Transcript: Inclusive Spaces: Why is cultural heritage under threat in London?

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

Culture, heritage, development, regeneration, hipster, diaspora, political change, policy, Brick lane, Bengali, Bangladeshi

**SPEAKERS**

Kamna Patel, Saif Osmani, Richard Lee, Mama D

**Kamna Patel 0:00**

Hello everyone. Welcome to the Inclusive Spaces seminar series that is coming to you from The Bartlett, the Faculty of the Built Environment here at UCL. It is my great pleasure to welcome you to our April edition of Inclusive Spaces, my name Kamna Patel and I'm the Vice Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in The Bartlett.

Today's talk is about why is cultural heritage under threat in London, a pertinent topic for every single one of us, not least myself who considers herself a proud Londoner. So I’m really keen to hear what our speakers have to say on this important and relevant and contemporary topic.

A little bit about our speakers, our first speaker will be Saif Osmani who's a postgraduate research student at the Bartlett school of architecture, and an interdisciplinary creative practitioner specializing in the fine arts and architectural design.

Saif is also a former Bartlett student and graduated from a master’s in architecture and historic urban environments, back in 2020. The second speaker will be Richard Lee, who is joining us from the Just Space network, and Saif will be saying a little bit more about Richard and his work later.

And our third speaker is Mama D, and Mama D is a community researcher and facilitator, whose background is in food and nourishment practice and food justice issues, who currently curates community-centred knowledge, learning journeys, and exploring the interfaces between community, modernity and systemic justice.

 Saif will also be introducing Mama D a little bit later on.

And now a little bit of housekeeping. The session is being recorded and will be added to the Faculty YouTube channel, the Bartlett EDI website and will be forwarded to all registered attendees. We encourage you to submit a question for the speakers at any point during this lecture by clicking on the Q and A function on the bottom of the screen. You can submit your own question or upload others.

We will hear from Saif and his speakers - and his guest speakers - for the first half, for about 40 minutes of the session, and then begin the Q and A in the second half of the session before ending promptly at two o'clock. And without further ado, Saif, i'm going to hand it over to you.

**2:25 Saif Osmani**

Thank you very much, Kamna, and Nishat for allowing me to speak. I'll just show the first set of slides.

So thank you for joining us this lunchtime, the key question has come in, as Kamna said, is why is cultural heritage under threat in London and there's some developments happening locally, which I think are of importance if you look at the Brick Lane area, certainly under Northern and there's a series of banners which have popped up this week. There's been 7000-odd individual objection letters which are objecting to a development on Woodseer street, which is around the middle of Brick Lane just near the iconic Truman bridge, and what we found was the planning talk that took place yesterday, actually deferred the application for viewing a bit later or reviewing it for later, but initially it has approved it, or granted it.

So what we're finding is there’s a lot of large scale changes happening around Brick Lane and one of the key things is the intensification of buildings. And in London generally has been low rise to medium rise, and the high rises really kind of picked up around the 1950s or 60s, one or two popped up, such as the Shell Center or NatWest Tower. And afterwards now what we're seeing is a real upsurge towards the kind of high rise city and similarly areas like Brick Lane and areas of particular cultural importance are experiencing that compression and that intensification. So at the moment, we've also got a livable streets program which is restructuring roads and walkways across parts of London, so that it's kind of cycle friendly and so forth, but a lot of the small businesses are finding this difficult because bikers don't necessarily shop with cars which they need, and all the rest of it, so this kind of  tangible things that constantly come up when you're talking at community level, which aren't necessarily something that is considered at policy level.

So locally, the heritage groups around Brick Lane, and a big well known one is Spitalfields Trust, there's other neighbourhood planning forums, who have tried to kind of keep the historic environment and the shops around, I mean the buildings around it, in keeping with sort of tangible date or so that it can be dated and that it sticks with conservation that rules.

For communities groups like myself, coming from a British Bangladeshi background, you find that the agency isn't necessarily dead, but community agency to speak up on these issues aren't necessarily there, and so a few years ago, actually five years ago now, we set up the Bengali East End Heritage society, partly on the back of the East End preservation society and the Jewish East End celebration society, because we felt that we needed to have that conversation about heritage ourselves within our own communities and that - that was that platform wasn't necessarily there.

And this was partly because there was some street lamps removed, which were Bengali themed, from Brick Lane and then reduced to halfway, and we thought that that was essentially an attack on our culture.

So, recent developments, again, the reason I mentioned these because they very much impact the - the context I’m going to be talking about, but also the fact that heritage policies really are - tend to be kind of surrounded around large scale and developer-led or land ownership, rather than necessarily being seen from community perspectives, the Truman Brewery which is as everybody knows, if they've gone to Brick Lane is - dates back to about 1666, it has 10 acre land where the granite flooring has recently been removed from the site, and this was, you know, that caused a big uproar amongst the heritage groups locally, where they felt that the heritage of the site was being undermined. This was mentioned in - the granite was mentioned as it was desirable to keep them, but they were in fact just bulldozed through to make plans for what might be coming up and the planning hearing tomorrow - yesterday and the Woodseer street development, in particular, which you see on the image below on the left, is currently being considered.

Now the landowners and developers aren't necessarily considering the - the impacts that this is having on the communities around it, what you're seeing is that there's a real lack of a master plan, and in fact there’s a lot of dodging of a master plan going on behind the scenes.

And we're really concerned about this, the reason is because there's an impact which is not just, one that is, you know, based on I live here, and you live there and that's - that's all it is, but Brick Lane itself is an important cultural centre, as we all know, and this culture is not just monocultural but it's across different communities and experienced at different scales of - of encounter or between different sectors as well, so all of that complexity was actually being, we felt, undermined by some of these developments.

The trends that we're seeing are predominantly sort of - ones that follow what's happening in King’s Cross as you saw under the arches, Camden Market, which is being sold off to large scale developers as well or owners, and then Brixton Market as well, which has recently turned - changed hands again so is Brick Lane under threat is something that's coming up and has come up over the last few years.

So here's some examples of what might be expected of Brick Lane, now, as you can see, at the top is Bishopsgate Goodsyard, which was approved a few months ago by the mayor's office and the Mayor of London’s office. And the style of development is very different to what’s there at the moment and it's very much kind of capitalizing on the heritage or the built aspects from a couple of hundred years ago, right the way to kind of industrial, dark industrial sort of atmosphere. Increasingly the ethnic minorities are photoshopped in or they're very much selected based on a particular image or a set of images which are seen as more desirable to be walking through these spaces, so this will significantly change the feel and the character of this historic and the conservation area that it falls under.

This map is a very useful example, very useful sort of way of looking at some of the sizes of these developments, so, if you look on the left there the City of London is shown in the yellow, the principal areas, I mean the other areas are ones which have been developed, and a lot of it has been criticized for, for kind of reflecting the facadist kind of element where you're keeping the facades of these buildings and behind it you're decking out and, in fact, taking away the inside of buildings.

And, as a result, a lot of people across the board, including Bangladeshis, and non-Bangladeshis, and heritage groups and old East End groups and the local groups they're really against a lot of what's being eroded. And at the top there you'll see Bishopsgate Goodsyard and that's coming up in the next 10 years, 10 to 12 years and our Truman Brewery there, you'll see is largely owned as privately owned and you won't necessarily experience this on Brick Lane, but when you - when you're on Brick Lane you won’t necessarily know how much land is behind there, but if you walk around that area you'll realize it's actually, round about the same size as the Bishopsgate Goodsyard there, so it's still a very huge site, it’s going to have a huge impact.

On the on the right you've got a kind of green dotted cross shape and that's the area that I’m going to focus in on today, and this is a cross section of Hanbury street, which goes from Liverpool street to towards Whitechapel and from Aldgate, on Brick Lane going on.

So the Hanbury street intersection is on the left there, and you can see a picture of the Hanbury street intersection and you'll see from this plan that there's been all sorts of discussions and talks that have happened over the years, and this is from the 1986 Community Development Plan which promised so much for local people, yet hadn't delivered the - the scale of changes that people wanted to see, or the benefits for the Community, so I’ve been kind of making comparisons with that largely as a as a point when it comes to developments locally.

So bit of overview about Spitalfields and Banglatown. And I put together some very broad terms here, so the Banglatown name really kind of started off from the community, the community felt that their - they needed a bit of defining in this area, and it was around the late 80s and 90s that they started casually using the term Banglatown and that really kind of picked up with the planners, and obviously either – they either saw it as a threat or an opportunity, or possibly both, and they decided that this could be a good term to kind of use to define these areas a bit more and that way, for example, the restaurant trade started picking up. Now so it's kind of a misnomer to think that the restaurant trade popped up then, it didn't, because a lot of the Bangladeshis who were working in leather factories locally, would go and eat in cafes, and those cafes were in fact the starting points of a lot of the restaurants or what they later viewed as Indian restaurants, but that the Bangladeshis claimed as Bangladeshi restaurants in particular.

And there's a lot also written about racism and structural racism in the area, so this is an area of immense activism at various levels, from, you know from demonstrations and so forth, to emergence of counterculture, so which what you have around the 2000s was Asian underground music started - started really kicking off around Shoreditch and people walking through brick lane, so things like ADF, Asian Dub Foundation, State of Bengal, Ozmani Sounds  et cetera, they - They were doing underground events which were very much pushed by the local authority as a way of saying that look - look how hip we are, look how cool we are. So If you look at the hipster movement or where the hipsters came in, it was it was - that was early kind of trickles of that.

And then later and certainly when I was at art school, the - the art scene was really important around Brick Lane, a lot of my tutors, my student friends had found places - they all were staying there temporarily and the art exhibitions there took place behind - behind the facades they - they took place anywhere, in fact, and some of them are behind toilet doors and so forth, and back rooms and all sorts, and these ad hoc places really did help facilitate an experimentation of multiple forms, so you would have kind of pop up gigs that nobody knew about or there was events happening against squats and so forth.

But the - around 2000s, early 2000s people generally felt that there was a balance with these community businesses and there was tolerance as a result of it and local people and newcomers were all able to have a say and in fact there was a lot of interaction between them, and I mean, seeing as we're on dates, the 1970s, 60s and 70s, there was a lot of talk about demolishing a lot of the East End. So the decline of the East End following World War Two really changed when the Bangladeshis moved in, and the reason I’m going to say that is because 1981, the birth rates went up and that was very much attested to the Bangladeshi community, because they are from - had large families, but prior to that it was certainly declining and the area wasn't getting the interest that - that - that it had done prior to the war.

So when we're looking at culture there's certain things in the East End which are seen as given, others are not so cogent so  we’re seeing some very different forms, so here you have temple culture, you have the built heritage and you obviously have the graffiti, for example, that's probably seen as temporal, some has remained there long term. You've also got cultural events, centres. You've got the food culture, and the culinary culture and you've also got places and some kind of architectural features and so forth.

So in my studies or my ethnographic research in particular what I was looking at was how is it that these communities defined culture themselves. Do they work within the parameters that are given or do they, you know - do they make their own culture, so on the left you'll see there's examples of some of those cultural interactions and on the right, with people who I interviewed, so where they – where were they based. So there's a big kind of misnomer, well, and myths going around that the Bangladeshis are moving out and that somehow something else has to come in and they have to get used to this movement, it’s normal for Immigrants and all the rest of it, but actually I found that a lot of the artists and people I interviewed do still live and work in the borough. And the area is still very important to them, although there is some movement across the country generally, Tower Hamlets in that area is seen as important for them culturally.

The demographic I looked at as well, we're - we're mainly artists and cultural workers, some were ex-councillors who knew a little bit more about the narrative of the Brick Lane Banglatown term, and they were very instrumental to that. There were other people who, who worked in or directly around the arts or part time and, more importantly, what I found was that there were two people who are very willing to speak and speak in Bengali sometimes, who were English people who were either through association or through marriage, they were - they engage quite heavily in the Bengali arts as well, so they were doing tours or part of our heritage group and something I was very much took for granted, was the – was, was how you define yourself.

So obviously being an artist sometimes you can wear three hats at once, or if you're in my situation which is, if your multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary it can be, it can be more, but then I asked them how they define themselves so they kind of gave me an idea of that, and we kind of broadly kind of looked at what is it, they do so, so they might be doing funding applications, or how they work, they might be collaborating with artists, and through that we find out where the opportunities are for the artists and actually what we found with those certain types of organizations within a particular setting in the intersection around Brick Lane, who are either located there or navigated around there, and for them, those were where the opportunities for the Bangladeshi artists were, they weren't in other places such as the big art centres and so forth, they were in fact off the back of sort of ad hoc on in the Community or in –

**18:50 Kamna Patel**

Sorry to interrupt you, could I just ask you to speak a little bit further into your mic, there are a few People, they can't hear you very clearly.

**18: 57 Saif Osmani**

Can you hear me? Yeah?.

**19:01 Kamna Patel**

Much better. Thank you.

**19:04 Saif Osmani**

So the connections are really important if you're a freelance artist and your connections become increasingly important, and so I did a little bit of mapping here which looked at how those connections could come together and where they overlap. More importantly, that obviously people might not define themselves as one particular - like they might not say that they are Bangladeshi artists, they might be Asian or South Asian so all of those kind of issues about identity do come up and also with those connections, you can get an idea of where - who I interviewed. The local authority in Tower Hamlets is actually quite active there  in terms of the arts and there was also a local church group and a built heritage trust, which was engaging with the Bengali arts. My theory that the intersection of Hanbury Street and Brick Lane was and is important to them, was kind of proved quite early on in terms of asking them questions about where they visit the most, the map on the right there you’ll see, the areas that the artists sort of mainly visited, Brick Lane of as it comes up quite strongly, but Hanbury street actually comes up more but not - not as many direct mentions, but certainly comes up stronger for them.

The other area was how - how they define Banglatown itself, so where does it start and end. So that was really important for me, because a lot of the debate or certainly the chats happening - happening with heritage groups was that the Banglatown identity was somehow dying and all the rest of it. But actually people are very active and forthcoming in terms of what they - where they viewed Banglatown so it extended mainly from the Bethnal Green Road at the north down to Petticoat Lane. And so, and Whitechapel Market right the way through and Brick Lane was very much key to that. If you look at the map on the left you'll see that there's some crisscrossing in orange and that was the area of most traction really so between Osborn Street at the top - southern end of Brick Lane right in the middle, which is just past Princelet Street, I think was the most traction, so - and again this corresponds with what's there as well.

On the right you'll see memories of Brick Lane, so the Mela was really important to the people we spoke to, so the reason is it’s a parade of an event that very much started from the community, so I did speak to a few people who - who said that they would they'd help start it and so forth, and it grew to become big and now taken over Brick Lane and now has moved to another part of the borough, not too far, but still it's-  the movement has actually impacted the Community, and certainly the restaurant trade there.

A lot of people also talked about the anti-racist demonstration, so they have a particular attachment to that area for that. And also the leather factories, the markets were really crucial. So the markets become important as well for this migrant group in particular, you'll see that and even from how they navigate Banglatown, it’s in between where the markets are.

And here's a quick timeline because sometimes they're easier to navigate. What I just wanted to say about the timeline is between 1972 to now it's been 50 years of Bangladesh, so for the diaspora here Brick Lane becomes really, really important, especially when you're looking at - looking at how identity formation has happened, so their idea of home, the idea of their country is very much associated to that. And yesterday's planning talk, which was the Woodseer Street development, someone said That it's commonly believed that there's three Bengals - there's an East Bengal, there's a West Bengal and there's Brick Lane. So I thought that was quite telling in terms of how important Brick Lane is for the Bangladeshis generally.

And also on this map you'll see on the left-hand side, there’s a timeline of changes and also the impact that it's having on their identity and culture on the right hand side, so one important thing, for example, was when the hijab gates popped up this was deemed - it was called the hijab gates by the British artist Tracey Emin and she - she felt that she was - certain architectural elements were too Islamic in its expression, and yet nobody really had spoken to the community about this, but they ran with Tracey Emin’s point.

So obviously coming from an architectural background, the - the thing that that I really was kind of interested in was to see what do people have attachment to in terms of place or space or any kind of features, and there's a few that come out. Obviously the most obvious one is the Brick Lane of Jamme Masjid, and the Truman Brewery which we spoke about a bit earlier came up second, which I thought was quite interesting that people do identify contextually in that garden and, interestingly it's often thought that the ethnic minorities aren't - aren't engaging, or are separate from - from the built heritage by actually they're very much - they're very much identified with their context quite strongly.

So this is one of the main findings that I wanted to talk about, which is the changes in the style of shops. So what you found is the red areas, the bright red in the middle, this is just around the intersection of Hanbury street in Brick Lane, is where the restaurant industries are and there's all these other creative businesses around it or creative uses for coming out of the, the area there which haven't really been looked at in terms of culture and its interaction with the ethnic minorities or whatever it is around there. And the pressure on in Brick Lane has very much come from the City, if you look at the financial, the corporate and the commercial, and the Shoreditch and the hipsters and the tech city, and also there's the greening and the pastoral is about how people are living and that's very much been pushed by Hackney.

So for me the policies that govern culture really come from the London Plan, which has been reviewed recently and Just Space network and Mama D and me did represent ourselves a little while back on it and we just kind of spoke about - I mean we spoke at the examination in public. And they don't really kind of give it much, much significance so it's kind of casually mentioned in about seven or eight places. And then the local authorities are very much expected to kind of interpret that however they wish and for Brick Lane it becomes really, really important because outside of central London it’s one of the biggest draws going towards the East so, and, obviously, for me, and the community that I’m part of.

The hipster phenomenon has definitely hastened the idea of gentrification. The cereal cafe has closed this year, for those who know it, that was a café that was selling three pounds a bowl of cereal, and what you're finding is that some people might call it your post-hipster age  and some people might not and then also you're in a situation where each of the boroughs are being very competitive about what is - how they want to define themselves so in Tower Hamlets in particular it's very kind of eclectic install  so that very much gives rise to the hipster phenomenon and graffiti that's allowed by the hipster but isn't allowed by locals and so forth.

So what the impacts of this kind of long term gentrification agenda, which is very clear that's happening there, is that it leads to polarization, displacement. For some of the restaurant traders that I have spoken to, for example, they talk about footfall not realizing that the extra footfall might be going in the other direction, and the other issues is obviously rent rises and so forth. there's - been there's been a report done recently by the Runnymede Trust which is called *Beyond Banglatown*, which is really worth - worth looking out for those who want to do further study.

 So my findings generally found that decisions were being made about Bangladeshis in Banglatown without actually consulting them, obviously, and there's people who are living beyond the boundary of or beyond these streets of - of Brick Lane and the - that the culture itself is not really understood. So it's more than the culture of the restaurants, it's the customs, the behaviour, the religious culture, The building features, including the culinary, and so this psycho-geography that is really important to the British Bangladeshi identity is really under threat and has been under threat for a while.

The intersection between Hanbury Street and Brick Lane allow for a liminal space or transition between these – these types of cultural expressions from community to commodified expressions. And the Bangladeshis very much are at the receiving end of sort of international geopolitical issues or agendas, if you look at the Shamima Begum thing, which is, you know, deemed every youngster a terrorist or something, you know it makes the community go quiet, which I don't think is really conducive to them to have a - have to be engaged locally so it's something to be considered. So this map here, very quickly, it's a diagram that  - it's not a map, it's a diagram that I did, which is, which I thought was kind of useful way of looking at how the arts had, or creativity had shifted in the borough. So to the left, you see, something which you might call poor art or one where you don't get so much audience, and it's low degree, right the way to the top right hand side, which is considered high art maybe, and architecture very much positions itself towards the middle class bourgeoisie areas.

So today, and I think we've not got very long, probably over - going over time, but today, some of the issues is that the Brick Lane brand, which was once co-created, now benefits the landowners and developers solely and the arts as well too, so, if you look at things like market trends in Brick Lane you've got the street markets, but the art market ones are happening in, and in the Truman Brewery, for example.

And increasingly the digital divide is starting to happen, so what you're finding is that people are registering for things online, but they're not really engaging with the local community there, so they’re going from A to B and there's not really that place-based sort of attachment. And through it, we can see racism in another form, which it's either through hipster exceptionalism in its extreme form, sort of Nazi hipsterism which can happen, and which can – and is also part and parcel of how those encounters happen at a local level. So where can we see those things happening locally and in other places including Whitechapel and Chrisp Street Market?

So going forward what - what I really wanted to do was kind of present this idea of co-design and co-production to engage local people in a meaningful way, and especially the restaurant trade where we need to kind of look at it across communities across multiple generations, some of that value system that was there earlier or in the early 2000s is brought back. Now in the 1986 Community Development Plan it’s strongly recommended that Bangladeshi community involvement had to be part of it which would then democratize the community voice. And in it, they said that it should be under - the area should be under local community control and this is to ensure a major role for local traders, restauranteurs, craftspeople and artists in its realization, operation and subsequent management.

And that's it. I’m just going to hand it over to Richard Lee from Just Space Network. Thank you.

**31:17 Richard Lee**

Yes, I wanted to say hello to everybody.

**31:19 Kamna Patel**

Sorry, Richard, can I ask you as well, just to speak into the microphone because we've been having a few issues with things.

**31:30 Richard Lee**

Is this audible?

**31:31 Kamna Patel**

It is to me, yeah.

**31:33 Richard Lee**

Okay, well, I hope everyone can hear. I’ll try and raise my voice a bit and imagine I’m - it's one of the meetings that we used to have. So I’m Richard Lee, I’m here representing Just Space, which is a network of community groups that is London wide. And our network includes the Bengali East End Heritage Society, it includes Community-Centred Knowledge that Mama D is part of, and something like 250 in total different types of community groups across London. And what I’d very briefly like to contribute is a quick perspective on why we're in the mess we are in terms of the loss of local cultural heritage, and what we are trying to do about it as community groups at a London wide level.

So, in Just Space, the - as a London wide network it's important for us to try and influence the Mayor of London’s strategies. One of the strategies is the London plan, and of course the kind of development on Brick Lane that Saif has just described, is heavily influenced by what's in the London Plan of Mayor Sadiq Khan.

 The London Plan has a chapter called Heritage and Culture and Saif, Mama D and myself, we went along to the examination of this heritage and culture chapter at City Hall. And we was really struck by really the - the absence of a narrative about what was precious to us, so that the Heritage and Culture chapter of the London plan, despite all the fine words in the opening of the London plan about a city for all Londoners and inclusion and good growth, lots of fine principles, but when you look at the heritage and culture chapter it's really a world that - before the Second World War it's a particular view of English history and there's really a - or a complete absence of a kind of culture as something that's living and dynamic.

There's a listing of important sites for culture and heritage in London, and this, of course, this listing doesn't include a Brick Lane or Brixton or Southall  doesn't include traditional street markets, it doesn't include anything really at a more neighbourhood level that really matters to people in terms of our culture and heritage.

So we sought to point this out, and we proposed various changes to the heritage and cultural policy of the London Plan.

And really we - we couldn't we couldn't gain traction, I don't think we got much of a hearing, because what we were saying just seemed so radical a departure, to the way in which City Hall, the mayor was actually seeing London. Very much seeing - seeing London as this world class city, something which that's what needs to be supported and retained. Not a London plan, actually, that is, about supporting what's happening at a local neighbourhood level that is really valued by - by everyday people so that was my - that was really my first observation and those of you who are listening to this webinar, especially from universities, from practitioners, there's a great need for you to provide support to act to almost act as a bridge sometimes towards the institutions in London who seem to be living in a different type of place to the everyday place.

And you know we have these wonderful discussion programs at the university, like today, where I think what we're what we're - what we're saying is probably very familiar to you and many of you will be nodding and agreeing, but actually it's not at all familiar, to those who are actually holding power in London. So we really need the support from universities and practitioners to actually completely change this this narrative.

Finally, just to give some quick examples of what we as community groups are trying to do about this to try and protect culture and heritage that matters to us, we've - we've been running a project called Reclaim our Spaces which takes a very wide view of inclusive valued spaces. We've produced a manifesto on this, we brought together many groups from across London. we've looked at mechanisms that could change the way in which development happens, such as social impact assessments, so that the system actually starts from an audit of what exists and is valued in a neighbourhood. It's amazing that this just doesn't happen at the - at the moment at all. We've formed a - an organization called Just Collaborate, which is trying to deepen relations between universities and community groups, because we read, what we have great knowledge and experience, but one of the things we lack is resources. And we really want to deepen the relationships with people like yourselves at UCL. And again we have a chart and a strategic plan about how we'd like to do that and we look for your support.

And finally, we produce our own plans. we're not content to - to simply try and change the plan of the Mayor of London, we produce our own plans and, at the moment we're running a series of workshops to produce a community-led recovery plan for London. So we do a lot to try and ensure that the voice of the grassroots does get raised and we'd welcome more support from yourself.

**38:41 Kamna Patel**

Thank you very much,  Richard. I see that we seem to have lost Mama D for a moment, so Saif, could you – oh, there she is, she’s coming back. Mama D, are you there? We’re turning to you, but can I ask you to try to keep your comments brief, if at all possible, I don't want to overrun, and I want to leave time for questions, but I really, really would like to hear from you as well. Over to you, and if you just unmute for me as well. Thank you.

**39:12 Mama D**

 Let's give it a try. I don’t know why the Internet’s being so bad today. So thanks, Saif, for offering me a space to contribute to this discussion, not only as part of disappearing - a disappearing presence here in London, but more widely as a part of a system seeking its soul. I want to quote Gail Lewis, who's a sociologist and co-founder of OWAAD, and what she has to say about this increasing absence. She says that presence and connection might be formed by subaltern subjects in the complicated waters of diaspora, and its radical hybridity seems to offer a way of becoming in relation that is supremely suited to the conditions of contemporary Britain. I figured that might mark the site of hope when it when - to be hopeful seems to indicate being out of touch with reality and, while in these post-Brexit times, “Get over it,” I hear them say. For some, at least holding on to the idea of hope alone with the figure who might symbolize it is ever more challenging. But it was never more needed.

One such figure might be the Black woman in her collective push against the violences of fleshy, experiential and epistemological erasure. Such a subject might be found, might declare her presence and of course she's all around and is - so is as such a creative producer of her own presence. But if she is to be of in the generation of new forms of sociality, she has to be found and recognized, not by pastors having only to do with that kind of statistically interstitial figure who pops in and out of visibility, depending on how much lack needs to be charted or how much the neo-liberal project of fairness is falling short, or the extent to which she is or might be included in descriptions of Britain’s super-diverse cities and towns. Let's look at our condition from her perspective, I mean inclusion is not really the one, is it.

We are not in Fernand’s France, for example, where to be a citizen means a full espousal with everything French. Here in the UK we value diversity, don't we? I mean this conference is testament to that. We recognize that diversity cannot be simply representational, limited to the superficial symbols of difference, notably, the pigmentation of the skin and texture of the hair, but what can we determine in relation to these conditions in terms of cultural values?

So what we are hoping for, when we ask tor this, what are we hoping for, when we ask for a space to be inclusive? Are we saying that there is a quality to normal space that is exclusively obstructive of the ability to breathe live and to be?

I would, after Crenshaw and Hill Collins, regard exclusive spaces as intersectionally privileged towards whiteness, meaning to say we're not talking here about pigmentation, this is saying that the features and qualities of exclusivity are somehow connected to specifically racialized agencies of control, power, meaning and authority. So how do these things manifest? Can we think about that? How also can we begin to navigate spaces in which we cannot breathe, for fear of falling foul of bottlenecks of disproportionality because the shapes, the forms, and formats of access are not configured with the minoritized or marginalized in mind? It seems we have a need here to re-evaluate what it is that is being that is required to bring into some kind of human parity, the conditions which require us to speak confidently about being included into something that we have not had the autonomy or the sovereignty to shape.

Or is this the case? After all, keeping with the perspective of the Black woman, when my mother's generation, after being refused access to what they thought would be reasonable forms of housing, decided to revert to forms of community relations which, in the it - this enabled them to pull together an alternative economy to purchase places to rest their heads, to find spaces for other new arrivals, and even expand into multiple ownership. When these mothers who cooked could not overcome the smell or taste of relentless boiled cabbage and potatoes with meat that was not familiar to one's palate as accustomed as it was to  a wide range of spices, we set up shop and we found ways and means to bring All these different foods into our markets and made this these markets places which were at once, attractive and exotic. Later arrivals found opportune ways to expand and develop footfall and places like Brixton, Shepherds Bush, Ridley Road, the places that Saif has also mentioned, became go to places for engaging with an alternative culture. Banglatown, however, sadly, did not make it as a site of cultural heritage needing protection within the London Plan as Richard has alluded to, and the future of London strategic policies concerning space express values which some have termed Victorian and reflective of the legacies of yesteryear, because it's essentialized Englishness hasn't changed.

So our Black woman's guide to hopefulness remains estranged, forlorn, though physically inside the city, because of course her children are urban. Neither she nor her daughters can easily assimilate into the new calls of what the city means. Despite her very existence as part of empire being carved in the shape of agro-industrial productivity and an early form of modernism according to Sidney Mintz and others, she is scarcely found in the many projects which define the face of the new healthy living and eating as part of the city. Not unless she gives up her spices, not unless she gives up her yam, or her plantain, or her other hard-won additions to the city culture.

It is a grim day when having been so deprived, she then has to sit in public committees where colleagues gaily consumed the preferred beverage of coffee and tea, sweetened with cane and scoffing all varieties of chocolate luxuries. You know, these mothers and, of course, others shaped British and London, in particular’s heritage, long before we actually arrived.

Of course, London, with its tobacco docks and coffee houses and banks to support the trade of our bodies and our goods. But goalposts keep moving and race relations keep changing and policies are anxious to follow suit, it would seem that what we need to do to avoid embarrassing contradiction is to sit together and closely examine, who is the “we,” and what the position - positionality is of that we. That way, the Black woman might not end up arguing against her own inclusion, because we have not made it clear what it is that is being sought for or fought for.

 What the end goal is, and if we have perhaps designed ourselves barricades to diversity that everyone understands intellectually, at least, to be the source of resilience survival for everybody.

There is so much to say on the subject, but let me end here, asking us all to think about the trauma that is often at the core of everyday stresses of navigating social change and social resistances. I just want to put this question to you. If we are leaving our homes every day and find that across the road we are faced with a man who is beating a dog, every day we leave our homes and we see this man beating the dog. He does so relentlessly every day you leave your house without fail. I want you to think about that, and I want to ask you now, as you sit in your homes imagining such a scenario, who in that scenario is traumatized. Now, if we can all respond to that question with insight and empathy we stand a chance of being able to understand who is really seeking inclusion, rather than justice. And how might we understand the diversity - that the diversity we seek is essentially that which will make out of all of us more just humans. so, I hope I wasn't too long. that's me.

**49:43 Kamna Patel**

Mama D, you were perfect. Thank you so much for your valuable contributions and insights. I’d like to thank all three of our speakers, Saif, Mama D and Richard, for a really stimulating discussion here on local cultural heritage and its value. And what I’m struck by is that, that's coming through from all of your talks is just that this is this is dynamic, it's living, it's live. Cultural heritage is not static, and it's continually created, particularly in the example of Brick Lane of diasporic practices. I don't like to use the word diaspora, Because I think of myself as a Londoner, not a member of the diaspora that’s made by London residents and communities that have links, ongoing links with different parts of the world that are continually being reimagined. And I applaud your actions in opposing really, the valuing of culture and heritage as something that is consumed, something that is valued for its exotic potential and its exotic imaginings, in the case of, particularly the restaurants of brick lane where quite literally you consume this “Bangladeshi” culture.

We don't have a huge amount of time for questions, but there is a question that I’d like to pose to each of you, that are coming in for the speakers from our audience members. Saif, there's a question for you that’s related very much to your research and it's quite a specific question around the co-design process and whether it's better to engage in planmaking, whether it's better to have this engagement in the plan making stage or at the planning stage, before allocations are made or after they have been settled

**51:27 Saif Osmani**

I think it has to be throughout, you know from what I found from research, campaigning, activism, arts, throughout, it's got to be throughout, you know people are part and parcel with the changes locally, if you look at East London, Brick Lane, classic example you know the the - the community have made the place, let them in, you know why are they not.

I mean, instead of kind of separating them from the debate, why you're not letting them or having those honest conversations, and on top of that, why is it so difficult for planning departments, they’ve got all the resources.

**51:57 Kamna Patel**

Thank you. And Richard, Mama D, I have a question for you both, there's a lot of interest here in more practical steps that can be taken, practical actions that can be taken to push back against planning systems, consultation systems that allow, this person has written “us,” to make our voices heard? I think you know who the “us” would mean, in this case, it would be folks that are traditionally marginalized by the planning processes and consultation processes, what can they do to help protect, protect our cultural heritage and you've given a few examples in your talks anyway, but perhaps if you could.

**52:40: Saif Osmani**

Richard, did you want to say something about that, the practical steps.

**52:45 Richard Lee**

think this I think you've heard today, several examples of practical activities, whether it's in the Spitalfields neighbourhood or London wide and - so the - the actions of their people, you know, we are organizing, we have visions, we’re developing plans, but what - what we lack is the resources, very often, we just don't have the resources that the powerful have. So, so the appeal really is that those - those of you are interested in pushing back if you like, and changing mindsets, you know, really be ready to reach out and work with people like ourselves. I’m not really - don't just be content, you know, on practitioner gatherings and on academic gatherings, but we need to really connect and connect stronger.

**53:46 Mama D**

Yes, I would echo that, the connection, especially. And there are a number of organizations, each locality will have different kinds of organizations organizing in ways to be creatively protective of our interests, yeah, but we're not speaking to each other. And that's my concern that we - we reach out laterally. it's something similar to the argument for South-south conversations. It's like we need to speak at that level, we need to also be intersectional in our approaches, because oppression, various kinds of oppressions intersect. And so we need to be speaking across class and race and gender and sexuality and all of these different things which share features in common, so that we can be stronger together Saif, I know that you want to say something so - Saif, you’re on mute.

**54:53 Saif Osmani**

That's probably a good thing, I think that's a good ending because we - were two minutes to go, thank you very much everyone.

**55:02 Kamna Patel**

I think that's a perfect place to stop Thank you so much for your invaluable contributions. This talk will - is being recorded, and so it will be put onto the Bartlett YouTube channel and will be linked to through the Bartlett EDI web pages. So everyone who's attending today can watch this again and pick up on the names that were mentioned in the different talks, pick up on some of the, more detail that you might have missed first time around. I hope that you'll be able to join us next month for our next Inclusive Spaces seminar, which is going to be on youth led co-design and regeneration. That's on the 19th of May and you'll be getting a little bit more information about it when you get a copy of this recording.

But everybody who asked a question, I’m sorry we couldn’t answer them all. But what I’m going to do is to ask Saif in particular is if he can spend a few moments and address them and then we'll send around the responses to some of those questions, particularly the more factual questions about your research side.  Then we'll send them around to everyone, with a copy of this recording.

Thank you it's a pleasure, as always, to welcome you back to Inclusive Spaces and I hope that this is the start of really deep critical engagement and thinking with how we can make our cities and towns better. Thank you all very much.