

## CHAPTER 2

### **Heritage-making, Borderwork and (Multi)Cultural Organisations in the North of England**

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#### **Abstract**

This chapter is based on recent AHRC-UK research into the ways that Black and minority ethnic organisations in the North of England engage with their heritage through their own cultural organisations. This heritage-making is analysed as ‘borderwork’ located outside of mainstream cultural organisations: as ‘boundary-making’ and/or as ‘contact zone’. The chapter offers critical insights into heritage work as an affective process by minoritized people who use the past or traditions to express creatively their place within the world, and strategically assert their voices in the public sphere. It concludes with reflections on the research process among motivated participants, and the impact and potential of ‘collected’ heritage shared in networked relationships.

This chapter discusses heritage, broadly defined, and the networks of Black and ethnic minority cultural organisations that address heritage-related issues. I ask questions about why, how and for whom such organisations operate, taking a ‘cultural democracy’ approach as per Mulcahy, rather than institutional ‘democratising of culture’ (Mulcahy 2006). By this I mean, studying how people on the ground engage with culture and heritage on their own terms through their own activities, rather than how mainstream institutions disseminate and assist access to pre-inscribed ideas about culture and heritage. As Hadley & Belfiore noted, such research work tries to circumvent the ‘hierarchies of cultural value [that] have always been, and always will be, bound up with questions of power and authority’ (2018, p. 222).

The research presented here examines the deployment of ‘heritage’ by Black and minority ethnic groups in the north and north-east of England - people who are immigrants or marginalised by race or ethnicity. The project studied the place of these minority ethnic people within local cultural environments, both in terms of representation and access, and in terms of agency. The research positioned minority-led cultural activities at the centre of enquiry, rather than as an adjunct to mainstream museums’ social engagement work. The project, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, was called ‘(Multi)Cultural Heritage: New Perspectives on Public Culture, Identity and Citizenship’. It asked, what are the ways that minority ethnic cultural organisations express and engage with heritage; what are the aims and challenges of those

organisations, and what are the UK cultural and heritage policy implications and possibilities of their cultural work.

Immigration issues have become a central political concern in the UK, with global movements of people, ideas and ways of life coming into conflict with local realities. Creating a ‘hostile environment’ for immigrants has been a central UK government policy (Travis, 2013). The Brexit vote in the UK - the 2016 public referendum to depart the European Union - reflected this social conservatism (Pendlebury & Veldpaus, 2018). In the region encircling Newcastle Upon Tyne, an area of industrial decline with less ethnic diversity than most other parts of the country, Brexit and this attitude to migrants was supported.

In recent years the north-east has experienced increasing migration from the Middle East, Somalia, Pakistan and Bangladesh with the number of residents not born in the UK rising by over 40% since 2008 (Wieser 2019). Despite this fact, Wieser notes that migration still does not figure in mainstream self-narratives of the ‘heritage’ of the north-east of England, and has attracted only limited historical or heritage research and few institutional representations. Thus the (Multi)Cultural Heritage project sought to highlight knowledge-making by immigrant and ethnic groups as an integral part of the history, society and culture in the north of England. By drawing attention to the motivations and impacts of the voices, activities and self-representations of multicultural organisations, the research aimed to tackle inequalities in determining what is designated and legitimised as culturally ‘valuable’ (EHRC 2016). It also intended to further equality and capacity in the heritage sector through direct exchange with culture and heritage policy managers of bodies such as National Trust, English Heritage and Arts Council of England. Several types of cultural organisations in the north of England were partners in the research, affiliated with different groups: the Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art and the Jewish Museum in Manchester; Eclipse Theatre which focuses on theatre produced by Black artists; the virtual site called Everyday Muslim, and in Newcastle-Gateshead, the North East of England African Community Association (NEEACA), Vamos Festival (a Latin American group); Sangini Arts (a mixed Hindu group); the Angelou Centre serving primarily Black women, and GemArts with its mixed minority ethnic scope. The project hoped to promote and facilitate a self-sustaining network among these practitioners, and facilitate their contributions to social equality and cultural democratisation.

The study inspected the participants’ organisational activities around art, culture, and identity to get a better sense of what the concept of heritage meant and why it was important to people. The

chapter presents the ways that ‘heritage’ was implied or demonstrated in these organisational expressions, and how their cultural labour had aesthetic, social, pedagogical and political motivations and impacts. Heritage was understood as a process of cultural production and active ‘making’ of individual and community senses of self. The analysis offers insights into how the negotiation and adaptation of heritage represents a potential source of tension, as well as solidarity, within both communities and wider society. Particular attention is paid to the ways that such heritage-making might be seen as ‘borderwork’ located outside of mainstream museums and arts organisations: as boundary-making (Rumford 2006) or as contact zone (Clifford 1997) or as engines of connectivity (Cooper & Rumford 2011).

### **What is heritage?**

Heritage was examined in this study not as buildings or preserved landscapes, but as traditions, expressions, identities, cultural practices linked to the past. This follows from the critical heritage studies tradition (Smith 2006; Waterton & Smith 2010), where heritage is understood as a discourse and process practiced by groups and individuals to create alternative and plural understandings of the past. Heritage in this view is positioned as a relational and meaning-making process more so than preserved objects or resources; a designation of significance (Ashley 2016). Heritage is then the practices that signify the past, as well as the goods and things that we raise up as an important inheritance from the past.

I was interested in the ways that people produced heritage as a do-it-yourself process – how they chose to signify or mark the past and traditions and culture in some way. It centred on those Black and minority ethnic organisations who had deliberately focused on their particular cultural identifiers to organise their community development and arts activities. This is not to say that anyone actually used the word heritage to describe this ‘cultural thing’ that they did. Heritage was a foreign word to many. But they did mark and signify aspects of their culture that are drawn from the past as essential to their group and personal identities, and demonstrated a desire to pass this on as a legacy for future generations. Their sense of heritage, or relationship with the past, tended not to be connected to the past represented through preserved buildings, monuments or exhibited objects in their newcomer country (the United Kingdom).

The research project looked at how and why such Black and ethnic organisations expressed cultural heritage, studying their organisational environments and their practices including creative,

exhibitionary or performance or community development activities. As mentioned above, several multicultural organisations agreed to give their time to the research. The study was guided by three primary questions: firstly, considering comparatively why each organisation existed - what issues affected them, who had a stake in their operations, their audiences, and the nature and impacts of their public activities. Secondly, how heritage was constituted through each organisation's representations and activities, to critically analyse what aspects of the past were valued. Thirdly, what was the political and policy context of their activities. The research employed qualitative data-gathering within the participatory research and 'engaged scholarship' tradition (Cuthill 2010) using grounded theory analysis. This involved document, ethnographic, interview and activity-based audience methods, as well as visual and textual media analysis, combined with four collaborative workshops that brought all partners together to discuss issues and impacts, in intense full-day group dynamics. This chapter focuses on the first area of research: the motivations, operations, issues and impacts of the organisations themselves.

### **Outside the Mainstream**

Key to this project was understanding those multicultural organisations that were positioned outside the mainstream, that is, outside the normalised spaces of whiteness that are constituted by British museums and galleries and performance spaces. The goal was to think about how communities engaged with their sense of heritage through cultural organisations which they led. This is a different organisational environment than inside mainstream culture or heritage institutions where terms like 'social inclusion' and 'diversity' are used – concepts, however, that normalise whiteness as the example of what heritage means in the British world (Naidoo 2016). Mainstream diversity initiatives tend to situate ethnic minorities as receivers of institutionally-generated programs, as beneficiaries of social inclusion (Lynch 2013, 2017), in order to further the 'democratisation' of mainstream culture (Mulcahy 2006). In those institutions, Black or minority heritage tends to be restricted to representation, rather than a meaningful, committed, resourced, long-term process of shifting power dynamics. Solving the diversity 'problem' in such cases often involves reaching out for the handful of well-known names in Black or minority ethnic communities to sit on committees or 'co-create' heritage activities. Cultural production is often directed towards existing white audiences, or to stimulate additional non-white audiences; it is about assimilation to an entrenched sense of 'Britishness' (Hall 2004).

Scholars have written about the importance of increasing representation within mainstream British and European white culture in an attempt to raise awareness among white audiences and ensure that non-white audiences see themselves legitimised within most cultural venues (Littler & Naidoo, 2004; Lynch, 2013). However, practices often situate people as ‘giving voice’ (Lynch 2017), rather than recognising that people and organisations are already expressing those voices. Such ways of legitimising what is heritage tends to result in misrecognition, and a sense that heritage-making is a white-only practice (Naidoo, 2016).

The aim of the (Multi)Cultural Heritage research was to bring to the centre the perspectives and activities of minority cultural producers themselves. Everyone has culture and heritage, although theirs might be marginalised from the mainstream. What kinds of arts, cultural and heritage work were people doing on their own? Sadiya from Everyday Muslim, an online heritage site, found that ‘doing’ heritage in her small organisation made her community realise it already had a voice:

*When I was talking to other heritage organisations about the idea of creating a museum, they were very cynical because they just thought Muslim communities just don't engage with heritage, they're not interested, they don't really care, it's not really on their radar. But then I found that was completely wrong, I think what it has been is that they've never been represented and therefore have thought that was not a space for them....*

The goal of the (Multi)Cultural Heritage project was to realise the agency of ‘outside’ voices to advocate whose heritage is important and how society should value them in real economic, social and political terms. Cultural production should ‘decolonise’ not just diversify, and demand that funders, universities, and other players in the heritage and cultural sectors deal with inequality, racism and white privilege head on. This implies structural changes to how heritage decisions are made and who gets to make those decisions.

## **Borderwork**

This kind of research focus is inherently about ‘borderwork’. Borders imply a boundary or an edge or periphery, often on a nation-based scale (Rumford 2006). Power relations saturate such borders, defining the conditions of knowledge production. On this border each side has their own agendas and knowledge is negotiated across this space of difference (Somerville & Perkins, 2003). Yet, such boundaries also imply that something is shared, where two sides meet (Star, 2010).

Rumford (2006) writes that borderwork requires thinking about the role of ordinary people in making borders, rather than assuming that this is always the business of the state. Borderwork and acts of bordering can be an everyday activity, sites for bringing together diverse, if unequal, communities of knowledge. Such actions have been defined as ‘acts of citizenship’ by which ‘non-status persons constitute themselves as being political’ to work to shift established practices, status and order, and create new possibilities (Isin 2008, p. 16). This borderwork can be ‘the stuff of action’ to produce new knowledge (Star 2010, p. 603). Wilson adds to this argument that ‘creativity’ is itself borderwork, a social process located in boundary spaces of human interaction that ‘thrives at the edge of things, in the gaps’ (2010, pg 368).

By virtue of the research focus and the selection of case studies, I have defined the work of heritage-making by multicultural organisations in terms of borders, positing an inside and outside in relation to the mainstream. The organisations involved in the research project placed their own work as on the margins or marginalised, implying a boundary between themselves and others. This very fact separated them out, situating them as bodies and communities who are not inside in the dominant sense - and separate. Critics argue that placing those voices to one side of mainstream culture sidesteps inclusion and further minimises them – they are described as ‘cultural silos’ (Fleuras 2009). In the UK in the 2000’s, New Labour actively worked to break down such silos through policies of ‘social inclusion’ that sought to integrate communities into culture and heritage institutions through regulations (Mason, 2004). Such single-voice cultural and heritage organisations might be considered isolating, in terms of participating in the broader public sphere (Brown 1993). But from the point of view of *users* however, those people within minority or immigrant cultures, their single-voice organisations on the borders or margins are active locations to assert their creativity and their own authority.

But there can be different understanding of the rules of engagement within this process, most often because of the workings of power and who is in control. Yuval-Davis et al argue that the impact of everyday borderwork must also be understood in a situated intersectional way, considering the differential perspectives of the social actors who are taking part in bordering encounters (2018, p. 229). The experiences of bordering can depend on social positioning and the situated gaze affected by citizenship status, ethnicity, race, gender, educational and professional positionings. While clearly a complex process of intersectional positionings, the borderwork of my partner organisations will be discussed here from two perspectives: as ‘boundary-making’ – a wall that contains and

separates – or as a location that enables exchange, a ‘contact zone’. The wall or boundary invokes edges and barricades. But the contact zone positions the organisation as a site for drawing together, negotiating and bridging or even disagreement among those inside and those outside the border. Somerville & Perkins (2003) describe the two positions as ‘border maintenance’ and ‘border crossing’ – the first making clear the nature of difference between inside and outside, and the second about translation and hybridity across this in-between space. Both concepts invoke some form of relation or mediation or transaction across a zone of interaction (Message, 2009).

Contact zone is a term famously used in museum studies, proposed by Mary Pratt (1992) and James Clifford (1997) as a space for colonial encounters. Pratt describes the contact zone as a space in which ‘peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other’ and characterised by unequal power relations (Pratt 1992, p. 7). The contact zone is then this space of communication where performances are enacted by both sides. The contact zone is an in-between space, characterised by Homi Bhabha (1994) as the ‘third space’ where identity is constructed through the negotiation and holding-together of difference and opens up a possibility of hybridity.

The analysis offered below considers the inward-looking and outward-looking positionalities of the borderwork of project partners: their boundary-making and contact zone motivations; who was considered an ‘insider’, looking in or looking out, and the effects of these positions.

### **Boundary zone - looking inward**

In the cases of some of the project partners, the motivation for establishing a border organisation reflected both making a wall and a contact zone, and of looking inward and looking outward. But the primary need for some kind of protective space was expressed by most organisations. Borderwork here was about creating safe spaces either for their marginalised community, or in some cases specifically for women. This was physical and mental protection of bodies and ideas, sometimes expressed as a ‘behind the scenes’ space of private interactions away from the eyes of the dominant society (Shryock 2004).

Inherent in this protected space was the enhancement of group belonging – a way of ensuring community, reinforcing identity and maintaining connections. Yuval-Davis et al point out that belonging relates to emotional attachment and feeling ‘at home’ as part of this safe space (2018, p. 230). Sadiya from the project partner Everyday Muslim summarised this feeling: “I think the basic

aim is really to create a sense of belonging for the community, to be able to say this is who we are and this is our home as much as anybody else.” Kath, a Caribbean woman who sat on the NEEACA executive, said of their New Year’s community social, “this is my place where I can let my hair down.” During the Angelou Centre’s heritage BAM! Sistahood, one participant said, “I enjoy being around all the other women. Learning, sharing together.” Another remarked said, “It’s very big for me to talk, because opening heart is hard, we suffered lots of things. ... I’m learning to be strong, to talk and stand up for myself and stand up for others.”

At its core, belonging also invoked a sense of heritage – an identity affirmed by ways of doing or thinking drawn from grandparents, or in other cases an intangible cultural expression like music or food or dress. Sadiya said she wanted:

To raise awareness of what Muslim heritage is and to engage with people in understanding how they perceive their heritage from the community..... From a personal perspective, my children have very little connection with back home. With generations that come after, it’s to be able to say this is my heritage, this is who I am....

The socials and special events of NEEACA, were affirmations of belonging and safety in the midst of white society, where members definitely let their hair down, but also participate in heritage-based talks and arts expressions. According to Beverley:

I think for me one of the interesting things is how as a group we understand culture, and how we pass on culture.... Africa is a huge continent. It’s not just one country which many people presume it is. Very diverse, very varied, very modern as well... So I think we felt that in a sense when we promote African culture, we have to promote the diversity of our culture, rather than giving either a homogenous picture or a picture of Africa as a place of jungles, which is what people often associate with Africa.

Beverly was clear that her organisation was meant to bring together people with African roots, and friends, in social gatherings. But their motivation also extended to sorting out, as a group, the cultural meanings of being African, in its complexity, a mission that also had outward-looking aspirations of ‘promoting’ African culture and correcting misperceptions or stereotypes.



Sharing traditional culture and heritage with next generations was essential for all groups. Vamos focussed much of its festival programme on different children's events for example Mexican Day of the Dead costumes and processions focused on recalling memories of ancestors. CfCCA promoted Chinese New Year children's arts and crafts as well as artistic and digital YouthLab activities. NEEACA emphasised African-based culture through kids' activities like storytelling by Grace Hallworth and movement with Gateway Studios, passing on sensibilities and expressions thought to be important, as well as histories that had black or African roots. Beverley from NEEACA recalled the importance of their memory work with children, citing how schools routinely overlook stories of Black history. She said, 'it's a massive amount of work to be done for everybody – schools, white children, Black children, children with one white parent... In a sense what we want to do begin to sort of chip away at that ignorance in a very positive way'.

Some groups maintained ethnically-based boundaries in order to focus specific training and development, for example the support of minority artists. It is not easy to gain access to the cultural sector as an ethnic actor or artist or filmmaker. Traditional art galleries and performance spaces can feel quite alienating. "These places are not for the likes of me" was often repeated. Organisations like Eclipse Theatre, Sangini, and Vamos gave minority artists the platform and the experiences so they can be gainfully employed in their field.

The Angelou Centre used its arts and heritage-related training programmes to offer Black women new skills in areas like taking oral histories, developing exhibits or creating films, but also practical tasks like filling out arts grant application forms. There was a level of comfort in learning to do new things through a minority-led organisation like the Angelou that offers protection. Learning through socialising and arts or heritage expressions reduces the sense of exposure, risk and fear that can accompany and public interactions in the outside world. The accreditation of this training was an important aspect of their work, considering many of the users have no higher educational training that is recognised in the UK. The Angelou's training and art sessions also produced materials exhibited in displays and presented at events, such as poems, prints, felting and embroidery. The writing and art sessions served to record many of the women's personal experiences and their relationship with their heritage. One filmmaker promoted by the BAM! Sistahood! project was enthused about "being part of a very determined group of women who had this vision about having a place where Black women could come and be trained, be educated, ... and reach a point where they could work."

## Contact zone, looking outward

The second way of looking at this border work is as a site to establish relations with outside or mainstream society – the Contact Zone, an interface for insiders and outsiders to come together and meet. But to move from boundary zone to contact zone requires courage and self-confidence on the part of minorities because of their lack of power. Participants must feel that they are equals, and will derive equal benefit from the exchange, not just participating in token representation. Sara Ahmed (2012) writes eloquently about the perils of being the token person of colour within institutional spaces that see her as speaking for all of her ethnicity, or whose presence is used as an indicator of how ‘diverse’ the cultural institution has become. Token representation by heritage sector employers is being challenged by groups such as Museum Detox in the UK, led by youthful Black workers. They ‘campaign, lobby, debate, advocate’ for changes to structures and practices, and their White Privilege Test confronts museum leadership and employees to self-scrutinize in a transparent way ([museumdeto.com](http://museumdeto.com)).

This borderwork carries with it risk, as participants with less power can be exposed and vulnerable. bell hooks describes this space as one of ‘radical openness ... a margin—a profound edge’ and found that ‘locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a “safe” place. One is always at risk’ (hooks 1990, p. 149). The collaborative work here as a minority participant is precarious, risky and emotionally difficult.

Padma, another partner from Sangini, expressed a sense of obligation to represent her community and take a leadership role in working with outside mainstream cultural institutions. She felt that not participating could have negative consequences, and said ‘nothing *about* us, *without* us’. Co-production of exhibitions with community-based partners has become an important ingredient in the museum field. Within the UK social engagement agenda, finding ‘minority’ partners is an essential requirement for funding (Lynch 2013; Thomson & Chatterjee 2014). But for Padma, such external or contact zone activities had to have real impact for her organisation, and she carefully weighed her precious time, energy and labour. Being asked to participate in external relationships requires a lot of free labour: there are significant material consequences of being asked and feeling obliged to constantly ‘engage’ or ‘participate’ or ‘represent’. Padma said:

The emails came around ‘would you like to take part?’ I am being very selective now. I used to say yes because I am so passionate about things, but now I am really careful as to how

much, you know, I can, and because I am working now more and more in my own right as an artist.... I am fine with this [MultiCultural Heritage] because it is something I believe in, the whole idea of migration, heritage, identity.

Project participants talked about the draining nature of working in their *own* organisations – most were volunteers labouring from a passion to preserve and promote community and identity. They were responding to community-level needs that valued kinship obligations, social networks, language and cultural knowledge (Yuval-Davis et al. 2018). Beverley from NEEACA said:

I remember meeting one Iranian women, that was looked up to in her community, but she was tired. She was pulling the strings for the community on her own. She tried to get some people involved, but she said to me when it came to actually doing something, they disappeared. But she struggled on because the pride for her culture, where she comes from, [but she] was tired, just trying to get money, the community expecting so much and not helping as much. But she was motivated because she wanted the best for her community.

The research workshops affirmed this sense that to operate within ones' own small organisation to promote culture and a sense of heritage was draining but fulfilling. To move on to engaging with mainstream organisations in a contact zone – including my demands as university researcher wanting to 'collaborate' – also required exceptional commitment.

Engaging in the contact zone was frequently cited not as a cooperative engagement or exchange, but as a more assertive push-back position. Here it was about asserting a *visibility* within the surrounding mainstream culture. NEEACA was adamant that a primary motivation was to demonstrate “the importance of African culture, and the importance of fighting racism and ignorance that there is”. A Caribbean arts partner, Kath, said, “we want to and need to show our differences, and to challenge the sameness of the dominant culture.” Degna from Eclipse Theatre said bluntly, “we want to shake up whiteness.”

In workshops and interviews we came back repeatedly to their problems with racism or misogyny in mainstream society. This was especially important for Black-led organisations. Beverley from NEEACA felt that racism affected their ability to work as an organisation:

What we are very keen on is to see the links between Black culture and fighting racism, and to see black culture as being very diverse, not something static that's been imported from Africa and is the same for everybody for all time...It was very clear that the government was very anxious about the existence of black groups...I think for them unless they are involved in controlling it, they don't feel safe...So although you can get funding...for things that are cultural... what is much harder to get funding for is things that are around fighting racism, things about influencing policy, things about making a change.

Borderwork in the contact zone also meant an intersectional advocacy role for minority organisations. Rosie from the Angelou Centre, for example, believed deeply in the feminist work she did as a means to change the world. She expressed the importance of minority women validating their own heritage first, expressing and sharing those ways and ideas, as an essential precursor to their own demands for equality with men, and, in society as a whole. She said that by expressing and celebrating their heritage differences and commonalities, the women could advocate for equality. Her organisation, one of the longest-running Black cultural organisations in the north-east UK, foregrounded relationships between people and the use of culture, arts and heritage to act together communally.

In a project policy workshop, Rosie bluntly and eloquently reminded all partners that inequality was fundamentally a structural problem within mainstream society, saying:

.... there is mass structural inequality within government and public bodies, and a disconnect between public policy, (the) cultural sector, and culture & heritage practices.... Heritage, arts and culture are entwined with public bodies which we need to accept, otherwise we are not facing reality....equality work is absolutely tied in with protecting and respecting people's rights... When we are looking at equality and how it filters through – heritage, arts and culture are not stand alone.

Key for Rosie was that borderwork could *not* be standalone but a foundational and equal part of a networked environment where human rights was central. She said:

Our communities are not an add-on, equality is not an add-on and it has to be central in everything that we do - equality must be a central part of public institutions and bodies... Yet, a range of equality practices and issues are not being actioned by major public

institutions who receive the larger proportion of government funding....our organisations need strategies and tools to monitor public bodies.

Her advocacy position was that work from the Border could be a force in changing *mainstream* systems and structures, not only a position just for protection or interactions. Such a position would actively work at cultural bridging.

### **Cultural bridging**

GemArts also stressed their mission to provide such advocacy for social change and equality, and for them, this work lay in the arts. Vikas, the Director of GemArts, said, ‘we use arts and culture to actually address issues ... we know that we can use creative practice to address issues but also to celebrate complex identities within communities.’ GemArts receives significant government funding from the Arts Council of England, thus straddles both sides of borderwork, as a minority-facing organisation, and as an outward-facing group aimed at addressing white audiences and furthering national policy goals. Vikas cautioned, however, about the difficulties of this dual role wherein he felt larger institutions sometimes would take on the ‘creative’ elements of artistic projects, and ask his organisation to do the aspects aimed at ‘community’ or ‘heritage’, ticking required diversity boxes rather than true collaborative work.

Arts expression was about heritage expression for Vikas: creative performances of deeply held senses of ‘self’ and of ‘difference’, connected to the past and tradition, in order to speak out for equality. For example, the annual summer Masala festival celebrates South Asian Arts, and the mini-Masalas take these out into schools and children’s workshops. But GemArts also takes an additional step in adapting and evolving new artistic and cultural forms, and ‘making’ new forms of heritage – that is, new ways of responding to the past to create something different. This bridging, expanding or creating something new, was a key component of their borderwork. Most project partners agreed that creating new cultural forms was essential to connecting second and third generational young people with their heritage cultures. While their organisational goals were to pass on traditional knowledge and histories to new generations, they also said that the dynamism that comes from multi-cultures offers new life and relevance to old cultures. This is most evident in music – the blending of musical styles of hip hop, rap, pop with ancestral music produced new sounds and different flavours, while still drawing on the deep identity recognition that comes from ‘heritage’ forms of artistic expression. Vikas felt that ‘such hybrid music-making makes a difference to young lives.’ He cited his multicultural youth group North by North East and the

internationally-touring Meza Boys comprised of Czech and Roma immigrant youth as prime examples of this work.

Vamos Festival places this philosophy at the centre of their arts practice, an annual Latin American festival that began in Newcastle and since 2015 has also taken place in Leeds. Nik, director of Vamos, felt disconnected with his 'heritage' and felt that Latin culture was oversimplified and even racist in its depiction in the UK. His festival was his way of helping people make connections across cultures, and inspiring people through each other's ethnic performance of art. He said:

I had a personal connection to Latin American cultures, and felt they were kind of invisible and they weren't really that engaged in the city and the cultural activities. And I knew a lot of people who are not Latin American who were passionate about those cultures or knowledgeable or studying in some area related to that or had travelled or had a passion for music. So there is that drive for me ... to sort of try and bring those two groups together.

Vamos was clearly expressed here as a contact zone that used music to bridge traditions, but also to create something new. Organisers at both Vamos and GemArts believed that their efforts could change the 'cultural ecology' of the UK's north-east. They felt they were drivers of the cultural agenda, rather than being invited by mainstream institutions. Instead of responding to questions from the outside, they were the ones asking the questions and taking the initiative to build bridges as part of their heritage borderwork.

## **Reflections**

While the (Multi)Cultural Heritage project revealed the complicated nature of the borderwork undertaken by these minority-led organisations, the research also offered insights about those people who were committed and engaged emotionally within these organisations. These participants demonstrated wide social networks and communities of practice, participated in the political decision-making for 'their' communities, and experienced deep forms of belonging and nuanced senses of heritage. Interviews indicated that the very action of participation within these enterprises generated rich levels of social and cultural capital for those who were actively committed to them, both within their communities and in wider society.

These observations were a product of intense one-on-one interviews and group workshops that were themselves contact zones requiring commitment and productive tension from university researcher

and collaborating partners. The time asked from participants, in light of their own precarious organisational and personal demands, revealed their heartfelt dedication to the topics of heritage, identity and culture. Most were well aware of the ‘bordering’ nature of their organisations’ work — shielding, promoting and nurturing community values, while at the same time keenly desiring to share and translate their experiences across cultures. Somerville & Perkins (2003) have called this space the ‘discomfort zone’, with all parties coming together from unequal subjectivities to create new knowledge.

I wanted to think about this research project in terms of creating a ‘cultural ecology’, perhaps potentially within its dynamics altering the cultural ecology of the UK northeast. The idea of a cultural ecology as a response to ‘borderwork’ is an attractive idea based on systems thinking, which encourages us to see culture and heritage as a dynamic, changeable and interconnected ecosystem, with elements that interact in a chaotic fashion to affect the social fabric over time (Makeham et al 2012). In this research we brought together Chinese, Caribbean, Latin American, Pakistani, Indian, European, Iranian artists and community organisers, mostly women, in dynamic, exciting and sometimes awkward cross-cultural exchanges. As noted in Somerville & Perkins’ work, participants positioned themselves diversely and intersectionally according organisational and discursive roles, affiliations, or personal histories. This borderwork was more about ‘collected’ than ‘collective’ heritage. Such thinking seems a little bit akin to the idea of ‘boundary-making’, but more fraught with conflict and precarity than the usual interpretation of ‘contact zone’. But we were creating an ecology here, a tangled network of signification, in this heritage-thinking work.

The commitment of my partners to come together and think differently about heritage-making was to me, the real impact of this project. It was the sharing of this, the bonds formed, and the relationships communicated through heritage consciousness-raising in all its complexity that was essential - the importance of *heritage-making* as a ‘collected practice’. But further, by tackling future research together around structural and resourcing issues that inhibit these minority-led organisations it is hoped that the borderwork of this project will establish a truly lasting contact zone. At the policy workshop in April 2019 we began to discuss a new and tangible outcome: a desire by partners to create a more politicised umbrella steering group, a forum or think-tank body for minority-led arts and heritage organisations in the north-east region in the UK. This would be an actual organisational entity to undertake strategies for group action, monitor public bodies, and undertake group funding bids. Such an entity would then be an active group for powerful cultural bridging within a networked ecology. This should be productive in enriching our understanding of

heritage, but also work to overcome inequalities in the cultural and heritage sectors, bringing on the cultural democracy that we all seek.

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