

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA)

PROJECT TITLE				
Reframing South Asian Stories: uncovering and activating lost histories through local newspaper photography.				
LEAD INSTITUTION				
Name of HEI institution	De Montfort University			
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
PARTNER ORGANISATION				
Name of organisation	Reach Ltd (MirrorPix)			
Website	https://www.mirrorpix.com			
THE PROJECT				
<p>This project will explore MirrorPix’s newspaper photography archive to uncover the local press’s visual depiction of South Asian experiences in 1970s Midlands. Working with communities to revisit stories from the past, it will reinvisage perceptions of South-Asian heritage and how archival metadata and language shape local archival history.</p> <p>While the pre-1971 period represents the arrival of the pioneering generation whose stories were told by Virdee in <i>Coming to Coventry</i> (2006), this project will focus on the strife-prone decade of 1971-1981, which strongly resonates with contemporary Britain. This decade is framed by the UK Parliament’s 1971 Immigration Act, restricting immigration from Commonwealth countries, and The British Nationality Act 1981, further tightening right to abode. The decade between these two pieces of legislation by two Conservative Governments was arguably the last time of relatively unrestricted travel into the UK from its former colonies-turned-Commonwealth-partners. The arrival of East African Asians to cities like Leicester added further complexity to the multicultural Midlands.</p> <p>This project makes a timely intervention to explore the troubled 1970s through the alternative space of community representation in the local press and a period before mass media began to penetrate every aspect of peoples’ lives, examining how photographs shaped immigrant subjects’ experiences. Photographs capturing the pride and prejudice that comprised the migrant community’s life in the Midlands in the 1970s, in their daily interactions with state institutions and their social identities, become an emotive social scene that the PhD student can revisit, uncovering embellishment, omission, and the people and stories behind the image.</p> <p>Key questions include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In what ways does place, and region inform and/or disrupt conventional narratives of migration, race and citizenship? 2. What role does local newspaper photography play in deconstructing and reconstructing community histories? 3. What does the archive tell us about the history of race, class, and gender in the Midlands, when viewed through the lens of the South Asian community? 				

THE PROCESS

The student will identify stories of south-Asians within the British Newspaper Archive in the MirrorPix Birmingham, Coventry and Leicester newspaper archives and discover the matching press images within the MirrorPix photography archive. There is a likelihood of the need to digitise these images and so training will be provided. The student will discover, contact and collaborate with communities using a participatory approach to recover and decolonise these stories, presenting the fieldwork in online blogs and exhibitions as a shared curation as well as within the thesis. The researcher will explore local Midlands' newspaper archives belonging to MirrorPix to surface South-Asian-origin stories from the long 1970s and connect these to their communities in the Midlands. The researcher will examine and document the journey of the photographs by tracing the life of those which were published and those that remained unpublished. Crucially, the student will assess and question to what extent the project's new ways of collecting historical data can challenge dominant narratives by adding hyper-local detail from marginal spaces and communities.

THE PLACE

The student will be based at De Montfort University but be expected to undertake fieldwork (12 weeks in year 1 and year 2, and 6 weeks in year 3) at the MirrorPix Archive and in the communities of the three newspaper archives in Birmingham, Leicester and Coventry. All of this will be supported by MirrorPix's Head Archivist (John Mead) and Professor Pippa Virdee's (DMU) expertise in colonial and migrant history, and the history of the South Asian Diaspora, and Dr Ben Kynewood's (Coventry) extensive experience of working with hidden or marginal local voices and the asset evidence, usually found in disparate archives, used to platform, spotlight and amplify these narratives. The student will be part of a vibrant M4C PhD community and a dynamic body of DMU.

THE PERSON

The student should have a strong background in historical studies, and a keen interest in community engagement or experience of working with visual/photographic objects. Support and training will be provided for community engagement, archival and online skills from supervisors at De Montfort University, Coventry University and MirrorPix.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE. Please email the lead university supervisor if you want to find out more about this CDA project.

Lead HEI Supervisor:	Pippa Virdee
Lead HEI Supervisor Email:	pvirdee@dmu.ac.uk