

# **Diversity in the spotlight: Highlighting perspectives on race, culture and migrants**

**Voluntary Sector Studies Network Day Conference  
Thursday 22nd November, 2018**

**The Bond Company, 180-182 Fazeley Street, Birmingham B5 5SE**

---

## **Programme**

---

**9.45 10.15**    **Registration and refreshments**

**Morning session**

**10.15-10.20**    **Welcome and Introduction**

**10.20–11.00**    **Presentation 1**

Asif Afridi, Birmingham Race Action Partnership  
*Race equality and the voluntary sector: learning from the inquiry into the future of civil society*

**11.00-11.30**    **Presentation 2**

Palmela Witter, independent researcher, London  
*Black youth and loss of trust: how can black women community activists create a platform for change?*

**11.30–12.00**    **Presentation 3**

Liz Bailey, TSRC, University of Birmingham  
*Women doing it for themselves: 1980s community organisation amongst black women's groups in Bethnal Green*

**12.00–12.30**    **Presentation 4**

Abi Woodward, CRESR, Sheffield Hallam University  
*Understanding the power of the 'informal sector': Exploring the lived experiences of Pakistani Muslims in Sheffield*

**12.30-12.40**    **Information exchange/research sharing**

**12.40–13.40**    **Lunch**

**Afternoon session**

**13.40–14.00**    **VSSN Annual General Meeting**

- 14.00–14.30 Presentation 5**  
Mike Aiken with colleagues from the *Pledge Against Charging* campaign, Sussex  
*Making a pledge: exploring the process of coalition building to defend health care rights in a hostile environment*
- 14.30–15.00 Presentation 6**  
Lucy Mort, Manchester Metropolitan University  
*Organisational loss in the age of austerity: voices from the frontline of a migrant organisation*
- 15.00–15.15 Break**
- 15.15–16.00 Presentation 7**  
Lucy Mayblin, University of Sheffield  
*Asylum and Refugee Support in the UK: Civil Society Filling the Gaps?*
- 16.00–16.30 Closing plenary**  
Contributors:
- Jan Etienne, Honorary Research Fellow, Birkbeck University of London
  - Sado Jirde, Director Black South West network
- 16.30 Finish**

## Abstracts and biographies

---

### Presentation 1:

#### **Race equality and the voluntary sector: learning from the inquiry into the future of civil society**

**Asif Afridi**

---

Asif will discuss in overview the findings from a two-year inquiry into the future of civil society ([www.civilsocietyfutures.org](http://www.civilsocietyfutures.org)). He will outline the findings from a strand of the inquiry which focused specifically on ‘race’, race equality and civil society. Is civil society talking about ‘race’? If not, why not? What can be done to create a more sustainable and impactful future for work on race equality in civil society?

**Dr Asif Afridi** is Deputy CEO at brap (Birmingham Race Action Partnership), a UK-based equality and human rights charity ([www.brap.org.uk](http://www.brap.org.uk)). brap adopts an inclusive and rights-based approach to equality, drawing on twenty years of practical experience in promoting social justice. Asif is Chair of the Equality and Diversity Forum (a national network of

equality and human rights charities) and a panel member of the Independent Inquiry into the future of Civil Society. Asif is a published researcher and previously worked in the field of international human rights protection. [asifa@brap.org.uk](mailto:asifa@brap.org.uk)

---

## **Presentation 2:**

### **Black youth and loss of trust: how can black women community activists create a platform for change?**

**Palmela Witter**

---

My earlier research (Witter, 2017) focused on the marginalisation of black and minority ethnic (BME) voluntary organisations and identified an absence of black and minority ethnic voices both in policy debates and voluntary sector research. In particular, I studied cases of black-led (African-Caribbean) mental health organisations. Many small, specialist BME voluntary organisations providing badly needed advice and support were being pressured to 'mainstream' resulting in the loss of accessible, culturally sensitive services. Like Tilki et al (2015), I also observed that 'collaborating' with larger non-specialist service organisations – whether voluntary or public agencies - was not generating wider learning or benefits from the creativity of black-led voluntary organisations among the larger organisations involved. Instead, they were often exploited for their specialist experience and expertise but later marginalised, with some ceasing to exist.

More recently, drawing on my long experience in youth work, including in voluntary and community organisations, I have been concerned with the increasing mistrust of mainstream society and growing street violence among black young people, and the roles of black women activists in strategies which might address these issues. In this presentation, I will draw on some of this research which echoes anxieties from my earlier work about unheard and 'raw' voices largely absent from both mainstream policy debates and studies. While these absences prevail, it may call for collective activism within black communities if we are to find better and more creative strategies. However, there is a strength, resilience and desire for change within black communities, often initiated by older black women, which is potentially growing. We would do well to heed their voices and their analysis of ways forward.

**Palmela Witter** has twenty years' experience of youth and education services. She has also been heavily involved in community development work and is a chair and trustee in her local community. Her research interests include young people, mental health and the role of older black women in community solutions, together with the continuance of BME voluntary and community organisations. She has a Masters in Voluntary and Community Studies, and in 2015, won the prize for the best new researchers' paper at the Voluntary Sector Research conference. Based on her research, Palmela has published a chapter in 'Civil Society Organisations in Turbulent Times' (Milbourne and Murray, 2017). In 2018, she spoke on black youth and black women's community roles at a Birkbeck university conference and is contributing a chapter based on this to a new book by Jan Etienne. [palmela\\_witter@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:palmela_witter@yahoo.co.uk)

---

**Presentation 3:****Women doing it for themselves: 1980s community organisation amongst black women's groups in Bethnal Green****Liz Bailey**

---

This paper focuses on the foundation and early activities of the London Black Women's Health Action Project (LBWHAP). Founded in 1982 the group was set up by women in the Somali and Arab communities in the Bethnal Green area of London. The LBWHAP addressed the specific health needs of black women by providing education, support and advocacy. The organisation's key activities focused on the issue of female genital mutilation but also included a broader range of health issues affecting black women.

The LBWHAP was a grassroots project, organised by women for women. They stated that the group provided a 'platform' to bring together women in the area and 'facilitate communications between us' in order to better bring 'demands forward and fight for effective change'. The group argued that black women faced a number of barriers to accessing state services, in particular healthcare, because of racial discrimination, language issues and cultural differences. The LBWHAP felt that these issues were particularly severe for vulnerable immigrants and refugees who were unaware of their rights. This case highlights an important story of activism in the community as the organisation fought to address the intersectional issues faced by black women migrants.

**Dr Elizabeth Cookingham Bailey** is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham's Third Sector Research Centre on a Leverhulme funded project looking at continuity and change in the voluntary sector in Bethnal Green from 1945 to the present. This project also looks at the strategies for survival used by voluntary organisations regarding delivery of services, funding and management as well as their relationship to the welfare state. Liz was an LSE Fellow in the Department of Social Policy (2016-7) teaching graduate and undergraduate students. Her PhD work looked at the development of English education policy in the 1980s and from that she is currently completing an article on the usage of narratives of crisis in policymaking.

[E.C.Bailey@bham.ac.uk](mailto:E.C.Bailey@bham.ac.uk)

---

**Presentation 4:****Understanding the power of the 'informal sector': Exploring the lived experiences of Pakistani Muslims in Sheffield****Abi Woodward**

---

While much is known about the coping strategies of low-income individuals and families who are predominantly white, the experiences of minority ethnic groups remain largely unexplored. Drawing upon empirical data collected across two PhD studies, this presentation will focus on the experiences of Pakistani Muslims in Sheffield to provide an insight in to how this group gets by day-to-day.

All minority ethnic groups are more likely to live in a deprived area compared to their white British counterparts, but does this mean that they are living in poverty or have a poor

quality of life? The Pakistani group is most likely to be in persistent poverty but less likely to access welfare services and food-aid. How then, do low-income groups get-by when they are not leaning on these safety nets? Are they seen to be 'looking after their own' and 'just getting on with things'?

I will firstly present an overview of my own PhD research in which I conducted 23 interviews and a focus group with Pakistani Muslims. This will form the basis of the presentation where I will explore examples of how this community (who are living in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Sheffield), engage in self-help and mutual-aid through collective participation as a means of getting by. I will introduce Chris D's research which included eight Pakistani participants, to explore the lives of young male 'hidden NEETs' (not in employment, education or training whilst not accessing welfare), to understand why they do not claim welfare and how they manage to get-by. Through this combined qualitative data, I will explore issues of benefit entitlement, work ethic, poverty, and financial insecurity, alongside positive examples of how cultural, religious and family values provide a vital safety net for the Pakistani community.

**Abi Woodward** is a third year PhD researcher in the Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University. Her research focuses on the coping strategies and everyday practices of Pakistani Muslims living in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Sheffield, exploring the extent to which these strategies are driven by religious, cultural and family values. In particular, Abi is interested in how this group may be engaging in collective participation and mutual-aid groupings to access more informal resources and support mechanisms to get by day-to-day. Prior to commencing her PhD, Abi completed a Masters in Research (MRes) programme with Distinction; her dissertation explored the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers living in Sheffield.

[a8041326@my.shu.ac.uk](mailto:a8041326@my.shu.ac.uk)

---

#### **Presentation 5:**

**Making a pledge: exploring the process of coalition building to defend health care rights in a hostile environment**

**Mike Aiken with colleagues from the *Pledge Against Charging* campaign, Sussex**

---

Changes arising from the UK Immigration Act (2014) aimed to restrict access to health care for certain groups of people living in the UK. These changes have particularly affected vulnerable groups including refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and immigrants. This paper explores the process of contesting these changes at city level. In particular it examines the practice of coalition building among civil society groups to develop a rights-based pledge for access to healthcare (PledgefortheNHS, 2018). Pledges, charters and petitions served as mechanisms to assert beliefs and make demands against discrimination or injustice long before modernity. Hence from the Magna Carta (Vincent, 2012) to Thomas Paine (1792) and Wollstonecraft (1792) they have played a role in asserting or codifying citizens' rights. In recent times the Birmingham Pledge set out a statement to combat prejudice in the USA. In the UK, attempts to de-contest controversial issues under New Labour (Kendall, 2010) were followed by active challenging of the voice role of certain groups under a Conservative administration.

The paper undertakes this exploration in three stages. First, it briefly sketches the context at policy and street level bureaucrat level (Lipsky, 2010) from injunctions to create a 'hostile environment' for certain migrants (May, 2012) to the Windrush scandal of 2018. It then focuses, second, on the complexities involved in the practice of drafting, agreeing and launching a pledge through partnership/coalition processes. It draws on voices from those engaged in developing the pledge – including campaign groups, migrant support groups and voluntary organisations. Decision making processes, timescales and agreeing precise wording present familiar challenges for 'integrative' and decentralised groups rather than 'segmentalist' or hierarchical organisations (Moss Kanter 1983:27). The paper concludes with reflections on how far practitioners see such initiatives as challenging injustices in the expressive arena or affecting changes at policy and practice levels.

**Dr Mike Aiken** has been a researcher or practitioner in the community, voluntary and co-operative sector for over 20 years, and has worked inter alia at The Open University and for IVAR (Institute for Voluntary Action Research). His published work includes articles in *Voluntas*, *Voluntary Sector Review* and *Public Management Review*. He remains engaged as an active participant in local community action and campaign groups.

[m.aiken@phoncoop.coop](mailto:m.aiken@phoncoop.coop)

---

## **Presentation 6:**

### **Organisational loss in the age of austerity: voices from the frontline of a migrant organisation**

**Lucy Mort**

---

This talk foregrounds the experiences of a lost organisation that supported – and was driven on the labour of – migrants and refugees. It will reflect on organisational ethnographic research undertaken as part of a PhD project that sought to understand the experience of austerity in a voluntary sector organisation that supported migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to access health, welfare and social care services. The organisation under study succumbed to funding cuts in the aftermath of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review which created intense instability in local authority – voluntary sector relations. As an organisation set up at the height of New Labour initiatives that foregrounded partnership working between the local authority and the voluntary sector, and at a time of significant funding for community cohesion projects, they were intertwined with the state in ways that inhibited them from opposing funding cuts.

My role as an 'insider' researcher allowed me a unique opportunity to document an organisation in crisis and to gain insights into the affective nature of crisis and loss in the 'age of austerity'. That the organisation facing catastrophic cuts was one that supported migrants was understood by those interviewed, not as a coincidence, but as politically motivated in a climate of rising hostility towards migrant communities. The slow closure of the organisation was experienced differently by workers depending on their own positionality; with workers from refugee and migrant backgrounds experiencing personal austerity more sharply.

Despite this research documenting a period of abject crisis, the culture of care and spoken desire for further resistance to hostile government policies (not necessarily acted upon)

point to ways in which 'loss' as a theoretical framework can be utilised in thinking about the future of social care provision for migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking communities.

**Dr Lucy Mort** has recently completed a PhD at Manchester Metropolitan University in the department of Social Care and Social Work. Her thesis explored the dual politics of austerity and hostility in the contemporary context of service provision for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in England. A qualified social worker, Lucy has 8 years' experience of working in the migrant and refugee voluntary sector. Lucy is currently working in a practice context with migrant women who have experienced gender-based violence and with the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme. She is also working on several publications from her thesis, and in 2019 Lucy will be published in an upcoming edited book on "going the extra mile" in Social Work with refugees and migrants – in which she poses that going the extra mile should be conceived of as a collective – not an individual – endeavour. [lucyhbmort@gmail.com](mailto:lucyhbmort@gmail.com)

---

### **Presentation 7:**

#### **Asylum and Refugee Support in the UK: Civil Society Filling the Gaps?**

**Lucy Mayblin**

---

The vast majority of asylum seekers in the UK are not permitted to enter the labour market. In the absence of the right to work asylum seekers receive welfare support, which amounts to less than a third of the weekly spend of the poorest 10% of British citizens. This presentation discusses recent research on the third sector response to the poverty created by this policy regime. Through a four-pronged methodological design I map the scale of this response nationally, and in doing so offer an alternative critical perspective on the inadequacies of government policy, inadequacies which lead to the human rights of some who are within, or who have been through the system, being breached.

**Dr Lucy Mayblin** is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Sheffield (transferred from Warwick at the end of October). Her research focuses on the politics of asylum. Since 2015 she has been researching the economic rights of asylum seekers in the UK (funded under the ESRC future research leaders scheme). She has published widely on asylum related issues. Her book, *'Asylum After Empire: colonial legacies in the politics of asylum seeking'* was published in 2017 and won the 2018 Philip Abrams Memorial Prize.

[L.Mayblin@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:L.Mayblin@warwick.ac.uk)

---

### **Plenary contributors**

---

**Dr Jan Etienne** is Honorary Research Fellow and former Associate Lecturer at Birkbeck, University of London. She graduated from the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, and is author of: *Learning in Womanist Ways: Narratives of first-generation African Caribbean women* (2016) UCL/IOE Trentham Press. She is chair of the Womanism, Activism and HE research network at Birkbeck and recently convened a conference on Black Women and HE, the findings of which have inspired her to compile a new book. Prior to a teaching

career in the HE sector, including contributing modules in Voluntary and Community studies, Jan worked as a women's rights officer for the London Borough of Hackney; a race relations adviser for the London Borough of Haringey; was Head of the Housing Equalities Unit in Hammersmith and Fulham; and a former local government Councillor in Brent.

[j.etienne@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:j.etienne@bbk.ac.uk)



**Sado Jirde** is the director of Black South West Network (BSWN), a charity focused on human rights, equality, access to knowledge and socio-economic inclusion within the framework of advocating on behalf of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. She sits on various local, regional and national networks and forums including: Coalition of Race Equality Organisations (CORE), Common Cause Advisory Board, Bristol & Bath Regional Capital Strategy & Innovation Board, Tackling Race Disparities Steering Group. She is also non-executive director of Ashley Housing, trustee of Somali Resource and Voice4Change England.

Sado has given evidence to the House of Commons Women's and Equalities Committee as well as other parliamentary forums. She also contributes to conferences, seminars and panel discussion on race, economic, political and cultural inclusion. BSWN also recently hosted a hearing of the UN Special Rapporteur into racism and all forms of racial discrimination in Bristol.

She has over 10 years' experience working in the civil society sector in the UK & internationally. She was awarded the African Achievers Award in 2015.

[director@bswn.org.uk](mailto:director@bswn.org.uk)

