

## M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award- Uncovering the History of Inter-religious Relations in Post-war Coventry

<b>Project Title</b>				
Uncovering the History of Inter-religious Relations in Post-war Coventry				
<b>LEAD INSTITUTION</b>				
Name of HEI institution	Coventry University			
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>PARTNER ORGANISATION</b>				
Name of organisation	Together in Action Trust (TiA)			
Website URL	<a href="https://tiacommunity.com/">https://tiacommunity.com/</a>			
<b>THE RESEARCH PROJECT</b>				
<p>This research responds to challenges encountered within grass-roots interfaith efforts in Coventry: contemporary mistrust between religious communities, despite memories of historical inter-faith collaboration. Rooted in the city and led by its practitioner and academic communities, this research will evidence histories of interfaith collaboration to inspire positive interfaith activity in contemporary Coventry.</p> <p><b>A Collaborative Focus on Coventry:</b> This research project is conceived, as a collaboration between Together in Action (TiA), a community group in Coventry and Coventry-based academics (Coventry and Warwick Universities). The research will record, validate and evidence stories of historical interfaith relations, so that lessons from the past can be used to guide and inspire a new era of positive interfaith activity in Coventry and beyond.</p> <p>Informal conversations within Coventry’s interfaith circuit have uncovered stories of collaboration between Coventry’s diverse faith groups. Deepak Naik, Coventry resident, long-time inter-faith activist and chair of TiA reflects,</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“In the 60s and 70s, Muslims helped build Coventry’s first Hindu temple and Sikh communities fund-raised to build the mosque. Back then, there was very little organised interfaith activity, I am not sure if the term interfaith had even been formulated, yet our everyday lived-experience of interfaith collaboration was so much stronger.”</p> <p>However today in Coventry, and as documented by Weller <i>et al</i> 2013 more broadly in Britain, inter-religious relations across these same groups are strained and tense. Through its grass-roots interfaith work, TiA recognises that contemporary inter-faith relations in Coventry are often characterised by prejudice brought about by international events and domestic competition for resources. In particular, these negative relations affect young people, as they have no recollection of memories of collaboration. This has led to a desire to reinvigorate dialogue activities through TiA’s <i>Coventry Sacred Space</i> initiative, which is a cross-city network of collaborating bodies (local authority, NHS, Police, Schools), voluntary sector, cultural organisations (the Herbert), faith communities and Coventry HEIs. At its core, <i>Coventry Sacred Space</i> aims to encourage positive inter-religious dialogue between Coventry’s various religious and non-religious groups and contribute towards greater community cohesion.</p> <p><b>Context:</b> Coventry’s post-war history makes it an ideal focus for such research . Firstly, the blitz caused exceptional damage to the city, yet in its aftermath, Coventry branded itself as the City of Peace</p>				

and Reconciliation. The process of reconstructing the city and its Anglican cathedral became symbols of its vision. We hypothesise that this may also have created a favourable environment for interfaith activity. Secondly, reconstruction and a strong post-war economy encouraged high levels of post-war migration. Although the economy subsequently struggled (with ramifications for inter-ethnic relations), the city maintains a diverse religious profile. In 2011, 53.7% of the population said they were Christian (including Catholics), 23% non-religious, 7.47% Muslim, 5.02% Sikh, 3.52% Hindu and 9% others (Census 2011).

**Theoretical frameworks** from the fields of peace studies and social history will be bridged to uncover the history of inter-religious relations in post-war Coventry and examine its implications for interfaith work today. Understandings of inter-religious relations from the World Parliament of Inter-religious Relations, 1893: “positive and constructive relations” and “ideals of brotherhood, harmony, respect and openness” (Moyaert 2013, 195) will inform our exploration. By working in collaboration with TiA’s *Coventry Sacred Space* initiative, this project will respond to Weller et al’s recommendation for increased community-led interreligious dialogue to challenge religious prejudice in Britain (2013). The research will also benefit from the increasingly rich body of historical research on post-war Black British identity (Hiro 1991); the changing demography of religion in Britain as it became less Christian, more religiously-diverse, more non-religious (Weller et al 2013); starting to uncover cities as key sites for the evolution of inter-religions relations in post-war Britain (Garnett and Harris 2016). More generally, the research will be informed by work that sees individual identity as being a fluid product of societal interaction (Hall 1996) and collective memory (Halbwachs 1941).

**Methodologically**, the research will work within a multi-disciplinary Pragmatist epistemological stance and will use a mixed clutch of methods including oral history interviews, archival research and participatory group work to build resources to disseminate project findings.

**Motivation:** This project has been conceptualised by a team that lives and works in Coventry and is motivated by a deep sense of commitment to enhancing interreligious relations in this historic British city. In meeting its own research aims, this project will additionally contribute to Coventry’s programme of activities as the City of Culture 2021. By uncovering the histories and interfaith contributions of minority communities in Coventry it will also contribute to the Black lives matter agenda.

#### HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

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