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“Black London” (BBC GLR 1991-1993) The importance of a BBC radio archive for Black British people and scholars.

Introduction

This article examines the importance of radio archives from a radio programme called Black London broadcast on BBC GLR from 1991-1993. It is facilitated by the uncovering of archive material that I found during the COVID-19 lockdown period in the United Kingdom. The material was then digitised following an international bid to the archiving body FIAT/IFTA. This article is autoethnographic, employing a self-reflective approach utilising Schon’s methodology of a reflective practitioner. Here the researcher exercises an ongoing scrutiny, while implementing a constant critique of his research. To give a context, the article also examines an earlier radio programme, Black Londoners presented by Alex Pascall and broadcast on BBC Radio London between 1974 And 1988.

At the centre of this article is the issue of whether the archive has a value? What is the importance of a radio archive for Black British people and scholars? Importance is a value judgement. Its significance will differ according to the receiver and their inherit interests.

Archive for this paper is a word that requires framing. Professor Stuart Hall in his treatise on archive ‘Constituting an Archive’ explains Foucault’s notion of archive as a *‘relatively inert body of works which happen to be produced and survived’* (Hall 2001:89). He adds:

Archives are not inert historical collections. They always stand in an active, dialogic, relation to the questions which the present puts to the past; and the present always puts its questions differently from one generation to another (ibid:92).

The National Archives points to the media’s intrinsic value, that is of material which has historical interest *“retained in their original form”*, and that *“Age is a relative rather than an absolute quality”* (Staff Information Paper Number 21, 1982). Luke McKernan, a former British Librarian adds *“all archive that has been broadcast matters because it has been broadcast”* (McKernan, 2022).

This then is an ongoing story for the archives, and one in which scholars, experts, interested parties and educators engage with this work and build upon it. To cite Bernard P Achampong, “Once we have these stories, we’re able to link them back to things that have gone on before and how they’ll happen again. If we’re aware of what happened before, we’re more empowered. (Gyimah, 2021)

The evidence of just how important the Black London tapes are can be drawn from the reception of FIAT/ IFTA, a global body, who selected the project as the winner of their Save Your Archive competition in 2020. Their previous awards have, for example, included the digitising of the Rivonia Trials of Nelson Mandela (1963-1964) (FIAT/IFTA, 2021).

Following the digitalisation process, interviews were conducted with a group of targeted interviewees, who listened to a sample of the material and expressed their views as to the value of the Black London archive.

Black London would, arguably, not be possible without Black Londoners (1974-88) which pioneered local radio programming aimed at Black people. Its launch and several other related programmes around the country can be attributed to actions arising from the Race Relations Act of 1968 “to secure the establishment of harmonious community relations” (Race Relations Act, 1968) when Caribbean people were one of the largest ethnic groups at the time, and the Annan Committee on Broadcasting in 1975. Black London emerged from BBC London Radio rebranding to BBC GLR seeking to build an inclusive station for London and “not build ethnic minorities an annexe in the back garden” (Cited in McCarthy, 2020: 172). That’s debatable given Black London, as part of a strand of community programmes, was broadcast weekly on medium wave, rather than the previous Black Londoners which was a daily broadcast on FM. Black London was a meeting place for listeners and acted as a platform for aspiring broadcasters to further their careers. My co-presenter Sheryll Simms would return to television, whilst I relocated to South Africa as a freelance reporter for the BBC World Service.

The label “Black” had come to signify a specific ethnicity in the late 1960s, early 70s. Years earlier, at times the term was interchangeable with “coloured” . Hiro (1991: viii) writes “British generally called anybody who was not white and caucasoid ‘coloured’”. The growing need for Asians to be differentiated from being called Black, amplified by the mass

deportation under Idi Amin's Uganda of Asians, would lead to a change in classification to Asians. Black would come to reference Black Africans and Caribbeans (Hiro, 1991). Significantly in the 1991 census, for the first time there was a question on ethnicity, which included eight ethno-racial categories: "*Black*", "*Black-Caribbean*", "*Black-African*", "*Black-Other*", "*Indian*", "*Pakistani*", "*Bangladeshi*" and "*Chinese*". The people who didn't fit in those categories were allowed to combine several of them (Cahiers du MIMMOC 2007).

At the time of being involved in Black London, I was one of its two producer/ presenters. Simms and I are both second generation Black-British, born and schooled to graduate level in a multi-cultural Britain. Our values are as much diasporic pertaining to our parents "The Windrush Generation" as we are British, being born in Britain (Hirsch 2018). I was also a researcher on BBC Newsnight, and then a presenter, researcher on BBC Reportage – a current affairs programme for youth produced in Manchester by Janet Street Porter. My programme making and journalism skills were as rigorous for Newsnight as they were for Black London, albeit a programme item's treatment would be different on Black London because of its primary audience.

This article serves to draw parallels with the BBC's intended changes in 2023 to new local radio format of community programming which will be shared across regions on Sunday evening. Will the new format help nurture talent with fewer staff positions?

It takes an observational autobiographical approach through the lens of the Reflective Practitioner as defined by Donald Schon (Schön 2017) to make sense of newly uncovered archive of Black London and how to document it. It enables me to recount stories of the 1990s presenting and producing Black London in an attempt to gain an understanding of the potential of its present impact. I will explain how in the COVID-19 Lockdown in 2021 I found an archive of the programme in my garage and how it was entered into a global competition and subsequently digitised. The use of semi-structured interviews was employed to understand the contribution of Alex Pascall, a leading pioneer in radio aimed at Black people in the UK between 1974-88 and also uses interviews with other notable commentators to understand the value of the archive.

The Background of Black London.

Black London on BBC local radio in London was not the first radio show to cover issues predominately impacting Black people. Before Black London, there was Black Londoners presented by Alex Pascall which ran from 1974-1988. Black London, to which this author and his co-presenter Sheryll Simms worked on was launched in 1991 following the station's Assistant Editor Trevor Dann's decision to:

Create a radio station for the whole of London. We wanted to invite everybody through the front door, not build ethnic minorities an annexe in the back garden.
(Cited in McCarthy, 2020, pg. 172)

A notable figure in programming aimed at Black people was Syd Burke who presented a show on LBC called Rice n Peas, and also contributed to BBC GLR and the Rankin Miss P show (BBC London, 2007). Burke was previously a continuity announcer on Channel 4 (*Bonner. P; Lesley A, 2003*). His broadcast voice was mellifluous, with a Jamaican lilt, the sonorous tone that could keep you engaged on a long motorway journey as he introduced talking points interspersed with music. He was an ardent supporter of young people which is how this author came to meet him. In the late 80s as a co-presenter on BBC Radio Leicester's Talking Blues alongside Hillary Carty, I visited BBC GLR and by chance crossed paths with Syd Burke. Burke interviewed me and this led to GLR's management contacting me to see if I was interested in presenting a new programme called Black London.

Radio was a medium where there were comparatively few outlets for Black people to produce speech-based shows. Local radio stations such as Birmingham, Manchester and Leicester featured programmes aimed specifically at Black people. At BBC Leeds Glen English presented Calypso. The Blackroot programme was broadcast on BBC Derby by Yvonne Guy and Glenton Wright. Back-a-Yard came from Nottingham with Leroy Wallace and from BBC Radio Leicester came The Herdle White Show and Talking Blues (Morrison, 2007).

The station manager at BBC Radio Leicester in the 1980s was Liam McCarthy (now Dr. Liam McCarthy) who was also my mentor and trainer. I asked him why Black programmes at that time did not enjoy the same level of care and growth given to Asian programmes.

McCarthy concluded there was no central policy to coordinate a strategy. Programming was in the gift of station managers. This policy stemmed from two conferences held by the BBC in 1965 for the Asian and Caribbean communities. The Asian delegates argued strongly for discrete programming in South Asian languages whilst the Caribbean delegates saw themselves as British and pushed for better representation across BBC output. It set back Black programming on the BBC for decades as the conference was seen as the ‘settled view’ of Britain’s black communities. (See Schaffer, 2014) (Ref personal communication McCarthy)

“Black Londoners” (BBC Radio London 1974 -1988)

The BBC Radio London Black Londoners programme preceded “Black London”. It was part of a wider development of BBC domestic radio services. In 1965 the Director General of the BBC Sir Hugh Carleton Green held a meeting, prompted by Harold Wilson’s government, with immigrant groups to find out how broadcasting could aid the integration of immigrants in Europe (McCarthy, 2020; BBC WAC R4/93/1) In 1968 the Race Relations Act led to the appointment of the Community Relations Commission (CRC), which looked to:

encourage the establishment of, and assist others to take steps to secure the establishment of, harmonious community relations and to co-ordinate on a national basis the measures adopted for that purpose by others” (Race Relations Act, 1968).

In 1970 BBC Radio London was launched. One of its programmes was “New Londoners” aimed at Africans, Eastern Europeans, Caribbeans and Asians, produced by a Jamaican Louis Marriott (BBC WAC List, 1970). *The Annan Report on the Future of Broadcasting* (1975) also looked at minority programming (Scannell 2005). The BBC’s submission to the Annan Committee in 1975 showed how weak it was in minority programming. It lists 6 programmes for Black communities which total around 5 hours a week (560 hours a year) across 20 BBC local radio stations (BBC WAC R4/93/1).

Radio was seen as a community builder by the CRC (Pascall 2023) and following discussions with the CRC and BBC, Pascall says he was chosen as the programme’s presenter and researcher because of his experience and knowledge of the Black community by Keith Yeomans, BBC Radio London’s education producer. Black Londoners first aired on the 22nd

November 1974.

The CRC brought in an independent producer Barry Clayton, a former Yorkshire TV producer to help with the development of the 6-month pilot series of programmes. I was introduced to Barry Clayton in a meeting organised by the Commission for Racial Equality officer David Shackman at the home of Barry Clayton to discuss development work. The budget proposed for the pilot programmes was £400.00 to be paid by the CRE, split between Barry Clayton and myself £200.00 each (Pascall, 2023).

Alex Pascall had arrived from Grenada in July 1959 with the promise of being involved in a documentary which did not materialise. He gained work as a ticket collector and then train driver on London Underground. In the 1960s into the 1970s he established himself as a showbusiness performer, singer songwriter, a community leader and an entrepreneur helping to set up The Voice Newspaper, and the Nottingham Carnival – now one of the biggest in Europe (Harker 2020).

In 1976 Black Londoners became a 57-minute weekly programme and from 1978 until September 1988 it was a daily programme. It was the only Black daily show on mainstream British broadcasting formatted as a magazine programme delivering interviews, special taped features and stories to the wider community of Black Africans and Caribbeans who constituted the largest black ethnic group at the time (Hiro 1991). The programme received much praise for being the only place in the capital that tackled ‘serious black issues in London’ (Local Radio Workshop 1982:130).

The 1970s was an era in which racism was ever present (Morrison 2007:49) and that tension between youngsters and the police spilled over at the 1976 Notting Hill carnival. An incident between two youngsters became the catalyst for all-out running battles. Speaking to Angela Cobbinah on her blog Pascall said:

It was a very tense time. Mrs Thatcher went from talking about Britain being swamped by immigrants to ignoring the news that 13 black children had died at New Cross [in a house fire] – the programme raised £21,000 for the victims’ families. At the same time, young people were finding it hard to get work, to get a good education

and couldn't walk down the street without the risk of being stopped by the police. But when the riots came the authorities were completely taken by surprise.
(adwoahakorkah, 2016)

The magazine format of the programme also contained entertainment too. Reflecting on the show Pascall says:

I met the stars and the Muhammed Alis, Gladys Knights; politicians never used to have a chance to be interviewed on the BBC. They all got the opportunity. What was supposed to be for local people was cassetted and it went national and internationally.
(Rimmer and Knowles 2021)

The significance of the show and its prominent guests can't be underestimated. The 1970s followed the continuum of Black empowerment and cultural assiduousness (Gyimah 2022). Pascall interviewed Bob Marley, writer Alex Haley and entertainers such as the Mighty Sparrow (Harker 2020).

In the 1980s, Britain's 'Suspected person' laws, SUS, that allowed police officers to stop and search people, leading to potential arrests, caused deep unease particularly amongst Black people. Writing in the Guardian, Community Editor Joseph Harker says during this time the "...the political importance of Pascall's show became clear" (Harker 2020).

Pascall cites both his influence and engagement with communities as "helping hold the country together..."

Black people from all around Britain were calling in. MPs were coming in to be interviewed. Oh, it was a time of turmoil..... Britain could have gone up, really. Black people were angry. The youth were angry. The elders could not deal with the children.
(Pascall 2023)

Black Londoners and Pascall was described by the editor of News and Current Affairs at the time Richard Francis, as "charming, amiable and friendly" (Linfoot 2011: 290). The show ended in September 1988 when the BBC decided that the station needed a new outlook and

closed Radio London. The station reopened as GLR Greater London Radio, GLR one month later (Pascall 2023a).

It served as a bellwether with its growing number of listeners and also helped develop on air talent, such as aspiring Black broadcasters Mike Phillips and Juliet Alexander (Academic 2000).

The cultural lens with which Pascall saw events was a perspective few other current affairs programmes could muster. The programmes were made from within the educational department of the BBC, as all minority programming according to Pascall was seen as educational. McCarthy says it helped immigrants fit in (McCarthy 2023).

Black London (1991-1993)

In 1988, the relationship between Pascall and management had broken down. Pascall left the station accusing the BBC of racism (Moore-Bridger 2018). He said that many of his belongings were ‘thrown in a skip’ (Pascall 2023). This resonated with my own experience as during my time at Black London the transmission recordings or ROTs, were also discarded. According to the media historian David Hendy, the absence of archive for a programme like Black London is “part of a historic bias towards attention to centres of power in BBC, rather than places (wrongly!) seen as marginal” (Hendy 2020).

BBC GLR opened in 1988 bringing in a new slate of talent, programmes and strands. Its new management included Matthew Bannister (previously at Capital Radio) working alongside Trevor Dann as programme Organiser and Gloria Abramoff, head of Community programmes. Dann looked to create an inclusive station for London where ethnic minorities were integral to the station rather than being “annexe[d] in the back garden” (Cited in McCarthy, 2020, pp 172).

Whereas Black Londoners was a daily show on FM and Medium Wave, the new show Black London was weekly and only transmitted on Medium Wave 1458AM. Black London joined a new raft of community programmes which aired during the week in the evenings between 8-9pm. They were Irish London with Olga Buckley, Jewish London with Vanessa Feltz, Asian London, Gay London and Black London. Management was seeking overall a new audience

of 25-45 year olds who'd grown away from BBC Radio 1 and wanted intelligent discussions and adult music, rather than pop (Academic 2000).

In the spring and summer of 1991, after a number of auditions and trial runs, Sheryl Simms from the BBC Rough Guides series and I broadcast our first show. Over the two-year period the programme covered a wide range of material, for example a scheme to boost ethnic minorities seeking to get into Oxbridge universities. We interviewed Fela Kuti, who had launched a new musical genre in Africa, Afro Beat, which, on air, he claimed was a “gimmick” although Afro Beat today is a global music phenomenon. Following the South African Boipatong massacre, which was recognised as a ‘watershed moment’ in South Africa’s negotiated transition from apartheid (Simpson 2011), the ambassador Kent Durr respond to events by, for the first time, coming into the Black London studio for a live interview to defend any state involvement.

Almost two years into Black London and cracks began to appear in the relationship between management and the show’s freelance presenter/ producers. The show’s recordings were saved and stored in the production office on quarter inch audio tape reels. However, in the last week of presenting Black London an attempt to retrieve the show’s ROTs came unstuck. Black London’s tapes had been thrown away.

In 2021, during lockdown, and with time on my hands, I came across boxes in my garage that contained single 7 inch and large reels, as well as loose tapes. Amongst the boxes’ contents were also TDK cassettes. However, the means and resources for identifying the find was lacking. The source tapes required equipment to play that was now obsolete, and the cost of equipment needed to digitise the tapes was prohibitive. The approach to solving this problem involved consulting with an AI consultant from IBM, whom it turned out was a professional archivist José Velázquez. After much discussion about the tapes, Velázquez suggested presenting the material to the International Federation of Television Archives (IFTA/ FIAT’s) Save Your Archive programme. The organisations states the following:

Audiovisual archives that tell stories about people’s lives and cultures exist worldwide. They are essential for our mutual understanding because they reflect the world’s social and cultural diversity. They help us grow and comprehend the world we all share... In short, their value is not recognised. The result is that entire

collections of material on film, wire, tape and disc and the value they represent are at risk of being lost forever (FIAT/ IFTA, 2021).

Among FIAT/IFTA's important contribution to preserving archive was working with the National Archives towards the:

Preservation and digitization of Dictabelt sound recordings of historic Nelson Mandela and ANC Leaders 'Rivonia Trials'(included in UNESCO Memory of the World register), in cooperation with INA (FIAT/ IFTA, 2020b).

Black London's tapes were combined with supplementary video material shot in Africa and on the 29th of October 2020 in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, via zoom we presented to a panel of experts. FIAT/ IFTA consists of archive experts, such as Bríd Dooley Head of Archives, RTÉ and Maria Drabczyk Project Manager, National Film Archive - Audiovisual Institute in Poland.

Within a month of the competition, we were informed that we had won and that the collection of Black Lives would be digitised. The collection was eventually digitised by Memnon, based in Luton in cooperation with LMH, their sister company in London. The project's timeline was expected to take 12 months to completion and would be featured in FIAT/IFTA's the World Conference reports 2021 and 2022 conferences (FIAT/ IFTA, 2021).

Fifty hours of digitised audio tape arrived in February 2022. Identifying and categorising the collection is an ongoing process and will take some time.

Black London Archive material

This following section will provide a textual sample of a programme, followed by feedback from experts and specifically from an interviewee in 1992 who would listen to his interview for the first time in thirty years. By way of an introduction a running order to a programme is provided which provides a flavour of Black London. The date of broadcast has not been fully determined but it's believed to be in the winter of 1992. I remember Fela Kuti appeared in summer clothes when it was it was chilly and Kuti requested we all go clubbing after the interview.

The cue for the show was as follows:

"Good evening, welcome to Black London on GLR 1458 am with David Gyimah and Sheryl Simms. On today's programme the Commission for Racial Equality appointed the first black

chairman. Will this herald a new direction for the organisation? Carlton Television which takes up the ITV London franchise on the first of January 1993 unveiled its package for Black programmes. We hear from its director of programmes Paul Corley. We hear from three great performers who are still confounding the critics and exciting the young. Nigerian, Fela Kuti, American George ‘Woof Woof’ Clinton, and the sultry Michael Brown. And London's lonely hearts and a dating agency: is Cupid still letting off those arrows? Plus, news of some of the going-ons around and across London. That's Black London.”

The Running Order was as follows:

Source tape available to listen at link in Black London (1992) in the Bibliography.

1. [Package] Klu Klux Klan race group from America is setting up shop in Britain. Ends 5.55
2. [Song] Jimmy Hendrix *Let me stand next to your fire*. Ends: 8.22
3. [Live] Interview with Herman Ouseley on his appointment to the CRE. Is this a new direction for the org. Ends: 12.21
4. [Live] New ITV London franchise Carlton Television takes to the air the first of January 1993. Its Controller of Factual Programmes Paul Corley talks about the package for Black programmes. Ends 20.50
5. [Song] Mzwake Mbuli, *Resistance is Defence*. Ends 25.26.
6. [Pre-recorded 2 hrs earlier] Interview with Nigerian, Fela Kuti. Ends 30.31
7. [Song] Fela Kuti *Underground*. Ends: 32.36
8. [Live] Interview with London's lonely heart and a dating agency for Black People. End 38.02
9. [Live news] Education League tables. Ends: 39.26
10. [Live] Interview with musician George Clinton. Ends: 44.14
11. [Song] George Clinton *Funkadelic*. Ends: 47.15
12. [Live news] News Filmmaker Spike Lee's Malcolm X Ends. 48.01
13. [Pre-record] Interview with Michael Brown, West End star actress. End 53.26
14. [Song] Funkadelic, *Who the funk do you think you are?*
15. End 56.22

Interviewees feedback

A series of semi-structured interviews was conducted with leading commentators to provide a sense the importance of the archive. Kwame Kwaten is one of the UK's most innovative musicians and music executives, managing Shola Ama and Laura Mvula with writing and production credits including Jay-Z, Mick Jagger, Tom Jones and Seal. He and his band are on the retrieved archives. He was interviewed after his band D-Influence were called up by Michael Jackson to be his support act on his UK tour in 1992.

We were supporting Michael Jackson, whatever we thought of the guy. We were playing in front of 100,000 people every day and then coming back and doing a show at WKD which held 200 people. That's quite interesting as well, the determination.

A telephone meeting was arranged in which Kwaten's 1992 interview was played back to him. He was unaware of the nature of the phone call and hence was caught by surprise. On hearing the recording, Kwaten says "wow" on the phone continuously. He refers to the archive as having "tremendous value," and that it is "Proper UK Black memory. And of that time", adding that "there is actually not a lot of that stuff around".

Kwaten cites another reason for the impact the recordings have on him. Band member Steve Marston, who is on the tape, passed away a decade ago and there are no recordings of this type of interaction with him and band members. This audio was then worked into a video with Kwaten providing photos of the band's presence at Wembley Stadium supporting Michael Jackson. The film provides vivid scenes from its photography capturing crowds and providing a feel of the time. Kwaten concluded by saying that the archive constitutes "proper UK Black memory" (Gyimah, 2022a).

Bernard P Achampong is a respected radio producer who sits on several award panels. Because of his experience he was invited to comment on the archive. Achampong has fifteen years of experience working across BBC Radio 1, BBC 1Xtra, Radio 2 and Radio 4. He is a Dubai Lynx & Rose D'Or Juror 2023. The Rose D'Or is a gathering of creatives in Switzerland, whilst the Dubai Lynx is a conference for creatives primarily from the Middle East. Achampong is also Founder of Unedited, Vice-chair AudioUK and an 8 x British Radio Academy awards. He sees a link between the dearth of what he refers to as the "*intelligent black voices of the past*", such as Darcus Howe, raising suspicion among the wider populace,

and considers as a result those conversations invariably happen through the inertness in comedy. Of the archive he says:

It's important to reclaim this space because the archive provides a situatedness to re-create stories from the past and also provide a sense of providence for talent (Gyimah, 2021).

Achampong cites the concept of '*Sankofa*' which in the Twi language of Ghana equates to '*Go and retrieve from the past*', as emblematic of the oral traditions of how Black communities learn about news and storytelling and that the value of this archive cannot be taken lightly. He says:

Once we have these stories, we're able to link them back to things that have gone on before and how they'll happen again. If we're aware of what happened before, we're more empowered. There's something in our ownership of that oral tradition and what we've reinvented that has a lot more premium, a higher premium than maybe for other communities (ibid).

Dr Carlton Brown is an influential entrepreneur behind The UK Black Business Entrepreneurs Conference whose speakers include: Professor David Olusoga OBE, British-Nigerian Historian, author and BAFTA Winner; Lord Michael Hastings CBE, London Chamber of Commerce Black Business Association Chair; and Theresa Harrison, Global Director of Environmental Social Governance Services & Enablement Services Leader at Ernst & Young.

Following the recording with musician Kwame Kwaten, the video was placed on LinkedIn inviting people to comment. Dr Brown left this comment on the social media LinkedIn platform.

History is often portrayed and discussed from an inherently biased perspective, particularly when considering diversity and race which means that the narrative and stories told, will often reflect societal and cultural norms at a particular moment in time from the lens of the dominant ethnic group. Archives play an invaluable role, in

capturing a repository of events. when history is ultimately revisited, it will be seen through a new critical lens, which will offer up new insights, a new narrative and new stories that can be told (Gyimah, 2022b).

Ayesha Taylor-Camara contacted this author in 2020 as a PhD student at the University of Nottingham. For her PhD research, she launched the online exhibition and three-part podcast series '*In Safe Hands – The Voices of Black Britain Project*' which looked at Black Radio pioneers from the 1920s to the present in British radio broadcasting. It included Black Britons historian Stephen Bourne and oboist and music educator Uchenna Ngwe speaking on musical heritage, and interviews with Pirate and community radio pioneers. Taylor-Camara included an interview with this author and clips of Fela Kuti and Eartha Kitt. She covered his archive and was interested in the editorial process. Although, we had an editor, we generally had carte blanche about what we produced and presented on the show (Aaliyah, 2020).

Taylor-Camara drew parallels between her research putting together a show featuring influential people in Black radio and my research into how archive can serve a community. She commented that mainstream media paid scant regard to publicly available Black archives, treating them and their audiences as "*insignificant*". She added

I wanted this project (her show featuring Black talent) to highlight and celebrate the 8contributions black people have made to the media and creative industries in Britain, while simultaneously commenting on how their work gets left out of this history (ibid).

Conclusion

Today's radio will be tomorrow's research substrates to inform a generation of the news worthiness and important issues at the time. For instance, in thirty years' time how will audiences interpret the killing of George Floyd and the racial context of a slew of murders, deaths and injuries brought on by the police? How will stories that covered equality, diversity and inclusion be viewed, with an emphasis on Black people's voice and agency? To that end the programme Black London serves a purpose, and the hypothesis is its content and approach has currency for today's media, social historians and students. It is not complete, nor does it cover every subject of importance at the time – but it offers a valuable snapshot that can be used to triangulate written archive material and oral history from the period,

allowing new insights into contemporary debates. Hence acting as a platform for scholars to build upon.

On the 31st of October 2022 the BBC confirmed modernisation plans for its 39 local radio services in England which it said would lead to greater programme sharing, whilst enabling the BBC to increase investment in digital services (Waterson and Weaver 2022). Its Director General, Tim Davie defended this decision attributing it to the government's freeze of the licence fee for two years (ibid). The NUJ described the announcement as, "...the biggest threat facing local radio since it launched in 1967", arguing that the success of local radio is due to its "localness" (NUJ 2022). The proposed changes, to be implemented by Autumn 2023, include sharing programming across local radio output after 2pm on weekdays and cutting staff across England by forty-eight (ibid).

This is not the first time the BBC has sought to target local radio to save costs. According to a former BBC radio station manager, Liam McCarthy, "BBC Local radio has been under constant funding pressure since its launch in 1967. Cuts in the 1970s through to the 1990s were followed by the serious threat of DQF (Delivering Quality First)" (McCarthy 2023). In 2011 wholesale programme sharing amongst stations was rejected following a public consultation which received thousands of complaints (Plunkett, 2012). However, this time the changes look set to go ahead (Iorizzo, 2023; McCarthy, 2023).

Amongst Britain's Black and Brown communities the intended changes have led to deep concerns, with public figures and broadcasters such as The Rt Hon Diane Abbott MP, Dawn Butler MP, and broadcaster Clive Myrie signing an open letter to The Voice Newspaper saying that "Any cuts, even if applied equally across the BBC, would disproportionately impact Black media professionals and journalism across the UK" (Motune 2022). This would also have an impact on representation and diversity with deleterious effect on audiences (Olszowska 2022).

Unlike other communities, Black people in Britain have no dedicated national broadcast channel with news, current affairs and topical issues specific to their lives. There are 3.2 million people of Black heritage in the UK. In an average week, this audience only has 2 hours of dedicated programming, primarily from where they live via BBC Local radio (ibid).

As a result of this pressure the BBC has partly reversed its decision to close Black and Asian community programming, however from Autumn 2023 all community programming will be shared across regions with a new Sunday evening ‘all England’ programme being launched to target black communities across England (BBC media Centre, 2023).

Programmes aimed at Black and Brown audiences in multicultural Britain, have the ability to correct the danger of a ‘single story’, by offering different narratives countervailing dominant points of view, as well as providing a currency for diversity and inclusionary discourse. They also provide a talent pool and access point for aspiring Black broadcasters into the BBC and a repository for archive, facts for historians, scholars and the public concerning Black agency.

New ‘shared’ community programmes across regions on BBC local radio will further diminish the opportunities for local issues that affect Black people to be adequately addressed or brought to the attention of communities and the wider population.

What happens then when voices catering for people interested in issues affecting Black people disappear? How does this impact audiences’ knowledge of Black popular culture and issues? And how will future generations become familiar or otherwise aware of the issues facing Black people? That’s the present threat from the BBC’s proposals and as such this study provides thought towards such as event.

Today, the presence of a myriad media apps e.g. Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat, podcasts etc. suggests this generation (Gen-z and Gen Alpha which follows) will not, in the future, be short on material and memorialisation were it to look back on 2023. However, viewed another way, what if such social and expanded media did not exist? It could also be argued that written archive material will become more scarce in more permanent forms.

That is the situation facing content from thirty years ago. There were, this author states, significant touch points and issues that framed the period. For example, there was the brutal beating of Rodney King in the USA, caught on camera. It became an international news story with wide spread revulsion of the police’s actions. “The Rodney King was the Jackie Robinson of police videos,” is how the Rev. Al Sharpton described the 1992 video to The New York Times (Risen, 2021). Thirty years later a serving US police officer would murder

George Floyd. It sparked world-wide protests and catalysed the Black Lives Movement (CNN, 2020).

These themes point to a recurring and contextual thread in newsworthy material that should be easily accessible to later generations. This is the essence of the Black London tapes and archive.

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