable to taking risks. The question of how the concept of risk corresponds with ethnic and racial diversity in cultural programming and staffing is an interesting and loaded one and is tied to the value of diversity and the impetus for it in the cultural sector.

During our ethnography, we attended monthly staff meetings at both organisations, which enabled an examination of what is regarded as essential and what gets sidelined in the running of both. The different structure and model of work in the TV production and museum sectors was very clear; TV production operated on precarious, fast-paced and changeable objectives, contingent on commissioners' decisions and priorities. The

museum sector, in contrast, functioned at a slower pace towards cultural outcomes that can be static and available for considerable periods of time, in some cases years, and dependent on external funding.

The meetings at Factual Media involved all staff working in production in the company and centred on an overview of progress on the programmes being developed as well as concept ideas for future programmes. Decisions on what should be pursued in the development stages centred on what sells, what might serve the public and their interests (this was especially true for programmes conceived or developed for the BBC), and how certain topics can be approached in order to maintain future relationships and income streams. There seemed to be considerable value judgement in what gets greenlit at the concept stage of programme development before it even reaches the broadcaster's commissioners. Thus, having a diverse representation at the staff meeting played an important role, as recognised by the company director in an interview where she pointed out that ideas for programmes often came from people's own experiences and those of their family and friends. Almost 50% of the members of staff at the meeting were ethnically diverse and they brought a different perspective, advocating concept ideas that might not be otherwise considered by their White peers or viewed as potentially 'risky'. They also argued for different approaches to casting and programme development.

Nonetheless, it was obvious that although diversity is considered, what remains at the heart of decision making within programme ideas and development is the urgency of commercial decision and what the absent commissioners were looking for. In an interview, a senior TV producer pointed out the risk-averse nature of TV production and its impact on diverse ethnic representation both on and off screen:

> the television industry is a business, so if they've had something that's worked in the past as a model of making a programme and hasn't necessarily involved ethnic minorities behind the scenes, then why feel you've got to change that to be more successful in the future?

Arguably, this remains one of the main reasons for the slow progress of diversity in the industry as it follows a commercial logic that produces assumptions about what audiences want with the implication that ethnic content reaches only small 'niche' markets. Assumptions about what constitutes commercial risk are deeply racialised and sift through green-light and promotional decisions (Erigha, 2021). New streaming services such as Netflix which are not dependant on advertising revenue, are increasing diverse representation as they seek out niche markets (Shevenock, 2020). Their success also disrupts the assumptions made about audiences – although to what degree these new digital venues are commodifying race remains a question for future investigation.

In contrast to TV, museums do not have the same pressure of capital-generation as they are largely publicly subsidised in the UK. Whilst often contending with their colonial legacy and changing localities, museums are encouraged to diversify their projects and audiences by funders such as ACE and adapt the image of the museum as more representative and inclusive of the communities it serves. ACE has argued for more diversity in the sector in 'The Creative Case for Diversity' and attempted to address the issue with project-based funds and grants and required diversity figures (of staff and audiences) to be embedded into its reporting systems

Museums have come under increasing pressure recently to address the colonial legacies of many of their collections. In that sense, the drive for diversity in museums can be part of an accommodation to de-colonial contemporary movements – what Hicks refers to as the 'scramble for decolonisation' (Hicks, 2020: 9; see also Lord, 2006). This has recently become a highly politicised space – with attempts by museums to address colonial pasts becoming a focus of criticism within the 'culture wars' with the previous UK Culture Minister Oliver Dowden threatening funding cuts to those cultural institutions that removed controversial objects from display.[7] It is an interesting question why decolonisation debates are so strong within the museum sector, but not the TV industry, where the preoccupation is limited to representation (mostly on screen but more recently off-screen too).[8] Museums face a history (embedded in buildings and collections) which is unavoidable, but colonial practices and thinking might equally be argued to be present in TV.

In the context of museums, Manchester Museum is a prominent player in the area of decolonisation and particularly the repatriation of stolen objects. In 2019, the Museum unconditionally repatriated 42 secret sacred and ceremonial objects to communities of origin in Australia, having already returned ancestral remains since the early 2000s. It is also involved in research on African restitution, particularly concerning a carved ivory tusk from Benin. These moves are also a response to the changing localities of museums as explained by a member of staff:

> As Manchester has become more multicultural, when it's on the verge of becoming hyper-diverse, communities in the locality of the museum, since the late 70s onwards, have challenged the colonial narrative in the museum, have challenged the representation of different non-European cultures. They've actively come in. They've written to us. [. . .] there have been sit-ins, protests, in various galleries, so [. . .] we have the diaspora communities in Manchester to thank for transforming how we operate as well.

The Museum was also programming events to bring in more diverse audiences to the space. This included exhibits (such as one on the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in collaboration with the Partition Museum in Amristar and new China and South Asia galleries) and innovative approaches to co-curation of the South Asia gallery. The Museum held a public Iftar event to mark the break of fast during Ramadan which garnered a large and enthusiastic audience. These initiatives were also dependent on funding structures and economic and political developments, with both the new China and South Asia galleries driven by funding in part negotiated by central government, with an eye to new flight routes opening up to Manchester Airport.

Whilst at one level decolonisation and diversity projects are prominent within Manchester Museum's thinking, they were somewhat illusive in operational practices. During the senior leadership monthly meetings, where diversity was mentioned, it was almost exclusively focused on what Anwar Tlili describes as 'numerical profile of visitors' (2008: 153), tied particularly to reporting to the Arts Council. Despite what appeared to be serious intentions for change in the leadership, the institutional practices of what diversity meant in these critical meetings remained limited to meeting funders' requirements and less focused on addressing fundamental issues causing ethnic inequality in

staffing. There appeared to be a disconnect here between individual projects and initiatives, significant as they may be, and the institutional life of diversity in terms of ethnic representation of staff, decision making, and the daily operation of the institution. Standalone projects, while often impressive, were unable to unsettle the status quo.

As we have discussed, the impetus for diversity is different in both sectors, relating to how race is negotiated and produced in those different cultural settings and its relationship to the present and the past – while TV production deals with the contemporary to inform understandings of the past, museums have to contend with the past to navigate the contemporary.

The Policy on the Shelf?

How organisations approach questions of equality can be perceived in their staffing, their practices as cultural organisations in terms of the work they produce, the ways they present themselves to different audiences, cultures within the organisation and the policies which seek to underpin them. In the museum sector, Tlili criticises the lack of clarity of terms such as 'social inclusion' driving previous policy agendas in museums and how they are subject to 'PR-ization' in the 'scramble for increased visitor numbers' (2008: 137). Focusing diversity on visitors' profiles is problematic, but remains fundamental to the institutional operationalisation of diversity as we have encountered in our ethnographic research where there was considerable emphasis in staff meetings on the numerical and demographic profile of visitors to showcase diversity. Furthermore, the presentation of highly unequal staff data without significant comment was reported to us as compounding a feeling of exclusion by one member of staff. As the focus on visitors' data was part of a mandatory reporting exercise for the Arts Council as a funder, it also signifies a wider issue regarding the bureaucratisation of diversity in cultural policy.[9]

At the level of internal policy, in both the museum and the TV production sectors, we asked our interviewees whether they were aware of an EDI policy in their place of work. Most interviewees who work at the Manchester Museum had a vague recollection of seeing the policy or knowing about it. One interviewee thought of the policy as 'sitting on the shelf', and another described it a 'lip service'. Policies around equality and diversity remained mercurial with one senior member of the staff commenting: 'I think it's definitely an abstract goal'. Ahmed, in her examination of the production of equality documents, argues that 'the point of a document can be to have a document to point to' (2012: 90). Ahmed (2007) shows how an EDI document becomes the end-all, a burdensome exercise that is meant to serve and maintain a 'good' institutional narrative. In meetings, it was also mentioned that, as the Museum is embedded in the University of Manchester, it follows the University general policy and guidance, including HR. However, one interviewee interrogated this relationship and thought that the Museum should develop its own policy that is more reflective of its practices and priorities. There was an Equality Action Plan which had increasing the diversity of the Museum as a strategic goal, whilst also noting the low levels of staff turnover within the organisation. As a research team, we were consulted on updating the policy for the year 2019–2020. We suggested adding realistic and actionable targets, review dates and accountability measures. This was part of our ethnographic methodology to work with institutions in order

to broker change. But the policy remained a bureaucratic document having seemingly little impact on the daily operation of the institution.

Through our institutional ethnography, explicit engagement with diversity as a policy or strategic aim was largely absent, lost in the more pressing business of the institution. Even though high levels of commitment to the goals of diversity and equality were almost universally expressed in interviews, there was at times a feeling that the overrepresentation of White staff at the Museum (particularly at senior levels) was an unfortunate inevitability, given the dependence on university HR processes, including redeployment policies, alongside low levels of staff turnover, particularly at senior levels and pipeline issues of the whiteness of museum studies degrees. However, there was some evidence of the Equality Action Plan being put into effect. For example, it had been proposed that changing the forms of recruitment and removing the formal interview for some posts would remove some of the obstacles in recruiting candidates from ethnically diverse backgrounds. This was implemented in the recruitment of community co-ordinators associated with the South Asia gallery.

In the TV production sector, none of our interviewees recalled having seen or dealt with an EDI policy. As an employee of Factual Media explained:

> I think it's practice. Not a policy, I don't think I've not seen any policies that they have here, for sure. I think it's just from the senior management being quite diligent about who we employ and how we employ them, from what backgrounds. Because the problem is as a company to keep the business going we always need programme ideas to be commissioned, and I think as an employer if you're always employing the same kind of person we're going to end up with the same ideas really. So the best thing is to employ people from all sorts of walks of life to then get more ideas to get commissions.

As this interviewee describes, despite the absence of EDI policy, Factual Media was a relatively diverse company in terms of its workforce – thus unusual for the TV production sector. Factual Media did not have any formal commitments to diversity. However, their CEO explained to us that she had a personal commitment to a diverse workforce and made a conscious effort to achieve that in her hiring and promotion. The invisibility of EDI policies in a company like Factual Media can be perhaps explained by the very different employment model of short-term and rolling contracts which respond to the changing needs of fast-paced projects. This raises many issues around instability of contracts and accountability of hiring processes within the TV production sector (Brook et al., 2020). Yet at the same time, it does also offer potential opportunities to bring ethnically diverse employees into the sector. The company took part in targeted internship schemes, including one run by Channel 4 which increased their pool of ethnically diverse employees including some retained in the company beyond their internships.

Policies can be a statement of intent – or guidance intended to ensure legal compliance with the Equality Act. But they do not necessarily have an impact on practice. This may be in part because of their engagement with diversity, which as discussed earlier, can lead to a weaker understanding of the operation of race within organisational structures. The following sections will explore the experiences of ethnically diverse people working in these organisations to shed a different light on the ways in which they were racialised by cultures, practices and policies.

Diversity Schemes: Opportunities vs the Commodification of Race

A key question that guided our research was how the discourse of diversity translates into action. One mode of action is diversity hiring initiatives and schemes and the impact of these, particularly on ethnically diverse members of staff. Over the last 15 years, there have been a number of diversity schemes, funds and grants in both the TV and museum sectors specifically geared towards increasing the representation of ethnically diverse people in the sector.[10] These schemes, often campaigned for by activists concerned with ethnic inequality in the sector and in many cases personally championed by the few ethnically diverse workers in the sector, can open up opportunities for new entrants within the sector. Nonetheless, progress in diversifying both fields remains slow. Targeted employment schemes face legal restrictions in that (in the absence of very specific conditions) they can only be used to create internships rather than permanent posts. There are other reasons why diversity initiatives fail to deliver on making fundamental and lasting changes towards ethnic equality in CCIs. These include a lack of prolonged investment and a lack of institutional strategy which means schemes are segregated and fail to achieve more structural changes. Diversity schemes are often problematically understood as a one-way stream, benefiting only the ethnically diverse 'recipient'.

This, of course, is symptomatic of a bigger issue regarding how diversity is understood by decision makers in policy and institutions including the political and economic rationale for it. As explained earlier, the political impetus behind diversity has shifted from an anti-racist one, to narratives of multiculturalism and social inclusion (Littler and Naidoo, 2005; Malik, 2013; Nwonka, 2015). The economic rationale for diversity is similarly flawed as it loses force if diversity does not pay off (Noon, 2007) – including when it is doomed to fail because of an existing racialised value judgement that labels diverse cultural products as 'risky' leading to lack of investment in its promotion or exposure (Erigha, 2021). Failing to acknowledge a priori value of ethnic diversity and failing to align it explicitly with anti-racism risks the perpetuation of what we term *white institutional benevolence.* That is, institutions perform acts of inclusion to maintain their 'morally good' status, but within these acts there is an implicit ordering of value where those included are judged as 'out of place' and potentially inferior. Benevolence here is founded on an 'imbalance of power' (Riggs, 2004a: 8) and should be understood as 'a network of power that attempts to mask histories of colonisation' (Riggs, 2004b).

Those who are 'included', the bearers of diversity schemes, have to negotiate myriad racial, cultural and social codes and practices that at best leave them drained and at worst push them outside of the sector. As interviews with ethnically diverse creatives and cultural workers show, there can be fatigue about lack of change and scepticism about the impact of such schemes. Because of the existing inequalities in the sector, the experience of ethnically diverse cultural workers is complex and potentially alienating, leading to a wariness in being identified as a 'diversity hire'. In addition, individuals may have ambivalent views towards them.

In the TV production sector, all our interviewees stated that they would apply to a diversity scheme in preference to a general one because they were painfully aware of the structural disadvantages they faced. However, a number of our interviewees explained

how diversity schemes can make them feel 'uncomfortable' because, as one respondent put it: 'I always felt like I wanted to be given the opportunity because of me, not because of my ethnicity giving me an advantage over someone else'. This sentiment, which was echoed by other interviewees, demonstrates multiple anxieties about meritocracy, talent, and self-worth. In a way, these diversity schemes can invite self-doubt about one's own skills and contribution to the sector, or what was described as an 'imposter syndrome'. Thus, paradoxically, even though these schemes are designed to empower ethnically diverse creatives and cultural workers, they can contribute to a sense of insecurity within CCIs. When the structural inequalities of the cultural sector are not explicitly recognised, diversity schemes can continue to make people from ethnically diverse backgrounds feel like they do not belong and that they have to continuously prove their worth. Having expressed ambivalence, the respondent went on to explain:

> But slowly I've been talking to more experienced people in the industry; they've kind of convinced me that these schemes are here because of the issues that arose years before, slowly [. . .], so really I should be taking full advantage of them, because that's the only way to then start, hopefully, evening it out almost, and [make a case for] representing the population of the country.

However, even in this reconsideration, it is notable that the interviewee presents discrimination and inequality as in the past, rather than regarding it as a present fact. Another concern of interviewees was that schemes could invite resentments from White colleagues, who having not experienced the same structural inequalities that ethnically diverse people face, fail to understand that these schemes do not provide an advantage, but a possible way of 'levelling up the playing field'. As one interviewee put it:

> what that speaks to is there are two things going on, which is you need the bosses up top to absolutely buy into it, whatever initiative it is, you need to buy into it and then what you've got to do it is get the whole culture within your organisation to understand.

One of the more complex and harmful issues that ethnically diverse cultural workers experience is being essentialised or fetishised and having their ethnicity commodified. Being fetishised here refers to employing ethnic stereotypes when dealing with an ethnically diverse workforce, seeing them through the limited prism of their ethnicity and amplifying that at the expense of professional development and career progression. This is problematic as it compounds feelings of exclusion, non-belonging and the imposter syndrome that many ethnically diverse personnel already experience in CCIs. In addition, it highlights how institutions are, at best, failing to recognise the value of an ethnically diverse workforce beyond their ethnicity, and, at worst, reproducing discriminatory and racist attitudes and practices. Although focusing on cultural production, Saha's insights are pertinent here as he argues that 'commodification acts as a technology of racialized governmentalities', explaining that through complex processes of cultural production 'historical constructions of Otherness are reproduced in an unchecked form' (2018: 138).

For some respondents, their attitude to diversity schemes was shaped by the desire for their race or ethnicity not to be commodified. As one interviewee explained: 'I would have an issue if I was recruited based on my ethnicity or not given an opportunity based on my ethnicity. So both would offend me'. She emphatically stated that she refused to be commodified and that she is aware of the essentialising processes employers may engage in:

> I completely refuse to do anything ethnic-specific like in terms of my role. I'm glad I'm in a role that's quite mainstream. It's got nothing to do with my ethnicity. [. . .] Because I don't see why people who are from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds should be working in [. . .] roles that have something to do with their ethnic background. More often than not, you'll find that people [. . .] are recruited based on their ethnicity because they're there to support a project, and behind that project has a link to their ethnic background. I find that that's more the case than not.

These comments highlight how diversity schemes are limited in scope and legacy as they are often tied to finite projects and funds. Nonetheless, despite her acute awareness of how ethnically diverse cultural workers can be essentialised, and her refusal to be commodified in this way, the above-quoted interviewee did work on projects that specifically engaged the ethnic background she comes from. Whilst at one level these new activities drew on her experience, networks and skills, at the same time, they became as Saha (2018) writes, a way of *making* race. Particularly important, whilst working in this area led to an expansion in her role, this was not matched by a new job title or promotion in the organisation. The ethnic value she brought was not rewarded.

Another issue that emerged through our research is that many diversity schemes or initiatives are spearheaded by ethnically diverse employees in the organisation. A respondent recounted her experience in one of the schemes at a nationally leading print organisation and she explained how the whole scheme was carried on the shoulder of one ethnically diverse editor:

> we all reported back to him because he set it up rather than [the newspaper] themselves coming from top down, which was quite interesting – the fact that he felt he had to bring that rather than the actual organisation themselves doing it, which I found quite interesting.

Similarly, a senior producer in a TV production company explained that, although it is not within his power to influence staffing decisions in the companies he works for, he is resolute in making diversity a priority when he can. Whenever he is in a position that enables him to have control over casting decisions for the programmes he produces, he insists on having diverse and inclusive representations, even when this is not something required in the specification of the job or given priority by the rest of the mostly White production team. Ahmed contends:

> It is certainly the case that responsibility for diversity and equality is unevenly distributed. It is also the case that the distribution of this work is political: if diversity and equality work is less valued by organizations, then to become responsible for this work can mean to inhabit institutional spaces that are also less valued. (2012: 4)

This reinforces the suggestion that the work to diversify the sector is falling on the shoulders of ethnically diverse people, which can add to the fatigue they experience and increased workload which might affect progression ambitions and have ramifications on their emotional and mental wellbeing.

The Whiteness of Space and Fitting In – Working in the Cultural Sector

The burden of 'diversity' that ethnically diverse cultural workers have to contend with is symbolic of the fact that the cultural sector remains ontologically and epistemologically White. Exploring the lived experience of ethnically diverse cultural workers, who have been the object of diversity discourse was at the heart of our research. Our findings show common threads that define the lived reality of diversity in cultural institutions, but which play out differently in the context of the contrasting structures of employment in the two sectors. In both contexts, the ethnically diverse cultural workers were working in environments which were largely White (particularly in the context of the wider TV production sector, rather than Factual Media directly). This can engender a feeling of being 'out of place'. As a respondent from the Museum explained, this can be a barrier to even applying for a job:

> The cultural sector is perceived as white, for middle-class and upper-class people [. . .] there is nothing within the cultural sector to attract BME communities [. . .] they don't see it as somewhere they'd apply for a job or somewhere where they would fit in. [. . .] I was at an event once [. . .] representing the museum [. . .] and I had members of the BME community looking at me and saying, 'do you actually work at the museum?' You know, they were quite shocked to think that there'd be a BME [person working at a museum]. And they were quite curious saying: 'so, what do you do there?'

A senior producer relayed the experience of being mistaken for a TV runner by a young intern, suggesting the 'impossibility' of his seniority: 'And I went, sorry, I don't know what you're talking about. And she looked at me up and down and walked off. I just laughed'.

Participants described some of the other consequences of these working environments which included being the only non-white person in a workspace and having to negotiate leave for religious holidays. Brook et al. (2020) link the experience of being out of place that gendered, raced and classed people encounter in the cultural sector to Nirmal Puwar's (2004) idea of women and minorities being 'space invaders' in traditionally White spaces. Brook et al. (2020) contend that 'being out of place' has serious consequences in the industry in terms of the practices of hiring and 'getting in and getting on' in the cultural sector (Brook et al., 2020).

The importance of networks is perhaps critically acute in the TV sector, where contracts are often fixed term, project-based and new jobs are mostly secured through a process of networking and being re-hired or word-of-mouth recommendations on the basis of previous projects. One interviewee described how his ethnicity played a part in this process:

> I can feel it and I know it's a barrier every single time. It's a barrier I have to get over and it's a barrier that people who are white don't have to get over.

This left him second-guessing the reasons why he felt he was excluded from a 'circle of trust' having hit a glass ceiling, despite many years of experience:

> Now, I've been hired by mainly people from Caucasian backgrounds and the struggles that I've had in my career, I've been left with questions of whether or not it was down to my ethnicity or not.

Of course, the informal nature of networking makes knowing the cause unknowable. However, a hesitancy to name discrimination was a common tendency among most of our interviewees. It stems partly perhaps from the intangible nature of this covert racism but may also be linked to a need to preserve a sense of self and survive in a difficult environment (see also Harries, 2014).

Exclusions based on ethnicity could also intersect with the classed nature of the cultural sector, as an interviewee explained:

> But I think one thing that I think is quite common amongst ethnic minorities and has been including myself is just that sense of imposter syndrome which then leads to being a bit introverted and you can't really afford to be introverted. There're people from middle-class backgrounds who can afford to be introverted and still get a job, but when you're working class you can't afford to be having those things.

Many of our interviewees reported experiencing an 'imposter syndrome', among other feelings of discomfort and anxiety. The overlaying of class and race in factors of exclusion and feeling 'out of place' was shared by others. This included questions of feeling awkward about styles of dress and different practices of hospitality, including cultures around drinking alcohol at work-based events. It is likely that these experiences directly impact the chances of staying in and/or progressing in the industry.

Conclusion

Ethnic inequality has been highlighted as a persistent issue in the cultural sector, impacting both its social and creative significance with discourses of decolonisation in the museum sector and developments of digital distribution in the TV production industry, renewing efforts to diversify the sector. In this article, we have traced how the discourse of diversity has been reconstructed over time from an anti-racist attitude to a less confrontational multicultural social vision through shifting socio-political understanding and 'governmentality' of race, and we aimed to steer the attention back to diversity as a practice of anti-discrimination. Our intensive institutional ethnography in two cultural organisations in the museum and TV production sectors showed that the translation of diversity from a concept to policies and practices is a complex and at times fraught exercise. Our analysis shows that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies may represent

institutional commitments to issues of diversity but have little impact on the daily running of the institution and on the experience of ethnically diverse staff within its space.

Diversity schemes as a route for implementing diversity in the institution, on the other hand, are seen as practical, though insufficient, first steps to 'levelling up the field'. While they offer a way into what Brook et al. (2020) call a 'socially closed' sector, their temporary and entry-level nature render them less effective in the long run. Our interviewees showed that even when ethnically diverse cultural workers benefit from diversity schemes, the cultural whiteness of most institutions they access and the structural inequality of the sector as a whole make these spaces alienating. Feelings of being an imposter or out of place were commonly experienced. Moreover, an awareness of, and resistance to, being commodified is a struggle that ethnically diverse cultural workers are often forced to negotiate at the expense of their emotional wellbeing and sometimes career progression. There is yet a long way for diversity to be structurally embedded in the institutional life of cultural organisations, and it is only through this overhaul of institutional culture that we are to reach a more equitable sector. The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter occurred after the research and was accompanied by further commitments to diversity and addressing inequalities within both sectors[11]. However, our research would suggest that much more than statements and policies are required to achieve structural and cultural change within sectors which have such deeply embedded inequalities.

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Ethical Approval

This research was conducted in accordance with the research ethics procedures of the University of Manchester.

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Notes

1. In the light of recent criticisms of the use of the term 'BAME' to describe people understood as racial and ethnic minorities, we use the term 'Black, Asian and ethnically diverse' as the collective term to refer to those groups, which we henceforth shorten to 'ethnically diverse'. See Inc Arts UK (2019) and Malik et al. (2022).
2. With thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.
3. June Sarpong, Director of Creative Diversity at the BBC quoted in the BBC report 'BBC reveals progress through its Diversity Commissioning Code of Practice'. Available at: https://bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2020/diversity-progress-reports (accessed 7 May 2021).
4. For a detailed examination of the institutionalisation of diversity and flow of its language in HE, see Sarah Ahmed (2012). For an exploration on the shifting meaning of diversity and its instrumentalisation in policy in the Broadcasting industry, see Sarita Malik (2013) 'Creative Diversity' and Clive Nwonka (2015) Diversity Pie.

5. This name has been changed; see later in the section.
6. This research was conducted in accordance with the research ethics procedures of the University of Manchester.
7. See the letter from Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden (DCMS, 2020).
8. With thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this question.
9. This is something that has been also highlighted in the way that the Arts Council collects data, for example, in a report by Susan Oman (2019) on recommended changes to measure social mobility.
10. For example, Arts Council England (ACE) launched the 'Change Makers' scheme worth £2.57m in 2016 to increase the diversity of senior leaders within England's arts and cultural organisations – see https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/change-makers (accessed 21 September 2022). In TV production, The Pact Indie Diversity Scheme was launched in 2013, aimed at entry-level diverse talent offering trainees a six-month placement with a partner independent production company – see https://diversity.pact.co.uk/indie-diversity-training-scheme.html (accessed 21 September 2022).
11. See further research: Ali et al., 2022.

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