

Telling it like it is...

Ethnic Minorities and the Media Forum Report

Editor: *Mike Jempson*

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Telling it like it is...

Introducing the Ethnic Minorities and the Media Forum, one of the UK's final contributions to European Year Against Racism.

The media did not invent the racism that sours British society, and mainstream journalists and editors would sign up to an editorial policy that sought to exacerbate racial tension.

Nevertheless, newspapers, radio and television bear a heavy responsibility for the way in which different sectors of society view each other. Carelessness, lack of sensitivity, and a willingness to profit by catering to the lowest common denominator among readers with populist xenophobic headlines, all contribute to a prevailing atmosphere of fear and anxiety among ethnic minorities. The Ethnic Minorities and the Media Forum was held in central London on 29 November 1997, as part of the UK's final contribution to European Year Against Racism.

Mike Jempson Executive Director of the media ethics body PressWise which organised the event, told delegates: "The Forum was designed to create a space in which those on the receiving end of discrimination have a chance to express their views and challenge the power of the media." He described it as, "A day not for big rows, but for trying to find ways of moving forward."

Experts in every aspect of the media were on hand to ask and answer questions and give advice. Notable for their absence, however, were editors of local or national newspapers, despite repeated invitations.

PressWise had joined forces with publishers Camden Press, the National Union of Journalists, the Community Radio (now Media) Association, The 1990 Trust and the Commission for Racial Equality to organise the Forum, which also formed part of the *Voices Without Frontiers* project funded by the European Community Horizon programme.

Four plenary sessions dealt with different themes, covering recruitment and training policies and the treatment of media workers from minority communities, as well as all the issues that surround media representation of ethnic minorities - including the language used and methods employed by journalists to obtain material.

In the session devoted to the avenues (*cul-de-sacs?*) of redress provided by media regulators, the Press Complaints Commission came in for special criticism because of its reluctance to entertain 'third party' complaints about discriminatory material.

The day exposed deep dissatisfaction among ethnic minority communities about the way the media treats them as individuals and as social groups. Many felt that programme-makers, columnists and journalists have ingrained attitudes which come from lack of social and professional contact with minorities.

As a result their representation of ethnic groups as somehow apart from the mainstream contributes to a 'normalisation' of hostility, affirming rather than challenging prejudice. This was seen as one of the most sinister and socially dangerous consequences of media bias.

The Forum also allowed delegates to 'pick and mix' between practical workshops dealing with community video production; setting up a community radio station, and making use of the Internet, and two screenings of controversial films about racism.

A day of debate ended with the Culture Clash Cabaret, a celebration of multi-cultural Britain, hosted by broadcaster Alex Pascall OBE. Delegates were still dancing at midnight.

The origins of the Forum

Publisher and former journalist Bob Borzello explains why he backed the Forum.

A few years ago I was in a cafe with a Taiwanese journalist, sent to London by his newspaper to do graduate work at City University's School of Journalism. He asked me about complaints I'd made to the Press Council against the *Sun*, *Sport* and *Star* for calling Chinese people 'Chinkie' and 'Chinks'. He had never heard the words before.

"Why," he asked, "do they call us 'Chinks'?"

As if on cue, a pinstriped Englishman in late middle age, sitting at the next table, put down his knife and fork. Leaning towards the Chinese, he pulled back the corner of his eyes and said with a smile, "It's because you chaps' eyes go like this." Without another word, he returned to his lunch.

This incident reflects part of the theme of this Forum. The experience of racism is something the vast majority living in Britain never have.

But the Taiwanese journalist's experience was one of innumerable humiliations, and worse, endured daily by people for no better reason than that they are 'different' - differently shaped eyes, differently textured hair, different skin colour, religion, diet, language, accent, culture, dress - 'different' as in "not like us."

Differences that lead to schoolyard gibes. Differences that lead to a black footballer having bananas thrown at him or being stopped by traffic police because his car looks too flash to be a black man's. Differences that get you ignored by the publican but taunted by his customers.

Differences that led to the death of black Steven Lawrence, killed by white racists, and white Richard Everitt, killed by Bangladeshi racists.

Differences that lead to Catholics killing Protestants and Protestants killing Catholics in Northern Ireland. Differences that lead to extermination camps in Nazi Germany, Apartheid in South Africa, tribal genocide in Rwanda and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia.

These are experiences of racism that the vast majority of us in Britain, including those in the media, will never have to endure - but of which we cannot be reminded too often.

Articulating the experience of racism is part of the Forum's theme. Another is to examine the experience of race and racism in the media.

Is there racism in the media? Of course, just as it is endemic in all areas of every society. Wherever, in fact, there are people.

It wasn't too many years ago that both broadsheets and tabloids would use colour to describe suspects and convicted alike in criminal (usually sex) cases. When the Press Council censured papers for this and ruled that colour should only be reported in a pejorative or prejudicial context if relevant to the story, newspapers argued that to describe a criminal's colour - always black, never white - was the Press's right.

"Our readers have a right to the facts!" headlined an outraged *Express* leader.

"This is the true discrimination," railed a *Mail* leader when censured by the Press Council for noting the colour - black - of an alleged rapist later found innocent of the charge.

Nor was the use of the crudest racist language and images unknown.

The Sun, *Sport* and *Star* referred to Chinese as 'Chinks' and 'Chinkie'. *The News of the World* described a Pakistani as a 'Paki'.

The People called a Spaniard a "Dago" and *The Sun* attacked 'Abos' as being "brutal and treacherous." *The Sun* also portrayed Africans as bones-through-the-nose cannibals and associated Muslims and Arabs with pigs.

Did the reporters, subs and editors on these papers ever consider the feelings of their hundreds of thousands of 'Chink', 'Paki', Muslim, Black and 'Dago' readers?

The Sun bragged about its many teenaged readers - did they consider that racist reporting might introduce schoolchildren to racist language and stereotypes? Did they consider that it might reinforce, even justify, the racist remarks of a pinstriped 'gentleman' or an East End skinhead pushing dog crap through an Indian family's letterbox?

The press may be 'better' today than in the 1980s on this score, but racist language and xenophobic reporting are hardly unknown.

Remember the rantings of the tabloids during Euro '96 - "Let's Blitz Fritz"; Vernon Coleman in *The People* and *Glasgow Evening Times* calling the Maltese "petty crooks, racists and barbarians" and "Nazi bastards;" Taki in *The Spectator* referring to Puerto Ricans as semi-savages.

The word 'Muslim' hardly appears in any paper without being closely followed by 'fanatic'. Indeed negative reporting of Muslims is so widespread that the Runnymede Trust calls it 'Islamophobia'. Would a visitor from outer space reading many of our papers think that immigrants to Britain were anything other than freeloaders, escaping not from tyranny but from having to make an honest living in their own countries? Or wonder if minority groups made any positive contribution to British society?

Although less blatant today, the big difference between racism in the Press now and in the 1980s is that today it goes uncensored.

Not one of the 600 or so complaints made to the Press Complaints Commission since 1991 about alleged racism in the Press has been upheld. In fact, the vast majority of them are not even allowable complaints under PCC rules.

Article 15 of the Code of Practice only recognises racist reporting made against a specifically named person, and even then there is no violation unless the named victim complains. Unlike broadcasting and advertising, the Press does not allow third parties to complain, even against the most blatant Code violation.

Incredibly, blanket racist comments - called 'collective' racism by the PCC - are not even recognised by the Code. So while it is a Code violation to call a named Italian a 'wop' or an 'Eyetie' it is not a violation to call all Italians 'wops' or to add for good measure that "Eyeties" are lazy or lecherous or smelly or cheats or whatever.

If today Adolph Hitler was writing for a British paper he would not be in violation of the Code so long as he called all Jews 'Yids' and aimed his racist comments at all Jews.

In fact, the more outrageous his lies the more likely he would be to escape censure.

As the PCC commented in the Vernon Coleman case, "the writer's opinions were indeed presented not as conjecture but as fact."

However, the PCC considered that "reasonable people were unlikely to be misled into believing that the articles were intended to be accurate in view of the hyperbolic language that had been deployed." Not much comfort there for victims of racist lies.

So, yes, the Press can be racist. But is it racist? I don't think so.

True, there are some arrogant and ignorant people in the media who think like a former PCC officer who wrote me: "I would find it difficult to sustain an argument that a reference to a Chinese restaurant as a 'Chinkie' was racist." Or the editor who justified using 'Paki' in a headline because 'Pakistani' didn't fit. Or another who accused me of trying to emasculate "our vigorous, splendid language" because I objected to the use of the word 'Chinkie' on his front page in 96-point type. Or the editor who returned my letter of complaint - a complaint later found in my favour by the Press Council - cut up and clipped to a compliments slip.

From 1984 until 1990 I made about 130 complaints to the Press Council. About 45 were adjudicated upon, 75% of them in my favour. A few other complaints were accepted - but never corrected - by the papers. But the vast majority of editors were hostile, not just to me but to the Press Council.

My experience was that while editors publicly portray their papers as the voice of the people, privately they regard their papers as their personal fish and chip shop: "You don't like it, go somewhere else."

As the editor of *The Sun* told the Press Council when I complained that the paper had violated the ruling on the reporting of race, *The Sun* did not accept my complaint, would not correspond with me, and would make no apology or retraction. My complaint against *The Sun* was upheld.

But if those working in the media are not racists, why do we find racism and racist attitudes in the press in particular - not to mention an almost total absence of a positive, let alone affirmative, attitude towards minorities? I think for four reasons.

First, the media is dominated and peopled by those with no direct experience of racism. We may live in a multi-racial society, but most of us, including those in the media, live alongside the multi-racial bits and not in them.

Second, media journalists and management are no different than anyone else - they bring their personal baggage to the job. Part of this baggage is the racism, seen while young, in the attitudes of family, peers, friends, newspapers, TV, and whatever else they came into contact with while young. The virus of racism is sneezed in all our faces at some point in our formative and impressionable years.

The first schoolyard rhyme I learned - and this during the Second World War - went like this:
"Red, white and blue;
Your mother is a Jew;
Your father is a curly-head -
Just like you."

And it still goes on today: "What's a 'Paki,' mum?" a friend's mixed race child asked on the first day of nursery school. "That's what they called me at school."

As the song from *South Pacific* goes, "to hate all the people your relatives hate, you've got to be carefully taught."

I'd agree there are probably no more - or less - people in the media infected by the racist virus than there are, say, in the legal or medical professions. The difference is that when a doctor or solicitor is unintentionally racist, it is usually on a one-to-one basis. When a newspaper writer or broadcaster is unintentionally racist, it is on a one-to-millions basis. Now that's what I call a sneeze!

Third, there are few minorities working in the media to remind journalists that these people not only exist but have feelings too. The fact is that the vast majority of those in the media are white, Anglo-Saxon, Christian, middle-class males and the media reflects their bias.

But just as women entering journalism toned down sexism in the media, more minorities in the media would change attitudes to race. Unfortunately, for all kinds of reasons, including bias, there are virtually no minorities in the media. One estimate puts the figure at about 100 out of 8,000 journalists.

Fourth, the same problem that made Princess Diana fair game for the media, and especially the Press, makes minorities fair game: insensitivity. If Princess Diana could be made into a cartoon character, devoid of feelings, to be publicly and endlessly run over with a steamroller of speculation or hit on the head with a sledgehammer of intrusive and even doctored photos, why not, for example, immigrants?

With its power to inform and influence, the media can do as much if not more than any legislation to contain and even roll back racism. But first it has to create the conditions within its own industry to make this possible. It must make employees aware of racism in society and the power of the media to ignite it. Journalists should be trained to watch for racism in their work as carefully as they are made to watch for libel.

Members of minority groups should be encouraged to enter journalism. At the very least, correspondents should be trained to report minority affairs, just as they are to deal with the courts, cookery and foreign affairs.

For the Press, there is a need for an industry Code of Practice which is anti-racist rather than the tolerance of racism that is the present Code.

So-called collective racism should be banned immediately. It is ridiculous to say it is wrong to call a named Chinese a 'Chink' but not wrong to call all Chinese 'Chinks'. Or to argue that free speech gives a columnist the right to present racist opinion as fact. If it is unprofessional, unethical and libellous to print lies about individuals, why should it be acceptable to print lies about whole groups of people?

It is also ridiculous that the public is forbidden to complain about racist lies and language simply because the lies and language are not directed at them personally.

Racism is a plague that everyone not only should be allowed to protest against, but has a moral duty to protest against. Will the industry, and especially the Press Complaints Commission, act, or do we first need the racial equivalent of a car crash in Paris before something is done?

In search of the tolerant society - the role of the media

Danny Farragher & Adeline Iziren report on the opening plenary session.

The tone for the day was set by journalist Jim Boumelha, founder member of the International Media Working Group Against Racism and Xenophobia. Introduced by Linda Townley of PressWise who chaired the first plenary session, Jim opened with a quote: "Racism and journalism are bound together with the stickiest of verbal glue."

It came from South African journalist Lionel Morrison, like him a former President of the National Union of Journalists and a member of the NUJ's Black Members' Council.

"News is a commodity and the working practices of journalists are influenced by competition and the profit motive," he said. "And there are wider questions involved to do with the ownership of the media."

Britain's media organisations are predominantly white, with white patrons and interests, explained Jim. Small wonder that stereotypical images are endemic in the media, while minority interests are marginalised. Part of the problem and much of the answer lies in journalism training which convinces reporters of their role as gate-keepers, and instils in them a flawed notion of being impartial and independent. They have to learn to engage with social issues and human rights, he said.

He criticised journalists and editors for failing to engage in public discussion about media representation of minorities. If they were to address the issue in the workplace and in working practices, we would get a fairer and more accurate picture of cultural diversity in contemporary Britain, he said.

Jim did acknowledge that there had been some changes. "I don't know if it's an accident that a newspaper like the *Daily Mail* which historically was very much in sympathy with fascism in Britain, has started reporting on black issues, championing the issue of the murder of Stephen Lawrence," he said. "A cynic might say that it is trying to capture a bit of the increasingly important black and ethnic market."

The black press in Britain had identified this market and is now being weakened as the mainstream media move in on it, he claimed.

Such changes have come about as black communities have become more assertive in Britain and wherever else in the past they have been marginalised - especially in Europe.

"No one has got all answers about how the new Europe is to be built. No-one has got answers about what's going to happen to the old nationalities.

"But something new is going to be created, whether in terms of fragmentation and the rediscovery of small nationalities in the 'mosaic of Europe' or a kind of unified status which no one has defined yet."

Jim predicted that Black people would have a profound impact on the creation of a new Europe. He also warned that Britain has lost out in the re-definition of Europe, because the UK press generally has been anti-European for years.

However, throughout Europe media companies are having to face up to the complex issues of race and cultural diversity and the portrayal of ethnic minority communities in the media.

He said that media ownership issues and the digital revolution are challenging European employers' federations and media organisations to reconsider how they will fit into the media landscape beyond the year 2000.

In terms of scrutinising the role of the media the UK has something to offer Europe, he said. Our media may be resistant to change, but at least they are under siege in a way which has yet to happen in Europe.

"In Britain problems are magnified by the strength of our media which have a very specific way of treating not only race stories but many other issues. As a result there is debate here about privacy, for instance, and how the media operate, in a way that has yet to happen in many other European countries."

"Traditions in Europe are very different. European broadcasting and newspapers are set in their ways and no one is going around, for example, to *Le Monde* and questioning how it writes copy or treats human interest stories, in the same way that people in the UK do with *The Sun*."

Jim was optimistic about better relationships in future between ethnic minority communities and the media. "The number of people tackling this issue, inside and outside the media, has increased. They have far more polished arguments and they are putting the media publishers and editors under siege in a way that wasn't done before."

He offered as an example the role being played by the International Media Working Group Against Racism and Xenophobia (IMWRAX) which had brought together journalists, publishers and other media professionals to look at ways of reasserting corporate and professional independence together with a respect for the truth.

In its first year IMWRAX had produced a handbook on professional practices for European journalists, and broken new ground by bringing together journalists from 70 countries at the first ever world conference on media racism, he said.

It had established a network of media professionals reporting on minority communities across Europe, and a European Prize for Excellence in journalism for the promotion of mutual understanding in multi-cultural society.

"IMWRAX has stirred up feeling to start addressing these issues," said Jim, ending on a positive note.

"Among journalists there is now a very firm recognition of the value and strength of diversity ." Sukhvinder Stubbs from the Runnymede Trust turned delegates' attention to 'Islamophobia' - fear of Muslims and the Islamic religion - which, she claimed, has become evident in much of the media coverage about Britain's Muslim population.

"The media perpetuates an idea that Islam is inferior to any other faith, and that Islam is an aggressive and manipulative religion that does not really have any values that can be of use to the Western world or to other faiths."

She recalled a recent gathering of British and American writers and journalists who talked through their feelings towards Islam.

"On a very personal level people talked about being embarrassed about strong religious feelings and not really knowing how to write about or start to address those issues. The dangers of those sorts of attitudes being portrayed in the media are really quite deep," she said. "Prejudice starts with the media and leads on to prejudice in everyday conversations about Islam and Muslims. That leads on to discrimination in employment and the provision of services in health and education. The danger is that this also leads to general exclusion from society, and that starts with unemployment."

Unemployment rates for Pakistani and Bangladeshi men in Britain are almost double those for White males, she said.

"The exclusion is also manifest in management responsibility, in politics and government. At its most extreme it leads to violence - starting off with verbal forms of violence, then vandalising of property and ultimately to physical assaults," Sukhvinder warned.

"We have something like 250,000 incidents of racial and religious violence every year. In the year 1992-93, there were 13 racial murders. Nine of those people murdered had Muslim names. At the moment there is no direct protection for Muslims under the Race Relations Act, and we are trying to make sure that religion is included as a factor in forthcoming legislation."

"The challenge to us is how we - as a liberal democratic society - actually embrace religious and other cultural values in our day to day lives," she said.

Adam Clayton Powell III, Vice President of the US-based Freedom Forum, who specialises in communications technology, shifted the focus to the medium of the Internet.

Advanced technology does not automatically mean an advanced society, he said, contrasting the achievements of the US space programme at a time when civil rights marchers were on the streets protesting against racism and segregation in the USA.

Central to the notion of the Internet and the amalgamation of computer and communication technology is the instantaneous access it can provide to small communities and groups. He saw this enabling minority groups to disseminate information from almost anywhere to anywhere else, bypassing conventional structures which might normally restrict publication of minority opinion.

The Internet is already being used as a forum for political debate on issues affecting minority and ethnic groups, he said. And he described how one investigative journalist had used it to track down racists responsible for arson attacks on black churches in Alabama.

A fundamental change in the media is underway, he said, shifting from a structure of a few central sources and the need for massive audiences, towards anyone with a personal computer who will be able to generate his or her own programming and have worldwide distribution at the touch of a button.

Although the new technology could be used as a force for good, its very ease of access meant it could be counter-productive, he warned.

"The United States Supreme Court is throwing up its hands and saying it cannot be regulated."

"The upside is that the technology empowers everybody, and the down side is also that it empowers everybody."

"It's empowering because of the price curve. One of the co-founders of Intel, the dominant microchip company, has drawn attention to a mathematical formula based on the fact that, simply because of technological progress, the price of a given unit of computer power falls by fifty per cent every 18 months. It sounds fantastic but it has proven true for the last 40 years. Every two decades the price of a given unit of computer power falls by a factor of a thousand," said Adam.

"The little machine I carry in my bag, costs about £1,000, but has more memory, faster speed, and more power than a machine costing £1million just twenty years ago.

"This is about to hit us at an individual level. In the next 24 months we're going to see the arrival of machines costing about the same as a television, which will be TVs but also computers," said Adam. "They will edit video, plug into a telephone line and send it worldwide. That's going to be extraordinary."

"I don't think anybody knows what that world is going to be like, and that world is almost here. It means every church, every community group, could have live video links for under £1000."

Vivienne Lichtenstein from Jewish-Arab Dialogue & Education (JADE) expressed amazement at what she perceived to be an obsession in the media with Jews and Arabs and the continuing conflict in and around the Middle East.

"If something happens in the Jewish-Arab conflict it gets massive column space, but if hundreds of people are killed in Algeria, I don't see the same media coverage. So I wonder what is so interesting about Jews and Arabs?" she said. "One of the major problems is that the media loves conflicts; they think conflict sells newspapers. There are an awful lot of peace initiatives in the Middle East, but we don't read about them. All we read about is the hatred between Jews and Arabs. It's a load of nonsense. Jews and Arabs are all colours, blond, blue-eyed, black. We are a whole range of things - from anarchists to fascists, atheists to ultra-orthodox - and yet people want to put us in a particular box.

"I don't know whether the media are pandering to people's demands or whether they shape them. They express things very emotively and I think they feed our worst instincts."

The media are guilty of ignoring distinctions between the races and religions, and showed a reluctance to criticise Jews due to over-sensitivity about being accused of anti-Semitism.

There remained an imperialistic and superior attitude among the British media, and a sanctimonious attitude when it came to reporting the failures of justice and fairness in other countries, said Vivienne. This was often used to proclaim how good it is that "we" are not like that, while at the same time ignoring injustices of equal magnitude on our own doorstep.

She ended with the call that was emphasised again and again throughout the day: the media should concentrate on our common attributes and highlight cultural differences as something to celebrate and to enjoy, rather than as something negative.

Chris Myant, Head of Media at the Commission for Racial Equality, began by outlining the Commission's determination to press for higher standards within society as a whole and the media specifically.

Delivering a speech which was to have been given by Commissioner Michael Hastings, he offered a fairly encouraging view, pointing out that those who feel frustrated or aggrieved should try to remember that there are people in the media actively working towards this goal.

The variety of organisations at the conference working for better standards and practices was a reflection of the many people who were at work in society with the same aims, he said.

Over the last 30 years there has been a real improvement in the media's coverage of ethnic minorities, and people inside the media had worked hard for it. Among the changes was a significant increase in the presence of ethnic minorities within the media, particularly broadcasting.

He attributed this to successive Broadcasting Acts, which have referred to the need for racial equality in employment practices.

In contrast, he noted that the newspaper industry was virtually untouched by equal opportunities practices. In recent years he had only seen a couple of adverts for jobs in national newspaper newsrooms and there is a very low percentage of Black or Asian employees in the media.

Calling for improved media coverage of ethnic minorities, Chris said that in the run-up to the last general election, the CRE had asked Leeds University to look at the performance of the media on

race-related news items. The researchers were impressed by the improvements, but concerned by the media's failure to respond in a rounded way to the diversity of modern Britain, he said.

"I'm afraid most media professionals are rather complacent about their work and don't like listening to criticism," he said. "The media has got choices on race equality.

"The most optimistic thing one can say is that we have done enough over the past generation to know that we can eliminate racial discrimination and intolerance."

Chris offered four ways of improving the way the media deals with race.

Firstly, that individuals who are not happy with the media should complain, cajole and criticise. The CRE plan to play their part in the process at face-to-face meetings with key decision-makers across the media.

Secondly, the CRE hoped that future legislation on race would parallel the references to racial equality in employment practices for broadcasters with references to content and portrayal.

Thirdly, the CRE intends to keep up the pressure for equality of opportunity practices in employment. "There is no part of the media that yet does what it should, but the national newspaper sector is undoubtedly the worst," said Chris.

"Fourthly, we want to see the regulators playing a more positive role in setting higher standards on race issues."

The CRE also wants to address the "absurdity" of the Code that the Press Complaints Commission polices.

"All other regulatory bodies accept the idea of general offence, but the PCC does not. When confronted with examples like the anti-German coverage of the Euro '96 football tournament, it has chosen to issue statements rather than findings," said Chris.

"Those statements are helpful expressions of the need to meet high standards, but complaint after complaint continues to be rejected on the grounds that the Code does not cover third party complaints in this respect."

He commented that the PCC had recently upheld a complaint that a columnist's 'humorous' remarks about the elderly and mentally ill were clearly distressing to them and breached the spirit of the industry Code.

"I can't see why they do not apply the same approach to the many complaints on racial offence that they receive," said Chris. "The CRE will be seeking to persuade them to do so."

The CRE recognises that it is, and must continue to be, part of the process to bring about change from concentrated, continuous and united effort from all parties concerned about racism in the media, he concluded.

Words will never hurt me?

Danny Farragher considers issues raised in the session devoted to the press and radio.

As angry participants to this session demonstrated, words certainly do hurt, especially when they are used without an appreciation of the consequences. The focus of discussion was on the language used in the press and on radio when covering race issues and stories about ethnic minorities.

Led by TV presenter Shyama Pereira, the session began with a poignant contribution from Kingsley Eakette, who explained how he and his family were both affected and treated by the press when mistakes were printed about the circumstances of his son's murder. Their errors, and the many months he spent trying to correct them, had added greatly to the sufferings of his grieving family.

He accused the press of disregarding the feelings and sensibilities of the people they reported on, especially if they were 'different'. It was clear, he said, that profit, not a sense of support or justice, was the motive behind misreporting. Even when he had tried to get his local paper to examine its own behaviour, initially he found their attitude at best indifferent. He had obtained satisfactory redress from the paper only after the intervention of PressWise, the voluntary organisation that provides advice and support to people with complaints about the print and broadcast media.

Mike Jempson, Executive Director of PressWise, told of other cases he had dealt with where newspapers and regulators appeared not to appreciate the harm done by careless and sensational reporting.

He recounted the appalling experience of PressWise founder Desiree Ntolo, a Cameroonian Rabbi who was mocked by the national press and media when she built an Oratory in her garden.

"As in so many cases, they all missed the real story and contented themselves with cheap headlines at her expense," he said. "She was inundated with hate mail, and only *The Voice* gave her space to tell her side of the affair."

He also drew attention to the fact that the Press Complaints Commission has yet to find in favour of a single complaint about racist reporting.

This led to lively debate. Representatives of every ethnic or minority group present had a story to tell about misrepresentation and misreporting, either from personal experience or affecting one of their community.

Jeanne Rathbone from Irish People & Equal Opportunities commented on the stereotypical and narrow portrayal of Irish people. She felt that the Irish had not only been marginalised in society but often ignored in the wider debate about racism which tended to concentrate on Blacks and Asians. The plight of travellers and gypsies, was aired by Rachel Morris from the Telephone Legal Advice Service for Travellers, who highlighted the crucial role of the media in creating or changing attitudes about such groups.

More specific examples, especially recent blatant and disturbing vilification of the gypsies from Eastern Europe, were cited.

Franqui Wolf from the Friends & Families of Travellers spoke of the hatred generated by such inaccurate and inappropriate coverage and the distress it caused.

The use of language in the material and resources used to educate children came in for criticism from Gerry German of the Working Group Against Racism in Children's Resources.

Vince Braithwaite from the Community Media Association (CMA) shifted the debate to concern about the problems faced by grass roots ethnic minority activists when they encounter the mainstream media.

He spoke about the efforts of ethnic minority communities to create their own media, and drew attention to the training work being done by the CMA on these topics, as part of an EC funded initiative.

Alex Pascall OBE, a veteran broadcaster who now chairs the National Union of Journalists' Black Members Council, had some sobering words for Britain's black communities.

We need to clean up our own backyard, he said.

Pointing the finger at the burgeoning black press he said it was time to cure some of the problems which exist there, especially over wages and conditions. Black journalists must be critical of their own work as well as challenging the standards of mainstream media coverage of black issues, he insisted.

Migration and the media

Research lecturer Liza Beattie of the Glasgow Media Group analyses an 'immigration scare story' and its the impact on audiences and readers.

Some of the 'fictions' generated by media coverage have influenced popular understandings - the words 'migrant', 'immigrant' and 'immigration' have come to be associated with migrants from India and the British Caribbean.

Yet historically, most migrants to Britain have actually been of 'white' European origin, mainly from Ireland. Migration is also a normal process of industrial capitalism which has contributed to the growth of all modern industrial powers in Europe.

It can be argued that migrants do jobs that are crucial to society and migrant communities have made a significant contribution to the British economy over the years. The Asian community, for example, has helped to reconstruct the textile industry and establish a new cuisine.

In modern times, migration has resulted from the end of the Cold War, the rise of nationalism and civil war, particularly in Eastern Europe. Shifts in the world economy which demand a free market for labour as well as goods, have also been cited as factors.

Some argue that the more skilled the work force and the greater the economic growth of a country, the more necessary imported labour becomes, to do the unskilled, low-paid jobs. And when you draw on that labour force, you are taking the young men, the most mobile, who take very little from society because they come to work.

It is not just the poor who migrate, but the best educated too. Recent migrants from India and the Caribbean have taken up posts in British hospitals, while British doctors and nurses travel to America and Canada.

In other words, there is a new phenomenon of migration in the 1990s which has to be understood in a different way from the old tribal concept of nationhood in Europe; it is a global process.

The Wardle resignation

Our study aims to examine images of migration and 'race' in British television and the press, for the period 11 February to 11 March 1995, when substantial coverage was given to immigration issues following the resignation of the Conservative Trade Minister, Charles Wardle over plans to relinquish British border controls under the European Union. Several themes emerged.

The immigration process was framed in a mostly negative way by the British news media. This is evident in the way in which the views of Charles Wardle were prioritised.

Most of the reported statements focused on his account of the scale of the illegal migration process and referred to the political and social nature of the 'threat' this apparently posed to Britain.

Alternative information to contest this view was available at the time. It occurs occasionally on the news, but only as fragments which are not pursued. For example, on the day following the resignation, a BBC reporter introduced Wardle's statement as follows:

'The fear that immigration checks will prove ineffective is at the root of the minister's resignation. He's worried that British controls won't be sufficient to stop immigrants who've already entered other European Union countries from coming here. Charles Wardle now intends to campaign as a backbench MP against European law which he says is weakening Britain's immigration control.'

Charles Wardle MP: 'We welcome millions of visitors, but what we don't want is an unchecked flow of vast numbers of people who would possibly stay here and incur a huge cost for social security, housing, education, health and so on.' (BBC1, 2050, 12 February 1995)

It would not have been difficult to criticise such views.

The Daily Telegraph managed to, noting that, 'There is one easy way to raise a laugh in Europe,' and that Charles Wardle had done this when he resigned. It was to 'conjure up the image of a flood of immigrants leaving the desperate privations of continental Europe as fast as they can for the fat, easy life in Britain'.

'It would have to be a pretty perverse sort of immigrant to make a beeline for Britain when there are nine or ten other richer EU countries...'

The reality of the migrant flow is that 'apart from Ireland...Britain has seen proportionately the largest outflow of population to the rest of the EU in the past 20 years. It has some 350,000 citizens living in other EU countries.' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 1995).

Little of this appeared in television news accounts which were dominated by the projected 'flood' of migrants who were apparently intending to come to Britain. For example: '...the country faces a flood of illegal immigrants;' (ITN, 1300, 12 February 1995) '...fears of weakened efforts against terrorism and a tidal wave of refugees' (BBC1, 1800, 14 February 1995). In fact, the 'flood' metaphor was used 11 times in news reports between 12-14 February 1995.

Frequent repetition of such phrases as 'flood', 'tidal wave' (on BBC1, 14 February) and 'unchecked flow' (3 times on BBC1 on 12 February), constructs a very specific view of the process; in which migrants are metamorphosed from the status of a social group to that of a natural disaster or 'catastrophe' threatening the survival of a country.

As a result, disaster and controls become the dominant themes of TV news where barriers must be kept in place to avoid disaster at all costs. For example, in the second day's coverage the ITN newsreader states (1825, 12 February 1995): 'Trade Minister Charles Wardle quit yesterday saying that European policies would bring a flood of immigrants into Britain but the Prime Minister insisted his fears were groundless saying the government would stand firm on its immigration rules.' In this way, 'European policy', 'flood of immigrants' and 'immigration rules' all co-exist together in the same sentence as though one naturally induces the other.

Television news reports tend to depict migration as a negative and threatening process. The government is represented in reported statements as responsible in the first place for evoking this 'threat' and secondly, in their attempts to conceal it. This is emphasised through the repetition of certain phrases.

On BBC1, we are told: 'The former Trade Minister Charles Wardle has accused the government of leaving Britain's back door open to thousands of illegal immigrants. (1230, 11 February 1995)

And, 'The former Home Secretary and Conservative Party Chairman Kenneth Baker has tonight accused John Major of sweeping the issue of immigration under the carpet in the negotiations leading to the Maastricht treaty.' (2055, 18 February 1995)

In this way, the issue of migration, border controls and the government become juxtaposed in a narrative of damage and destruction focused on the 'true level' of illegal immigration into Britain. As a result, the issue of migration as a process is transposed into migration as a threat, through the repetition of such phrases as 'surrender', 'defend' and 'fears', as this example from BBC1 demonstrates:

'The former Trade Minister Charles Wardle who resigned at the weekend saying he feared Britain was going to surrender border controls said today the speech confirmed his suspicions.' (1800, 15 February 1995):

The frame of reference created by this kind of language is of migration as a process to be 'feared' and resisted at all costs.

Migrants as 'invaders'

Our study revealed 179 references to the need for border controls and to the 'threat' posed by European policy.

News language and imagery are also dynamic in framing migrants as invaders who damage the social system. This is evident in the repeated reference given on BBC1, to the comments of the former Trade Minister Charles Wardle, who resigned over the threat of illegal immigration in Britain, referring to it as: '...an unchecked flow of vast numbers of people who would possibly stay here and incur a huge cost for social security, housing, education, health and so on. That would be unacceptable.' (1230, 12 February 1995)

Thus, migrants are depicted as a 'threat' to the social fabric of Britain, as threatening Britain's 'quality of life', 'social security, housing, education and health'. Indeed, this concept of migrants as invaders who damage the social system becomes a pervasive theme of the visuals as well, which frame images of young men who sit at street corners smoking and chatting to their friends.

Our analysis also revealed xenophobic attitudes towards migration in general - as opposed to illegal migration in particular - in the television coverage of the issue. This was revealed by the conflation of the terms 'illegal immigrant' with 'immigrant' in some of the news reports. Between 11-20 February, the noun 'immigrant' was used in TV reports 32 times - only on 8 occasions was it not qualified by the word 'illegal'.

This was particularly evident in reports on BBC1, ITN and Channel 4. As in the following example: Trade Minister Charles Wardle quit yesterday saying that European policies would bring a flood of immigrants into Britain. (ITN, 1825, 12 February 1995)

Therefore, the distinction is not always made clear, between legal and illegal immigrants. The effect of this is to distort the issue as though it is the process in general that is the problem.

Depicting the 'race' of migrants

The iconography of television news also identified a particular 'race' of migrants perceived as coming from Third World countries and, even more specifically, identified as being black.

News items can often focus on and end with visuals of Asian families entering the UK when discussing the threat of illegal immigration if border checks are relinquished under European rules. Ten out of 14 references to the source countries of migration, depicted the third world as a major source of migration into Europe. Most of these depicted North Africa as the main source and occurred on all the TV channels, but especially on BBC1, where five statements appeared between 14-15 February 1995.

'Along the Spanish coast people fleeing persecution in North Africa or simply seeking a better life come ashore regularly. Once inside the external borders of the 15 member states, tracking them successfully relies on very good police work and exchange of intelligence between member states.' (BBC1, 1300, 14 February 1995)

The study results so far

Our study also aims to examine the structure of audience beliefs and its relation to the perception of media content, by tracing the processes by which key messages are received and the conditions under which they are believed, rejected or reinterpreted.

Seven of the audience groups we conducted were white and these were drawn from Glasgow, London and Bradford which were structured to reflect the role of key variables such as personal experience, cultural history and socio-economic groups.

What we have found is extraordinary, in so far as it demonstrates the extent to which the focus groups were able to reproduce and replicate the content of the news, over 18 months after this story had featured in the news.

In the first phase of the group session, participants were asked to produce a written exercise. Group members were given a newspaper headline and asked to write the news article which may have accompanied it. The headline read: 'IMMIGRATION: NEW WARNING - London to bear brunt as 1 million head for Britain (*Evening Standard*, 7 March 1997)

The extent to which our groups were able to reproduce the language and terminology of the tabloids was remarkable. For example, the *Daily Mail* on 13 February 1995 ran the headline: 'Wardle warns of a tidal wave of migrants.' And *The Sun* had declared (22 February 1995): 'Hundreds of thousands are flooding into Britain.'

Eighteen months later one group of students wrote: 'A leaked document yesterday revealed phenomenal waves of immigrants flooding towards the UK.'

Another group wrote: 'London set to be swamped by refugees as Britain relinquishes sovereignty of Hong Kong to the Chinese. Many Hong Kong citizens already hold British passports and many more are rushing to apply before the deadline for applications is reached.'

The group exercises used the same metaphorical terms as the tabloid press and repeatedly used the terms, 'flooding', 'waves of immigrants', 'swamped', 'rushing', 'saturation', 'surge' and an 'influx' which would have 'catastrophic effects'. The 'alarm' which such terminology can generate was also expressed in the exercises.

One middle class group wrote: 'London today is in the throes of an alarming warning as a figure of one million immigrants was predicted.'

A group of cleaners expressed 'anger' at the headline: 'The headlines have London in a state of anger as we are fed up with bearing the cost of foreigners.' Indeed, the extent to which press accounts structured public perceptions is apparent in the extent to which our groups perceived the process as an invasion. The *Sun* in particular had developed this theme on 15 February 1995, in its front page headline: 'WE WILL FIGHT THEM ON THE BEACHES - Race war peril if UK curbs go.'

On 31 October 1996 a group of students from Glasgow reproduced this headline: 'CHURCHILL FIGHTS THEM ON THE BEACHES.'

Another group were clearly aware of the extent to which media reports had influenced them. They entitled their exercise: 'TABLOID VIEWPOINT - Can our faltering economy withstand this 'Asian invasion'? Call our hotline with your opinions now!! 0891...'

This reveals the extent to which media coverage provides a framework for understanding the process of migration in particular kinds of ways, a template even, which can be modified, adapted or updated to any new information or events which they perceive to be a variation of this theme.

If our study shows anything, it shows the power of the media to influence popular understandings of such important public issues.

Image is all - the changing face of TV

Adeline Iziren witnesses a lively session about TV's efforts to represent multi-cultural Britain.

Broadcasters have failed to reflect the diversity of British culture, and the growing number of African-Caribbean presenters on TV gave a false impression of what was going on behind the scenes, according to Diane Freeman of the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television (PACT).

Black people found it difficult to get programmes made, she added, and it had become even more difficult in recent years, because broadcasters were commissioning from a smaller number of companies. Her targets were all broadcasting companies but in the absence of Yasmin Anwar, recently promoted Commissioning Editor of Multi-Cultural Programming at Channel 4, only the BBC heard the criticism.

In response, one delegate remarked that the only really successful black production company was Crucial Films, owned by comedian Lenny Henry.

A media student, lamented that when he finished his studies he was not even going to bother pursuing a career in the media because he did not feel he stood a chance.

Journalist Beulah Ainley supported the view that members of ethnic minorities got a raw deal in terms of employment opportunities. She has conducted interviews with 100 black and Asian media workers and research is to be published in book form during 1998 under the title *Black Journalists, White Media*. Her comments were backed up by Jane Paul, the Equalities Officer with the broadcasting technicians' union BECTU and her colleague Europe Singh.

Former journalist and successful TV presenter Shyama Pereira, who was moderating the debate, encouraged media hopefuls to keep plugging away, but pointed out that few senior broadcasting executives has turned up to defend their corner.

David Docherty, Deputy Director of BBC TV, however, was present and rose to the challenge. He admitted that the BBC could do a lot more for ethnic minorities. "We have done a good job getting ethnic minorities into the BBC, but we haven't focused on how you develop once you are in, and so people end up leaving," he said. He insisted that the BBC is taking steps to rectify the problem, and was backed up by staff from the Corporation's Equalities Unit.

In January 1998, the BBC is to launch a year-long mentoring and development scheme aimed at a mixed population of ambitious mentors and mentees who are committed to developing a career within the broadcasting arm of the BBC.

The scheme would include development programmes, projects, seminars, and practical hands-on training, as well as one-to-one mentoring. The BBC is also launching a new diversity database to improve the range of programme contributors. The database, comprising an initial 15,000 contacts, should enable programme-makers to find ethnic minorities, women and disabled people to talk about a particular subject.

In a lively opening contribution to the session Jim Pines from the University of Luton, screened part of the most recent edition of *The A Force*, BBC2's late night 'black entertainment' slot. He dubbed it the "trash element of black culture," and while one media worker leapt to the defence of the BBC, describing *The A Force* as "funny and thought-provoking," most people seemed to agree with his critique. He felt that participants in the programme were feeding on stereotypes and contributing little to the creation of a new image for black people.

Ethnic minority delegates to the Forum seized this opportunity to attack the BBC over the portrayal of black people in entertainment programmes. They demanded more black drama; a more positive portrayal of black and Irish characters in *EastEnders* - one person was applauded when she

described the black characters in *EastEnders* were as 'unreal'; and fewer programmes like *The A Force*.

David Docherty said the BBC had no plans for a black drama programme, but told delegates that the BBC was making a four-part documentary on the slave trade and a season of programmes to mark the 50th anniversary of the historic arrival of Caribbean immigrants to Britain on MV Windrush in June 1948.

Impressed by his frankness and willingness to listen, delegates quickly surrounded David when the session ended and kept him talking.

Getting in the picture

Adeline Iziren & Mike Jempson join the debate about two controversial films.

Two workshops at the Forum cast a critical eye over TV coverage of race issues by viewing controversial films - one which upset the media establishment when it was first broadcast by the BBC in 1981, and another which network TV has so far failed to screen.

Workshop screenings of Bristol-based Black Pyramid Films' recent documentary *Aftermath: The Marlon Thomas Story* and the BBC Community Unit's provocative *It Ain't Half Racist, Mum*, certainly got people talking.

Film-maker Mindell Bowen was on hand to discuss *Aftermath* which received its first London screening at the Forum. It tells of an unprovoked racist attack on a black teenage boy and his friends by a gang of white adults at a Bristol fairground.

Marlon Thomas was in a coma for many months after the attack in March 1994 and was left severely brain damaged. Relatives, friends and neighbours of the Thomas family were outraged by the low-key media coverage afforded to the incident. Black and white anti-racists united around the family to expose the fairground workers responsible for the attack and demand justice.

When Marlon's attackers received derisory jail sentences the campaign continued to ensure that stiffer penalties were imposed. The film also charts Marlon's slow but gradual progress and the feelings of others who were injured in the original incident. It is a painful but moving documentary.

Mindell, the film's producer and director, discussed how the film was made and how she had sought to ensure that Marlon's family were happy with the finished product.

Channel Four gave Black Pyramid development funds to make the film, but refused to commission it after they saw the finished product. According to Black Pyramid, C4 said the film was too dramatic, and they wanted the story told 'straight'.

Commenting on C4's decision, Mindell said: "It is C4's prerogative to say no they don't want a particular film, but they didn't say, 'We've got this strand coming up, have you got any other ideas?' Black film makers are having a really hard time."

Another broadcaster has expressed an interest in the film and she remains hopeful that Marlon Thomas' story will eventually reach a much wider audience.

Meanwhile, delegates decided, there is plenty of scope for a remake of the *It Ain't Half Racist, Mum*, originally made for the BBC's community access slot almost 20 years ago by the Campaign Against Racism in the Media.

Some were shocked at how blatant the comedy stereotypes had been, and amazed at the deference shown by respected white presenters to racists advocating repatriation and worse.

All agreed that much had changed in the meantime, but there is still room for improvement in media representation of ethnic minorities. More black faces may now appear in front of the camera, but too many dramas and documentaries still present ethnic minorities as living on the margins.

Arabic, Asian, Chinese, and Irish characters often have cameo roles as 'exotic villains', and programme-makers still seem very self-conscious about employing 'minority representatives' in mainstream roles.

Delegates also expressed annoyance at the continued use of white UK-based academics as resident 'experts' on world affairs, as if people from the country in question, and especially refugees, cannot be trusted to tell us the truth.

Regulation and Redress

Danny Farragher & Adeline Iziren listen to a heated debate about the role of media regulation in developing a tolerant society.

The final session of the Forum was devoted to the strengths, weaknesses and effectiveness of the statutory and self-regulatory bodies which are supposed to ensure fairness and high standards in the British media.

Inevitably, given the record of the self-regulated press on race issues, much time was given over to berating the Press Complaints Commission. Ironically the two leading contributors were Americans bemused by the 'British way.'

Moderating discussion was urban sociologist Professor Thom Blair, editor of a new Internet magazine *The Chronicle: Changing Black Britain*, launched at the Forum.

Thom introduced the highly entertaining Bob Borzello, a former journalist who now runs Camden Press, the main sponsor of the Forum. He launched a ferocious attack on the Press Complaints Commission, calling it "weak and flabby."

"Its predecessor, the Press Council was much stronger," said Bob.

The focus of his criticism was the PCC "Third Party" rule which effectively denies anyone other than the person named in a story the right to complain. Anyone can submit a complaint, but it is entirely within the discretion of the PCC as to which are proceeded with.

Complaints about reports which cast a slur upon an ethnic or national group are particularly difficult to obtain a ruling on because no individual is singled out.

"Today, of course, newspapers can call gays 'poofs' and Pakistanis 'Pakis' and get away with it, because the PCC calls this language 'collective racism,'" said Bob. "If Hitler were around today, there would be nothing to stop him being a popular columnist."

Continuing his attack, Bob declared: "The PCC is crap. It doesn't work and it is not intended to work."

He insisted that individuals and organisations representing ethnic minorities should be more active in voicing their dissatisfaction with offensive coverage.

"How many of those present feel there is racism in the British press?" he asked delegates. Judging from the reaction, everyone present shared his view.

"OK," he went on, "how many of you have registered complaints with the PCC?" Only three hands went up. His riposte was as blunt as his challenge to the PCC. "Victims remain victims because they do bugger all. If you want to change something, you have got to change it yourselves."

The PCC were not present to defend themselves despite having been given six months notice of the Forum.

PressWise Executive Director Mike Jempson explained that PressWise had been set up by 'victims of media abuse' and welcomed Bob Borzello's call to arms. "We are happy to assist anyone who wants to make a complaint, especially if groups want to take up Bob's challenge over third party rulings," he said. PressWise offers free advice whether complaints are about the print or the broadcast media.

Stephen Whittle, Director of the Broadcasting Standards Commission, explained the role of the new BSC.

The Broadcasting Standards Council which dealt with taste and decency issues and conducted research into the social impact of broadcasting, has now combined with the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, the statutory body responsible for investigating complaints about fairness and accuracy.

The new body considers complaints on all these matters, and conducts research into the impact of broadcasting on people's lives. The BSC has a statutory duty to devise guidelines for broadcasters, and to adjudicate on complaints from the public.

The BSC deals with public service and commercial broadcasting, including radio, satellite, cable and digital TV, and broadcast advertisements.

Broadcasting companies are obliged to publish corrections and apologies where appropriate, but the BSC has no power to fine broadcasters or award compensation to complainants.

Broadcasting companies are themselves supposed to frame internal guidelines based on those set by the BSC, and the Independent Television Commission (ITC).

Steve Perkins from the ITC was on hand to describe its regulatory functions. It is a statutory body which issues licences all TV broadcasters. It monitors the technical quality of their services and the fulfilment of their contractual obligations, as well as regulating programme and advertising standards. Unlike the BSC, it does have the power to fine, but not to award compensation to victims when complaints are upheld.

Broadcasters found to be in breach of their license agreements may face the ultimate deterrent - foreshortening or revocation of their licence to broadcast.

The view from the Press Complaints Commission

PCC Chairman Lord Wakeham supplied the Forum with a copy of his speech to the Commission for Racial Equality Race in the Media Awards 1996.

"Justice and equality...are so easy to bandy about in rhetoric but far more difficult to put into practice. I served many years in Government - and I have little hesitation in saying that one of the most difficult areas of public policy that politicians of any party have to grapple with is that of equality.

"Equality between the sexes. Equality between those of different races. And in Ulster in particular, even equality between those of differing traditions. These are all complex issues which invite no easy or swift political solution.

"But that said, they go right to the heart of why I - like, indeed, most politicians whatever party label is placed on them - went into politics in the first place. To heal divides based on ignorance and fear. To break down barriers to opportunity. To ensure that each and every one of us has the chance to fulfil his or her talents to the full.

"In short, to create a society in which tolerance begets opportunity - and opportunity tears down those walls of prejudice which have shut out too many. I say that with passionate conviction - but I say it aware that it is easier to talk about than to achieve.

"A little over a century ago, Trollope - beloved of a generation of politicians - told us how 'equality would be heaven - if we could attain it'. He wrote that at a time when women didn't have the vote and when domestic service helped to make us truly two nations, not one.

"That century has gone, we have attained much of the equality he probably thought impossible. In the last 150 years the statute books have been filled with legislation - stamping out in statute the sorts of inequality to which law could put an end.

"We legislated to allow Catholics to take their place in Parliament. We legislated to give women the vote. We legislated to ensure that jobs are open to all regardless of race or sex. And so far as the law is concerned, we live today in an equal society - where rights, responsibilities and freedoms are shared uniformly by all.

"But we all know that this is not always the case. The difficulty is that there is no scope for legislation to deal with the hardest part: the vagaries of human emotions; the murky sinews of instinct; the foibles of historical prejudice.

"No magic wand will deal with those. But (the CRE's) work can. And (the PCC) can help. It is my belief that while legislation has stamped out a great deal, it is public opinion, the persuasion of peer pressure and the lead of opinion formers that will have to do the rest. To ensure that the equality that exists in the ether of the law exists on the streets of our great cities and in the quiet pubs of rural retreats.

"Equality and intolerance exist only in the mind. Crucial in any battle to shape minds and win hearts is the media - and not just newspapers, but television and radio as well. All forms of media have a great capacity to act as the motors of public opinion - shifting out-of-date moods, and condemning what is wrong.

"In (the CRE's) efforts to tackle pre-judice and intolerance, (the CRE) may not always have looked at the print media...as an ally. In the early and mid '80s when a handful of journalists and some newspapers were thumbing their noses at authority across a wide range of conventions and precedents, you would certainly have had very good grounds for such concerns.

"Whether it be an invasion of privacy, inaccuracy in reporting, or mistreatment of minorities, there are some examples of what can loosely be described as journalism from that period that are worthy of the most effective condemnation.

"But times have changed - and must continue to do so. Across the range of my responsibilities - including the thorny issue of privacy - there has been a sea change in attitudes since the PCC was established in 1991.

"It is my belief that a combination of an effective Commission - policing a Code of Practice drawn up by the press itself - with a realisation that this really is the last chance for self-regulation, has raised journalistic standards across the board.

"What simply raised eyebrows in the 1980s would today bring down a ton of bricks on any editor who allowed his or her newspaper blatantly to flout the central tenets of our Code of Practice. This is just as true in (the area of racial equality) as in any other.

"Furthermore, I believe that it is not just our Code but the imperatives of the market place that have helped ferment this change. Readers today simply won't tolerate newspapers that invade the privacy of private individuals without any defence of public interest - and they won't tolerate newspapers that treat racial minorities in an offensive manner. And nor will I.

"For all these reasons, the dismal days when a very few newspapers helped keep barriers up - rather than acting as a power for good to tear them down - have receded into the rear view mirror. But I know utopias don't exist, and I am not going to pretend that there are just roses in the garden.

"Those journalists (honoured by the Race in the Media awards) do their profession the greatest credit - (they) are ambassadors representing the vast majority. Examples of bad practice do still exist, however, and in dealing with them I need (the CRE's) help and the help of those members of Britain's ethnic minority communities who have things to complain about.

"Contained within the newspaper industry's Code of Practice there is a clause (13) that deals with race. It binds the industry - which framed it in the first place - to avoiding 'prejudicial or pejorative references to a person's race, colour or religion', and also to refrain from 'publishing such details about a person, unless (it is) directly relevant to the story'.

"Very few substantive complaints under that clause have ever come before us, not, I believe, necessarily because of uniformly high standards but sometimes because some readers still do not believe it worthwhile complaining to us...Those who think this could not be more wrong.

"Every complaint we uphold sets a precedent and adds to our body of case law. In the absence of substantive complaints which raise a real breach of the Code, it is difficult to gather such precedent and the progress of both (the CRE and the PCC) is hampered as a result.

"So, if readers want to ratchet up standards as much as I do - then complain when something goes wrong. They will find my Commission ready, willing and able to assist (the CRE) in its important work. That of course won't be the end of the story, but it has a small part to play in tackling intolerance through persuasion and public opinion.

"Three hundred years ago one of the greatest of English philosophers - John Locke - set out a creed which is at the heart of democratic politics: 'Man being by nature... free, equal and independent, no one can put (him) out of that estate without his consent.'

"Free. Equal. Independent. That was the sort of society I came into politics to help foster. It is the sort of society (the CRE is) working to create. In those tasks, the media has a full role to play as well.

"Much has to be done. More remains to do - and in that I need your assistance. I hope that in coming years we can work together increasingly closely in a joint task: to raise standards across the board to those high levels to which the vast majority of editors and journalists already aspire."

PressWise Footnote

1. Six months before it took place PressWise invited the PCC to jointly sponsor the Forum. In his reply Lord Wakeham declined, explaining:

'The PCC is primarily a complaints handling body. Unlike the old Press Council, we do not have a campaigning remit on issues such as this or any other. I think it would therefore be inappropriate for the Commission to be involved as a partner in the Forum - however personally committed Members of the Commission may be to its laudable aims.'

In the event, neither Lord Wakeham nor any member of his staff was able to attend the Forum.

2. What is the difference between elderly people, the mentally ill and ethnic minorities?

The PCC defends tabloid use of 'robust' language (which many would find offensive) while issuing several warnings about the dangers of xenophobic press coverage during sports tournaments. However, the PCC ignored the objections of the Association of Greater London Older Women (AGLOW) to offensive remarks about "a dozen varieties of sweating ethnic minorities" in a supposedly humorous article in the magazine *Time Out*.

Upholding the rest of AGLOW's complaint, the PCC decided: "The columnist's humorous remarks had misfired... (and) were clearly distressing to the elderly and to those with mental health problems."

Race and the media - a global review

Bill Norris, Associate Director of PressWise, surveys the world scene.

Do journalists care about the way they tackle racial issues?

The answer seems to be that it all depends where they come from.

Though most of the 44 countries covered in a recent PressWise global survey of journalistic codes of ethical conduct do mention the subject of race, the emphasis placed on the subject varies widely. In western countries the topic tends to get no more than a cursory mention.

Germany, for instance, which has one of the most voluminous press codes in the world - running to 17 pages of advice and admonition - devotes only a couple of lines to race.

"There must be no discrimination," it says, "against anyone on grounds of sex, race, ethnic background, religion, social group or nationality." And that's that.

A worthy sentiment, and one which is echoed to a greater or lesser degree in most of the European codes, from Russia and the members of the former eastern bloc to Spain and Ireland.

Some elaborate a little, some are even more brief, but the general sentiment seems to be that once reporters have avoided deliberate discrimination, and left out any mention of a person's ethnic background wherever possible, they have done enough.

Some ten nations - among them the United States - fail to include the word "race" in their codes at all.

This may be because the issue of racism never arises in these countries, though anyone who has spent a little time in America might have doubts on this subject.

Things are very different in Asia, where the concept of avoiding offence and the stirring up of racial hatreds by injudicious or malicious reporting has taken strong hold. This is especially true of India, where a strongly-worded code on the reporting and commenting on communal incidents was put in place by the All India Newspaper Editors' Conference as long ago as 1968.

Among its provisions:

"All editorial comments and other expressions of opinion, whether through articles, letters to the Editor, or in any other form should be restrained and free from scurrilous attacks against leaders or communities, and there should be no incitement to violence."

"Generalised allegations casting doubts and aspersions on the patriotism and loyalty of any community should be eschewed."

"Likewise, generalised charges and allegations against any community of unfair discrimination, amounted to inciting communal hatred and distrust, must also be eschewed."

"Items of news calculated to make for peace and harmony and help in the restoration and maintenance of law and order should be given prominence and precedence over other news."

"Names of communities should not be mentioned nor the terms 'majority' and 'minority' communities be ordinarily used in the course of reports."

And so on....

India, of course, has special problems. So do many other countries in Asia, nine of which sent journalist delegates to a special conference in Davao City in 1970 to thrash out an all-embracing code of conduct.

Among its provisions:

"Factual accuracy in a single story is no substitute for the total truth. A single story which is factually accurate can none the less be misleading."

"Prejudice may sell newspapers but newspapers should resist the temptation to exploit human fears for commercial gains."

"In mixed societies, editors should be aware of the danger of feeding by selective reporting, common prejudicial stereotypes about groups.

"Generalisations based on the behaviour of an individual or a small number of individuals are invariably unjust."

"When there is potential for communal tension, there should be a constant effort to investigate and expose the underlying causes."

"Statistics can be used to excite passion. They should always be checked and interpreted."

"Journalists should always use cool and moderate language, especially in headlines and also in display. No concession should be made to rhetoric. Lurid and gory details and emotive references to past history should be avoided."

"The traditional newspaper standards of checking for accuracy should be applied with even greater rigour in any stories involving racial, religious or communal groups.

"Statements should not be accepted at face value from any source, including official ones, and where necessary these should be accompanied in the news columns by corroboration and interpretation."

The full Asian Editors' code runs to 22 clauses, all of them devoted to helping, rather than hindering, the cause of ethnic harmony.

They make an interesting contrast to the terse brevity of the British NUJ code's reference to race:

"A journalist shall only mention a person's age, race, colour, creed, illegitimacy, disability, marital status (or lack of it), gender or sexual orientation if this information is strictly relevant."

"A journalist shall neither originate nor process material which encourages discrimination, ridicule, prejudice or hatred on any of the above-mentioned grounds."

The UK newspaper industry's Code of Practice, which is policed by the Press Complaints Commission, was recently updated but no changes were made to its anti-discrimination clause:

"The press should avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to a person's race, colour, religion, sex or sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.

"It must avoid publishing details of a person's race, colour, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability unless these are directly relevant to the story."

There is nothing the matter with these British codes until, that is, you begin to think about them. They seem to be linking a person's ethnic origin with a number of other characteristics - illegitimacy, for instance, or mental illness - which carry a social stigma.

Is that the way we should be thinking about race and the way in which it is reported? Perhaps it is time we took a leaf out of the Asian book, and thought again.

References to race in other codes and guidelines

The following examples provide a useful illustrative guide to the varied but essentially similar approach to racism adopted by UK media regulators.

The Advertising Standards Authority Code

The ASA Code places racism in the section on Decency, urging (5.1) that 'particular care should be taken to avoid causing offence on the grounds of race, religion etc' and points out that 'Compliance with the Code will be judged on the context, medium, audience, product and prevailing standards of decency.'

Elsewhere (11.1) it reminds advertisers to include 'nothing that condones or is likely to provoke violence or anti-social behaviour' and lists (67) the many laws they must comply with including the Race Relations Act 1976.

The Radio Authority Programme Code

1. Taste and Decency and the Portrayal of Violence.

1.3 Bad Taste in Humour

(a) Licensees must avoid humour which offends against good taste or decency. There is a danger of offence in the use of humour based on particular characteristics like race, gender or disability. Even where no malice is present, jokes can all too easily, and plausibly, exploit or humiliate for the purpose of entertainment. This not only hurts those most directly concerned but can repel many listeners.

(b) Recorded items

Items not used immediately must be checked before transmission to ensure that jokes or scenarios are not rendered tasteless by intervening events, such as death, injury or other misfortune.

5. Other Legal Matters

5.8 Racism

Licence Holder's attention is drawn to the requirements of the Race Relations Act 1976 (and corresponding legislation in Northern Ireland), particularly section 29 (discriminatory advertisements) and section 70 (incitement to racial hatred).

8. Promotion & Presentation

8.1 Opening Announcements and Warnings

When material is broadcast that is likely to disturb some listeners, a short factual statement must be given about the nature of that material immediately in advance. The statement must avoid taking the form of a warning that, in effect, invites listeners to prepare to be shocked.

Broadcasting Standards Commission Code

In its Code on Taste and Decency, which was under revision at the time of the Forum, the BSC has a special section on race.

3.33 It is important that broadcasters familiarise themselves with the culture of the different ethnic groups in Britain as part of their reflection of its cultural diversity. Apart from the strict requirements of the law governing race relations in Britain, there needs to be sensitivity towards the differences which exist between races and nations. Such differences and the conflicts they cause, as well as the occasions when they are overcome, need to be reflected in any accurate portrayal of both history and contemporary life. For example, there are times when racial or national stereotypes, whether physical or behavioural, may be used without offence in programmes, but their use and likely effect should always be considered carefully in advance.

3.34 Almost invariably, the use of derogatory terms in speaking of men and women of other races and nations gives offence and should be avoided unless the context warrants it. Great distinctions exist between many people within single countries, let alone whole continents, and a broad community of interest or a common identity cannot always be assumed. The presentation of minority groups as an undifferentiated mass, rather than a collection of individuals with limited interests in common should be discouraged.

3.35. Research also suggests that many of the racial role models provided for the young, particularly young black men, are derived from programming produced outside the UK, especially films and programmes originating in the US. For many, this is a problem, not least because of the stereotype it suggests to others

NUJ Guidelines

a. On race and journalists

1. Only mention someone's race or nationality if it is strictly relevant.
2. Resist the temptation to sensationalise issues which could harm race relations.
3. Press for equal opportunities for employment of black staff, particularly in areas of extensive minority group settlement.
4. Seek to achieve wider and better coverage of black affairs: social, political, cultural.
5. Investigate the treatment of blacks in education, employment and housing and the activities of racist organisations.

b. On reporting racist organisations

1. When interviewing representatives of racist organisations or reporting meetings or statements or claims, journalists should carefully check all reports for accuracy and seek rebutting or opposing comment. The anti-social nature of such views should be exposed.
2. Do not sensationalise by reports, photographs, film or presentation, the activities of racist organisations.
3. Seek to publish or broadcast material exposing the myths and lies of racist organisations and their anti-social behaviour.
4. Do not allow the letters column or 'phone-in' programmes to be used to spread racial hatred in whatever guise.

Do-it-yourself media

Danny Farragher talks to a media consultant about setting up a community radio station.

Any individual trying to tackle head on all the problems posed by the mainstream media and its treatment of minorities is likely to feel like a David up against an army of Goliaths. Getting in the door can be hard enough, but fortunately there are alternative avenues by which people who feel excluded can gain access, acquire skills, and develop the confidence to get involved in media production.

Community media projects, and especially community radio, offer an ideal training ground for later careers in the mainstream, but they also have a life and a value of their own.

There was a large contingent from the community media sector at the Forum already convinced of its value as an alternative outlet for the voices of minority communities. Ethnic minority groups in Britain have already begin to make use of this route, using short-term Restricted Service Licences (RSLs), and even broadcasting as pirate stations.

Desmond Coke of Truplay Radio ran a radio workshop at the Forum with his colleagues Owen Hamilton and Simone Penanc. They gave delegates a taste of what is involved in putting together a magazine programme for radio, working out a schedule and identity for the programme. Participants got to use the equipment and hear what the show would sound like.

Desmond believes that ethnic minorities can use their own media projects not only to communicate within their own communities but also to address the wider society. "My starting point, as a member of an ethnic minority myself, was the imbalance in terms of what was owned by ethnic minorities and what was being developed. I thought 'Well, what can we do about it?'

"I decided to put a concerted effort into making things better for the community in which I live, and for the people I wanted to work with - who are mainly young people - and give them the skills to develop as a group."

Desmond refuted any notion that community media is for 'anoraks'. He considers it a serious business, after all he pointed out, 'pirates' are willing literally to risk their lives to get on the air.

"We community media people see ourselves as a crucial part of media development. RSLs allow people the opportunity to gain confidence and skills they aren't normally able to get," he says. "They get the chance to set up their own radio station, promote their products, identify their market, and to be in contact with people.

"Commercial stations have not been giving us that opportunity. In community media young people and local organisations learn how to communicate within and beyond their own groups - when the Radio Authority allows them to do it."

The Radio Authority is the regulator that awards radio broadcasting licences. It has shown a marked reluctance to encourage community radio.

"It's difficult for community and ethnic minority groups to obtain such licences, especially when they are expected to compete with commercial broadcasting organisations," said Desmond. "It's a shame that in certain areas people are not allowed to broadcast on a longer-term basis - like eight years."

Janet Baldwin, who has wide experience of community radio in her native Australia, expressed surprise at how little community media has been allowed to develop in Britain. She was amazed at how much control over access to the airwaves is still exercised by existing companies and the regulators.

According to Desmond, the mainstream media are ambiguous about their community-based cousins. They express dismissive contempt for what they regard as amateurs but acknowledge the potential of community radio as a breeding ground for new staff and material.

Ironically many local radio stations, including the BBC, rely heavily upon unpaid volunteers to help with the day-to-day business of producing programmes and running a radio station. "Community media projects should be taken seriously, because we allow people who have never had a public voice to gain one, and to address the media in their own styles, and in their own dialects," Desmond insisted.

"That's an invaluable part of social development. Without fresh voices, new styles and dialects the English language and broadcasting would stagnate."

The costs of setting up and running community media projects can prove prohibitive; to meet them requires considerable dedication. "To be on air for a month will cost anything between £5,000 and £12,000," Desmond warned.

"I would encourage ethnic groups to do it, but trying to raise that type of money puts a voluntary group that has never done it before under a lot of pressure. I would like to see the process made cheaper, starting with Radio Authority licences."

For all the excitement and enthusiasm generated at this Forum workshop, there was continuing exasperation about lack of access to the airwaves. "The way forward is through schools and after-school clubs; community media should be part of the curriculum," replies Desmond.

The big question, of course, is will whether all this community activity will make any difference. The primary audiences they attract are already aware of the problems because they face them nearly every day.

"What community media does is to add to rather than take away from peoples lives. It puts an end to the feeling of being left out."

In an era when combating 'social exclusion' is supposed to be top of the political agenda community media could have an important role to play, but Desmond sees new problems on the horizon.

"The biggest problem could be in the changes from analogue to digital transmission. It will mean relearning skills, doing away with a whole load of equipment, and more difficulty in terms of people just being able to get online."

All is not doom and gloom. New technology is also opening up other routes of communication. Thomas Harding and Helen Iles of the groundbreaking *Undercurrents* community video team demonstrated the power of live footage at another workshop, and the Internet was also in full use.

"The Internet means that people can now access programming and use the Internet to give information about setting up stations, broadcasting opportunities and multi-media facilities," explained Desmond. "There are CMA members online in newsgroups now - they can communicate experience quickly and cheaply to newcomers who want to get involved. Between them they can bash ideas around and who knows what new opportunities will emerge."

Of course the Internet provides access to the world, and the community media movement is international.

Minority groups in Britain will now find it easier than ever to share ideas and experiences with partners elsewhere who have already found ways of overcoming the obstacles to communication that have limited access to the airwaves in their own backyard.

Accessing the information society in the blink of an eye

Danny Farragher learns about the Internet by visiting the cyber-conference that linked the Forum to the world.

While Forum delegates interacted 'in the flesh' around the different meeting rooms in the Abbey Community Centre, a stone's throw from the Houses of Parliament, other interested parties from around the world were exchanging views on the information superhighway.

With the aid of GreenNet, a cyber-conference was in full swing all day, and delegates were able to plug in to websites and newsgroups dealing with media issues and the concerns of ethnic minority communities in very different social settings.

John Adams of Black Information Link (BLINK) set up by The 1990 Trust, is an enthusiast. "Suddenly, people I haven't seen for 20 years are able to find me because of things I've written and put on the Internet."

He sees the new technology as liberating because it is uncontrollable. "How can you regulate a world in which any individual can generate programming and distribute it worldwide?"

"Suddenly we have this explosion of unregulated and uncoordinated, ad hoc, inventive information and entertainment. It's posing a great challenge to conventional structures of regulation and co-ordinated information management. "

The 1990 Trust BLINK Network is encouraging the use of cyberspace to influence government policy by disseminating Parliamentary Bills and information to minority communities which may be most affected and seeking to open the issues to a much wider forum, says John.

"Our site receives about 3,500 hits every day. That's 6-800 people every day, so the response is really huge.

"We are here to tell people that this sort of technology exists and how it can be useful to them. We know there is a problem of people gaining access to it because of the costs involved and all that, so we've got community access points all around the country."

BLINK supplies well-established community groups with a computer, hooks them up to the Internet, and pays for the service for a year. This enables previously powerless people to enter into the political arena and "tell it like it is" without having to go through a journalist.

"They can surf the Net and look for other information as they please, because there are no restrictions; but most of the information on the Net is irrelevant to our cause.

"There are a few black sites but they are all dealing with things like music, fashion and sport - the usual stereotypical things. We want to get away from those sites and bring people into the political arena, because until you affect change from the top, nothing is going to happen."

One new website launched at the Forum was *The Chronicle: Changing Black Britain*, a quarterly Internet magazine, edited by Prof Thom Blair. His intention is to chart social and political developments and provide useful data for those playing an active part in the process of change.

The information superhighway certainly seems to be opening up new routes to democracy and freedom of expression for those denied a voice by conventional media.

Ethnic minorities and the regulation of converging communication technologies

Mike Jempson summarises a report produced by PressWise and the Community Media Association about ethnic minorities in the digital age.

In the digital age it will be possible for all who can afford access to the technology to conduct communications via a unified interactive 'receiver' capable of use as a telephone, computer, word-processor, radio, TV, and video.

Many people regard the advent of interactive commercial, retail, leisure and learning services including pay-per-view TV, video on demand, Internet services and home shopping, banking and market research as 'the true dawn of the information society'.

As always the real power will remain with those who own the technology, unless there is regulation to ensure equal access to the communication networks. For social groups which are marginalised because they are thought to represent a commercially insignificant market in terms of numbers or disposable income, the digital age may become yet another barrier to break through.

Following the Ethnic Minorities and the Media Forum, PressWise and the Community Media Association made detailed submissions to the UK Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, the European Commission and the EC Information Society Forum. The focus of our report was the protection and enhancement of the interests of ethnic minority communities in the new communications environment.

We acknowledged that the convergence of communications technologies opens up almost unlimited potential for democratic participation in the information society. However we concluded that there is a real danger that the development of the information society will be technology led and driven by commercial considerations rather than social and democratic principles.

This could result in new forms of exclusion, especially among sectors of the population whose cultural identity or socio-economic status marks them out as minorities. We took the view that formal regulation is required to ensure that best practice is adopted across the spectrum - ownership and control, employment, access, quality of product, and content.

This should prevent convergence leading to the creation of a two-tier information society of 'haves' and 'have nots', and help to prevent the spread of unrepresentative commercial oligopolies benefiting from the economies of scale without considering social responsibilities.

Regulation should be 'rights-based' to ensure that the democratic potential of the new technologies is tapped. There should be a clear division between the rules and regulatory structures governing ownership, technical matters and employment policies and those governing content, complaints and redress.

Our report also called for ethnic minorities to be represented on and within the regulatory bodies. And we argued that an independent consumer-led body should be established to monitor convergence and ensure that it is used to the benefit of the many rather than the few.

After the Forum

Mike Jempson considers the options for PressWise.

Our aim is to improve standards of journalism and provide support for those who suffer as a result of unethical media behaviour, but like most ethnic minority organisations in the UK, our ambitions far exceed our resources.

The Forum was a successful partnership which gave minority groups a chance to bite back at those who have ignored or misrepresented them. It also provided an arena in which new partnerships could be formed to work for change.

We shall continue to back individuals and groups with complaints about discriminatory media coverage.

We are keen to develop joint projects looking at the problems of representation and redress faced by minorities, especially gypsies and travellers.

We are able to devise media training programmes to suit the varied needs of community organisations and campaigning groups.

We intend to collaborate with media professionals and bodies such as IMWRAX in an effort to improve media coverage and representation of minorities in the UK and overseas.

We will continue to support Bob Borzello's campaign to insist that everyone - not just a named individual - should have the right to complain and obtain satisfaction when vulnerable groups are misrepresented in the mass media.

Without his fervour and generosity the Forum would never have got off the ground.

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