Connected Communities

South Asian Musics, Cultures and Communities in Newcastle upon Tyne and the North East of England

David Clarke

with Thomas Hodgson
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INTRODUCTION

Blending the particular and the general, this essay explores three conditions that have a bearing on communities. These are: locality – the UK city of Newcastle upon Tyne, the areas within it and the wider region beyond it; ethnicity – people of South Asian heritage, and minority-ethnic communities more widely; and culture – most notably music, but other art forms too. Equally important are questions that relate these elements: What is the experience of a locality from the perspective of minority-ethnic groups who live there? What cultural opportunities are there for these communities (if indeed they exist as such), and who promotes them? And how might individuals or groups use or experience culture to create a sense of identity and community?

A key working assumption here is that ethnicity remains a valuable term in debates about the development of communities in the current socio-economic climate of the UK. An openness to the ethnic diversity of communities, to their particular needs and world views, and to the implications of cultural plurality is critical to any aspiration to make connections across actual or perceived cultural boundaries. While there may be a wish in certain political quarters to play down (arguably censor) discussions of multiculturalism, we seek to present a countervailing case (see also our discussion in Hodgson and Clarke 2012). Public debates about multiculturalism in the UK have become

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1 This paper is an output from the scoping study, ‘Musics of South Asia: A Means for Connecting Communities?’, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (ref. AH/J012149/1). It accompanies a literature review (Hodgson and Clarke 2012) and two further essays, one examining the role of music amongst young Mirpuri communities in Bradford (Hodgson, forthcoming), the other exploring South Asian musics and multiculturalism in the North East of England (Clarke 2012). Our co-investigator, Mónica Moreno Figueroa was an invaluable critical friend in the fine-tuning of both this paper and our literature review.
tainted by a reduction to a small number of discursive tropes – usually fuelled by anxieties about non-assimilation or separatism – in which Islamophobia is often an implicit or explicit factor; and they have tended to focus on certain localities perceived as problematic – e.g. Tower Hamlets, Brixton, Bradford – which have then taken on a certain (negative) iconic status, and further gridlocked debate. By contrast, Newcastle and the wider environs of Tyne and Wear and the North East of England represent a different multicultural locality that carries less in the way of media baggage. Furthermore, music and the arts represent further different places from which multiculturalism might be experienced and understood – hence our interest in this inquiry in South Asian music in its various genres, the communities that practice them, and the organisations that support them.

Why these specifics – this locality, this ethnic category, this set of expressive practices, practitioners, supporters? To a large extent these interests are a matter of contingency: they have chosen us as much as we have chosen them, by dint of our living (or having lived) in a given locality, and because we ourselves happen to be practitioners and researchers in kinds of music that in one way or another have helped us make connections with people of South Asian heritage. As they affect the possibilities for a research programme, however, these matters are of more than biographical consequence. Given that political critiques of multiculturalism have tended to reify certain locations as iconic, shifting the locus of inquiry to the North East of England, where ethnic minorities represent a smaller portion of the demographic, and where other contingencies – notably socio-economic ones – dominate the political landscape, will, we hope, add to the diversity of perspectives on multiculturalism. That said, a number of the issues we identify as pertinent regionally may well also be relevant nationally; hence the particular – our local and regional case study – may, as exactly that, be of more than parochial significance.

Arising from a scoping study, this paper takes its remit to be to raise questions as much as answer them. Our snapshots of Newcastle and the North East at the time of writing will necessarily form a partial picture – again related to our own contingencies – but we hope that this will also elicit further perspectives. And, as is implicit in the above, we find it congenial to allow a certain flexibility in our categories. Hence, while South Asian communities are our principal focus, this may be extended to the situation of the

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2 Throughout this paper we use the term 'South Asian' as a shorthand for 'British South Asian' or people of South Asian heritage – which may (and often does) refer to second- and subsequent-generation groups and individuals born in the UK, or to people now resident in the UK.
black and minority (BME) population more widely.\(^3\) Similarly we do not want our particular concern for music to preclude discussion of other art forms where relevant. And while our geographic focus is Newcastle, we also draw on evidence and examples from the wider conurbation and region.

Our paper falls into three main parts. In the first, and longest, we offer a sketch of the locality and of communities and organisations involved in South Asian arts, or in working with BME groups more generally – perhaps the first time such information has been collated in this way. In the second part we explore some of the implications and issues arising from this picture. And in the final part we make some proposals for future avenues for research and engagement. Our methodologies include consultation of formally commissioned reports and statistical data, internet searches, interviews with representatives from the several arts development organisations who have kindly agreed to partner us in this project (and to whom we here record our thanks),\(^4\) and an application of approaches from ethnomusicology and cultural and critical theory.

**PART ONE: THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT**

**Maps and demographics**

Mapping a place, literally and metaphorically, can be fundamental to any social-anthropological account of its peoples. Where do those peoples live, under what circumstances, in what concentrations relative to each other, and with what corollaries?

Empirically speaking, it is in Newcastle’s (historically white, preponderantly working class) West End\(^5\) that South Asian peoples are most visible, and have made the

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\(^3\) Nor would this be to preclude discussion of white communities (and their relation to BME communities) from future research – bearing in mind that the agendas will not be identical in all cases.

\(^4\) Our partner organisations (and their representatives) are as follows: GemArts (Vikas Kumar), Kalapremi (Dr P.V. Nath and Richard Neville); Saarang – Arts and Culture (Vidy Sarangapani), and The Sage Gateshead (Sarah Kekus). We are also grateful for discussions with Mumtaz Sanam of Pakistan Cultural Society, Mahtab Miah of Newcastle Bangladeshi Association, Ann Schofield of Newcastle City Council, and Sudipta Roy of Newcastle University.

\(^5\) For a fascinating historical account of this area of the city, including both contextual commentary and video testimonials, see the website of the project Archive for Change at [http://archiveforchange.org/](http://archiveforchange.org/) (9 October 2012). Produced by filmmakers Taryn Edmonds, Laura Maragoudaki and Julie Ballands, the archive constitutes a valuable ethnographic resource giving a voice to the historical white communities alongside which more
strongest impact commercially and culturally – impressions given, for example, by a
growing number of South Asian clothing shops, food stores and eateries, and by the
presence of a Hindu temple, several mosques and a gurdwara. Such impressions are in
part borne out by statistical data. At the time of writing, only the most general data from
the 2011 census have been released, but the 2001 census captured a major
demographic shift that is likely to have been subsequently sustained. As reported on the
city’s Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) website:

Between 1991 and 2001, Newcastle's black and minority ethnic (BME) community
grew by 60% to nearly 6.9% of the total population. In 2001, the biggest BME
group was Asian or Asian British, comprising 4.4% of the population, (some
wards have [a] higher Asian population e.g. 21.9% in Wingrove), 1% of the
population was mixed ethnicity, 0.7% Chinese and 0.4% Black or Black British.
6.9% is still below the national figure (9.1%) but this will have grown since 2001,
with significant migration from EU accession states.

The latest school census information [2007] shows that of the school
population in Newcastle (37,030), 16% are from black and ethnic minorities and
14% have a first language which is other than English.6

As this summary goes on to report, there is a strong correlation between age bracket
and relative size of BME population: while children of school age represent the largest
BME group, at the opposite extreme only 0.9% of people aged 85 or over are black or
minority ethnic. This would suggest significantly different generational experiences of
ethnic and cultural identity – different expectations, aspirations and needs (see Hodgson,
forthcoming, also discussed in Part Two of this paper).

A further gloss on the 2001 census is provided by the Cathie Marsh Centre for
Census and Survey Research (University of Manchester), which sorts data on minority
ethnicity by council ward, and lists the largest ‘non-white’ group in each case.7 This
 corroborates and refines perceptions that Newcastle’s West End is where its largest

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7 See http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/ (16 October 2012). A map of current council wards can be found on Newcastle
City Council’s website, at http://gis.newcastle.gov.uk/mapsonline/map.asp?wid=1024&browsertype=ie (16
October 2012). For a map of wards before boundaries were re-drawn in 2004 (i.e. those to which the 2001
South Asian populations are to be found. The wards of Elswick and Wingrove are reported as having the highest percentage of black and Asian residents (both 25%), with Bangladeshis and Pakistanis the largest subgroups respectively. In other West End wards – Fenham, West City, Benwell, Scotswood – Pakistanis formed the largest non-white groups (where black and Asian populations represented, respectively, 10%, 8%, 5% and 4% of those wards’ populations).

The 2001 census showed people of South Asian ethnicities also to be distributed in other areas of the city, albeit in lower concentrations than in Elswick and Wingrove. Indians were the largest non-white groups in a number of wards outside the West End recognised as preponderantly lower middle class or middle class – such as Grange, Dene, Jesmond and South Gosforth (with black and Asian populations comprising, respectively 9%, 8%, 7% and 7% of these wards). Pakistanis were shown to be the largest ethnic minority in middle class and lower middle class wards such as Heaton (8% non-white) and Kenton (6% non-white). In addition the statistics show smaller numbers of Indians and Pakistanis comprising the largest non-white groups of several other wards across the city.

In ethnographic terms, these data suggest a field on which research might be focused – or arguably two fields: the West End and everywhere else in the city. The former could be seen as an example of how ‘particular communities of identity often dovetail with particular communities of place’, as Graham Crow and Alice Mah put it (2012: 18). Significantly Crow and Mah are here referencing research (Mooney and Neal 2008) which shows that such dovetailing is often symptomatic of a correlation between ethnic diversity and social exclusion. This would seem to be borne out in the case of the West End: the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation showed Newcastle as the 40th most deprived local authority in the UK, and within the city those areas in the highest deprivation bandings tend to correlate with those with the highest percentage of black and Asian residents – notably Elswick, and Benwell and Scotswood. Paradoxically, then,

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8 While certainly helpful to projects such as the present one, these ethnic categorisations remain fairly broad. For example, Pakistanis might identity with different areas of Pakistan or Kashmir, or with their kinship group or caste. Indians might similarly identify with a particular region of family origin, which in turn – notably in the case of Bengalis and Punjabis – might cut across categories defined by nation-state following the Partition of India in 1947 and Bangladeshi independence in 1971. More nuanced data might be acquired through ethnographic research. We explore these matters further below.

9 See http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/your-council/statistics-and-census-information/equalities-statistics. Mah (2010) offers a geographically complementary perspective in her account of communities living under the experience of ‘industrial ruination’ in Newcastle’s East End; she also touches on tensions between the historical
the term ‘community’ can be used ‘both in a positive sense to represent social belonging, collective well-being, solidarity and support networks, and in a negative sense to describe or categorise social problems and “problem populations”’ (Crow and Mah 2012: 2). Certainly Newcastle’s West End is an area of the city that is not without its social problems (affecting both BME and white populations), and in which the local council and various charitable bodies have made significant interventions (discussed further below). If communities emerge at least in part as a means of fostering resilience under such difficult social and economic conditions, it may also be that the reverse is true in the case of our second proposed field: that outside the West End, where more affluent members of the South Asian population live, a sense of a community of place is weaker. On the other hand, our fieldwork to date (partly recounted in Clarke 2012) suggests that looser networks, which might be coterminous with ‘communities of interest’ and ‘communities of identity’ (to invoke Peter Willmott’s (1996) terminology), nonetheless operate with some vitality among South Asian professionals.

Two related points emerge from these initial observations. First, the model of two different fields, with different profiles of class and community, is a matter for further inquiry, not least regarding permeability between them (where communities of identity and interest – notably musical and cultural interest – may cut across communities of place). This rough cultural map, then, is advanced as a hypothesis for now, a starting point for a possible future programme of ethnographic research (discussed further in Part Three, below). Secondly, these observations suggest that mappings are as much about perceptions and beliefs as they are about quantifiable demographic facts: that narratives germane to the complexities of identities and lives lived under a range of social contingencies are a necessary complement to statistical data. What such data

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white working-class community and primarily black African asylum seekers who have arrived in the area since 2000 (2010: 409). For a discussion of deprivation in the wider North East region see Sutherland et al. (2010).

10 For a critical discussion of ‘community’ as a conceptual category see Crow and Mah (2006) and Hodgson and Clarke (2012).

11 At first blush, this distinction may seem broadly congruent with that between ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ categories used in cultural anthropology – which derive from Kenneth Pike’s (1954) application of the linguistic terms ‘phonemic’ and ‘phonetic’. As Timothy Rice summarises (2008: 53), ‘Pike ... distinguished between what he called etic accounts of language and culture, which were based on the categories of scientifically trained observers, and emic accounts, which sought to understand the categories and meaningful distinctions of native speakers and cultural insiders.’ Yet this may be an invidious binarism that reifies a dichotomy between insiders and outsiders, and construes the investigator as a dispassionate outsider free of subjective interest (see Agar 2007).
suggest in the case of Newcastle and the North East is that geography, class and socio-economic circumstances intertwine closely with ethnicity and culture; and insider accounts of how these conditions and cultures are actually experienced offer potentially vital tools of representation that may ultimately help effect change.

Culture and agency, organisations and associations

While economic and political factors determine many aspects of individuals’ and communities’ well being (both positively and negatively), and while supporting cultural activity is emphatically not to be seen as an alternative to proper political support and economic investment, we want nonetheless to posit the possibility that culture can play an important, complementary role in fostering communities and connections. In brief, cultural activities might enable individuals and communities

• to articulate their identities (howsoever constructed), and hence to experience and affirm their cultures;
• to make their cultures visible and audible to a wider demography (where this is desired), and possibly to enrich perceptions of them;
• to promote or affirm cultural confidence and improve cultural well-being.

Cultural activities are the work of several kinds of agent, or agency – individual practitioners, intermediaries, networks and organisations – all of which may inform the dynamics of community. In the next stages of this account we offer snapshots of groups and organisations known to foster South Asian arts and culture in the Newcastle locality. This is not a comprehensive compilation, and the picture is indeed dynamic. Among other things, organisations are being variously affected at the time of writing by cuts to public funding and by the wider vicissitudes of an economic recession that has disproportionately affected the North East (see PricewaterhouseCoopers 2011).

We proceed from a provisional distinction between two categories of organisation or association: public facing and community facing. We define public facing organisations as having one or more of the following characteristics:

• they are funded principally by public money and/or corporate or institutional sponsorship aimed at the wider public good;
• they are accountable to public bodies (e.g. local authorities, funding councils);
• they present themselves (or are perceived as) non-coterminous with the communities with which they nonetheless engage and which they serve. In this
sense, even though they may have emerged from community needs, they now function quasi-autonomously.

By contrast, community facing organisations would be defined by the following qualities:

- they emerge from communities;
- they are orientated towards the cultural needs or aspirations of a particular community, and are principally accountable only to it;
- making connections with other communities or with a wider community is not necessarily a priority;
- they are principally privately funded, or are not reliant on public funding.

This distinction is nonetheless provisional since some organisations have a liminal status, bearing qualities of each type, or may mutate from one type to the other. But this potential for mutation is itself informative, and provides one justification for such a typology. Another would be that the typology reflects different experiences of involvement (or different phenomenologies of engagement) that in turn point to different relationships of community. So, without being unduly attached to it, we advance the distinction as a potentially helpful working schema.

Public facing South Asian arts organisations in the North East

The three most prominent public facing organisations that historically have had the strongest involvement in South Asian arts in the North East are GemArts, Kalapremi and Pakistan Cultural Society (PCS). These are all classified as arts development organisations, and until recently all three had active and extensive programmes; on two occasions, in 2007 and 2008, the organisations collaborated on a major festival of South Asian Arts and Music (SAMA).\(^\text{12}\) In more recent times the organisations have experienced different fortunes. Their stories are instructive.

Of the three, GemArts, under its director Vikas Kumar, has most unambiguously continued to enjoy success under the current economic recession – if this is taken to mean maintaining, indeed growing, a funding base. Following the Arts Council’s recent major strategic review (Arts Council England 2010), GemArts made the transition from the status of Regularly Funded Organisation (RFO) to the Council’s new category of National Portfolio Organisation (NPO), in the process securing a near-doubling of its

funding for the period 2012–15.\textsuperscript{13} This outcome starkly mirrored the experience of Asian Music Circuit (a national organisation operating from London), which lost 100\% of its funding in the same exercise. Here, then, was a graphic example of Arts Council England being true to its of word of making "[f]unding levels appropriate to each organisation rather than "equal pain for all"."\textsuperscript{14}

While this radical asymmetry might remain contentious, it is not difficult to see why GemArts would meet many of the Council's '13 priorities' for the period 2011–15 (Arts Council England 2011a: 7). In addition to promoting a programme of performances by early or mid-career artists of excellence (as well as by practitioners of international renown), GemArts visibly supports 'artistically-led approaches to diversity in the arts' and is responsible for 'developing arts opportunities for people and places with the least engagement' (ibid.). Under its umbrella organisation, Gateshead Visible Minorities Ethnic Support Group (established 1989),\textsuperscript{15} GemArts has a significant outreach programme extending across the Newcastle–Gateshead conurbation and beyond into the regions (e.g. southwards to Middlesbrough, westwards to Kendall). Thus, while on the one hand promoting concerts by, for example, sitarist Shujaat Khan or sarangi player Murad Ali (September 2012), the organisation also supports outreach projects such as the two-year venture ‘Power Play – Youth Music’ located in ‘challenging places’ such as

\textsuperscript{13} As an RFO in 2010/11 GemArts received c. £35K; as an NPO in 2012/13 it receives £70K, followed by increases to match inflation in the two successive years – a 'real' change of 96.5\%. (See information given for the North East at \url{http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/apply-for-funding/national-portfolio-funding-programme/} (25 July 2012).) In addition GemArts has over the years secured additional funding from trusts and foundations including the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales, the Community Foundation and Northern Rock Foundation; it has also received local authority support from Gateshead Council and Newcastle City Council. With thanks to Vikas Kumar for this information.


\textsuperscript{15} Prior to its formal establishment 'the work of the group started with the arrival of Ugandan Refugee families in 1973, where community members in Gateshead came together with a vision to create a multi-cultural all-inclusive community, free of fear, prejudice, disadvantage, racism and ignorance; and then the Race Relations Act and the formation of the REC commission enabled the organisation to develop a lot of work in [the] anti-racism and advice field' (Vikas Kumar, personal communication, September 2012).
Newcastle’s West End, and involving art forms such as street dance, drumming and DJ-ing.  

Meanwhile, PCS and Kalapremi seem to have commonly experienced a different trajectory from GemArts. This might be described (following the typology mooted above) as an arc from being community facing organisations to public facing ones and back again. The ambit is perhaps more pronounced in the case of PCS, which at the time of writing no longer has an active organisational website, the main generally public evidence of its continuing life being clips of its activities on YouTube. In the absence of any official history, it is possible to infer that PCS’s community roots go back to around the late 1980s: information provided for a 2008 press release refers to ‘a loyal presence of local businessmen who almost two decades ago helped to build the foundations of the organisation’ (Ethnic Now 2008). A significant step change came in 2004 with the appointment of a new director, Munmun KC. The organisation became a registered charity in the same year, and subsequently went on to win awards and grants (sometimes substantial) from Arts Council England, Heritage Lottery Fund and Newcastle City Council, as well as continuing to receive sizeable levels of private donation.  

PCS-supported activities have included the promotion of performances (e.g. Hindustani classical music, jazz, mixed media and theatre) and community ventures, such as a well-being programme aimed principally at South Asian women.

In this most public facing period of PCS’s history, such eclecticism was also mirrored in its governance. To quote from the aforementioned press release: ‘The board isn’t exclusively Muslim as it holds representatives from a cross section of the community – providing PCS with a culturally diverse make up that will assist in the positive progression of the organisation for years to come’ (Ethnic Now 2008). Indeed, at that time the board’s director was Hindu (of Indian rather than Pakistani origin), and ethnicities other than South Asian were represented among its officers. However,

16 For more information see www.gemarts.org/. These outreach initiatives suggest GemArts as also having attributes of a community facing organisation, albeit that these activities are managed with levels of funding and lines of accountability characteristic of a public facing organisation.


18 Similarly, GemArts report that their own board has a multicultural constitution (Vikas Kumar, personal communication, September 2012).
following Munmun KC’s departure from the PCS board in March 2012, the organisation’s progression appears to have been back to its roots, with a change of base and reach, including a focus on more intimate community gatherings, including Urdu poetry recitations and the singing of ghazals. Chairman Mumtaz Sanam reports that these gatherings take place weekly, with separate groups for men and women; also that PCS continues to mount performances by visiting artists often to sizeable audiences who travel from across the region to attend. These events seem to be promoted principally within the community, not least via the South Asian community radio station, Spice FM (also discussed below), on which Mr Sanam hosts a twice-weekly show featuring ghazals and Punjabi folk songs. All this points to impressive community resilience and vitality in the absence of earlier levels of public funding, though clearly the presence of a ‘worker’ to maintain a website and develop grant applications is sorely missed.19

Each of these two most recent phases of PCS’s history suggests a corresponding interpretation of multiculturalism. In its most public facing – and most publicly funded – period, PCS made the pursuit of cultural diversity an explicit programme, as regards both its constitutional make-up and its target audiences. Here, then, a multiculturalist ethos seems to have been first internalised and then projected outwards. In its more recent, community facing period PCS seems to have turned inwards, cultivating a more monoculturalist ethos while nonetheless continuing to contribute to the multicultural totality of life in the city and region. Perhaps this only makes representation of Pakistani cultural life in accounts of the region all the more pressing.

While PCS has been geographically based in Newcastle’s West End, Kalapremi operates from the town of Stanley in County Durham, nonetheless extending its reach regionally, including activities in Newcastle. Kalapremi was founded in 1983 by Dr P.V. Nath and his wife Satya, after they migrated from the South of India to County Durham.20 Again the beginnings were in the community, with Dr Nath (who is a GP) and other associates funding Kalapremi by private donation in order to put on performances – principally of classical music by professional Indian musicians. Like PCS, Kalapremi engineered a major gearing-up of its activities in the new millennium by appointing a younger (again female) executive officer with professional experience and aspirations in arts management: Vidya Sarangapani took up the role of programme manager in February 2005, and held this post until May 2011. During this period Kalapremi’s funding

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19 Interview, Mumtaz Sanam and David Clarke, 25 September 2012.
base expanded substantially, including grants from Northern Rock Foundation, the European Social Fund and Durham County Council. These awards supported an expanded programme of performances (including Indian music and dance) and community ventures – often with a strongly multicultural flavour and/or an emphasis on young people (notably its ‘Yuva’ project).\(^2\text{1}\) This professionalisation of Kalapremi’s management was also reflected in a sumptuous website and meticulous photo-documentation of events.

Vidya Sarangapani’s departure as Programme Director in 2011 meant another significant reorientation. In some ways this mirrors the trajectory of PCS, though the situation is possibly more complex, with Kalapremi’s present status somewhere between that of a community facing and public facing organisation. With no major tranches of public money for development projects there has been a scaling down of activities; a new project administrator, Richard Neville, is employed on a part-time, project-by-project basis (with an element of voluntary commitment). In interview he reports that funding for future professional performances is likely to come from Kalapremi’s original community benefactors. Meanwhile, he has successfully applied for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to collaborate with Beamish Museum and County Durham Archives to digitise Kalapremi’s archive. As the resulting online collection will include documentation of the organisation’s history and its numerous projects, this promises to be a valuable public resource, not least for researchers interested in the relationship between arts organisations and communities.\(^2\text{2}\)

One recurrent event that Kalapremi is likely to continue to promote is the Ganesh Festival, which the organisation celebrates annually at the Lamplight Arts Centre in Stanley. The centrality of this major Hindu festival to Kalapremi’s activities contrasts with PCS’s tendency (at least in its public facing phase) to keep any specifically Muslim dimension to its activities well in the background. Conversely, Kalapremi’s inclusion of religious practice and discourse in its programme (for example, it mounted a ‘Faith and Global Peace’ conference in 2007), reflects the interests of its founder Dr Nath, who has significant involvement in events such as the Global Gita Conference.\(^2\text{3}\) The Ganesh Festival, as conducted by Kalapremi, is a good example of how a certain Hindu ecumenicalism can be married to multiculturalist strategies. The day begins with a

\(^{21}\text{See http://www.kalapremi.org/yuva.html (9 October 2012).}\)

\(^{22}\text{See http://www.kalapremi.org.uk/archive/ (12 October 2012).}\)

\(^{23}\text{See http://www.kalapremi.org/events.html (8 September 2012).}\)
formal puja (a religious ceremony) to which the public is invited, and which includes explanation of the Sanskrit liturgy and rituals. Following this is a series of performances, and sometimes talks, involving music, dance and literature by both amateurs and professionals, drawn from the region and internationally, and involving South Asian and other cultures. The message here is clearly one of cultural confidence, reflecting Kalapremi’s mission of ‘Celebrating, encouraging, empowering South Asian arts’.

The above case studies indicate that the agency of motivated (and remunerated) professional individuals may be decisive for a public facing arts organisation’s ability to develop (and particularly raise funds for) an active programme of events and publicly engaged works. Vidya Sarangapani’s departure from Kalapremi has meant an at least interim scaling back of the organisation’s programming; at the same time this energy now flows into Saarang – Arts & Culture, a company which she established while studying for an MBA. This new venture draws from experience gained in promoting arts and education during her time at Kalapremi, and in working with younger people. Saarang operates principally with primary schools (‘because that’s where it starts’), bringing experiences of South Asian and other world cultures to largely ethnically un-mixed areas such as rural County Durham. These cultures are often explored through dance, coupled variously with music, visual art, food and storytelling. Saarang works with a small core of committed professional artists (among them choreographer Devika Rao), and with a small network of equally committed head teachers, whose mediation is identified as critical. Relationships are reported as being extremely positive, with school staff treating artists not as mere ‘add ons’, but as ‘real international guests’, who in turn feel valued, perhaps more so than in more metropolitan areas (‘we don’t see that down South’). One objective – increasingly important in attracting funding – is to integrate projects with the content of school curricula, which may involve relating creative work to topics as diverse as food politics and Greek mythology. One particularly noteworthy project involved schoolchildren aged 7–11 from the village of Crook in County Durham, who spent a year working on a multi-media project, ‘Brahma Hindu Star’, based around the life of the Buddha (mediated via Hermann Hesse’s novel Siddhartha). Saarang’s

26 Interview, Vidya Sarangapani and David Clarke, 27 March 2012.
27 Ibid.
director claims, ‘[the children] now understand how it is ... not to bully; ... their emotional quotient has been developed in a stronger way.’

**Other public facing organisations**

Alongside these arts development organisations are other public facing bodies that also aspire to community engagement and social inclusion. Newcastle University has an explicit civic mission, as articulated in its strategy document, ‘Vision 2021’, of which a key objective is ‘to play a leading role in the economic, social and cultural development of the North East of England’ (Newcastle University 2012: 3). Between 2005 and 2010 the University’s music department – formally known as the International Centre for Music Studies (ICMuS) – led a Hefce-funded Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) on the theme of Music and Inclusivity. This scheme’s many activities included a project on Indian music, led by David Clarke, and now embedded in the ICMuS curriculum. To date this has involved around 150 students in the practical study of Hindustani classical music. They have studied in the guru–shishya (master–disciple) tradition under world-class artists: vocalist Vijay Rajput, Indian born but now resident in Newcastle, and British-Pakistani tabla player Shahbaz Hussain, based in Rochdale and a regular visitor to the North East. For most of these students (predominantly white, or non-South Asian) learning in this way has meant an encounter with another culture grounded in a lived relationship with their teachers. This has resonances with ethnomusicologists’ accounts of fieldwork as an experiential route to understanding (Kippen 2008, Rice 2008, Titon 2008); it arguably represents an analogously experiential form of multiculturalism – an internalisation of the dynamics of cultural plurality which may serve as a basis for personal reflection and development. A further legacy of the CETL programme and its successor activities (including the present scoping study) has been to build networks with the arts organisations mentioned above, and through this to strengthen and extend relationships with South Asian communities in the region.

The Sage Gateshead, based in its landmark Norman Foster building, represents another large, complex, public facing organisation, in this case with a principally musical mission. Substantial regional and national resources (and thus commensurable levels of agency) are consolidated in it. It receives a spectrum of financial support from many

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28 Ibid.


sources – trusts, foundations, sponsors, corporations and endowments.\textsuperscript{31} As an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation in receipt of over £3.5M p.a., and historically a recipient of significant levels of corporate funding, The Sage Gateshead has been able to mount substantial performance, learning and participation programmes notable for their diversity. It is also the Arts Council’s regional Bridge Organisation for the North East of England. Bridge North East’s strapline reads ‘connecting children and young people with great arts and culture across the North East’; and the organisation asserts that it ‘will connect schools and communities with Arts Council National Portfolio Organisations and others in the cultural sector ... all across the North East region’.\textsuperscript{32} Inclusion and community are also expressed among the values of the North Music Trust, which manages The Sage Gateshead.\textsuperscript{33} Perhaps the major challenge facing the organisation, and others like it, is how to continue to pursue its mission under the present economic recession. Local authority budget cuts (Gateshead Council) and an 11% reduction in The Sage Gateshead’s Arts Council funding for the period 2010–15 have meant internal restructuring, and a necessary refocusing of activities.

The implications of this for ethnic minority communities are not straightforwardly discernible, since the organisation has in any case never determined its programmes explicitly along ethnic lines. As pointed out by Sarah Kekus, The Sage Gateshead’s representative for the present scoping study, they have wanted not to ‘put people in boxes’, and have tended to benefit from relationships with organisations such as GemArts and Kalapremi for the promotion of South Asian music programmes.\textsuperscript{34} GemArts reports its own conception in a partnership between The Sage Gateshead and Gateshead Visible Ethnic Minority Support Group, and continues to use the former as a venue for performances by international calibre artists; Kalapremi has similarly presented performances in the building and has also used it as a base for teaching – e.g. for Karnatak vocal music. This collaborative rationalisation will no doubt remain salient in more austere times.

The Sage Gateshead’s stance toward multiculturalism could thus be described as vicarious – and it remains moot whether or not this is a policy lacuna. Rather than

\textsuperscript{31} See \url{http://thesagegateshead.org/support-us/our-supporters/} and \url{http://www.communityfoundation.org.uk/connect/projects-partnerships/sage-gateshead} (8 August 2012).

\textsuperscript{32} See \url{http://thesagegateshead.org/about-us/bridge-north-east/about-bridge-north-east/} (12 October 2012).

\textsuperscript{33} See \url{http://thesagegateshead.org/about-us/north-music-trust/} (12 October 2012).

\textsuperscript{34} Interview, Sarah Kekus and David Clarke, 27 April 2012.
address multiculturalism directly, the organisation tends to focus on other formations of inclusion. Its marketing strategy, at least as represented on its website, identifies diversity – and then caters for it – along two axes of difference. One is generational, with learning and participation programmes stratified from Early Years to ‘Silvers’. The second is based on musical genres, ranging from Americana, through brass, classical, folk and traditional, jazz and blues, to popular and world music. Yet with the obvious exception of this last category, ethnicity as a mode of diversity is not explicitly addressed. This suggests that even consciously inclusivist bodies must still be selective about how they construct the notion – which means that something gets unconsciously excluded or played down.

However, this is not to say that certain of The Sage Gateshead’s community engagements do not have multicultural aspirations. For example, Mongrel UK, a youth theatre group based at The Sage Gateshead involving both refugees and members of the indigenous population, ‘use[s] music, dance and drama to create vivid performances exploring experiences from ... many different cultures and backgrounds’. And Sarah Kekus reports that Gamelan North, a consortium in which The Sage Gateshead is a lead partner, has also gathered a multicultural clientele around it, not only attracting a small number of local Indonesian migrants, but also a Palestinian co-worker alongside numerous white participants. This is another sense, then, in which multiculturalism, while not addressed directly, is catered for elliptically.

**Community facing organisations**

The community facing organisations that feature below do so because we know them directly, or have learned of them in the course of our research or through dialogue with other organisations. However, since general public visibility may not, by definition, be a priority for community facing organisations (some having no obvious web presence), it is probable that the thumbnails below do not represent a complete inventory.

Asian Artists Network (AAN) adopted its constitution in 1998, and states its charitable objective as being ‘To advance the education of the public[,] in particular

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those persons of ethnic minority groups[,] in all aspects of Indian classical music.\textsuperscript{37} In reality ‘ethnic minority groups’ manifests as a collective of mostly Indian middle-class music lovers based in the Newcastle–Gateshead area, who usually meet in domestic spaces (typically in Gosforth). It is in the more spacious homes that visiting world-class musicians such as Sanjeev Chimmalgi or Rajan and Sajan Misra might be invited to perform to members and their guests, such events being supported by private donation and membership subscription. The group also sponsors public concerts in collaboration with public facing organisations – for example a concert given in October 2012 by vocalist Sanjeev Abhyankar at The Sage Gateshead in conjunction with GemArts. But AAN also has a strongly participative culture that extends beyond its expressed classical music remit. Its meetings as often as not involve members singing Bollywood film songs (\textit{filmi}) to one another – which shows how cultural erudition can sit within a wider ethos of popular sociability.

It would be a reasonable inference that such sociability is based around an affirmation and remembering (or, in the case of second- and subsequent-generation British Indians, evocation) of cultural roots. Indeed, this motivation probably applies to most South Asian community organisations. The point about cultural memory is explicit in the case of the North East of England Bengali Puja Association (NEEBPA, established in 1999), which in the History section of its website includes the following objectives: ‘To create a puja atmosphere, which people still held fondly in their memories from their time in the Indian subcontinent’; and ‘To enlighten future generations of Bengalis, ensuring that these young people do not miss out of these very important festive occasions as they grow up in the UK’.\textsuperscript{38} A \textit{puja} is a ceremony often involving a representation of the Hindu god or goddess who is the devotee of the particular occasion. \textit{Pujas} sponsored by NEEBPA are celebrated in a separately demarcated space of the Hindu Temple in Newcastle and are devoted principally to the goddesses Durga and Kali, who have a strong following from Bengalis. As with Kalapremi’s Ganesh Festival, these \textit{pujas} are also an occasion for public cultural events, in NEEBPA’s case drawing on performers from the community. These performances are one of the ways in which NEEBPA fulfils another of its objectives: ‘To invite and encourage the wider

\textsuperscript{37} See http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/Showcharity/RegisterOfCharities/CharityFramework.aspx?RegisteredCharityNumber=1068013&SubsidiaryNumber=0 (9 October 2012).

\textsuperscript{38} See http://www.neebpa.org.uk/ (10 August 2012).
regional community to participate in our religious and cultural occasions, and thereby increase cultural awareness and diversity in the region’.39 This seems to imply an identity that is both discrete from the wider community while at the same time affirming a place within it and opening out to it – probably not a bad working definition of multiculturalism. At the same time, the issue of diversity remains moot for many Bengalis – a point which will be picked up below.

Given the rich cultural heritage of the Bengal region (historically encompassing what is now West Bengal in India and the People’s Republic of Bangladesh), it is perhaps unsurprising that a large number of community-based cultural organisations in the North East region are Bengali or Bangladeshi. Just as NEEBPA arose as an initiative from three Bengali families, so the Teesside based Northern Friends Circle (NFA) ‘was formed in 1978 by a small group of Bengalis living in the north east of England’. Cultural memory again looms large: ‘The motivating factors were nostalgia for the land they left behind and a passion to maintain cultural ties, which gave them a common sense of identity.’40 As well as celebrating pujas and other festivals such as Diwali, NFA mounts performances by artists of international renown. For example, Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya, a leading Bangladeshi exponent of the song repertory of Rabindranath Tagore (Rabindrasangeet), performed at a concert organised by NFA in Peterlee, County Durham in May 2012. This event was supported by GemArts as well as by other Bengali societies – including the Teesside Bengali Institute, described elsewhere as an ‘association for the Bangladeshi Hindu community’.41 The concert (at which David Clarke, Sudipta Roy and Dalvir Singh Bajwa also performed together) was attended by a large, preponderantly Bengali / Bangladeshi audience, and much of the presentation was conducted in the Bengali language. This, then, would be an example of an event largely aimed at affirming ‘a common sense of identity’ – an ethos somewhat different from NEEBPA’s Durga puja event the previous October, which made an explicit attempt to draw in members from other communities (South Asian and white), but was conspicuously less well attended (see the account in Clarke 2012).

Newcastle Bangladeshi Association (NBA) is based in Newcastle’s West End in Elswick ward, in which the city’s Bangladeshi’s community is concentrated. NBA’s assets

39 Ibid.


41 The organisation does not appear to have a website of its own, but it is described this way in a list of BME networks for the Teesside, Wearside and Cleveland area, in NHS Tees (2011: 18).
include its own premises – a community centre linked to a mosque – which also makes
the ward something of a regional centre for Bangladeshi Muslims.\textsuperscript{42} Through the agency
of Elswick’s local councillor, Ann Schofield, we have been able to begin discussions with
NBA’s leaders about their wish to use music and culture to grow community confidence,
which they currently report as low. The history here is pertinent. Ann Schofield initially
stood for election as a Labour councillor in 2011 (and won the seat) at a time when the
British National Party was also fronting a candidate – presumably a symptom of anxieties
around race. For Bangladeshis, then, developing a sense of community identity and
finding a way to negotiate a presence within a community of communities have become
salient and sensitive issues. NBA committee members explicitly expressed the need to
affirm an identity that is both British and Bangladeshi, and a desire both to remember
cultural roots and to foster representations of them to a possibly less aware younger
generation of Bangladeshis (arguably a kind of re-acculturation process). Music is seen
as having an important role to play here, yet our discussants also expressed the
question of its ambivalent status within Islam (a point also examined in relation to
Bradford Mirpuri Pakistanis by Hodgson (forthcoming)). How this will play out in the
Newcastle context will be a matter to report on in future research and engagement. As
noted above in the case of Pakistani communities, there seems to be a need for
representation of Bangladeshi communities in the bigger cultural picture of the region.

Our preliminary research, then, shows how that picture is indeed multi-faceted. Together
with the diverse organisations outlined above, a further clutch of cultural
associations active within the North East region suggests a microcosm of the regional
complexity of the Indian subcontinent itself. Here, as there, these groups are defined by
language, religion and sometimes also by profession or gender. They include the North
East Marathi Association (NEMA), the North East Gujarathi Association, the Newcastle
Association of Malalayees (NAM), not to be confused with Our Newcastle Association of
Malalayees (ONAM), as well as North East Kannada Koota, Bangladesh Overseas Ladies
Organisation (BOLO), the North East Hindu Cultural Trust, Hindu Nari Sangh, and
Sruthi.\textsuperscript{43} These many micro-communities, giving the lie to any simplistic notion of an

\textsuperscript{42} Details at \url{http://newcastlebangladeshiassociation.org/} and
umber=1040931&SubsidiaryNumber=0&DocType=AccountList} (29 October 2012).

\textsuperscript{43} With thanks to Vidya Sarangapani, who provided details of most of the groups listed here.
'Indian’ or ‘South Asian’ community, represent a potentially rich field for future engagement and collaborative research.

**Support networks**

Certain BME-orientated arts initiatives fall outside or straddle the categories of public facing and community facing organisations. They may be orientated towards communities; at the same time elements of public funding may be critical to their operation, and their commitment may be to a wider public good rather than to any single community. Their role may indeed be to connect communities or artists and individuals within them; they are here termed *support networks*.

Intercultural Arts, which began life as NECDAF (North East Cultural Diversity Arts Forum), describes itself as ‘a development agency for culturally diverse artists and the sector in the North East of England’. Much of its work is done through its website, which offers a repository of information about job vacancies, and training and funding opportunities, as well as a database of arts practitioners. A charitable organisation with a board of trustees, Intercultural Arts has promoted artists’ work, collaborated with other development organisations, and supported research (its website archive includes publications from the research project Creative Policies for Creative Cities (Irving 2010) – a valuable point of reference in Part Three of our own account, below). The termination early in 2012 of the organisation’s status as an Arts Council Regionally Funded Organisation meant a hiatus in activities. However, it has recently resumed with a project called StepUp!, supported by the Arts Council and responding to the latter’s Creative Case for Diversity scheme. The project has two main strands, one involving the exchange of skills, mentoring, CPD, etc.; the other a regional discussion forum with an emphasis on networking.

Crossings, founded in 2009, is the brainchild of Lucy Fairley, a one-time mature student on the Folk and Traditional Music degree at ICMuS, Newcastle University. The organisation states its intent as follows: ‘We build bridges across racial and cultural divides through music. Our project creates a welcoming space where asylum seekers and refugees come together with local and international musicians, to collaborate on the development and performance of our music.’ Crossings’ work is based fundamentally on participation: it runs a choir and a band (which give public performances), offers

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instrumental lessons, and provides a crèche. The organisation relies significantly on volunteers, but has also been supported by The Sage Gateshead’s CoMusica scheme. Its funders include (or have included) Newcastle City Council, the Big Lottery Fund, Newcastle University, regional organisational donors and private donors. Crossings affirms a pro-multiculturalist and communitarian agenda, stating that its activities ‘demonstrate the value of multiculturalism, with members making a positive contribution to their local community’. Indeed Crossings would seem to constitute a multicultural community in its own right; there would thus be an interesting case study in examining how this translates into the wider multiculturalism that is one of the organisation’s expressed core values. Another research question would be how repertoire is chosen, deployed and adapted in this multicultural context.

**Community centres**

In certain cases the operation of a space or place may be an organisation’s main rationale. Centres run organisationally for and/or by communities have by definition a role to play in community development; at the same time, their very presence may be symptomatic of socio-economic hardship or marginalisation. It is salient that Newcastle’s West End, in which a number of areas of deprivation are officially identified, has a number of such centres.

For example, the Nunsmoor Centre in Fenham seeks ‘to promote the benefit of young children and families (a) by advancing education, protecting and preserving health and relieving the effects of poverty; and (b) by providing facilities for recreation and leisure-time occupation’. Built between 2004 and 2006, funded by, among others, the New Deal for Communities, Sure Start, Newcastle City Council and the EU, this family centre is now run by the Nunsmoor Centre Trust, a charitable company limited by guarantee (see Newcastle New Deal for Communities 2006). Activities include adult learning (e.g. IT training, creative writing, aromatherapy), childcare, antenatal sessions, and family sports. Although statements made by or about the Centre do not indicate any discrete provision for minority ethnic groups, evidence that this may sometimes be the case is implicit in at least one project, involving the provision of English conversation

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classes for women, and run jointly with CHAT Trust (Churches Acting Together), based in the Arthur’s Hill area of Fenham.⁴⁸

By contrast The Angelou Centre (also located in Fenham) caters explicitly for the BME community, is primarily for women, and specifically addresses disenfranchisement. One way in which the centre seeks to achieve its aim of offering ‘community based provision … for women, who are excluded due to disadvantages of race, gender and age’ is through strategic partnerships with local FE and HE institutions and organisations such as NE Women’s Network and Northumbria Criminal Justice Board. Notably the centre offers support for female victims of domestic violence, as well as courses including arts and crafts, IT and personal development. There is provision for language: courses are offered in ESOL (English as a Second Language), and its staff speak a range of Indic languages, as well as Arabic and French. The centre’s website also offers a digest of research papers and reports.⁴⁹

The Millin Centre (the trading name for the North Benwell Black Residents Support Group, now merged with Huddersfield’s Sadh Lok Housing Group) aims ‘To improve, strengthen and promote the needs of all communities living in North Benwell and surrounding areas with particular reference to Black [and] Minority Ethnic Communities’.⁵⁰ Its building, a converted terrace, offers a seminar room and a meeting space, from which community activities are also run. These include asylum seeker advice sessions; a self-advocacy group; tuition in numeracy, literacy and IT; a study group to support homework; and various arts and crafts practices. Funding and support comes from Newcastle City Council, Northern Rock Foundation, the EU Development Fund, the Community Foundation and The Trusthouse Charitable Foundation.

The Beacon Newcastle is a purpose-built centre in a newly completed ‘iconic flagship building’ on the site of the West End’s former fire station. The centre’s promotional copy declares: ‘The Beacon’s prime location places it in the heart of a rich and diverse culture …. At The Beacon we want to embrace the multicultural ethos by showcasing local talent in 12 artisan units that offer visitors a unique creative environment.’⁵¹ The Centre is managed by two charitable companies: Centre West, a recent avatar (established 2009) of the New Deal for Communities programme (which

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⁴⁸ See [http://www.chattrust.co.uk/](http://www.chattrust.co.uk/) (8 October 2012).


⁵¹ [www.thebeaconnewcastle.co.uk](http://www.thebeaconnewcastle.co.uk) (15 August 2012).
ended in 2010); and Groundwork South Tyneside and Newcastle, which aims ‘to create better neighbourhoods, to build skills and job prospects, and to live and work in a greener way’.\(^5\) This major infrastructural investment includes a function suite (suitable also for performances), rentable office space, an enterprise centre and a bistro – all of which clearly represents a significant initiative in the regeneration of Newcastle’s (now culturally very mixed) West End. Its operation would seem driven by an amalgam of ideologies, certain of which are consistent with a neoliberalist belief in small-to-medium sized enterprises as a basis for economic regeneration. An SME-meets-BME policy is evidenced in its twelve ‘artisan units’, whose current occupants include a number of minority-ethnic (principally South Asian) artists and arts-and-crafts practitioners. Rents for these units and the centre’s office spaces are low, presumably subsidised (given that larger commercial companies are excluded); and on-hand entrepreneurial training is available. Among The Beacon’s current artisanal incumbents are: Urbane Renaissance, comprising poet Wajid Hussain and his manager Richard Neville, who run arts workshops ‘as a means of developing confidence within hard-to-reach ethnic groups’;\(^6\) Kaptech Design, a print and website design company; Spice FM, a local community radio station with a strong emphasis on South Asian musics and culture; and NiSaPa (National Institute for South Asian Performing Arts), a new venture by Vijay Rajput aimed at extending his activities as a performer and teacher of Indian classical music by building on existing national professional networks.

**PART TWO: ISSUES**

Having assembled a picture of local organisations and institutions that have various kinds of agency in relation to South Asian (and more widely BME) cultures and communities, we now turn to draw out some inferences and issues. The following discussion aims to raise consciousness of what researchers seeking to build relationships with communities might need to know in order to be able to function more effectively. Additionally, it introduces some theoretical dimensions that may also be useful to non-academic partners.

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\(^6\) [http://www.thebeaconnewcastle.co.uk/artisan-units.html](http://www.thebeaconnewcastle.co.uk/artisan-units.html) (8 October 2012).
**Identities, ethnicities, genres**

The missions of many of the organisations and associations discussed above are to a large extent predicated on assumptions about ethnicity. This is arguably appropriate. As Bhikhu Parekh points out (2006: 154), ‘Since every culture is the culture of a particular group of people, its creator and historical bearer, all cultures tend to have an ethnic basis.’ Cultures and communities may indeed consciously construe themselves along ethnic lines – based on a shared history (which may involve patterns of migration) and a sense of commonality (real or imagined) as a people.\(^{54}\) Ethnicity, then, is constructed out of salient cultural and historical contingencies, rather than being based on any biological or racial essence.

While acknowledging ethnicity as an anthropological tenet thus becomes important, so too does recognising its vicissitudes. For example, historic geopolitical tensions may continue to operate between even second- or third-generation members of migrant communities. Regarding a project that GemArts conducted with young men in Newcastle’s West End, Vikas Kumar reported that ‘the Pakistani and Bangladeshi [lads], they don’t knock around together, there’s factions between them. … There’ll be two community centres, [one here,] one there; they won’t go even down to that street in some instances.’\(^{55}\) But complexities of ethnicity and identity go beyond distinctions based on current national boundaries within the South Asian subcontinent – as we have seen in the case of different migrant and post-migrant groups from the former Bengal region. Different elements of identity within and across these groups – Indian, Bangladeshi, Hindu, Muslim, secular, Bengali speaking, English speaking, Sylheti speaking, metropolitan, provincial, rural – lead in their different permutations to different crystallisations of community.\(^{56}\)

Yet these in turn should not be reified: communities themselves may be fluid, comprising, as they do, members with a variety of interests and networks. Two different events, with their different imaginings of community and solidarity, may have a significant overlap in their audience members – as evidenced by the two contrasting Bengali/Bangladeshi events described above, mounted respectively by NEEBPA and NFA: one more outward facing and cosmopolitan, the other more introversively focused on

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\(^{54}\) See also the discussion of ethnicity in our companion literature review (Hodgson and Clarke 2012).

\(^{55}\) Interview, Vikas Kumar and David Clarke, 17 April 2012.

\(^{56}\) To paraphrase a statement by one of our Bangladeshi respondents, ‘Bangladeshi is not the same as Indian, and is not the same as Bengali; our culture is not that of Kolkata [Calcutta].’
‘Bengali-ness’ (or at least ‘Tagore-ness’). Two things are suggested here. First, these events point to different constructions of multiculturalism – and hence to the further possibility of a multiplicity of multiculturalisms – with different claims to validity and different problematics. Secondly, cultural events qua events represent significant moments of possibility: opportunities to build new networks, make new acquaintanceships and friendships, and re-imagine identities. Hence there is a question here for arts development organisations as to whether the potential of events could be still further exploited.

Identities (and with this, communities) based on ethnicity may be complicated in at least two other ways: by gender and by generation. Gender may form a basis for a different form of solidarity, either within communities (as would seem implicit in the work of groups such as the Peterlee based Bangladesh Overseas Ladies Association) or across them; sometimes in difficult circumstances, as addressed by the Angelou Centre, sometimes in more congenial ones, as in another GemArts project, based on beat box and Kathak and Bollywood dance forms. Vikas Kumar describes this project:

We’re working currently … in the West End with a group of young women, … because again we know that lots of young women don’t access arts opportunities … especially from those communities, for all sorts of different reasons, and if it is, it’s a very closed shop. So, [we’re] working with … sixteen young women from various BME communities …. The Pakistani and Bangladeshi young women seem to … get on a lot more than the young men, to be honest.

At the same time there are strong cultural prohibitions on these women performing publicly:

a lot of the Muslim young women … they wouldn’t even perform outside because they would only perform to another group of women … within the groups that they already know. They wouldn’t come out and, say, perform on a stage here because, basically, they wouldn’t be allowed, or if their families found out it would be frowned upon.

The implications for researchers and community developers is not only that such gender-specific possibilities should not be overlooked, but also that such activities, which might

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57 This point is also explored in Clarke 2012.

58 Interview, Vikas Kumar and David Clarke, 17 April 2012.
be seen as a positive contribution to multiculturalism, may need, paradoxically, to remain non-public.

Sensitivity to generational differences is also important. As the earlier discussion of demographics indicated, elders of BME communities are likely to experience themselves as a tiny minority in relation to their own age group at large; some of them, having migrated with their families, may experience a particularly acute dislocation from their country of origin. Conversely, second- and later-generation BME members may have a very different experience of identity. Perhaps in some ways ostensibly more integrated with the social majority by dint of having been born in the UK and grown up there, they may in other ways experience a different kind of dysphoria. For example, what Hodgson (forthcoming) says of young Pakistani Mirpuris in Bradford – ‘in the home they are chastised for not being Pakistani enough; at the mosque they are rebuked for not being Islamic enough; and, in the eyes of some politicians and the media, they are villainised for not being British enough’ – may go equally for Muslim youths in the North East. It is possible that in identifying younger people as having an ‘international’ outlook (an epithet applied by one of our respondents), community leaders may overlook their particular, local needs. And their particular interests: Hodgson’s analysis of how, for a younger generation of Bradford South Asians, rap music is a means for voicing an identity, is reflected in projects undertaken by GemArts in Newcastle’s West End. As Vikas Kumar put it:

I’ve tried doing tabla sessions with young people from the West End, but they’re not interested because, basically, they see it as, well, ‘What’s tabla got to do with me really? I’m British born, I come from here, I’m a rapper – hip hop – but I like Indian music as well, and Bollywood music."

Here as in any other modern culture, identification with a musical genre may be bound up with identification as a member of one’s own generation – which may not sit squarely with ties to one’s family’s community, and which may cut across ethnic delineations. At the same time, the kind of essentialisation that would suggest that South Asian people should relate to certain archetypes (or stereotypes) of South Asian cultures (tabla, harmonium, Bollywood dance) should arguably not be repeated by assuming that certain genres are inherently appropriate only to certain generations; publicly sponsored rap projects might in the end risk turning into their own kind of reified practice.

59 Ibid.
Relationships / capital

An assumption behind the notion of ‘connected communities’ is that individuals and groups of different identities may wish to come into relationship with one another – a desire which, as we have seen, should not be taken for granted. A further assumption, inherent in the involvement of academic researchers and their associates, is that they too might come into relationship with communities and individuals. This too is not a straightforward matter. Awareness of how such relationships are (or could be) structured is thus of no small importance.

Relevant to the kinds of relationship likely to emerge between education institutions, arts development organisations and communities is a distinction between organisational structures and networks. The point is brought out by Alison Gilchrist in a key text, *The Well-Connected Community* (2004: 34):

[Organisations] function through roles and regulations that exist independently of who might be occupying or implementing these. In contrast, networks operate through connections between specific individuals whose attitudes and actions shape interpersonal interactions and incorporate local conventions. Organisations use rules to coordinate activity. Networks need relationships to influence behaviour and change minds.

As Gilchrist elaborates, organisations tend to be defined by formal relationships – members acting in officially defined roles – networks by informal ones – individuals brokering relationships and agreements according to need or contingency, often based on personal connections. Both modalities have their virtues and vices, but awareness of both is essential, especially for those (academics, say) more used to working in an organisational capacity. As compared to the ostensibly greater transparency of the latter, networks may be the less immediately obvious means by which things get done in communities, not least in South Asian communities, where family networks may continue to be important. According to one of our respondents, experienced in working with BME communities:

[In] the West End, as a whole ... it’s still a very much [an] auntie / uncle community, you know. If somebody wants something, they will have a chat to their friend whose auntie / uncle is friends with another auntie / uncle, who will then work out the deal, and then that will disseminate down, back to the two people who had the initial conversation. That’s just the way it is, you know.
That’s, if you want to work in the community … you acknowledge that that is the way things are done.⁶⁰

Distinctions between organisations and networks may not be absolute. Family ties, personal friendships and relationships may operate behind the scenes within and between organisations, and may among other things constitute a channel for philanthropy.⁶¹ Individuals working in an organisational capacity may mutate their function within it such that personal investment in an activity takes them beyond the formal remit of their role, often simply in order to reach a desired end. One respondent (quoted anonymously here) described their involvement with an organisationally sponsored musical activity as follows:

I’m terribly subversive really, do lots of things for nothing. To make it happen I do it in my own time, really. … I’ve got one group which is, they’re all, it’s all voluntary. So, nobody pays anything into it to keep it going, so essentially, it is a community of people coming together to make things happen. … I have basically had to give it a bung [subsidy] to pay for the room, and if we need any extra tuition I also have to pay for that at the moment, and I can’t keep doing that. … It’s a real, huge juggling act.

What these observations also point to is the way human relationships within organisations and networks, and between individuals, are mediated by various forms of capital. Shortfalls in economic capital may be compensated for by resources of social capital – for example, access to, or input from, other individuals and organisations able to give of their time and/or expertise. (In many South Asian cultures, this is characterised as lena-dena (give and take) based relationships of reciprocity (see Shaw 2000).) That expertise may in turn be construed as cultural capital – the repositories of knowledge and skills acquired over long time spans by individuals, or collectively by institutions and communities. Social capital may also be a route to economic capital. For example, being plugged into a network of ‘aunties’ and ‘uncles’ may be a way to eliciting funding by private donation, thus making an arts event possible. And by converting their economic capital into cultural capital, such donors may reciprocally enhance their own social capital – their status and influence within a community.

⁶⁰ Interview, Richard Neville and David Clarke, 5 July 2012. This view was corroborated by all partners in a plenary discussion held on 30 August 2012.

⁶¹ A point which emerged in the above interview with Richard Neville.
The *locus classicus* for this typology of capital is Pierre Bourdieu’s essay, ‘The forms of capital’ (1986). Bourdieu reminds us that capital (and with it power and agency) is not limited to the economic sphere. He analyses the implications of the fact that different types of capital may be convertible into one another (as we have just seen illustrated).\(^{62}\) The tenor of his critique – which like all critiques is designed to wake one up from naivety – would seem to be that this capacity of conversion is, to invoke an idea from Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘beyond good and evil’, or perhaps has elements of both. To relate this to our present discussion, this is on the one hand how communities may be helped to grow and why they may have an interest in connecting with one another. Gilchrist, for example, takes it as axiomatic that social capital is intrinsic to the growth of networks – the linkages that establish bonds and build bridges – which is in turn essential to the development of communities (2004: 4–7). On the other hand, Bourdieu (1986: 252–3) insists that with his schema

\[\text{two opposing but equally partial views are superseded: on the one hand,}\]

\[\text{economism, which, on the grounds that every type of capital is reducible in the last analysis to economic capital, ignores what makes the specific efficacy of the other types of capital, and on the other hand, semiologism (nowadays represented by structuralism, symbolic interactionism, or ethnomethodology), which reduces social exchanges to phenomena of communication and ignores the brutal fact of universal reducibility to economics.}\]

What might this mean for the practical realities of the current project? For one thing, the latter point invites organisations (e.g. Higher Education Institutions, arts development organisations) not to regard themselves purely in the mirror of their own symbolic representations – for example, the way they represent themselves on their public-facing websites, which to some extent must reproduce the values of the funding bodies that provide their economic capital. For another thing, it suggests to everyone that fostering the production of art and culture within communities (that is, helping to increase social and cultural capital), is not identical with fostering the accumulation of economic capital – which is a salutary reminder about the extent to which such activities can contribute to a region’s economic regeneration. On the other hand, those activities do not take place in a realm that is disinterested from the sphere of economic capital – which structures social relationships in such a way that they will tend to reproduce the economic ones.

\(^{62}\) Marcel Mauss’s *The Gift* (2002 [1950]) is also pertinent here.
Organisations, groups, communities and individuals possess economic, social and cultural capital in different measure. In other words there are structural inequalities between them, which unavoidably generate differences of empowerment. Large institutions such as The Sage Gateshead and the region’s universities will have all three forms of capital in large measure, while, at the other extreme, individual artists seeking work may have radically less economic capital both in absolute terms and relative to their own cultural capital. There are also paradoxes. While large organisations hold significant concentrations of all forms of capital, their workers, because of their place in the organisational hierarchy, may have limited ability to tap into their employers’ economic capital; hence, in working with communities they may need (as in the testimony quoted above) to draw on other forms of capital. Conversely, some communities may collectively own little in the way of economic or wider social capital – a cause of low cultural confidence – while individuals within them (say, business entrepreneurs) may have access to considerable economic capital.

An obvious inference from this picture is the need to redirect the flow of capital (of all kinds) in new directions that would help achieve an improved cultural situation. While this inference is not difficult to draw, effecting change is more challenging. It calls on all stakeholders to be creative and giving with whatever forms of capital they have at their disposal, looking beyond their immediate habitus, that is, their normative spheres and habits of practice (see Bourdieu 1977). Paradoxically, this may be harder for larger, already empowered organisations, which, with their large workforces, need continually to search for large sources of capital in order to sustain themselves; with this comes the tendency to perpetuate their own cultures and reproduce their own values as they engage with – that is, redistribute capital towards – communities outside. This is an issue for individuals working for such institutions and also trying to network with outside communities; identical with neither their organisations nor their networks, they may need to negotiate the tensions that come with multiple allegiances; at the same time, they remain agents for change.

Accessibility of place becomes one important empirical indicator of flows of capital. The possibility (or the lack of it) on the part of researchers and community developers to gain access to the physical locations of community life is an index of social capital (or the lack of it) expressed as personal bonds with members of those communities. Those bonds may be crucial in effecting the reverse traffic. Because large organisations symbolise significant concentrations of capital of all types, their physical premises may not be a natural destination for individuals and communities, which
perceive themselves as lacking in capital. As Sarah Kekus (of The Sage Gateshead) put it: ‘big public buildings can put people off. ... [A]lthough it isn’t the organisation, it’s where the organisation is based, and although most of the work is outside of it ... you don’t feel that you’ve got permission to come in.’ Richard Neville, recalling his efforts to market a project run by Northern Stage theatre to communities in the West End, stated: ‘to get to Northern Stage you’ve got to walk ... within the heavy duty boundaries of Newcastle University, for one thing, so, you know, it’s already a rather strange environment’. One solution to this was to supplement institutional advertising with personal networking:

One of the things I said was, ‘Go to a shopkeeper, give him some tickets and ask him to sell them. Do it that way.’ And, you know, they did ... . [T]he shopkeeper who was trying to sell the tickets came on the opening night, you know, he’d sold ... three or four tickets, and he was absolutely chuffed to bits that he’d been involved in this process. He was so apologetic that he hadn’t managed to sell all of these tickets, because ... he took it as his responsibility ... to sell these things, but he thoroughly enjoyed the show. He brought his family along. ‘Fantastic’, he said ... ‘next time I’ll sell them all.’

Here, then, developing social capital (personal connections) becomes a way to overcome what is alienating about the spaces that symbolise institutions’ concentration of economic and cultural capital. But flow both ways remains important. For example, Bangladeshi community representatives expressed to us a preference for holding events in their own community spaces because, in their words, their community lacked the confidence to visit spaces outside. Developing networks with such communities therefore needs to begin at their heart, with the hope that with increasing confidence (development of social capital) those communities might eventually also seek to connect outwards.

63 Interview, Sarah Kekus and David Clarke, 27 April 2012.

64 Interview, Richard Neville and David Clarke, 5 July 2012.
PART THREE: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE AVENUES FOR RESEARCH

Evidence collated in this essay suggests a complex and lively cultural chemistry at work within South Asian communities in Newcastle and its environs, and some connections already in place between those communities, arts organisations, educational institutions and other bodies. This is not to imply that all is harmonious or that there is no further work to be done, but rather indicates that future engagement between these parties in the interests of community development does not start from a blank slate. There is plenty of history.

This picture also offers an alternative take on images of the city and region circulating in the rhetoric of cultural regeneration, in its critique, and in the vernacular imagination. In brief, these images project Newcastle as one of several cities in the UK and Europe that since the late twentieth century have sought to reverse post-industrial decline through attempts to grow an economy based on culture. The NewcastleGateshead Initiative (NGI), set up in 2000 and key to those authorities’ (as it turned out, unsuccessful) bid for 2008 European Capital of Culture, is one example of this tendency\(^6\) (the London 2012 Olympics would be another). Characteristically, landmark buildings – The Sage Gateshead and Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art – have been integral to this strategy, as have developments outside the centre, in the Ouseburn Valley and (as we have seen) in Newcastle’s West End. Notwithstanding community involvement in such ventures, and some evidence of their having had a selective effectiveness, these regenerative efforts have, on the view of several academics, largely benefited the already enfranchised, and offered at best limited economic benefits to those most dispossessed by the loss of the region’s former industrial base (see Irving 2010; Mah 2010). As James Heartfield argues, ‘With other job prospects limited, the straitened people of Scotswood or Benwell serve up lattes at the Baltic café to the pampered residents of Gosforth’ (Heartfield 2006: 218; quoted in Irving 2010). Newcastle’s image as a ‘party city’ can be argued as the vernacular flipside of the same conditions – epitomised by the many bars on the Newcastle quayside which face Baltic and The Sage Gateshead on the opposite side of the Tyne; happy hours and an attendant drinking culture are perhaps a more brash symptom of socio-economic

\(^{6}\) For more information see [http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=11221966#contents-3](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=11221966#contents-3) (31 August 2012).
conditions in which ‘policy makers and local people alike have aligned themselves to an imagined community and post-industrial future’ (Irving 2010).

Against this background, our picture of micro-communities and networks organised around South Asian and other minority-ethnic cultural activities suggests another Newcastle, another North East. While connections between these communities may be limited – they do not represent a homogeneous South Asian or BME population – they perhaps have a number of things in common: the experience of migration in their relatively recent cultural memory; their negotiation of change, as subsequent, UK-born generations articulate different relationships with contemporary society; and their consequently complex experience of identity.

It is only by looking through the lens of ethnicity that this picture (and others like it) comes into focus at all. This does not cancel out other images of the city, like those just sketched, but nor can it be smoothly assimilated into them under some critically unconsidered notion of ‘diversity’ – an idea which becomes problematic when it risks equating all forms of difference (e.g. ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability) as facets of the same, synchronic continuum, effacing differences of history, social need and class. Traces of such an essentialising tendency can be detected in Arts Council England’s recent reformulation of its diversity policy – for example, in its adoption of ‘a single equality view, with no strand seen as more important than any other’ (2011b: 6; emphasis added); and in its embrace of the paradoxically homogenising notion of the ‘diverse artist’. This is why ‘ethnicity’ and ‘multiculturalism’ are terms worth holding on to, for the time being at least. Foregrounding ethnicity is one way in which the true multiplicity of cultures comes to light, and in which their sometimes challenging implications for one another – their incompatibilities and possibilities – resist being glossed over. Further critical interrogation of public policy around culture and the arts, and of the metalanguages and ideologies of funding bodies and related organisations might thus be one element of a future research programme.

Bringing an alternative cultural image into focus, as begun here, is a matter of representation; and this suggests another possible avenue for future research, namely an ethnographic inquiry into the musical and cultural activities of South Asian and other BME communities in the city and region. Our initial hunch that there are many humanly interesting stories to be recounted and interpreted was borne out by an anecdote from one of our research partners, in which a chance conversation in the back of a cab led to a group of local Mirpuri taxi drivers being supported by his organisation in their
aspirations to play tabla together. This story points to a much larger tale about the role of music in the lives of working people and in communities of which society at large may not even be aware (an unknown or unacknowledged presence of actual ‘diverse’ cultural practices). Working with such groups could help develop a richer picture of the musical and cultural life of communities, and so contribute to a more nuanced and more representative self-image of the region, which may also be of benefit to a national consciousness. This tale also suggests a number of tasks for future research, such as further testing the hypothesis operating throughout this essay (and explored in associated work – Clarke 2012; Hodgson, forthcoming), that music and other cultural practices might help sustain communities and promote resilience, especially in difficult times. A related question would be whether there is there something that musicking in particular offers in this respect – perhaps something akin to what Tia DeNora, in her account of music in everyday life, has described as a ‘technology of the self’ (DeNora 2000).

There are also of course ethical issues. While such narratives may offer fertile ground for academic enquiry by ethnomusicologists or social anthropologists, they cannot be researched without self-reflexive awareness of the power relationships between the parties involved, and indeed would be best approached as a collaborative venture (a point we discuss in Hodgson and Clarke 2012). Such a co-creative stance would be consistent with much of the current wisdom in the field of community development (Gilchrist 2004) and with many of the recommendations by researchers critical of cultural regeneration programmes (as reported in Irving 2010). All this points to the question likely to be asked by potential respondents regarding what might be in it for them – answers to which might include, helping give them and their community a voice; and promoting visibility (or audibility) and hence a potentially stronger sense of belonging. There would also be the possibility of extending their networks, thus developing social capital which might in turn give access to economic capital. From the researchers’ side, connections with our arts organisation project partners and already-known community members would remain crucial in brokering further linkages; hence continuing to develop networks would be integral to any future research programme.

A further desideratum for research, as mentioned near the outset, would be to develop some form of cultural map of the city and its environs. Most prosaically this would involve attempting to get a factual picture of who is doing what, and where; but

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66 Recounted in the project partners’ plenary discussion, 30 August 2012.
there is also a case for a more interpretative, critically orientated ‘thick description’. Irving (2010) states that much of the critical literature she analyses in her own review points to cultural mapping as a necessary step to moving beyond the instrumentalism of culture-led regeneration strategies [in order] to discover the spaces where local cultural activities and mobilisation capacities are attached, what these local activities are[,] and the collective sense of identity of the people who participate in the activities. ... Cultural mapping involves the identification and recording of an area’s indigenous cultural resources, as well as other intangibles such as their sense of place and social values. The identified values of place and culture will then provide the foundation for sustainable strategies, vibrant and more cohesive community networks, greater community confidence and direction, and increased community capacity for holistically addressing its own needs.

Our arts organisation research partners have confirmed that some form of mapping would indeed be a desirable resource. Necessarily this would be a dynamic – and hence also partial – map, but it would represent a valuable tool in achieving a clearer image of the multicultural complexion and complexity of communities in the area. There might also be interesting correlations to be made between such mappings and socio-economic ones which chart areas of deprivation.

In summary, then, future avenues for research and engagement would include the following.\(^67\)

- maintaining a critical analysis of public arts policy against the background of the wider socio-economic picture;
- strengthening and extending networks;
- helping communities gain confidence and agency through cultural activities;
- developing a collaborative ethnography;
- undertaking a cultural mapping of the city and its environs.

Timescale is also an important element. Research in other Connected Communities studies conducted for the AHRC raises interesting questions about the temporality of communities and community engagement (see Bastian 2011). It is clear that effecting change cannot be achieved overnight, and the pace of change is probably related (in

\(^{67}\) These points are elaborated in an Action Plan produced in association with this scoping study, available at: [http://research.ncl.ac.uk/icmus/scholarship/musicsofsouthasia/](http://research.ncl.ac.uk/icmus/scholarship/musicsofsouthasia/).
some non-linear way) to the rate of economic movement – a salutary point given the depth of the current economic recession and limited signs of recovery in the region at the time of writing. Yet one cause for non-pessimism is that the networks so far established grow out of personal relationships and commitments that already go back some years, and hence have the potential to be sustainable beyond the lifetime of any single research grant or funding stream. Hence, there is a basis for being able to continue to operate on a longer-term temporality in the future. And it is perhaps the existence of relationships that are not entirely coterminous with their organisational contexts that gives hope for growing connections – between communities and between individuals – that transcend their mediation by capital (of whatever kind). This would be the very opposite of corporatism.

November 2012
REFERENCES AND EXTERNAL LINKS


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68 This list includes works – in print and/or electronic form – with one or more identifying authors and/or an identifying title and date of publication. Footnotes above also include references to individual web pages, interviews and items of correspondence not listed here. For details of further works consulted within the wider remit of this scoping study, see our reading list (‘Library’) at [http://www.citeulike.org/group/16625](http://www.citeulike.org/group/16625) (21 October 2012).


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The Connected Communities

Connected Communities is a cross-Council Programme being led by the AHRC in partnership with the EPSRC, ESRC, MRC and NERC and a range of external partners. The current vision for the Programme is:

“to mobilise the potential for increasingly inter-connected, culturally diverse, communities to enhance participation, prosperity, sustainability, health & well-being by better connecting research, stakeholders and communities.”

Further details about the Programme can be found on the AHRC’s Connected Communities web pages at:

www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/connectedcommunities.aspx