

Project Proposal Application

To be completed by the lead proposed supervisor,
with input from the non-HE Partner Organisation(s).



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

SECTION 1: PROJECT SUMMARY AND APPLICANT DETAILS

Proposed Project Title:	Multiculturalism in the Everyday: The Community Hub and the Lived Experience of Migration in Middlesbrough, 1985-2025		
Project Summary: <i>(Maximum 100 words)</i>	This project explores the role of a community hub as a space where multiculturalism is enacted and negotiated. While national migration histories and multicultural policies have dominated scholarly discourse, this study shifts focus to the localised, lived experiences of migration in the post-industrial town of Middlesbrough. Using oral history and participatory place-based storytelling, this project responds to the tension between celebratory narratives such as those embodied by the Middlesbrough <i>Mela</i> , and critical perspectives that view multiculturalism as failing, particularly in the wake of the 2024 riots. It offers a timely and critical intervention by highlighting the importance of local place-based migration histories.		
Host University:	Teesside University		
Name of Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
1. The Other Perspective CIC (TOP), The International Centre, 7 Abingdon Road, Middlesbrough TS1 2DP.			
2.			
Contact(s) at Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
Name:	Mr Biniam Araia	Email:	biniaaraia@gmail.com
Name:		Email:	
Primary AHRC Subject Area: <i>Select one subject area from the list here. Please do <u>not</u> add or amend subjects, as there will not be a corresponding Subject Area Review Panel to assess your nomination.</i>	History		
Does the project include a Creative Practice component?	YES ☒	NO ☐	
Do you consider the project to be interdisciplinary?	YES ☐	NO ☒ Place-based storytelling is a research approach that can be applied across disciplines and not a discipline per se.	
If you consider the project to be interdisciplinary, please state why: <i>(Maximum 100 words. Please note that your application will be assessed by the relevant primary AHRC subject area review panel. However, in this space you should indicate which other subject areas your proposal covers and how your methodology is genuinely interdisciplinary.)</i>			

SECTION 2: PROJECT PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT

Please provide full details of the proposal and make your case for support below:

(Maximum 750 words)

Multiculturalism in Britain has long been contested, oscillating between celebration and critique. At local level, Middlesbrough's annual *Mela*, widely regarded as one of the most prominent and dynamic multicultural festivals in the North-East, has long stood as a symbol of the town's rich cultural diversity and inclusive spirit. Conversely, the violent disturbances that occurred during the 2024 riots, particularly severe in Middlesbrough, highlight a contrasting and arguably more dominant narrative: that multiculturalism, both locally and nationally, has *failed*. This project *transcends* both the celebratory festival or violent backlash to explore the historical and lived experiences of multiculturalism, focusing on one specific community hub: the International Centre, situated on Abingdon Road in Middlesbrough's central ward, the town's most ethnically diverse area.

In a local context, such as Middlesbrough, where multiculturalism is both celebrated and challenged, community hubs provide a unique lens for exploring the everyday practices of multiculturalism. Community hubs are physical and symbolic spaces. They can function as intercultural contact zones facilitating interaction across ethnic, religious, and linguistic boundaries. They provide platforms for dialogue, collaboration, and cultural expression, often serving as informal mechanisms of integration and community support. Unlike top-down policy interventions, these spaces reflect bottom-up practices of inclusion, shaped by local histories, community leadership, and grassroots participation. Community hubs are increasingly recognised as sites of civic innovation, where arts, heritage, and community services converge to address issues of marginalisation, identity, and belonging.

While the *historiography* of migration and multiculturalism in Britain has increasingly developed over past decades, general narratives still dominate. These narratives understandably work across a broader canvas, both nationally and internationally. The problem is that this often obscures the diverse and uneven experiences of migration at local, even neighbourhood level, under-representing many migrant voices – those of women, smaller ethnic groups, asylum-seekers – hidden, marginalised, or simply lost altogether. Oral history is key to their recovery. For sure, the growth in localised migration histories at the end of the twentieth century was welcome and presented many untold stories (see *Our Migration Story*). However, much of this literature remained celebratory (Taylor, 2020). As is the case with Middlesbrough, much has now become dated. The primary local history of Teesside's Muslims was published thirty years ago (Lawless, 1995).

Place-based storytelling complements oral history. It offers a participatory framework for exploration of multiculturalism in the local context by drawing on both collective memory and contemporary experience to foster inclusive dialogue and social cohesion (Pesce et al., 2024). By rooting narrative practice within specific local contexts, this method amplifies marginalised voices and facilitates re-signification of place identities through collaborative production of visual and textual stories. Using methods such as story circles, collaborative storyboarding, and digital storytelling, this participatory approach actively values the diverse linguistic, cultural, and experiential assets of community members, facilitating meaningful participation of individuals who might otherwise have been excluded (Liguori, 2024). By validating a plurality of perspectives emerging from shared places and themes, participatory storytelling actively resists the imposition of singular or dominant narratives, supporting more equitable and representative forms of community memory.

The International Centre first opened in the 1980s. Originally a Drill Hall dating back to the 1890s, the building had long served the local community, initially comprising first and second-generation migrants from Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, and other areas. Governed under the auspices of Middlesbrough Council, the International Centre transferred to registered charitable status in the mid-2010s. With such deep community roots, the International Centre is uniquely placed to facilitate examination of the extent to which this local community hub has functioned as a site of multicultural engagement over the past *four* decades.

Through a methodology grounded in oral history and participatory place-based storytelling, the student will address the following research questions:

1. How have different migrant and minority groups experienced and engaged with the International Centre?
2. What role has the Centre played in facilitating multicultural dialogue and inclusion? How has it influenced perceptions of multiculturalism among residents?
3. What narratives of identity, memory and resilience emerge from this space?
4. How has the International Centre supported hybrid identities? How far has it facilitated intergenerational dialogue and navigation between heritage and host cultures?

5. In what ways does this community hub reflect or challenge dominant narratives of multiculturalism in Middlesbrough, the wider region, and the UK?
6. How can this community hub contribute to the construction of localised migration histories?
7. How can oral history and participatory place-based storytelling empower diverse communities in Middlesbrough to co-create and reshape local narratives, thereby fostering intercultural understanding and social cohesion?

Provide details of any resources and facilities, including equipment, fieldwork, training, etc., that will be required to complete the project successfully. NBC has limited Research Training Support Grant funding, which may affect the feasibility of high-cost projects. Please note where you might also secure additional funding, (e.g. partner organisations; department or school). Include estimated costs:

(Maximum 200 words)

In addition to the rich opportunities provided by Northern Bridge, the student will access the Oral History Society's training courses, which are available online or offline. These courses include an introduction to Oral History, design and planning, data protection, and audio editing. Membership of the Oral History Society is £39., and membership provides discounts on training sessions (c. £100 per event).

Training in Digital Storytelling will be delivered through *StoryCenter*, an innovative participatory media organisation committed to the power of personal narratives for equity, wellness and social action. The candidate will participate in a certificated online training programme (2 hours x 10 weeks) which provides a practice-based introduction to the technical, editorial and ethical practices and principles of digital storytelling (c. £745).

The student will also benefit from multi-disciplinary perspectives on qualitative research skills through attendance at relevant components of PG modules delivered by the School of Arts and Creative Industries at Teesside University, including specialist provision in oral history.

The student will access ENRICH, a researcher development support hub for staff and postgraduate researchers, bringing together learning and development opportunities across enterprise, networking, research, innovation, and culture. Its programme of online, in-person, hybrid and self-directed learning is aligned with the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF), across the domains of knowledge and intellectual abilities, personal effectiveness, research governance, organisation, engagement, influence and impact.

Outline the arrangements for communication between the non-HE partner organisation and the academic host institution in regard to project management and monitoring academic progress:

(Maximum 200 words)

The International Centre is located on the University's doorstep which will easily facilitate in-person communication with the supervisory team. Regular communication with the partner organisation (TOP) will be embedded within this project journey. In Year 1, the partner organisation (Biniam Araia, TOP) will be formally engaged at four stages: at interview; at induction; at project design/ethical approval; and at annual review. Thereafter, the TOP will participate in at least three supervisory team meetings in each successive year as well as participating in further annual progression points. The University and TOP will work closely in co-producing and co-curating migration stories.

What benefits will there be for the candidate and the non-HE partner organisation as a result of your collaboration?

(Maximum 200 words)

Benefits to the student:

Acquisition of subject knowledge and understanding.

Access to the International Centre, a safe and respectful environment.

Building emotional intelligence.

Multi-skills development through application of a creative mixed methods approach.

Recognising and championing both oral history and participatory place-based storytelling in terms of amplifying the voices of those who are often not heard.

Building connections and trust amongst 'hard-to-reach' participants, rooted in the sharing of values and mutual respect.

Responding to, and impacting upon, debates and policy regarding community hubs and their role in the fostering of intercultural dialogue and multiculturalism.

Benefits to TOP/the International Centre:

Showcasing the place of the International Centre and its value as central community hub.
Providing deeper historical understanding of the breadth and depth of community engagement since the 1980s.
Incorporating a history of the building and its occupants before this period, establishing common threads around migration stories.
Introducing and co-producing inclusive displays and exhibitions.
Prioritising and empowering the needs and perspectives of Centre users, ensuring that they remain central to the Centre's thinking and future planning.
Recording and archiving the Centre's heritage and the lived experiences of local populations. There is a commitment to legacy.

State what financial (if any) or in-kind contribution the non-HE partner organisation will be making over the duration of the award:

*(Maximum 200 words. A financial contribution is **not** a requirement. However, the AHRC expect that **non-HE partners based overseas** will make a financial contribution to the costs of the student's return travel and accommodation when visiting.)*

The in-kind contribution that The Other Perspective will make will be as follows:

Support in the selection and appointment of the successful candidate.
Support in the ongoing monitoring of the project.
Access to specialist knowledge and expertise from within the International Centre's volunteer network.
Facilitating unique access to community contacts.
Assisting in the organisation and delivery of participatory workshops and events.
Ensuring compliance with health and safety, data management, and other researcher/participant safeguards.

Describe the nature of the collaborative arrangement and the activities the candidate will be undertaking with the non-HE partner organisation:

(Maximum 200 words)

The collaborative arrangement will be approached from common recognition of a shared understanding of the value of the project and its mutual benefits. Collaboration will be established between the supervisory team and The Other Perspective from the very inception of the project and maintained throughout. That the International Centre is in Abingdon Road, which is virtually adjacent to the central University campus, facilitates a close and collaborative environment. The student will begin with observing the activities of the Centre and acquire a comprehensive understanding of its place, its uses, and the services that it provides. This will mark the beginning of the student's interaction with visitors and community hub stakeholders.

The Centre will then host a series of informal 'getting-to-know-you' sessions, introducing the student, the project, and building mutual trust through conversation. It will facilitate community contacts that will enable the student to identify both past and present users and then invite participation. The Centre will provide a safe and confidential space within the Centre for the student to undertake one-to-one oral history interviews. TOP will then assist in organising participatory activities that will facilitate place-based conversations and storytelling, allowing for creative descriptions of why the Centre holds special meaning for different groups within the immediate neighbourhood and beyond. As the research progresses, TOP will assist in showcasing the stories of the participants using a variety of inclusive displays, integrating multimedia elements, such as storyboards, with photo, audio, and video. At the end of the project, the student will donate a 'living archive' to the International Centre which can be added to, with primary documents, artefacts, archival photos, and audio narration.

Both the HE and non-HE partners recognise that the collaboration between TOP and the supervisory team is essential for steering the student's research effectively. Only through close collaboration will this research remains relevant to the needs and concerns of the Centre and its stakeholders.

SECTION 3: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

Primary (or Co-) Supervisor:

Professor Nigel Copsey

School or Department:	School of Arts and Creative Industries
Email Address:	N.Copsey@tees.ac.uk
Secondary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Professor Antonia Liguori
School or Department:	School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Law (Education)
Email Address:	A.Liguori@tees.ac.uk
Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:	Biniam Araia
Organisation/Institution:	The Other Perspective CIC (TOP), International Centre, Abingdon Road
Email Address:	biniaraia@gmail.com
Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:	
Organisation/Institution:	
Email Address:	
Additional Internal or External Advisors or Academic Supervisors, if any:	
Name:	Dr Charlie McGuire/Dr Aleena Din
Organisation/Institution:	Teesside University/University of Manchester
Email Address:	Dr Charlie McGuire C.McGuire@tees.ac.uk ; Dr Aleena Din aleena.din@manchester.ac.uk .

Explain how the expertise of the supervisory team and external advisor(s) will allow them to support the proposed project and the selected candidate:

(Maximum 500 words)

Primary

Nigel Copsey (Professor of Modern History) holds specialist expertise in the far right, 'whitelash', multiculturalism, migration, and racism. He has worked at Teesside University for over 30 years and is therefore ideally placed to support the student with this localised study. Nigel currently supervises an AHRC CDA (with the British Library) on racism and football (now in its third year) and can therefore draw on his ongoing experience with an existing CDA-partnership. He is a member of the Institute for Collective Place Leadership. As Chair of the School's Research Ethics Committee, he will give expert guidance on managing the ethics process. He has six completions as primary supervisor.

Second

Antonia Liguori (Professor of Participatory Storytelling and Public Policy; Co-Director at the Institute for Collective Place Leadership at Teesside University) will provide specialist expertise in digital storytelling as a participatory methodology for interdisciplinary research. She earned her PhD from the University of Bologna, Italy, in 2005 and has worked across heritage, media and HE sectors in Italy and the UK. She has been involved in over 30 transnational research projects, with a special focus on innovative tools and methods in relation to storytelling and memory in the digital world, including both formal and informal education contexts. She has three doctoral completions as primary supervisor.

Third

(Dr) Charlie McGuire (Senior Lecturer in History) has expertise in oral histories of working lives, and he has been involved in oral history projects of building workers and activists within the various building unions. Charlie is also a member of the Institute for Collective Place Leadership. His most recent monograph is *Steelworkers in Struggle: An oral history of the 1980 national steel strike*, published by Manchester University Press in May 2025. He has one doctoral completion as a primary supervisor and one as a second supervisor.

External Advisor

(Dr) Aleena Din (Simon Research Fellow, University of Manchester) is a historian of gender, class and race in modern Britain. Her DPhil research focused on the migration, settlement and labour experiences of working-class British-Pakistani women in Middlesbrough and Oldham between 1962 and 2002. Her interests include women's paid and unpaid work, community, family life, religion and generational change. Aleena has been co-investigator of the community history project 'A Muslim History of Oxford', in collaboration with the national heritage organisation 'Everyday Muslim'. Her specialist knowledge of the experience of Muslim women will be invaluable.

SECTION 4: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

Please provide details about the research environment the selected candidate will be joining and its suitability:

(Maximum 500 words)

The student will be integrated into the Institute for Collective Place Leadership (ICPL), an interdisciplinary community of researchers from three different Schools at Teesside University (Social Sciences, Humanities and Law; Arts and Creative Industries; International Business School), clustered around three thematic areas: Empowered and Inclusive Places, Imaginative and Innovative Places, Sustainable and Resilient Places. This project sits under the theme of Empowered and Inclusive Places – a theme that addresses the needs of diverse communities through projects and partnerships that engage marginalised populations with inclusive models of placemaking.

The ICPL is committed to collaborative research that engages local communities, policymakers, and stakeholders, providing rich opportunities for participatory approaches and applied research. With its strong emphasis on social inclusion, cultural diversity, and regional regeneration, it promotes innovative methods that can capture the 'lived' experiences of diverse populations in the Tees Valley. Its established networks and commitment to impact-oriented research ensure that the PhD student's work will be grounded in real-world contexts and have tangible relevance to community resilience and cohesion. Moreover, the ICPL's access to Teesside University's broader research infrastructure, expertise in cultural and social studies, and active partnerships make it a supportive and stimulating environment for advancing knowledge on multiculturalism in everyday life.

The ICPL provides a supportive environment for doctoral researchers, integrating them into its active research community, serving as a platform for collaboration with interdisciplinary teams and engagement with policymakers, businesses, and community partners.

The ICPL hosts workshops, seminars, and events that provide opportunities for PhD students and early-career researchers to present their work and receive feedback. It also supports professional development through leadership training, fostering skills in evidence-based policy, creative placemaking, and participatory research methods. This environment encourages knowledge exchange, skills development, and visibility, helping the PhD student build their research profile and connect with diverse stakeholders.

Working alongside the *Borderlands* project (hosted by MIMA) would offer a rich, experiential learning environment that strengthens research skills, community connections, and scholarly contributions relevant to multiculturalism and everyday life in the Tees Valley. As a project focusing on increasing cultural access and participation in underserved communities within Middlesbrough, Redcar, and Cleveland, *Borderlands* could offer the PhD student additional opportunities to explore how co-creation can break down barriers to cultural engagement in socio-economically deprived areas. This aligns well with studies of multicultural lived experience, social cohesion, and place-based identity in complex, diverse urban contexts. *Borderlands'* strong community focus offers the student direct access to local networks, cultural collaborators, and community members who are actively shaping cultural initiatives, providing rich ethnographic and participatory research opportunities. Moreover, the linkage with national arts programmes and policy frameworks gives the student contextual grounding on how cultural initiatives intersect with social regeneration and community empowerment.