

BBC diversity tsar threatens ethnic purges

Contributed by Thingfish
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In a bid to appease the unappeasable, the BBC recently invented the position of "editorial executive of diversity". And last week, Mary Fitzpatrick revealed just what an executive of diversity does: They conduct ethnic purges.

In an interview with The Observer, Ms Fitzpatrick explained her role: "What's really important is that BBC News reflects the audience that it's serving. You need valid and culturally accurate voices speaking. I get tired of repeatedly seeing programmes where [the situation is] here we are in Africa and here's a white person, saying well, look at these people. I would prefer to see somebody who understands that culture, understands what's going on and can say "look with me, because I am a part of this". It feels more authoritative and more involved."

Of course, there's no reason to assume a journalist's skin colour should give them any special insight to a story. I'm part Scot and as pale as lard, but that doesn't mean I speak Gaelic or shag hairy women. Whatever your colour, experience, research and local knowlege are what count, not race.

Job cuts

Ms Fitzpatrick, whose previous editorial accomplishments included the diversification of How Clean Is Your House? and Wife Swap, seems to think a policy of "representative reporting" will only effect white, male reporters – the implication being that John Simpson and Fergal Keane could be first up against the wall when the revolution comes.

It's clearly intended that way, but if the policy's applied with any honesty, the job losses would go much further. Women would be barred from reporting on politics or religion, since most world leaders are men. Sports round-ups would once again be delivered by ex-footballers and the weather by nerds in anoraks. All royal correspondents would be fired for their obvious lack of appropriate breeding. The downside to this would be the risk that Prince Edward might finally get a job.

BBC World's Asian service employs many staff of South Asian descent, most of whom will follow their European colleagues out the door as the Beeb balances its Asian representation. Sadly, this includes the lovely Darshini David, who'll have to roll her big round eyes somewhere else, as it would be clearly unethical for a Tamil to report on New York stock prices.

The only show on BBC World that Ms Fitzgerald can't possibly mess up is Top Gear: After all, who better to represent arrogant gits in fast cars than Jeremy Clarkson?

No room for neutrality

For decades, the BBC has tried to build a reputation for informed, impartial reporting. But representative reporting will see an end to that. The Beeb could only employ Jews and Arabs to cover Israeli news. They'd then have to explain why each report contradicted the one before. In Iraq they'd need Shia, Sunni, Christian, Kurd, Bedouin and even Jewish reporters – each of whom would offer a uniquely biased perspective. Reports from Venezuela would be delivered by a reporter with a pudding bowl haircut, condemning Yankee imperialists and promoting the cocaine trade.

Representative reporting means some stories will no longer qualify as newsworthy. Russia will fail to meet quota standards, since all its reporters are white; Indian coverage will be impossible since no channel could afford to hire reporters from all the country's several thousand tribes and castes.

Yesterday's chip wrappers

We can be thankful that the BBC has taken so long to appoint a diversity guru. With a policy of representative reporting, even George Orwell (who broadcast on the BBC's Eastern service) would have been out of a job. There'd have been no Micheal Buerk in Ethiopia, Rageh Omar in Baghdad, John Simpson in Kabul or Kate Adie in Tiananmen.

Speaking of Kate Adie, she also covered the Rwandan genocide. When the country's majority Hutus began slaughtering their Tutsi neighbours, the massacres were actively coordinated by Hutus in the local media. There's representative reporting for you.

Newsroom apartheid

While white males would become a rarity on BBC World, there'd be plenty of jobs for them at home.

Despite the Daily Mail's dystopian vision of Britanistan, the UK remains a very white society. According to the Office for National Statistics, 91 per cent of Britons describe themselves as white. Just three per cent are Muslims, less than one per cent are African, Black, or Caribbean.

With truly representative reporting, black or Asian reporters would all but disappear from British domestic TV, where they'd be forced into ethnic ghettos, as tokens to be wheeled out whenever "their communities" are covered.

If the BBC implemented its own recommendations, that would mean abandoning 30 years of equal opportunities inclusiveness.

Overt or covert

But most people don't give a toss about who reads their news, as long as they do it well. Trevor McDonald presented the news on ITV for 30 years, and his overwhelmingly white audience never complained that he was born in Trinidad.

Speaking as a wishy-washy liberal type, I find left-wing racists even more irritating than their opposite numbers, because at least right-wing bigots are open about their prejudices.

Left-wing racism is more insidious because it's so self-deceiving. The left-wing bigot happily hires and fires on the basis of sex or skin because they've convinced themselves that their prejudice is morally superior to everyone else's. But skin colour is not an acceptable criteria for awarding or denying someone a job. Racial discrimination is racial discrimination, no matter how much inclusive, jargonised management-speak you use to justify it.

The one positive aspect to the Beeb's new diversity policy is that Mary Fitzpatrick will have no choice but to fire herself, since being black, white, Irish and British, she doesn't qualify to represent anyone.