

The Munchetty controversy: Empire, race, and the BBC

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Abstract

In September 2019, Naga Munchetty, a BBC presenter, was charged by the corporation as having breached its guidelines in sharing her personal experience of racism in reaction to Donald Trump's "Go Back" outburst at four female political opponents, an incident understood worldwide as a racist attack. The BBC, acting on complaints from some viewers, upheld that Munchetty had partially breached its journalistic guidelines in speaking about her experience of racism. This article, through a postcolonial critique of the incident, argues that the BBC guidelines and the censure of Munchetty have to be viewed through an organizational "dual consciousness" of the libidinal economy of the BBC as part of the British Empire and being an active broker of race relations in Britain through the national broadcasting space as a public service broadcaster. The BBC, both as an organization and a broadcaster, is inscribed through its historicity and a long trajectory of "fixing" the identity of the racial "Other." In the Munchetty controversy, her racial subjectivity is made "uncanny" or alien to the racialized subject through the BBC's organizational ethos of "objectivity and impartiality" to reassemble race as fiction within its "regime of representation."

KEYWORDS

BBC, empire, objectivity and impartiality, public service broadcaster, race, racialized subject

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1 | INTRODUCTION

On July 17, 2019, on *BBC Breakfast*, Naga Munchetty shared her personal experience of racism following tweets from President Trump about Democrat women of color politicians Ilhan Omar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib (BBC, 2019). The incident was covered widely in other media as a racist attack by Trump.¹ In September 2019, the BBC partially upheld a complaint against the presenter, ruling that Munchetty had gone beyond what is permissible in terms of its journalistic guidelines. Significantly, a complaint against her White male co-host, Dan Walker, was not considered by the BBC's Executive Complaints Unit (ECU) (Waterson, 2019). A public furor ensued and, on September 30, 2019, the Director-General of the BBC, Tony Hall, overturned the decision of the ECU. The controversy re-ignited the view of the BBC as a conflicted and troubled organizational entity which has illuminated race as an unsettling and unsettled proposition throughout its organizational history.

The Munchetty saga adds to the long and convoluted legacy of the BBC as a turbulent and racialized organizational entity which draws on its historical roots in colonialism, the violent politics of racial representation postwar, its role in seeking to forge multiculturalism as part of Britain's national identity with the influx of postcolonial subjects into the UK, and its persistent Whiteness, despite its organizational discourse of embracing diversity both as an employer and a public service broadcaster (PSB). Most pointedly in 2001, the then BBC director-general Greg Dyke, commenting on the large turnover of staff from ethnic minority backgrounds in the corporation, famously labelled it "hideously White" and added that its race relations were "as bad as those in some police forces" (BBC News, 2001).

This trajectory foregrounds the BBC's long-running and turbulent relationship with the racial subject which has induced an interior logic in the production and representation of race, both internally as an organization and outwardly as a PSB. In heuristic terms, the BBC's inside (i.e., the organization and its intrinsic logic) and the outside (the broadcast space) merge in the production of the racial subject, creating a dual consciousness centering race as an unresolved terrain of its organizational identity. This organizational dual consciousness, through time, has been disrupted and fragmented by a social reality in which race relations have unfolded in the UK.² The BBC's "fixing" of the racial subject (to transform it into the *racialized* subject) and the resistance against its representational hegemony over it has created a "hybridity" (Bhabha, 1983, p. 204). Here the imposed meanings of the empowered encounter the subjectivation of the racial subject post-empire. Its techniques of fixing the racial "Other" are imbued through its organizational ethos encapsulated by a moral high ground where it is supposed to be an arbiter of truth where the journalistic values of *objectivity* and *impartiality* are always upheld.³ These moral standards then control both the production of content and the racialized subjects within the organization. Munchetty, as the gendered and racialized subject, occupies an object/subject dualism: the object of the BBC's "cultural diversity" and, in becoming a "speaking subject," she enacts her subjectivation, thereby exploding the myth of the racialized subject as an unspeaking subaltern (Spivak & Chakravorty, 1983). The Munchetty incident probes the intersectionality of race and gender or the "the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of lived experiences" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244) and in subverting the race/gender binaries in analyzing organizational practice as cultural sites. Equally it captures and theorizes the simultaneity of race and gender as social processes (Crenshaw, 1992, p. 403).

The Munchetty case is revelatory of the BBC's libidinal and primal organizational economy, bound with this racialized subject as a recurrent and unresolved figure throughout its historical trajectory. Its ordinance of sensitive issues through its organizational ethos of objectivity and impartiality has helped it re-process issues of conflict, specifically race and ethnicity, at a distance and to transpose them through paradigms which detach it from the subject and, equally, from its racialized imperial past. This very ethos is also utilized in producing the racialized subject in the organization through its "regime of representation" (Hall, 1997, p. 269), both as an interior project within the organization and its role in brokering race relations as the PSB.

In mooting a postcolonial critique of the BBC, this article locates the Munchetty controversy as entrapped within a fissure, or Bhabha's (1983, p. 204) "hybridity," between its colonial tendency to control and fix racial identity against the reflexive subject who speaks back. This moment of speaking back is encapsulated in Munchetty

reclaiming her racial subjectivity by sharing her experiences of racism in a public space. It breaks the myth of race and fiction and, at the same time, fragments and dislocates the inside/outside and object/subject binary, producing a fissure and dislocation in terms of the regime of representation. It is this very regime the BBC utilizes to censure, control, and discipline the racial subject. This regime operates by de-racializing her through its representational modes of objectivity and impartiality in which the subject is disciplined for enacting her racial subjectivity and experiences of racism. Within this libidinal economy of psychic desires of control over the other, this regime of representation works internally to make what is intimate and familiar “uncanny” (Freud, 1919), such that race and racism become alien to the affective racialized subject. The racialized subject who speaks back breaks the fiction of race as a premise manufactured by the organization. Repressive tendencies and selective memory become a defined aspect of this libidinal economy, where the racial subject is “the site of both fixity and fantasy” (Bhabha, 1983, p. 204).

Race and racialization are firmly anchored as an immanent and fearful domain of its primordial organizational identity as evidenced through its sustained ruptures with the Other over time, both as a PSB and a “model employer” committed to equality and diversity (Browne, 2004, p. 554). Its legacy of race and its imperial past remain an interiorized and libidinal component of its organizational self, symbolized through its own schizophrenic experiences with race relations harking back to its role in image-building for Great Britain and its empire and as an agent of soft diplomacy in representing British interests through cultural content, programming, and propaganda. This article argues that in fusing organizational identity with the role of the national broadcaster in the UK, the BBC is implicated in the regime of representation (Hall, 1997) as a dual articulation. On the one hand, it is welded to the representational politics of race in the broadcasting sphere, and on the other, the BBC re-orders race through its ideological ethos as an organization. The journalistic ethos of impartiality and objectivity are co-opted as tools to de-racialize and distance race in its diverse workforce, while in tandem these very values have historically bolstered its image as an ethical and moral entity, particularly in conflict situations.

This article opens up with Stuart Hall's (1997) notions of identity, ideology, and regimes of representations to understand the BBC as an organization through its historicity and ideology, and how these manufacture and maintain race through the hegemony of cultural representations. It then contextualizes the organizational identity of the BBC through its historic origins and its sustained entanglement with the Other through its role as a PSB after the decline of the British Empire. This is followed with the examination of the Munchetty incident in terms of the judgment and reactions from the public after the broadcast and the BBC's governance of Munchetty. The article argues that organizational theory can benefit from cultural studies in lending an insight into how the production and manufacture of *race* is birthed, reinforced, and reiterated within ideological fictions of nation-building, national identity, and cultural representations of broadcasting and, hence, is anchored in a wider ideological architecture which projects and fixes race within the social imaginary of a society. In tandem, as porous cultural entities, organizations absorb and re-articulate these as a given social reality. As Rhodes and Parker (2008, p. 628) point out while “organizations concern production, whilst popular culture concerns consumption, and the intersection is a narrow one.” Yet, drawing on Raymond Williams (1976), culture has a broader anthropological meaning and, rather than being the non-productive part of our lives, it can be widened to embrace all of our lives—our symbols, our language, our materials, our labor, and so on.

2 | STUART HALL'S “REGIME OF REPRESENTATION” AND THE “RACIALIZED” SUBJECT

In analyzing the BBC as part of the cultural and creative industries,⁴ organizational theory must be fused with cultural theory to interrogate the hermeneutics of governing the racial subject. This can be done by understanding cultural production or through Hall's (1997, p. 269) notion of “regime of representation” as ideological formations can influence the social production of the subject. For Hall, colonization convened cultural differences under the

"canopy" of a sort of imperial empty "global" time, without ever effectively erasing the disjunctures and dislocations of time, place, and culture by their intrusion into the "worlds" of the other (Hall, 1999b, pp. 8–9). This is the palimpsest of the postcolonial world which Stuart Hall interrogated with his critique of cultural representation through national mass broadcasting in the UK.

The power and ideology of representation is closely aligned to the apparatuses of state power and becomes a tool of Western colonization (Hall, 1997). Cultural representations then become an integral part of the social processes of differentiation, exclusion, incorporation, and rule (Kwek, 2003). As Hall (1996, p. 14) asserts, "identities are constructed within, and outside, discourse, and we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific formations and practices, specific enunciative strategies." Hall (1996, p. 17) refers to identity as a suture, between the practices and discourse which attempt to interpellate or speak to us and, on the other hand, the social processes which produce us. Identities are positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always knowing that they are representations, and that representations are constructed across an absence. In invoking Althusser's application of ideology to organization as material entities, it opens up the materialist function of ideology in reproducing the social relations of production, and the symbolic function of ideology in the constitution of subjects. If ideology is effective, it works at the most rudimentary levels of psychic identity and drives (Rose, 1986, p. 5). Repressive tendencies and fantasies, as such, constantly recur in the production of the Other.

Hall argues that ideology works at the level of discursive formation and practices and, in tandem, he employs interpellation as the summoning into place of a subject or its "fixing." There is then a specular structure in which this interpellation works, entailing recruitment into the patriarchal ideologies of late capitalism where the subject is racialized and nationalized. For Gramsci (1971), it was important to comprehend culture, consciousness, and subjectivity as not solely reduced to an economic base. Subjectivity can be mediated by sociocultural factors through his conceptual notion of hegemony. In drawing on Gramsci, Hall (1971, p. 99) employs the ideological as the domain people use to figure out the social world, and one which is never overdetermined by economic class but is, instead, located within historically situated social formations. As such, organizational identity molded through the historicity of the empire retains its psychic drives to reproduce the racial other and to manufacture race through representations as a means to govern the racial subject and in the production of difference. Similarly, Edward Said's (1978) analysis of representation through the notion of Orientalism reveals how Western systems of knowledge and representation are complicit in the West's material and political hegemony over the racial other. The libidinal economy derives its power from the location and production of difference.

For Hall, this ideological interpellation works beyond the organizational framework, particularly in the ways in which the broadcasting space projects race through cultural representations. The role of art and culture, and its co-optation into the ideological sphere as culture, operationalizes difference beyond its representation. Since the eighteenth century, the collection of cultural artefacts and works of art has been closely associated with informal public education and has become part, not simply of governing, but of the broader practices of governmentality in supplementing the state in inducing and soliciting appropriate attitudes and forms of conduct from its citizens (Foucault, 1977). Culture, and the culture industries by extension, have a role to play in social incorporation (Hall, 1999b, p. 4). PSBs, as part of the state apparatus, are involved in the mass manufacture of silences, forgetting and eliding through a selective "canonization" of conferring authority, and a material and institutional facticity, on the selective tradition. These institutions have a responsibility for making the "selective tradition" work and in developing a deep investment in their own "truth" (Hall, 1999b, p. 5).

For Hall, the modern mutation of the media is a "fatal coupling of difference and power" as majority ethnic and racial groups seek to maintain cultural and political control in a changing world (Molina-Guzman, 2016, p. 440). Television, through its representations and organizational cultures, sustains and legitimizes the fixing of difference. As such, the regime of representation is about the production of difference at any one historical moment through a whole repertoire of imagery and visual effects (Hall, 1997, pp. 223–245). For Hall, this racialized regime naturalizes "difference" in a representational strategy that fixes and "secures it forever" within recurring stereotypes. Within

Hall's framework, changes in representations, narratives, and media discourses become part of the struggle as transforming the representational regime requires transforming the economic, social, and political structures as well. Change requires a willingness to give up political, economic, and cultural power through the empowerment of marginalized Others. Hall perceived these questions of power, difference, and media representation as ethically important to democratic societies (Molina-Guzman, 2016, p. 441). The media as machinery lending to virulent symbolic circulation is actively engaged in the material signification of representations, suturing race through its cultural projections and facilitating "imagined communities" (Anderson, 2006) through its mass distribution. As such, media transform the field of ideological representation itself. For Hall, ideologies are systems of representation materialized in practices.

Through the regime of representation, it has been typical to reduce the culture of Black people to nature. The logic behind these racialized representations is that, if they are natural, fixed and beyond history, and, as such, permanent. Naturalization is a representational scheme to fix difference forever and to secure discursive closure. Naturalizing practices then encompass practices of "governmentality" (Foucault, 1977) which tightly entwine forms of power and processes of subjectification. In this sense, race as a historically contingent and socially constructed category of knowledge is equally a hegemonic social fiction (Mirón & Inda, 2000, p. 87). Race is ingrained as an integral part of a classificatory system through which social order is produced and maintained. As such, organizational ethos and identity reframed as codes of practice can "fix" the racial other as a means to sanitize its location within an organization while utilizing diversity as a regime of representation to be a model employer. In the Munchetty controversy, the organization's canonization of objectivity and impartiality act as a means to purge race from the racialized subject or to enact it as uncanny. To speak and reclaim racial subjectivity is to unfix this "fixity" of control over the racial Other.

The racialized subject in enacting resistance unsettles this regime of representation. Resistance can come in many guises, and even the seemingly innocuous can have profound consequences. Resistance entails behaviors and cultural practices which contest hegemonic social formations that threaten to unravel the strategies of domination (Haynes & Prakash, 1991, p. 3). Munchetty's articulations on her experiences of racism within a postcolonial paradigm have to be viewed as opening up new productive spaces, or interstices, to speak back where the knowledge is derived from one's lived experience. This is a form of knowledge that can be deemed unscientific or overly subjective and to not fit into what has been predetermined as acceptable or permissible knowledge within an organization. Similarly, Bhabha's hybridity as an interstitial passage can call into question dominant meanings in a hegemonic culture by referring to the hybridity or difference from which it emerges.

How is the gendered and racialized subjectivity of Munchetty to be analyzed against the White governmentality of a post-empire BBC? To locate and contextualize the fissure produced by the Munchetty incident, it is necessary to understand the BBC through its history and organizational mythologies.

3 | BBC, THE EMPIRE, AND ORGANIZATIONAL MYTHOLOGIES

The term postcolonial is traditionally seen as a chronological marker that points to the period following colonialism. This is a view that raises controversial questions, such as: When, if ever, did colonialism end? (Kwek, 2003, p. 127). In veering away from chronology, Kwek (2003) invokes Quayson (2000) to, instead, review the processual understanding of the term to illuminate fissures and struggles emerging against the many guises and effects of colonialism. In so doing, its ripples are not confined to the postcolonial areas of the world but broadened to include wide cartographies shaped at numerous interrelated levels by the effects of the colonial legacy (Kwek, 2003). The colonial legacy as baggage can manifest itself in multiple domains, both in the material and immaterial, particularly in the ideological and symbolic work of the cultural and creative industries. Pennycook 1998 asserts that "although the economic exploitation and political rule of colonialism can never be downplayed, the cultural effects of

colonialism need to be given equal weight, not as mere rationalization or products of social and economic relations but rather as a significant site of colonialism in its own right" (p. 16).

Organizational identity draws from both its past and its movement towards the future. In centering the BBC's organizational identity through race politics over time, its genesis draws directly from its primordial origins in the empire and, equally, from its practices as part of the culture industry to integrate the Other. As such, the BBC works within an ideological and ideational space, where its origins and formation merge with the empire, appropriating an active agentic role in the representation and production of race in the UK, during and after the empire. The production and social construction of both the nation and race are a vital and ingrained aspect of the BBC while it endeavors to be a model employer embracing diversity under the Equality Act (2010),⁵ in which race figures as a protected characteristic. Many modes of fiction align together vis-à-vis the BBC, both in the production of the nation and race. Nations are fictions (Renan, 1990) and, in tandem, race is fictionalized through its cultural representations.

The organizational identity of the BBC operates through a set of mythologies which reify its status of exceptionalism in the broadcasting sphere. One of these is its relative independence. Despite its governance structure, the BBC, formed by Royal Charter in 1927, occupies a unique position of privilege in the UK broadcasting landscape, having had almost complete independence in the conduct of its activities until 2017, when it became subsumed under the remit of Ofcom.⁶ The emergence of its prominence as a broadcaster dovetails with the expansion and operations of the empire, with its initial imperative focused on expanding its monopoly of radio broadcasting throughout the British Isles. In 1932, the establishment of the British Empire Service aimed to consolidate radio and television as ideological tools of the empire, per this imperial role (Marsh, 2012, p. 71). It sought to encourage audiences in Britain and the dominions to "imagine themselves as part of a global Britannic community" with the intent of preserving an imperial order (Potter, 2012, p. 1). As such, the BBC has been historically implicated in fashioning the subjectivity of colonial subjects to feel part of the empire.

The BBC's role in the government's counter-propaganda objectives leading up to World War II saw the launch of the foreign language service in 1938 to expand the reach of the BBC beyond former colonies and the anglophone world and into areas influenced by Nazi Germany. The establishing of the specialist BBC Monitoring (BBCM) in 1939, for intelligence purposes alongside generating content for programs (Webb & Haddon, 2007), reiterated the BBC's role in counter-propaganda efforts to present the "British worldview" without being discordant with the interests of non-British audiences (Chadwick, 2015). British colonization enabled the BBC to dominate a transnational space while safeguarding British interests and disseminating Britain's worldview. Potter (2013) suggests that in projecting Britishness beyond the UK, the organization was used by the state as a subcontractor for cultural diplomacy to promote British interests, culture, and news from an imperial perspective.

If both nations and race can be appropriated as myths, the BBC's identity though crisis-ridden periods in modern history was constructed through a set of interlocking mythologies: being closed and yet seemingly transparent; committed to truth yet averse to conflict; objective yet closely aligned to the state as an ideological apparatus. The organizational identity of the BBC is inscribed through its nationalist orientation and the teeth marks of its imperial past. Such a bifurcation can "obscure links between the insular and expansive aspects of the BBC" (Potter, 2012), fostering episodes of organizational amnesia (and, in tandem, national and international amnesia) where the past can be carved out from its modern imagination to reconstitute its self-identity. The BBC's organizational identity as an arbiter of truth and objectivity plays into a romanticized fiction which obscures its colonial past and retains it as an entity beyond scrutiny, despite being considered a "public good" (Scannell, 2005) and funded through a TV license fee paid by the public. As such, it is closeted and not entirely transparent in terms of its operations. Burns (2016, p. 127) argues that the "image it presents to its external publics is largely a myth as the corporation and its staff are inherently secretive." It contradicts its cultivated image of an organization for whom the concerns of the public are paramount. Its Auntie Beeb's⁷ reputation of service to the public, reiterated through the Reithian⁸ principles of "educating, informing and entertaining," stands in contrast to its reality of being introverted and cut off from the public (cf. Balmer, 1994). Its unwillingness to be open to scrutiny until recently, due

to its close links with government and questionable funding sources for parts of the operation,⁹ has raised doubts about its transparency.

From the 1930s, the organization built its core corporate identity on its conceptual ideals of objectivity and impartiality (Burns, 2016, p. 19). Its propaganda role in the empire is obfuscated through its normative organizational ethos of truth and objectivity (Curran & Seaton, 2018), largely concealed to safeguard the “independence of the BBC in the eyes of the public” (cited in Seul & Ribeiro, 2015, p. 369). Its commitment to “plain, unvarnished truth” (Seul, 2015, p. 378) as a distinct aspect of its reporting exonerates the organization from taking sides through its normative ideals of objectivity and impartiality in the face of political conflict, foreign policy, industrial action, or labor unrest (Marsh, 2012). These also provided a mechanism to constantly negotiate and defend government actions, subsuming the Reithian belief that the BBC should serve the “nation's interests” (Seul & Ribeiro, 2015, p. 396).

The BBC would interiorize and reify its conceptual ideals of objectivity and impartiality beyond its application to content production. By 1949, staff handbooks integrated these as part of its institutional norms such that staff “must keep to objective reporting of facts and to the analysis and assessment of other people's opinions” (Hampton, 2008, p. 481). With a changing political economy of media postwar, a more heterogeneous society, and the UK's involvement in multiple conflicts, the postwar consensus on social issues had fragmented and, thus, the notion of impartiality from philosophical, cultural, and societal paradigms was challenged (Marsh, 2012). In practice, it became more difficult to hold on to. The notions of objectivity and impartiality became a defense and disciplining mechanism over time, enacted as a ritual to retain its virtuous identity. The mythology of objectivity and impartiality persisted as it became incorporated as a brand value and as its point of distinctiveness in competitive markets, lending it journalistic authority, elitism, and untouchability.

4 | RACE, GENDER DISCRIMINATION, AND THE BBC

Stuart Hall (1999a, p. 188) posed the question: What does it mean to be “British” in a world in which Britain no longer rules the waves? The televisual space needs to be contextualized historically within Britain's colonial and racist relations with and images of Black and Asian people, and how these have been challenged, mutating yet persisting in the historicized present. The BBC's evolution over time as a public broadcaster in fostering a national identity is a passage marked by deep racialization of content which illuminates a racialized regime of representation. In tandem with this, Hall (1997) posits that the televisual space lends itself to this machinery of representation and of cultural production where the signs and symbols work for the ideology and hegemony of Whiteness. The production of race and the racial subject is an immanent aspect of the BBC as it played a critical role of mediating race relations in the UK postwar with immigration into the UK from its colonies. In becoming a primary site for the creation of a national identity between 1927 and 1954,¹⁰ it embarked on what was deemed a “cultural hegemony” through its narrow view of the nation (Creeber, 2004, pp. 28–29) emerging through the empire and made manifest through its programming policy (Hajkowski, 2013, p. 234). With postwar immigration and growing heterogeneity, the BBC's traditional role as a PSB became complicated, particularly in terms of representing a nation (Malik, 2015). In reinforcing an overarching British identity, the organization sought to ease conflicts and barriers between the constituent parts of the UK, despite being London-centric and having a poor record of representing cultural diversities and minority tastes (Day, 2012). From the 1960s, it was also charged with neglecting the tastes and interests of the working class in suppressing the development of regional cultures. Its neutrality principle, its sustenance of racial stereotypes through its comedy and entertainment formats and its intrinsic Whiteness would be ensconced against turbulent postwar race relations in Britain.

With immigration remaining the subject of heated debate, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, television became an ideological and representational site for imagining a multicultural society. BBC programs through time targeted specific groups as a strategy for integrating migrants through their hegemonic notions of national values and cultures (Hilgert, Just, & Khamkar, 2020, p. 63). BBC policies and practices sought to assist White Britons to

adjust to the presence of the Other, such as Afro-Caribbean immigrants (Newton, 2011). On the other hand, the BBC was seeking to incorporate representation of Black and Asian people in its programming, and for them to be accepted as citizens. The BBC's multiculturalism agenda, framed through the acceptance of British values, came under criticism for foisting an informal segregation (Schaffer, 2014).

The corporation was perceived as a "conflicted and diversified agent in seeking to shape public opinion" over multiculturalism, immigration, and race relations, and its interventions were perceived as fragmented and contradictory, perpetuating tensions by emphasizing perceived differences between natives and newcomers and constructing them as unresolved problems (Schaffer, 2014, p. 16). The BBC's adaptation of Black minstrelsy¹¹ is a case in point. The corporation adapted the form into the highly popular radio series *Kentucky Minstrels* that ran from 1933 to 1950. This was followed by the TV series *The Black and White Minstrel Show* (1958–1978) which had White people "blacking" up to caricature blackness (Malik, 2002). In 1967, The Campaign Against Racial Discrimination petition, signed by people of all colors, including Stuart Hall, lobbied for the show to be taken off for causing distress in its depictions of Black people. Despite the objections, the show continued to run¹² but was finally shelved in 1978. Such discordant portrayals remained an immanent part of the BBC and a culture in which White management determined what was or was not racist. In an attempt to illuminate the racism overt in British broadcasting, Stuart Hall produced a skit, "It Ain't Half Racist, Mum,"¹³ which critiqued the racial stereotypes in British humor in the 1970s that disseminated racist attitudes across the nation and fueled unrest in Britain's growing multi-ethnic society (Parker, 2019). Its objectivity norms of attempting to balance the views of hardline conservatives and radical extremists further eroded the organization's anti-racist agenda. By the 1970s, tensions over the BBC's role as "neutral arbiter" on race ignited accusations of bias from both White and Black communities (Schaffer, 2014, p. 68).

The 1990 Broadcasting Act further fractured its diversity agenda as it not only created a new framework for the media industry in the satellite and digital age¹⁴ but also unleashed contradictory imperatives by privileging commercialism and increased competition in the PSB sector to ultimately compromise the public service argument for multiculturalism (Malik, 2015). After the enactment, the BBC reformulated its multicultural department into a more mainstream definition of cultural diversity. Issues of structural inequalities, discrimination, and cultural representation were superseded by an emphasis on cultural diversity but without a clear definition of the term. The organizational emphasis on "quality" and "creativity" were privileged over structural questions of inequality and recognition of sociocultural differences. The structural and institutional racism in British institutions became an issue of public scrutiny with the release of the "Macpherson Report" (1999) on the Metropolitan Police's investigation into the murder of Black teenager Stephen Lawrence by a White gang, which concluded the existence of "pernicious and persistent institutional racism" in British institutions. Stuart Hall (1999a) contributed to the Macpherson report and argued that institutional racism arises through "routine, habitual, taken for granted" norms and behaviors within organizations (p. 195). Following this, the Bhikhu Parekh report commissioned by the Runnymede Trust into the Future of a Multi-ethnic Britain (2000), which also included Hall's input, produced evidence and arguments that pointed to a profound institutional racism at the heart of the British state and dominant national identities.

The shift in government discourses from cultural industries to creative industries accelerated the neoliberal agenda and this "creative marketization of PSB" deepened the governance of racialized minorities within the politics of representation (Malik, 2013, p. 228). This governance was connected to "specific conditions of capitalistic, industrial cultural production" (Saha, 2012, p. 436). Saha (2012) notes that racism is rooted in conditions of production and that the integration of more Black and ethnic minorities into mainstream programming and the repetition of stereotypes was accentuated through commercial forces. As such, "race-making" in cultural industries in the context of neoliberalism entailed the commodification of race and its exploitation for a commercial agenda (Saha, 2018, p. 138).

Against this shifting landscape of public service broadcasting and equality legislation, the BBC's role as an organization also came under scrutiny. Despite the BBC being perceived as an "enlightened" employer because of the range of jobs it offered to women (Tunstall, 1993, p. 134), by the 1970s it was lagging behind feminist aspirations and changing notions of workplace equality prompting the commissioning of various internal reports and

audits. Its lack of agility in bringing change fostered a sense that there was a “concrete ceiling” in the organization, with the Sims Report (1985)¹⁵ concluding that “despite the changing social climate ... little had been done to translate ideology into action.” The sex discrimination actions against the BBC in the mid-1980s focused on issues of promotion and recruitment to higher management. In the late 1980s, more women had been put on staff (rather than contracts) but a slew of high-profile women claimed they had been sidelined due to gender discrimination, including Selina Scott, Anna Ford, and Moira Stuart. In January 2011, a landmark legal victory was won by Miriam O'Reilly on being unfairly removed from BBC1's *Countryfile* because she was considered too old despite frequent examples of older men on screen (BBC News, 2011).¹⁶ It is notable that O'Reilly won her claim against the BBC on ageism and victimization complaints, but not sexism. She had been one of four female presenters in their 40s and 50s dropped from the show. In 2018, the BBC's China Editor Carrie Gracie resigned due to a “crisis of trust” in the BBC over the ongoing gender pay gap (Gracie cited in Wyatt, 2018).

In 2019, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) announced that it would formally investigate the BBC over claims men were consistently paid more than women for doing the same job.¹⁷ In 2020, presenter Samira Ahmed claimed she was underpaid by £700,000 for hosting the audience feedback show *Newswatch* compared to the White male co-host of *Points of View*. The unanimous judgment concluded that the BBC had failed to prove the pay gap was not because of sex discrimination.¹⁸ During Samir Ahmed's tribunal, it emerged that 121 women had begun equal pay grievances against the BBC, a few months after the corporation had been forced to publish its gender pay gap and the list was indicative of a “communal” revolt against the BBC (Singh, 2019). Notably, Naga Munchetty was also on the list. Samira Ahmed's case was filed under gender discrimination but, like Munchetty's grievance, Ahmed's straddles the intersectional subjectivity of the gender and race pay gaps, illuminating the fact that women of color face a double penalty in the workplace, being confronted by both sexism and racism (Heuchan, 2020).¹⁹ In the wake of the George Floyd killing in the United States in 2020, the BBC Women group, which has drawn attention to the long struggle against “insidious racism,” are lobbying for “real and urgent action to end both racism and sexism at work” (PA Media, 2020).

5 | TRUMP AND THE MUNCHETTY INCIDENT

It is within the preceding imperial and modern history of the BBC that we need to contextualize the Munchetty controversy. Naga Munchetty, a London-born British Asian with Indian-Mauritian parentage,²⁰ is an award-winning presenter on *BBC Breakfast*, one of Britain's most popular breakfast shows. The breakfast format departs from news broadcasts in its informal and conversational style of presenting that is often more personality driven (Wieten & Pantti, 2005). On the show, in response to being asked by Walker about Trump's tweet that four women of color Democrat politicians should “go back” to where they came from, Munchetty cited her own experience:

Munchetty: Every time I have been told, as a woman of colour, to go back to where I came from, that was embedded in racism. Now I'm not accusing anyone of anything here but you know what certain phrases mean.

[Walker, acknowledging BBC guidelines on impartiality, proceeded ...]

Walker: *I know you are not here giving an opinion, but how do you feel then as someone who's been told that before?*

Munchetty: *Absolutely furious. A man in that position thinks it's OK to skirt the lines by using language like that.* (BBC, 2019)

The video went viral, reaching hundreds of thousands of viewers and eliciting comments from around the world (Benton, 2019). When a complaint was tabled with the ECU, only Munchetty was investigated, her co-host's involvement was not considered. The ECU partially upheld the complaint against Munchetty. According to the ECU, while she was entitled to “give a personal response,” the guidelines do “not allow for journalists to then give their opinions about the individual making the remarks or their motives for doing so” (Benton, 2019). The BBC director of editorial policy, David Jordan, said that under the guidelines, Munchetty could “objectively analyse the impact” the comments might have on people of color:

but she was not allowed to express a personal opinion on the motives and character of the person making those racist comments and in the politics of the present, when we are in the politics of name-calling and insult, I think it's probably unwise of the BBC to be calling out people for being liars and racist. What is really notable is that we look at the things people say, we analyse them, we describe them objectively. Our audiences should not be able to tell from the BBC output the personal opinions of our journalists or current affairs presenters on matters of public policy, political or industrial controversy. (Benton, 2019)

The ruling caused upset inside the BBC, with former vice-chair of the BBC Trust Diane Coyle tweeting, “unprecedented private anger and public disagreement from BBC staff (not just BAME²¹)” (cf. Davies, 2019). Outside the BBC, there was outrage at the decision and a petition with 13,000 signatures was sent to the corporation (Edmonds, 2019). About 150 ethnic minority presenters accused it of “racially discriminatory treatment” towards Black employees in its handling of Munchetty (Moore, 2019). The letter challenged the BBC's journalistic logic in treating racism as an impartial issue:

Racism is not a valid opinion on which an “impartial” stance can or should be maintained. For communities and individuals who experience racist abuse—including Munchetty—being expected to treat racist ideas as potentially valid has devastating and maybe illegal consequences for our dignity and ability to work in a professional environment, as well as being contrary to race equality and human rights legislation. To suggest a journalist can “talk about her own experiences of racism” while withholding a critique on the author of racism (in this case President Trump) has the ludicrous implication that such racism may be legitimate and should be contemplated as such. (Moore, 2019)

The BBC Executive Committee responded in an internal message to its employees stating that it is “not impartial on racism.” It added that Munchetty had been within “her rights” to comment on tweets “which have been widely condemned as racist” and that the ECU decision had rejected that element of the complaint, reiterating that the “success of the BBC is built on the quality and diversity of our people. That is not negotiable” (Aoraha, 2019). Even though the ECU's decision to partially uphold the complaint was reversed subsequently by its Director-General, at least 18 complaints were made to Ofcom, mostly over the ECU's decision and the BBC's lack of transparency in the handling of the case. After undertaking an investigation, it concluded that Munchetty had not breached BBC impartiality rules and raised concerns regarding the BBC's handling of the issue, the decision, the subsequent reversal of the ruling, and the need for transparency in the BBC complaints' process (Clatworthy, 2019). In a subsequent interview, while Munchetty is in agreement that a process needs to be followed, she believes there is a need to “rethink” the guidelines:

While journalists are trained to imbibe balance, they also have a “responsibility to show that certain things are not acceptable ... I'm not there to give an opinion, but I'm equally not there to ignore an [damaging] opinion and to absorb that into our coverage.” (cf. Saner, 2020)

The BBC's “representational logic” creates cultural knowledge separate from actual reality (Kwek, 2003, p. 122). The cultural logic of the institution can, according to David Kwek (2003, p.122), impose its representations on the reality it seeks to describe and to mold behaviors, understandings, and strategies based upon such representations. They then become a means to colonize and to homogenize our ways of thinking. The lack of logic in imposing their impartiality principle on racism and its conflicting discursive articulations in dealing with Munchetty reveal the intimate relationship between the BBC's ideology and the production of cultural knowledge.

Western rationality, drawing from the Enlightenment, has produced a distinction between reason and unreason (Foucault, 1977). In tandem, the BBC's production of its own logic as a mode of disciplining and legitimizing control wreaks a mode of “epistemic violence” (Spivak, 1999, p. 291) in perpetuating the racialized subject as not in

possession of her emotions and, as such, not capable of being a fully formed subject. Munchetty's encounters with racism and her ownership of her racial subjectivity is constructed as her failure to conform to the BBC's rules of objectivity, one which requires her to take a position that racism must be approached neutrally and objectively, positioning racism as a topic that must be analyzed rationally but not through her lived experience. The racial subject through history is not one who is rationalized (Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Taylor, 1997), falling outside of the BBC's bounds of reason. In this sense, the co-location of the BBC as a locus of the West's reason and rationality against the lived experience of Munchetty as a UK-born subject with postcolonial parentage produces a hybridity. In this instance, it rather leads to an "epistemicide" where epistemological positions and worldviews that challenge the dominant are decimated or, in this case, "disciplined" (Ibarra-Colado, 2006, p. 462). In her encounter with racism, affective subjectivity falls beyond the requisite object/subject position of Munchetty as an employee of the BBC. Spivak argues that the return of the non-Western Other depends on it becoming real and knowable and, as such, Munchetty's "speaking back" decimates race as a manufactured myth "fixed" through an organizational ethos.

6 | THE BBC AND THE PRODUCTION OF THE RACIAL SUBJECT

The modern organizational identity of the BBC, which represents the Other as "new" subjects of the nation, is juxtaposed against its reproduction of the racial Other as employees through its institutional ideologies and practices. Its imperial past, as a palimpsest, constantly produces ruptures without resolving the fear of the Other; it is both unsettling yet a construct which can be racialized or detached from its racial subjectivity through its journalistic ethics of objectivity and impartiality. The other dimension is its role as the PSB within a virtuous moral space, where broadcasting produces the Other as both subjects and objects who can be commodified and represented through its machinery to remake race as an intrinsic aspect of its organizational identity and the competitive neoliberal space of broadcasting.

Hall in his assessment of the impartiality principles, notes that:

It leads to the impasse of false symmetry of issues. All controversial questions must have two sides and two sides are given rough equality in weight. It has little or no relevance to the quite unequal weights of the case for each side in the real world. The symmetrical alignment of arguments may ensure the broadcaster's impartiality, but it hardly advances the truth. Objectivity like impartiality is an operational fiction. (Hall, 1972, pp. 9–10)

Hall opines that impartiality gives the broadcaster an in-built interest in compromise and that all conflicts thus become translated into a language of compromise. Hall deems that the tendency of broadcasting to stand above conflict and to judge it impartially is damaging and it legitimizes the prevailing structure of interests.

It is this operational fiction that is applied to Munchetty, where her own racial subjectivity and experience is made uncanny (Freud, 1919). For Freud, repression is the psychic engine for everything that ought to have remained a secret. The process of repression then makes the familiar or the established become alienated through its presence. So, what might be intimate and real to the racial subject becomes defamiliarized and strange. Here one's own internal affective state and lived experiences, even those which uphold the most elemental understanding of our worldview, become mistrusted (Bearn, 1993, p. 33). The moment Munchetty declares her racial identity, she becomes socially and narratively imperceptible, and the corporation steps away from its norms of cultural knowledge and production. The production of racial difference, as W. E. B. Du Bois (1992) notes, is through a double consciousness, and Black identity is never self-generated but always reflected from a dominant Other. This double consciousness entailed not just the practical racism in society but the internal conflict within the racialized subject in which a wider world and its social reality make race and racial identity dilemmatic enmeshed through its relationship with power and society. As such, the uncanny in the Munchetty controversy is about fixing her ontological status.

To be part of the organization, the compromise of one's own racial subjectivity becomes a vital part of its production of the racialized subject. Hence, organizations are involved in articulations and practices to naturalize the differences of the racial Other. For the BBC, its journalistic codes are invoked to produce Munchetty as transgressing its rules in articulating her experiences of racism, and the clause of impartiality is enacted as a self-regulating mechanism which has to compromise her difference in not articulating it and in securing discursive closure to racial subjectivity. With diversity used as a mantra by organizations, racial subjectivity and struggle is an ongoing fight to "unfix" race. The Munchetty controversy demonstrates how the racialized subject is governed and performs within an organization. This disciplining is also about de-racializing her subjectivity. Munchetty's sharing of her experience re-materializes her as the racial subject engaged in the act of "speaking back" (Bonnafeuf-Boucher, 2009, p. 77), producing a rupture in breaking away from White governmentality to fix the production of race internally within the organization, and its projection into the broadcasting space. As Bonnafeuf-Boucher (2009) posits, resistance as an integral aspect of subjectivation vis-à-vis racialized power or White governmentality emerges here through modes of autonomy, self-fashioning, and speaking back which entails problematizing and criticizing the world which one inhabits.

Munchetty's public articulation of her experience of racism within this organizational framework is about subjectivation, which entails the practice of liberation from the political, historical, and cultural, and the affective conditions which govern one's self (Tate, 2018). In invoking Foucault's conception of "aesthetics of the self," Tate (2018) asserts that aesthetics constitute body, affect, and critical views and actions related to subjectivity and self-creation. As such, whilst a person is being governed, she is simultaneously freeing herself from the domination of another through this aesthetic of the self.

7 | CONCLUSION

The formation of the BBC, its role in the British Empire, and, subsequently, in the birthing of a modern nation (post-empire) are integral and conflicted tropes of its organizational history. These temporal configurations have invariably shaped its attitudes towards race within its interior (as a corporation) and its external projections as a PSB in terms of its cultural dominance in representing and brokering race relations in the nation. Shaped through the historicity of the Empire as its propaganda and publicity tool, the BBC has been imbricated in the production of race beyond its present stature as a global brand forged through its ethical codes of objectivity and impartiality. As such, it sutures a dual consciousness of being tightly welded to a politics of race through the empire and, equally, its broadcasting history, in which its incongruence with race produces ruptures in a postcolonial landscape. It illuminated race as both an unsettled and unsettling proposition for the corporation over time. Its codes of practice, namely objectivity, balance, and impartiality, as contested and problematic ideals in practical terms, have become the very tools in governing the racial subject within its endogenous arrangement. The Munchetty controversy has been examined through the cultural hegemony of the BBC as a national broadcaster, how its ideology and journalistic practices are intimately implicated in the politics of racialization, both within (i.e., as an organization managing its diverse workforce) and beyond as a state-aligned entity is responsible for creating an "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006) through a regime of representation (Hall, 1997) in the broadcast space as a PSB. Within this paradigm of duality, the cultural hegemony and the circulation of ideology as a means to fix identity has been examined through the rich contributions of Stuart Hall and his theoretical legacy to cultural studies. Organizational cultures are shaped through a wider ecology of ideological institutions and their cultural dominance and circulation of ideas and symbolic forms. Media, particularly the PSBs, have a far-reaching influence in the manufacture of the racialized subject within this assemblage. This wider cultural landscape within the postcolonial paradigm is entangled in a politics of resistance, articulating its "hybridity" (Bhabha, 1983) to counter the coding and fixing of the racialized subjects, both within organizational cultures and outside of them. The Munchetty incident illuminated racial subjectivity (through its intersectionality of gender and race) as an uncanny encounter where its imposed fixity

disintegrates. It equally highlighted how the production codes of objectivity and impartiality break down as an immanent part of its governmentality and as a disciplining tool. The Munchetty incident unfixed race and racism as something which cannot be bound or proscribed through journalistic codes. Being impartial and objective about racial subjectivity or racism, particularly unleashed through the violent rhetoric of dominant world figures in public spheres, is not only out of sync with common sense and sensibility but as *colonial* as the Empire.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest that could be perceived as prejudicing the impartiality of the research reported.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The incident was framed in the *Guardian* as a “racist attack” (see Pengelly, 2019).
- ² We used the term “dual consciousness” as a state of being of the organization in terms of its subliminal and overt operational ethos which emerges through the empire and its cultural dominance in brokering race relations post-empire as a PSB. This may resonate for readers with W. E. B. DuBois’ notion of “double consciousness” in which the subject is racialized through the gaze of others who determine one’s racial fixity. This term is important for the racial subject in terms of their racial stereotypes imposed on them. We use the term “dual consciousness” to refer to the BBC’s complicated organizational identity in the production of the racial subject through its history of the empire.
- ³ The BBC had a more ethnically diverse workforce in 2018, with people of color at 14.8%, broadly consistent with the sector and the wider population (Davie & Ogungbesan, 2018). This is, however, concentrated in the professional services and the World Services, with “very low” representations in regional cities and towns despite highly diverse populations, and with no diversity on the BBC’s Executive Committee. An internal BBC report concluded that a “substantial culture change” was needed to arrest the high attrition rates and “sense of exclusion and isolation” among staff of color (Davie & Ogungbesan, 2018 pp. 1 and 5). In 2020, in response to the killing of George Floyd, Director-General Tony Hall announced the BBC was investing £100 million in producing “diverse and inclusive content” intended to address the “stain of systemic racism” in society (Pearson, 2020).
- ⁴ The cultural and creative industries refers to those parts of the modern economy where culture is produced and distributed through industrial means, applying the creativity of individuals and groups to the generation of original cultural product which may have commercial value either through direct sale to consumers or as intellectual property” (Flew, 2017).
- ⁵ The Equality Act 2010, which all employers must abide by, legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society in the UK.
- ⁶ Ofcom was established in 2003 to regulate the broadcasting, communications, and postal sectors but the BBC was excluded from its remit, retaining its own regulatory structure (i.e., by Parliament) through a periodic review of the Royal Charter and an internal governance structure comprising the BBC Trust and a governors’ board, the majority of whose appointees were selected by the government. The Board of Governors served as trustees of the public interest. After Ofcom assumed regulatory oversight for the BBC, the internal complaints procedure is followed first and there is recourse for the public to complain to Ofcom if not satisfied with the outcome.
- ⁷ “Auntie Beeb” is a colloquial term for the BBC to denote its everyday familiarity with the public.
- ⁸ Sir John Reith was the General Manager/Managing Director of the British Broadcasting Company 1922–1927 and then the first Director-General of the newly incorporated British Broadcasting Corporation.
- ⁹ The BBC’s domestic service is funded through the license fee (approximately £3.83 billion), purportedly to distance content from political or commercial interference. International operations were funded by different government departments including the Ministry of Defence and the intelligence sector. Since 2014, the license fee and profits from international commercial services have funded the World Service and BBCM but government has continued to invest in the expansion of operations perceived as key to furthering its cultural diplomacy agenda (cf. Conlan, 2015).
- ¹⁰ The BBC’s monopoly on the domestic broadcast market was broken with the 1954 Television Act which created the Independent Television Authority with a remit to regulate the industry (excluding the Corporation) and to award public service broadcasting franchises to new market entrants. One of the major rivals to emerge was the Independent Television Network.
- ¹¹ Minstrelsy as a tradition “symbolized an essentially pro-slavery and anti-emancipatory politics, harking back to the days

- of the American Deep South when good Black slaves would serenade innocent White roses. The minstrel, as a new spin on the Black entertainer role, became a popular early image of 'blackness' in music halls, revues and radio" (Malik, 2002, p. 111).
- ¹² The program had 12 million viewers at the time of the campaign and BBC officials defended their decision to retain it claiming the "show is not about race" but "tradition" (Grandy, 2019).
- ¹³ The program was produced under the BBC "Open Door" series in 1973 in a bid to make TV accessible for marginalized audiences in the UK by delegating editorial control to representatives of these communities, against a turbulent period of race relations in the 1970s.
- ¹⁴ The Act relaxed restrictions on cross-media ownership in the sector and legislated for the introduction of digital television. Deregulation was intended to encourage innovation, expansion, and the development of new services.
- ¹⁵ Monica Sims, who, in the 1970s, was one of few women to have reached a senior position in the organization, was asked in 1984 to report on the shortage of women applicants for senior positions in the BBC (Sims, 1985).
- ¹⁶ The employment tribunal ruling in *O'Reilly v. BBC and others*, London Central Employment Tribunal can be found at <https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/Misc/2011/1.pdf>
- ¹⁷ Concerns about wage disparity at the BBC made headlines in 2017 when it was forced by government to publish the salaries of stars earning more than £150,000 a year, showing for the first time how many famous men were paid substantially more than their female equivalents. In March 2019, the EHRC announced a formal investigation in the gender pay gap at the BBC and in October that year, Ahmed launched her case against her employers. After the ruling in January 2020, the National Union of Journalists reported a greater willingness on the part of the BBC executive to address outstanding gender pay gap claims (Waterson & Marsh, 2020). The ruling in *Samira Ahmed v. BBC* can be found at <https://www.matrixlaw.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Samira-Ahmed-v-BBC-2206858-2018.pdf>
- ¹⁸ The BBC had argued, among other issues, that Jeremy Vine deserved a higher pay packet as he was more famous and had a "glint in his eye" (Waterson, 2020).
- ¹⁹ Women of color, unlike their White male counterparts, are often the subject of critical comments from the public about their appearance. Moira Stewart, the first African-Caribbean female newsreader on British television who spent 26 years from 1981 working on nearly every news format in the BBC, was frequently the target of disparaging comments. The difference now is that female presenters can, like Munchetty, use social media to challenge those who mock their appearance (West, 2020).
- ²⁰ In a media interview about the incident, Munchetty disclosed that her mother had come from India, her father from Mauritius; both were nurses in the National Health Service and struggled to fit into British society (Saner, 2020).
- ²¹ BAME refers to Black and Minority Ethnic people.

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