

## **(Multi)Cultural Heritage Workshop 2 - Summary**

**DATE:** Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2018

**TIME:** 10: AM- 4PM

**LOCATION:** CFCCA in Manchester, <http://www.cfcca.org.uk/>

**PRESENT:** Susan Ashley, Hengameh Ashraf Emami, Marianna Tsionki, Nikolas Barrera, Rosie Lewis, Kathleen Boodhai, Sadyia Ahmed, Leonie Wieser, Degna Stone and Afshan D'souza-Lodhi

**APOLOGIES:** Beverley Prevatt, Don O'Meara, Wessie Ling, Rosie Sherrington, Sinead Burke, Kitty Porteous, Ysanne Holt, Padma Rao

### **1. Manchester Jewish Museum (MJM)**

The second of four workshops started with an introduction by visiting the Manchester Jewish Museum, [www.manchesterjewishmuseum.com/](http://www.manchesterjewishmuseum.com/). Gareth Redstone, Learning Manager, provided a detailed and profound explanation of the museum's history and what they are doing currently with their £7 million HLF redevelopment project. Gareth explained how the Museum strategic plan focused on 'food', an important part of Jewish culture, as a means to connect and relate to diverse communities. The focus on food enabled people to share their stories and narratives and emphasise similarities while acknowledging the differences among local and wider audiences. Merton Paul, a long-time volunteer at the museum, then gave a tour of the historic synagogue.

### **2. Introductions**

Participants proceeded from the MJM to the workshop at the Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art (CFCCA), [www.cfcca.org.uk](http://www.cfcca.org.uk). Susan Ashley welcomed participants, introduced all participants, and reviewed the first workshop held in February 2018. She outlined the aims and agenda for workshop 2, and the following workshops. Marianna Tsionki and CFCCA were thanked for hosting.

### **3. Presentation "Tell and Show" on Heritage**

Each participant was asked to give 5-10-minute talk about one activity offered by their organisation that they would consider to be 'heritage' oriented, why it is heritage and how audiences were engaged.

- Marianna Tsionki from CfCCA explained the central contribution of their new archive and engagement materials, funded by the HLF. She also discussed Chinese New Year activities in and outside of the gallery that attracted 500 participants, which was overwhelming. One of the main aims was to connect CfCCA to people outside of the gallery. She also emphasised the importance of connecting with the local Chinese community.
- Sadiya Ahmed from Everyday Muslim [www.everydaymuslim.org](http://www.everydaymuslim.org) shared a photo of her father sitting in a suit with birds at Trafalgar Square, taken soon after he had arrived UK as a young man with lots of hopes and dreams. She discussed how seeing him out of her daily context prompted her to start the Everyday Muslim online history project. Sadiya shared the many religious, technological and cultural changes between the two generations of her family. The heritage activities of Everyday Muslim are digital and

physical, and include seminars, community works, symposium and networking, with the Archive the most important part. The organisation introduces heritage, while not actually using the word heritage.

- Nikolas Barrera from ¡VAMOS! addressed his work, which explores culture through festivals. He explained his feeling of distance and lack of connection in the UK from Latin American culture and traditions. While this was the inspiration for ¡VAMOS! its message has changed, encompassing many cultures in the Kommunity space in Newcastle, with sessions such as dance, visual art, Iranian New Year party, and music workshops. Kommunity helps people make connections and get inspiration and learning from each other. See [www.instagram.com/vamos\\_festival/](http://www.instagram.com/vamos_festival/)
- Afshan D'souza-Lodhi and Degna Stone Eclipse Theatre <https://eclipsetheatre.org.uk> discussed their play *Black Men Walking*, about Black people hiking in the rural landscape, which aimed to 'shake up whiteness'. Eclipse tells stories about BME people and events in the past important to Black British identity in the north of England, like the first black suffragettes, riots of Black British, and Martin Luther King in Newcastle. Degna pointed out the importance of exploring heritage and connecting with people, to help in understanding current issues.
- Rosie Lewis talked about The Angelou Centre, a Black feminist organisation. She explained that The Centre is a political statement in northeast, and their works are based on holistic service (not doing one thing such as art). But heritage is at the heart of everything they are doing. The Angelou provides space for women who marginalised, enabling an ongoing conversation and development. Rosie talked about the BAM! Sistahood! project, a collective action aimed at gathering untold stories. The work of the women to develop a 6-foot print banner that illustrated their barriers, resistance, freedom, education, culture and identity was used as an exemplar of shared heritage production.

#### 4. Lunch

Participants had opportunity to continue networking and one to one discussion while they enjoyed a Chinese themed lunch.

#### 5. Discussion groups

The participants gathered in two groups and discussions were held around 'What is heritage?' and 'Heritage Issues'.

##### What is Heritage?

Participants discussed diverse definitions to answer this question. They also were asked What does our heritage 'do' for us? Do we need a relationship with the Past? And Is there one aspect of heritage you feel you must keep?

Many different perspectives were brought to the meanings of the word, and some participants admitted not really understanding the word at all. Heritage was defined as cultural meanings passed on through time, as things that survive, as history that shapes us, or as stories or experiences that shape us and connect us to the past and the present. Not limited to buildings, but identities and stories- something alive and always evolving. Heritage is often personal, informed by experiences – perhaps passionate experiences we want to keep. Meaning, resonances and connectedness with each other and environments were important. Heritage means doing things related to cultural background, which is both given and taken

away, or that gets repeated and reinterpreted not fixed ('timeless and spaceless' in one view). Heritage is what is deemed to have 'value', but others asked why are some things 'unvalued'?

We also touched on the question of 'what does heritage do'? Participants reflected on the uses of heritage for connectiveness, belonging and identity-building. Their heritage engagement was seen as a way to express and/or reinsert narratives that were missing from mainstream ideas about 'British' history and heritage. From sharing powerful experiences, and signifying it as heritage, those without power could assert power. When asked to articulate one aspect of heritage participants wanted to keep, language, literature, music and emotional experiences were some of the things expressed.

### **Heritage Issues?**

The groups were then asked to reflect on some issues about minority ethnic heritage: the relationship of heritage and the arts; the relationship of heritage and youth; and attitudes towards 'British' heritage.

#### **Heritage and the Arts:**

Participants discussed the way that artists generate art no matter what their heritage – that imposing ethnic identities on artists essentialises them. Ethnic minority artists should be viewed and critiqued equally by society. But creating spaces to enable the practices of those artists not part of the dominant sector narratives was important. Some noted that minority ethnic artists did draw on lived experiences in their work, especially deeply felt and important experiences which might be signified as 'heritage'. Using art to challenge and make political statements about society (e.g. Black Men Walking) was vital – even/especially those in subsidised organisations.

#### **Heritage and youth:**

Passing on through generations, not necessarily holding on, through reusing and remixing emerged during the discussions about youth. Mixing heritage creates a fusion by hybridising – music was cited as an example that gave people belonging and place but creates a new heritage. The problem of co-opting of heritage and its connection to commercialisation was raised, such as Bollywood. Is this a problem? Passing language on was again addressed, and the importance of the stomach! A powerful poem was read by Afshan.

#### **'Our' heritage and 'British' heritage:**

Points noted include heritage centres/institutions seen as colonial, classist and alienating, often dominated by 'good immigrant' narratives using history stories. British nationalist 'heritage' is not personal, but about grandiosity (empire) with stolen objects and erasures. Instead, there was a desire for 'dirty dark past every day in your face', that future generations could use to make decisions. Institutions like HLF are broadening the definitions of Britishness, but more needs to be taken up. The potentials of digital platforms like Twitter and Instagram were noted for storytelling, but also for archives.

## **6. Next workshop**

The third workshop on 'Impacting' will be held at Kommunity in Newcastle on Tuesday 6 November from 10:30 am – 4 pm. The workshop aims to address how project organisations have an impact on community and the cultural and heritage sectors, and, how the research project and partners might 'impact' each other. Partner organisations will be asked to prepare 5-10 minute talks with concrete examples of their 'impacts' related to culture, identity and heritage.