

Writing the Future:

Black and Asian
Writers and
Publishers in the
UK Market Place

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A word from Spread the Word

Spread the Word is proud to present this important and timely research into Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) diversity in the publishing industry and the publication of BAME fiction writers.

As the writer development agency for London, talent development and diversity are key priorities in our programme of work. We have a 20 year track record in the provision of ground-breaking creative and professional development schemes for BAME writers, including Free Verse, a report into the publication of Black and Asian poets, which led to The Complete Works 1 & 2 – a highly regarded mentoring programme. This year, Spread the Word began Flight 1000, a three-year Associate scheme developed specifically to tackle a lack of diversity in publishing, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

We believe that for UK literature of all genres (and its publishers) to thrive, it must reflect the complexity of the cultures and society it is responding to. Yet the success and upsurge in the publication of BAME fiction writers in the 1990's and early 2000's, has not been followed by a new generation of BAME writers

being published. What, we asked ourselves, has been going on? And, is the publishing industry still as hard to enter for aspiring BAME and White editors as seemingly it is for writers? We brought together a brilliant Advisory Group of BAME and White writers and publishing professionals, dug into our financial reserves and commissioned Danuta Kean and Mel Larsen to carry out the research.

Spread the Word's aims for Writing the Future are to re-open a debate on BAME diversity in publishing, leading to constructive strategies and partnerships for change. We will also use the research findings to design strategies to support the career development of talented BAME writers and aspiring publishing professionals.

We look forward to using the recommendations from Writing the Future to work with publishers to create lasting initiatives that result in BAME fiction writers gaining a higher profile and creating a more diverse workforce within UK publishing.

SUE LAWTHER

*Director, Spread the Word
April 2015*

Introduction: why writing the future?

If you want to look ahead 30 years and imagine what the average British reader will look like, you would do well to picture an educated young woman of mixed heritage.

That is, it will be, if the UK publishing industry pays more than lip service to improving its cultural diversity both in-house and editorially. But, there is a level of pessimism among Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) writers and publishers that the industry will not change in time to engage meaningfully with the next generation of readers. That is the stark conclusion we have reached after spending a year interviewing publishers, agents and BAME novelists and analysing data from creative writing programmes and literary festivals for this report into cultural diversity in UK publishing.

Ten years ago I edited *In Full Colour*, the first in-depth report to look at the representation of BAME people in the trade. The report included a small section on BAME writers. It uncovered disturbing evidence of institutional bias, a sense of exclusion and an industry wedded to recruitment methods that undermined diversity rather

Random House and Penguin, to prizes aimed at supporting BAME writers into print.

Ten years is a long time, and when the writer development agency Spread the Word approached me to look at the area again, with special focus on novelists as well as publishers, I expected to find that changes wrought by those initiatives had filtered through to all levels of the business. I also hoped to see that BAME novelists were finding it easier to establish their careers and be taken seriously as universal voices for our times. I was wrong.

Aided by consultant Mel Larsen, I found that the past 10 years of turbulent change affecting the UK book industry has had a negative impact on attempts to become more diverse. With profit margins assailed by high volume/high discount outlets, which demand expensive marketing support, as well as new book formats that challenge everything from copyright

to distribution, traditional publishers have retrenched and become more conservative in their editorial and employment choices. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the rise of the unpaid

internship as a primary route into the business – a practice that immediately discriminates against those without the economic power to support living and working in London unwaged.

‘By 2051, one in five people in the UK is predicted to be from an ethnic minority; a rise from 14 per cent in 2011 to at least 30 per cent.’

than promoted it. As a result, a raft of initiatives were introduced by decibel, the Arts Council England programme that had commissioned my report. These ranged from paid internships for BAME graduates in publishing houses such as Faber,

We discovered during our research that this change has had an impact on BAME authors, who, despite the successes of a few 'popular stars' such as Dorothy Koomson and Dreda Say Mitchell, continue to be better represented in the smaller, less lucrative literary genres rather than the high selling genres that reap the greatest financial reward and publication longevity. Furthermore, Black and Asian authors complained that they were expected to portray a limited view of their own cultures or risk the accusation of inauthenticity if their characters or settings did not conform to White expectations. Failure to comply, many felt, limited their prospects of publication.

As a result, many Black and Asian authors who struggle for representation and publication in the UK have turned to India or the US to get book deals (see *Digital or Be Damned*, Page 10). In part, this appears to be because those from a BAME background working in publishing remain at relatively junior levels and are out of the loop of key decision-making. It seems that, despite the debate about diversity in other industries moving to the boardroom, in publishing, such initiatives remain focused on entry level recruitment through paid internships. Though these schemes are to be lauded, they are not having a long-term impact on the whole trade.

Does this matter? Yes. In an industry that operates increasingly on a global level, the absence in most publishing houses of staff at a senior level with Indian or Chinese heritage – especially in international sales - risks putting the UK trade at a disadvantage for working in these significant and growing markets. It also makes the trade look increasingly mono-cultural and parochial, even though at the very least British publishers acquire books with an eye to English language publication in the UK and Commonwealth territories.

But it is not only globally that UK book publishing is looking out of touch with the market. At home, British society has undergone rapid change. By 2051, one in five people in the UK is predicted to be from an ethnic minority; a rise from

14 per cent in 2011 to at least 30 per cent. In London, the proportion of BAME people is already 40 per cent. Those with a mixed heritage are in the fastest growing ethnic group in the UK: over one million people (two per cent) of the population are of mixed race and this is expected to more than double over the next 30 years.

Furthermore, since 2001, ethnic minorities have seen an increase in birth rate that contrasts with the steady decline in births in the White British and Irish populations. What this means is that publishers' present concentration on People Like Us – White, aged 35 to 55 and female – will not reflect the society of the future, no matter how much that elides with their own current workforce.

To remain relevant and attractive to the educated young men and women from Black, Asian and mixed heritages who will form an ever more considerable economic force in the UK, the trade will have to change. It will have to become less homogenised, with editors, publicists and marketers at all levels who have an innate understanding of the diverse communities that make up this small island. Otherwise, the book industry risks becoming a 20th century throwback increasingly out of touch with a 21st century world.

DANUTA KEAN

Editor, Writing the Future

No excuses

If publishers are serious about diversity, they need to look beyond recruitment and put their corporate culture under the microscope, Rare Recruitment's Raphael Mokades tells Danuta Kean.

Raphael Mokades does not mince his words. 'It is, ultimately, about how much of a shit you give – and you can quote me on that.' It is a robust response to a question about why diversity in publishing lags behind other London-centric professions. Of course, he acknowledges, publishing is not alone in failing to improve the representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people at recruitment and board level. Last year a study by Trevor Phillips and Professor Richard Webber found that two-thirds of FTSE 100 companies had an all-White executive leadership. But the fact that in the book trade over the past 20 years, recruitment initiative after initiative has failed to make a lasting impact on anything but entry-level numbers should worry senior management, he adds.

that have raised intake and retention of BAME staff across the company. At the time, Penguin was part of Pearson and introduced a number of graduate and literary initiatives aimed at BAME communities. Through Rare Recruitment, he now works with a stellar client list that includes global brands such as Barclays and L'Oreal as well as GCHQ, Teach First, Facebook and Google, however it does not include any book publishers.

Looking relaxed in a pink shirt and dark blue suit, the 36-year-old Oxford graduate crosses his legs and leans back in his chair. Through the window on one side of the room in which we meet, you can see an open plan office in which a rainbow coalition of staff pound keyboards and telephones. I notice that White faces are in the minority.

'If you look at the companies that work with us, it is funny how many of them are at the absolute cutting edge of what they do.

These are the firms that are shaping British society and the economy. Now, are there any publishers doing that?'

'I'll tell you why publishing companies ain't finding BAME applicants,' he says looking through the glass. 'It's because they ain't looking. It's as simple as that. If you talk to Pearson about its diversity scheme, it fills that every year and has a lot more applicants than it can take on. It's very competitive to get on it.'

Mokades has inside knowledge about book publishing. Before setting up Rare Recruitment, which specialises in recruiting BAME people for blue chip employers in the public and private sectors, he was in charge of diversity at Pearson and was responsible for introducing programmes

By looking, he doesn't mean just advertising in the Black or Asian press or holding a few open days at universities outside the Russell Group. He means doing a root and branch audit of how your company is performing in its treatment of staff and rethinking the primary route into the

trade – unpaid internships – and low pay for everyone bar senior staff.

The arguments for diversity he says, are unequivocal, but they are not about the domestic market. 'I don't think that Black people read Black books and White people read White books in the same way that Black women use Black hair products.' Even if publishers are happy to continue publishing books with a core market of 'White, ABC1 women aged 35 to 55' in mind, he adds, that is no excuse for a homogenised work force. 'Even if they want to sell to middle class ladies aged 45 to 55 they still want the best editors, the best PR people, the best sales people and for that reason it makes sense to recruit from the widest group of people.'

But beyond global markets, Mokades, who is of mixed-race heritage, contests that the most compelling argument for diversity within a workforce is that it means fishing in a bigger talent pool and bringing in people who will not just challenge the prevailing culture within an organisation, but recognise the cultural issues that may make books seem irrelevant to a younger, mixed generation of multi-format media consumers. 'If you look at the companies that work with us, it is funny how many of them are at the absolutely cutting edge of what they do,' he explains. 'These are the firms that are shaping British society and the economy. Now, are there any publishers doing that?'

A prime reason cited by the trade for its failure to attract more candidates from a BAME background, is low pay

and the primacy of unpaid internships as a route into the business. The argument goes, that people from a BAME background want to work in professions that promise higher initial rewards and that the dominant route into publishing – unpaid work

experience – limits the number of people economically empowered to pass the test of entry. Given the level of competition for posts (as many as 400 people applying for an entry level editorial post), there is no pressure to change the low, or no pay rewards for interns and new recruits, especially in an industry under threat from new technology and ever decreasing margins.

Mokades used to believe this too. He does not now. 'I had this argument with someone,' he begins. 'I was sticking up for publishers saying that they do care, it's a low margin business that is threatened by the Internet and they don't have a lot of money to spend on recruitment full stop. But her argument was: 'How much does the chief executive of a publishing company pay himself? Quarter of a million? Half a million? More? It is absolutely inconceivable that he couldn't take £50,000 off that and devote it, to sorting this problem out.' And she is right.' ►

'You can bash the City all you want, but they pay their interns, and they could get away without paying them, people are queuing to work for them, but they don't, because they want the best not just those who can afford to work for them.'

Growing in intensity, he leans forward and underlines his point with a tap of the forefinger on the table so that the noise becomes a percussive backbeat to the whole interview. Post-Internet, alarm bells should ring within publishing companies – tap-tap-tap – because books are acquired with an eye to their international potential – tap-tap-tap. 'If you look at a company like the ad agency WPP, it recognises that it is in a global market and wants to sell to everyone in the world and diversity can help with that.' He leans back in his chair with the satisfied air of a man who knows he is right.

He has a point. Given that UK publishers and agents are opening offices in China and India to capitalise on these rapidly expanding markets, it could/might be expected for the importance of these markets to be reflected in the ethnicities of executive directors or international sales directors at the very least. It is not.

The entrepreneur practices what he preaches. Pay at Rare Recruitment, which has a 10 per cent profit margin, starts at the London Living Wage (LLW) (currently £9 to £15 an hour), including cleaners and Mokades takes home £80,000 a year. 'I have a wife, a kid and a mortgage, and it's enough,' he says. 'If I can do that, these big companies can do that. If publishers really do believe that unpaid internships are hampering diversity, they should put their money where their mouth is', he adds. By failing to do so they are only paying lip service to diversity. 'If the people who run these companies choose to pay themselves more and to pay their interns a lot less, that is a moral choice.'

He points to the city firms with whom he works, all of whom pay the LLW to interns. 'Ah, but law firms and banks have money to splash around unlike publishers', I point out. He thumps the table again and turns my comment on its head: 'You can bash the city all you want, but they pay their interns and they could get away without paying them, people are queuing to work for them, but they don't because they want the best, not just those who can afford to work for them.'

With a dismissive wave of his hand, Mokades adds: 'If your business is so low margin that you can't afford to pay your interns, it is a shit business, close it down. The truth is, publishing is not, because they are all happy to pay their directors huge amounts. And besides, even when times were not tough, they still didn't pay interns.'

He is evangelical about the morality of paying a living wage to those on the bottom rung of the ladder. 'If you are paying yourself a million, you could pay five people the LLW and still take away £900k a year. I mean, how greedy do you have to be? Now, you might argue that a person running a hedge fund shouldn't take home £500m or that we should have a 90% tax rate for the richest, but given the rules of the game, the dude running the hedge fund can have a clearer conscience, as long as he is paying his cleaner properly, than the dude running his publishing company who has people working for nothing.' It is a view supported by Rare Recruitment's board of directors, which includes Profile

Books' founder Andrew Franklin – despite its size Profile pays the LLW and has a better than average record for recruiting minority ethnic staff.

Having directors willing to challenge company orthodoxy is another reason Mokades feels that limiting diversity programmes to entry-level jobs misses the point. 'We've all had the experience of groupthink and the danger of having a group of the same people at the top in publishing, patting themselves on the back and telling each other everything is all right when it isn't,' he explains. 'If there is someone different in the room, even if she isn't radically different in terms of corporate experience and pay, what she knows and what she has experienced as a Black or Asian woman will be different to those other directors.' In other words, the outsider has a better perspective with which to judge corporate governance than those from a homogenised class and ethnicity.

In Mokades opinion, this is not about good PR or ticking boxes, it is about checking that the systems in place within a company, from bonuses and pay scales to recruitment and retention, are fit for purpose. 'If publishers are serious about diversity they should be looking inwards as well as outwards,' he says, through internal audits that compare how non-White and White staff fair. 'For example,' he suggests, 'if you are looking at the pay of your top managers, you have to ask yourself the obvious question; in the same jobs, is there a pay gap between BAME and non-BAME staff?'

Also, he suggests comparing cohorts of staff recruited in a year – say 2013, 2010 and 2005 – comparing retention, pay and promotion rates between White and non-White staff and also comparing appraisal results for White and BAME staff.

'If you do that rigorous analysis and you see that the BAME cohorts are performing in line with the White cohorts, that is okay and quite honestly it is going to take a while to change' he adds. 'But if you find that the BAME people are leaving more quickly or taking longer to get promoted, then you have one of two issues; either all the BAME people you recruit are

crap, in which case your recruitment is broken and you need to fix it, or - and this is more likely - there is institutional bias going on and you need to work out what it is and you need to stamp it out.'

To do this means publishers must acknowledge their own cultural bias and be unequivocal in how they tackle it, Mokades says. But he adds, if publishers take this action now, it should mean that in 10 years' time the trade should have moved on from entry-level initiatives. 'The problem with just looking at recruitment is that it could be a sticking plaster on a gaping wound. Y'know the sort of thing: 'get a few interns in, we're doing everything we've always done.' But that is no longer good enough.' And with that the interview is over.

DANUTA KEAN is a publishing analyst and journalist with 17 years experience writing about the book industry. Her work appears widely in national and specialist publications and she has taught about the publishing industry at Brunel University and on The Guardian Masterclasses. She is also books editor of *Mslexia*, the magazine for women writers. You can follow her on Twitter @Danoosha

Rare Recruitment – root and branch guide to diversity

- **Internships:** pay a living wage to ensure talented, economically disadvantaged graduates are able to compete for jobs.
- **Internal audit:** take cohorts of staff recruited two, five and 10 years ago and compare the pay, appraisals, promotions and retention of BAME staff to White staff.
- **Board appointments:** look to senior BAME directors in other industries for non-executive directors who can cast a fresh eye on corporate culture.
- **Openness:** don't batten down the hatches, but be willing to acknowledge cultural bias and stamp it out.
- **Global perspective:** recognise that BAME staff help reach a global market, not just the UK one.

Written off

A survey of authors for Writing the Future found that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic writers feel pressurised into using cultural stereotypes. Danuta Kean analyses the results.

In a market dominated by mass-market fiction, it appears that the best chance of publication for a BAME novelist is to write literary fiction that conforms to a stereotypical view of Black or Asian communities. So, gone are Black families in Brixton growing up with classical music and Asian families who spend more time on the football pitch than the cricket pitch. Instead, writers find that they are advised by agents and editors to make their manuscripts marketable in this country by upping the sari count, dealing with gang culture or some other image that conforms to White preconceptions. That is one of the main findings of a survey of 203 UK-based published novelists. The finding was supported by qualitative research undertaken for this report.

Authenticity

Overall 30 per cent of respondents to the survey came from a BAME background. Of those, 47 per cent said their début was agented. In comparison, 64 per cent of White novelists in the survey had an agent for their début. Once into their publishing career, 53 per cent of BAME authors remained without an agent against 37 per cent of White authors in the survey.

The homogeneity of the UK publishing and agent community (see *Plus ça change*, page 13) was regarded as the reason that there appears to be a lack of nuance in editors' and literary agents' view of BAME culture. Authors of colour thought that engaging more BAME staff within editorial and agenting would help address the misconception that a manuscript is not 'authentic' when it reflects an aspect of non-White culture unfamiliar to mainstream White editors.

'My last novel had an Indian location and characters,' one respondent wrote. 'I think a significant aspect of the reticence from agents... was that the novel is uniquely steeped in realities that are not common knowledge and perhaps hard to take in along with the atmospheres and cultures of a private face of India. I put it down to tunnel vision – a certain smugness which rules out the adventure of the unknown for readers and an assumption that everyone else is the same.'

Though not critical of the industry as a whole, other BAME novelists wrote that publication of their novels had been affected by the limited cultural awareness of their editors. One wrote: 'I think there was some doubt (among commissioning editors) about the 'authenticity' of my story. People in the UK just didn't know about the community I wrote about in the Caribbean. So perhaps it was no surprise that my first agent was of Caribbean descent.'

At other times, 'authenticity' was not the problem, rather it was assumptions within publishing houses about what White readers, who form the majority, would accept. This was summed up in the response of one BAME writer: 'There was a reluctance on the part of publishers and agents to deal with books with a non-mainstream setting and mostly non-White characters. I remember being told to make sure one half of a love relationship was White, because White readers would have problems reading books with 'foreign' settings or all-Black casts.' Though reluctant, BAME writers in the survey said they made such changes because they didn't want to create barriers to publication.

‘There was a reluctance on the part of publishers and agents to deal with books with a non-mainstream setting and mostly non-White characters. I remember being told to make sure one half of a love relationship was White, because White readers would have problems reading books with ‘foreign’ settings or all-Black casts.’

A majority of BAME novelists reported that their ethnicity was the main focus of their publisher’s publicity campaign rather than any more universal aspect of their book. This could backfire. ‘Publicity-wise, we did try and use the BAME angle to spread the word about the book, approaching the BBC Asian Network and the Eastern Eye newspaper, but neither showed any interest,’ one respondent wrote. But for others it helped get their work before literary editors, as another respondent noted. She was marketed by her large publishing house as ‘the new voice of multicultural talent’ and though she thought that ‘seemed unnecessary’, she thought it may have been a factor in why her debut was reviewed widely.

Literary vs genre

The survey found that 42 per cent of respondents from a BAME background wrote literary fiction, making it by far the biggest genre for BAME writers in the poll. The next biggest genre was young adult (YA) fiction at 26 per cent with romance/women’s commercial fiction far behind at eight per cent of respondents. Of the biggest selling genres, crime accounted for four per cent of BAME novelists’ output, the same amount for women’s commercial fiction and erotica. Science fiction and fantasy was written by eight per cent of respondents and horror by 10 per cent. The propensity of the industry to publish writers of colour under the ‘literary’ banner, respondents felt, effectively distanced them from the mainstream, a finding also confirmed by the qualitative research undertaken for this report.

The balance between fiction genres was much more evenly spread among novelists who self-define as ‘White Caucasian’. As crime and women’s commercial fiction sell in far larger quantities than literary work and agents report it

increasingly difficult to place literary books, it means that BAME authors could be at

a commercial disadvantage. Though 27 per cent of White writers in the survey published literary fiction, 23 per cent wrote YA fiction, while 16 per cent wrote crime or thrillers and 16 per cent wrote romance/women’s commercial fiction. The remaining 18% were writers of other genres.

Crime, romance and YA books make up almost half of the adult fiction market in the UK (source: Nielsen Bookscan), while books that would earn a review in the literary pages of newspapers are witnessing a decline in market share. It means effectively, that as a published Black or Asian writer you will probably write in a genre that not only earns little but sells little too. Consequently BAME writers were at a disadvantage if they wanted to be full time novelists.

One respondent to the survey said she believed the relative affluence of most publishers by background, meant they were less aware of the economic difficulties the majority of BAME authors faced in establishing a career: ‘Finances are an issue, especially for BAME novelists,’ she said. ‘We’re more likely to be writing on the side as well as working.’

This is, of course, an issue for White writers from less affluent backgrounds, but shows how the current market is reshaping into one that favours those with alternative income streams, which, in turn, could act as a brake on social ►

inclusion and the mix of voices heard in books.

When it comes to who publishes BAME authors, in the poll the large publishers were responsible for more of the small number of BAME authors published than medium-sized independents; 36 per cent said their début was published by a large publisher compared to four per cent by a medium-sized independent. Small publishers, defined as those with 20 or fewer employees, accounted for the débuts of 30 per cent of respondents. But large publishers should not pat themselves on the back; these figures are no indicator of general diversity on lists. Among White novelists, 44 per cent were first published by one of the large houses such as Penguin or the Hachette Group, while 16 per cent were published by a medium-sized independent and 32 per cent had their début published by small independents. The remainder were self-published.

Though large publishing houses power their profits through sales of commercial genre fiction, they published more literary fiction by BAME novelist respondents than commercial fiction. Of the literary fiction published by Black and Asian authors, the big three houses were responsible for 45 per cent of it. In comparison, they were responsible for a lower proportion of literary fiction by White respondents – 20 per cent. Of those with a current publishing contract, large houses publish 43 per cent of the BAME novelists surveyed, while 36 per cent were published by small houses. The relative stability in numbers is interesting but requires more research than was in the scope of this report.

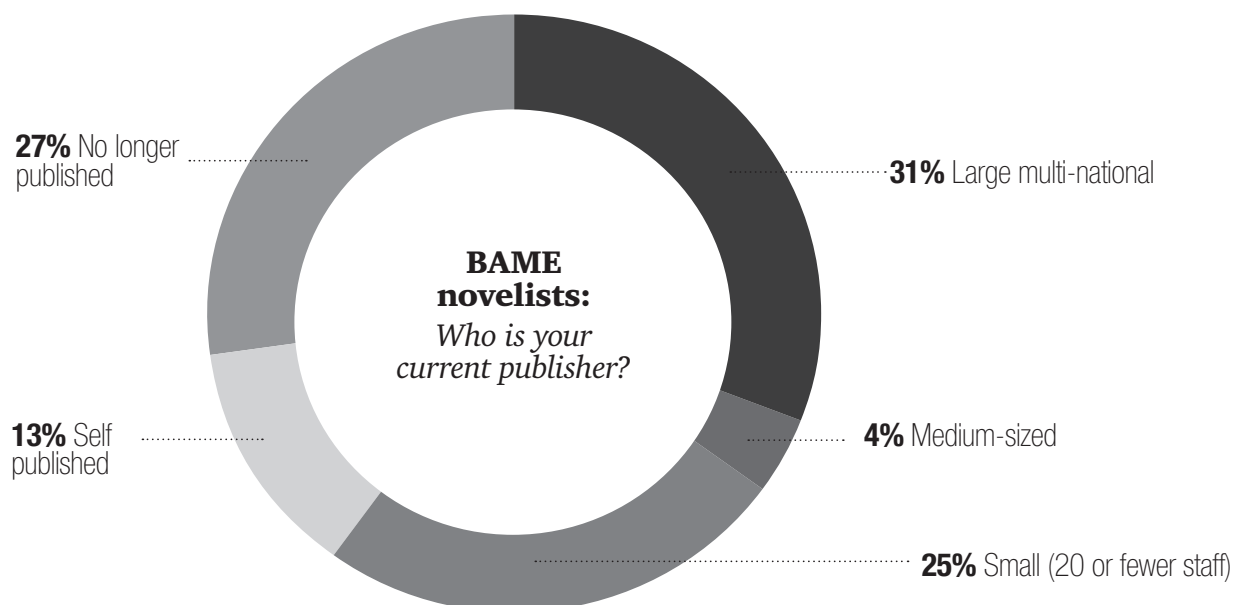
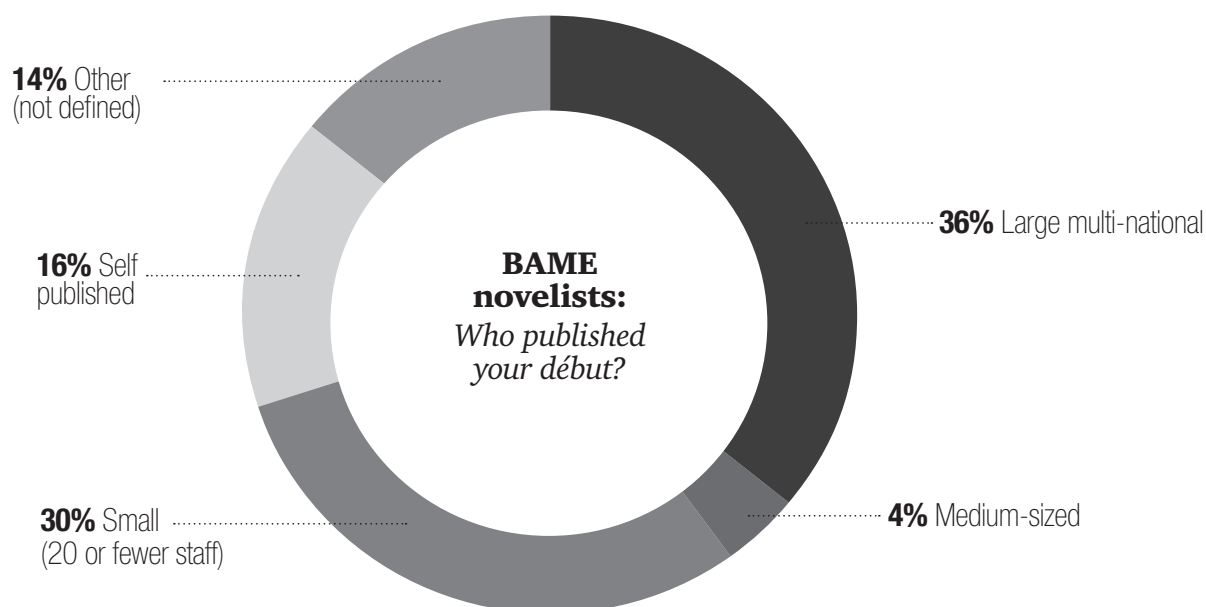
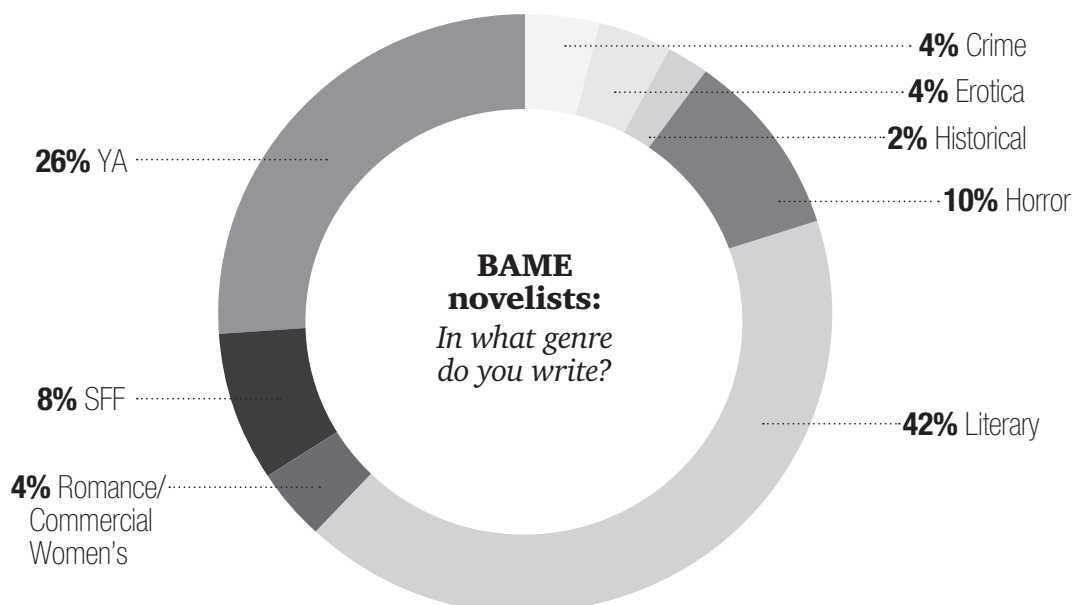
In a break down of ethnicities among published BAME novelists in the survey, 29 per cent identified as Asian, the biggest subset of this group (21 per cent) being of Indian heritage and only three per cent from a Chinese background. The next largest group, accounting for just over a quarter of respondents, were of mixed heritage (26 per cent). Black African and Black Caribbean writers accounted for similar numbers, 14 per cent and 16 per cent respectively.

Given this mix, which represents some of the biggest emerging global markets, the dominance of literary fiction

as the ‘best chance of publication’ for a BAME author was called into question by a number of respondents to the survey, they said they were now looking to overseas publication as UK publishers who buy, with the exception of North America, global English language rights – seem uninterested in anything that doesn’t have an obvious appeal to the UK mass-market.

‘My picture of India was authentic – if unfamiliar – and I presented a set of contexts which were other than British Raj/working class British Asian/high maharajah meets governess genres, nor did I write a Hundred Foot Journey or Marigold Hotel type of book,’ said one respondent. After rejections in the UK, she published the book in India. ‘It was published without changes and has done well’ the author added. Despite the changing context for publication, there was general pessimism among BAME novelists that the industry would change. In fact, there was a sense of weariness among the most established novelists that they still struggled to challenge stereotypes. The only way to change is to challenge the privileged position of those who run the industry, was the general consensus. ‘My perception of the publishing industry is that it is awash with White middle class men at board level, many of whom see no anomaly in this or realise that it doesn’t reflect society as a whole. It’s simply ‘their turf’,’ one bestselling respondent wrote. Another wrote; ‘Personally, I don’t have much faith that things will change top-down; things will change by the grass roots, by people doing stuff themselves.’ Whether the industry can smash this stereotype remains to be seen.

** Names and identifying details have been removed to protect the identity of respondents. Ethnic classifications were based on those used by the Office for National Statistics 2011.*



Spotlight

Layla and the Axe

by Stephanie Victoire

This extract from 'Layla and the Axe' features in 'And the Other World, It Whispers', a collection of fairy and folk tales for adults that weave together old storytelling traditions with modern themes.

Layla trudges through the grass across the meadow towards the forest, with Rowan by her side and the axe weighing heavy in her hands. 'He won't get me; he won't get me,' she mutters to herself over and over like a chant, she swats away a fly without looking at it. The height of summer buzzes all around her in the stiff heat that renders birds, bees and butterflies restless. Rowan trots along, his brush hanging low behind him, his thin legs keeping up with his friend. The axe that Layla carries is not clean and isn't new; it has cracked its way through logs before now and it has threatened a wife who didn't know how to stop her mouth. It has sat in the corner by the hearth watching a chubby white cat writhe on the fraying rug and young, excitable girls spill tea on the sofa. It has seen snow being stamped off of heavy boots and a mother sob hearty tears when the rest of the house was sleeping. And now this axe might very well be a hero.

Layla has a small bruise forming on her knee from where she buckled over the locked gate and landed awkwardly and hard onto the gravel before the thick pale greens and dry yellows of the meadow's floor began. She had brushed herself down and waited for Rowan to squeeze through

the gap, tucking his body in and making himself flat. His ears warn Layla of sounds she has yet to hear. One of them was scraped and scabby when she first found him. 'You're my fox now aren't you?' She'd said softly, dabbing hot lavender water over it with a flannel, the fragrant steam rising from the bowl and dampening her skin. Rowan, who was just called 'Fox' then, was shaking and contemplating whether he should stay for this girl or bolt through the kitchen door and back through the hole in the garden where he came from. 'You're my fox now, you chose me.' Layla was prepared for the telling off she knew she was in for when Pa got home.

'Get that thing out of here; do you know what diseases they carry?' Pa yelled when he came into the kitchen and saw the woodland animal shifting nervously in Layla's embrace. Pa was tall and broad – a giant even, but Layla knew that even the smallest of creatures could stand up to a giant.

STEPHANIE VICTOIRE was born in London to a Mauritian family and has been writing since she was a child. She has recently been published in the American literary magazine, *Pilcrow & Dagger*. She is currently working on a collection of fairy and folk tales for adults.

Plus ça change

A sense that the trade was opening up to Black and Asian novelists seems to have reversed in recent years, according to in-depth interviews of 60 published BAME novelists by Danuta Kean.

A decade ago, for the first time in her career, Malorie Blackman stopped feeling lonely. 'For the first few years of being published I was always the sole face of colour at any publishing event I went to,' the bestselling author of Young Adult (YA) fiction and Children's Laureate recalls. 'About 10 years ago that changed and there were a number of faces of colour at various events. It was wonderful. Progress was finally being made I felt.'

But since then her optimism has faded. 'Over the last three or

says the author and broadcaster Bidisha of that period 10 years ago. A sudden upsurge of novelists like Courttia Newland, Zadie Smith, Bidisha and Monica Ali, all writing about contemporary multicultural Britain, was a false dawn, she believes. 'I think it was a trend just like there is now a trend for novels about terrorism or about how I did or didn't become a terrorist or Jihadi bride, or something to do with the veil and proving that women who wear veils are as lustful as anyone else.' She is only half joking.

According to Bidisha – and the majority of BAME authors I interviewed over the past year – one problem Black and Asian authors face if they confine themselves to reflecting White perceptions of their culture is that their topicality goes off the boil. As a result they are overlooked by the literary establishment. 'Instead of being an artist, you risk being seen as a commentator on your race, rather than a writer who had a wonderful idea that you wanted to explore formally in the format of a novel,' she adds. For this reason Keren David, who has a Jewish heritage, avoided alluding to her ethnicity in her first novels. 'I was very keen not to be pigeon-holed as a 'Jewish' writer,' the author of YA award-nominee *When I Was Joe* says. 'So for my first five books I avoided Jewish characters and themes.' Such an attitude to writers without a WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) heritage is absurd, contends Bernardine Evaristo. 'Sometimes people assume that if you write stories about people of colour that you must be writing about racism, which is ridiculous,' she comments robustly.

But the fact is that many BAME novelists do feel restricted by market expectations of their work. Comments one African Caribbean literary writer: 'There is a sense that if you are a Black writer, you should be writing about that – being Black. I have heard publishers say: 'She's Black, what is she doing' ►

'Sometimes people assume that if you write stories about people of colour that you must be writing about racism, which is ridiculous.'

four years, I seem to have gone back to being the sole face of colour at literary or publishing events,' she says. 'What happened?'

She may well ask. For judging by my in-depth interviews with some 60 British-based published Black and Asian authors, it is a question being asked by many other writers of colour. For while the publishing industry has continued to promote and benefit from recruitment initiatives aimed at improving in-house cultural diversity, these have failed to make a noticeable dent on either the make-up of senior management and literary agencies or on publishers' lists. BAME authors feel this is putting them at a disadvantage.

Pigeon-holed

'Non-White authors are given one chance to succeed and in every generation two or three are allowed to come forward,'

writing about Australia?’ In part, she concedes this reflects a risk-averse culture in publishing that focuses on the most obvious aspects of an author’s life for marketing and publicity. ‘There is a sense that there is now a certain book that they want from you,’ adds the author who has been in print for 20 years. ‘So no, it hasn’t changed. That is what was happening before when they were scrambling around for the next Walter Moseley or Joy Luck Club.’

It could be said that BAME authors are just falling victim to the same marketing pressures as White authors/publishers, driven by the demands of major retailers, who are under pressure to focus on obvious markets rather than anything more nuanced. It’s why their hearts sink when a bestselling genre writer delivers their literary opus for their next book. But the focus on ethnicity rather than anything more universal makes authors feel alienated from a trade they support and more importantly, in danger of limiting their market.

BAME authors are not convinced evidence exists for a market that separates Black and Asian readers from White ones, or that White readers only wish to read their interpretation of the ‘race issue’. ‘There is an orthodoxy whereby the presumed reader is totally mono-cultural, White middle England,’ says Aminatta Forna. ‘We know from looking at census data that this is a very out-dated view. I think sometimes a paradigm gets created and everyone starts to subscribe to it.’

How this affects writers of colour is that any universality in their work is trumped by a supposed ‘exoticism’. ‘Colonialism is the lens through which they want to look at Africa and Asia, because it is all about them (White publishers and literary critics). It is not about us,’ is the bitter commentary of one well-known name who asked to be kept anonymous. Writers at all stages in their career felt an expectation by the trade to reflect assumptions about race and colonialism – whether

somehow because of my race and that I ‘should’ write about race, exoticism, immigrant stories.’ Such is the frustration among some authors that they are choosing to publish in the US or Indian sub-continent where they feel they are under less pressure to conform to stereotypes (see Digital or be damned page 17).

Authenticity

Nowhere was any perceived limitation resented more than in the use of the word ‘authentic’. ‘Authenticity’ is used as an excuse to deny opportunities for people outside the cliché,’ one respected literary name with an African heritage says. He adds the use of the word turns Black and Asian writers into totems for their communities, which emphasises the sense that they are outsiders to a White literary culture. ‘Many of us simply wish to tell stories rather than represent our entire race,’ the author adds.

For many BAME novelists the word ‘authentic’ is interchangeable with ‘exotic’ and is equally resented because it seems to emphasise difference rather than universality. ‘If an unusual novel about minorities is an exposé of weird rituals or traditions, it creates a special appeal: see also, female infanticide, holy men molesting children, forced marriages, honour killings and so on. Add to that a thriller element and you stand a much better chance of publication,’ one established Indian author says. ‘If you have that, then your ethnicity becomes a license of ‘authenticity’ and fair comment.’

Perhaps the most insidious use of the word is when it is used to attack a BAME author’s right to write about their community. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the reception of Gautam Malkani’s *Londonstani*. The comic novel was acquired with much brouhaha by Fourth Estate, and though Malkani says he could have coped with bad reviews,

he was stung by the personal nature of some. ‘I’d open newspapers and I would actually hope for bad reviews of the book, because at least they’d be reviews of the book rather than a take-down of my publisher for being suckered by a ‘brown phony’ author who was too middle-class and too educated to meet the literary editor’s criteria for being authentically Asian,’ he recalls.

Although Malkani could have pulled the ‘right credentials’ for his background – he may have gone to Cambridge but he was from a working class London family that struggled to get him there – he didn’t. And why should he? As he says – ‘It

‘Thomas Harris never had to prove he was an authentic cannibal serial killer.’

the tension of the ghetto or the fragrance of the mango grove. An ex-creative writing student sums up the feeling: ‘Maybe America is a slightly more liberal place towards the arts - there are writers there who are not White who don’t ‘have’ to write about their race – but, I feel I’m supposed to be placed

was fiction for fuck's sake – Thomas Harris never had to prove he was an authentic cannibal serial killer.'

Defining cultures within narrow preconceptions misses the nuance in any culture, it also encourages a sense that a Black or Asian person is somehow 'Other' to a White person.

Unconscious it may be, but such attitudes are prejudiced and would (BAME authors feel), be spotted earlier if there were more Black and Asian people not only working as editors in publishing, but as literary critics and editors.

Cultural displacement

Bambo Soyinka, head of Creative Writing at Bath Spa University, believes the disconnect between BAME authors' experiences and the overwhelmingly White publishing industry is not conscious. 'I haven't met many villains out there who are deliberately trying to impede the progress of Black writers,' she says. 'To the contrary, I have encountered numerous generous White authors and publishers who go out of their way to support Black writers. But there are real obstacles for writers of colour, indeed for any writer seeking to express the world in their own terms.'

The problem, she believes, is the narrow literary criteria by which Black and Asian writers can find themselves judged. 'The problem begins with ingrained ideas about taste and literary standards. A narrow view of literary quality can have a negative impact on any writer who draws from different cultural influences or who strives to produce original text and new ways of seeing.' She has a point. More than one literary agent who replied to the publishing survey discussed elsewhere in this report, described 'language' as a 'challenge' to sourcing more BAME clients. It was felt that this could be addressed if publishers and critics were more familiar with the Commonwealth literary heritage upon which many BAME writers draw.

This comparatively parochial attitude to the literary canon was seen by novelists interviewed for this report as a symptom of the relative mono-culture operating in British publishing. The numbers drawn from the English upper middle classes is hugely disproportionate to the rest of society. 'Even my editor

'If all the gatekeepers have a certain way of looking at things and they are all of a certain type, it's very hard. If you are a Black person allowed in and are from a lower middle class background, you have to know how to negotiate the class system as well and that is possibly harder than anything because it is really invisible and entrenched.'

was astonished at the level of independent wealth when he started working in publishing,' one well-known literary name says. 'This really is a posh boys' and girls' job.'

Does it matter? Yes, according to another famous name who asked to be kept anonymous. 'If all the gate keepers have a certain way of looking at things and they are all of a certain type, it's very hard,' she says. It is less about ethnicity and more about class. 'if you are a Black person allowed in and are from a lower middle class background, you then have to know how to negotiate the class system as well and that is possibly harder than anything because that is really invisible and entrenched. It's so subtle that you can't even rally round it to change it. I have been constantly surprised at how difficult it is to change these things.'

The class divide was cited by the majority of BAME authors I spoke to for this piece as a reason why many continue to feel like outsiders despite successful careers. 'I am a working class girl and had to understand how the middle class work,' says Andrea Levy of the monolithic class structure in much of UK publishing. For Diana Evans, this is yet another reason why publishers need to diversify their recruitment if Black and Asian writers are to stand more chance of publication: 'There is a dire need for many more BAME editors, agents and editorial assistants in the UK publishing industry. This, I think, is crucial in trying to get more Black and Asian authors published.'

But these are the ones who broke through. A startling result of the survey was the disproportionate number of BAME writers to White writers who did not have an agent when they set out. Given the importance of who you know and not what you know in publishing, the reliance on Oxbridge for recruitment, discriminates against unpublished BAME



authors who are less well represented in those institutions and therefore less likely to network with those who may help with their career.

The presence in the trade of more senior professionals from a BAME background should also mean that the appalling experience of one Black African writer of commercial women's fiction is not replicated: at a photoshoot for other writers in her genre, a fellow author turned to her and demanded a cup of tea. 'She clearly thought that as I was the only Black person in the room, I must be a waitress.' She is not the only BAME author to report that kind of treatment. Such attitudes need to be exposed, says Bidisha. 'We shouldn't hedge around the word 'racism'. Everyone knows that we live in a world where there are all different sizes, shapes, sexes and races; so to know that theoretically – and still on sight, mistake a non-White person for being an assistant or a low-level employee is just racist. We shouldn't let people who do that off the hook.'

Contemporary world

Bidisha's comment is a reminder of how out of touch such attitudes are with wider society. They are also a reminder of the market in which publishers now operate and why many Black and Asian novelists started writing in the first place. 'I only started writing fiction because, growing up as a voracious reader, I noticed that all the characters in all the books I read were Lily-White,' one Black Caribbean novelist tells me. 'I wanted to read about people who not only looked like people around me, but thought and felt in similar ways.'

The sense that Black and Asian people have been largely invisible in fiction remains strong, even among writers of colour. One reason authors spoken to for this survey are keen

to break down the barriers around what BAME writers feel and is expected of them, is that society is not mono-cultural. A novel set in contemporary London with no main Black or Asian characters is simply inauthentic, as one YA interviewee notes: 'Too many books are still humungously White. I read book after book with not a single non-white character of any import; at the most, there might be a Jamaican neighbour, a Black teacher, an Indian doctor, but never a major character.' She puts it down to fear among White authors that they could be labelled racist if they get their characterisation wrong. 'I think White authors need to be more courageous,' she adds. 'They must surely know that this is not today's Britain. The book doesn't have to be about the 'issues' of race and ethnicity. Just make the characters real.'

For Andrea Levy it isn't just about contemporary fiction. She believes it is important to remind us all, that British heritage is mixed and not mono-cultural – whatever certain politicians may claim. 'This country is not as we have perceived ourselves to be, a sort of White homogenous place that got invaded recently,' she explains. 'That wasn't how it worked. There are a lot of political issues that stop people looking at who we are, so you get someone like Nigel Farage who wants to hark back to some kind of Little England before all these foreigners came, but that is a place that never existed.'

** Names have been left out at the request of the interviewees.
(Additional research by Mel Larsen)*

- **Recruitment:** *more diversity at senior editorial and marketing levels within publishing and literary circles should help challenge narrow stereotypes of BAME culture.*
- **Awareness:** *publishers and literary critics need to be made aware of cultural bias and how they may be judging the writer rather than their work for pre-conceived ideas of Blackness or Asian-ness.*
- **Authenticity:** *rather than a pejorative to condemn writers, all writers – White and BAME – specifically writing about contemporary society, should consider how authentic is their portrayal if there are no main Black or Asian characters in it.*
- **Dialogue:** *the trade needs to talk to BAME authors about preconceptions of what is universal and assumptions about cultures that lack nuance.*

Digital or be damned??

With so many challenges on the path to publication, Mel Larsen looks at alternative routes for BAME writers.

Self-published books in the UK account for just five per cent of the market with the fastest growing genres being thrillers and fantasy. But some say this is just the start of a rapidly climbing curve. In the US, 33 per cent of paid for e-book sales on Amazon.com are indie, self-published e-books and last year, indie e-book authors there overtook the earnings of e-books by the majors. In the UK, Price Waterhouse Coopers has somewhat controversially predicted that e-book sales will overtake printed sales within the next three years.

Certainly from a customer point of view, the digital revolution has made it easier for readers to find exactly what they are looking for; a boon for readers searching for the BAME penned titles they can't find elsewhere. Speaking in *Beige* magazine, Rebecca Idris, winner of a 2013 Polari First Book Prize for her self-published 'gaysian'

novel *The Sitar*, said: 'For niche books like mine, about sub-cultures, it's perfect because anybody who's reading around your book's subject just needs to type in a few keywords and they'll get it immediately, so your audience is perfectly targeted.'

Digital self-promotion can lead to offers: 24 year old, London-based Taran Matharu, attracted a book deal reaching 11 countries after gaining millions of readers for his first novel posted in excerpts on Wattpad.

However, it has been estimated by the Alliance of Independent Authors that it can cost as much as £2,500 to £5,000 to self-publish and I was warned by one university tutor that self-publishing is not the easy route it can be made out to be. 'The rise of self-publishing will enable those who traditionally have not been published to get access (...) but, it has got its own set of difficulties. The gatekeepers are not there in the same way but it's very tough – you have to be an editor, publisher and marketer not just a writer.'

Diversify or die

Former director of decibel Samenua Seshar says book publishers are still out of touch with a market that glories in diversity.

Ten years ago I spent five years on the front line of ethnicity and the arts as the director of Arts Council England's decibel programme. It is a messy battlefield full of acrimonious frustration and bewilderment, with intelligent pacifists wandering around confused to find themselves at war and White, middle class liberals crying 'Who me? – I don't have a racist bone in my body, I just champion great art.'

Battle worn, I left that fight and fled to the coast where I now go to sleep listening to sea gulls. But there is no escape and in recent years I have watched in despair as our few hard fought gains disappear. Still, I had to think twice about even writing this article; let alone returning to the frontline to deliver a large complex research project as I have done with the Museum of Colour, which is focused on the creative journeys of British people of colour. But I love books. I am passionate about stories and believe that the creative industries are important because they are the most powerful of the soft powers and shape how we think about the world.

African women (my demographic) who do well educationally and professionally and are documented as 'avid readers', have not made it into commercial women's fiction? Does the industry not imagine we may have complicated love lives? Or does the industry simply not want our money? Pennies began to drop, although clearly not enough. As here we are, a decade later asking the publishing industry variations on the same old question: why are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people underrepresented in both fiction and the UK publishing workforce?

So what has happened in the interim? To be fair a great deal. A small thing called a recession, a big thing called Amazon and a rear guard action of consolidation. Nobody is at his or her best when in defensive mode, much less a sector that has historically been resistant to any kind of change. So is it surprising that the publishing industry may have taken its eye off the diversity ball? Of course not, but that doesn't mean we should settle for the old saw that 'these things take time'.

'So now advertisers recognise; we eat, drink, furnish our homes, use phones and wash our clothes, they are scrambling for a share of our estimated £300bn in disposable income (...); but where are the publishers who recognise that we read too?'

At decibel, I experienced real clarity when I delivered a speech to the Booksellers Association. I was commenting on something that mystified me. Why

myself looking at labels for unfamiliar products written in Polish! This small-town Sainsbury's is not giving precious shelf space to these goods as a gesture of

This was the view I took until one day, earlier this year when I walked into my local Sainsbury's on autopilot, headed to the aisle for gluten free crisp bread, but instead of seeing an assortment of free-from goods, I found

community cohesion or goodwill; these goods sell.

That evening I watched a commercial for fitted bedrooms featuring an African couple. Not a mixed couple, but both of African heritage. This followed hot on the heels of a BAME family in a mobile phone ad. In short, ethnic groups pop up in television advertising because businesses understand that minority ethnic communities represent a youthful and fast growing demographic. Rising from eight per cent in the 2001 Census to 14 per cent in 2011; and projected to rise to 30 per cent by 2050 (source: University of Oxford Migration Observatory 2013).

So now advertisers recognise; we eat, drink, furnish our homes, use phones and wash our clothes, they are scrambling for a share of our estimated £300bn in disposable income (source: IPA 2014). Where are the publishers who recognise that we read too? And more importantly, does it matter to existing readers?

Yes it does, but not for the reasons you may think. Assumptions that White readers won't relate to stories about non-White characters not concerned with race, nationality or colonialism were proved wrong by decibel with the help of The Times. A multi-ethnic group of authors agreed to write separate segments of a story structured by the author Kate Mosse. Readers of the newspaper were challenged to match authors to segments. We danced around the office when a David Baddiel fan, who swore she would know his work anywhere, proudly held up what she believed was his contribution. It was actually written by Alex Wheatle.

At an event at the Cheltenham Literary Festival in support of the publication, many in the audience expressed frustration

at the gatekeepers. Indeed, at lunch an elderly gentleman regaled me with his experience of asking for the Black books section in his local book shop. An incredulous assistant told him: 'This is Cheltenham.' When he then asked if the assistant could recommend some contemporary BAME writers, the assistant could not.

Fiction with origins from a diverse community drives

'Fiction with origins from a diverse community drives understanding and wider cohesion within society. However, it is in danger of being undermined because of the homogeneity of the publishing workforce; a workforce that can be unaware of how their own cultural bias affects what makes it into print.'

understanding and wider cohesion within society. However, it is in danger of being undermined because of the homogeneity of the publishing workforce; a workforce that can be unaware of how their own cultural bias affects what makes it into print.

With this in mind, I developed diversity training based on the most effective work the decibel programme did with senior management teams. The feedback was that having a safe space in which to acknowledge one's own prejudices and explore how it affected decision-making was liberating. I believe this is because we are all prejudiced and when the stigma and fear of emotive labels are removed, we are able to explore how they operate in our workplace and can then deal with them. This is the field of unconscious bias (<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/employment-and-careers/staff-recruitment/unconscious-bias/>), which underlies our



assumptions and affects the life chances of people who do not reflect our own background or values.

The reason that diversifying the workforce is important to the bottom line is because unconscious bias is as hard to change as any other ingrained habit. So to ensure your business is not missing crucial markets by having mono-cultural attitudes, you need to mix it up. There is a growing body of evidence that makes this point far more eloquently. The British Social Attitudes survey 2014 reported that nearly a third of people in Britain admit being racially prejudiced, which returns prejudice to the levels of 30 years ago. That is just of those who admit it – statistics don't include the coded bigotry that enabled Sky News to misrepresent the Children's Laureate Malorie Blackman when she spoke about the need for more diverse characters in children's books. Her plea was misrepresented in a headline that read 'Children's books have 'too many White faces''.

The years are rolling back for race relations, but each time something like this happens I am heartened by the sizeable backlash that occurs. Malorie's many fans took to social media to take on racist trolls and let her know they agreed: children's books should reflect the world in which they are published. The rush to the lowest, easiest attention grab that now defines much of mainstream media does not help. It is also why an organisation like Media Diversified is so important. This non-profit organisation seeks to cultivate and promote writers of colour through its online platform (<http://mediadiversified.org>) and by providing advice and contacts.

It is doing beautiful work challenging crude stereotypes and casual racism within the media and fashion industries. It is a good place to start for publishers who claim they can't find any BAME writers of commercial women's fiction through the traditional routes.

Ten years on from decibel, what would I say to book publishers? Well, I tried the business case then and the statistics didn't seem to convince the trade. So, those of you involved in publishing books now, I am going to remind you that the words you publish feed our souls, so it's time to embrace the glorious hybridity of difference that makes us Brits the creative overachievers that we are. Don't suck in our colour but spit out our creativity, there's a word for that and it's not nice. Thankfully it is no longer my job to try and convince you that ethnic diversity matters. My optimistic heart says you will try, but my now cynical head says you will fail. Prove my head wrong and just do it!

SAMENUA SESHER is a writer, coach and arts management consultant. She is currently working with Queen Mary University of London to build a Museum of Colour. For more information on MoC email her at Samenua.sesher@peoplespalace.org.uk or follow her at @merisesher.

Could do better

UK publishing is overwhelmingly White and middle class and that affects Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic novelists' chance of publication. Danuta Kean analyses the results of surveys undertaken for Writing the Future.

It is a fact the book trade agrees upon: British publishing is not diverse in either what it publishes or whom it employs. In a snapshot survey of 66 publishers and 49 literary agents undertaken for Writing the Future at the end of 2014: 56 per cent regarded the industry as 'not diverse at all', while 29 per cent regarded it as only 'a little diverse'. Only six per cent regarded it as 'very diverse'.

Literary agents were even more critical: none regarded it as either 'moderately diverse' or 'very culturally diverse', while a staggering 97 per cent regarded it as 'a little diverse' or 'not diverse at all'.

To underline the impact that the absence of significant numbers of BAME people within publishing has upon BAME authors' prospects, one agent wrote: 'I recently

'I recently had feedback on a memoir by a Black author where several editors asked me – 'Do enough Black people buy books?' I was gobsmacked. The title didn't sell to a publisher.'

had feedback on a memoir by a Black author where several editors asked me – 'Do enough Black people buy books?' I was gobsmacked. The title didn't sell to a publisher.'

A homogenised industry

The sense that UK publishing is not diverse is surprising, because a sizeable group of respondents (38 per cent) were from companies employing 100 or more staff. These are among the companies with links to Creative Access, which provides paid internships in the media for young people from a BAME background. Despite this commitment, 74 per cent of those employed by large houses regarded the industry as either only 'a little diverse' or 'not diverse at all', which suggests that efforts being made at entry-level, are failing to filter through to the wider trade. Again this was underlined by the statistics, which showed that 50 per cent of respondents from companies employing 100 or more staff regarded their employer as 'not diverse at all' and only 33 per cent regarded their company as either 'a little diverse' or 'moderately diverse'.

Among small publishers, especially the 34 per cent of respondents employing less than 20 staff, the figures for diversity were divided almost equally. 24 per cent said their company was 'not culturally diverse', while the same percentage regarded their employer as only 'a little diverse'. Of the remaining respondents from small houses, 18 per cent said their company was 'very diverse'.

The data suggests that the experience of staff within a company was reflected in their opinion of diversity within the wider industry. Within literary agencies, diversity among clients varied enormously and again



the size of the agency, was not always an indicator of greater diversity. Of the responses from large agencies with 10 or more agents, one agency said it had over 50 BAME clients, while another estimated to have only three per cent from a BAME background. Agencies with two to six agents, appeared to have the most diverse lists, with the average number of BAME clients at four. Although this hid a huge disparity: one medium-sized agency had no BAME clients, one had only five per cent and another had 10 non-White clients. All those with low numbers of BAME clients regarded this as an issue – one agent replied ‘not enough’ to the question of how many minority ethnic writers they had on their list.

finding clients). Again, this means that those novelists able to finance a creative writing degree, will be better placed to meet literary agents whom they may approach at a later date with a finished manuscript.

When it comes to employment within publishing and literary agencies, the data showed this to be a very highly qualified workforce. Eighty per cent of those working within it hold a post-graduate diploma, higher degree or industry-specific accredited qualification, such as post-graduate diploma in proofreading. With post-graduate university fees at £9,000 a year and entry-level salaries in publishing very low, accumulated student debt may mean those from a more diverse

ethnic or social background do not consider publishing as a viable career.

The heavy reliance upon unpaid internships as a route to entry for publishing hopefuls, could have a limiting effect on the aspirations

‘It should be a matter of concern to the industry that a primary route into the business poses a significant barrier to those outside the affluent professional classes and explains why the industry remains dominated by White, public school educated, ‘Oxbridge’ graduates, even though this group represent a tiny fragment of the overall UK population.’

Privilege or prejudice?

Low numbers of clients and agents from a BAME background may be having a knock on effect upon agencies’ ability to find BAME novelists to represent. Although 61 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that ‘unsolicited manuscripts are a significant source of new clients’, personal contacts and recommendations were more important. Eighty-nine per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they were a ‘significant source of new clients’.

For those writers who seek entry to the literary loop, university creative writing courses proved a significant source of clients for 40 per cent of respondents from agencies. However, non-university courses, such as those run by Arvon, which has a significant commitment to diversity, and Masterclasses such as those run by the Guardian and Faber Academy, were only regarded as significant by 19 per cent (of which only two per cent strongly agreed with the value of these courses for

of those without private or familial support to fund working unwaged in London, the hub of UK publishing. In a survey sent to members of the Society of Young Publishers (SYP) undertaken for this report, 19 per cent of respondents achieved their first job in publishing through an unpaid internship and the same percentage through paid internships. A further 13 per cent achieved their first job through a personal contact, such as a family member or friend.

Again, this suggests that a primary problem for BAME graduates seeking employment in publishing is access to personal publishing contacts as well as paid internships. With some of the SYP members who responded to the survey working as many as nine unpaid internships before they secured paid employment. It should be a matter of concern to the industry that a primary route into the business poses a significant barrier to those outside the affluent

professional classes and explains why the industry remains dominated by White, public school educated, 'Oxbridge' graduates, even though this group represent a tiny fragment of the overall UK population. Only seven per cent of the UK population attended public schools and less than one per cent attended Oxbridge (source: Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission 2014). A report in 2010 by the Race for Opportunity Campaign found that only 11.1 per cent of Oxford students and 10.5 per cent of Cambridge students have a BAME background.

Industry initiatives

Publishers and some literary agents appear mindful of this issue and are trying to make their recruitment of workers and clients less exclusive. A significant proportion of agencies, 55 per cent who responded to the survey, said they had introduced paid internships to improve diversity and although only one had signed up to the Equip Charter, this number should improve as the Association of Authors Agents joined the scheme in late January this year.

Among publishers, there were a higher percentage, who had joined Equip, 16 per cent, but only 32 per cent used paid internships to improve diversity at entry-level. There is some attempt to widen awareness of publishing as a career, but only 11 per cent of respondents had ties with non-Oxbridge universities or developed educational programmes for state schools. Again, all the effort is focused on entry-level recruitment. Virtually no respondents did cultural awareness training in-house, or audited their business for cultural bias that may hamper the prospects of BAME employees or authors.

When it comes to BAME people who work in publishing: the departments most likely to employ them are editorial (35 per cent), finance (35 per cent) and social media/online (26 per cent). A point of concern should be the lack of BAME people within human resources departments. Only four per cent of respondents said

they had a minority ethnic member of staff within this department. This lack of representation has an impact on the publishing prospects of BAME novelists and appears to be an opinion shared by some of those who responded to the survey.

In response to the question 'What is the most difficult challenge you face in improving the cultural diversity of your publishing list?' One publisher wrote 'having HR,

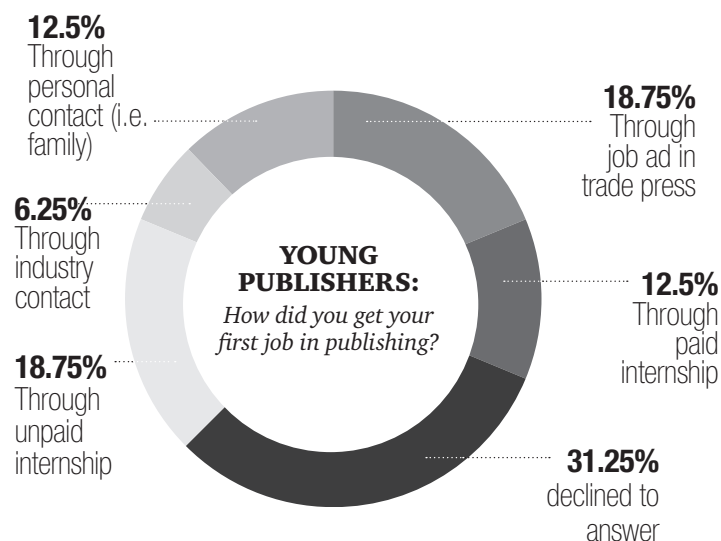
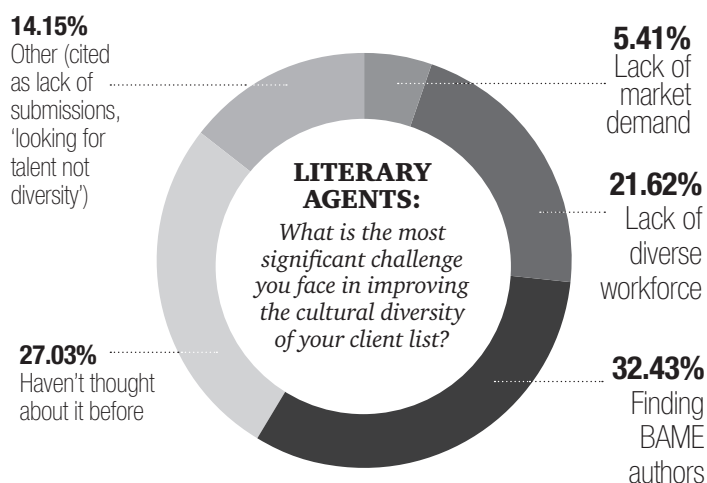
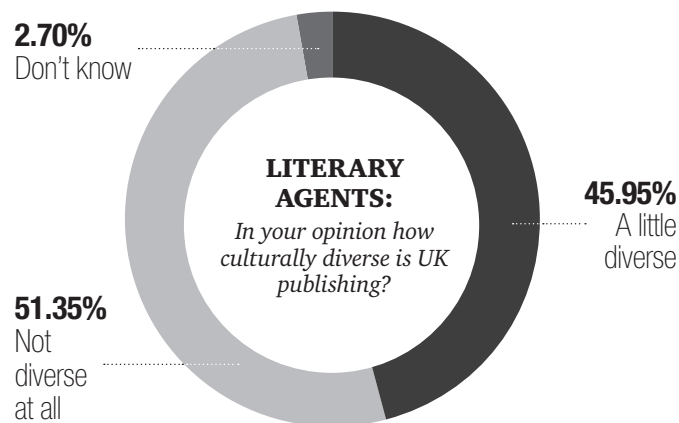
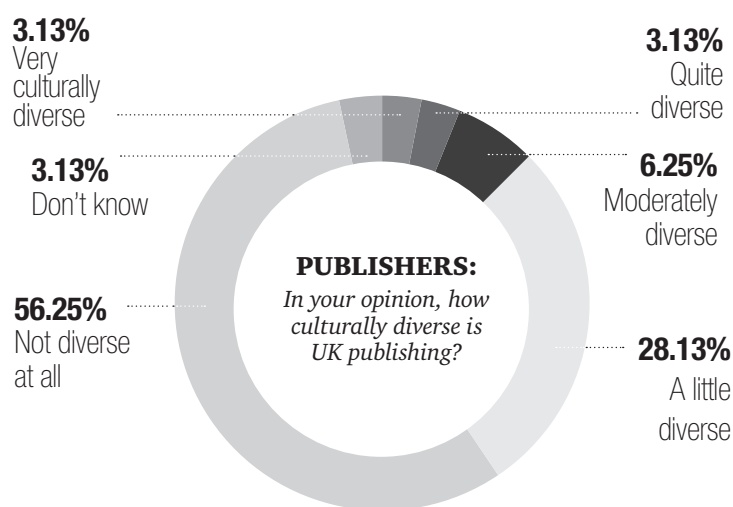
'It is unhealthy that British general trade publishing remains relatively focused on what is essentially a UK-based, relatively mono-cultural, mass market and it should be developing the obvious potential of the world English-language market far more.'

but especially the decision makers in the organisation, wake up to why this is important'.

Despite the 'overwhelming Whiteness' of the industry, as one respondent described it, this is an industry open to ideas of how to change. One agent wrote in the comments box: 'I'd love to be approached by or meet more BAME authors – I'm embarrassed by the Whiteness of my list.' It isn't just about reflecting the liberal values espoused by most in the trade, as one respondent explained; it's about UK publishing operating more effectively on a global stage. This respondent wrote; 'It is unhealthy that British general trade publishing remains relatively focused on what is essentially a UK-based, relatively mono-cultural, mass market and it should be developing the obvious potential of the world English-language market far more, for which (excluding North America), it typically acquires publishing rights.'

** Names and some details have been omitted from quotes to maintain the anonymity of respondents. Ethnicity classifications are based on those used by the National Statistical Office Census 2011.*

Publishers survey results



The Handsworth Times

by Sharon Duggal

The Handsworth Times is a novel about a working class British Asian family in inner city Birmingham, set around the time of social unrest in the early 1980s. The family are reacting to the death of Billy, the youngest member of the family. The novel plots how individual members come to terms with this tragedy.

Police officers are everywhere; more than either Kuldip or Surjeet have ever seen in England before. The officers stand in shirtsleeves, a zebra line of black and white. They form a barricade across the top of the high street where Villa Road meets Lozells Road, all the way from the Acapulco Café across to Mr. Lovejohn's cage-fronted optometrists on the corner of Barker Street.

'Lozells is getting brok down', a voice in the crowd sighs.

'It 'as halways been brok down', says another, and others in the crowd nod and suck teeth in agreement.

Lozells has long been a broken place. The Lozells Road runs through the heart of it and this is the most broken place of all. Cracks in shop windows are taped over with silver gaffer and creased brown packaging tape. Already, even before this night, many shop windows are boarded over, daubed with the words 'Business as Usual' in jagged spray paint lettering. Uneven pavements along the Lozells Road bear witness to the nocturnal lives of the drunks and the homeless who sleep in burnt out cars or in the entrances and doorways which stink of urine and damp clothes, rotten with mildew. Empty bottles of cheap vodka lay discarded next to wrappers of burgers made with cheap meat, acquired by the takeaway owners from the back of a lorry on Rookery Road. At night rancid half-eaten burgers are recovered from filthy bins and devoured by tramps full of bitter expectation after hours of hanging around late night fried chicken joints and kebab houses. Any rare shoppers with money in their pockets walk hurriedly down the Lozells Road towards bus stops to the livelier Soho Road and on towards the city centre. But there is another side to Lozells Road – the heart-thumping, roots reggae music that escapes from open windows and doorways all the way down it, bringing it to life. Music is the

blood pumping through its arteries - deep chuga, chuga bass beats and low mournful voices keeping the heart beating:

My way is long, but the road is foggy,

My way is long so long, but the road is foggy, foggy

My head never swell, my heart never leap

I never have no fear from within

Even though the road is so foggy, foggy yeah

Velvety smooth words drift out and mingle with the high-pitched birdsong of Indian playback singers and the grating, tinny rattles of Radio 1 on transistor radios. Combined, the sounds waft discordantly around a soup of smells which permeate the air: over ripe plantain from Jimbo's Caribbean Market, fragrant coriander, aromatic curry leaves, fresh, cool mint, stale cooking oil and the overwhelming stench of sickly-sweet goat carcasses hanging by their necks on giant butcher's hooks above the blood-stained counter of Taj & Co. Next door to the butchers, Ashoka's Textile House is a vivid rainbow of Technicolor silks and cottons folded over wire hangers attached to a neon blue nylon washing line nailed to a sun-bleached canopy. The bright fabrics sway in the breeze, soaking up the surrounding odours. The Lozells Road spills over with colour and noise. Tonight the sounds and smells are different.

SHARON DUGGAL started writing seriously after being a runner-up in the Decibel Penguin Prize in 2006. She has an MPhil in Creative Writing from Sussex University and is juggling writing her first novel with raising three children and a career in the arts.

No more boom and bust

Publishing needs to take ownership of diversity from the boardroom down if it is to have a lasting effect, says Danuta Kean.

At the end of a gruelling interview for an entry level job in editorial a young graduate, let's call her Alia, was taken to one side by her interviewer, a senior publisher. Alia hadn't got the job – she had come close, but despite two years of working as an unpaid intern around the industry, she had been pipped at the post. The publisher was full of apologies, but had some advice for her, which she hoped Alia 'wouldn't take the wrong way'. 'If you don't mind me saying', she said! 'if you want to get on in publishing, you need to lose your London accent.'

It is a story that will shock many in a trade that values its liberal metropolitan credentials. But what is most shocking is that it happened five years ago, after *In Full Colour* (IFC), was published; a survey into cultural

increase the representation of Black and Asian people in the industry so that it was better equipped to reach the BAME market, which has an estimated purchasing power of £300bn (source: IPA/Clearcast 2012).

Good intentions

But something has gone wrong. A sign of how wrong, is that only a handful of those spoken to for this article agreed to speak on the record. Why? Because they feel sensitive that those efforts to recruit more widely have largely failed – a point conceded by the human resources directors in most major houses. They also admit, though their figures are unaudited, that the proportion of people from a BAME background working in most houses remains woefully short of the proportion of BAME people in the national populations – 14 per

cent. What is more disturbing is that most major UK publishers are based in London, where the BAME population is 40 per cent of the whole.

'The reason that these initiatives start up and then die again and again is that the issue of diversity is not taken up properly by those with strategic decision-making authority. They are paying lip service to the issue rather than bringing in effective change, because that could attack their privileged position.'

diversity in publishing that I edited. IFC shocked the trade into taking action and was aimed at making it more inclusive of people like Alia, a young Black Muslim. Initiatives launched included the Arts Council funded *decibel* paid internships and DIPNet, a networking organisation for BAME publishers set up by Elise Dillsworth and the late Alison Morrison. They also included commitments by leading publishing houses to

Alia believes the poor statistics within publishing are not to do with a much repeated and unsubstantiated myth that minority ethnic people 'don't read books' and therefore are not interested in a career in the industry. Instead she believes it is to do with the make-up of the workforce. To put it bluntly: UK publishing is just too White. 'I've been to events for Black and Asian people and there are readers who are hungry for books that

reflect their lives and yet they aren't finding them,' she says. 'Conversely, I have been to literary events and the only other Black person there is serving drinks.'

The impact of this lack of diversity is far greater than a few BAME employees feeling isolated: it affects Black and Asian authors, many of whom feel that the prevailing White, public school educated, Oxbridge culture of publishing influences editorial decisions about their work and how it is marketed to readers (see *Plus ça change* page 13). If what one BAME publishing insider tells me is anything to go by, publishers are keenly aware of the problem. 'There is a story about one well known Asian author,' she says. 'Every time she goes in to meet her publisher, the accounts person comes along, because there are no other Asian or Black people working there.'

To be fair to publishers, the good intentions about entry-level recruitment that followed my report were massively interrupted. When the global recession hit in 2008, it squeezed margins already under pressure from aggressive, new entrants to the trade and a digital revolution that challenged traditional revenue streams. In the period of consolidation that followed, one diversity initiative after another was knocked sideways. A handful remained intact, such as Penguin's Helen Fraser Fellowship; a paid internship aimed at developing BAME talent within editorial, but cultural awareness training and other initiatives that should have checked cultural bias within departments and organisations largely disappeared.

In 2012 Creative Access seemed to come to publishers' rescue. Supported by the UK Commission for Employment & Skills, Creative Skillset and the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, the organisation places BAME graduates in paid internships within the creative industries. Among the first to join the scheme was HarperCollins (HC), but others soon followed. Now publishers ranging in size from Hachette and Penguin Random House to Bloomsbury and Canongate and literary agencies such as Aitken Alexander and Curtis Brown have signed up.

The scheme has an excellent track record as a pipeline to permanent jobs for BAME graduates from outside the usual publishing gene pool. 'We've had 17 of their interns in the last 18 months. We love them,' the HR director of one publishing house beams. The HR director adds: 'Most are in place at the moment or have had their internships extended or been given a job. They did such a good job. They are hard working.

Passionate about what they do. We keep them and go back for more.'

A pull factor for Creative Access is that it co-funds the internships, on a 50:50 basis. 'That makes it very attractive,' says another senior publisher. A further factor in its favour is that interns are paid. Unpaid internships – which have become a dominant access route for those who wish to work in the trade – are regarded as a blight on the industry and severely impede diversity. 'I don't like unpaid internships. They prohibit people who don't live in London or who don't have parents to support them working in publishing,' says Ann Woodhall, HR director at Little, Brown Book Group.

Andrew Franklin, Profile founder and managing director, is more robust in his criticism: 'Unpaid internships are disgusting and should be banned.' Profile's commitment to diversity includes sponsoring a scholarship at City University, as well as paying all its internees the London Living Wage. As a result, the independent has an enviable record in recruiting BAME staff and White staff from a broader socio-economic background, though Franklin is not complacent. 'I'd like more, simple as that,' he says.

Not all publishers are like him. They don't put their money where their mouth is – or at least much money. There is concern that the funding structure of Creative Access internships, which is similar to that of the now defunct decibel, and co-funds placements with employers, could mean the longevity of the programme is uncertain. 'If ever Creative Access can't afford to fund the internships, I wonder how long publishers will remain committed,' one senior publisher comments, pointing to those paid internships that folded after decibel funding dried up.

This issue, raised in many of the interviews, was regarded as less to do with money and more to do with management buy-in. 'What we see time and again is a reaction to guilt privilege,' claims a mid-ranking manager at one of the large houses. When I ask what he means, he explains: 'The reason that these initiatives start up and then die again and again is that the issue of diversity is not taken up properly by those with strategic decision-making authority. They are paying lip service to the issue rather than bringing in effective change, because that could attack their privileged position.'

Gloves off

Any unwillingness to take on board the true implications of diversity at senior level forms a rift in understanding between well-intentioned senior management and BAME



staff frustrated at poor career advancement and a continued feeling of exclusion. It is a feeling even Black and Asian employees who have benefitted from paid internships understand. 'Everyone has been very nice, but you do look around and think you are the only one here who isn't like them,' one intern says. 'But they don't really get it, and sometimes they make you feel like you are a special case, as if you are only allowed in because you are Black or Asian and not for your skills. They don't realise how hard it was to get onto this scheme and how many people you had to compete against.'

At this point, it is worth returning to Alia. She eventually found her way into the trade – through a government funded paid internship – although it continued to feel as if the trade was determined to marginalise staff like her; not only Black, but neither Oxbridge nor middle class. The senior publisher's advice was not the only such encounter she has had in the past five years. 'I was asked once by an older publisher 'where did you get your exotic looks from?'' she recalls. 'I have also been asked about my 'colour'.' She laughs it off, but it hurts, because, she adds: 'These are people who should know better, but as an outsider you end up forever making them feel comfortable and forever managing their attitudes. There is so much energy wasted in making these people feel unthreatened.'

Valerie Brandes, founder of small independent publisher Jacaranda Books, says that the problem is that no one wants to confront the issues, for fear of making White publishers feel uncomfortable. This is because the White publishers are the ones with power: calling them out is not regarded as a smart career move.

Brandes benefitted from working at Profile and regards Andrew Franklin as one of those who 'gets' the issues that must be addressed to create greater diversity. 'When I came into publishing everyone said that the people are so 'nice', but there are also a lot of big issues that get skirted around because we are so committed to the niceness of everyone,' she says. 'These do need to be addressed on a real level.'

No BAME publishing people are saying that the industry is overtly racist. What they are saying is that there are institutional issues that need to be addressed

at all levels if the trade is to become truly inclusive and take its share of that £300bn spending power.

HarperCollins has decided to address this head-on through a diversity forum made up of 20 volunteers drawn from across the company, including senior management. John Athanasiou, director of people, explains: 'It's been driven by employees with the support of senior executives and covers everything from people issues to author content and diversity.' The committee is not just a talking shop. It is expected to come up with strategies that will address diversity not just in race, but gender, disability, sexuality and socio-economic background.

'Organisations that are involved in anything to do with diversity, sustainability or the environment have a bigger return on their investment to their shareholders than those who don't.'

For Athanasiou, the business argument for diversity is as sound as the ethical one. 'Organisations that are involved in anything to do with diversity, sustainability or the environment have a bigger return on their investment to their shareholders, employees and consumers than those who don't,' he explains. 'There is loads of research that shows that. The brand improves in multiple ways. It's win-win.'

For book publishers, he adds, it is also about recognising how the market has changed in the past decade. 'Ten years ago, many publishers would have been focused predominantly on English language markets, but now we have saturated those markets, so we have to focus on the foreign language markets,' he adds. 'So it makes business, moral and ethical sense. Why wouldn't you do it?'

Little, Brown Book Group's Ann Woodhall agrees. 'Diversity matters because it brings a broader perspective to the company,' she explains. 'If you end up with everyone the same then you are going to have a narrow view of how to operate and in a diverse society, you need a much broader range of people, experience and knowledge to reach it.'

Industry buy-in

It is not just senior management in individual businesses that need to buy into the need for the industry to better reflect the diversity of 21st century society. To be properly funded it needs buy-in from the whole trade and with that in mind, the Publishers Association (PA) and Independent Publishers Guild (IPG) last year launched the Publishing Industry Charter under the banner of Equip, a successor to DIPNet. The charter commits signatories 'to help promote equality across UK publishing, bookselling and agenting, by driving forward change and increasing access to opportunities within the industry.' In January, the Association of Authors Agents joined the PA and IPG and signed up to Equip.

Equip members pledge to promote equality across the board and to develop strategies, share best practice and promote corporate social responsibility that encourages inclusion and access within book publishing. It is behind industry initiatives aimed at getting publishing as a career into state schools as well as non-Russell Group universities and beyond English Language departments. It has taken its lead from a host of initiatives run by individual companies, such as the university outreach days launched successfully by Hachette, as well as mentoring schemes and equality training.

What it has not done however, is demand that each member of Equip undergo an audit with which to judge cultural bias and try to get to the root of why so few Black and Asian recruits stay in the industry. It is an essential requirement, says Rare Recruitment's Raphael Mokades, who headed diversity at Pearson and now works with FTSE 100 companies, if the trade is to avoid a repetition of the boom and bust cycle of initiatives we have seen over the last 20 years.

Such an audit would compare retention, promotion, pay rates and appraisal results of BAME staff to White staff from the same intake. If there is little variation between BAME and White staff, the employer can feel relatively confident that there is no institutional bias working to stop diversity. If there is a significant disparity, then the publisher will know that there is a problem, either in the BAME people it recruits or how they are managed. Such an audit, would also pick up on the attitudes that make a senior publisher think it is acceptable to take a Black job candidate to one side and say 'lose the accent if you want to work in publishing'.

** Names have been omitted to protect the anonymity of interviewees*

Key recommendations to improve diversity:

Industry-wide:

- *Equip members should agree to conduct an internal audit to address cultural bias and ensure that buy-in to diversity goes up throughout the organisation.*
- *Unpaid internships – as opposed to two-week work experience – should be banned as a route into the industry.*
- *The trade should work with state schools and non-Russell Group universities and outside of English Departments to promote the diversity of careers available in publishing.*
- *The trade should work with other media organisations, such as Channel 4, which have run successful schemes to improve diversity.*
- *The trade should forge links with organisations like the Social Mobility Foundation (<http://www.socialmobility.org.uk>) which helps employers widen their talent pool.*

Let's not forget

Too often the contribution of Black and Asian publishers to the UK book trade is forgotten. Jazzmine Breary argues it's time we all remembered.

Last year I was invited to talk at a school about my route into publishing. The next day I received a series of tweets from a young Muslim girl thanking me; telling me she was deeply interested in publishing, but had almost given up on the idea, because she didn't think there was any room in the trade for someone like her, and her parents were concerned she would feel ostracised. It made me think about what a difference it could make for young people like her to have even one role model to look up to, and how sad it was that she felt so excluded considering the significant impact Black and Asian publishing professionals have had on the UK trade.

In order to create a more diverse future for the British publishing industry, we must look back and recognise the pioneers from the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community who have made significant contributions not only to publishing in and for their own communities, but to the wider industry, so that young minority ethnic candidates will have role models with whom they can identify.

Margaret Busby is a wonderful case in point. A legend within the BAME publishing community, she co-founded the popular (and still thriving) independent publishing house Allison & Busby (alongside the late Clive Allison) in 1967, making her the UK's first Black woman publisher. Serving as editorial director for the firm for 20 years, she brought to a UK audience a host of major names, including CLR James, Buchi Emecheta, George Lamming and Michael Moorcock.

When in 2012 Tricia Wombell interviewed her for the Black Book News website, the veteran publisher said: 'It is important to document and celebrate the

achievements of many of our Black creatives (...) so that they do not get written out of history simply because their importance may not be recognised by the mainstream.' There is a long and rich history of publishing by Black and Asian people in the UK, yet their contribution remains barely recognised. As Busby also said in the interview: 'Much as I love reading good, 'Black books', I wish that I were also asked to review books outside of that perceived expertise, of being Black.

Busby's contribution to the publishing industry is not limited to Allison & Busby. Over the years she has championed diversity in publishing. She co-founded the GAP (Greater Access to Publishing) initiative with Jessica Huntley. Now, 50 years on from founding Allison & Busby, she shows no sign of losing her zeal and continues to promote and encourage new writing talent from the African and Caribbean community through involvement with prizes and initiatives such as: the Commonwealth Book Prize, the Caine Prize, the St Leeds Literary Prize and the Etisalat Prize.

Like Margaret Busby, Verna Wilkins has made a largely unrecognised, but no less significant contribution to UK publishing. The founder of the hugely successful multicultural children's publisher Tamarind Books (now part of Penguin Random House), she was driven by an intense concern at the lack of diversity in the books her children read at school. In fact, the catalyst to forming Tamarind Books came after her son returned from school with a project in which he had portrayed himself with pink skin rather than brown. Though, he said, he knew his skin was brown, he 'had to show it pink', so it would be correct in the book.

The result of Wilkins' affirmative action gave rise to a ground-breaking British publishing house that recognised the influence of literature on children's identity and put diversity at the forefront of children's publishing. At the launch of DIPnet, the diversity networking initiative in 2005, Wilkins challenged the audience to think by posing the question: 'If the images in a book exclude you, how does that exclude you from life?' Through the children's books she has published, some written by her, she has striven against the exclusion of ethnically diverse children from literature.

Yet, her contribution to this issue is poorly recognised by the industry – in 2014, Amy McCulloch wrote in *The Guardian*: 'Children from all backgrounds need literary heroes of all races and nationalities. They need characters that represent them and their friends on book covers.' The article gave a passionate call for more diversity in children's literature and was shared widely on social media receiving much praise. However, when I referenced Wilkins in a few of my own social media posts about the article, the recognition was abysmal. How could so many people who felt so strongly about it, be unaware of one of the British pioneers of diversity in children's publishing?

These women present just two examples in a long list of BAME professionals who have made, and continue to make, significant contributions to British publishing. Other names include John La Rose, Jessica and Eric Huntley, Arif Ali, Dotun Adebayo, Steve Pope, Rosemarie Hudson, Elise Dillsworth and the late Alison Morrison, co-founders of DIPnet (now known as Equip).

The biggest fallacy is to think that this problem only matters to the BAME community. But the importance of Black and Asian publishing pioneers is not limited to the great books they published, the careers they launched or the financial contribution they made to British publishing. Being outside mainstream publishing, they were forced to find new channels of distribution, production and sales, at a time when there was no Google search, no mobile phones and no Amazon.

They were also forced onto the front line of a wider battle for equality in the UK. Jessica Huntley, co-

founder of Bogle-L'Ouverture, one of the first Black publishing houses in the UK, recalled receiving death threats from the Ku Klux Klan and had shop windows broken, in attacks by the National Front. Despite similar hostility, New Beacon Books, founded by John La Rose with his partner Sarah White in 1966, the UK's first Black publisher and bookshop, also acted as a community hub that took a stand against racism and institutional harassment and campaigned for greater justice and equality.

The bravery and endurance of these Black and Asian publishers must be understood if we are to present a true image of British publishing and its impact on our society. It is also vital, if we are to encourage more BAME publishing professionals and writers, that British publishing is inclusive and welcomes all comers. Literature is the written record of our society and it is our legacy to future generations. To fail to recognise certain groups' contribution to this legacy is to present a false image of how the UK book industry has evolved over the past 60 years. It also risks alienating those who see their communities' contribution whitewashed from the history books and impoverishes a publishing industry, to which many of us in the Black and Asian community feel proud to belong.

JAZZMINE BREARY manages SMP & digital publishing at Jacaranda Books and is building a commercial fiction list for the company that includes Nigerian thriller *Satans & Shaitans* by Obinna Udenwe and upcoming romance debut *From Pasta to Pigfoot* by Frances Mensah Williams. Jazzmine is dedicated to promoting diversity in publishing and served on the committee of Women in Publishing UK from 2012 to 2014.

Back to school

Universities play a key role in supporting new novelists. Mel Larsen looks at how their Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students fare.

A recent Runnymede Trust report into higher education uptake of BAME students in all subjects found 'lower admissions rates at top universities despite equivalent A-level results, higher rates of unemployment and depressingly few Black academics, particularly at a senior level'. Given that creative writing degrees are an established pipeline to publication, especially for writers in the literary market, could it be there is a 'supply problem' here when it

course much smaller). Interestingly, outside London, two universities in areas of low BAME population were attracting similar or greater levels of BAME students to their courses at both UG and PG level than counterparts in regional areas of higher BAME populations.

Taken in context of the Runnymede findings, this snapshot suggests that, while a handful of universities are successfully attracting BAME creative writing students,

'Our BAME students don't have families and friends who work at the BBC or in the business, so it's much more difficult. You can't do a six month unpaid internship unless you've got a family that will support you and see it as normal. So it's economics and class.'

many others could be doing more to increase their take-up. Some university tutors I spoke to thought this was a cultural issue about career choices among BAME students: they contested that BAME students are more disposed to take up IT or finance courses. I'm not

comes to Black and Asian writers?

Attraction factor

I contacted 16 universities known and respected for their creative writing courses to get a sense of access and demand by BAME students. Eight supplied data for 2013/14. Four are based in London and four outside the capital. As a rough benchmark, I also looked at the BAME population of London: 40 per cent according to Office for National Statistics data from the 2011 census, and nationally, 14 per cent.

Five of the eight universities offer under-graduate (UG) courses and of these, four show representation at a level below the London or national BAME population percentages ranging from four to eight per cent lower. Eight offer post-graduate (PG) courses of which six show under-representation ranging from 16 to 35 per cent lower in London and by one to four per cent elsewhere. However, one London university was eight per cent over represented for its UG courses and another 13 per cent above for its PG courses (although at this level the numbers are of

convinced, as there is evidence of demand outside the formal education system. Arvon for example, is renowned for its excellent residential creative writing courses (held in rural retreats outside London) and last year eight per cent to 15 per cent of its attendees were of a BAME background.

Boxed in/boxed out

Having secured a place at university, there are further challenges for BAME students. Armando, an American student now resident in the UK, did his MA at an esteemed regional university. He describes himself as 'definitely a writer of colour and there hasn't been a day I haven't felt that, especially here in England. I'm very conscious of being a writer of colour and having multi-cultural characters. I'm perfectly content with that. A lot of the writers I admire are writers of colour.'

A confident individual, he seems to accept as a fact of life, that the richness of his cultural background could not be acknowledged or understood at university. 'I don't think

any of my peers really cared about diversity because they weren't aware of the issues. Most of the tutors are straight, White males, they are more aware of the politics, but don't really have the background to support me.'

Indeed, one White male department head feels that the equality issues being discussed here are actually irrelevant. 'We are trying to find exceptional people and there aren't that many in the world. That isn't about privilege.' Focusing on an individual scholar's craft rather than equality is easy to understand, but sanctioned on an institutional level, this stance without context can be damaging. The White, female tutors I spoke to were more aware of, and concerned about 'cultural gaps'. 'There have been moments of discomfort where you think, could I have handled this better...?' Furthermore, a Black tutor had noticed cultural bias in 'the types of comments that are given on the work, the references'.

The Runnymede report recommends that greater diversity among teaching staff at universities would make a positive difference and enhance learning and understanding all round. Another Black tutor told me that BAME students have said that 'the difference it makes to see Black academics is psychologically huge... they have told us many times'.

Armando also shared his experience of environmental factors such as that the visiting tutors he saw during his years at his university were all White and male. He talks of these experiences lightly – after all, he received personal support by a tutor influential in the field and has had agents interested in his work. However, he is still keenly aware of the barriers BAME students must face: 'Well it's everywhere, I've been watching *The Wire* lately and it's like that – different sections of society.' I asked him what he thinks would make a difference: 'You could definitely start at universities; how many writers of colour are on staff for

example? Also, how much do they invest in writers of colour through scholarships? That would be a measure of how much they want to invest.'

The long route to market

For the students that survive these elements of 'cultural illiteracy', how many will go on to work in publishing or to be published? Not enough universities were able to supply information at this level of detail. One reputable university based outside London reported that of all students listed on its website as having graduated and published in the past three years, just three per cent were UK-based BAME

'My sense is that BAME students don't see it as a discrimination issue (...) it's more class-based than anything else.'

students, (BAME representation on its creative writing courses range from seven to 15 per cent). Of all its BAME creative writing students who completed a destination survey in the last three years, only 12.5 per cent had gone on to work in publishing.

The signs are not good and not all graduates are as resilient as Armando. One BAME tutor believes that some promising Black and Asian graduates have given up, turning to poetry and short stories when really they are wannabee novelists.

So what is happening to them when they graduate, why are they not getting published? For sure the playing field is fierce for all concerned, as the same tutor said: 'I worry about all our students because it's such a bitch profession. Who is out there looking out for you? The industry has gotten so much smaller and BAME students are always at a disadvantage.'

I asked course directors and tutors at universities what they thought the issues were, in particular for BAME students ►

University challenge at a glance

Fail

- Low diversity of teaching body (and in some cases, students)
- 'Cultural illiteracy': judgments of quality made from a limited or inflexible cultural viewpoint
- BAME writers are problematised instead of the institutional systems

Top marks

- Encourage diversity of student take-up
- Increase diversity of staff and of visiting lecturers, eg. invite BAME writers and publishers for different viewpoints
- Develop diversity of materials and viewpoints covered
- Encourage and enable awareness of diversity issues and their relevance and importance for all

aiming to get published. Publishing houses were perceived to be largely mono-cultural, 'You never see a Black face in publishing, it's always quite well-off White girls. It is depressing,' said one. They were also regarded as ill-informed and nervous: 'White publishers are afraid to do something and get it wrong, it's a very British thing and there is a lot of embarrassment and fear.'

The personal economics of the students themselves were also thought to play a part. 'A lot of my students have part-time jobs and can't afford to do an internship or work experience,' said one tutor. Another noted: 'The thing I have to deal with the most is cultural capital (...) our BAME students don't have families and friends who work at the BBC or in the business, so it's much more difficult. They have to write a hundred letters and hope that two reply. You can't do a six month unpaid internship unless you've got a family that will support you and see it as normal. So it's economics and class.'

It was also believed that only the most self-assured of BAME students would be equipped to breakthrough into the sealed 'Oxbridge culture' of the publishing world. 'It's possibly also a confidence issue (...) the milieu: I get the sense that it's a White, middle-class environment. There are certain ways things are organised and BAME students have less experience. We are talking about young undergraduates brought up in South London and the only way they will get the experience is by internships.'

Being bold enough to break through the class code was seen as a key skill. 'My sense is that BAME students don't see it as a discrimination issue (...) it's more class-based than anything else.' The ones who crack it do well. The others are left saying: 'I don't know how to.'

Higher education, higher purpose

Ultimately, getting published is a tough game for experienced writers let alone new ones. I asked Dr Bambo Soyinka, head of Creative Writing at Bath Spa University: if the traditional publishing industry doesn't seem to care about latent BAME talent, why should universities bother to develop their culture to best support aspirant BAME writers? And, why should they take notice and care? She answered: 'To create a healthy environment with the strength to sustain a variety of original voices.' She reminded me that the job of a university is: 'to lead the way and to research original models of thought and practice. Within my field, this means defining rather than simply following standards of excellence in creative writing. My objective is to develop a world-leading creative writing and practice research environment that fosters and disseminates new work in this field at the highest possible level. In order to achieve this goal, universities and creative industry partners will need to work together to build graduate research and educational spaces that support and nurture the best writers from all backgrounds.'

It's an exciting and challenging era for creative writers: digital delivery and shifting economics have introduced both opportunity and uncertainty. But Britain is in a unique position: centuries of global journeying both inward and out, has left a legacy of young people – Black, White and Mixed – with a wealth of unique perspectives, influences and stories to share. This very diversity could be the key to the sustainability and rejuvenation of British writing. Universities that take notice are well placed to nurture the future story-telling stars. And if the traditional publishing world won't give the best a break, more will look to self publishing.

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Literary festivals

Side show or no show

There's no fun at the fair for BAME book lovers, as Mel Larsen discovered when she surveyed diversity at our leading literary festivals.

If an avid fan of fiction by BAME writers – let's call her Jade – were to visit some of our top literature events, what would she find? I looked at the representation of UK BAME fiction writers at three major lit-fests last year and was surprised by the results.

Several festivals I contacted don't keep an analysis of ethnicity of their authors, 'We generally don't classify authors by ethnicity', was a common reply. But I wanted to know how much BAME 'bang' Jade would 'get for her buck' so I trawled through over 2,000 names taken from the combined 2014 brochure indices for the 'big three': Edinburgh, Cheltenham and Hay.

Of these names, just 100 (four per cent) could be classified as people who are Black Caribbean, Black African, South Asian or East Asian and UK based. A disappointingly low amount to start with but not all of these are authors: the figure includes those who are professors, journalists, footballers and the like. If Jade discounts the 55 non-authors, the percentage is just two per cent. If she also takes out the 22 BAME fiction writers from abroad and also decides not to attend talks by the 22 poets, cookery and children's book writers, the home grown literary talent on show dwindles to just 23 British BAME authors (one per cent).

This is not to say these festivals completely lack diversity, I didn't count those who were of Middle Eastern or South-East Asian origin for example, of which there were rightly several. And all these festivals have highlighted BAME writers over the years: Amit Chaudhuri was guest director of Cheltenham in 2014; Hay runs literature festivals all around the world and has recently instigated the Africa39 programme along

with UNESCO, which champions new fiction from sub-Saharan Africa. At the Edinburgh International Book Festival Bookshops last year Letters Home, featuring British based Kei Miller and Kamila Shamsie, was the second bestseller. All the more surprising then, that just one per cent of home grown BAME fiction stars were platformed at our top festivals last year.

Perhaps things are slowly changing. One BAME writer/publisher told me, 'Twenty to 30 years ago, you'd go in the green room at festivals and it would all be old, White men and it is different now.' And yet... just one per cent? Where are the British BAME writers? Perhaps Jade can take comfort from the fact that at least she will probably save on ticket costs at literary events. Several interviewees said that at mainstream festivals, BAME authors are often grouped together, regardless of whether their writing has anything in common with the other writers.

Is this lack of representation entirely the fault of the festivals? It's true that they are led to a certain extent by publishers' views of what's hot and what's new, but surely the festivals are about leading on ideas and new thinking? One journalist who regularly attends such events says: 'Things will only change if there is a conscious effort to change them (...) getting yourself out of your default mode. It's to do with challenging your unconscious default bias (...) we need a conversation where people say, 'this is a bit strange that we have incredibly non-diverse events and programmes (...) it's not a desirable situation to have a mono-culture.'

Undeclared mono-cultures are odd at a national level but in terms of the unheard and the hidden a more singular focus is ►

often the only choice. There are alternative options for Aesha, which include for example, the Yardstick Festival in the South-west which celebrates authors from the African Diaspora or the popular South Asian Literature Festival in London. I spoke with author and literature programme manager at the British Council, Bhavit Mehta about why he set up the festival which attracts a mixed audience, profiling writers from and writing about India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, with more emphasis on the content than the ethnicity of writers:

'South Asian culture has reached a high level of awareness in the UK – films, theatre, food, fashion and music, but literature

is it all the publishers' fault? Some say: 'Asian people are not good book buyers.' But, Mehta thinks that while this may have a grain of truth in the UK, there is huge potential. One inspiration might be the Jaipur Literature Festival in India, the largest book-fest in Asia, which attracts 50,000 attenders over five days. A mini version was held in London last year at the Southbank Centre.

He feels the publishing and bookselling world needs to start to forge a relationship with South Asian book buyers to take advantage of the potential market. Like many people spoken to in this study, he does not believe the problem is overt racism or prejudice. 'I know the people who work in the book industry (...) they do what they do because they love books, irrespective of where writers are from. Part of it is lack of understanding of the potential for the communities. They say, 'Asian people don't buy books' – a lot do buy books, but a lot more

don't! But what would happen if you worked out how to tap into them? Affluent, literary, business-minded, IT savvy communities?'

How can people buy books they don't know exist? If Asian audiences are attending in their droves elsewhere, why not here? Literature festivals are a powerful positioning and

'We need a conversation where people say, 'this is a bit strange that we have incredibly non-diverse events and programmes (...) it's not a desirable situation to have a mono-culture.'

hasn't quite had that level of awareness. If you ask someone to name a South Asian author they name Hanif Kureishi and Salman Rushdie and a few others and then they get stuck and they say, 'that's about it.' He adds: 'South Asian writers are getting published (...) however, from a perspective of percentages it's a dire situation (...) there's no drive to promote the mid-range writers (...) often South Asian writers based in the UK and the subjects they write about, aren't seen as important to the big publishers. Less energy is put in to promoting them and hence these mid-range writers don't become well-known. Sometimes our festival gives an author more PR than their own publishers.'

So why is it that more homegrown Asian authors aren't better known in the UK? After all, the South Asian Literature Festival alone has more than enough UK-based authors on its books to host a successful on-going annual event. Mehta thinks targeted promotion would help: 'Eid and Divali is a time when people spend a lot. Tesco's and Morrisons are doing huge Divali promotions, BT has ads in the Asian press, HSBC is targeting South Asian consumers, all the industries get it other than the literature industry.'

'Sometimes our festival gives an author more PR than their own publishers.'

publicity tool for writers new and old. The value of UK media coverage for the Edinburgh International Book Festival in 2014 for example, was estimated to be £5 million, 519 journalists visited and broadcast audiences exceeded 60 million. It could be a game-changer if the immense power held by literature festivals were focused more sharply on our homegrown BAME talent; and it would be great for Jade to know her festival ticket would buy her some new stories.

Spotlight

This One Sky Day

by Leone Ross

This One Sky Day is a satirical love story about last chances, spanning a single day in the life of Xavier Pere, a chef forced to cook the most romantic meal in the world.

Anise used to wear suck-on skirts in bright reds and greens so everyone could appreciate the contrast between her waist and hips and wonder about the secret triangle in the midst of it all and Tan-Tan could think: mine, all for me. He'd come home early to kiss her ripples. All before they began to breed water children and she changed into funeral white and never stopped wearing it.

He used to be so happy at the loom, but now he snapped the thread and sucked his teeth and didn't appreciate beautiful things.

She found him on the front veranda, puffing clouds of white smoke into the air. She slipped onto the floor next to him and waited.

'What?' he said, eventually.

She looked up without speaking. What should her first question be?

'What?' he said again, as if it was a different word and not an enquiry at all, but something harmless, like aubergine or ambergis.

She struggled to remain kind; he was the sort of man who thought there was no good in this world from feeling too much and what did he allow himself to feel anyway, besides rage?

She put her cheek on his knee and he shivered, as if threatened by an ocean undertow. They looked out at the dark spines of the mountains. He shook and shuddered. She couldn't remember their last lovemaking; the celibacy had dried her skin and made the ends of her hair brittle as old leaves.

She reached up for his hands and placed them on top of her head. They lay there like dead things. She reached up for his hands and kissed them; anything to move him past this dreadful storm shaking.

'Tan-Tan,' she murmured, over and again. If only he could speak, they might begin to heal.

'What?' he said and neither of them found an answer until the day moved on and he moved her half-doing head from his knee and stepped over her and away, through the yard, heavy work bag on his shoulder.

LEONE ROSS is a critically acclaimed novelist and lecturer, writing speculative fiction and erotica. Her previous books are: *All The Blood Is Red* (ARP) and *Orange Laughter* (Picador).

Key recommendations

In many ways this report is a starting point, from which we hope further research will be commissioned and acted upon if UK book publishing is to significantly improve the diversity of both its workforce and fiction lists.

As a result of our research we have formulated a series of key recommendations. If they are adopted by all sides of the industry they should ensure that in 10 years we will look back on this report as a game changer and not, as has happened in the past, yet another initiative that died of good intentions without serious management buy-in.

- Equip: a condition of membership of the newly formed industry-wide diversity scheme, should be that signatories conduct an internal audit to address cultural bias and institute changes to tackle inequality at all levels that may hamper diversity within organisations.
- Unpaid internships – as opposed to two-week work experience – should be banned as a route into the industry because they automatically discriminate in favour of AB1 socio-economic groups.
- Stronger trade links should be forged with careers services within state schools and non-Russell Group universities and a campaign launched to highlight the diversity of careers available in publishing.
- The trade should look to other media organisations such as Channel 4, which have run successful schemes to improve diversity, and adapt and adopt best practice.
- The trade should forge links with organisations like the Social Mobility Foundation (www.socialmobility.org.uk), which helps employers widen their talent pool, as well as organisations such as Creative Access, which places BAME candidates in paid internships within the creative industries.
- Literary agents and editors should forge strategic partnerships with writer development agencies like Spread the Word as well as magazines like Wasafiri, SableLitMag and The Asian Writer to enable access to and mentoring of a more diverse pool of talented authors.
- A condition of all public funding – Arts Council or local authority – for literary festivals should be that they conduct an audit of the diversity of their panels and agree to monitor their events for diversity in future funding applications.
- Book publicists and festival organisers should be encouraged to programme Black and Asian authors on to panels that address more general, literary topics rather than diversity-related issues and thus acknowledge the universality of voice and appeal of BAME novelists.
- University creative writing courses should monitor the diversity of their student intake. Tutors and guest speakers to include more BAME authors and industry professionals.
- Tutors should be given cultural awareness training to ensure that they are able to develop more culturally diverse teaching materials that acknowledge the wider canon of Commonwealth literature.
- More strategic partnerships between publishing companies and universities should be encouraged to fund scholarships that support a more diverse intake of students, such as that funded by Profile at City University.
- Further research needs to be undertaken into the treatment of BAME fiction writers in the arts' media and by retailers.
- Further research needs to be carried out into the market for books amongst BAME consumers – research that acknowledges the sizable middle class BAME market and the White market for work by BAME authors.

DANUTA KEAN and MEL LARSEN, April 2015

Resources

Whether a Black or Asian writer or a publisher looking to expand your list or outlets for existing BAME novelists, the following should help:

- **Africa Writes** – the Royal African Society's annual African literature and book festival. The event showcases established and emerging talent from the African continent and its diaspora in what is now the UK's biggest celebration of contemporary African writing. Activities include book launches, readings, author appearances, panel discussions, youth and children's workshops, and more. www.africawrites.org
- **ALCS** (Authors Licensing and Collecting Society) – a national organisation affiliated to the National Union of Journalists and Society of Authors that protects and promotes writers' rights. Whether a journalist or an author of fiction or non-fiction, those who earn from their work should register with the ALCS to ensure they receive payments when their work is reproduced around the world. It also campaigns for writers' rights and has a regular electronic newsletter. www.alcs.co.uk
- **ALLi** (The Alliance of Independent Authors) – a non-profit professional organisation for self-published authors. The many benefits of membership include a raft of free services such as: self-publishing resources, online seminars, legal and contracts advice; listing on a searchable author database, publishing services directory, support in selling translation and TV rights plus much more. www.allianceindependentauthors.org
- **Black Book News Blog** – a long-standing blog run by Tricia Wombell celebrates the books and writings of the best of Black British, African, Black European and African-American literature. Also, Tricia is the organiser of the Black Book Swap in London. As the name suggests, the events offer the opportunity to swap books and to hear from leading authors. www.tricia-blackbooknews.com
- **Commonword** – organisers of Cultureword, the national Black & Asian Writers Conference and The Diversity in Children's Fiction Competition. The conference features debates, workshops, information stalls, performances, book launches and talks by leading authors and publishers. www.cultureword.org.uk
- **Creative Access** – provide opportunities for paid internships in the creative industries for young people of graduate (or equivalent standard) from under-represented Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds. Their aim is to improve their chances of securing full-time jobs and in the longer term, to increase diversity and address the imbalance in the sector. www.creativeaccess.org.uk
- **Equip** – established to promote equality across UK publishing, bookselling and agenting, by driving forward change and increasing access to opportunities within the industry. Membership is free and provides invitations to events, inside information for job seekers and access all to areas of the site. www.equalityinpublishing.org.uk
- **Inscribe** – a national creative and professional development programme for Black & Asian writers. Housed by publishers Peepal Tree and run by Co-Directors Kadija George and Dorothea Smartt, the programme welcomes writers and performers of poetry, fiction and non-fiction. www.inscribewriters.wordpress.com
- **Renaissance One** – produce and curate spoken word, poetry and fiction-based events. Their work includes: book tours, literary readings, spoken word shows, talks and workshops. Fostering a legacy and identifying talent early on is integral to their work. www.renaissanceone.co.uk

- **Royal Literary Fund** – provides grants and pensions to writers in difficulty. It also runs a Fellowship Scheme, placing writers in universities to help students develop their writing and The Writing Project, which puts professional writers into the workplace to raise the quality and impact of written communication. www.rlf.org.uk
- **Sable** – produce the events Sable LitFest, Word from Africa!, and SableLitMag. They offer training and support through e-internships, professional development for writers through courses and workshops, a manuscript reading service, residential courses and retreats and a writers coaching service for people of colour. www.sablelitmag.org
- **SI Leeds Literary Prize** – is the prize for unpublished fiction by Black and Asian women resident in the UK aged 18 years and over. The prize aims to act as a loudspeaker for Black and Asian women's voices, enabling fresh and original literary voices from a group disproportionately under-represented in mainstream literary culture to reach new audiences.
www.sileedsliteraryprize.wordpress.com
- **Social Mobility Foundation** – is a charity which aims to make a practical improvement in social mobility for young people from low-income backgrounds. The Foundation extends support to students throughout university across 11 career sectors including Media & Communications and also runs programmes to support young people wherever they live in the UK.
www.socialmobility.org.uk
- **The South Asian Literature Festival** – takes place in London and beyond. The festival is a platform generating interest and discussion about the themes and literary heritage of the subcontinent, reaching out to new audiences across the UK with established and emerging talent. www.southasianlitfest.com
- **Spread the Word** – is London's writer development agency. Through an affordable workshops programme and a wide range of project work, they help London's writers to develop their craft and their careers. Projects include Young Poet Laureate for London (London Laureates) and Flight 1000, a project specifically aimed at providing access to publishing for excluded / disadvantaged writers. Spread the Word also run the London Short Story Festival each June, which has a diverse programme of short fiction writers.
 - www.spreadtheword.org.uk
 - www.lssf.co.uk
 - www.youngpoetlaureate.co.uk
 - www.londonlaureates.com
- **The Asian Writer** – is an online resource offering an eclectic approach to South Asian writing through profile interviews, Q&A's and reviews. It features the latest news, original comment and thoughts on contemporary South Asian literature and publishing as well as practical advice and inspiration.
www.theasianwriter.co.uk
- **The Literary Consultancy** – provides bursaried access to professional editing services to writers on low income. Their Quality for All campaign aims to increase their diversity outreach and they are interested in hearing from talented BAME writers who might be eligible for their bursary scheme. Details of the bursary scheme can be found on their website.
www.literaryconsultancy.co.uk/editorial/ace-free-reads-scheme
- **The Society of Authors** – protects the rights and furthers the interests of all types of authors. A trade union representing over 9,000 authors working across the whole spectrum of genres and sectors, the SoA acts as an advocate for the profession and offers its members advice (including contract vetting), events and offers.
www.societyofauthors.org

- **UEA Literature Fellowships** – UEA offers the Charles Pick South Asian Writing Fellowship; a six month fellowship worth £10k at University of East Anglia for unpublished writers. Also offering The David T.K. Wong Creative Writing Fellowship a year-long fellowship worth £26k at University of East Anglia for writers of fiction about the Far East. www.uea.ac.uk/literature/fellowships
- **UK Black Writers Forum** – created to address the lack of mediums and information forums focusing on UK based Black Writers. A news portal for UK based African Caribbean writers/authors. It features a list of book clubs, bookshop outlets, a History Corner with articles on past African Caribbean writers or institutions and a list of UK based writers. www.ukblackwritersforum.wordpress.com
- **Wasafiri** – is a literary magazine at the forefront in mapping new landscapes in international literature. Since the early 1980's, it has continued to provide consistent coverage to Britain's diverse cultural heritage, travel the world via the word and publish the best of tomorrow's writers today. They also run a New Writing Prize – open to anyone worldwide who has not published a complete book in their chosen category. www.wasafiri.org
- **Writer development agencies** – funded by Arts Council England, offer professional development and support to writers:
 - New Writing South covers the South East region, based in Brighton. www.newwritingsouth.com
 - New Writing North covers the North East region, based in Newcastle upon Tyne. www.newwritingnorth.com
 - Writing East Midlands covers the East Midlands, based in Derby. www.writingeastmidlands.co.uk
 - Writing West Midlands covers the West Midlands, based in Birmingham. www.writingwestmidlands.org
 - Literature Works covers the South West, based in Exeter. www.literatureworks.org.uk
 - Writers' Centre Norwich works across the East region, based in Norwich. www.writerscentrenorwich.org.uk
- **Words of Colour Productions** – is a not-for-profit community interest initiative which enables aspiring and diverse writers, voluntary and community organisations and small to medium sized enterprises to get their ideas and writing published, heard, seen and online. Services include: creative writing workshops, mentoring, coaching, masterclasses, networking and an internship programme. Publication support includes production, marketing and PR. www.wordsofcolour.co.uk
- **Yardstick** – is a new and innovative, national programme of African diaspora author events, organised by partners: Bristol Libraries, Bath & North-East Somerset Libraries and City Chameleon. Activities include panel discussions, workshops and masterclasses, socials and performances with leading authors and writers. www.yardstick.org.uk

Astronauts

by Ruel White

Astronauts tells the tale of three couples living in London's east end in a novel that is part comedy, part detective story, part literary fiction.

He left school to work in his local leisure centre, study Leisure and Tourism part-time and practice and teach his mix of martial arts. For an extra bit of money and along with other young men at the centre, he began bouncing when the centre was offered money the management could not refuse, for the hire of a cleared gym by a dance promoter on Saturday and Sunday nights. The money was invaluable in helping out his dying Mum. It gave her a mobility which she never imagined. She teased Michael by saying it was a pity she was dying. The extra money he earned had enabled her to see all her 'old time' friends and 'close close' friends and family who had been like her brothers and sisters in the West Indies. She had been to The States, Canada and all over England before the end came. Michael asked why these people had never been around when times had been hard for the two of them?

It wasn't about support and history, she told him. Not in the end. Not at this point in her life. His dad had died, she reminded him. They had not been abandoned so she had never felt helpless; hard-up maybe, but never in need of help. It was difficult to explain but it was how she had felt. She was glad to have lived and died the romantic, having found a man who truly knew her and who she could really be herself with.

It meant nothing to her that they lived together without ever making it down the aisle and their time together had not lasted more than a dozen years. What better pursuit could there be than finding one's own true love? She used the phrase with an earnestness that over-rode the hackneyedness of the statement itself. She told Michael that he had that romantic, searching streak in him too.

He was married, he argued and laughed at his mother's sauciness.

She winked at him.

'Cool,' he said, meaning that he would, very amicably, not welcome any further comments upon Tanyka from his mother.

RUEL WHITE – His first novel *Heroes Through the Day* was published by New Beacon Books over two decades ago. He has been a secondary school teacher ever since and has recently completed *Astronauts*.

