



DIVERSITY IN BROADCAST PEAK SCRIPTED TELEVISION, 2018

**A REPORT COMMISSIONED
BY EQUITY'S RACE
EQUALITY COMMITTEE**

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Executive summary

The findings of Phase One of this study include:

- East Asians are severely under-represented on broadcast television
- 8% of lead roles were played by actors of African-Caribbean, south Asian, east Asian or Middle Eastern heritage
- The depiction of Middle Eastern and/or south Asian characters continues to reinforce stereotypes by portraying narratives about terrorism
- Stereotypes of African-Caribbeans as criminals persist in scripted narratives
- There is a high level of segregation within peak scripted programming, as productions with a majority minority cast continue to “other” British-born actors of African-Caribbean, south Asian and east Asian heritage. These programmes are situated in Africa, south Asia or east Asia and cast British actors as foreigners.

Actors from east Asian and Middle Eastern backgrounds are severely under-represented in peak scripted programming, with rates ranging between 0% and 3%, dependant on the genre.

Representations of African-Caribbeans and south Asians within scripted programming in peak broadcast schedules are generally better represented, but they are more prone to being stereotyped.

Further work is needed in analysing this data in order to understand the complexity of the use of stereotypes of Britain’s ethnic minority population in television writing and casting choices. However, examples below help to illustrate the nature of stereotypical representations in scripted programming although it does not yet show its extent.

Methodology

The scope of this study is primetime scripted drama and comedy that was broadcast during peak hours (6:30-11pm) on BBC One, BBC Two, ITV and Channel 4 during the calendar year 2018.

Using the cast lists in the *Radio Times* as a primary source, 53 weeks of programme level data was accumulated between 6 January 2018 and 4 January 2019. The information was augmented by Spotlight, press interviews and other online resources in broadly categorizing performers’ ethnicity. Appendix A provides the weekly totals, broken down into broad categories of ethnicity.

The programmes monitored were those that premiered during the weeks surveyed. Repeats, films and foreign programmes that were not co-produced by British companies were excluded from the data sample, although programmes originally premiered on the broadcasters’ sister channels were included, if they made their debuts on the main stations during the period surveyed.

This report analyses programme level data on a weekly basis, as a whole data set, and broken down by genre with case studies of select programming. This helps to build a picture of the ways in which diversity is approached by the main broadcasters.

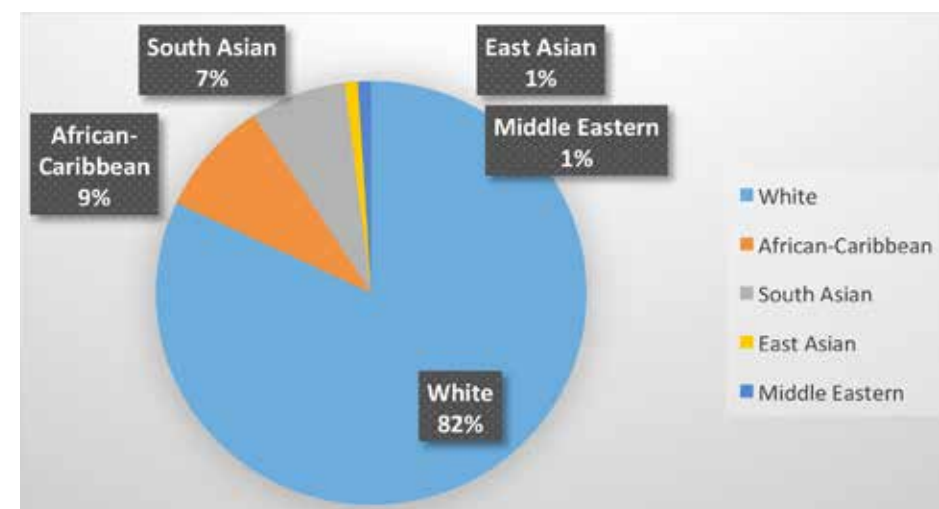
With the available data and methodology, an analysis of the full level of diversity within scripted programmes broadcast during peak hours on BBC One, BBC Two, ITV and Channel Four was not possible. Protected characteristics such as disability, sexual orientation, age and social background were not considered, as these are not self-reported in quantities large enough to gain a broad enough data sample.

It was also not possible to monitor the castings of people of one ethnicity who are playing another ethnicity in Phase One of this study, as this requires a considerable number of person hours to locate scripts or watch the programming.

Gender will be considered in Phase Two of this research project.

Overall demographic breakdown

Across the 53 weeks monitored, there was an average of 388 individual appearances of actors in scripted drama and comedy across the four broadcast channels. The majority of weeks had over 400 actors’ roles with the number of actors fluctuating depending on broadcast schedules, with the lowest number of dramas broadcast



during the World Cup throughout June and in early July 2018.

A survey of the entire year, across scripted television on BBC One, BBC Two, ITV and Channel shows that broadcast television remains predominantly white. 82% of performers cast across the 992 episodes of television monitored were white, with the remaining 18% spread across multiple non-white groups, with 9% African-Caribbean and 7% south Asian representation.

As the chart above also shows, performers of east Asian and Middle Eastern descent were virtually excluded from major network programming, both at 1% of total appearances across the year.

Further breakdowns of the data at genre and programme level reveal the level of inequality that persists within broadcast television scripted programming. In some instances this is to the point of creating a segregated output of predominantly white drama in conjunction with predominantly ethnic minority drama. This attempt to diversify television drama serves to segregate white and minority stories instead of depicting multicultural Britain as it is – or, indeed, was as recent scholarship – such as that from David Olusoga in *Black and British* and Miranda Kaufmann in *Black Tudors* – has shown.

There has not been the scope within Phase One of this project to physically watch all the programming monitored. This means that the analysis of programming has been select and further work is needed in order to comprehend the full nature of the roles played by people of colour, particularly within the context of pervasive stereotypes, which continue to be in evidence in scripted programming within the sample.

Genres

The programmes monitored are broken down into five broad categories, identified for the purposes of this study as Comedy, Contemporary Drama, Continuing Drama, Mystery and Period Drama.

The chart below provides a visualisation of the make-up of peak, scripted television in 2018.

Continuing drama comprises the largest portion of the peak output of the four major broadcast networks with 49% of episodes broadcast. The other 51% of programming was split between the other four categories.

For our purposes, the Contemporary Drama category – which comprises 20% of broadcast primetime television outputs – is broadly defined as narratives that are set in the present or recent past.

Period Drama made up 5% of broadcast primetime television outputs in 2018. Period Drama was separated out from the broader Drama category as ethnicity is treated differently – e.g., generally excluded from – than it is within the former category. For the purposes for this study, the definition of period drama encompasses narratives that are typically referred to as costume drama as well as those set in prior to the 1980s.

Within the full data sample, programmes also came from genres labelled as Animation, Family and Science Fiction. These have been excluded from the genre analysis as there was insufficient data across the calendar year to detect patterns of representation.

Contemporary Drama and Mystery are the most racially diverse genres, while Period Drama, Comedy and Continuing Drama were the least inclusive in 2018. The demographic breakdowns by genre were:

	White	African Caribbean	South Asian	East Asian	Middle Eastern
Comedy	87%	6%	5%	1%	1%
Continuing drama	85%	8%	6%	0%	1%
Contemporary drama	70%	12%	14%	3%	1%
Mystery	79%	11%	7%	1%	2%
Period drama	95%	3%	1%	0%	1%

What follows is an analysis of the representation of the four broad ethnicity categories in each of the five genres.

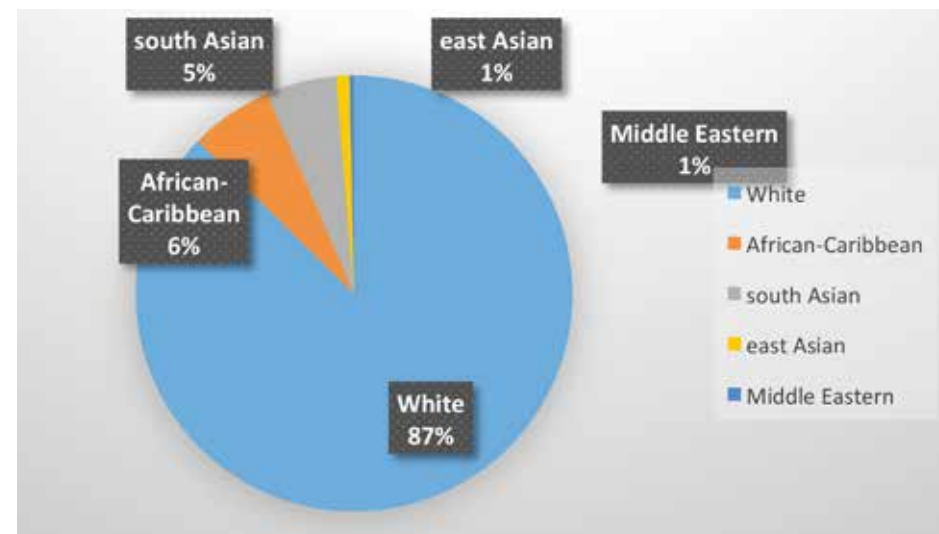
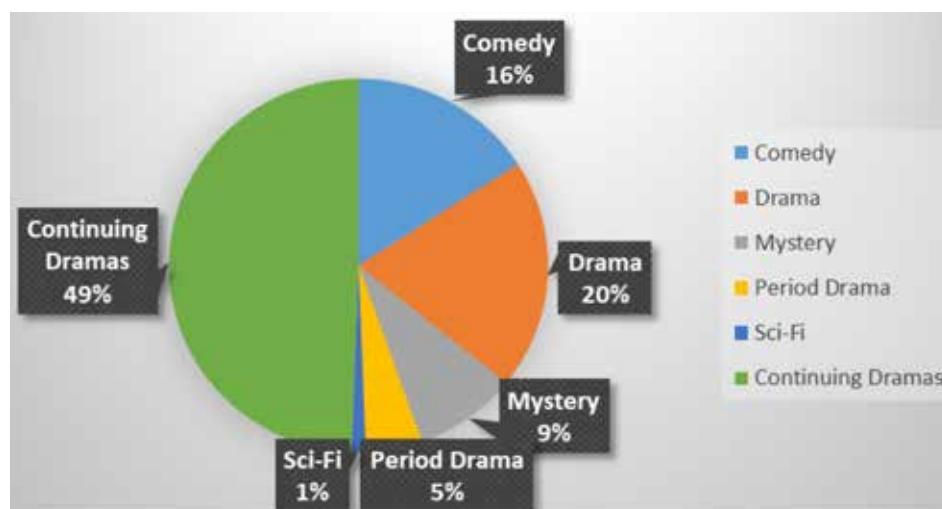
1. COMEDY

A. Overview

34 comedy series or one-off specials were broadcast in 2018, with a total of 156 episodes monitored. The BBC was the largest provider of comedy entertainment, followed by Channel 4 and ITV.

Comedy as a whole had one of the lowest rates of inclusion with a representation breakdown of 87% white, 6% African-Caribbean, 5% south Asian, 1% East Asian and 1% Middle Eastern.

34% of the 156 episodes had all-white casts, while 66% had some form of inclusion. That is one-quarter of the total comedy output for a complete calendar year remained exclusionary of minority ethnic actors. B. Lead roles Characters played by a performer from one of the four minority categories were most often supporting or background roles, although one series out of the 34 – *Defending the Guilty* – had a minority ethnic leading actor.



2. CONTINUING DRAMA

A. Overview

For the purposes of this study, the continuing drama category comprises the long-running BBC hospital dramas, Casualty and Holby City, as well as programming more colloquially known as ‘soaps’ across the BBC, ITV and Channel 4, EastEnders, Coronation Street, Emmerdale and Hollyoaks. As noted above, these six programmes comprise the bulk of the overall primetime scripted output, at just under 50% of all episodes monitored in 2018.

Cast lists in the *Radio Times* for the four “soaps” tended to be listed on a weekly or a biweekly basis, although each listing is treated here as an individual episode. 491 episode listings were monitored across the genre in 2018. The overall averages for Continuing Drama were 85% white, 8% African-Caribbean, 6% south Asian and 1% Middle Eastern.

The numbers were so low for east Asian performers – 15 appearances out of a total of 11,229 across the entire Continuing Drama genre – that the percentage of representation was effectively 0% for performers of that heritage.

B. Representation by programme

The BBC’s two hospital dramas had greater levels of representation for African-Caribbeans and south Asians than did their counterparts, although both Casualty and Holby City struggled with representation of Middle Easterners and east Asians.

The levels of representation of on-screen talent by ethnicity for each strand by programme is instructive in this regard. Particularly low levels of representation have been highlighted below:

	White	African Carib'n	South Asian	East Asian	Middle Eastern
Casualty	71%	21%	7%	0%	1%
Holby City	74%	20%	6%	0%	0%
Hollyoaks	81%	10%	9%	0%	0%
EastEnders	84%	8%	5%	0%	3%
Coronation Street	87%	4%	8%	0%	1%
Emmerdale	94%	3%	3%	0%	0%

The relative diversity of both Casualty and Holby City stems from both programmes’ recurring characters at their core, as well as the diverse pool of talent hired to play each week’s guest stars.

Where all programmes within the continuing drama strand fail is in even nominal inclusion of performers from east Asian and Middle Eastern

heritage. Across 53 weeks of monitoring data, the total of weekly appearances by actors of east Asian and Middle Eastern descent

for each of the six programmes is mostly in the single digits. That means, for example, that across the entire calendar year, only 3 performers of east Asian heritage appeared in Casualty (who were all also seen in a single episode).

	Number of appearances for East Asian performers	Number of appearances Middle Eastern performers
Casualty	3	6
Coronation Street	4	35
EastEnders	5	70
Emmerdale	1	8
Holby City	1	2
Hollyoaks	1	3

The relatively high number of appearances by Middle Eastern performers in Coronation Street and EastEnders is deceptive, however. All but one of the appearances by a Middle Eastern male were made by 2 performers in EastEnders in 2018. Likewise, all appearances by a person of Middle Eastern descent was actually made by 1 actor in Coronation Street. While the recurring character means there is consistent representation in both Coronation Street and EastEnders, the opportunities are limited as these appearances are split between 3 performers in total. There were no recurring east Asian characters in any continuing drama in 2018; all other ethnicities are represented through recurring characters in one or more of the continuing drama programmes.

C. Stereotypes

One reason for the comparatively high levels of representation of African-Caribbean and, to a lesser extent, south Asians in both Casualty and Holby City is the long-term association of immigrants with the National Health Service in the popular consciousness – and on television.

This cultural depiction of real-life experiences enables the producers, directors and casting directors of the BBC’s two hospital-set continuing dramas to cast recurring roles and guest leads

using men and women from African-Caribbean and south Asian backgrounds.

Many of the guest appearances by performers from African-Caribbean, south Asian and east Asian backgrounds in three out of the four remaining continuing dramas (Coronation Street, Hollyoaks and Emmerdale) were also depictions of people of colour within an NHS context. More often than not, however, they were also unnamed characters that were generically listed in the *Radio Times* as “Nurse,” “Consultant,” “Doctor,” “Sonographer,” “Registrar,” “Gynaecologist,” or “Oncologist.”

What is important about the long-standing depictions of people of colour in television drama, as epitomized within the two continuing dramas and the guest appearances of unnamed “types,” is not that the stereotypes are negative, but that the depictions are limited and people of colour are pigeonholed. Stereotypes – both positive and negative – play into the lack of diversity and inclusion in other areas of scripted television.

Further study of the roles played within the Continuing Drama strand is needed in order to understand the types of roles actors from these four broad ethnicity categories are playing and how stereotypes are perpetuated.

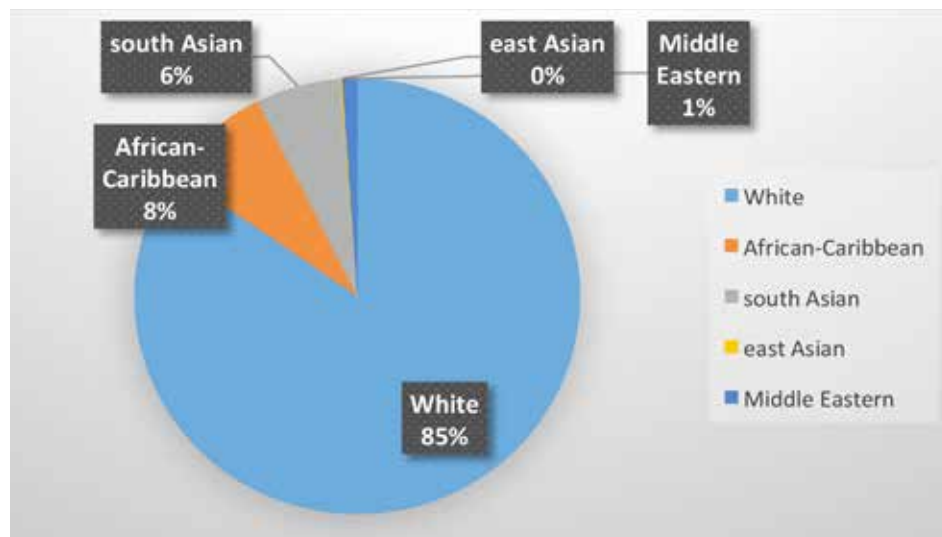
3. CONTEMPORARY DRAMA

A. Overview

50 programmes fell under the category of contemporary drama within 2018, which included series, serials, stand-alone dramas and television versions of theatrical work, with a total of 197 weekly episodes monitored. The programmes themselves ranged from established series such as *Benidorn*, *Our Girl*, *Humans* and *Ackley Bridge*; serials like *Black Earth Rising*, *Press*, *Strangers*, *The Bodyguard* and *Killing Eve*; one-time dramas such as *Torvill and Dean* and *Killed By My Debt*.

The breakdown of ethnicity for the output in what we list here as Drama – contemporary drama – has the greatest levels of participation within the six broad categories monitored here.

Overall the demographics of 2018 primetime broadcast television for contemporary drama was 70% white, 12% African-Caribbean, 14% south Asian, 3% east Asian and 1% Middle Eastern.



B. Segregated programming

Within the drama genre that comprises 44 separate serials, recurring series or stand-alone dramas, four of these are programmes that were set – and filmed – in Africa, the Indian subcontinent or Asia: the BBC’s Black Earth Rising and Our Girl, and ITV’s Strangers and Good Karma Hospital; a fifth programme, Channel 4’s Ackley Bridge, is set in a BritishPakistani academy school in Yorkshire.

These five programmes are singled out as their demographic breakdowns are individually – and collectively – more diverse than the overall averages of the contemporary genre subset:

	White	African Carib'n	South Asian	East Asian	Middle Eastern
Ackley Bridge	52%	0%	45%	0%	3%
Black Earth Rising	53%	47%	1%	0%	0%
Our Girl	48%	24%	26%	1%	0%
Strangers	40%	3%	0%	57%	0%
The Good Karma Hospital	25%	0%	75%	0%	0%
Average above programmes	47%	12%	30%	10%	1%
Excluding above programmes	78%	12%	7%	1%	1%
Contemporary drama average	70%	12%	14%	3%	1%

The chart above also shows that when the five programmes with higher than average inclusion rates are removed from the contemporary genre data sample, continuing drama as a whole decreases its inclusion levels by seven percentage points. Because the five programmes provide higher representation for people of south Asian and east Asian heritage, south Asian inclusion falls by nearly 50% when the five programmes are removed from the genre averages. East Asian representation – already at extremely low levels – also falls by 50% when Strangers (the only programme with high levels of east Asian inclusion) is removed from the contemporary drama data sample.

While the genre as a whole appears diverse, granular level analysis of the demographics by programme shows that the inclusion numbers come from programming choices that segregate

minority ethnic performers into particular strands that continue to “other” the groups as non-British or – in the case of Ackley Bridge – self-segregates within a British context.

The issue is not that these stories are being made but, rather, that these programmes are made at the expense of wider inclusivity elsewhere in broadcast schedules.

C. Stereotypes

There are indications that actors from African-Caribbean, south Asian, east Asian and Middle Eastern heritage continue to be stereotyped in television drama and comedy. While the five programmes singled out above are also stereotypical, the rest of the data sample helps to illustrate these are not anomalies.

One example that received press attention when the programme aired was the BBC’s Bodyguard, in which a woman of colour was portrayed as Muslim and stereotyped as a suicide bomber. Other examples permeate the rest of the sample.

One of the most diverse programmes was the BBC’s Informer, which is described on their website as a “character-driven thriller about Raza, a young second-generation BritishPakistani man from London who is coerced by Gabe, a counterterrorism officer, into informing.” Again, criminality and terrorism are associated largely with people of colour.

D. Leading roles

Out of the 39 programmes classified as contemporary drama, five had an actor from African-Caribbean, south Asian, east Asian or Middle Eastern heritage playing the lead. That breaks down to 11% of the contemporary genre output broadcast in 2018.

With the five programmes that are above average in terms of including actors from the four minority backgrounds monitored in this study, only one – Black Earth Rising – had an actor from one of the minority ethnic groups playing the lead character. Even in narratives that revolve around minority ethnic characters, white actors dominate the leading roles within scripted television.

It is worth noting that one of the most prominent examples of a title character played by an actor from one of the four groups monitored was Sandra Oh in Killing Eve. Sandra Oh is a Canadian actress, which means that a prominent role for an east Asian performer went to an actor who was not British denying British-based performers of valuable exposure and experience.

4. MYSTERY

A. Overview

The survey of 2018 broadcast scripted television included 18 separate long-running series or serials, with a total of 87 individual episodes monitored. The programmes included returning series Endeavour, Vera, Midsomer Murders, Shetland, Silent Witness, Unforgotten, Death in Paradise and Luther as well as several new serials, Collateral, Marcella and Next of Kin.

The Mystery genre was one of the most diverse genres on broadcast television in 2018, with an overall demographic breakdown of 79% of roles played by white actors. The minority breakdown across the genre was 11% representation of African-Caribbeans; south Asians, 7%; east Asians, 1% and Middle Eastern, 2%.

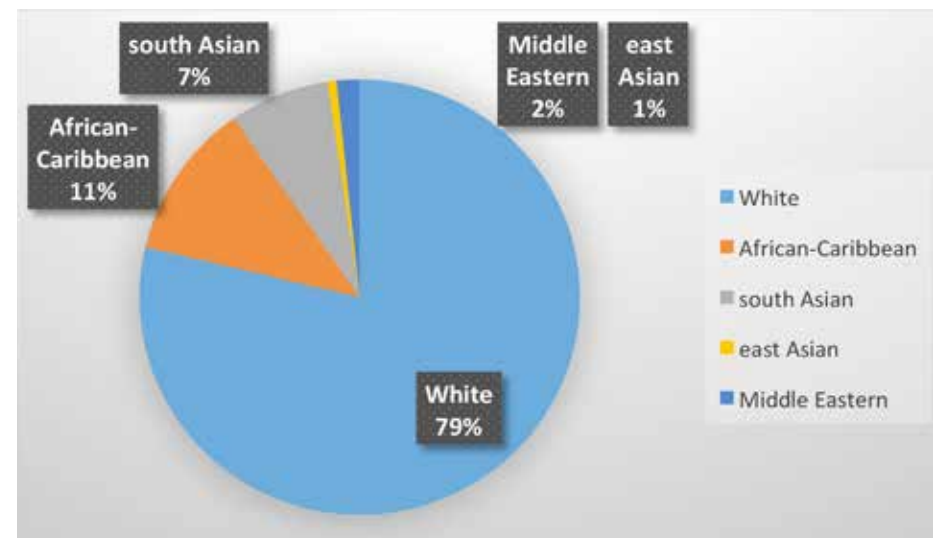
Apart from Death in Paradise, the long-running

mystery series (Death in Paradise, Endeavour, Luther, Midsomer Murders, Shetland, Vera) were less inclusive than those that were either stand-alone drama serials or have been launched since 2014:

	White	African Carib'n	South Asian	East Asian	Middle Eastern
Long-running series	83%	15%	1%	1%	0%
New series post 2014	76%	10%	11%	1%	2%

Death in Paradise is the exception within the long-running series subgenre, but the reasons for this are simple. Like its Contemporary Drama counterparts such as Black Earth Rising, Strangers and similar programming, the BBC series is set on an island in the Caribbean and skews heavily towards an African-Caribbean demographic across most of the episodes that aired in 2018. It was ground-breaking in terms of the mystery genre when it first aired, but the lack of similar programming set in England highlights the segregation that occurs within the context of diversity initiatives.

The lack of inclusivity within the long-running series becomes more apparent, once Death in Paradise is removed from the sample.



	White	African Carib'n	South Asian	East Asian	Middle Eastern
Long-running series including Death in Paradise	83%	15%	1%	1%	0%
Excluding Death in Paradise	89%	9%	1%	1%	0%

Without Death in Paradise, the inclusivity of the long-running series drops 6% with AfricanCaribbean representation dropping by the same amount.

B. Lead roles

Two out of 18 programmes in the mystery genre had actors from the four broad ethnic categories monitored for this study with top billing, e.g. were the acknowledged lead characters: Luther and Next of Kin. Put simply, 89% of programming (16 programmes) had a white leading actor or actress and 11% (2 programmes) had a minority ethnic lead.

The example of Death in Paradise is illustrative in terms of the appropriation of leading roles throughout the mystery genre. In 2018, the demographic make-up of Death in Paradise was majority African-Caribbean with 59% of appearances played by actors of that heritage. Despite having a majority African-Caribbean cast, its leading actor – the person with star billing and the lead detective of the series – was played by a white, male performer. The series has had four lead detectives – or stars – since its debut in 2011; none of them have been African-Caribbean.

It is worth noting that Unforgotten had a south Asian actor who received second billing, after the white, female lead.

C. Stereotypes

Unforgotten, Collateral and Death in Paradise are examples of series that present major characters in professional positions, in these cases as police officers of various ranks: Detective Inspector (Unforgotten), Detective Sargent (Collateral; Death in Paradise), Officer (Death in Paradise) and Commissioner (Death in Paradise).

At the other end of the spectrum, negative

stereotypes remain present within the genre as in Next of Kin. This ITV thriller was another example of a programme that was largely set in a foreign country and had more appearances by minority ethnic actors than white actors. Next of Kin had 50% representation by south Asian performers, followed by 10% Middle Eastern and 6% African-Caribbean; no east Asian actors appeared in this programme. The lead character (and performer with top billing) is a GP of Pakistani heritage practicing medicine in London and the story centres around a Muslim family, all potentially capable of breaking stereotypes. However, the programme premise uses its near-majority minority cast to tell a story about Islamic terrorism, thus reinforcing negative stereotypes about people from the backgrounds the series has employed.

5. PERIOD DRAMA

A. Overview

There were 13 serials broadcast in 2018 that were categorized as period dramas for the purposes of this study with a total of 62 episodes monitored. Programming included highprofile costume dramas such as Poldark, Versailles and Vanity Fair as well as serials that are set between 1930 and 1960, including A Very English Scandal and Mrs. Wilson and established series including Call the Midwife and The Durrells.

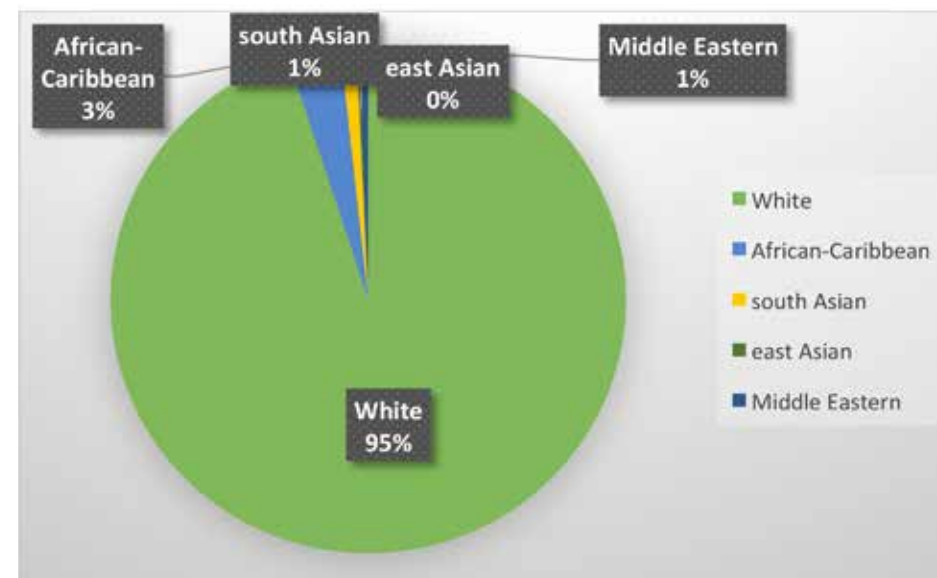
Period drama was the least representative genre on broadcast television in 2018 with 95% of weekly appearances played by white actors. Correspondingly, representation of ethnic minorities within this set of programmes is very low at 3% African-Caribbean, 1% south Asian, 1% Middle Eastern. There was no east Asian representation within any of the episodes surveyed.

In 25 out of the 62 episodes, there was no representation across the four ethnicity categories monitored for this survey.

B. Lead roles

No period drama had a lead role played by an actor from African-Caribbean, south Asian, east Asian or Middle Eastern heritage.

David Oyelowo played Javert in Les Miserables,



which was the most prominent role played by a non-white actor. The central character in Les Miserables is Jean Valjean while Javert is the largest supporting role, as the police officer in pursuit of Jean Valjean.

Although the character is not the lead, the importance of the casting of Javert using an African-Caribbean should not be overlooked. It was a major breakthrough in terms of equal opportunity, even as the genre remains 95% white.

Conclusion

There are areas that remain problematic within scripted television programming on the major broadcast channels, which result in a lack of inclusivity within the industry despite the paths for access that also exist.

One of the major problems is the propensity of broadcasters to attempt to resolve their diversity issues by over-representation within programmes that have an overseas setting. While this does increase their diversity numbers, it also segregates that diversity within a context that allows audiences to continue to perceive British actors of African-Caribbean, south Asian, east Asian and Middle Eastern descent as “other”. This needs to be balanced by representation of them as British in stories that illustrate the full breadth of their experience within British society.

East Asian and Middle Eastern representation is almost non-existent on television, even within those pockets of scripted drama that are generally more diverse.

Stereotyping of people of colour – whether it is as criminals and servants or as terrorists – continues to be rife, although further study is needed in order to fully understand the extent of these depictions.

There is little access to the highest levels of the industry and performers of AfricanCaribbean, south Asian, east Asian and Middle Eastern descent continue to be overlooked for leading roles in favour of their white counterparts or, in some cases, American or Canadian actors. Broadcasters are unwilling to promote diverse talent to leading roles, despite many distinguished stage actors with experience of television having been in the profession for ten, twenty, thirty, forty or even fifty years.

Appendix A: Weekly Totals

Week	Cast listed in Radio Times (total)	White (total)	Black (total)	South Asian (total)	East Asian (total)	Mid Eastern (total)
6-12 January	401	315	35	44	0	6
13-19 January	460	360	52	40	2	6
20-26 January	442	357	47	29	1	8
27 Jan - 2 Feb	472	381	52	32	0	7
3-9 February	477	402	35	35	1	5
10-16 February	470	389	44	27	4	6
17-23 February	431	365	43	17	1	5
24 Feb - 2 Mar	503	433	44	16	4	6
3-9 March	528	451	50	19	2	6
10-16 March	463	401	32	23	1	5
17-23 March	423	369	29	27	1	4
24-30 March	404	340	29	33	0	4
31 Mar - 6 Apr	500	417	36	39	1	6
7-12 April	462	392	25	38	2	5
14-20 April	372	311	25	31	2	3
21-27 April	375	316	23	31	3	2
28 Apr - 4 May	359	302	31	22	1	3
5-11 May	357	304	26	22	2	3
12-18 May	346	294	21	24	3	3
19-25 May	349	302	24	19	1	3
26 May - 1 June	356	294	34	24	1	3
2-8 June	378	295	32	47	2	2
9-15 June	372	296	33	36	5	4
16-22 June	343	286	27	28	1	4
23-29 June	363	287	31	41	1	3
30 June - 6 July	334	282	15	41	4	5
7-13 July	323	259	17	39	2	2
14 - 20 July	433	349	37	41	1	5
21 - 27 July	400	332	31	32	1	4
28 July - 3 August	410	332	31	42	1	4
4-10 August	389	321	22	40	0	6
11 - 17 August	405	323	41	39	0	4
18-24 August	369	291	30	42	2	3
25-31 August	347	287	29	28	2	3
1-7 September	389	333	34	20	0	1
8-14 September	423	340	39	27	13	1
15 - 21 September	453	372	42	25	15	1
22 - 28 September	419	338	41	24	14	1
29 Sep - 5 Oct	452	378	37	20	13	3
6 - 12 October	456	349	52	33	17	3
13 - 19 Oct	434	338	47	28	18	3
20 - 26 Oct	447	348	52	26	18	3
27 Oct - 2 Nov	461	358	55	32	11	5
3 - 9 November	377	311	32	27	2	5
10 - 16 November	338	269	35	30	0	4
17 - 23 November	328	258	42	22	1	5
24 - 30 November	314	253	31	22	0	6
1-7 December	314	247	24	18	1	6
8-14 December	314	267	31	11	1	4
15-21 December	264	209	39	10	1	3
22 Dec 2018 - 4 Jan 2019 (2 weeks)	589	509	51	28	3	3
YEAR TOTAL	20588	16912	1797	1491	183	205



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