

# The legacy of *gal-dem*



The *gal-dem* team at a London event

## Urmī Pandit and Nana Okosi speak to the team behind the publication that revolutionised the British media landscape

In its own words, *gal-dem* was “so much more than a magazine”. The closure of the online and print publication sent a wave of shock and sadness through the community it had created. Over a period of eight years, *gal-dem* covered topics spanning politics, culture, lifestyle, first-person essays and more, through the lens of people of colour from marginalised genders.

In an industry that lacks representation and diversity, *gal-dem* served as an outlet for underrepresented voices to not just be heard, but spotlighted. Beyond this, though, it was – at its core – a home for a host of talented creatives, fresh, innovative discussions, and shared experiences. We spoke to the journalists behind *gal-dem* to learn about what it meant to them, and its lasting legacy.

### Chapter one: The beginning of *gal-dem*

Suyin Haynes, Head of Editorial:

“It was in 2015 that I first joined *gal-dem*, in my last year of university. I saw it in a Facebook group and joined as a sub-editor from there. It was very spontaneous and collaborative, and it was all voluntary in those days. After I did that for about a year, I helped to produce the first print edition. It became a company in 2019, which meant it could pay people, so I came back in 2021.”

Halimah Manan, Chief Sub-Editor:

“I saw the [Facebook] post and I was so excited by the prospect of having a space for people like me. I expressed my interest and got added, starting in May 2015. I think the philosophy of giving a voice to women of colour – and later non-binary people too – is great because I discovered I am non-binary while at *gal-dem*!”

Suyin Haynes:

“It took on a different energy – it didn’t really feel like work in the early days. But, then it became something much bigger. When *gal-dem* started, there was a report by the Sutton Trust that said 97 per cent of British journalists were white and 55 per cent were male. I think it’s so important that journalism is reflective of society and of world in which we live today. The feeling – especially at the beginning – of knowing that this could be really big was exciting.”

Halimah Manan:

“When we were all learning how to create a magazine together, some of us had more experience than others, but a lot of us were university students. There were maybe 10 people, which grew as the magazine grew. Back then, you would rarely see fully-fledged Black and brown people in the media, not stereotypical portrayals. People in the team would feel pigeon-holed into writing certain kinds of articles

for mainstream publications. So, it was really freeing to be part of *gal-dem* where we could write and create articles about anything that interested us, touching on personal stories but also exploring whatever else we wanted.”

### Chapter two: What set *gal-dem* apart

Naomi Larsson Piñeda, Senior Politics Editor:

“It was always a space that I really admired and saw as important – especially going from working in a newsroom like *The Guardian*’s. In my role at *gal-dem*, it was called the Politics section, but it was actually dealing with a lot of social issues – human rights topics, a lot about communities. Everything is political, and everything is related to the policies that the government is making and implementing. What our Politics section did was frame it as how this is affecting different people around the country and abroad.”

Lakeisha Goedluck, Freelancer:

“*gal-dem* was a breakaway from traditional journalism. It offered me an opportunity to share my truth and tell gritty, heartfelt stories that had an inherently personal element to them. I wrote pieces about my name and its use in pop culture, called ‘My Name is Keisha and Pop Culture Ruined My Name’, and a piece about drug use, Black female agency and abuse, based on the BBC show, *I May Destroy You*. I felt like I was making more of a difference with the stories I wrote for *gal-dem* because they were steeped in my own lived experiences, or at the very least, highlighted the plight of Black people in a collective.”

Suyin Haynes:

“One really important thing about *gal-dem* was the autonomy and the freedom and playfulness – the tone of voice. I can’t think of another publication anywhere else, where I could publish an opinion piece titled ‘F\*ck Tim Westwood’ or ‘Now The Queen’s Dead, It’s Time We Bury The Monarchy’. I think that tone is really important because leftist, progressive media that represents the perspective of people of colour from marginalised genders is all too rare. Being that place, that destination – I’m really proud of that.”

### Chapter three: The impact of *gal-dem*’s storytelling

Kayleigh Watson, Music Contributor:

“For ‘The Hyper-Scrutiny Of Black Women’s Bodies In The Music Industry’, I ended up talking with Aluna Francis, Jillian from Lion Babe, and Rahaven. I’m still very proud of that. Also, in an interview with Laura Mwula when *Pink Noise* came out, I felt she could speak more openly about racism in the music industry because she was talking to *gal-dem*.”

Lakeisha Goedluck:

“My favourite piece was the article I wrote about Black loneliness. It got into the discourse around class relations in the UK and the closure of public spaces, which is having negative ramifications for all citizens but especially those of colour – both young and old. There was a lot of discussion from the Black community about feeling this but not being



Singer Emeli Sandé with Editor-in-Chief Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff

able to put words to it. It’s a largely unspoken about issue that’s gotten worse since the pandemic, so I was glad that I was able to help bring it into public consciousness.”

Rose Eskafi, Head of People and Wellbeing:

“We wanted to do something different in January 2023. Our team was culturally diverse and I love learning about people’s backgrounds, so I suggested we write about the long-held traditions that bring us comfort. The team shared some meaningful traditions that have kept them connected to heritage, family, friends and childhood memories throughout the years. It was a beautiful way to learn more about the team and to connect on a deeper level.”

### Chapter four: The legacy of *gal-dem*

Riann Phillip, Editorial Assistant:

“[It was] paving the way and showing other publications that our stories are important, people do want to read them, and brands will invest in us. I think without *gal-dem*, the media would not look the way it does right now. *gal-dem* opened doors, but it also broke down doors. ‘Representation’ is such a buzzword these days and it gets thrown around a lot. But no one is doing it, or has done it, like *gal-dem*.”

Suyin Haynes:

“It was the key aim of the project to change the narrative and have communities writing their stories themselves, not being written about. I think that continues to be really important. I’m really sad that the project doesn’t exist in that same way, but I do feel that the spirit does, and I’m proud of having played a small role in building that legacy.”

### Chapter five: The state of British media post-*gal-dem*

Kayleigh Watson:

“I think the sense of loss that out-poured on social media following *gal-dem*’s closure says a lot about both readers and the industry, and how the publication impacted the media landscape. In order to move toward a healthier, united society, people need to connect with the experiences and struggles of others from similar and different backgrounds. I don’t think traditional media has caught up.”



The ‘gal-hood’ issue from 2016

Suyin Haynes:

“I think *gal-dem* punched so far above its weight, and wasn’t like some sectors of British media, which continues to be very elitist and very cliquey. I often felt that *gal-dem* was not taken seriously – in many ways, independent media is still not taken seriously. So, I was really proud to oversee significant projects and collaborations that built on the work that went before me, and helped cement our name as a force to be reckoned with.”

Naomi Larsson Piñeda:

“We live in a very diverse multicultural society, and it’s glaringly obvious that that still isn’t reflected in the news or media that we’re consuming. So, that is a very fundamental reason as to why it was important for spaces like *gal-dem* to exist, because it definitely digs at the heart of that.”

Riann Phillip:

“It’s my responsibility to keep *gal-dem* alive through the work I do elsewhere. I think it’s on all of us. The state of British media at the moment is pretty bleak. If anything, this is the time for new things to start. *gal-dem* started with no resources – there wasn’t a magic pot of money that just appeared and so came the magazine. It started because a group of friends wanted to start a magazine and they did it. Anyone can do that, and anyone should do that.”

# Fuel for thought: The female presenters driving change at Formula 1

Since its inception in 1950, F1 has been a man’s domain. Katie Baxter and Otilie Blackhall talk to the trailblazers steering the circuit scene in a new direction

Five women lie on sun loungers, their tanned and toned bodies wrapped in neon bikinis. Beneath them, a race car speeds past as they soak up the Monaco sun. This scene may sound like something straight out of a problematic 1980s Miami motor movie, but it’s not. It’s actually a clip from series one episode three of Netflix’s *Drive to Survive*. And it sets the tone for the show – throughout all 60 episodes of the hit Formula 1 documentary series, women speak for just over an hour in total, less than three per cent of the total run time.

And yet, this representation fails to reflect the drastically changing landscape of F1. Once markedly void of women, with just five female motor racing drivers in the history of the sport, today we are witnessing a remarkable transformation around the F1 paddock and grandstands alike.

Up until relatively recently the absence of women has extended far beyond the race track itself. According to F1 CEO Stefano Domenicali, around 40 per cent of Formula 1 fans are now women, but women journalists and presenters are still having to work to keep up to speed with their male counterparts in the adrenaline-fuelled world of Formula 1.



Courtesy of Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff

Courtesy of Charles Johnson/Associated Press