# **AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CPD) studentship**

**Birkbeck, University of London, and the British Film Institute**

## **Uncovering the Influence of Migrant Filmmakers on the Emergence and Development of British Film 1940-1970**

**Project overview**

Dominant narratives about the emergence and development of British film in the twentieth century have largely overlooked the influence of filmmakers from outside Britain. While the 1970s inaugurated an era of reflexive, radical filmmaking by Britain’s diasporic populations, less understood is the transnational sensibility cultivated by migrant filmmakers in the preceding decades and how it continued to underpin the stories Britain told about itself through film, as well as the aesthetic approaches used to tell those stories. While there has been work done into some areas of the subject – for instance into the contributions of German-speaking migrant filmmakers who came to Britain in the 1930s to escape Nazism – there remain large gaps in our understanding of the great impact made to the ongoing development of the British cinema in the post-War years by migrants from Europe, the wider Commonwealth and beyond, as British cinema moved through the 1950s and into the new movements of the 1960s.

The project examines the influence of the ‘outsider’ perspectives of, for example, refugees from post-war Communism in Eastern Europe or British colonial subjects on the story of Britain as presented in its national cinema. With this in mind, this project approaches the BFI’s collections with the intention of drawing out the neglected contributions of migrant filmmakers operating in a variety of roles, such as Director of Photography, Screenwriter or Composer; exploring what influence they have in the overall shaping of the film, and on broader aesthetic and thematic developments in British film. The project might examine the influence of, for example, Polish director Mira Hamermesh, who fled Nazism in 1941; director Robert Vas, who left Hungary following the uprising in 1956; or actor/director Lloyd Reckord, who left Jamaica in 1951. The student will access – and be trained to use – the BFI’s moving image collections (both digitised and physical material), and papers in the archive’s Special Collections holdings. Some of the figures cited above made films funded by the BFI itself, and the student would have unique access to newly-digitised films from that collection, and related paper collections. The work will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the material in the BFI’s own collections, and to its own history.

Research questions include:

* What influence did migrant filmmakers have on British film in the post-War period before the emergence of reflexive diasporic filmmaking in the 1970s?
* In what ways is the notion of a national film culture disrupted by the presence of migrant filmmakers in this period?
* How have migrants helped shape film culture in Britain through less visible roles such as cinematography, composition and screenwriting?
* How did key geopolitical events of the era, such as the Cold War and the break-up of Empire impact on the development of British film and moving image?
* How does an alternative story about ‘British cinema’ help us understand questions of ‘heritage’ and the legacies of colonialism?
* How did migrant filmmakers in Britain in this period both respond to, and help to shape, wider shifts in British film culture towards an increasingly international ‘arthouse’ cinema culture?