



Ethnic and Racial Inequity in the Cultural Sector: Confront, Eradicate, Transcend

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We first conceived of this special issue in the spring of 2018. At the time, the need to address a lack of diversity, problematic discourses around diversity, and the absence of holistic understandings of multiple and intersecting axes of oppression in the cultural sector were vital and critical questions. We received enthusiastic, thought-provoking, generous, and -- at times -- viscerally raw responses to our call for papers. As editors, we were grateful, enthused, and honoured to be able to provide a platform for such rich and important discourse. Now, as we publish this issue in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, these issues feel more urgent than ever. Many cultural institutions have issued statements of support upholding the message of Black Lives Matter. Some have been genuine, while others have been performative. Nonetheless, the movement has laid bare -- for those who previously ignored such truths -- the many racist practices, structures, and attitudes embedded in the cultural sector's daily operations. The summer of 2020 brought forward brave and honest accounts of the lived experience of inequity experienced by numerous Black and ethnically diverse students, cultural workers, and artists. As a contribution to those conversations, this special issue could not be timelier.

Simultaneously, it is clear that the pandemic is disproportionately affecting Black and ethnically diverse communities, institutions, and artists. The collapse of both large and small cultural institutions has and will continue to undermine livelihoods and opportunities for many who rely on them. In the UK, for example, a recent survey of underrepresented minorities in the cultural sector has found that 40% 'had been furloughed, made redundant, or



had work cancelled or postponed’ (Creative Access, 2020). Similarly, researchers at Birmingham City University report that 29% of BAME-led independent TV organisations are now in ‘financial distress’ or ‘financial crisis’ (Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity, 2020). How and why are Black and ethnically diverse cultural workers, projects, and knowledge among the most dispensable at the exact moment when cultural institutions have sought to reaffirm their commitment to addressing structures of ethnic and racial inequity? And, turning the clock back to a few months before our world was paralysed by the pandemic, we ask: why do diversity initiatives, which are significantly visible in the public-facing agendas of many leading cultural institutions, so often fail to make any real progress towards greater access and representation of Black and ethnically diverse creatives and their work?

This special issue does not hold the answers to the many problems and failings of the Global North’s cultural sector, when it comes to how structural racism facilitates and perpetuates oppression. It does, however, offer poignant reflections on how practices of cultural production and knowledge in educational settings, casting, digital spaces, and the charity/non-profit sector are saturated with inequity, in ways that reproduce hegemonic power structures that perpetuate the oppression of the oppressed. To do so, this special issue offers four research articles that provide an in-depth exploration of key institutional settings and practices that reproduce racial and ethnic inequity, as well as two artistic reflections from creatives who engage honestly and critically with their lived experience in different contexts.

The first of the four research articles is ‘Reflections on Researching within a Structurally Racist Institution’ by Mary C. Parker, Anna Claire Walker, and Michaela Gasteratou, which undertakes a thoughtful autoethnographic critique of a complex and



racially charged moment in the authors' experience of navigating their position as a biracial research team at a leading educational institution. They explore how their experience demonstrates foundational structural racism that manifests at that institution and higher education institutions more widely. Second, Evi Stamatiou's 'Inclusive Casting Debunked: Towards Holistic Interventions in Staged Performance' highlights the problematic nature of inclusive casting and inclusive authorship. Stamatiou argues for a more holistic approach that recognises the intersectional identities of those working within the acting industry. Third, in 'Culture Jamming as a Strategy of Survival: Pop Music, Video Remixes, and Cultural Efficacy', Micaela Segal de la Garza explores cultural artifacts that are largely outside immediate academic scrutiny, by focusing on remixes of popular songs and their related music videos. Segal's article aims to evaluate pop culture and harmful mainstream pop-culture discourses on gender and race, while reading individual and community creative responses as a counter narrative that centres intersectionality. Finally, in '*How I Got Over: The Staging of Gendered Blackness and Homelessness*', Kimberly Chantal Welch examines how representations of homelessness and poverty in theatre are (or can be) raced and gendered, even in the context of theatre that works explicitly with groups of people that are marginalised or dispossessed. Welch does so by analysing the documentary *How I Got Over*, a film that follows the creation and performance of an original play about women living in a recovery community in Washington, DC.

As for the artistic reflections, the first of two powerful essays is Ülfet Sevdı and Nicolas Royer-Artuso's 'The Politics of the Other in Canadian Theatre/Performance', in which they reflect on the process of creating and producing artistic work in Canada while being rendered 'ethnic' and/or Other. The authors explore the limitation and the liminal and



conditional spaces afforded to ethnically diverse artists and how these spaces are often demarcated and interpolated to serve the diversity project. Second is 'Resisting Neocolonialism in Participatory Theatre' by Devika Ranjan, which explores the author's experience as a theatre maker and facilitator in a charity that aimed to utilise participatory theatre as a means to empower immigrant women. However, in practice, as Ranjan argues, the charity ended up reproducing neocolonial structures of power in complex, confusing, and concerning ways.

Each contribution conveys an honest, elegant, and thought-provoking critical reflection that, when combined with the others, argues together for racial social justice in vital institutions that reproduce culture and shape representation. In the face of a threatened and changing cultural sector, and at a moment when Black and ethnically diverse creatives and cultural workers are at risk, we need to stop, listen, and reflect. Upon doing so, we must confront our institutions and their practices -- as well as our own -- so that we can eradicate and transcend problematic structures on the way to imagining new alternatives. As you read through this issue, we invite you to join us in doing so.



References

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