

# *spiked-online*

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## ***spiked-culture debate***

### **Culture and difference**

#### **Is cultural diversity policy good for the arts?**

(This debate is closed and is a read-only archive)

## **Political correctness stifles debate**

[24-July-2003]

Dr Gëzim Alpion

On Saturday 5 July, I wrote an article for the *Birmingham Post* taking issue with the EMMA (the Ethnic Multicultural Media Awards), under the title 'Racism of a Different Hue'. I argued that the EMMA Awards ceremony is as guilty of discriminating against the people whose achievements it apparently wants to acknowledge as any institution or person who categorises, segregates, pigeonholes and stereotypes talents on the basis of the colour of their skin. Furthermore, the EMMA Awards ceremony seems to exclude artists from Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Albania, Poland, Russia) who, like any other non 'ethnic' British citizens, have made the UK their new home. No 'ethnic' community in Britain is immune from racist attacks, and as an East European academic and writer myself, I have noticed more than once that being white in the UK is no passport to equal opportunities.

In an ideal world, I would prefer outstanding people to be acknowledged not because they belong to ethnic communities. Considering that we hardly live in an ideal world, or as George Orwell put it, we still live in a world where ‘All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than the others’, we who are reminded daily that we belong to ethnic communities must work harder to acknowledge our talents which are part and parcel of the wealth of talents the British nation has always been blessed with.

I have been surprised and saddened by the response I have received to this article – my colleagues said that they could have lost their jobs if they had written such an article, or that they couldn’t believe that the *Birmingham Post* could accept this kind of controversial material. Are people in the UK really under the influence of a mysterious Big Brother or are we victims of self-censorship? At the moment I don’t know. As an academic and writer, however, I feel it is my duty to speak openly about any issue no matter how sensitive. No harm comes from a well-informed open debate. Ignorance is power only for the blind who do not foresee the consequences of being too politically correct.

- **Dr Gëzim Alpion**, research fellow in cultural studies, University of Birmingham, UK