

Decolonising Publishing: The Production of Marginalised Voices in Contemporary Publishing

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This dissertation is submitted in part fulfilment of the regulations for the MSc Degree in
Publishing.

Word Count: 16,035

Edinburgh Napier University
2026

Statement of Originality

This project is an original piece of work which is made available for photocopying, for inter-library loan, and for electronic access at the discretion of the Dean of the School of Arts & Creative Industries.

J. Wilkinson

Signed

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my dissertation supervisor and the MSc Publishing teaching team at Edinburgh Napier University for their guidance during the development of this project. I am particularly grateful to Adam Lowe of Peepal Tree Press and Habiba Desai of Fox & Windmill for giving their time to discuss publishing, representation and access, and to the sixteen people who completed the reader survey. Their responses made it possible to place academic arguments about publishing alongside contemporary professional and reader perspectives. I would also like to thank the people who supported the research and writing process outside the university.

Abstract

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This dissertation examines how editorial, commercial and institutional practices shape the production and circulation of writing by marginalised authors in contemporary UK publishing, with its strongest empirical focus on Black British, Caribbean and British South Asian writing. It distinguishes decolonisation from numerical diversity by asking whether greater representation is accompanied by changes in who defines literary value, marketability and the presumed reader. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* provides the central account of decolonisation, supported by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural production, Gérard Genette's paratext, and scholarship on racialised publishing and institutional diversity. The research uses a qualitative-led mixed-method design: four publishing case studies, an exploratory survey of 16 anonymous readers, a semi-structured interview with Adam Lowe of Peepal Tree Press, and a written interview with Habiba Desai of Fox & Windmill. The findings show a persistent tension between visibility and containment. Identity labels can help readers discover neglected writing, but can also narrow assumptions about genre and audience. Both publisher participants describe resisting trend-led commissioning and treating racial identity as a genre, while their accounts also expose the resource and geographical constraints faced by independent presses. The dissertation concludes that contemporary UK publishing has created more visible space for marginalised writing, but that visibility alone does not amount to decolonisation. More substantial change depends on editorial authority, sustained audience investment, career progression into decision-making roles, regional access and the distribution of economic resources across the industry.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research context and rationale

Publishing is often described as a route through which voices enter public life. That is true, but it can make the publisher sound more passive than it is. A manuscript is selected, edited, packaged, described to booksellers, assigned a marketing budget and placed within categories that tell readers what kind of book they are looking at. None of those decisions is incidental. Together they shape the conditions under which a book becomes visible and the kinds of readers it is expected to reach.

Questions of representation have become increasingly prominent in UK publishing. Large publishers, trade organisations and literary charities have introduced recruitment schemes, open submission periods, mentorship programmes and public diversity commitments. The available workforce data, however, does not describe a settled or consistently improving picture. The Publishers Association's 2024 workforce survey, based on 9,707 employees from 52 businesses, found that 15 per cent of respondents belonged to ethnic minority groups, down from 17 per cent in 2022. It also reported that 65 per cent came from professional backgrounds, 16 per cent had attended an independent or fee-paying school, and 79 per cent held an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification (Publishers Association, 2024). These figures are useful evidence about access to the industry. They tell us much less about which manuscripts are acquired, how books by marginalised authors are edited and positioned, or whose reading habits are treated as commercially central.

This study therefore treats representation as a question of power as well as presence. A more diverse publishing list can still be produced through familiar ideas about literary value, commercial risk and the presumed 'general' reader. A marginalised author may be published while also being asked to explain cultural references, framed mainly through identity or trauma, or given less room to move between genres. None of these outcomes should be assumed in advance. They are the practices the dissertation sets out to examine.

The term 'decolonising publishing' is used in a deliberately demanding sense. Frantz Fanon's account of decolonisation in *The Wretched of the Earth* does not reduce colonial power to a problem of representation. Colonial rule organises material life, political authority and culture, and it also determines whose knowledge is treated as legitimate (Fanon, 2001). That makes Fanon useful here because he raises a harder question than whether more

marginalised writers are visible: have the terms on which cultural value is decided changed? Aníbal Quijano's concept of coloniality develops this concern by describing how Eurocentric arrangements of knowledge and hierarchy can persist after formal colonial rule has ended (Quijano, 2000). In a publishing context, this directs attention towards apparently ordinary judgements about taste, readability, professionalism, audience and market value.

The dissertation does not claim that every unequal publishing decision can be traced directly to colonial history, and it does not treat mainstream publishing as a single coherent institution. Nor are independent presses assumed to be decolonial by virtue of being small. Race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, geography and economic scale overlap in ways that this project cannot fully separate. The title retains the broader phrase 'marginalised voices', but the evidence gathered for this study is strongest on racialised authors and writing shaped by Black British, Caribbean, British South Asian and postcolonial experience. Claims are kept at that level where the evidence requires it.

1.2 Research focus, question and objectives

The central research question is: To what extent do editorial, commercial and institutional practices in contemporary UK publishing reproduce Eurocentric power structures in the production and circulation of writing by marginalised authors?

The question is organised around three areas that recur throughout the dissertation. Editorial power concerns acquisition, commissioning and manuscript development. Commercial power concerns covers, blurbs, publicity, metadata, categorisation, bookselling and distribution. Institutional power concerns where decision-making authority sits within publishing organisations, including the relationship between workforce diversity, ownership, leadership and resources. The categories overlap in practice. A sales forecast can affect an acquisition; an imagined reader can shape an editorial request; retailer expectations can influence a cover; and the composition of the team making those decisions matters at each stage.

The objectives follow from that structure. The dissertation distinguishes decolonisation from numerical diversity, examines how ideas about quality, universality, authenticity and risk enter publishing decisions, and studies the way paratext and marketing frame marginalised authors for readers. It also asks whether diversity activity changes who holds authority or mainly widens participation within existing systems. Finally, it compares mainstream publishing practices with independent models, using Peepal Tree Press and Fox

& Windmill as two purposively chosen cases rather than as representatives of all independent publishers.

1.3 Research design, case selection and contribution

A single method would capture only one part of the research question. The study therefore uses a qualitative-led mixed-method design that brings together published objects, reader responses and publisher testimony. Each method addresses a different stage of the same process. A cover or blurb can show how a book is publicly framed, for example, while a publisher interview can explain some of the pressures behind those choices and the reader survey can show how a small group of readers respond to comparable labels and categories.

The book analysis is included because publishing power becomes visible in the finished object as well as in internal decision-making. Four titles were selected for close comparison: Candice Carty-Williams' *Queenie* (2019) and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) from mainstream trade publishing, alongside *Glimpse: Contemporary Black British Speculative Fiction*, edited by Leone Ross (2022), from Peepal Tree Press, and Fox & Windmill's *Into the Wilds* (2022). The selection reflects the strongest racialised and postcolonial strands of the project, offers two different publishing scales, and provides enough public paratextual material for comparison. The texts are not treated as representative samples of Black British or South Asian writing. Keeping the group small is intentional: the purpose is close analysis of positioning rather than a numerical audit of the market.

The reader survey was chosen for a different reason. Much publishing and marketing practice depends on assumptions about what readers will recognise, buy or find accessible. Asking readers directly cannot reveal the behaviour of the UK book-buying population, but it can test whether some of those assumptions appear straightforward even within a small sample. Sixteen anonymous respondents completed the survey. All reported reading for leisure at least monthly, so the sample is weighted towards engaged readers. Questions covered discovery, access, publisher awareness, the importance of author identity, difficulty finding writing from different backgrounds, and reactions to labels such as 'Black British writing', 'LGBTQ+ fiction', 'world literature' and 'diverse voices'. The survey is therefore used as exploratory reader-response material, not as representative consumer research.

The publisher interviews were selected purposively. Adam Lowe, Digital and Programmes Producer at Peepal Tree Press, was interviewed on 23 July 2026 (Lowe, 2026). Peepal Tree was chosen because it is a long-established independent press with a sustained

commitment to Caribbean and Black British writing, writer development and backlist publishing. Lowe's cross-departmental role also meant that the interview could move between editorial culture, marketing, partnerships and the practical limits of a small press. A second perspective was obtained through a written interview with Habiba Desai, co-founder of Fox & Windmill, received on 7 August 2026 (Desai, 2026). Fox & Windmill is a much younger Northern independent publisher focused on South Asian writers and describes its publishing process as slow and not led by trends (Fox & Windmill, n.d.). It was selected because it provides a useful comparison with Peepal Tree across a different community, publishing history and regional context. The comparison is not designed to show what all independent presses do; it asks whether similar concerns about genre, audience, access and commercial pressure recur in two differently situated presses.

Bringing these methods together is the main contribution of the project. Research by Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente (2020; 2022a; 2022b) has already shown that writers of colour can be disadvantaged by assumptions made at acquisition, promotion, sales and retail stages. Graham Huggan (2001) and Sarah Brouillette (2007) examine the market positioning of postcolonial difference, while Sara Ahmed (2012) considers the institutional performance of diversity. This dissertation does not claim to discover those problems for the first time. Its narrower contribution is to examine how they connect across editorial, commercial and institutional decisions within a small contemporary study, and to place published books, reader responses and independent-publisher accounts in the same analysis.

1.4 Scope and limitations

The scale of the topic places clear limits on what a 15,000-word dissertation can establish. 'Decolonising publishing' could encompass the history of print, education, copyright, translation, global rights, labour, bookselling and many forms of marginalisation. This study does not attempt that breadth. It is limited to contemporary UK trade and literary publishing and concentrates on the points at which books are selected, edited, framed and circulated. Academic, educational and children's publishing fall outside the main sample. The study's strongest evidence concerns race and postcolonial identity, so it cannot be used to make equivalent claims about every marginalised group.

The primary data is also small. The survey has 16 respondents and all of them read at least monthly; it is useful for identifying tensions and examples, but not for estimating how UK readers as a whole behave. Both publisher participants work for independent presses

with explicit commitments to marginalised writers. Their positioning is one reason they were chosen, yet it also means the interviews cannot stand in for the views of editors or executives at major conglomerate publishers. A mainstream-publisher interview would have provided a valuable counterpoint. An author interview was also sought so that the publishing process could be examined from the author's side, but one had not been secured at the time of writing.

Recruitment more generally was slower than anticipated. Potential participants were being asked to discuss race, marginalisation, editorial judgement and organisations with which they may have ongoing professional relationships. Those subjects can be sensitive, and some of the people approached did not respond or were unable to take part. It would be an overreach to treat non-response itself as evidence that the industry is unwilling to discuss these issues. The practical effect is simpler: the range of primary voices is narrower than originally hoped, and the later analysis must be careful about the scale of its claims.

There is a further interpretive limit to the book analysis. Covers, blurbs, metadata and publicity are public evidence of positioning, but they do not provide direct access to the private intention of an editor, designer or marketing team. The dissertation can analyse patterns and compare them with interview testimony and published research; it cannot reliably infer motive from a visual choice alone. Later chapters therefore state these limits when the relevant evidence is discussed.

1.5 Chapter structure

The literature review that follows establishes the academic context for the study, moving from postcolonial and decolonial accounts of culture to publishing as a field of cultural production, editorial mediation, paratextual marketing and institutional diversity. The theoretical framework then narrows that literature into the concepts used in analysis. Chapter 4 sets out the case-selection process, survey design, interviews, coding, ethics and primary-research limitations in more detail. Chapters 5 to 7 are organised around editorial, commercial and institutional power so that evidence from books, survey responses and interviews can be considered together. The conclusion returns to the research question, distinguishes the findings from the limits of the sample, and identifies questions that a larger study could pursue.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Decolonisation, culture and the authority to represent

A study of decolonising publishing first requires a distinction between colonialism as a historical system and colonality as a continuing structure of knowledge and power. Frantz Fanon (2001) understood colonialism as an order that acts upon land, labour, political authority, culture and the psyche. His writing is frequently reduced to its discussion of revolutionary violence, but that emphasis can obscure the relevance of his account of culture. In the chapter 'On National Culture', Fanon rejects the idea that liberation can be achieved by recovering a pure and static pre-colonial past. Culture is not a museum of inherited customs. It is produced through a people's active struggle to describe themselves, to contest imposed meanings and to create a future. This is particularly useful for publishing research because it prevents decolonisation from becoming a decorative exercise in which recognisably 'diverse' content is added to an unchanged market.

Fanon's argument also draws attention to the colonised intellectual who has been trained within the values of the colonial centre. The issue is not simply that the intellectual lacks access to national culture, but that the standards through which culture is judged have already been organised by colonial authority. In contemporary publishing, this raises questions about apparently neutral categories such as literary quality, accessibility and universal appeal. These terms can describe genuine editorial concerns, yet they can also conceal the social position from which a work is being judged. A book may be considered inaccessible because it does not explain cultural references to a White British reader, or insufficiently universal because its social world is not already familiar to the publishing team.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* provides a related account of representation as an exercise of authority. Said (2003) argues that Western descriptions of the 'Orient' did not merely record an external reality. They produced an object of knowledge through repeated distinctions between a rational, modern West and an exotic, irrational or static East. The relevance to publishing lies in the power to frame cultural difference. Covers, catalogue descriptions, endorsements and sales language may reproduce a recognisable version of otherness even when a book itself is formally or politically resistant to that framing. Said's work is not a theory of book marketing, but it clarifies why representation cannot be separated from the institutions authorised to circulate it.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) places language at the centre of cultural domination. His account of colonial education describes language as both communication and a carrier of collective memory. The decision to write, edit or publish in a dominant language is therefore not politically empty. For a UK publishing study, the issue extends beyond the choice between English and another language. It includes the treatment of dialect, untranslated words, creole, syntax and culturally specific knowledge. Editorial requests for clarification may help readers, but repeated demands to translate a work towards a presumed dominant reader can reposition that reader as the standard against which all writing is measured.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) question of whether the subaltern can speak adds a necessary warning. The problem is not the literal absence of speech. It is the process through which speech becomes recognised, translated and represented by institutions that already possess authority. This matters when publishers describe themselves as 'giving voice' to marginalised writers. Such language can unintentionally preserve the publisher as the active agent and the author as a silent subject who becomes audible only through institutional selection. A decolonial approach should therefore ask how authors exercise agency within publishing relationships, not merely whether they have been included.

Aníbal Quijano (2000) helps connect these arguments to the present by distinguishing coloniality from colonial administration. Coloniality describes the persistence of racial classification, Eurocentric knowledge and unequal economic relations within modern institutions. It offers a way of examining contemporary British publishing without claiming that a publishing house is equivalent to a colonial state. The connection is structural rather than identical. The task is to identify whether inherited hierarchies continue to shape whose knowledge appears general, whose writing is treated as culturally particular and whose readership is considered economically significant.

2.2 Publishing as a field of cultural production

Publishing operates through a mixture of cultural judgement and economic calculation. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production is useful because it rejects the idea that literary value emerges from texts alone. A field is a structured space in which authors, agents, editors, publishers, critics, booksellers and prize organisations occupy different positions and compete over forms of authority (Bourdieu, 1993). Some actors possess greater economic capital, while others rely on symbolic capital such as reputation, critical recognition or association with literary prestige. These forms of capital can be

converted. A prize may increase sales; a commercial success may allow a publisher to take a risk elsewhere; and an editor's reputation may attract authors.

Bourdieu's framework clarifies why individual goodwill does not remove structural inequality. An editor may be committed to publishing marginalised writers while working within an organisation that requires sales forecasts, retailer support and rapid returns. The decision is not made in isolation. It is shaped by the editor's position, the imprint's resources, the perceived status of the author, the expected audience and the power of other departments. This does not make editorial judgement meaningless, but it places that judgement within a network of constraints.

John B. Thompson's study of Anglo-American trade publishing develops this institutional account. He describes a field transformed by corporate consolidation, the growing influence of agents and retailers, and pressure to produce a limited number of high-impact titles (Thompson, 2012). The resulting 'winner-takes-more' dynamic increases the importance of anticipated sales and encourages publishers to search for books that can be made visible in a crowded market. For marginalised writers, the problem is not simply that commercial considerations exist. All trade publishing involves commercial judgement. The difficulty arises when commercial uncertainty is racialised, so that some writers are treated as a departure from the normal market while White writing is less often required to prove that a specific demographic will buy it.

This relationship between value and risk is visible in the research of Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente. Their study of UK publishing, based on more than one hundred interviews, found that diversity discourse shapes acquisition, promotion and sale, but does not necessarily displace the dominant culture's authority (Saha and van Lente, 2022b). The industry's problem is often narrated as a failure to find enough writers of colour. That explanation places scarcity outside the publisher. It gives less attention to the processes through which books are evaluated, developed and connected to audiences. The authors argue that diversity can operate as a form of racial governance: difference is welcomed in a managed form while the terms of inclusion remain controlled by the institution.

Bourdieu is sometimes criticised for presenting cultural fields as more settled and internally coherent than they are. The UK publishing industry is not one unified market, and independent presses, literary charities, online communities and self-publishing can contest dominant routes to recognition. Even so, the concepts of field, capital and position remain

valuable because they allow this dissertation to compare the resources and pressures surrounding different publishing models. They also prevent the analysis from reducing unequal outcomes to individual prejudice alone.

2.3 Editorial mediation and the imagined reader

Editorial work is necessarily interventionist. Manuscripts are selected, discussed and revised; a completely unmediated book is not the norm within trade publishing. The important question is therefore not whether an editor influences a text, but which assumptions guide that influence and how authority is negotiated with the author. Research on writers of colour suggests that editorial mediation can become racialised when cultural specificity is treated as an obstacle requiring translation.

Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing examines the stages through which a book moves from acquisition to the reader. Saha and van Lente (2020) found that publishers commonly recognised the need for greater diversity while expressing anxiety about how books by writers of colour would be positioned and sold. Their later work argues that publishing constructs a core reader who is implicitly White, middle-class and metropolitan (Saha and van Lente, 2022a). Once this reader becomes the default, authors of colour may be asked to make cultural references clearer, to explain a community to which they are writing, or to present their work in terms that are immediately recognisable to a dominant audience. The imagined reader is not a harmless marketing fiction. It can shape the text itself.

Melanie Ramdarshan Bold's research on British young adult authors of colour reaches a similar conclusion. Authors described pressures involving tokenisation, the burden of representation, limited marketing support and the narrowcasting of books towards racially defined audiences (Ramdarshan Bold, 2019). Narrowcasting can create valuable spaces in which readers find work that reflects their experience. It can also confine an author to a particular identity category and separate the work from mainstream genre readerships. The tension is not resolved by rejecting all targeted marketing. It requires attention to whether identity is one meaningful aspect of a book or the main condition under which the book is permitted to exist in the market.

Spivak's warning about institutional representation is relevant here. Editorial sensitivity to unfamiliar cultural material can be constructive, especially where an editor recognises the limits of their own knowledge. The problem appears when the editor's imagined reader is treated as neutral and the author's community as a special audience requiring explanation. A

decolonial editorial practice would not remove editing; it would make the location of editorial authority more visible and create space for disagreement, specialist knowledge and author agency.

2.4 Paratext, marketing and the commodification of difference

The material surrounding a text affects how the text is read. Gérard Genette (1997) uses the term 'paratext' for the threshold formed by titles, covers, prefaces, jacket copy and other devices that mediate between a book, its producer and its reader. In trade publishing, these devices are also commercial tools. They signal genre, mood, status and audience within a few seconds. Paratext is therefore central to this dissertation because it provides observable evidence of how a publisher frames a work.

Claire Squires argues that marketing does more than communicate a pre-existing literary meaning; it participates in producing that meaning (Squires, 2007). A book described as a family saga, a migration narrative, a Black British novel or an urgent account of racism enters a different set of expectations in each case. These descriptions can be accurate and useful. They can also privilege one feature so heavily that other aspects of the work become difficult to see. The category 'world literature', for example, may increase visibility while simultaneously positioning the work outside an unmarked category of general literature.

Graham Huggan's concept of the postcolonial exotic explains how cultural difference can acquire market value within metropolitan publishing. The 'exotic' is not simply an unusual setting. It is a mode of consumption through which difference is made available, recognisable and attractive to readers positioned at the cultural centre (Huggan, 2001). Sarah Brouillette (2007) similarly examines how postcolonial writers negotiate a global literary marketplace that rewards recognisable forms of marginality and authorial self-positioning. Both accounts resist an easy division between exploitation and agency. Authors may use the market's interest in identity strategically, and readers may encounter important work through such framing. The problem is that the terms of recognition are unevenly distributed.

Recent empirical work shows how this operates within UK publishing. Saha and van Lente (2022a) identify the cultural distribution stage - marketing, publicity, sales and retail - as particularly important in the production of racial inequality. Their interviewees described an industry organised around a White middle-class audience and a belief that books by authors of colour carry greater commercial risk. These assumptions affect investment, media targets, retailer support and, at times, decisions about whether a person of colour should

appear on a cover. The authors' key contribution is to show that distribution is not a neutral stage that follows editorial selection. It feeds back into acquisition and design, shaping what can be published in the first place.

This literature gives the dissertation a way to interpret identity labels without assuming they are inherently harmful. A label may help a reader find a book that would otherwise be overlooked. It may also become a form of containment, especially where the label replaces genre, style or subject. The survey data can explore how readers experience this tension, while the paratextual analysis can examine how it is materialised across the case-study books.

2.5 Diversity, institutional performance and racial capitalism

The publishing industry's diversity debate has often concentrated on demographic representation. Workforce data is necessary because it makes patterns of exclusion visible. The 2024 Publishers Association survey nevertheless illustrates the limits of a numerical account. The report records differences in ethnicity, class background, education, gender, sexuality and disability, but those figures do not in themselves show how authority is distributed between departments, how long employees remain in the industry, or whether publishing output changes (Publishers Association, 2024). A diverse workforce can still operate through established commercial and cultural norms.

Sara Ahmed's study of institutional diversity is useful in explaining this gap. She argues that diversity commitments can function as 'non-performatives': statements that name an intention without bringing that intention into being (Ahmed, 2012). An institution can use its diversity policy as evidence that it is already addressing racism. The document becomes proof of commitment, while the people attempting to change practice continue to encounter resistance. Although Ahmed's research focuses on universities, the argument applies to publishing organisations that publicise schemes or targets without altering the everyday distribution of decision-making power.

Nancy Leong's theory of racial capitalism sharpens the commercial aspect of this problem. Racial capitalism refers to the social or economic value that an individual or institution derives from another person's racial identity (Leong, 2013). In publishing, a company can gain reputational value by appearing diverse and economic value from books marketed through racial difference. This does not mean that every diversity initiative is cynical or that an author receives no benefit. Leong's point is structural: racial identity

becomes a form of value that can be captured by institutions whose underlying hierarchy remains intact. The emphasis on visible representation may then displace more difficult reform.

Anamik Saha (2018) connects racial capitalism to the cultural industries by showing how race is produced through the organisation of cultural work, not only represented in the final product. Saha and van Lente (2022b) extend this argument within publishing, where diversity can commodify writers of colour while continuing to devalue their presumed audiences. Their findings complicate the idea that inclusion and exploitation are opposites. A book may create cultural space for a community and generate value for its author while also being packaged through restrictive assumptions. This ambivalence is central to the present study. It prevents the analysis from treating diversity as either empty performance or uncomplicated progress.

The literature also suggests that entry-level recruitment cannot be treated as a substitute for authority. If marginalised staff are concentrated in junior or promotional roles while acquisition, finance and executive leadership remain less diverse, the institution can display difference without redistributing control. This concern is especially relevant to the distinction between marketing marginalised voices and enabling marginalised people to determine what is published, how it is edited and which audiences receive investment.

2.6 Independent publishing and alternative models

Independent presses are often described as an alternative to corporate publishing because smaller lists can permit closer editorial relationships and a different tolerance for commercial risk. That possibility is real, but independence is not the same thing as freedom from the market. Small presses still depend on distribution, bookselling, publicity and funding systems in which larger organisations hold greater economic power. Pierre Bourdieu's distinction between economic and symbolic capital is helpful here: a press can acquire literary reputation and a culturally distinctive list without possessing the money or retail leverage available to a conglomerate (Bourdieu, 1993). John B. Thompson's account of trade publishing similarly shows how scale changes the resources available to make books visible (Thompson, 2012).

This matters for a study of decolonisation because alternative editorial choices may still encounter conventional commercial bottlenecks. A small press might keep a modestly selling book in print for years, work with an author over several projects or publish into a readership

that a larger house regards as uncertain. It may also struggle to fund national publicity, secure prominent retail placement or retain an author if a larger publisher offers substantially greater resources. The question is therefore not whether independent publishing sits outside the field, but what kinds of autonomy it can exercise within it.

Peepal Tree Press and Fox & Windmill were chosen as later case studies because they make that tension visible from different positions. Peepal Tree has a long history of Caribbean and Black British publishing and writer development; Fox & Windmill is a newer Northern press focused on South Asian writers. Their primary-research interviews are not treated as literature in this chapter. Instead, the published scholarship above establishes the questions that will later be put to those accounts: what can a smaller press decide differently, and where does the wider structure of the book trade continue to set the terms?

2.7 Research gap

The gap addressed by this dissertation is not that race, coloniality or diversity have been ignored in publishing research. That would overstate the originality of the project. Existing work already shows that racial inequality can enter acquisition, editorial development, marketing, sales and employment, while postcolonial scholarship provides a much longer account of the relationship between cultural authority and the market. What is less often brought together in a small contemporary study is the movement between those stages: how ideas about an audience can affect editorial judgement, how public framing can alter the meaning attached to a book, and how institutional resources shape both.

The dissertation addresses that narrower problem through the recurring categories of editorial, commercial and institutional power. It also adds two forms of evidence that are modest in scale but useful for comparison: reader responses to identity-based positioning and testimony from two independent publishers with different histories and community focuses. These sources cannot produce a representative picture of UK publishing. Their value lies in testing how far arguments made in the literature can be seen, resisted or complicated in a set of concrete publishing practices.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Rationale for a combined framework

The theoretical framework is deliberately narrower than the literature review. It does not carry every writer discussed above into the analysis. Frantz Fanon provides the organising account of decolonisation; Pierre Bourdieu explains how cultural value and economic constraint are organised within publishing; Gérard Genette provides a way of reading the published book and its surrounding material; and work by Sara Ahmed, Nancy Leong, Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente is used where questions of institutional diversity and racialised value become specific to contemporary cultural industries. The point of combining them is practical. No single one of these approaches explains acquisition, market pressure, paratext and organisational power at the same time.

3.2 Fanon: decolonisation as a test of structural change

Fanon supplies the framework's basic test. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, colonial domination is an ordering of material life and cultural authority, not merely a shortage of representation (Fanon, 2001). Applied cautiously to publishing, that distinction means that the presence of more marginalised authors cannot by itself demonstrate decolonisation. The analysis instead asks what has happened to the rules by which work is selected, interpreted and valued, and whether the people historically placed at the margins have greater authority over those processes.

Fanon's writing on national culture is equally important because it resists the idea that marginalised writers should reproduce a fixed or recognisable identity. Culture is made in the present and is internally varied. For this study, that matters when a market appears to prefer familiar forms of racial trauma, migration narrative or cultural explanation. A decolonial publishing practice would have to allow aesthetic range as well as access. The framework therefore does not ask whether a book looks 'authentically' Black British, Caribbean or South Asian; it asks who is setting the terms of authenticity in the first place. Fanon is not used to cast contemporary editors and authors as a simple coloniser-colonised pair. His value here is diagnostic rather than literal.

3.3 Bourdieu: field, capital and constraint

Bourdieu provides the institutional mechanism that Fanon's account does not. Publishing is treated as a field in which authors, agents, editors, sales teams, retailers, reviewers and prize organisations occupy unequal positions and hold different forms of economic and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1993). This makes it possible to analyse a decision without reducing it to an individual's prejudice or goodwill. An editor may want to acquire a book and still face a weak sales forecast; an independent press may have strong literary credibility and little money for promotion; an author's cultural visibility may be valuable to a publisher while the author remains in a relatively weak negotiating position. The framework therefore distinguishes stated intention from the distribution of resources and consequences.

3.4 Genette: the published book as evidence

Genette's concept of paratext connects those institutional questions to material that can actually be observed (Genette, 1997). Covers, titles, subtitles, blurbs, endorsements, publisher webpages, retailer categories and publicity language form a threshold through which readers encounter a book. In the case studies, these elements are read for the prominence given to identity, genre, trauma, cultural specificity, universality and audience. A single colour or image will not be treated as proof of stereotyping. Interpretation depends on the relationship between design, copy, genre convention, the text itself and comparable titles. Genette is therefore used as a method of close reading, while Squires, Huggan, Saha and van Lente provide the publishing and postcolonial context needed to interpret what that paratext is doing.

3.5 Diversity, racialised value and institutional effect

The remaining concepts are supporting lenses rather than separate frameworks. Sara Ahmed's account of institutional 'non-performatives' helps distinguish a public diversity commitment from a change in everyday practice (Ahmed, 2012). Nancy Leong's racial capitalism is relevant where racial identity appears to generate social or economic value for an organisation without a corresponding transfer of authority (Leong, 2013). Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente bring these concerns directly into UK publishing through their work on the racialised construction of audiences, risk and cultural distribution (Saha and van Lente, 2022a; 2022b). None of these theories makes a diversity initiative or identity-based marketing campaign suspect by definition. The analysis has to look at what follows: who

receives support, who makes decisions, which audiences attract investment and whether an author's possibilities expand beyond the immediate diversity moment.

3.6 Analytical model

The framework is applied through the same three domains used in the research question. Editorial analysis considers selection, ideas of quality and accessibility, the handling of cultural explanation, and authorial agency. Commercial analysis examines how the book is described and categorised, which reader is imagined, and how identity works alongside genre and market positioning. Institutional analysis looks at where authority and resources sit, how diversity commitments operate in routine practice, and what changes when publishing takes place in a smaller independent press rather than a conglomerate structure.

Across those domains, a small set of questions keeps the theory tied to the evidence. Whose knowledge is treated as ordinary and whose requires explanation? Which readerships are assumed to have economic value? When an author's identity becomes part of a publisher's cultural or commercial value, what does the author gain in return? Most importantly, does the practice being examined alter decision-making power or leave the established centre largely intact? These questions do not turn the framework into a scoring system. They are a way of keeping the word 'decolonisation' specific enough to be tested rather than used as a synonym for diversity.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

The project uses a qualitative-led mixed-method design. The phrase is important because the methods do not carry equal weight. The interviews, case-study reading and open survey responses provide most of the interpretive evidence; the closed survey questions are used descriptively, mainly to show where the sixteen respondents converge or disagree. This combination was chosen because the research question concerns several stages of publishing at once. An interview can illuminate how a publisher thinks about acquisition and author development, but it cannot show how readers encounter a finished book. A survey can record reactions to labels, but it cannot reconstruct the organisational decisions that produced them. Paratextual analysis can examine what is publicly visible while remaining silent about private intention. The methods are therefore used to correct some of one another's blind spots rather than to produce a single numerical measure of 'decolonisation'.

The design is comparative rather than representative. The dissertation does not attempt to estimate the prevalence of a particular practice across the UK industry. Instead, it places a small number of cases alongside existing research and asks whether the same problems or alternatives become visible in different forms of evidence. This is consistent with the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 3: editorial, commercial and institutional power are treated as connected, but each leaves different kinds of evidence behind.

The research was also shaped by what could realistically be gathered within the dissertation period. The proposal anticipated book analysis and a small number of semi-structured interviews. The final dataset contains four publishing case studies, sixteen anonymous survey responses, one recorded semi-structured interview and one written publisher interview. An author interview was pursued but not secured in time. That absence matters because authors are the people most directly affected by editorial and marketing decisions. Rather than filling the gap by inferring author experience from publisher testimony, the dissertation marks it as a limit and keeps claims about authorial agency close to the secondary literature.

4.2 Selection of book case studies

Four titles were selected purposively: Candice Carty-Williams' *Queenie* (2019), Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017), *Glimpse: Contemporary Black British Speculative Fiction*,

edited by Leone Ross (2022), and Fox & Windmill's *Into the Wilds* (2022). The sample is small enough for close reading but varied enough to compare two mainstream publishing contexts with two mission-led independent presses. It also reflects the strongest areas of the dissertation's primary research: Black British and Caribbean writing, and British South Asian writing.

Table 1: Case-study selection

Title	Year	Publisher/context	Form	Reason for inclusion
Queenie	2019	Orion / Hachette; mainstream trade	Novel	Black British/Jamaican-British debut; race, gender and broad commercial positioning
Home Fire	2017	Bloomsbury; mainstream literary	Novel	British Muslim family narrative; literary prestige and classical framing
Glimpse	2022	Peepal Tree Press / Inscribe	Anthology	Black British speculative fiction; identity named alongside genre
Into the Wilds	2022	Fox & Windmill	Anthology	British South Asian writing; identity named alongside varied everyday themes

Queenie was selected because it was published within the Hachette group and because its marketing makes race, gender, contemporary London life and a broad commercial readership visible at the same time. The current Orion description identifies *Queenie* as a Black woman living between Jamaican and British culture, while also positioning the novel within contemporary romance and general modern fiction (Orion, 2019). *Home Fire* provides a different mainstream case. Bloomsbury's copy frames it through family, politics and its relationship to Sophocles' *Antigone*; British Muslim identity is central to the plot, but the marketing is also heavily organised around literary prestige and prize recognition (Bloomsbury, 2017). The contrast allows the analysis to ask whether identity is always foregrounded in the same way even within mainstream publishing.

Glimpse and *Into the Wilds* were chosen because the publishers themselves form part of the primary research. Peepal Tree describes *Glimpse* as the first anthology of speculative

fiction by Black British writers and simultaneously classifies it through speculative forms including Afrofuturism and magic realism (Peepal Tree Press, 2022). Fox & Windmill describes *Into the Wilds* as an anthology of short stories and poetry by British South Asian writers, with themes including love, family, food and friendship (Fox & Windmill, 2022). Both titles make collective identity explicit. That makes them useful tests of a point that runs through the dissertation: naming identity is not necessarily the same as reducing a book to identity. The analysis asks what else the paratext allows the work to be.

The cases are not perfectly matched. *Queenie* and *Home Fire* are individual novels, while *Glimpse* and *Into the Wilds* are anthologies. They also carry different levels of author prestige and were released across a five-year period. Those differences prevent a controlled comparison in the experimental sense. They are accepted because the study is interested in positioning practices rather than sales performance, and because the contrast between an individual-author mainstream title and a consciously collective independent anthology is itself analytically useful. No claim is made that the four books represent their publishers' complete lists.

4.3 Reader survey

The survey was included because publishing decisions repeatedly invoke readers, often through anticipated audiences rather than direct knowledge of individual readers. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2, particularly Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente's work, shows how assumptions about who buys books can shape acquisition, marketing and sales decisions (Saha and van Lente, 2020; 2022a). A reader survey offered a modest way of putting those assumptions alongside actual responses.

The survey was self-administered online and produced sixteen anonymous responses between 17 and 29 July 2026. No names or email addresses are present in the final export. The respondents were all leisure readers: four read daily, six weekly and six monthly. This matters because the sample is not a cross-section of the general population; it is weighted towards people who already read with some regularity. The survey is therefore used to explore how engaged readers think about discoverability and identity-based marketing, not to estimate national consumer behaviour.

Survey design followed Arlene Fink's emphasis on keeping questions tied to the objectives of the study and moving from accessible factual questions towards more evaluative material (Fink, 2003). Questions moved from ordinary reading habits to the

dissertation's more specific concerns. Respondents were asked how they discover and access books, what influences a purchase, whether they notice the publisher, how important author background is to them, and whether they find it easy to encounter writers from different backgrounds. Later questions asked whether they had read a book because it was promoted around a culture or community and how useful they found labels such as 'Black British writing', 'LGBTQ+ fiction', 'world literature' or 'diverse voices'. Open questions invited respondents to explain perceived benefits and drawbacks and to describe patterns they had noticed in covers or promotional language.

The mixture of closed and open questions was deliberate. Closed responses make the shape of the small sample visible, while open comments prevent the same answer category from being treated as if it meant the same thing to everyone. Five respondents, for example, described the identity labels as 'somewhat not useful', but their written explanations ranged from concerns about shelving to broader worries about pigeonholing. Conversely, respondents who found labels useful frequently added qualifications about oversimplification. The qualitative comments are therefore more important to the analysis than a simple positive/negative total.

No inferential statistical tests were performed. With sixteen respondents and no probability sampling frame, percentages could create an impression of precision that the design does not support. Counts are used instead and always reported with $n=16$. Respondents are identified as R1-R16, corresponding to the anonymous IDs in the survey export.

4.4 Publisher interviews and recruitment

The interview participants were selected because they offered perspectives from publishers whose lists are explicitly concerned with writing that has historically been marginalised in the UK market. This was purposive sampling. The aim was not to obtain an average publisher's opinion, but to examine how two presses that define themselves partly against gaps in mainstream provision think about selection, genre, audience and institutional access.

Adam Lowe, Digital and Programmes Producer at Peepal Tree Press, took part in a recorded Microsoft Teams interview on 23 July 2026. Peepal Tree was established in 1985 and describes its focus as Caribbean and Black British writing, with an emphasis on books that remain alive over time rather than simply achieving immediate sales (Peepal Tree Press,

n.d.). Lowe was a particularly useful participant because his role crosses marketing, publicity, partnerships and writer development. The interview lasted approximately thirty-five minutes and was semi-structured. Questions addressed Peepal Tree's publishing identity, acquisition, editorial and commercial priorities, marketing, changes since Black Lives Matter, decolonisation, independent publishing and common misconceptions about marginalised writing. Follow-up questions were used when a response opened an issue relevant to the research question.

Habiba Desai, co-founder of Fox & Windmill, provided a written interview response received on 7 August 2026. Fox & Windmill was founded in 2021 and is based in Lancashire and West Yorkshire, specialising in work by British South Asian writers (Fox & Windmill, n.d.). The written format was not identical to Lowe's interview, which limits direct comparison, but it gave Desai space to respond to five focused questions about barriers facing South Asian writers, authorial voice, slow publishing, stereotyped expectations of a commercially successful 'South Asian story' and structural changes to the industry. The press was chosen because it is newer than Peepal Tree, works with a different racialised community and is located outside London. Similar concerns appearing across the two interviews can therefore be treated as suggestive, although not representative.

Recruitment proved more difficult than the eventual two-participant dataset might imply. Authors, academics and publishing professionals were approached during the research period, and an author interview was a particular priority because it would have introduced the perspective of the person whose work is edited and marketed. Several approaches did not result in participation. Race, marginalisation and institutional decision-making can be professionally sensitive subjects, especially when a potential participant may still depend on publishers, agents or colleagues discussed in the research. Time pressures within publishing are another plausible factor. The study cannot determine why any individual did not respond, and non-response is not interpreted as evidence of avoidance. It nonetheless narrowed the range of perspectives available.

4.5 Analytical procedure

The interviews and open survey responses were analysed thematically. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke describe thematic analysis as a flexible method for identifying and interpreting patterned meaning across qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The approach used here was partly deductive and partly open. Initial codes came from the

research question and theoretical framework: gatekeeping, imagined audience, cultural explanation, genre, commercial risk, identity-based marketing, institutional diversity, geography, long-term author development and resource inequality. During repeated reading, additional codes were added where the data did not fit neatly within that structure, including 'trend cycles', 'identity as genre', 'ordinary stories', 'publisher invisibility to readers' and 'independent press capacity'.

This approach carries an obvious risk of confirmation bias. A dissertation framed around Fanon, racial capitalism and publishing inequality could easily notice only material that supports the initial critique. To reduce that risk, contradictory responses were retained rather than treated as noise. In the survey, for example, some respondents found identity labels extremely useful. In the interviews, both publishers described positive possibilities created by targeted publishing rather than presenting identity-based work as inherently restrictive. These cases matter because they force the analysis to distinguish between visibility, categorisation and containment instead of assuming they are interchangeable.

The book materials were analysed through close paratextual reading informed by Gérard Genette (1997) and Claire Squires (2007). The coding focused on title and subtitle, publisher description, genre classification, endorsements, references to identity, references to trauma or political conflict, claims of universality, and the kind of reader implied by the copy. Public publisher webpages were used because they provide a consistent, accessible example of how the books are currently positioned. This means the analysis concerns public-facing paratext and metadata rather than the full historical marketing campaign for each title.

The final discussion is organised thematically rather than by method. Survey findings, case-study observations and interview testimony appear together where they address the same question. This prevents the primary research from becoming a sequence of disconnected data reports and follows the dissertation's editorial-commercial-institutional structure.

4.6 Ethics and researcher reflexivity

The research concerns race, marginalisation and professional experience, so participant control over identification and quotation is important. The survey dataset is anonymous, and no attempt was made to identify respondents. Publisher participants are cited by name in accordance with the consent arrangements used for the project. Lowe was explicitly offered the opportunity to review the transcript and to request the removal of material. Written

interview material from Desai is used in the form in which it was supplied, with minor correction of obvious spelling only where doing so does not alter meaning.

Interview extracts are quoted selectively. The purpose is not to make individual participants responsible for proving an industry-wide claim. Their accounts are treated as situated professional perspectives and compared with published research. This distinction is particularly important when Lowe discusses mainstream publishers or when Desai describes stereotypical expectations around South Asian stories: the comments reveal how two independent publishers understand the field, while the broader claim depends on triangulation with secondary evidence.

The researcher's own framing also requires attention. The project began from an interest in structural inequality and decolonisation, so it would be unrealistic to claim a neutral position outside the argument. Reflexivity in this study means making that starting point explicit and resisting the temptation to make every piece of evidence confirm it. Fanon is used as a test of structural change, not as a verdict imposed before the data is read. Where evidence points to the practical value of identity labels, diversity initiatives or mainstream publishing resources, that evidence is included even when it complicates the original expectation.

4.7 Methodological limitations

The primary limitation is scale. Sixteen survey respondents cannot represent UK readers, two independent publishers cannot represent the publishing industry, and four books cannot establish a market-wide pattern. The dissertation therefore makes analytical rather than prevalence claims. It can identify tensions, compare practices and test whether established scholarship is visible within these cases. It cannot say how often those practices occur across the entire sector.

The two publisher participants also share a position that is important but partial. Both work at independent presses with explicit missions around underrepresented writing. Their testimony is especially valuable for understanding alternatives to mainstream structures, but the project lacks an interview with a commissioning editor, sales director or marketer at a major publisher. The same is true of author experience. Secondary research can describe common editorial pressures, but without the intended author interview this dissertation cannot directly test how one of its case-study authors experienced the process.

Finally, the concept of decolonisation is broader than the evidence. The study focuses on racialised and postcolonial questions in UK trade publishing. It does not examine translation in depth, global rights markets, colonial publishing archives, educational curricula, disability, queer publishing, class as an independent axis, or the material geography of printing and distribution. These are not minor omissions; they define the boundaries of what the conclusion can responsibly claim.

Table 2: Selected survey response distributions

Survey item	Response	Count	n
Notice publisher	Sometimes / Rarely / No	8 / 5 / 3	16
Read because promoted around identity/community	Yes / No	10 / 6	16
Usefulness of identity labels	Extremely not / Somewhat not / Neutral / Somewhat / Extremely useful	1 / 5 / 4 / 4 / 2	16
Range in mainstream publishing has changed	Yes / Not sure / No	8 / 5 / 3	16

Table 3: Thematic coding framework

Domain	Initial codes	Examples of emergent codes
Editorial	Gatekeeping; quality; accessibility; authorial agency; cultural explanation	Identity as genre; ordinary stories; long-term development
Commercial	Imagined audience; paratext; categorisation; discoverability; risk	Publisher invisibility; containment; repeated visual/language conventions
Institutional	Diversity; leadership; resources; geography; independent/mainstream scale	Trend cycles; regional access; independent capacity

5. Editorial Power: Selection, Voice and the Boundaries of the Publishable

5.1 Acquisition and the problem of 'marketability'

Acquisition is an obvious place to begin because it determines which manuscripts enter the publishing process at all. Yet an acquisition decision is rarely only a judgement about prose. Pierre Bourdieu's account of the cultural field is helpful here because literary and commercial values are formed through relations between editors, agents, sales teams, retailers, reviewers and existing reputations (Bourdieu, 1993). John B. Thompson likewise describes contemporary trade publishing as a market in which expected visibility and sales increasingly affect which titles receive attention and resources (Thompson, 2012). An editor's enthusiasm can therefore be genuine while still being filtered through a prediction about audience.

Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente's research makes the racial dimension of that prediction harder to ignore. Their interviews with UK publishing professionals found repeated uncertainty about the audiences for writers of colour and a tendency to treat those audiences as commercially less secure than a presumed White middle-class core readership (Saha and van Lente, 2020; 2022a). 'Marketability' is not a meaningless word in a commercial industry, but neither is it socially neutral. If some readers are imagined as the normal market while others must continually be proved, the category of risk reproduces an older hierarchy without needing an openly exclusionary decision.

Adam Lowe's description of Peepal Tree offers a different acquisition rhythm. He explained that editors and staff attend Caribbean festivals, hear writers reading, follow literary communities and sometimes build a relationship with a writer years before a publishable manuscript emerges (Lowe, 2026). In his account, the decision is partly about the quality of a particular book and partly about whether the writer is doing something that the press considers new or worth sustaining. He also described a political element: decisions can involve what literature should be preserved and what work is not being heard elsewhere. This is still gatekeeping. Peepal Tree's editors make judgements about talent, significance and fit. The difference lies less in the disappearance of editorial power than in the time horizon and the audience assumptions attached to it.

That time horizon matters. Lowe described Peepal Tree as interested in 'long sellers rather than bestsellers' (Lowe, 2026). The phrase condenses an institutional difference that runs through the interview. A title does not need to justify itself through a brief period of high-volume sales if the press believes there is cultural value in keeping it available and allowing an audience to develop. Peepal Tree's own description of its publishing philosophy similarly places long-term survival of a book alongside, and sometimes ahead of, maximum immediate sales (Peepal Tree Press, n.d.). A decolonial reading should not romanticise this model: the ability to subsidise slow sales depends on funding, staffing and the economics of the backlist. Even so, it loosens one mechanism through which unfamiliar audiences can be classified as too risky.

Habiba Desai's account of Fox & Windmill is different in scale but similar in its resistance to a purely trend-based acquisition model. She described the press as choosing stories that its editors feel are important to share and that they themselves enjoy reading, rather than beginning from whatever is currently selling most visibly (Desai, 2026). This is partly an aesthetic claim and partly an institutional one. A small press can sometimes make a decision with a lower required sales threshold than a large publisher. At the same time, it has much less money to absorb failure. Independence produces freedom and vulnerability together.

The value of the two interviews is therefore not that they reveal a purified space outside the market. Both publishers have to sell books. Their accounts instead show that commercial judgement can be organised around different thresholds and timescales. This distinction fits Fanon's usefulness to the dissertation. If decolonisation is understood as a change in the terms of authority, the question is not whether money disappears from publishing. It is whether the same commercial assumptions continue to decide in advance which cultural experiences count as viable.

5.2 Identity as genre

The interviews became most directly comparable when both participants discussed genre. Lowe objected to the tendency to treat 'Black British fiction' as though it were itself a literary genre. Black British writers, he argued, write romance, fantasy and many other forms; the racial label describes an aspect of authorship or cultural position, not a set of narrative conventions (Lowe, 2026). Desai made a parallel point about South Asian writers. In her experience, mainstream expectations can cluster around stories of oppression, forced

marriage and restrictive gender roles. Those experiences can be real and worth publishing, but Fox & Windmill deliberately wants its writers to have access to fantasy, science fiction, poetry and other forms rather than repeatedly being asked for the same legible version of South Asian life (Desai, 2026).

This is where Frantz Fanon's account of culture becomes more useful than a simple diversity metric. In 'On National Culture', culture is not a fixed repository that a writer proves they belong to by reproducing approved symbols. It is active, changing and made through people arguing with the present (Fanon, 2001). A publishing system that welcomes racial difference only when it appears in familiar narrative forms risks turning culture into a marketable script. The author is included, but the range of stories they are expected to tell remains constrained.

Melanie Ramdarshan Bold's research on authors of colour in British young adult publishing identifies a related pressure: writers can be made to carry a burden of representation and can find their work narrowcast towards a racially defined readership (Ramdarshan Bold, 2019). The burden is contradictory. A writer may be asked to produce something 'authentic', while any single narrative is incapable of representing a whole community. Desai's interview addresses this explicitly. Fox & Windmill, she said, does not expect a writer to speak for an entire community because shared experiences are still lived differently. That position does not deny identity; it refuses to make identity a demand for representativeness.

The independent case-study books help complicate the argument further. *Glimpse* places 'Contemporary Black British Speculative Fiction' in its title and is promoted by Peepal Tree as a Black British anthology (Peepal Tree Press, 2022). On a superficial reading, that might appear to reproduce exactly the identity-first categorisation criticised above. Yet the same paratext is unusually precise about genre. The collection is described through speculative fiction, Afrofuturism, magic realism and transformation. Black British identity is the reason for the anthology's collective intervention, while speculative writing is the field in which that intervention takes place. The book's premise is not that Black British writing constitutes one genre; it is that Black British writers have been insufficiently visible within a genre that is already much larger than them.

Into the Wilds works in a comparable way. Fox & Windmill labels it as work by British South Asian writers, but the description points towards love, family, food and friendship

rather than oppression as the organising subjects (Fox & Windmill, 2022). The anthology's mixed form of poetry and short fiction also resists a single generic expectation. The identity label is therefore being used to build a platform rather than to prescribe one story.

This distinction matters for the dissertation as a whole. Identity-based publishing can be restrictive, but it is not restrictive merely because identity is named. The problem appears when identity substitutes for genre, style and subject, or when it becomes the narrow route through which a writer is expected to remain commercially intelligible. In the two independent examples, collective identity is made explicit precisely to create more room within it.

5.3 Editorial mediation and authorial voice

Editing makes the issue of power more intimate because it operates inside the text rather than around it. There is no useful argument for an entirely unedited trade book; selection, structural discussion, copy-editing and proofing are part of the publishing process. The question is whose understanding of clarity and accessibility becomes authoritative when editor and author do not share the same cultural knowledge.

Saha and van Lente found that writers of colour could encounter requests to explain material presumed unfamiliar to the industry's core reader (Saha and van Lente, 2020). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's account of language and cultural authority helps explain why such requests are not always trivial. Language carries a social world. Dialect, creole, untranslated vocabulary and culturally specific reference may be meaningful because they assume an audience rather than stopping to explain one (Ngũgĩ, 1986). Repeatedly translating towards an imagined White British reader can make that reader the silent norm.

Neither publisher participant argued for the absence of editing. Desai instead offered a useful phrase for Fox & Windmill's approach: the press works through changes with authors while 'polishing the heart without eradicating their voice' (Desai, 2026). The phrase acknowledges two kinds of responsibility at once. The publisher has to improve a manuscript sufficiently to publish it; the editor also has to recognise that improvement does not mean making the voice resemble the editor's own.

Lowe described Peepal Tree's managing editor, Jeremy Poynting, as capable of very hands-on development, including work with manuscripts that may still be rough when a relationship begins (Lowe, 2026). This might initially seem at odds with the idea of authorial

autonomy. The important point is that Lowe places this intensive editing inside a longer relationship with the writer. Peepal Tree, he said, tries to support writers rather than only individual books. Some relationships develop for years before publication, and support can continue when a new title is not an immediate commercial success.

Long-term development is not automatically decolonial. An editor can exert substantial influence over a writer while acting patiently and with good intentions. The absence of an author interview prevents this project from testing how Peepal Tree or Fox & Windmill authors themselves experience that influence. The publisher accounts can establish an editorial philosophy; they cannot verify its effect from the other side of the relationship. This is one of the points where the primary-research limitations affect the conclusion most clearly.

Even so, the two accounts move editorial authority away from a narrow idea of 'access'. The aim is not merely to accept a manuscript by a marginalised writer and then fit it into an existing list. Both presses describe development as part of building a writer's range. In Lowe's interview, this includes projects for Black British and British Asian writers and efforts to maintain relationships beyond a single release. In Desai's, it includes protecting the individuality of a writer who may otherwise be treated as representative of a whole community.

5.4 The imagined reader

Editorial decisions cannot be separated neatly from commercial ones because editors work with some idea of who will eventually read the book. Saha and van Lente's research repeatedly encounters a White middle-class woman as the publishing industry's imagined core reader (Saha and van Lente, 2020). The demographic description should not be taken literally as the only reader publishers consider. Its importance lies in the way one audience can come to stand for general marketability while others are approached as specialist.

Lowe described this problem in practical terms. He suggested that mainstream publishers can acquire a Black British book and then struggle with how to market it because they have already trained themselves to imagine literary fiction as White and middle class (Lowe, 2026). The result is circular: a publisher assumes a particular audience is difficult to reach, invests less confidently in reaching it, and then reads weak sales as proof that the audience was not there. Saha and van Lente make a similar argument about racialised audiences being culturally and economically undervalued (2022a).

Peepal Tree's approach is not to assume that Caribbean or Black British writing belongs only to Caribbean or Black readers. Lowe said that the press knows it has Black and Caribbean customers, but also expects its books to travel beyond those communities. He gave the example of an engaged readership in Slovenia and translations that emerged from that interest (Lowe, 2026). The anecdote is useful because it breaks the equation between cultural specificity and narrow audience. A book can be specific without needing to be confined to readers who share the author's identity.

This is also visible in the mainstream cases, although in different ways. Orion's *Queenie* copy foregrounds the protagonist's Blackness, Jamaican-British culture and experience of racism, but it also moves towards a broader language of sex, selfhood, friendship and questions 'every woman' faces (Orion, 2019). *Home Fire* is framed as a contemporary Antigone, using an established European classical reference to position a story about British Muslim characters inside a prestigious literary lineage (Bloomsbury, 2017). Neither approach is simply inclusive or exclusionary. They show two ways of negotiating cultural specificity with a wider market.

Editorial power, then, is not only the right to say yes or no to a manuscript. It includes the ability to decide what needs explaining, what counts as a genre, which reader is assumed to understand without explanation and how much time a writer is given to find an audience. The independent interviews suggest that these terms can be organised differently, although they do not remove gatekeeping. That distinction becomes clearer in the next chapter, where the finished book and the survey responses make the problem of audience visible from the commercial side.

6. Commercial Power: Paratext, Categorisation and Reader Reception

6.1 The book before the first page

A reader rarely encounters a book as an unframed text. Gérard Genette's concept of paratext names the material around the text that guides entry into it: title, cover, blurb, endorsements and other thresholds (Genette, 1997). In contemporary trade publishing that threshold extends into publisher webpages, retailer categories, metadata, social media copy and promotional campaigns. Claire Squires argues that marketing participates in the production of literary meaning rather than merely reporting what a book already is (Squires, 2007). For this dissertation, that means a book's commercial framing is part of the cultural object being studied.

The stakes are especially visible when identity is used as a marketing category. Graham Huggan's account of the 'postcolonial exotic' describes a marketplace in which cultural difference can be consumed as a recognisable form of value (Huggan, 2001). Sarah Brouillette similarly shows how postcolonial writers negotiate a literary market that can reward recognisable forms of authorial difference (Brouillette, 2007). These theories do not imply that a publisher should hide an author's background. Doing so could erase the very histories that make a book legible to communities seeking representation. The commercial question is more specific: what happens when identity becomes the quickest and most repeated explanation of why a reader should care?

The four case studies produce no single answer. Their differences are more useful than a forced pattern.

6.2 *Queenie* and *Home Fire*: two mainstream forms of framing

Orion's current page for Candice Carty-Williams' *Queenie* places racial identity near the front of the book's description. *Queenie* is identified as a Black woman in south London negotiating Jamaican and British culture, a national newspaper workplace, White middle-class colleagues and a White former partner (Orion, 2019). Race is therefore not a late contextual detail; it is part of the commercial introduction to the protagonist. The page also classifies the book within adult and contemporary romance and modern fiction, so identity does not formally replace genre.

The interesting move comes later in the description. The copy broadens *Queenie*'s questions about her life into questions faced by women more generally and presents the book as capable of speaking beyond the specific social position described at the start. This can be read as an attempt to solve the 'niche' problem identified in Saha and van Lente's research. Cultural specificity is established, then translated into a claim of broad emotional recognition. The book is allowed to be about race and still be ordinary commercial fiction.

There is an ambivalence to this strategy. The universalising language can widen the invited audience, but it also reveals that universality has to be argued for. A White protagonist in contemporary commercial fiction is less likely to require a sentence explaining that her questions apply to other women too. The comparison is not proof of discriminatory intent. It shows how paratext does ideological work by assuring a presumed general reader that specificity will remain accessible.

Home Fire is marketed differently. Bloomsbury's description centres family separation, love, politics and radicalisation, then explicitly presents the novel as a contemporary reworking of Sophocles' *Antigone* (Bloomsbury, 2017). The characters' British Muslim identities are central to the plot, and reviews reproduced on the page repeatedly discuss Islam, jihadism and the 'war on terror'. Yet the publisher's own headline positioning relies heavily on literary prestige: Shamsie's established reputation, the classical intertext and major prize recognition.

The contrast with *Queenie* should not be overstated because the books differ in genre, author career stage and subject. Carty-Williams was a debut novelist in 2019; Kamila Shamsie was already an established literary author when *Home Fire* appeared. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital is useful here (Bourdieu, 1993). Shamsie's existing literary reputation and the novel's classical framework give Bloomsbury resources for positioning the book as serious literary fiction without needing a racial category in the title or headline. Cultural difference remains visible, but it is mediated by established forms of prestige.

This is not necessarily a better or more decolonial strategy. The *Antigone* framing can itself make a British Muslim story legible through a canonical European reference. At the same time, it refuses the idea that a novel about a Muslim family must be marketed as a specialist ethnic text. What matters is the route through which legitimacy is granted.

6.3 Glimpse and Into the Wilds: naming identity without making it the genre

The independent anthologies make identity much more explicit than either mainstream title. *Glimpse* announces 'Contemporary Black British Speculative Fiction' as part of its title. Peepal Tree also describes it as a first-of-its-kind anthology of speculative work by Black British writers, while naming forms such as Afrofuturism and magic realism (Peepal Tree Press, 2022). This is overtly identity-based packaging. It is also difficult to describe it as identity replacing genre because the genre intervention is the point of the collection.

The distinction helps clarify Lowe's interview. When he rejects the idea of Black British fiction as a genre, he is not arguing that the phrase 'Black British' should disappear from books. *Glimpse* uses the phrase to reveal an absence inside speculative fiction and to gather writers whose work might otherwise be dispersed or overlooked. The label is functioning as an editorial and political claim: Black British writers belong within speculative pasts and futures.

Into the Wilds performs a comparable act for British South Asian writing. Fox & Windmill's product page identifies the contributors collectively as British South Asian and then describes themes of love, family, food and friendship across short stories and poetry (Fox & Windmill, 2022). There is no attempt to make oppression the collection's unifying subject. That is consistent with Desai's interview, in which she objects to the assumption that commercially intelligible South Asian writing must repeatedly return to forced marriage, gender oppression or similar tropes (Desai, 2026).

The two anthologies therefore make an important distinction between a strategic category and a restrictive category. A strategic category tells readers that a historically underrepresented group is being assembled within a field from which it has been less visible. A restrictive category tells the reader what people from that group are expected to write about. The same identity language can move between these functions depending on context.

There are commercial consequences either way. An anthology promoted as Black British or British South Asian can be found by readers searching for those categories, libraries building representative collections or booksellers creating themed displays. It can also be shelved away from comparable speculative or literary work. The publisher does not control every point of retail classification. This is precisely why Saha and van Lente treat cultural distribution as a chain involving sales and bookselling as well as editorial decisions (2022a).

6.4 What the survey respondents notice

The reader survey offers a small test of these competing effects. The first useful finding is how little attention respondents pay to the publisher itself. Eight of the sixteen said they sometimes notice who published a book, five rarely do and three do not. None selected an option indicating routine attention. For publishers such as Peepal Tree and Fox & Windmill, whose institutional mission is central to their identity, this creates a practical problem: readers may encounter the cover and blurb without knowing the politics or editorial philosophy of the organisation behind them.

Author identity mattered more unevenly. Six respondents described it as somewhat important when choosing a book and two as very important. Four were neutral and four said it was not important. This alone cautions against the assumption that identity-based marketing addresses a single coherent demand. The sample contains readers who actively value author background and others for whom it carries little weight.

The strongest evidence for the usefulness of identity-based promotion comes from behaviour rather than attitude. Ten respondents had read a book because it was promoted as representing a particular culture, identity or community. Six had not. Identity marketing therefore did lead a majority of this small sample towards at least one reading choice. R1 described such labelling as a useful way of discovering authors even while calling the labels a generalisation. R11 considered clear labels highly useful for bringing overlooked experiences into view. R15 similarly argued that labels can introduce readers to unfamiliar authors when they do not replace information about the book itself.

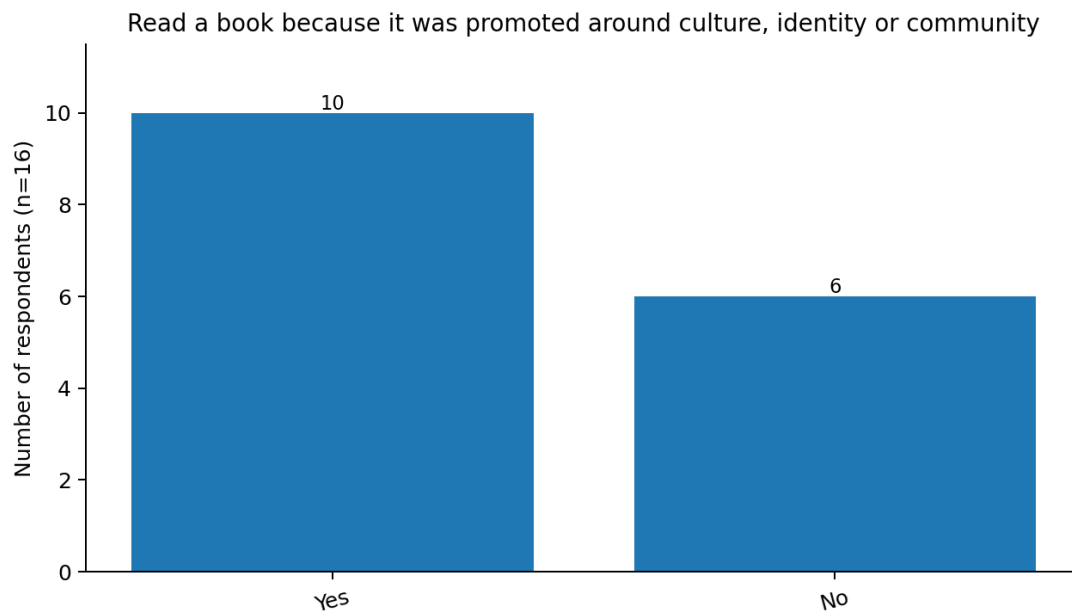


Figure 1: Read a book because it was promoted around culture, identity or community (n=16)

That qualification appears repeatedly. The distribution for the direct usefulness question is almost deliberately awkward: five respondents chose 'somewhat not useful', four were neutral, four chose 'somewhat useful', two found the labels extremely useful and one extremely not useful. There is no clean positive or negative majority. The written comments explain why. Respondents often want the discoverability that a category provides and resist the simplification that can follow.

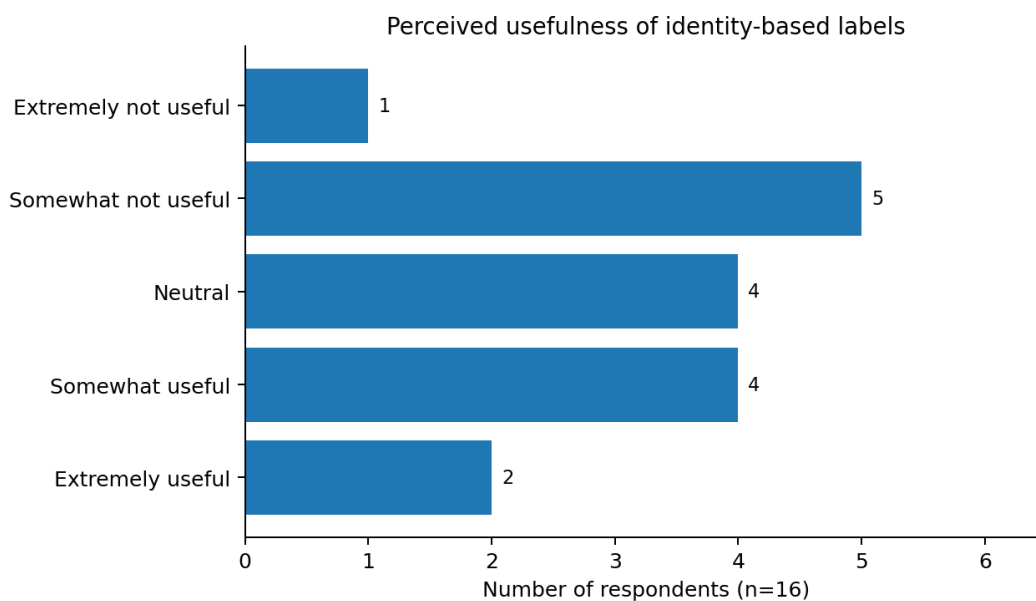


Figure 2: Perceived usefulness of identity-based labels (n=16)

R2 was frustrated by bookshop categories that place a book under Black identity even when the story is not principally about being Black. R4 described labels as creating 'silos or pigeon holes' and said marginalised authors can be marketed through their 'otherness' rather than individual talent. R6 gave perhaps the clearest version of the central tension: the respondent saw value in platforming historically marginalised authors but worried that separate categories reproduce othering and can encourage readers to treat the books as outside 'general fiction'. R13 made a related point about the same label following an author across different books and overshadowing writing style or genre.

The comments do not support removing identity from marketing. R5, who rated the labels extremely useful, argued that they make neglected cultures and experiences more accessible. R11 also emphasised browsing and discovery. The survey therefore mirrors the difference between *Glimpse* and the restrictive marketing imagined by some respondents. The issue is not whether identity appears, but how much interpretive space remains after it appears.

6.5 Difficulty finding representation

Five respondents said they had struggled to find books reflecting a particular background, culture or experience, five said they had not and six were unsure. The open examples are revealing because they are unusually specific. R4 had looked for non-academic work by Zimbabwean authors about ethnobotany and local wild plants. R9 wanted contemporary fiction about mixed-heritage families that was not mainly organised around trauma. R11 wanted accessible histories written by people from the communities being discussed. R13 looked for literary fiction by working-class writers outside London without that location or class background being treated as a niche subject.

These answers show why a simple category such as 'diverse books' is too broad to be analytically useful. What readers struggle to find is often the intersection between identity, subject and genre. A reader may be able to find Black fiction but not Black speculative fiction; South Asian family narratives but not South Asian fantasy; working-class writing but not work that is allowed to be about something besides class. The problem resembles Desai's objection to stereotyped commissioning. Availability cannot be measured only by the presence of an author's demographic category if the available stories remain narrow.

Seven respondents said they had noticed patterns in how underrepresented writers are covered, titled, described or promoted; six were unsure and three had not. The comments

again focus on repetition. R2 mentioned recurring colours and typefaces. R9 and R13 said identity can be foregrounded ahead of plot, style or individual themes. R11 noticed repeated language around voice, belonging and identity. R15 referred to similar colours and imagery being used to signal culture before the reader knows the story. These observations are subjective and the sample is too small to establish a design trend. They are useful because they show how readers can become aware of paratextual conventions even without usually noticing the publisher.

6.6 Has mainstream publishing changed?

Eight respondents thought the range of authors and stories in mainstream publishing had changed in recent years, five were unsure and three thought it had not. The written responses are again more qualified than the closed answer. R4 felt the range had widened. R9 noticed more varied voices in bookshops and prize lists. R15 saw a broader range particularly in fiction. Yet R1 believed mainstream publishing remained highly trend-led and that diverse books did not receive equal attention. R7 described a wider visible range but said the same few titles receive most of the promotion. R13 likewise distinguished between more writers being published and uneven marketing support.

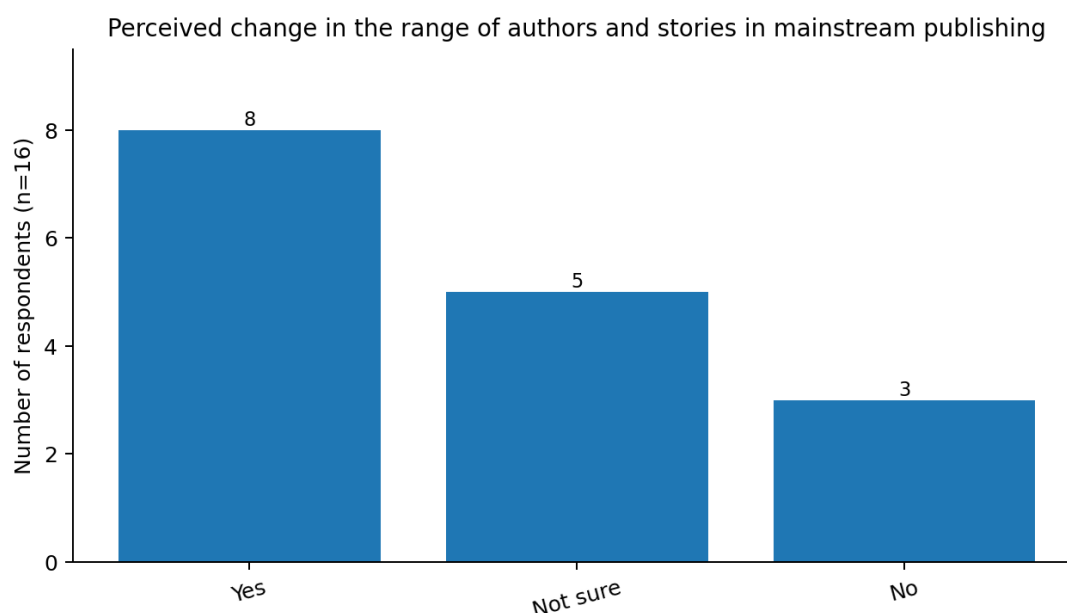


Figure 3: Perceived change in the range of authors and stories in mainstream publishing (n=16)

This separation between presence and support returns the survey to the dissertation's central research question. Readers can perceive a broader range without concluding that resources are distributed equally. The finding is modest because the survey does not measure

actual marketing expenditure. It does, however, show why numerical publication alone may not settle the question of commercial power.

6.7 Discoverability and containment

Across the four case studies and sixteen survey responses, identity-based marketing emerges as neither an obvious problem nor an uncomplicated solution. The case-study books make this visible in different ways. *Queenie* places race prominently alongside genre and then makes a claim to broad relatability. *Home Fire* relies more heavily on literary prestige and classical intertext while keeping British Muslim politics central to the narrative. *Glimpse* names Black British identity in order to open space inside speculative fiction. *Into the Wilds* names British South Asian identity while foregrounding ordinary and varied themes.

The survey respondents respond to the same range of possibilities. Some want labels because they make discovery possible. Others resist the moment at which a label becomes a shelf that separates the book from its genre peers. Several hold both positions at once. That ambivalence is analytically useful. It suggests that the decolonial question cannot be answered by either stripping identity from paratext or making it the dominant marketing proposition.

Commercial power lies in the ability to decide which part of a book is most legible to the market and which audience is worth addressing directly. A more equitable practice would allow identity to be visible without treating it as a ceiling on genre, readership or authorial career. The challenge is less about finding a perfect label than about building routes through which culturally specific books can circulate without being made specialist by default.

Table 4: Case-study paratext comparison

Case	Identity foregrounding	Genre/literary frame	Main tension
Queenie	High in publisher description	Romance / modern fiction	Specific Black British/Jamaican-British experience paired with broad relatability
Home Fire	Present through British Muslim plot rather than an identity label	Literary fiction / Antigone / prize prestige	Cultural specificity legitimised through established literary capital
Glimpse	Explicit in title and anthology premise	Speculative fiction; Afrofuturism; magic realism	Identity used to open space within genre rather than replace genre
Into the Wilds	Explicit in anthology description	Short stories and poetry; love, family, food, friendship	Collective South Asian identity paired with non-stereotyped subjects

7. Institutional Power and Alternative Publishing Models

7.1 Diversity and the location of authority

The Publishers Association's workforce data makes the institutional problem visible at a basic level. In 2024, fifteen per cent of respondents to its survey were from ethnic minority groups, while the workforce remained heavily drawn from professional and highly educated backgrounds (Publishers Association, 2024). The report is useful for monitoring representation, but it cannot by itself explain where cultural authority sits. An employee in marketing, an editorial assistant and a publishing director all count as one person in a demographic total while holding very different capacities to acquire books, allocate budgets or change policy.

Sara Ahmed's work on institutional diversity is useful precisely because it separates the existence of a diversity commitment from its effect (Ahmed, 2012). An organisation can develop policies, schemes and public language that demonstrate concern while leaving ordinary decision-making less altered than the documentation suggests. Nancy Leong's theory of racial capitalism adds another possibility: racial difference can produce reputational and economic value for an organisation (Leong, 2013). In publishing, the appearance of a diverse list or workforce can be valuable in itself. Neither framework proves cynicism. They direct attention towards what happens after the visible intervention.

Lowe's interview repeatedly returns to that distinction. He acknowledged diversity schemes but argued that the industry has a shortage of Black editors and that Black publishing workers are often channelled into marketing rather than the editorial roles that decide what enters a list (Lowe, 2026). He also described Peepal Tree's own succession problem. With founder and managing editor Jeremy Poynting beyond conventional retirement age, the press has discussed how to develop Black editorial talent capable of taking on greater responsibility. The problem, in Lowe's account, is not simply finding individuals; it is the absence of enough jobs and progression routes once they have been trained.

Desai approaches access from an earlier stage. She links the underrepresentation of South Asian people in publishing partly to educational and socioeconomic expectations. Publishing and the humanities can appear financially insecure, especially where young people have had little prior exposure to cultural institutions or are encouraged towards

careers considered more stable (Desai, 2026). Her point is not that South Asian families share one attitude to education; she presents it explicitly as an account from her own experience. It nonetheless expands the institutional question beyond recruitment schemes. A scheme aimed at graduates cannot fully address barriers that shape who imagines publishing as a plausible career years earlier.

This is where the broader term 'marginalisation' remains useful even though the dissertation's strongest evidence concerns race. Desai's response ties racialised access to class and educational opportunity. Lowe's account of London salaries and regional concentration does the same. Institutional power is reproduced not only by who is accepted once they apply, but by who can afford to be in the place where the jobs are and who has learned that such jobs exist.

7.2 Diversity as a cycle of attention

The Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 created a particularly visible moment of industry attention. Lowe remembers a rapid rush among mainstream publishers to demonstrate commitment by acquiring and promoting Black writers, followed by a loss of momentum (Lowe, 2026). In his account, many of the titles that gained attention centred race, racism and explanations of racism for White readers. He does not object to those books existing; his criticism is that a temporary market surge can be mistaken for structural change.

This testimony is consistent with Saha and van Lente's broader warning about numerical diversity and with Leong's account of the value institutions can derive from visible difference (Saha and van Lente, 2022b; Leong, 2013). It should still be treated as one participant's interpretation of an industry moment rather than a complete history of post-2020 publishing. The survey responses add a small reader-side echo: several participants believed there were more diverse authors visible but described promotion as trend-led or concentrated around a few books.

Fox & Windmill defines its own publishing model partly against this cycle. Desai describes the press as 'slow' and says its editors try to choose work they think matters rather than chasing what is currently selling (Desai, 2026). The press's public description likewise emphasises an ethical, non-trend-led process (Fox & Windmill, n.d.). Slow publishing can create room to resist a sudden diversity moment, but it does not abolish market pressure. A small publisher has fewer staff, less cash and less capacity to produce and promote multiple titles at speed.

The comparison therefore makes a distinction between attention and infrastructure. A surge in commissioning can change who is visible for a season. Infrastructure determines whether editors remain in post, whether an author receives a second and third book, whether the backlist is maintained, and whether a readership is developed after the news cycle moves on. Decolonisation, in the demanding Fanonian sense used here, sits closer to the latter.

7.3 London, region and access

Both publisher participants work outside London, and both independently raised the geography of publishing as a structural issue. Lowe described the industry as highly centralised in London and linked that concentration to salary and progression. He referred to senior editorial vacancies whose pay, in his view, remained difficult to reconcile with London living costs (Lowe, 2026). Desai used the image of publishing and agents sitting behind 'metaphorical steel gates' and argued that moving more of the industry beyond London would make careers and agents less remote to graduates and writers elsewhere (Desai, 2026).

Fox & Windmill's own institutional location gives this argument practical weight. The press is based across Lancashire and West Yorkshire and explicitly positions itself as a publisher for British South Asian writers (Fox & Windmill, n.d.). Peepal Tree has operated from Leeds since the 1980s. Neither press proves that regional publishing is inherently more equitable. London contains many independent and socially committed publishers, while a regional press can reproduce the same exclusions as any other employer. The point is about concentration. When a large share of publishing's jobs, networking, agents and decision-makers are located in one expensive city, geography becomes part of who can reach the industry.

Bourdieu's idea of capital helps here because proximity itself can function as an advantage. Professional networks, internships, events and informal knowledge are easier to accumulate if a person can afford to live near them and already understands how to enter those spaces (Bourdieu, 1993). Desai's discussion of cultural exposure makes the same point in less theoretical language: people are less likely to imagine themselves working in theatres, museums, galleries or publishing if they have not had access to those institutions.

A decolonial institutional analysis therefore cannot stop at the racial composition of a London office. It has to ask where the office is, which routes lead to it and whether professional authority can be built elsewhere.

7.4 The freedom and precarity of independent publishing

Independent presses appear throughout this dissertation as potential alternatives to mainstream structures, but the interviews make clear why 'alternative' should not be mistaken for 'unconstrained'. Lowe contrasts Peepal Tree's willingness to keep lower-selling books available with the higher sales expectations he associates with larger publishers. In his account, midlist authors can move to a large house, fail to sustain the required volume and later return to a smaller press willing to publish them at a different scale (Lowe, 2026). This gives Peepal Tree more room to define success across a long backlist.

The press's history supports that emphasis. Peepal Tree states that its focus is Caribbean writing wherever that cultural nation exists, alongside Black British work, and that it cares about whether a book remains alive in the future (Peepal Tree Press, n.d.). Its Caribbean Modern Classics programme and Inscribe writer-development activity make preservation and development part of publishing rather than peripheral charitable work. Within the dissertation's framework, this matters because cultural value is not restricted to the immediate sales window.

Fox & Windmill's account shows the other side of independent scale. Desai argues that a small press can take risks on stories without the same sales-margin expectations, but she also notes that success can create capacity problems. When an independently published book grows beyond what a small press can service, rights may move to a larger publisher with greater resources (Desai, 2026). For the writer, this can be beneficial. For the originating press, it can mean doing the risk-intensive cultural work of discovering and developing a book without retaining the later economic value.

Bourdieu's distinction between symbolic and economic capital again helps explain the imbalance. An independent press can build cultural authority by taking risks, discovering writers and maintaining specialist knowledge while lacking the money, sales force and distribution leverage that convert a breakout title into large-scale revenue (Bourdieu, 1993). The large publisher may appear more risk-averse at the acquisition stage while being much better equipped once risk has been reduced.

This complicates any easy recommendation that the industry should simply 'support independent presses'. Financial support, distribution access, bookseller visibility and rights arrangements matter because editorial autonomy without economic capacity can become

another form of fragility. A decolonised publishing ecology would need institutions capable of sustaining the cultural value they create.

7.5 What would redistribution look like?

The evidence in this dissertation does not produce a single model for decolonised publishing, but it does make some conditions clearer. The first is editorial range. Both Lowe and Desai resist the idea that racialised writers should be confined to predictable subjects or treated as a genre. That suggests that meaningful change can be observed when writers move across forms without their identity being repeatedly used to justify or limit the work.

The second is duration. A short recruitment scheme, themed acquisition window or marketing campaign can be valuable, but it has limited structural meaning if the author, worker or audience disappears when the initiative ends. Peepal Tree's emphasis on writer development and long backlists offers one example of what a longer timescale can look like. It is not a model every commercial publisher can copy directly, but it raises a useful question about how long an institution remains responsible for the diversity it publicly celebrates.

The third is authority. Workforce representation matters most when it reaches roles that decide acquisitions, budgets, strategy and rights. Lowe's concern about the shortage of Black editors and Desai's concern about cultural careers feeling inaccessible both point towards pipelines that extend beyond getting people through the door. The objective is not to replace one demographic composition with another and declare the problem solved. It is to widen who has the authority to define quality, risk and audience.

The fourth is audience development. Saha and van Lente's work and the reader survey both undermine the idea that marginalised writing has one specialist readership. Publishers need to invest in finding readers rather than treating the absence of an already visible market as evidence that a market does not exist. The survey respondents who valued identity labels show that targeted discovery can help. Those who disliked pigeonholing show why it cannot be the only route.

Finally, geography and independent capacity belong inside the same discussion. If decision-making, salaries, agents and networks remain concentrated in London, and if smaller presses can discover writers without retaining the resources generated by success, then representation at the level of individual titles sits inside a wider unequal structure. That structural difficulty is why the term 'decolonisation' should be used carefully.

8. Conclusion

This dissertation asked to what extent editorial, commercial and institutional practices in contemporary UK publishing reproduce Eurocentric power structures in the production and circulation of writing by marginalised authors. The evidence does not support a simple claim that publishing is either decolonised or unchanged. It points instead to a more uneven situation. Greater visibility is real, targeted categories can help readers find work, and independent publishers have created spaces in which Black British, Caribbean and British South Asian writers can be developed across a wider range of genres. At the same time, familiar assumptions about marketable stories, ordinary readers, geography and institutional authority continue to shape the terms on which that visibility is produced.

Frantz Fanon's value to the project has been to keep decolonisation from collapsing into a count of who is present. The question throughout has been whether the rules of cultural authority move alongside representation. On editorial power, the two publisher interviews suggest that this requires more than acquiring marginalised writers. Adam Lowe and Habiba Desai both describe a need to resist treating racial identity as a genre and to allow writers aesthetic range. Peepal Tree's long-term writer development and Fox & Windmill's emphasis on preserving individual voice offer practical examples of how editorial relationships can be organised differently. They remain forms of gatekeeping, but they widen the criteria through which a writer can be valued.

Commercially, the four case studies and survey show why identity-based marketing cannot be classified as either progressive or reductive in advance. *Queenie* uses Black British and Jamaican-British identity prominently while also claiming a broad commercial readership. *Home Fire* is positioned through politics, family, literary prestige and a canonical classical reference. *Glimpse* and *Into the Wilds* name Black British and British South Asian identity explicitly in order to create space inside speculative writing, poetry and short fiction. The survey respondents recognised the same ambiguity. Ten of sixteen had read a book because it was promoted around a culture, identity or community, yet views on labels were divided. Readers described discovery and visibility as benefits while repeatedly warning about pigeonholing, shelving and the replacement of genre by identity.

Institutionally, the strongest finding is that presence and authority are not the same measure. Workforce diversity data provides an important picture of entry to the industry, but it does not reveal who controls acquisitions, budgets or long-term strategy. Lowe's concern

about Black editorial progression and Desai's account of educational, socioeconomic and regional barriers show why the route into decision-making begins before recruitment. Their shared criticism of London centralisation also places geography inside the discussion of access.

Independent publishing provides some of the clearest alternatives in the study, but it should not be idealised. Peepal Tree's 'long seller' philosophy and Fox & Windmill's slow publishing model create room for work that may sit awkwardly with short commercial cycles. Both presses, however, operate with fewer resources than large publishers. Desai's observation that successful indie titles may move to larger houses and Lowe's account of the resource gap between small and large marketing teams show how cultural risk and economic reward can be separated. Independence can redistribute editorial freedom without redistributing market power to the same degree.

These findings are necessarily limited. The reader survey contains sixteen engaged readers and cannot represent the UK reading public. The publisher interviews come from two mission-led independents and therefore give a partial view of the field. The project did not secure the author interview originally planned, so it cannot directly compare publisher accounts of editorial care with an author's experience of being edited and marketed. The four book cases are purposive and heterogeneous. Public paratext can reveal positioning, but not private intention. The subject itself is also much larger than the research design: translation, disability, queer publishing, class, global rights, educational publishing and the colonial history of print require studies of their own.

Recruitment is part of that limitation. It was difficult to secure participants willing and available to discuss questions that touch on race, institutional practice and ongoing professional relationships. It would be speculative to claim that non-response demonstrates discomfort with the topic. What it demonstrates for this project is that research on publishing power can be hard to conduct from outside the organisations where many decisions happen. Future work would benefit from longer recruitment periods and institutional partnerships that provide access without making participants feel professionally exposed.

Several directions follow from this. A larger study could interview commissioning editors, marketers, sales staff and executives at major publishers, then compare their accounts with independent presses rather than relying on external perceptions of mainstream practice. Author-centred research is equally important, particularly longitudinal work

following a writer across acquisition, editing, publication and a second or third book. A larger stratified reader survey could test whether attitudes towards identity labels differ by age, ethnicity, class, reading frequency or genre preference. Regional research could examine whether publishers based outside London produce different employment networks or acquisition patterns. Finally, separate studies of Black British, South Asian, queer, disabled and working-class writers would avoid treating 'marginalised voices' as one coherent experience and would make intersectional differences easier to see.

The dissertation therefore reaches a qualified conclusion. Contemporary UK publishing has created more visible space for marginalised writing, and that space has cultural value. Decolonisation asks for more. It requires changes in who decides what counts as publishable, which audiences are worth sustained investment, who can build a career with authority inside publishing and which institutions retain the economic value created by cultural risk. On the evidence examined here, those changes are present in partial forms rather than complete. The task for publishing is not simply to keep adding voices to the list, but to examine the conditions under which those voices are selected, shaped, sold and allowed to continue.

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