Tech Justice

Report

Catalyst



‘What Does Tech Justice Look Like in the UK?’

And what opportunities are there for shifting power towards the most racially marginalised?

Written by **Siana Bangura**

with:

Interviews conducted by **Nikita Shah**
Desk research conducted by **Quito Tsui**
Visualisation designed by **Rachel Arthur**
Powered by **Catalyst**, in partnership with **Engine Room**

Abstract

In ‘Race After Technology’, sociologist and researcher on race, justice and technology, Ruha Benjamin speaks of the ‘everyday coding’ of our identities. When reflecting on whiteness, which she describes as the ‘invisible cent[re] against which everything else is compared, and the “norm” against which everyone else is measured’, she notes how this reality is weaponised as a ‘superpower’, offering a unique immunity.

And why does this matter and what does it have to do with technology?

Well, everything.

Race itself, to borrow from Benjamin and other theorists such as Falguni A. Sheth, can be thought of as a technology that legitimates violence and exclusion while concealing its nature and function. Sheth asserts that, ‘Race has three technological dimensions: instrumental, naturali[s]ing, and concealment.’ In a world as increasingly digitised as ours, data, surveillance, social media, and more recently AI technology, are at the forefront of conversations and considerations for what the future of our societies hold in a rapidly changing and evolving landscape. Urgent existential questions about the future of our societies need answers as we witness and experience power becoming increasingly centralised, corporations growing in their lack of accountability and untouchability, and a reactionary backlash to individual freedoms, alongside the simultaneous decimation of what it means to be in community and networked. With all this in mind, the question of what ‘justice’ really looks like - and how we get there is more pressing than ever before.

Although much of this vital conversation is taking place in the US, across Europe and in parts of the Global South, through this discovery piece of research, we begin to understand what this conversation, if happening at all, looks like in a British context. We note that the Tech Justice landscape in the UK is in its infancy with regard to how it is discussed, framed, and engaged with. Often, there is work being done, described using alternative language, but pointing towards the same intentions of Tech Justice - that is putting a focus on anti-oppression, shifting power, working towards social justice, and holding big corporations to account in some way, shape or form.

Alternative language used instead of 'Tech Justice' includes:

- 'Use of digital in social justice ends'
- Data justice
- Digital rights
- Algorithmic justice (as a response to algorithmic discrimination)
- Data ethics
- AI ethics, AI for good
- 'Tech for Good'

In the UK there is a long history of stratified power structures. Power is concentrated in the hands of the few and not equally or equitably distributed amongst and across society. The digital world is a reflection of this, holding an online mirror to our offline lives.

Ultimately, at the intersection of technology and questions of justice, we have to engage with ethical considerations and challenges around:

- **An Invisible centre and 'norm' of whiteness and its biases, which is replicated by technology**, and in turn whiteness acting as a 'superpower', especially in the world of technological advancement, at the detriment of already marginalised groups, particularly those racially marginalised.

- **Race itself as a 'concealed technology', underscoring how race operates as a system that justifies violence and exclusion while simultaneously hiding its mechanisms.** This concept challenges the notion that race is purely a biological or natural phenomenon, emphasising its cnstructed and manipulative nature, which mimics all that we see in an increasingly technological landscape, amidst societal injustice.

- **Technology's role in society: Technology, including data, surveillance, social media, and AI, plays a crucial role in shaping and amplifying existing power dynamics**. It has the potential to reinforce biases, entrench systemic inequalities, and perpetuate discriminatory practices if not carefully designed and scrutinised responsibly.

- **Centralisation of power and lack of accountability: The centralisation of power within corporations and institutions, coupled with their lack of accountability, can exacerbate social inequities.** The digital landscape can magnify these issues as technology companies wield immense influence over information dissemination and societal narratives.

- **Challenges to individual freedoms and community:** The tension between individual freedoms and the sense of community is complex. While technology has enabled global connectivity, it has also raised concerns about privacy, surveillance, and the erosion of authentic human connections.

- **Pursuit of justice: As the world becomes more digitised and complex, the concept of justice becomes even more critical.** Achieving justice involves addressing historical and contemporary inequalities, ensuring equitable access to technology and its benefits, and promoting transparency and accountability in technological development and deployment.

- **Future societal landscape: The rapid pace of technological advancement requires thoughtful consideration of its societal implications.** Discussions about the future of society must encompass a wide range of perspectives, including ethical, cultural, and political viewpoints, in order to navigate potential challenges and opportunities.

A more just approach to Tech would eradicate these siloed concentrated groups of power and dismantle how society configures itself, challenging the issue of whiteness and its 'superpower' over others. In this context, the pursuit of justice involves recognising and challenging the structural inequalities perpetuated by both historical and technological factors. It requires fostering inclusive technological innovation, holding powerful entities accountable, and engaging in meaningful conversations that consider the diverse needs and experiences of individuals and communities.

Not only does racial justice intersect with Tech Justice, but in a world in which all our identities are deeply impacted by the axis of race (i.e. gender is racialised, as is one's experience of class, disability, sexuality, and so on), how we engage with technology in a just and more liberatory manner is intricately connected to all questions of social justice and radically (re) imagining our ways of being.



A Manifesto for a more Tech Just Society

A vision of Tech Justice looks like:

- **Technology that is** accessible, enabling, empowering, available, representative, inclusive, non-extractive, owned by the people, made by designers and developers who are answerable to the people, and held accountable by the people.

- **Technology that has** practical applications at grassroots level for those working on the frontlines of social justice issues, addressing root causes, such as health inequality, social housing inequality, injustice in the education system, racism in the workplace, and promoting diversity in all its breadth as an essential part of everyday life.

- **Technology that is** community owned by default, or at least having the potential of co-ownership, with the primary function of Tech being in service to our communities.

- **Technology that can** be reused for good. Enabling repurposing and reusing feels important given the amount of waste produced by the need to create new things constantly as a by-product of capitalism.

- **Tech Justice looks like** individuals having more rights and knowledge over our data and how its used, with the agency and right to not be digitalised if we so wish.

- **Tech Justice looks like** the most marginalised being leading voices in the design of technology and have decision-making power on its uses in their lives. As technology develops, humans will still need to have involvement and decision making power in order to ensure ethical considerations are always front and centre in the work of technological advancement. For example, with artificial intelligence - automated decisions will have human intervention with a human having the final check over a decision. People will have the right to receive an explanation for an automated decision, and will be able to file a complaint and appeal against decisions.

'Tech Justice for me from a design perspective and design and development perspective, just like meaningful participation, meaningful engagement, having some proactive human rights impact assessment in place. Those are the things that enable justice and fairness and paying attention to human rights' - **Yasmin Boudiaf**

'Thinking about achieving tech justice will require intentional and deliberate effort to slow down and first repair the harms that have existed. It is not possible to move forward without reflecting on what has gone wrong in the past, where the neglect has been and who is responsible for this. Technology gives the impression of being faceless and situated outside of big tech companies, however companies like Facebook do have an impact on local communities - take, for example, the impact of Facebook on Nigerian elections.' - **Debs Durojaiye, Multitudes**

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Introduction: Why Tech Justice and why now?

> 'The social majority—those who were already so broadcasted, so commonly seen, that they felt the Dawn's sight was the same as their own—for them, there was safety. The perception of it. The assumption that they had nothing precious, no different or unusual coding, to conceal. That they fit.' - Janelle Monáe, The Memory Librarian: And Other Stories of Dirty Computer

As part of looking towards the longer-term work and focus of Catalyst (perhaps as a field catalyst), there has been recognition of a need to take a more root-causes approach to systems change work. There has been recognition of the need to centre Tech Justice in the building of the next version of Catalyst's DNA, especially if the network hopes to play a role in movement building, more meaningfully collaborating with a wider, more diverse spectrum of stakeholders within the network and wider ecosystem.

We knew exciting work was already being done in this space - perhaps by a different name - or names - by different people, organisations and practitioners in the UK (and of course beyond) thinking about tech and the digital space, through a lens of social justice. We noted that the work was being done particularly by Black people, People of Colour and practitioners of Global Majority descent. And as a practitioner of Global Majority descent myself, it felt timely to call for exploration of the key questions being asked, and answered; the work already being done to build the field, and figure out the role a network like Catalyst could play in meaningfully supporting this work.

In light of Catalyst's values-led approach; evolving mission and vision around liberation; and deepening commitment to more just-ways of working and collaborating, considering how we engage with technology in a just and more liberatory manner feels intricately connected to all questions of social justice and radically (re)imagining our ways of being.

What does Tech Justice mean and look like in the UK, with a specific focus on racial justice and its intersections?

This discovery piece of research, along with other work commissioned, including research on transformational governance and an exploration of Web3, feeds into the wider Catalyst strategic review and transition work. In this discovery piece of research, we explored the landscape of work currently focused on Tech Justice in a UK context, and how Catalyst should best respond to and support this movement, including specifically what Tech Justice principles and considerations Catalyst should look to embed at the core of its DNA and best practice advocacy.

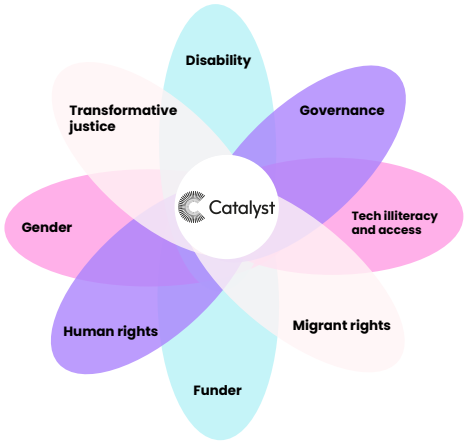
It is also important to note that this work has been undertaken by a team of British women of Global Majority descent, with backgrounds spanning West and East Africa; South, South East and East Asia, with lived experience of racial marginalisation. For us, it is vital for this work to shift away from a superficial focus on 'equality, diversity, and inclusion', and move towards a vision of equity, underpinned not by 'fairness', but by justice. We demand those in the Tech industry to not only strive to be passive allies (as a bare minimum) to the most marginalised, but work hard to be active accomplices, co-conspirators, and comrades, placing their heads above the parapet, ensuring that at the heart of technological advancement are intersectional, decolonised, anti-racist, liberatory, and socially just practices and approaches.

Understanding Tech Justice | Our Methodology

Envisioning Tech Justice

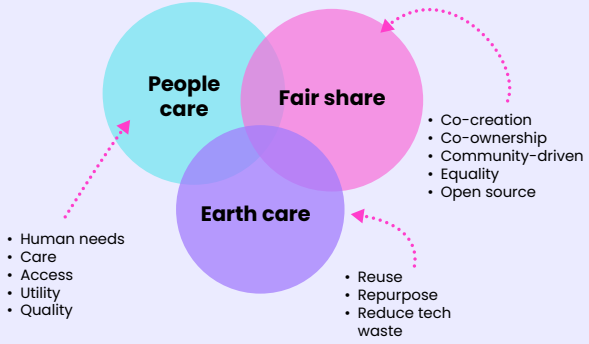
Interconnectedness

Inviting different perspectives and lens to the roundtable



Reimagining with permaculture design

What if we apply permaculture ethics to make a regenerative tech just world?



Graphics designed by Rachel Arthur

In order to understand what justice - as it pertains to the intersection of race and technology - may look like for those interested in shifting power from the margins to the centre, we held a series of conversations with a range of practitioners, thinkers and doers in this space to get a deeper understanding of what Tech Justice means, or could mean, to them, noting that for some, they may have used other language to describe their work up until now.

As well as conducting desk research, led by Quito Tsui, and interviewing key actors in conversations surrounding the intersections of Tech and racial justice in the UK, we also convened a roundtable of peers to come together and envision what a more just Tech landscape would look like, and what it would take to get us there.

Our roundtable participants were asked to reflect and envision what a Tech just world might look like and mindmap or doodle the world they imagined.

Amongst the many prompts we offered, we asked them to imagine:

- A thriving world of interconnectedness
- How it would feel to be present in a Tech just world?
- Who would be present in the world we've imagined (and are working towards creating)?
- How power would flow?
- What forms of Tech are centred and who built them?

Following the visualisation exercise, participants fed their thoughts back to the group and articulated what their imagined Tech just world would look like.

Below are some examples of the responses from participants.

Key themes included:

- Tech as an extension of reality
- Accessibility
- Digital literacy
- Designing technology to be people-centred
- Knowledge, expertise and who needs to be involved
- Limitations of Tech
- Questions and concerns surrounding Tech



Figure 1. How do we make our collective vision of a Tech just world a reality

Following a roundtable event, in-depth interviews were conducted by researcher Nikita Shah, and participants were asked what Tech Justice means to them. Whilst answers varied, similar themes around accessibility, ownership and agency, and rights-based responses were noted. Additionally, participants felt that Tech Justice should reflect principles of social justice - centring needs and making Tech equitable for marginalised communities.

Another common theme was environmental impact and the extractive nature of technological practices, including the harm caused to people and planet through producing hardware.

Although a nascent field of focus, particularly in the UK, there are some commonalities in understanding and articulation of what we mean by Tech Justice.



(SHARED) DEFINITIONS

Below are some example definitions from our series of interviewees with various practitioners and thinkers on the subject:

'**Tech Justice means power and power distribution.** I think whether it's the wider economy, finances or accessing various resources, it doesn't really matter so much, as it's the way that power is distributed amongst people and governments and other special interest groups, that determines how Tech impacts life, and particularly the public. Tech injustice comes out of a skewed distribution of power towards entities that don't serve the public interest or even further, potentially harm minority groups and the way that technology is practised is a consequence of that.' - **Yasmin Boudiaf**

'**Tech Justice is about designing and developing technologies responsibly and including and engaging with communities (particularly communities of colour) whose human rights may be impacted by said technology.** We have seen how harm is caused through technology, e.g. internet freedom, censorship, doxing, cybersecurity issues, cyber stalking, etc. Taking lessons learned from these technologies and applying them to emerging technologies tells us that we have to meaningfully involve affected communities in the design and development of these technologies. Meaningful community engagement is about taking responsibility to carefully consider what the negative impacts on communities might look like in both the short and long term alongside thinking about community vulnerability in marginalised communities having rights and for there to be better stakeholder mapping of community members and needs.' - **Roya Pakzad**

‘Tech Justice could be a state of restitution, where people know the harm that’s been done, either by overarching pre-existing systems or even by the technology themselves that harm has been reduced or mitigated, or the technology itself has been used to further the aims of human rights and justice across the different oppressed groups that exist. Tech Justice is about holding Big Tech companies to account and challenging powers that speak truth to power. But also seeing Tech as a tool that is used to achieve aims you want to see in the world. This vision is not fixed as an idea because of the systems of oppression that exist, change and adapt to the state of the world. Things are always changing, our oppressions are not static and so, our approach to solving and standing firm against those oppressions also needs to be changeable and adaptable.’
- **Debs Durojaiye, Multitudes**

‘**Tech Justice is where technology is deployed in anti-oppressive ways.** That can mean that technology isn’t used against particular communities, or it’s not used to make decisions that impact people disproportionately. There’s almost an assumption that Tech could be fine if it weren’t impacting marginalised communities. However, the issue is that Tech is often used as the answer to a lot of issues in society. Tech Justice to me looks very much like a wider social, academic, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist justice that cannot be disentangled from others. For example: One argument around facial recognition, a surveillance technology is that it misidentifies people of colour. Whilst this is a problem as it results in increased numbers of people of colour who are stopped and searched more and are surveyed more by the police, or it’s deployed in communities that are predominantly made up of marginalised communities. Fixing the recognition element does not mean that the technology itself is ok. Technology still causes harm and has inherent problems.’ - **Emmanuelle Andrews, Liberty for Human Rights**

Emmanuelle Andrews - Liberty

The intersection between racial injustice and Tech Justice has a thread of human rights running between them. The protection of human rights and the ability to take legal action against a violation of human rights allows for some checks and balances of Tech and its actors. Liberty shared an example of their strategic litigation case around facial recognition:

"We had a successful case around facial recognition a few years ago which can arguably be seen as Tech Justice in action. The case consisted of South Wales Police being taken to court over their unlawful use of facial recognition technology. The court said that whilst South Wales Police's use of the Tech was unlawful, if they had utilised the Tech in another way its use case would have 'probably been fine'. This example demonstrates that firstly, the courts can only assess a situation based on existing laws and existing frameworks, and the existing laws and pretty much that we have are narrow. Further, that harm was already caused and, thereafter, a strategic litigation case in court was enabled to be enacted."

Digital World

> ‘How we relate to one another both online and offline is at the core of civic engagement.’ — Nicol Turner Lee

Across our desk research and conversations (as w ur own lived experiences as Black, brown, and Global Majority descent women of colour using the internet and navigating digital spaces), it is clear that the digital world is a broad space that intersects with issues of content moderation, Big Tech, online harm, (mis)information among other key topics. More of the justice focused work tends to look at online harm and abuse, with discussions around content moderation not appearing as significant, despite being a key issue, as highlighted by work done by Glitch , The Alan Turing Institute, Brennan Centre for Justice and others. This may point towards an understanding that content moderation alone does not tackle the root-cause issues, although effective moderation remains a key tool in our toolkit for tackling some ways Tech injustice manifests across social media.

In their recently published, groundbreaking, report on Digital Misogynoir, Glitch UK note that:

> ‘The majority of online safety research and policy across civil society, government and Tech companies continues to ignore the compounding racialised and gendered nature of online harm and abuse, with incredibly sparse work [focusing] on digital misogynoir… Without safety mechanisms for Black women using social media, there is no online safety for all… Gender and race should not be separate conversations when talking about content moderation, safety, policies or regulation but interwoven in all conversations, including broader topics of privacy, ethics and Tech for good.’
>
> - Glitch, UK (2023) “The Digital Misogynoir Report: Ending the dehumanising of Black women on social media”

How are racialised communities experiencing online spaces?

The digital space, primarily the realm of social media, is where the ordinary person may engage with the everyday positive and negative impacts of Tech most regularly. This is especially with widespread access to mobile phones and other portable technologies, for example.

And as the online world is a reflection of our offline lives and societies, incidents that take place in real life and in real-time find a new life in the digital world. As a result, this can cause harm to individuals and our movements.

During the course of this research, we spoke to a range of practitioners, including movement-builders and campaigners as well as academics, researchers, and technologists.

One such conversation was with a representative from The Network for Police Monitoring (Netpol), a campaigning group working to hold police accountable for state violence and empowering campaigning groups to know their rights. Through Netpol's work, they note that police often target movements or individuals involved in them in various ways, including through targeted surveillance, online and offline harassment, and in particular cases, with violence. During the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 especially, a number of videos showing horrific police violence against Black and brown people were reshared across the online space. These videos contained upsetting and sensitive footage which was captured and shared without the consent of those in the videos, causing further distress to many racialised communities, particularly Black communities.



Kat Hobbs - Netpol

In Bristol, an incident took place involving a much loved local cafe and the Police. The cafe Owner posted a sign that read 'Black Lives Matter - Police aren't welcome here, don't come in for lunch' on the window of the establishment. A police officer saw the poster and was aggravated. As a result, the police officer took a picture and posted it in an online police forum mobilising police from across the UK to post one-star ratings on Google reviews. In turn, ruining the online reputation of the Cafe.

The restaurant itself sits in the heart of St. Paul's, which is historically the Black district in Bristol. It's a very well-organised and very politicised community that's had a lot of policing issues over the years. The local community responded and organised a solidarity response in which organisers mobilised as many people as possible to give the Cafe a five-star rating as locals felt the Cafe deserved it because of the quality of the Cafe. Community members also used Facebook to raise awareness of the incident and to rally community support. People tried to counter the police officers' damage by supporting the Cafe by eating there or posting positive reviews. And whilst the local community members knew, anyone searching online for a place to eat may not consider the Cafe due to the affected rating.

Overall, some of the perspectives on the incident are mixed. Even when [Netpol are] doing work in communities where the police are violent and racist, not everyone is necessarily anti-police. Some have strong abolitionist perspectives, some support the police and some have the perspective that 'there are a few bad apples'. Whilst community members did support the Cafe, support does not equate to anti-police politics.

During incidents such as this [and movement moments such as Kill The Bill], there is a risk of spreading misinformation including from police officers themselves. After the Bristol riots the police put out a statement that the media picked up stating that several officers had suffered broken ribs and serious injuries in efforts to paint the crowd present as violent....The police had to retract the statement and admit to lying about the claims made. However, the messaging of racialised communities being violent was still made causing people to have a perspective that legitimises police violence.



As pressure mounts around digital responsibility and accountability - with racially minortised groups and campaigners especially, searching for alternative, safer, digital spaces, as demonstrated by recent pushback against Twitter (or 'X'), content moderation is likely to become more rigorous in the future, with new legislation and requirements for companies to do more to protect users online[1]. In particular it established a concept of legal but harmful content that expands discretion around content that may comply with community standards but may still cause harm.

As outlined by Glitch and others alike, online hate is acutely experienced by racially minoritised groups, women[2] primarily, and other marginalised groups including trans people.

Another big aspect of conversations - and calls to action - around creating a better, safer experience of the Digital World is how we hold Big Tech accountable for their leading role in toxic online culture, data mining, exploitation, and causing and replicating Tech injustices.

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1 'It's time to ban surveillance in advertising' by Oliver Hayes, Global action plan

2 'Black and Asian women MPs abused more online' by Amnesty International UK

Our desk research found that new legislation[3] will give more teeth to UK regulatory bodies overseeing Big Tech practices. The Digital Markets Unit will be able to levy hefty fines and disqualify directors who aren't in compliance with a new code of conduct.[4] The impact of this will remain to be seen, however it may go some way towards managing the issue of disinformation and misinformation that also disproportionately negatively impacts racially minoritised groups engaging with the digital space. Discussions in this area are wide ranging (of note is the misconduct of Covid disinformation units overstepping their mandate and attempting to get anti-government posts taken down[5][6][7] during the height of the pandemic, with incorrect deployment of this method leading to many social-justice focused-posts calling out racism, state violence, and bigotry also being taken down and censored). Work is being done in this area to gain an empirical understanding of misinformation[8], identify at-risk groups[9], tackle misinformation and protect against it.[10]

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3 'New Powers so UK Regulator can Hold Big Tech Firms to Account' on Techolony

4 'Britain says no to Big tech as competition bill lobbying falls flat' by Tom Bristow, Politico.eu

5 'How secretive units tackling Covid disinformation strayed towards censorship' by The Telegraph

6 'Ministry of Truth exposed' by bigbrotherwatch.org.uk

7 The State of Free Speech Online, by Big Brother Watch (PDF)

8 Understanding online false information in the Uk, by Ofcom (PDF)

9 'Who is most vulnerable to health-related misinformation?', by The Alan Turing Instititute

10 'Protecting against misinformation: evidence from an online experiment', on Katarpublic.com

Jumoke Abdullahi - Triple Cripples

The digital world offers great opportunities in terms of seeking connection, kind of like with global Blackness. At the forefront, I think there are lots of connections for that". For example, Black Twitter enables a space for global Blackness to meet, connect, celebrate and have a safe space to build community. However, not all spaces are or remain safe.

During the pandemic, Zoom meetings became a space for conversations and connection, whether formally during meetings or informally for individuals and groups to come together. Black people and other racialised communities of colour who tried to create safe spaces for themselves to relate to one another, speak with, connect, share each other's hurt and triumph's were often 'Zoom bombed' making these spaces no longer safe. Zoom bombing became another extension of real life into the digital world, whereby safe spaces for Black people and other racialised communities were filled with racial slurs, aggression and harm.

'The long-reaching arm of whiteness and white supremacy, it will always find you, it will always find you. And if it can't immediately find you, you know that it will. You always have to be kind of like looking over your shoulder' - Jumoke, The Triple Cripples.

When thinking about Tech Justice, we have to think about how people are able to use and enjoy digital offerings in a way that reflects and reproduces the injustice experienced by racialised communities offline. If some is racism offline, then they're likely to be more open and racist online where there is a digital screen of protection against any in-person, physical confrontation, whereby they can remain 100% anonymous and there are less repercussions.

'All of the misogyny still exists online, racism still exists online. All of these different things are also transported.' - Jumoke, The Triple Cripples.

World of Work

(Anti-racism, Intersectionality and EDI in the Digital workforce; Tech literacy)

> 'When Black women and other women of [colour] are left behind, innovation and progress are left on the table.' — Dwana Franklin-Davis

When speaking to lifestyle and technology publication and platform, **Black Ballad**, Responsible AI Programmer and Consultant, Toju Duke, notes, after being asked 'In another world, if AI was created by Black women and non-binary people, would it look different?':

> 'It would definitely be more representative, less hateful... better, nicer. People might actually trust AI – which isn't something they feel today. It would likely be created to benefit society and life.'

Duke also warned that things are also not as straightforward as just shifting power over to the most marginalised and expecting change to occur overnight.

This 'overnight approach' is often the approach found in EDI strategies - stick a female face, a Black or brown person, a disabled person, in an environment and hope for the best, without taking the time to tend to the soil to ensure what is planted blossoms, is healthy, sustainable, and can multiply. This tokenistic approach, and the absence of this nurture, ultimately sets people up for failure, disappointment, burnout, and disillusionment.

Much of the genesis for this discovery piece of research stems from my own negative personal experiences in the world of work as a Black woman, as well as the anecdotal experiences of other women of Global Majority descent.

More often than not, good intentions are expressed by those we work with, the right social justice language is used by those who consider themselves to be liberals and 'progressives', creating a false sense of security that ultimately leads to frustration, disappointment and disillusionment when actions do not match up with words.

When reflecting on the work of Inclusion[11] at Catalyst and other projects I've worked on, I wrote of once:

> '...enthusiastically tak[ing] part in these conversations, hopeful every time something (that felt) cataclysmic would take place, feeling that perhaps 'this time' we'd edge ever-closer to living, working and thriving in a society that felt truly equitable'

And then instead being left feeling:

> '...spiritually drained and tired! Tired of talking, asking, explaining, demanding, reminding, and 'teaching'. Whether the issue is race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, or indeed any other axes of identity, anybody with lived experience of marginalisation feels caught in the tension between needing to take part in order to have your voice and experiences pulled towards the centre, whilst also wanting to throw your hands up and say 'I'm out — get on with it yourselves!'.

So is it any wonder that the world of work is where we find many of the conversations regarding intersections of race and technology taking place (framed more so as EDI work rather than Tech Justice)?

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11 'Inclusion is not a project but a lifelong commitment', by Siana Bangura, Catalyst

Across our desk research, EDI framings dominated discussions around the world of work rather than discussions on Tech Justice. It is clear that racially minoritised people working in Tech face the most challenges and are underrepresented in the workforce, in design and development of technology and in founder and executive roles.

Unsurprisingly to us, we noted there were massive inequities in Tech[12] with Black people and people of Global Majority descent reporting microaggressions, earning less, having less support in the workplace[13] , often finding themselves pushed into doing EDI work, and generally having less positive experiences in the workforce than their white counterparts. This is especially true for Black individuals, even more so for Black women[14] who report microaggressions and other forms of discrimination at work.[15] Across the research, there is a lot of valuable data and insight into the experiences and discrepancies of these groups. Concerns over use of automated Tech in hiring processes[16] and the ways it may introduce bias or reinforce problematic/ concerning hiring practices was also something of note.

In the last three years alone, the world of work has changed due to the global Covid 19 pandemic, compounded by rapid advances in digital technology.

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12 'How Might We Progress Ethic Equality in Tech?' by Lauren Coulman

13 The Enablers, by Colorintech (PDF)

14 Leeds Racial Diversity in Digital Research, by WILD (PDF)

15 Leeds Racial Diversity in Digital Research, by WILD (PDF)

16 'What does it mean to 'solve' the problem of discrimination in hiring? Social, technical and legal perspectives from the UK on automated hiring systems' by J. Sanchez-Monedero, L. Dencik and L. Edwards (2020)

When discussing these changes with our interviewees, some noted factors such as:

- The rise of remote working as a response to the pandemic, noting this has been a key demand of the disability justice movement for many years
- The impact of the Black Lives Matter movement on work culture more generally, including promises made and promised broken since 2020
- Using Tech for EDI and anti-bias training and the mainstreaming and popularisation of this
- New spaces being created within the Tech space for Black people and people of colour
- The rise of AI technologies such as ChatGPT and increasing desire for (and fear of) automation
- Increased use of facial recognition software and the impact on racially minoritised groups in particular
- Increased use of tracking software (including Covid Track & Trace)

On the shift towards remote working, interviewees reflected that:

- The shift towards more remote ways of working during the pandemic and later hybrid working have changed the world of work, especially for those most negatively impacted by cisnormative, patriarchal, capitalist notions and standards of productivity and working life, which do not prioritise care and are not human-centred. During the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement also impacted the workplace and how remote working impacted racialised individuals positively (many racialised people experienced remote working in a positive way. For example, self-identifying women shared how they were able to focus on their work more) and in some cases negatively (particularly around beliefs around productivity and presenteeism, often laced with racial and gendered undertones, especially for women and women with children)

- Remote working has also shifted power from leaders to workers. Newer employees joining the workforce or shifting jobs are coming into the workplace with different expectations and needs from organisations. There is a question about whether leaders at the very top of organisations are completely aware of this shift in power yet, although we have also seen a push to return to 'normal'

And on the note of shifts in power, particularly considering if certain sectors are more affected than others, we asked our interviewees to consider to what extent technology presented an opportunity or a threat to the workforce?



On surveillance in the workplace (and in universities as this was relevant to the academics we spoke to), interviewees reflected that:

- There is growing use of surveillance tools being deployed in the workplace, especially during and post-COVID-19 to monitor workers' productivity, time management and the like. This signals a lack of trust in workers. A similar trend can be seen in universities. At one University, the creation of 'seats' - an attendance tracing software - demonstrates a way for students to survey other students' attendance in courses. Student response to this was divided, for students with British citizenship it was simple to refuse in engaging in this surveillance tactic. However, for students without citizenship who were studying on a visa, or on scholarship a higher risk was presented in declining participation in the tactic. This makes clear that not all students enter the learning environment on equal footing.

Sara Alsherif - Open Rights Group

In the UK, employers are given the right and responsibility to check that employees have the right to work in the UK. Typically, these checks were done using a UK government website. However, the UK government has now allowed third parties to conduct these checks. The Open Rights Group has had many cases where people have complained about false decisions made by automated third-party Tech companies. There are high consequences to false decisions including the loss of employment and impacts on livelihood for individuals and their families. In some instances, employers have also asked employees to pay for third-party checks which are unlawful.

For asylum seekers who have been granted status, the Home Office allows them to work during the transition period. However, the ID checkers do not always correctly identify that they are allowed to work during this period. This results in negative impacts including potentially losing their jobs, foregoing a salary and risk securing housing. Further heightening vulnerabilities.

The Open Rights Group is working on something related to challenging these kinds of checks. So people are not left relying on a third party and can instead make checks directly with the government. Further, for people to have a mechanism to appeal false decisions. these kinds of decisions.

On the question of what needs to be done to upskill and support those whose jobs may be (perceived to be) threatened by the advancements of technology, especially over the last three years, interviewees reflected that the following areas of work needed focus:

- Leadership skills
- Digital fundraising skills
- Service design skills
- Good data skills
- Building communities of care within the workplace

Creating the ripe soil and suitable conditions for a more just Tech sector requires involvement from various people with various skills. It is important to be able to link Tech skills and knowledge with social justice knowledge and involvement from those who are/will be affected and those working in the sector. We need to shift power away from organisations and producers of Tech who negatively impact or harm individuals, noting how challenging this work is, especially for those with lived experience of Tech injustice.

Year on year, The Charity Digital Skills Report[17] highlights the state of the charity sector as it intersects with the digital space, something of particular interest to networks such as Catalyst.

Highlights from the 2023 report include:

- 45% of charities say reaching and meeting the needs of diverse users has become a priority
- 65% of charities now have a hybrid working model (remote and office based)
- 66% of charities are interested in making use of emerging Tech such as AI and ChatGPT

17 Charity Digital Skills Report, 2023

With this in mind, alongside the fact that ethnic minority representation in charity sector is decreasing[18], and yet service users across the many different types of charities and third sector organisations in the UK undoubtedly being from the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, bridging gaps and leading with equity is vital, with the role of digital playing a key part in this. At individual and organisational levels.

Zoe Amar - Zoe Amar Digital

'Over the past three years, we have been providing advice on inclusion for charities. There are two key ways we do this. First, a charity may reach out to us with a digital/inclusion problem and share that they want to engage more people from diverse communities as part of their digital engagement and need support to do this. They may request a strategy or something else. But they will proactively seek support and advice. Second, we may already be working with clients on procuring websites, for example. In this case, we will suggest ways to demonstrate the value of being more inclusive and how this is possible. For example, talking to agencies who represent different types of lived experience or who are really good as part of the bills and doing user research where they involve different types of communities.'

Ultimately, we must reject approaches that fail to address structural issues. As noted, meaningful inclusion is a marathon and not a sprint, and we are dealing with lifelong commitments, not one-off tokenistic projects when we commit to centring justice in our work. Technology ultimately mirrors and exacerbates racial injustice and inequities we already see in our workplaces and elsewhere.

18 'Ethnic minority representation in charity sector decreasing, government figures show' by Rob Preston, Civil Society

Yasmin Boudiaf - Independent Researcher

'There are many examples of how organisations take performative and tokenistic action around EDI. The Black Lives Matter movement has caused waves across sectors, empowering racialised individuals to speak out and try to advocate for change. Organisations have had varied responses, with some taking meaningful steps to do the hard work to implement anti-racist practices in the workplace and in their work whilst many took little to no action and others have taken performative action.

'I worked in the EDI space for a long time. I would research and design virtual reality experiences to deliver unconscious bias training to people. The training using VR was seen as an empathy machine and stirred much interest in the product rather than the research itself. It became apparent that organisations wanted to be seen as doing the right thing and not being left behind the 'trend' rather than working towards systemic change. I soon realised that to get buy-in, I would have to describe what I was doing in terms they were really interested in. Individuals were more interested in gender equality and mental health but far less interested in racial equality. My impression was that they were fine with being called misogynists, but not fine with being called a racist - this was not something they wanted to confront.

'Without having real buy-in from clients who recognise there is an internal problem and recognise they need the training, delivering the training and creating change is unviable. So, instead, the EDI training space tends to tweak its product to suit the self-image of clients - augmenting their offering and diluting the work which ends up being a PR tactic.

‘Similarly, the Tech space saw a trend to involve more women in Tech. Whilst that was initially invited, I soon realised that this trend was just repackaged neoliberalism and the same thing happened with getting racialised individuals in Tech. Various Big Tech companies would throw events or have special programmes where they’d invite a woman and a racialised individual onto a panel or throw some money at their startup. But it was entirely tokenistic. Whilst there was a short-term feel-good moment, it was completely unsustainable, because no money beyond the event was ever invested in the start-ups nor were facilitators (on the panel) given long-term jobs. The facilitators, who are members of the community leveraged their social capital, at the behest of Tech companies which enabled the Tech companies to benefit enormously from the good PR, and likely gained a lot of clients who were also image-conscious leaving the facilitators without a job or increased security at the end of the opportunity. Whilst the facilitators may have been paid for their time at the talk they were merely invited to perform.’



Networks and Communities

When considering the question of networks and communities in relation to Tech Justice, of particular importance to networks such as Catalyst and others attempting to work and organise in more decentralised, non-hierarchical and non-traditional ways, we asked our interviewees to reflect on:

- What technologies they saw and experienced networks and communities most using and why?
- What role does technology play for organisers/campaigners?
- What opportunities, challenges and harms can we see?
- What examples do we already have of experiences of networks and communities engaging with different technologies in their organising work?
- How might models of data ownership such as data stewardship support social justice goals?
- What role do networks and communities play in creating a more tech-just world?/shifting power to racially marginalised groups

The work of social justice is particularly central to networking and community building and we've noted that, as it pertains to Tech Justice, folks already engaged in the work of social justice are leading the thinking, conversations and the doing in this emerging field in the UK in a way that those predominantly concerned with Tech first, are not.

From our conversations, three main themes emerge in relation to the intersection of Tech Justice with networks and communities:

- How nonprofits and grassroots entities are using digital tools?
- How nonprofits and grassroots entities are supporting accessing to digital tools?
- How nonprofits and grassroots entities are responding and engaging to the use of digital tools in contexts or communities they are concerned with?

In many instances considerations around Tech Justice emerged from social justice organisations, groups and individual campaigners having concerns about the way technology is intersecting within the communities they work with.

From the more technology focused side, digital rights organisations have increasingly begun to think about the deployment of technology in the larger social and cultural context. Across the board, the complexity of using Tech tools is clear, with data and Tech being used both against communities and by communities. And Charities, who are often serving the needs of communities and organisations and groups serving the grassroots are increasingly grappling with their relationship with technology. As noted in the Charity Digital Skills Report and other sources, charities are becoming more aware of importance of Tech[19] and there is a clear uptake in interest, however there is also a lack of skills to meet this interest across the board, and a lack of funding to meet the skills deficit.[20]

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19 'Latest Charity tech trends' by Circle Interactive

20 Charity Digital Skills Report, 2023

Bigger organisations are better able to design their own solutions as compared with smaller organisations and grassroots entities who often have to rely on pre-built solutions or be left behind completely. Alongside this, awareness of how to protect data is growing but it is not clear if nonprofits have what they need to implement data policies. [21] Additionally, it's worth noting that data policies require resources for implementation, which can also be a challenge for organisations, and so the cycle continues.

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21 The Charity Digital Code of Practive, by Charity Digital Code (PDF)



Nish Doshi - Tech For Good Organisers Network

When reflecting on the current technologies grassroots groups and orgs they're involved in organising with use, especially for events organising, Nish Doshi, Tech For Good Organisers Network Co-ordinator, noted that:

'...there was so much of a shift towards organising online because you could connect people from very broad parts of the world and in some ways, it was a massive win because suddenly disabled people who couldn't necessarily access things were able to access things that they couldn't before. So there was a lot of organising that exists online and it's a good thing in that context. In other ways, it's also created the organising of people in power. I don't think we can disconnect left forms of organising - for example, through Facebook, which was very central to a lot of things back in the early 2000s, late 2010, early 2020 - from also the rise of the far right. So the tools we're using are also being used by others.

'In terms of technology playing that role, we have things like social media, which is connecting us, but then inherently has its own problems. In person is very different to online organising. So things without necessarily using technology had a different form of connection to online connecting, yet, it's also true that online connecting is also the most affordable way for people to do things. And that's specifically important when you've got funding and budgets. So using online technology tools is essential. But it also means within that, that some people just can't access it. And there's not really a widespread interest in challenging that. For example, if you want to go to any part of the highlands and Scotland, Wi Fi is a rarity, because they don't have the infrastructure for it because it was never developed. And there's been a lot of amazing solutions that have come through on this in terms of the Midlands, etc. But it's just too expensive to cover Scotland, and Scotland doesn't have the funding to do so. So it means there are things that people just can't access in different parts of the country. The other thing to note is that

when we do organise things, we end up being stuck in our own little bubbles. And technology really reproduces that, especially around personalisation. Because everything is personalised, and data is used to kind of sell us things all the time. So everything is an advert. It's really hard for us to escape outside of those sorts of bubbles, which means we're all talking to ourselves, which means it's harder to get into having this conversation in a broader space because you don't interact with people outside of these bubbles.'



We know that Non-profits and grassroots entities are increasingly concerned with the digital divide [22] as an access and justice issue, which includes thinking about digital divide as relative and issues such as slow connectivity, lack of confidence and financing access to the internet as barriers of entry.[23]

Organisations such as Liberty, Amnesty and Privacy International are focused on trying to make government policy and regulation around the use of Tech more just. There is an emphasis on mainstreaming data ethics principles and encouraging uptake for the public [24], practitioners [25] and policymaker.[26] Some digital rights and data justice organisations are thinking about how technology impacts specific communities and trying to build the evidence base around this intersection.[27]

After the pandemic, there has been a greater shift towards online campaigning which has helped to connect people from broad parts of the world. This push has also been accelerated by crackdowns on the right to protest, with legislation such as the Police, Crime & Sentencing Bill[28] being passed, despite the efforts of the Kill the Bill Movement.

The shift to a more predominantly digital way of campaigning and organising also allowed people with disabilities to be able to join who would not have had the same level of access previously. However online campaigning showcases a tension between how one tool can be used for different means by groups, such as the Left and the Far Right, often posing threats and risks to marginalised communities.

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22 'Building a Digital Nation' by Good Things Foundation

23 'Local communities and the internet ecosystems: Scaling solutions to data poverty in the UK' by Digital Poverty Alliance

24 'A Citizen's Guide to Data: Ethical, Social, and Legal Issues' by Christopher Burr, Zenodo

25 'Data ethics in practive: challenges and opportunities for data ethics policy function in the public sector' by Natalia Domagala

26 Understanding artificial Intelligence ethics and safety, by The Alan Turing Institute (PDF)

27 'Trapped in the Gangs Matrix', by Amnesty Internation UK

28 Wikipedia page on the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022

Other considerations for Networks and Communities working for social justice, using different technologies?

Whilst speaking to Netpol, we noted that:

- **It is important for campaigners to be more Tech literate**, especially when considering the permanency of social media posts online, ownership and susceptibility to police surveillance. Our social media is often accessible for police surveillance and in many instances, footage that has been posted without the consent of those in the material containing incriminating footage from police incidents, demonstrations, protests can and has been used to prosecute individuals.

- **Technology such as biometrics, facial recognition and surveillance more broadly is not well understood** resulting in either apathy or fear surrounding the Tech.

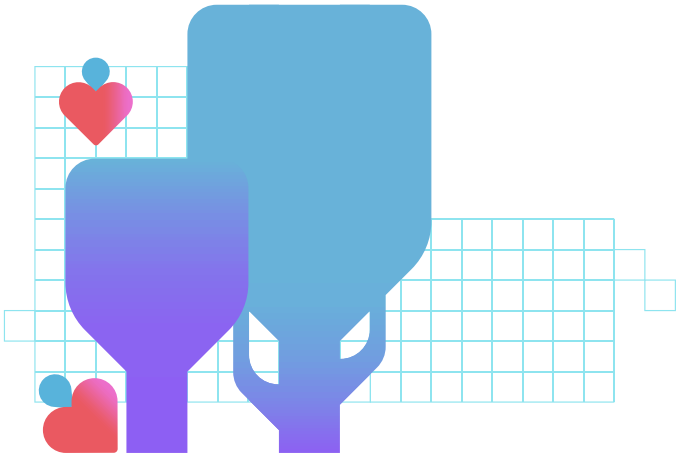
- **Police, as part of standard practice, are not supposed to conduct fingerprint scanning or searches** but it is known that they do and tend to target Black and brown youth in particular.

- **With the implementation of new laws, including the Public Order Act, the police will soon be granted the ability to use Tech in more concerning ways**. It is important for activists to really consider ways to safely organise and find ways to protect themselves.

- **Digital tools are often designed for a certain class and ability**. This makes it challenging to organise and connect with people. Some tools are too expensive to be used widely at an individual grassroots level e.g. notion. Tools such as Miro or Mural can be difficult to use, particularly for people with neurodivergence.

- **A lot of technology was developed for military use which has been repurposed to increase accessibility**. For example, closed captions/live captions were developed for surveillance purposes and record keeping.

Ultimately, Networks and Communities play a key role in creating a more Tech just world, as folks most deeply impacted by Tech injustice and therefore, most aware of what Tech Justice would look like. There is currently a gap between people who are very rooted in Tech and those who understand the intersection between Tech, security and justice. There is also a need to upskill people so they can use less mainstream technology and see the benefits of the alternative, more open-source offerings, noting there are challenges with this type of technology also. Networks and grassroots communities offer an invaluable opportunity to create a space of solidarity and tap into the solidarity economy which underpins the Community Tech space, holding people, organisations and governments to account.



Emerging Tech (including AI & Ed Tech)

The news comes in cycles, and right now, more than ever, it feels like AI and other emerging technologies are at the forefront of reports and mainstgream conversations about Tech, social media, and our working lives.

A lot of the technology being discussed by experts, campaigners, and Tech enthusiasts, such as live facial recognition or welfare algorithms often exists in a grey legal area making it harder for activists and advocates to push back against the use of this technology with legal support. As a result a lot of the work happening is reactive, with most organising focused on the harms that have already happened, or considering future harm in the context of realised harm.

From our desk research, it was noted that much of the discussion around emerging technology focused on AI, facial recognition and algorithmic based products like predictive analytics. Discussion of more emergent technologies such as Chat GPT, large language models and digital wallets was limited.

What are the current or potential harms that may be caused by emerging technologies?

The charity sector needs to have clear parameters about how vulnerable service user data is used and imputed into emerging tech.

On Regulation:

- The UK government has published a whitepaper on taking a pro-innovation approach to AI regulation.[29] The paper was critiqued as being 'very substance-less' by Liberty who also suggested that a framework regulating AI requires groups to be produced by groups coming together. Further, emphasises that a framework needs to make sense within a racial justice framework.

The Human Rights organisation flagged:

> **'The Government's central aim, which shapes the content of its regulatory approach, is for the UK to be world-leading on AI. But rather than becoming world-leading in terms of setting best practice, and protecting the public from the harms of AI, the Government takes the facilitation of innovation as its foundation. We believe this is misplaced: human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law should be the starting point when assessing intrusive technology which fundamentally changes public decision-making and implicates the rights of millions.'**

29 Liberty's Written Submission to a pro-innovation approach to AI regulation consultation, by Libery, 2023 (PDF)

- It is important to remember that automated decisions are making decisions about important things in people's actual lives which will impact them. People have very little control over the result of the decision but also there are very few opportunities and ways to hold those decisions and decision-making tools to account especially as the decision-making process/method is not clear.

- In addition to the issues of automated decisions, the actual data set the model is built on is also problematic. The data used to build these models is not shared. Oppression may be inbuilt into the process either early on or later in the chain. The lack of clarity makes it difficult to know how fair and just these automated decision-making models are.

Rebecca Heilweil, journalist at Vox reminds us that:

> 'Very simply, a generative AI system is designed to produce something new based on its previous experience. Usually, this technology is developed [by] teaching an artificial intelligence to perform tasks by exposing it to lots and lots of data, which it 'trains' on and eventually learns to mimic… AI already plays a pretty big part in most of our lives. You just probably didn't know it. Something else you may not know is that because AI is trained on real-word data, it inherits all the bad things that come with this information. The real world is oppressive, biased and unjust, which means the data that trains AI is too.'

At present, technology is predominantly applied to racially marginalised individuals rather than involving said groups in the ideation, design, development, testing and implementation of the Tech or the regulation and governance. Therefore, having meaningful engagement with affected marginalised communities is essential in shifting power.

How has emerging technology impacted the UK landscape?

Emerging technology is having an impact on our lives. Whilst there has been a lot of news around the use of AI tools such as ChatGPT, this technology is not entirely brand new, in that it has been around for many years. One trend identified by Zoe Amar is that some charities are utilising AI to create content and write social media posts or newsletters whilst others are using AI to take meeting minutes.

Amar observes that: 'As a sector focused on civil society, there is a lack of a sector-wide response to the integration of AI which is starkly compared to the education sector which has developed a response... a lack of a sector-wide response is a real issue because it means that when these tools get introduced, they'll further perpetuate inequality. And it's going to benefit the charities with the greatest level of skills are all the ones who have proprietary Tech or the ones that have smart ways of using these tools as they develop'.

Therefore, a sector-wide response is needed.

As the government pushes to reduce costs and increase efficiency, the use of AI has been brought in to help public sector bodies with their workflow. For example, AI has been, controversially, used in the health sector; the benefits system; and even issuing marriage licences for example.

When speaking to **Black Ballad**, Erika Brodnock from Kinhub (a digital health and wellbeing platform giving employees access to tailored coaching, guidance and content, with the aim to boost empathy and equity in workplaces worldwide), noted that: '**[Kinhub's] patent-pending sentiment detection algorithms and learning models help mitigate the risks of perpetuating biases and inequalities in the health and wellbeing space. By focusing on diversity and inclusion early on, we want to set a positive example for how AI can contribute to health and wellbeing without perpetuating common biases, like those which lead to Black women being four-times more likely to die in childbirth [for example].**'

- Outside of government and healthcare, we have seen the implementation of AI in schools to determine A-level results and in the form of facial recognition to process student's lunch payments, nodding to a slippery slope when we circle back to real-world biases being replicated and racially minoritised groups experiencing the sharpest ends of this.

Bias that is embedded into emerging Tech as these technologies learn from sample data which often excludes marginalised communities. Emerging Tech, like other forms of technology, exacerbates harms that already exist in society as well as play a role in shaping our society.



Data & Surveillance

Data

Data is perhaps the most widely discussed but least tangible aspect of the Tech Justice inquiry. In the desk review, data was often mentioned in relation to something else, for example a specific kind of technology. This might be because implicitly a lot of existing work is coming from a data justice context, or because social justice organisations are finding their way to these questions through data concerns and technologies that impact communities and individuals they work with.

Data is discussed in a wide range of contexts making it important to get specific about what kind of data, and which actor(s)[30] are of most concern.

There is a demonstrable desire to collect and share data evident across the desk review. At the government level discussions around data can be split into legislation and strategy.

On National Data strategy

The National Data Strategy[31] (NDS) is an ambitious, pro-growth strategy that drives the UK in building a world-leading data economy while ensuring public trust in data use.[32]

A lot of these key issues are applicable to the use of data more broadly and capture national desire for more thoughtful approaches to data.

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30 https://theodi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Getting-data-right_-perspectives-on-the-UK-National-Data-Strategy-2020-1.pdf

31 'Ada's National Data Strategy consultation response' by Ada Lovelace Institute

32 'National Data Strategy' by Gov.uk

On bias and discrimination with regards to data:

There is difficulty in accessing protected characteristics data to measure or ascertain whether algorithms are biased or having adverse impacts for certain groups or individuals with particular intersecting identities, however we know from the research that biased historical data informs predictions and data categories, with the process of creating proxies involving stereotyping and generalising about behaviours.[33] [34]

As Nish Doshi points out, 'there is a need to take a decolonial approach when looking at knowledge that stems from data and information. In this instance, what is considered to be knowledge, how is it valued, who can access it and who owns it? Here is a critical difference in data stewardship which seeks to define what the data is and how it can be read.'

Data has historically been known to be used to cause harm to marginalised individuals for example, the British Empire utilised data as a form to govern bodies and to further create structural and systemic infrastructure and hierarchies. It is important to look deeply at the history of the UK and think about how deeply structures today are rooted in ideas, knowledge and data of the past.

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33 'Trapped in the Gangs Matrix' by Amnesty Internation Uk

34 Biometric Britain: The Expansion of Facial Recognition Surveillance by Big Brother Watch (PDF)

In a 2021 reflective post by DataKind UK focusing on what it means to Decolonise Data[35], particularly when thinking about Extractive Practices, the writers note:

> 'While there are many global benefits to technological advances, the trend towards open data can also pose a danger, as Rudo Kemper explained. As it is predominantly Northern donors who fund research with Global South researchers, personal data and information are shared with these Global North institutions.
>
> 'Often, researchers interview participants from different communities, delving into personal and private information, and this becomes exacerbated in vulnerable communities in the Global South. This frequently leads to a clash between local, Indigenous customs and extractive research methods.
>
> 'The global shift towards open data can also put Indigenous communities at risk. Increased visibility of Indigenous communities, land, and resources, especially through use of satellite imagery, can expose the area to non-Indigenous actors such as investors. The unequal power dynamics stemming from the colonial legacies of the Global North makes it essential to emphasise building a culture of trust, especially regarding data and research.'

Such historic links show up and repeat themselves in the ways governments often overlook the impact of surveillance, data scraping, and the like on already marginalised communities[36].

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35 'Decolonising Data' by DataKind UK

36 'The Digital Impact of Surveillance' by B.Gellman and S. AdlerBell, The Century Foundation

Even in conducting this research, particularly as a team of women of Global Majority descent, notions of equity, extraction, and knowledge remained front and centre with regards to how we approached this work. Although expert researchers were on our team, it was also important to draw from the expertise of the creative practitioner background available to us, as well as real-life campaigning and grassroots organising experience to ensure this body of work felt 'living', rather than aloof, written from an academic Ivory Tower.

Surveillance

Technology has made surveillance more covert, while at the same time making it easier to surveil increasing numbers of individuals. Surveillance and data are intimately intertwined, as often the desire to increase data collection facilitates surveillance of particular communities or groups of individuals.

The UK government has been quietly developing a system capable of collecting people's "internet connection records" (ICRs) according to reports by Wired UK. ICRs include information such as IP addresses, customer numbers, date and time of access, and the amount of data transferred. Critics argue that the system is highly intrusive and raises concerns about the proper protection of individuals' data, especially in light of the UK government's history of not properly safeguarding data in the past[37], a cause for concern.

37 'Uk Government data breach for millions of children ruled unlawful' by Financial Times

When asked to reflect to what extent human rights have been infringed through surveillance in the UK, Kerry Pimblott from Northern Police Monitoring project (NPMP) said:

> 'We're becoming more aware of the extent of surveillance of communities of colour, particularly young people of colour through social media and understanding the monitoring of young people as a real threat to their human rights, which can have diabolical consequences for everybody around them, in their networks. And that to me is a tremendous risk. We need to lock in on police practices like stop and search and other street level policing practices, as these are all connected. It creates a culture of extreme over policing and that is something we are really, really concerned about.'



Kat Hobbs - Netpol

"Police are pulling an enormous amount from social media about what particular movements are doing. This seems to be their predominant information source on a number of large social movements. Most recently, during the Bristol Kill the Bill protests, Netpol saw up to 90 people go through court processes. There were a number of house raids that took place after the protests where the police were cross-matching CCTV body-worn footage and facial recognition videos taken with photos on social media and photos from the event to identify and target people to press charges. There were a number of insecure housing people including from travelling communities and people of colour."

Another area of concern with regards to the ramping up of surveillance is in the struggle for Migrants Rights. The hostile environment policy has given the Home Office sweeping powers that mandate access to people's personal data from GPs, hospitals, schools, and job centres. This data is used to track down individuals for immigration, detention or deportation. We see Tech being used such as ankle tagging, with GPS tagging providing 24/7 location data of individuals, meaning their every movement is documented and scrutinisable.[38] And of course, as mentioned several times already, facial recognition technology is also by the State, specifically as part of the Home Office database.

38 Every Move You Make: The Human Cost of GPS Tagging in the Immigration System by BID, Medical Justice and Public Law Project (PDF)

Dr. Keren Weitzberg - Queen Mary University

"Migrants are seen to have biometrics collected as part of their visa process and asylum seekers have their biometrics taken at the point of entry. People who come to the UK on spousal visas or other entry points also have their biometrics taken and The Home Office have been developing large databases that have citizens' and foreign nationals' biometric data. This form of data collection is especially seen at the border. It is clear that biometric data collection has been normalised for foreign nationals in particular which shows a discriminatory approach in whose data is collected, where and for what purpose. Biometric forms of data collection present surveillance concern, regardless of what a persons' legal status is. Whilst collecting data is one part of the problem. The second part is developing large biometric databases that are used for further surveillance purposes. Within the Home Office, fingerprint and facial databases have been built over many years. There is a growing attempt to merge these existing databases to enable easier cross-checking of individuals' details."

On Facial Recognition and Biometric technology:

'We know that there's these really fundamental problems where a lot of technologies are really designed with white able-bodied people in mind' - Dr. Keren Weitzberg, Researcher and author of 'A Very British Problem': the Evolution of Britain's Militarised Policing Industrial Complex.[39]

- In the UK, there are growing concerns around facial recognition technology and its use for ambient surveillance. The South Wales Police and the Metropolitan Police have been at the forefront of using very cutting-edge technologies like facial recognition technology for the purposes of surveillance.

- Facial recognition technology collects people's data and there are no laws or regulations in the UK around this.

- Facial recognition technology is also being implemented in public spaces such as concerts. There are no clear means of protecting people's rights against this kind of technology in their every day lives. Nor is there a system in place for people to complain about the collection of their data using facial recognition technology at present.

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39 'A very British Problem: the Evolution of Britain's Militarised Policing Industrial Complex' by Campain Against Arms Trade

There are racial, gender and class biases with the collection of facial recognition and biometric data.

- The training data used in AI is biased by default; first by the data that is fed into training the AI. Police records are used, in which, the number of complaints, sentences, and arrests are also biassed. There is a known problem of police targeting Black people. As such, these biased records are used to train the AI to make automatic decisions about who is at high risk. As a result, Black people are more likely to be suspected as high risk by the AI.

- Facial recognition algorithms have been known to be inherently discriminatory due to the training data. Though many companies have since claimed to remedy faults related to training data, they do not adequately address the wider problems with how facial recognition algorithms are created, how they are used and upon who and for what purpose, so much so that Big Brother Watch described using use of live facial recognition surveillance technology as posing a 'threat to freedom'; being 'incompatible with human rights'; 'ineffective' and 'discriminatory' in its 2020 Briefing to Parliamentarians.[40]

- Classism is baked into technologies. For example, fingerprint scanners have become increasingly popular and commonly used in many parts of the world and in different sectors. People working in manual labour jobs have a harder time having their fingerprints scanned or read. In some instances, there have been examples of labour workers being denied access to basic and essential services because their fingerprints could not be read. Their fingerprints were tied to services such as food, government or private sector rights or entitlements.

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40 Big Brother Watch Briefing on Facial Recognition Surveillance, by Big Brother Watch (PDF)

Are there lessons to be learned from other countries on how to protect individuals from being surveilled and having their rights infringed upon?

Legislation and policies

- The Algorithmic Intelligence Accountability Act bill was introduced in 2022 in the US and required all major government agencies to have a repository or inventory of AI use cases and to show the use of AI. Though there is a lot of conversation around the AI Accountability Act and regulating technology companies, it is yet to be seen that regulations on tech companies have been applied in comparison to GDPR in Europe.

Audits and transparency

- There are various calls for more audits and more transparency around technology questioning how technologies are being used, what does the public understand about these technologies, and how can we call for more transparency around, for example, the training data that is being deployed and the way the algorithms operate in facial recognition.

- Auditing has its limitations but it can be an effective way of pushing back. Sometimes, using pre-existing legislation such as labour laws that are already in the bill.

- One of the big concerns around technology that receives complaints by civil society is that the release of technology is often rapid and fast-paced. It is challenging for laws and regulations to keep up with the rollout of Tech. However, perhaps there is a way to use pre-existing laws to slow down the development of dangerous technology.

In the current British landscape, described by some as a Big Brother situation, it is impossible to avoid state surveillance. Therefore there is a need to find ways to discuss how people are using Tech platforms in the context of surveillance without being sensationalist. Some people may feel defeated from the start if overwhelmed with all the dangers and threats, however lots of work is being done by campaigning groups to provide useful, empowering information and techniques to better manage our personal security rather than feeling disempowered by fear.



Conclusions

Overarching observations

Across the research Tech Justice was very rarely described in such a manner.

In the public sector the literature pointed to use of technology by the Home Office in tracking migration, by local and national level governments in welfare related technology, and by the police in surveillance and facial recognition. Growing use of technology in the justice system and within the education system is also notable. This technology use is happening in the absence of clear evidence of benefits or comparisons with existing systems.[41]

Overall there doesn't appear to be a Tech Justice 'movement', as such, in the UK as yet. It is not clear if this is a result of the use of technology still being quite limited or if because information and knowledge of the impacts of violent or harmful deployment of technologies is not yet known. Lastly it is clear that minoritised groups (primarily by race and those in lower socioeconomic circumstances) bear the brunt of the impacts of emerging technologies, a lack of regulations and limited accountability.

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41 Biometric Britain: The Expansion of Facial Recognition Surveillance by Big Brother Watch (PDF)

What key opportunities does the digital world offer to shifting power towards racially marginalised groups in the UK?

Academics are doing a lot of work on using data to shift power to racially marginalised communities, however, they are not speaking with grassroots groups nor are academic outputs reaching the mainstream public. Within the US, there is a community that works together to shift power - people from large Tech institutes, grassroots organisations, activists and individuals who have all experienced various issues. The landscape in the UK is dissimilar despite having a Tech industry. Hence, a focus on Tech Justice is almost missing. Ultimately the question of Tech Justice is a global one, due to the interconnected nature of our offline and online worlds, but it is important to note that, since Brexit, the UK is taking what can be described as a sector-based approach to the regulation of AI rather than having a dedicated piece of legislation, which is an interesting divergence and one that should be kept track of as to how that manifests around the deployment of AI in the UK as compared to somewhere like the EU, for example.

In general confining Tech Justice to the UK can be tricky, for instance there are organisations based in the UK working on digital rights or discriminatory uses of technology that happen outside of the UK.

When trying to focus on the UK specifically, we can ask two questions to help narrow the remit of Tech Justice in the UK and what that means:

- **How are global/ international Tech Justice issues or lines of inquiry occurring in the UK?**

- **What Tech Justice issues are specific to the UK?**

Of these, the desk research provides a lot more depth regarding the first category:

Some emergent understandings of Tech Justice include:

- Making Tech and the use of Tech more just by:
- Examining the policy aspects of the use of Technology to use in advocacy.
- Using Tech in pursuit of justice or as part of social justice endeavours.
- Mapping out the ways problematic Tech is being developed or deployed in the UK.

Broadly speaking, more practical, and clear everyday experiences of injustice related to Tech are further developed:

- More legal, social, or less tangible questions being asked are more outward looking.
- Things closest to social justice give us a stronger sense of reframing the root causes, work looking at intersections is doing much better at getting towards this with migrants justice probably best example of this.

Call to Action: The Role of Field Catalysts

Catalyst's role in addressing Tech (in)Justice as part of their work in the digital ecosystem:

Networks like Catalyst are well-placed to address key issues particularly in the realms of:

- Upskilling people, organisations, funders, and grassroots groups in digital literacy, enabling them to more effectively and more savvily engage in the Digital space.

- There is a role to play with regards to Data literacy, particularly for charities and NGOs, who are a big stakeholder in Catalyst's work currently.

- Catalyst has a role to play in supporting people, organisations, funders, and grassroots groups to be ready to engage with and understand Emerging technologies, reducing some of the fear and anxiety around what the future holds because of their increased importance in our digital lives.

- Best practice and leading by example in the World of Work and in its working culture, doing better by any individuals of Global Majority descent who may work with Catalyst in the future.

- Related to the above, as a values-led network, it is important that Catalyst takes a root-causes approach to systems change, and moves away from corporatised, tokenistic, and harmful EDI approaches, moving towards decolonial, intersectional, Black Feminist principles of care, ensuring the most marginalised by Tech are not just invited to a table built already, but are an essential part of building the DNA of the network if it is to be truly liberatory and just in its work.

- Acting as a bridge between funders and organisations, especially small grassroots orgs, and groups that need funding for their digital work (including campaigning work and work that is cutting edge and pushing the envelope), helping to redistribute resources as a means of shifting power.

- Continuing to commission research, such as this, that pushes the envelope and explores ideas in the digital space that others are not (yet) talking about, particularly with a UK-lens.

- Resourcing the convening of caucus-based groups, particularly coalitions for People of Colour and People of Global Majority Descent and people with experience of disability to lead the conversation, network with each other, collaborate and work together on their various pieces of interconnected work, helping to establish a field for Tech Justice to keep developing as an umbrella in the UK (we need to catch up with everyone else!)

Funding as a means of shifting power

Reflecting on the importance of reciprocity as a value in funder relationships after hosting a convening for some of Catalyst's funders, I wrote that 'from the beginning, we've been keen for our funders to also see themselves as part of the Catalyst network - funding the work of others in the network, whilst also being involved as stakeholders. Often reciprocity can be lacking in more conventional funder-grantee relationships due to established patterns of hierarchy and power, dictated by the default 'transactional' nature of the partnership.[42]'

42 'From Programme to Movement': Continuing to redefine our relationship with our funders' by Catalyst.

Funder PoV - Case studies in shifting power through resourcing

How do you leverage your funding to support and shift power to racially marginalised communities?

Disrupt Foundation:

'It is important for funders to be aware of where knowledge in the sector sits, what resources are available and how to be a connector. At present, Tech funding remains more project focused in comparison to venture capitals or Tech cycles which focus more on funding an idea and moving through iterations.

'Funding co-produced projects which involve different methods, different people and digital skills are really important. Whilst funders may have ambitions to fund exciting projects within marginalised communities, sometimes communities would need support with basic visual upscaling, upskilling and capacity building. It's important to centre the needs of individuals rather than to prioritise the wants of funders.' - **Dalia Abu Yassien**

Promising Trouble:

‘Storytelling feels really important at the organisation. At present, storytelling is being built into the inclusion strategy to highlight and centre best practices from marginalised communities. In the broader Tech space, Diversity, Inclusion and Just are not necessarily at the forefront of sector actors’ minds. In part, because there is a lack of lived experience. Power to Change recognises the importance of sharing stories based on lived experiences as it brings key issues to the agenda and highlights what is important to people. The sector also requires spaces and opportunities to talk about the different work that is happening and share knowledge, stories and contacts to facilitate an infrastructure of inclusion that leads to producing change.

‘Further, this work requires resourcing especially as it can be emotionally laborious. The more we can connect up and have that solidarity space for ourselves, the more realistic it is to do this work over the long term.’ - **Roseanna Dias**



What lessons have been learned that other actors including Catalyst can glean regarding funding as a means of shifting power?

- How do you create funding modules that create the space and time for people and fund these spaces to enable people to test and test their ideas whilst holding space and room for failure?

- Reconceptualising what it means to fail - seeing this as an opportunity to have tested a co-produced project with people from a community where you as a funder or project member might learn new things.

- Funders have the power to increase access individually but also as a group. What if a group of funders could come together and approach a Big Tech company, for example, to pitch a specific test within a specific platform to improve safety in a way that is co-designed with a community? What if?

- Funders can focus on creating new and alternate ecosystems that engage with Big Tech companies and communities.

- Funders need to think about being braver and taking risks around finding people who have the expertise (including lived expertise) on their subject matter and enabling an opportunity to give time, space and money to experiment within that particular area.

- Sharing examples, particularly from projects that may not immediately link to Tech Justice. For example, applying a Tech lens to issues like housing justice, migrant justice, or young people broadly. This could enable deeper learning and linkages between broader justice issues and Tech Justice but can also provide an opportunity to increase access to Tech through upskilling.

In conclusion, a more just approach to Tech would go some way to dismantling many of the root causes of social injustice, and vice versa, as all questions of liberation are connected. As outlined at the beginning of this report, the pursuit of justice involves recognising and challenging the structural inequalities perpetuated by both historical and technological factors. It requires fostering inclusive technological innovation, holding powerful entities accountable, and engaging in meaningful conversations that consider the diverse needs and experiences of individuals and communities.

It's not a coincidence that if you stop and look closely, Black women and women of Global Majority descent are at the forefront of some of this century's most important discussions about race and technology: from trolling, to online harassment, to algorithmic bias, influencer culture; and of course the very building blocks of movement building. Not only does racial justice intersect with Tech Justice, but in a world in which all our identities are deeply impacted by the axis of race (i.e. gender is racialised, as is one's experience of class, disability, sexuality, and so on), how we engage with technology in a just and more liberatory manner is intricately connected to all questions of social justice and radically (re)imagining our ways of being.

Further Resources

Useful Orgs

Public Sector

- Centre for Countering Digital Hate
- Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation
- 100% Digital Leeds
- West Midlands Data Science Ethics Committee

Academic/ think tanks

- Data justice lab (Cardiff University)
- Alan Turing Institute
- Minderoo Centre
- Data Kind UK
- Ada Lovelace Institute
- Open Data Institute
- Oxford Internet Institute
- Protecting Minority Ethnic Communities Online (PRIME) project (University of York and Heriot-Watt University)

NGOs and non-profit organisations

- Stemettes
- Diverse AI
- Liberty
- Amnesty
- Black Valley
- Color in Tech
- Code Bar
- No Tech for Tyrants
- Open Rights Group - Migrant Digital Justice

- Big Brother Watch
- NO2ID
- Southall Black Sisters
- Bail for Immigrant Detainees
- Migrants Rights Network
- Migrants Organise - Abolish Reporting
- Digital Poverty Alliance
- Good Things Foundation
- Privacy International
- Do It Now Now
- 5rights
- Fair Trials
- Racial Justice Network and Yorkshire Resists - Stop The Scan Campaign

Relevant Legislature and Guidance

- AU auditing framework
- Guidelines for AI procurement
- Review into Bias in Automated Decision-Making
- Data Ethics Framework
- Ethics, Transparency and Accountability Framework for Automated Decision-Making
- UK Data Protection
- Online Safety Bill
- UK Digital Strategy 2022

Resource Bank

- Miro Journey Space, designed by Rachel Arthur (Visual Representation of the Research)
- Research Section of Catalyst website, with links to additional resources as part of this package of work
- Series of related blog posts, written by Siana Bangura (including summary of Roundtable event, facilitated by Nikita Shah)
- A Manifesto for a more Tech Just Society
- Research Deck Presentation
- Further Questions & Explorations Miro Space

Glossary of Key Terms

Ableism

The unjust treatment, discrimination and social prejudice of persons with disabilities. Ableism is rooted in the assumption and belief that persons with disabilities are inferior to persons without disabilities.

Anti-Blackness

Anti-Black racism is a term that describes the beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, stereotyping and discriminations specifically directed at people of Sub-Saharan African descent (including its diaspora). These beliefs, attitudes, and prejudices are held by individuals and are therefore also embedded into the policies and practices of institutions, including schools and universities.

Anti-racism

Anti-racism refers to the active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organisational structures, policies, practices and attitudes rooted in white supremacy, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably. Anti-racism is an active way of seeing and being in the world in order to transform it. It goes beyond passive notions of 'allyship' and moves us towards more active forms of comradeship.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality summarises the interlinking and connected nature of all types of oppression. The Oxford Dictionary defines intersectionality as 'the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage'. The term acknowledges that everyone has a unique combination of identities, resulting in specific experiences of discrimination and oppression. Therefore we must consider the many different ways people are marginalised by our societities – including, but not limited to: gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, and age for example.

The term was first coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and was added to the Oxford Dictionary in 2015.

Misogynoir

Misogynoir refers to a specific hatred and prejudice directed towards women and girls racialised as Black. Coined by Black feminist Moya Bailey in 2010, the term highlights the intersections of race and gender, and the unique experiences of women and girls navigating anti-Black racism and prejudices on multiple fronts.

Power

Power is about our relationships with one another. It is the ability to accomplish something or act in a certain manner. In a work setting, power includes the ability to make decisions, set deadlines, allocate work, delegate, recruit and promote people, disagree or say no without fear of personal repercussions, and access others in power through networks. Power is not just individual, but cultural. Power is relational and can shift in different contexts. Whiteness, wealth, citizenship, and education are some of the mechanisms through which certain groups can have more power. Power can be used intentionally both in negative ways and positive ways, and individuals within a culture may benefit from power they are unaware of.

White Supremacy & White Supremacy Culture

White Supremacy is the belief that the white race is inherently superior to other races and that white people should have control over people of other races and backgrounds. White Supremacy Culture describes the social, economic, and political systems that collectively enable white people to maintain power over people of other races. Ultimately this is the basis of structural and institutionalised racism the world over.

(As defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary.)

Contributors Biogs

Siana Bangura

Siana is a writer, producer, performer, campaigner and community organiser hailing from South East London, now living, working, and creating between London and the West Midlands.

She is the founder and former editor of Black British Feminist platform, No Fly on the WALL; she is the author of poetry collection, 'Elephant'; and the producer of '1500 & Counting', a documentary film investigating deaths in custody and police brutality in the UK and the founder of Courageous Films. Siana is also co-founder and co-curator of the Sierra Leone Arts & Culture Festival (SLACfest), founded in 2017.

Siana works and campaigns on issues of race, class, and gender and their intersections and is currently working on projects focusing on climate change, the arms trade, Tech Justice, and state violence. Formerly a campaigner and co-ordinator at Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), and a producer at Catalyst, co-creating networks & ecosystems, she is currently the Head of Phoenix Education's Changemakers Lab, and continues to network weave as a freelancer out in the field.

With three TED Talks to her name, Siana is also a public speaking trainer, workshop facilitator, and social commentator. Her work has been featured in mainstream and alternative publications such as The Guardian, The Metro, Evening Standard, Black Ballad, Consented, Green European Journal, The Fader, and Dazed, as well as the 'Loud Black Girls' anthology, presented by Slay In Your Lane.

Across her vast portfolio of work, Siana's mission is to help move marginalised voices from the margins, to the centre.

More at: @sianaarrgh | linktr.ee/sianaarrgh

Nikita Shah

Nikita has a curiosity about using art to both analyse and present findings on complex global issues. While Nikita has been writing poetry since her childhood. In 2015, she began to bridge her creativity with her research interests. Nikita wrote her Master's thesis 'Threads of Migration: A Decolonial Unravelling of British Kenyan Asian Identity, Belonging and Citizenship'. As an international development professional, she has provided high-quality research, analysis, client and project management across a portfolio of work. Nikita has a background in migration, modern slavery, decoloniality, human rights, climate change and gender-related issues. Most recently she has co-led a series of 'Unlearning Sessions' to promote anti-racist and decolonial practices in the workplace; creating a safe, open and trusting space for colleagues to critically challenge and re-imagine international development. Nikita holds an MA in Global Governance from the University of Waterloo, Balsillie School of International Affairs and a BA (Hons) in Politics from the University of Warwick where she Co-founded The Colonial Hangover Project.

Find out more about Nikita Shah's work on the Hyphen Poetry website.

Quito Tsui

Quito is a Researcher at The Engine Room where she works on technology in the context of conflict and humanitarian organizations, and the development of a technological environment rooted in human rights and leads the design and execution of research projects. Quito is fascinated with narratives and the stories we tell ourselves about our histories, communities and the possibilities of the future. Prior to the Engine Room, Quito worked in transitional justice and international criminal law, and conducted research at Stanford University, the University of Cambridge and the LSE. She cares deeply about technology in the context of conflict and humanitarian organisations, and the development of a technological environment rooted in human rights.

Find out more about Quito Tsui's work on The Engine Room's website.

Rachel Arthur

Rachel works at the intersection of design leadership, learning and well-being. She helps organisations create more human learning and service experiences with design-thinking. She works at a strategic level and helps stakeholders unlock insights and translate them into tangible programmes and services. She has led several international research projects from China, Philippines, India, Mexico, Turkey, Indonesia and specialises in understanding the cultural needs of users. She has a track record enabling change by growing team culture, design and research capabilities and community of practice at Education First and Pearson Education.

She coaches individuals from kids to emerging leaders to fulfill their highest potential with purpose and passion.

The Engine Room

The Engine Room is a non-profit organisation with a distributed global team of experienced and committed activists, researchers, technologists and community organisers.

Their vision is for social justice movements to use technology and data in safe, responsible and strategic ways, while actively mitigating the vulnerabilities created by digital systems.

Since 2011 Engine Room has supported more than 500 organisations, big and small, from different corners of the globe, through pro bono partnerships and paid consultancies.

As a result of their work, humanitarian organisations have reconsidered questionable technologies, more funders are managing grantee data in responsible ways, and many more activist groups have developed robust technical infrastructures and data management practices.

Visit The Engine Room website to learn more about their work.

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To keep up with all of Catalyst's research commissions, visit Catalyst's reseach page on their website for more information.