



WHOSE HERITAGE?

CHALLENGING RACE AND IDENTITY IN
STUART HALL'S POST-NATION BRITAIN

Edited by
Susan L.T. Ashley and Degna Stone



Whose Heritage?

This edited collection challenges and re-imagines what ‘heritage’ is in Britain as a globalised, vernacular, cosmopolitan ‘post-nation’. It takes its inspiration from the foundational work of public intellectual Stuart Hall (1932–2014).

Hall was instrumental in calling out embedded elitist conceptions of ‘The Heritage’ of Britain. The book’s authors challenge us to reconsider what is valued about Britain’s past, its culture and its citizens. Populist discourses around the world, including Brexit and ‘culture war’ declarations in the UK, demonstrate how heritage and ideas of the past are mobilised in racist politics. The multi-disciplinary chapters of this book offer critical inspections of these politics and dig deeply into the problems of theory, policy and practice in today’s academia, society and heritage sector. The volume challenges the lack of action since Hall rebuked ‘The Heritage’ twenty years ago. The authors featured here are predominantly Black Britons, academics and practitioners engaged in culture and heritage, spurred by the killing of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement to contest racist practices and the structures that support them. This fact alone makes the volume a unique addition to the Routledge Museum & Heritage Studies repertoire.

The primary audience will be academics, but it will also attract culture sector practitioners and heritage institutions. However, the book is particularly aimed at scholars and community members who identify as Black and who are centrally concerned with questions of identity and race in British society. Its Open Access status will facilitate access to the book for all groups in society.

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in Stuart Hall's Post-nation Britain**

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Young Writers' City gives young people the chance to express their ideas, thoughts and opinions through creative writing. It is an in-depth and long-term project run by New Writing North, who support writing and reading in the North of England by commissioning new work, creating opportunities and making connections.



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Introduction

On Stuart Hall and the imagining of heritage

Susan L. T. Ashley and Degna Stone

This book takes its inspiration from the foundational work of cultural studies scholar and public intellectual Stuart Hall (1932–2014). Hall was a British sociologist and cultural theorist, founder of the *New Left Review* in the 1950s and the influential director of Birmingham University’s School of Cultural Studies during the 1970s. He was instrumental in raising theoretical and social questions about race, culture, identity and representation in the UK. Hall’s intellectual leadership arose from his activist roots combined with groundbreaking ideas in the new field of cultural studies. As a ‘public’ intellectual rooted in action, he presented and debated his ideas and politics on television, radio and print media, beyond the typical confines of academia. Throughout this interdisciplinary and intersectional work, questions of how diasporas, particularly from his native Caribbean, challenged fixed concepts of ‘Britishness’ were foundational. Hall’s ‘first political lesson in black diasporic politics’ came in the late 1950s, when he supported Caribbean migrants with exploitative landlords in London’s Notting Hill (Hall and Schwarz, 2017).

Hall’s ‘Whose Heritage?’ speech in 1999 was a product of these long years as a vocal public intellectual in the United Kingdom. He was then an emeritus scholar from the Open University and delivered the address at the Whose Heritage? conference organised in Manchester by the Arts Council of England (ACE). This event brought together culture, heritage and arts practitioners and policymakers for the first time in order to debate and challenge the concept of heritage in response to an increasingly multicultural Britain (ACE, 1999). Hall’s speech called on a re-examination of British heritage as a living activity – not only the conservation of the past – that included diasporic traditions as well as their arts and creativity. His presentation deconstructed the concept of The Heritage and the way in which it was locked into Eurocentric and imperialistic perspectives. He maintained in his speech that ‘continuing to misrepresent Britain as a closed, embattled self-sufficient, defensive, “tight little island” would be fatally to disable them’ (Hall, 1999, p. 10). Instead, Hall pointed out how the ‘multi’ in multicultural ‘represents one of the most important cultural developments of our time: the stakes which “the margins” have in modernity, the local-in the global, the pioneering of a new cosmopolitan, vernacular, post-national, global sensibility’ (Hall,

1999, p. 13). But to reach this point, ‘It will take the massive leverage of a state and government committed to producing, in reality rather than in name, a more cultural diverse, socially just, equal and inclusive society and culture, and holding its cultural institutions to account’ (Hall, 1999, p. 9).

His *Third Text* essay from that speech, ‘Whose Heritage? Un-settling ‘the Heritage’ Re-imagining the Post-nation’ (Hall, 1999), called out the embedded elitist conceptions of ‘The Heritage’ of Britain and instead asked for a re-imagining of what was valued about its past, its culture and its citizens. ‘Whose Heritage?’ has been a touchstone for heritage scholars and practitioners in the UK and globally who are concerned about the politics of heritage. Many have found that Hall’s observations more than 20 years ago about stagnant narratives, inadequate representation and lack of structural changes in the UK’s mainstream institutions of heritage still hold true today. In May 2019, more than 100 participants gathered in Newcastle upon Tyne to tackle the serious inequalities within representation, production and decision-making about ‘The Heritage’ in the UK. Spurred by talks by historian David Olusoga and Eclipse theatre activist Dawn Walton, as well as passionate presentations by Black academics, creative producers and activists, the conference audience and speakers continually returned to the question, ‘Why has so little changed?’ This was a conference *before* the stranglehold of the Covid-19 pandemic, and before the tremendous outpourings of grief and outrage that came with the racist murder of George Floyd in the USA in May 2020. This conference began as an attempt to challenge the narratives of what constituted ‘Britishness’, and this edited book is an outcome of the conference prompted by Hall’s challenge, but it was further galvanised by the summer of 2020 and the surging Black Lives Matter movement as a ‘reckoning with the past’ (Naidoo, 2021).

This edited collection, *Whose Heritage? Challenging Race and Identity in Stuart Hall’s Post-nation Britain*, details and scrutinises the ongoing efforts of those who have taken up Hall’s provocative work. Throughout, authors have not only grappled with what many see as the racist environment of British culture, but they have also returned to the question of what *is* heritage, and how is it a central concept to people’s lives? Engaging with the past is both an individual and a societal concern, as our ideas about self and our world are shaped by who we think we are, who others think we are, and how we present ourselves in intimate and public spheres. Stuart Hall was particularly concerned with identity and its positioning and with his identity, as someone straddling the Jamaica of his birth and England where he settled; as someone of mixed family, with ancestors hailing from many parts of the world; and as an academic and public intellectual concerned about class identities and on the forefront of struggles against hegemony. The heritage we write about in this book is a social imaginary used by people to define these identities in relation to the past: *not* just a label given to objects, buildings or places, but signification or valuations of the past that all humans employ to give meaning to their lives (Ashley and Frank, 2016).

‘What is heritage?’ is not only an individual identity concern, it resonates on a societal level, as Hall’s foundational paper illustrates. Heritage can be an indicator of group identity, where any individual in society understands their place in relation to others through a common vision of foundational narratives and ‘shared’ valuations of the past. Here, ‘whose heritage?’ becomes the crucial question, a process of cultural production and representation of the past affected by power dynamics within the group, where heritage defines who belongs in that group, and who is excluded. This imagining is the essence of Hall’s ‘The Heritage’ critique; he writes, ‘The Heritage inevitably reflects the governing assumptions of its time and context. It is always inflected by the power and authority of those who have colonised the past, whose versions of history matter’ (Hall, 2005, p. 26). This ‘collective’ vision and valuations are those of white culture.

Populist discourses around Brexit in the UK, the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, and phoney ‘culture wars’ have demonstrated the ways that this version of heritage and ideas of the past are mobilised in racist politics. Recognising the importance and impact of different perceptions of heritage in these conflicts, and asserting the validity of multiple experiences and perspectives, has been slow in the UK and internationally. Critical academic work in addressing inequalities and racism was spurred with Littler and Naidoo’s collection of essays *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of Race* (2005), still the benchmark treatment of Stuart Hall’s work in this field. This coincided with the reconceptualising of heritage as a discourse of power with the publication of Smith’s *Uses of Heritage* in 2006 and within the framework of critical heritage studies that emerged in 2011. The Association of Critical Heritage Studies’ manifesto bluntly states: ‘Heritage is, as much as anything, a political act and we need to ask serious questions about the power relations that “heritage” has all too often been invoked to sustain’ (Smith, 2012, p. 534).

Our book follows Smith and Littler and Naidoo in challenging the role of heritage in perpetuating racist discourses, and it presents the experiences and expertise of those who have been affected by this political marginalisation. It details the opinions and ongoing work of activists who identify as Black or ethnically minoritised and their allies to confront the structural inequalities of UK public heritage bodies and institutions and to carve their place in the sector. The goal is to present struggles with and by these activists, to critically question mainstream inaction and politics and to dig deeply into the problems of theory, policy and practice in today’s academia, society and the heritage sector that hinder the re-imagining of ‘The Heritage’ proposed by Hall 20 years ago.

Definitions

It is worth taking a moment here to discuss definitions. In this collection of essays, each author has their own relationship to ethnicity, racialisation and what it means to be a minoritised person living in the UK. It is not surprising

that there is a focus on Blackness in many of the chapters, given the global reckoning with anti-Black racism following George Floyd's murder. In the US, the term 'Black' is perhaps more easily definable than it is in the UK, where its use as a catch-all is contested.

The need for the umbrella term of political Blackness, which served so well in the 60s, 70s and 80s, is being increasingly questioned, particularly by younger generations. Using the term Black in this old-school sense could be seen as just another act of erasure, with the unfortunate side-effect of keeping the conversation about race and racialisation in the latter decades of the last century. The world is very different now, but, so far, an umbrella term that every racialised and minoritised person can shelter comfortably beneath has failed to emerge.

As editors we have chosen to follow the convention to capitalise the term 'Black' where it is being used to denote racial identity but not 'white', which remains in lowercase. Most of the authors who submitted work seemed to follow this convention, so adopting it for all the essays means that, whilst it is an imperfect solution, it ensures consistency across the volume.

In addressing why heritage narratives still exclude and 'other' people, the search continues for a language that allows us to talk about race and push back against the machinery that keeps us from embracing all our narratives, all our experiences as part of 'the Heritage'. Navigating the terms used to describe people who are not racialised as white can be daunting, so we continue to trip over definitions, uncertain whether they are inclusive or excluding; respectful or disrespectful; make visible or erase. The only certainty is that, whilst people live with systemic and structural racism, we still need to define those who are othered and oppressed.

Considering all this uncertainty, the only option (as far as this volume goes) is to allow people to define themselves, as Dawn Walton says in Chapter 8, and to be open to correction if a term that used to be okay is now widely perceived as offensive by those it is used to describe. Just because something was okay 30, 40, 50 years ago does not mean that it is still a good fit. It might help to think about language that was used to oppress (e.g., 'coloured') versus language that is used to express (e.g. 'people of colour').

The authors in this book

The contributions to this book have been arranged in four parts: Stuart Hall's Essay – Context and Impact; Challenging 'Whose Heritage?' as Historical Production; Challenging 'Whose Heritage?' through Arts and Self-reflection; and Final Provocations. While this reflects thematic groupings, the individual chapters are not intended to be read in sequence, as each author examines a different aspect of the 'post-nation' scenario within culture, arts and heritage in the UK. Below is a summary of the authors' abstracts.

In the first chapter of Part I, 'Stuart Hall's Essay – Context and Impact', we offer Stuart Hall's presentation itself, 'Whose Heritage? Un-settling "The

Heritage”, Re-imagining the Post-nation’ as it was published in *Third Text* in 1999. The authors of all chapters take this pioneering essay and speech as their inspiration and provocation. Hall identified the need to ‘un-settle’ ideas of British heritage from its elitist conception as a white English middle-class concern. He argued that heritage was a discursive practice, not a fixed entity, shaped by cultural and political interests and expressed through myriad means in the arts, popular culture, media, and heritage institutions. Rethinking national heritage meant broadening both the representation of heritage and the practice of heritage to embed ‘other’ heritages and a recognition of the deep importance of the breadth and depth of the UK social fabric. He suggests that embracing this complexity in arts and heritage would be the true path to a strong post-nation.

Following Hall’s own words, Matt Martin in Chapter 2, “‘The Way in Which We Learn to Sing’: The Heritage of Ideas Behind “Whose Heritage?””, traces the genealogy of Hall’s essay, which crystallised ideas that he had developed throughout his career. The departure point is an earlier keynote, ‘West Indians in Britain’, from the 1968 conference of the Caribbean Artists Movement at the University of Kent. Hall’s audience were primarily born in the Caribbean, yet already he was pondering how their British-born children’s and grandchildren’s creativity might reshape British culture for the better. Martin sets out Hall’s intellectual development in the ensuing decades, his emphasis on popular culture as an expression of Black British belonging, and his cultural studies work on structural racism, which strongly informed his 1999 critique of heritage institutions.

Clara Arokiasamy OBE takes up the historical narrative of how Hall’s critique was followed up by cultural structures and institutions in the following years in Chapter 3, ‘Race Equality in the Cultural Heritage Sector: Perceptions of Progress over the Last Twenty Years and Actions for the Next Decade’. Arokiasamy describes how Hall’s 1999 address was presented at a high-profile conference of the UK Arts Council and other prominent bodies, which aimed to measure the ‘impact of cultural diversity on Britain’s living heritage’. The author, who participated in this plus two more ‘Whose Heritage?’ conferences in 2009 and 2019, reflects on whether discourses have changed in the 20 years since Hall’s provocation. Despite many cultural diversity initiatives and the availability of anti-discrimination legislations (which Arokiasamy herself led on several fronts, including the high-profile Mayor’s Commission on African and Asian Heritage from 2003–2005), she asserts there is little evidence of change, especially in the redirection of resources and the tackling of institutional resistance to new heritage narratives, and references current interviews with leading Black activists and practitioners in the heritage and culture sectors to bolster these claims. Citing the current culture wars, Black Lives Matter movement and increasing inequalities, she emphasises that responding to Black communities’ expressed needs and holding the heritage sector accountable for the lack of progress are essential.

In Part II, ‘Challenging “Whose Heritage?” as Historical Production’, we cluster those authors who look more closely at the production of histories and heritage in institutional settings. We begin, in Chapter 4, with an essay by a worker within one of the primary governing structures of heritage in the UK, Historic England. Don O’Meara, science advisor and archaeologist for Historic England, uses a very specific institutional example of the issues raised in Hall’s paper – archaeological heritage. In his chapter, ‘Mothers Milk or Regurgitated Fish? Resisting Nostalgia and Embracing Dissension in British Heritage’, O’Meara assesses British archaeology as a part of ‘The Heritage’ that conserves, preserves and presents culture and the arts in all its forms. He suggests different directions to take on the provocations raised in Hall’s work, reflecting on international trends within archaeology that have begun to emphasise public participation and increase democratisation. But he points out how the profession in the UK, as in most countries, has failed to widen its ethnic diversity profile and is facing calls for the decolonisation and repatriation of archaeological museum collections. In a particular example, O’Meara cites the increasing misuse of ancient DNA science to present an exclusive rather than inclusive view of the past. The chapter argues that such issues are manifestations of a national soul searching on Britain’s role and legacy in the modern world and the failure to tackle them will ultimately be disastrous for the profession and for society.

Errol Francis, Artistic Director and CEO of Culture&, takes us specifically into those museum collections in Chapter 5, ‘Beyond Our System of Objects: Heritage Collecting, Hoarding and Ephemeral Objects’. This chapter responds to Stuart Hall’s critique of museum institutional practices particularly in relation to those ‘Objects’ of heritage. Francis notes that object is a term that Hall uses only once by name but is very much implied in his arguments, particularly those ‘heterogeneous assemblages of the cabinets of curiosity and wonder’ in European collections that, Hall argues, ‘adorn the position of people of power and influence’ (Hall, 1999, p. 4). The chapter foregrounds the problematic of how objects in heritage collections dominate and influence our primary understanding and experience of heritage. Inspired by the post-symposium events and Black Lives Matter movement, the chapter probes a number of issues that continue to arise from the collecting, acquisition, display, status and conservation of objects and what role they could play in redefining both the theorisation and practice of heritage that does not operate in the nationally exclusive and imperious ways that Hall critiques. Francis examines the work *Fons Americanus* by artist Kara Walker as a powerful response to such collections.

To understand the processes by which dissonant versions of heritage are perceived, produced and valorised by different players in society, independent scholar Leonie Wieser offers Chapter 6, ‘Historical Methods Implicated in the Making of “The Heritage”’. Hall understood heritage as a ‘discursive practice’ pertaining to ‘the whole complex of organisations, institutions and practices’ that authorise and validate aspects of the past for the present. Wieser implicates historical methodology and epistemology, upheld by

history-writing in academia as well as museums, in Hall's 'highly selective traditions'. Using the case of minority and migration histories of Tyneside, this chapter examines how divergent practices by academics, museums and bottom-up history-writers are implicated in the socially unequal dynamics and valorisations of heritage. This knowledge-making about the past is thus, as remarked by Hall, a distinctly political process that is not independent of present power relations.

Rounding off Part II, Chapter 7 presents the essays of two young Black Masters students who actively work to change the ways that historical narratives are produced in British heritage institutions. Curated by heritage practitioner and activist Sandra Shakespeare, 'Whose Heritage? Deconstructing and Reconstructing Counter-narratives in Heritage' introduces the work of Culture& and the teaching of a new generation of heritage workers for and by this Black-led cultural enterprise. The essays of Qanitah Malik and Edinam Edem-Jordjie describe the authors' own research at UK heritage sites into 'hidden' histories of Black citizens. Malik details how adjustments in documenting and transcribing the collection records for the South Asia Collection in Norwich can change both the representation of and access to these objects. Edem-Jordjie centres the stories of Black residents Sarah Forbes Bonetta and her daughter Victoria Davies at Osborne House, a National Trust site once the summer home of Queen Victoria. Their examinations and recommendations have been integrated into the interpretation of collections and stories at both heritage institutions.

Part III, 'Challenging "Whose Heritage?" through Arts and Self-reflection', consists of chapters that recount Black representation in media, arts and culture beyond historical institutions. Hall felt that strong representation of artistic and cultural practice by Black creatives was flourishing at the time of his 'Whose Heritage?' speech, and he saw in those activities the potential to change the heritage discourses in Britain. He himself was actively involved in arts organisations at the time, including Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts), a creative hub supported by Black and Asian artists. The chapters we feature here focus on film, television and theatre, as well as education, all concerned with how narratives about the past are creatively presented in public arts and culture.

First is Chapter 8, which returns us to the 24 May 2019 Whose Heritage? symposium and the keynote address by Dawn Walton that energized the audience and spurred this book. 'In the Shadow of Stuart Hall' is an abbreviated version of that speech by the then Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Eclipse, the UK's principal Black-led theatre production company. Walton speaks about the importance of her work directing significant Black theatre productions and as CEO of Eclipse. Eclipse developed Revolution Mix, the largest-ever delivery of new Black British productions for stage, screen and radio; and Slate: Black. Arts. World., a ground-breaking programme enabling Black artists in the North to work regionally, nationally and internationally. Her work represents the dynamism and potential called out by Stuart Hall as essential to changing the sensibility of the 'post-nation' by investing

and building the leadership, works and practices of Black and minoritised creatives.

Chapter 9, by Tom May, is titled ‘The Black British Presence on Television in Barrie Keeffe’s *Play for Today* (BBC1) Dramas and Beyond’. Stuart Hall argued that those who cannot see themselves reflected in the ‘mirror’ of National Heritage cannot properly belong. The mirror of television at the time of Hall’s speech, such as the period drama adaptations *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Jewel in the Crown*, were a selective, naturalised version of a ‘legitimate’ heritage that smoothed over internal conflict and inequalities. The chapter inspects the BBC’s flagship *Play for Today* (1970–84), the sort of ‘new work’ on topical social issues and concerns that Hall said was neglected in the dominant British cultural mode of ‘preservation and conservation’. In particular, the chapter examines the content and reception of Barrie Keeffe’s ‘Waterloo Sunset’ (1979) and ‘King’ (1984), which were among the few attempts to hold up a mirror to multicultural Britain. Though the ‘behind the camera roles’ did not include Black creatives, these early works were amongst the precursors for current breakthrough television by artists such as Michaela Coel and Steve McQueen.

Tina Gharavi continues the discussion on media and cultural representations in Chapter 10, looking particularly at who gets to do representations within British film and documentary. In ‘Narrative Cannibals: Who Speaks for Whom? Heritage, Documentary Practice, and the Strategies of Power’, Gharavi interrogates the power relations inherent in cultural productions, especially ethnography, and questions not only who gets to see themselves reflected in national heritage but also who actively gets to produce those documentary narratives. New documentary practices, new digital cinematic conventions and self-reflexive narratives are detailed by the author, using as examples her own documentary work such as *Mother/ Country* (2003) and *Tribalism Is Killing Us* (2019). The democratisation of media, strategies of power and proliferation of alternative stories and narratives through digital media are central here. The author focuses on how the narratives of immigrants and asylum seekers are entering the mainstream using emerging technologies, which is affecting the politics of marginalized voices in post-colonial landscapes, challenging ideas of ‘The Heritage’ and shifting the balance of power of narratives.

Chapter 11 is a reflective piece on the teaching of the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans (TTEA) in UK schools and in heritage institutions, particularly challenging Stuart Hall on issues of Black subjectivity that Hall did not tackle in his work. In ‘Searching for New Perspectives on Heritage: The Transatlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans’, Beverley Prevatt Goldstein, a leading community activist in the North East, examines the problematics of past and current education in TTEA and challenges the assumption that the inclusion of minority heritages in the national story is an uncontested good for those of minority heritage. The benefits of ‘a more complete truth’ and of honest representation cannot be overlooked, but they are put in the context of

the complex effects of the portrayal of enslavement on those whose ancestors were/are at the receiving end of enslavement. This chapter centres the Black minority experience of people from the Caribbean diaspora, but Prevatt Goldstein argues that this more nuanced understanding of the impact of heritage stories is relevant to global others – for example, those at the receiving end of narratives of the Irish ‘famine’ or of the ‘Raj’ in India. The author examines the production of the booklet ‘African Lives in Northern England’ as an example of the complications of moving narratives from margin to centre.

Finally, for Part IV, ‘Final Provocations’, we have selected three essays by authors who take academic, political and artistic approaches to the re-imagining of heritage in the UK.

We lead off with the thoughtful insights of Etienne Joseph in Chapter 12, ‘Brand New Second Hand: Production, Preservation and “New” Diasporic Forms’. Joseph, a front-line worker in heritage and director of Decolonising the Archive as well as other engagements with the past, picks up on and questions the differences expressed in Part I and Part II of this book: the emphasis on ‘preservation and conservation ... as opposed to the production and circulations of new work’ (Hall, 1999, p. 3). The author questions the efficacy (and undesirable dependencies) of strictly materialist approaches to heritage, invoking Hall’s notion of access to a ‘cultural repertoire’ as a means of thinking through more ‘living’ engagements with the past. Drawing on African/Diasporic cultural frameworks, part explanation and part provocation, this chapter is an inspiration for those interested in moving beyond established heritage paradigms.

The penultimate chapter, Chapter 13, takes up the central concern of critical heritage scholars, and heritage practitioners, regarding the need for structural changes to bring about the post-nation that Stuart Hall envisioned. In ‘Crisis of Authority: Rebuilding the Heritage Narrative in Stuart Hall’s Post-nation State’, R.M. Lewis asks readers to consider what contributions *they* might make to truly decolonise – within their own actions – and to actually live the equality that chapter authors have called for. The author, working in the field of community development and support for minoritised women in crisis, looks at the micro and macro scales of her own heritage questioning and the social actions that have brought about some institutional changes, for example the United Nations’ CEDAW feedback model as a tool to assess and enact change from an intersectional women-centric, Black-centric viewpoint.

Finally, we close the volume with poetry, the combining of ideas, words and actions needed to express the power of heritage. In Chapter 14, ‘The Power to Represent’, Degna Stone reflects on the strength of creative works to carry out Stuart Hall’s call to action, offering links between the writings of poets in the North East, her work with Eclipse and ideas of heritage. Black British identity is not separate to British identity. It is not a case of either/or and never has been. As a Black woman from a working-class background, Stone sees the artificial segregation of the Black and white working classes as

an attempt to create friction and perpetuate the false idea that one group can only do better at the expense of the other. This separation between the various cultural identities allows the status quo of under-representation within heritage narratives to continue. Mindful of the intersectionality of heritage, cultural identity and race, four poets from diverse backgrounds share work that responded viscerally to the themes in Stuart Hall's seminal speech, 'Whose Heritage? Un-settling "The Heritage", Re-imagining the Post-nation'. Reflecting on transcripts of the readings they gave during the symposium in 2019 in relation to the wider literature on creative writing and storytelling, poetry offers new ways into understanding our common heritage practice.

This volume is not exhaustive; there are voices and topics missing from this conversation. There are ethnicities and heritages that remain unrepresented. This is where the reader comes in, especially if they do not see themselves represented within these pages. The intention is to continue to challenge normative ideas of what constitutes 'heritage' in the UK and globally and to return to the insights of Stuart Hall in these conversations. Questioning 'Whose Heritage?' persistently highlights unchanged and changing power relations within societies and helps us understand the myriad ways that the past is politicised on personal, social and global scales in the making of heritage. We hope this book will demonstrate that these challenges matter and stimulate further important conversations.

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Part I

**Stuart Hall's Essay – Context
and Impact**



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1 Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'The Heritage', Re-imagining the Post-nation

Stuart Hall

This is the text of the keynote speech given on 1 November 1999 at the national conference 'Whose Heritage? The Impact of Cultural Diversity on Britain's Living Heritage' that took place at G-Mex, Manchester, England.

This conference on 'Whose Heritage?' provides an opportunity to look critically at the whole concept of 'British Heritage' from the perspective of the multicultural Britain which has been emerging since the end of World War II. How is it being – and how should it be – transformed by the 'Black British' presence and the explosion of cultural diversity and difference which is everywhere our lived daily reality?

In preparing to say something useful on this topic, I was struck again – as many of you may have been – by the quaintness of the very term, 'Heritage'. It has slipped so innocently into everyday speech! I take it to refer to the whole complex of organisations, institutions and practices devoted to the preservation and presentation of culture and the arts – art galleries, specialist collections, public and private, museums of all kinds (general, survey or themed, historical or scientific, national or local) and sites of special historical interest.

What is curious in the British usage is the emphasis given to preservation and conservation: to keeping what already exists – as opposed to the production and circulation of new work in different media, which takes a very definite second place. The British have always seen 'culture' as a vaguely disquieting idea – as if to name it is to make self-conscious what well-bred folk absorb unconsciously with their mother's milk! Ministries of Culture are what those old, now discredited, Eastern European regimes used to have, which is altogether the wrong associations! Culture has therefore entered the nomenclature of modern British government only when sandwiched alongside the more acceptably populist terms, 'Media' and 'Sport'.

This gives the British idea of 'Heritage' a peculiar inflection. The works and artefacts so conserved appear to be 'of value' primarily in relation to the past. To be validated, they must take their place alongside what has been authorised as 'valuable' on already established grounds in relation to the unfolding of a 'national story' whose terms we already know. The Heritage

thus becomes the material embodiment of the spirit of the nation, a collective representation of the British version of *tradition*, a concept pivotal to the lexicon of English virtues.

This retrospective, nation-alised and tradition-alised conception of culture will return to haunt our subsequent thoughts at different points. However, it may also serve as a warning that *my* emphasis does include the active production of culture and the arts as a living activity, alongside the conservation of the past.

We spend an increasing proportion of the national wealth – especially since the Lottery – on ‘The Heritage’. But what is it *for*? Obviously, to preserve for posterity things of value, whether on aesthetic or historical criteria. But that is only a start. From its earliest history in western societies – in the heterogeneous assemblages of the ‘cabinets of curiosity and wonder’ – collections have adorned the position of people of power and influence – kings, princes, popes, landowners and merchants – whose wealth and status they amplified. They have always been related to the exercise of ‘power’ in another sense – the symbolic power to order knowledge, to rank, classify and arrange, and thus to give meaning to objects and things through the imposition of interpretative schemas, scholarship and the authority of connoisseurship. As Foucault (1977) observed, ‘There is no power relation without the relative constitution of a field of knowledge nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute ... power relations’.

Since the eighteenth century, collections of cultural artefacts and works of art have also been closely associated with informal public education. They have become part, not simply of ‘governing’, but of the broader practices of ‘governmentality’ – how the state indirectly and at a distance induces and solicits appropriate attitudes and forms of conduct from its citizens. The state is always, as Gramsci argued, ‘educative’. Through its power to preserve and represent culture, the state has assumed some responsibility for educating the citizenry in those forms of ‘really useful knowledge’, as the Victorians put it, which would refine the sensibilities of the vulgar and enhance the capacities of the masses. This was the true test of their ‘belongingness’: culture as social incorporation.

It is important to remember that the nation-state is both a political and territorial entity, *and* what Benedict Anderson (1983) has called ‘an imagined community’. Though we are often strangers to one another, we form an ‘imagined community’ because we share an *idea* of the nation and what it stands for, which we can ‘imagine’ in our mind’s eye. A shared national identity thus depends on the cultural meanings which bind each member individually into the larger national story. Even so-called ‘civic’ states, like Britain, are deeply embedded in specific ‘ethnic’ or cultural meanings which give the abstract idea of the nation its lived ‘content’.

The National Heritage is a powerful source of such meanings. It follows that those who cannot see themselves reflected in its mirror cannot properly ‘belong’. Even the museums and collections apparently devoted to surveying the universal, rather than the national, achievements of culture – like the British Museum, the Louvre, or the Metropolitan Museum in New York – are

harnessed into the national story. Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach (1980) have argued that these institutions 'claim the heritage of the classical tradition for contemporary society and equate that tradition with the very notion of civilization itself'. Much the same could be said about the museums of Modern or Contemporary Art in terms of the way they have colonised the very idea of 'the modern', 'modernity' and 'modernism' as exclusively 'western' inventions.

Heritage is bound into the meaning of the nation through a double inscription. What the nation means is essentialised: 'the English seem unaware that anything fundamental has changed since 1066' (Davies, 1999). Its essential meaning appears to have emerged at the very moment of its origin – a moment always lost in the myths, as well as the mists, of time – and then successively embodied as a distilled essence in the various arts and artefacts of the nation for which the Heritage provides the archive. In fact, what the nation 'means' is an on-going project, under constant reconstruction. We come to know its meaning partly *through* the objects and artefacts which have been made to stand for and symbolise its essential values. Its meaning is constructed *within*, not above or outside representation. It is through identifying with these representations that we come to be its 'subjects' – by 'subjecting' ourselves to its dominant meanings. What would 'England' *mean* without its cathedrals, churches, castles and country houses, its gardens, thatched cottages and hedgerowed landscapes, its Trafalgars, Dunkirks and Mafekings, its Nelsons and its Churchills, its Elgars and its Benjamin Brittens?

We should think of The Heritage as a discursive practice. It is one of the ways in which the nation slowly constructs for itself a sort of collective social memory. Just as individuals and families construct their identities in part by 'storying' the various random incidents and contingent turning points of their lives into a single, coherent, narrative, so nations construct identities by selectively binding their chosen high points and memorable achievements into an unfolding 'national story'. This story is what is called 'Tradition'. As the Jamaican anthropologist, David Scott (1999), recently observed, 'A tradition ... seeks to connect authoritatively, within the structure of its narrative, a relation among past, community, and identity'. He goes on to argue that,

A tradition therefore is never neutral with respect to the values it embodies. Rather a tradition operates in and through the stakes it constructs – what is to count and what is not to count among its satisfactions, what the goods and excellences and virtues are that ought to be valued ... On this view ... if tradition presupposes 'a common possession' it does not presuppose uniformity or plain consensus. Rather it depends upon a play of conflict and contention. It is a space of dispute as much as of consensus, of discord as much as accord.

[Scott, 1999]

The Heritage is also a classic example of the operation of what Raymond Williams called the 'selective tradition':

Theoretically a period is recorded; in practice, this record is absorbed into a selective tradition; and both are different from the culture as lived ... To some extent the selection begins within the period itself ... though that does not mean that the values and emphases will later be confirmed.

[Williams, 1963]

Like personal memory, social memory is also highly selective, it highlights and foregrounds, imposes beginnings, middles and ends on the random and contingent. Equally, it foreshortens, silences, disavows, forgets and elides many episodes which – from another perspective – could be the start of a different narrative. This process of selective ‘canonisation’ confers authority and a material and institutional facticity on the selective tradition, making it extremely difficult to shift or revise. The institutions responsible for making the ‘selective tradition’ work develop a deep investment in their own ‘truth’.

The Heritage inevitably reflects the governing assumptions of its time and context. It is always inflected by the power and authority of those who have colonised the past, whose versions of history matter. These assumptions and co-ordinates of power are inhabited as natural – given, timeless, true and inevitable. But it takes only the passage of time, the shift of circumstances, or the reversals of history, to reveal those assumptions as time- and context-bound, historically specific, and thus open to contestation, re-negotiation, and revision.

This is therefore an appropriate moment to ask, then, who is the Heritage *for*? In the British case the answer is clear. It is intended for those who ‘belong’ – a society which is imagined as, in broad terms, culturally homogeneous and unified.

It is long past time to radically question this foundational assumption.

It is, of course, undeniable that Britain has been in recent times a relatively settled society and ‘culture’. But as something approaching a nation-state, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (subsequently ‘and Northern Ireland’) is in fact a relatively recent historical construct, a product of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Britain itself was formed out of a series of earlier invasions, conquests and settlements – Celts, Romans, Saxons, Vikings, Normans, Angevins – whose ‘traces’ are evident in the palimpsest of the national language. The Act of Union linked Scotland, England and Wales into a united kingdom, but never on terms of cultural equality – a fact constantly obscured by the covert oscillations and surreptitious substitutions between the terms ‘Britishness’ and ‘Englishness’.¹

The Act of Settlement (1701) secured a Protestant ascendancy, drawing the critical symbolic boundary between the Celtic/Catholic and the Anglo-Saxon/Protestant traditions. Between 1801 (the date of the Act of Union which brokered Ireland into the Union) and Partition in 1922, the national story proved incapable of incorporating ‘Irishness’ into ‘Britishness’ or of integrating Irish Catholic migrants into an imagined ‘Englishness’. Their culture and presence remains marginalised today.

Though relatively stable, English society has always contained within it profound differences. There were always different ways of being 'English'. It was always fissured along class, gender and regional lines. What came to be known, misleadingly, as 'the British way of life' is really another name for a particular settlement of structured social inequalities. Many of the great achievements which have been retrospectively written into the national lexicon as primordial English virtues – the rule of law, free speech, a fully-representative franchise, the rights of combination, the National Health Service, the welfare state itself – were struggled for by some of the English and bitterly resisted by others. Where, one asks, is this deeply ruptured and fractured history, with its interweaving of stability and conflict, in the Heritage's version of the dominant national narrative?

The British Empire was the largest *imperium* of the modern world. The very notion of 'greatness' in Great Britain is inextricably bound up with its imperial destiny. For centuries, its wealth was underpinned, its urban development driven, its agriculture and industry revolutionised, its fortunes as a nation settled, its maritime and commercial hegemony secured, its thirst quenched, its teeth sweetened, its cloth spun, its food spiced, its carriages rubber-wheeled, its bodies adorned, through the imperial connection. Anyone who has been watching the Channel 4 series on *The Slave Trade* or the 'hidden history' of the West India Regiment or the BBC's *The Boer War* will not need reminding how deeply intertwined were the facts of colonisation, slavery and empire with the everyday daily life of all classes and conditions of English men and women. The emblems of Empire do, of course, fitfully appear in the Heritage. However, in general, 'Empire' is increasingly subject to a widespread selective amnesia and disavowal. And when it does appear, it is largely narrated from the viewpoint of the colonisers. Its master narrative is sustained in the scenes, images and the artefacts which testify to Britain's success in imposing its will, culture and institutions, and inscribing its civilising mission across the world. This formative strand in the national culture is now re-presented as an external appendage, extrinsic and inorganic to the domestic history and culture of the English social formation.

Despite all this, the idea of Heritage *has* had to respond to at least two major challenges. The first we may call the democratisation process. Increasingly, the lives, artefacts, houses, work-places, tools, customs and oral memories of ordinary everyday British folk have slowly taken their subordinate place alongside the hegemonic presence of the great and the good. The inclusion of domestic vernacular architecture and the agrarian and industrial revolutions, together with the explosion of interest in 'history from below', the spread of local and family history, of personal memorabilia and the collection of oral histories – activities witnessed to in, for example, Raphael Samuel's memorable celebration of the 'popular heritage', *Theatres of Memory* (1997) – have shifted and democratised our conception of value, of what is and is not worth preserving. A few courageous if controversial steps have been taken in our direction – the Liverpool Museum on the Slave Trade, the Maritime Museum's

re-hang. However, by and large, this process has so far stopped short at the frontier defined by that great unspoken British value – ‘whiteness’.

The second ‘revolution’ arises from the critique of the Enlightenment ideal of dispassionate universal knowledge, which drove and inspired so much of Heritage activity in the past. This has to be coupled with a rising cultural relativism which is part of the growing de-centring of the West and western-oriented or Eurocentric grand-narratives. From the ‘Magiciens de la Terre’ exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in Paris in the 1980s, on through the ‘Te Maori’ exhibition from New Zealand at the Metropolitan Museum of New York, the ‘Paradise’ exhibition from New Guinea at the Museum of Mankind, ‘The Spirit Sings’ exhibition of Canada’s ‘first peoples’ at Calgary, the ‘Perspectives: Angles on African Art’ at the Centre for African Art in New York, and on and on, the exhibiting of ‘other cultures’ – often performed with the best of liberal intentions – has proved controversial. The questions – ‘Who should control the power to represent?’ ‘Who has the authority to represent the culture of others?’ – have resounded through the museum corridors of the world, provoking a crisis of authority.

These two developments mark a major transformation in our relation to the activity of constructing a ‘Heritage’. They in turn reflect a number of conceptual shifts in what we might loosely call the intellectual culture. A list of these shifts would have to include a radical awareness by the marginalised of the symbolic power involved in the activity of representation; a growing sense of the centrality of culture and its relation to *identity*; the rise amongst the excluded of a ‘politics of recognition’ alongside the older politics of equality; a growing reflexivity about the constructed and thus contestable nature of the authority which some people acquire to ‘write the culture’ of others; a decline in the acceptance of the traditional authorities in authenticating the interpretative and analytic frameworks which classify, place, compare and evaluate culture; and the concomitant rise in the demand to re-appropriate control over the ‘writing of one’s own story’ as part of a wider process of cultural liberation, or – as Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral once put it – ‘the decolonization of the mind’. In short, a general relativisation of ‘truth’, ‘reason’ and other abstract Enlightenment values, and an increasingly perspectival and context-related conception of truth-as-interpretation – of ‘truth’ as an aspect of what Michel Foucault (1977) calls the ‘will to power’.

Each of these developments would take a whole lecture on their own to elaborate. But I take them here as together marking an unsettling and subversion of the foundational ground on which the process of Heritage-construction has until very recently proceeded. We see it reflected in different ways: in how the texts supporting art works and framing exhibits are written by museums; in the attempts to make explicit the ‘perspective’ which has governed the selection and the interpretative contextualisation, so as to make it more open to challenge and re-interpretation; in the exposing of underlying assumptions of value, meaning and connection as part of a more dialogic relationship between the cultural institutions and their audiences; and

in the tentative efforts to involve the 'subjects' themselves in the exhibiting process which objectifies them. These are only some of the manifest signs of a deep slow-motion revolution in progress in the practices of cultural representation.

They have taken hold, but are certainly not yet extensively or ubiquitously deployed in the institutional complex of the British Heritage 'industry' as a whole. Their appearance is at best patchy, more honoured in the breach – in profession of good intentions – than actual practice. Nevertheless, the question 'Whose Heritage?', posed in the context of the current 'drift' towards a more multicultural Britain, has to be mounted on the back of this emerging 'turn'. I take the appearance of 'cultural diversity' as a key policy priority of the newly restructured Arts Council, its greater visibility in statements of intent by the government and the Ministry of Culture, Media and Sport, the recent efforts by the British Council to project a more 'diverse' image of British culture abroad, and even the much-delayed declaration of a 'Year of Cultural Diversity' – two years after Amsterdam, but much to be welcomed nevertheless – as potential but uncertain harbingers of change.

Suppose this *were* to turn out to be a propitious moment. What would those new constituencies who feel themselves woefully inadequately represented in the mirror of culture which the Heritage holds up to British society want out of it?

It goes without saying that we would need more money specifically targeted at this objective. The corners of the government's mouth tend to droop significantly when the money and material resources required to meet objectives are mentioned, and the weary muttering about 'not simply throwing money at the problem' rises to a quiet crescendo. However, the idea that a major culture-change – nothing short of a cultural revolution – could take place in the way the nation represents the diversity of itself and its 'subjectcitizens' without a major redirection of resources is to reveal oneself as vacantly trivial about the whole question.

In fact, however, money really *is* not enough. For if my arguments are correct, then an equally powerful obstacle to change is the deep institutional investment which the key organisations have in going on doing things in the ways in which they have always been done; and the operational inertia militating against key professionals re-examining their criteria of judgement and their gate-keeping practices from scratch and trying to shift the habits of a professional lifetime. It will require a substantially enhanced programme of training and recruitment for curators, professionals and artists from the 'minority' communities, so that they can bring their knowledge and expertise to bear on transforming dominant curatorial and exhibitory habits. It also will take the massive leverage of a state and government committed to producing, *in reality rather than in name*, a more culturally diverse, socially just, equal and inclusive society and culture, and *holding its cultural institutions to account*. There are some straws in the wind and a lot of wordage, but so far no consistent sign of this.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that *we* have here an opportunity to clarify our own minds and to refine our agendas so that we can seize every opportunity to challenge institutions, shift resources, change priorities, move practices strategically in the right direction. The rest of my talk is devoted to this task of clarification.

First, we need a better idea of who the 'we' are in whose name these changes are being articulated. Principally, we have in mind the so-called 'ethnic minority communities' from the Caribbean and Indian sub-continent, whose presence in large numbers since the 1950s have transformed Britain into a multicultural society, together with the smaller groups of non-European minorities from Africa, the Middle East, China and the Far East and Latin America. Their impact on diversifying British society and culture has been immediate and significant. It may therefore surprise you to hear me say that it is really very complex to understand how appropriately these communities should now be culturally represented in mainstream British cultural and artistic institutions. Our picture of them is defined primarily by their 'otherness' – their *minority* relationship to something vaguely identified as 'the majority', their cultural difference from European norms, their nonwhiteness, their 'marking' by ethnicity, religion and 'race'. This is a negative figuration, reductive and simplistic.

These are people who have formed communities in Britain which are both distinctively marked, culturally, and yet have never been separatist or exclusive. Some traditional cultural practices are maintained – in varied ways – and carry respect. At the same time, the degrees and forms of attachment are fluid and changing – constantly negotiated, especially between men and women, within and across groups, and above all, across the generations. Traditions coexist with the emergence of new, hybrid and crossover cultural forms of tremendous vitality and innovation. These communities are in touch with their differences, without being saturated by tradition. They are actively involved with every aspect of life around them, without the illusion of assimilation and identity. This is a new kind of difference – the difference which is not binary (either–or) but whose '*differances*' (as Jacques Derrida [1982] has put it) will not be erased, or traded.

Their lives and experiences have been shaped by traditions of thought, religious and moral values, very different from the Judeo-Christian and classical traditions whose 'traces' still shape 'western' culture; and by the historical experience of oppression and marginalisation. Many are in touch with cultures and languages which pre-date those of 'The West'. Nevertheless, colonisation long ago convened these cultural differences under the 'canopy' of a sort of imperial empty 'global' time, without ever effectively erasing the disjunctures and dislocations of time, place and culture by its ruptural intrusion into their 'worlds'. This is the palimpsest of the postcolonial world.

These communities are, as C. L. R. James (1990) once put it, 'in but not of Europe'. Nevertheless, they have known 'Europe' for three or four centuries as what Ashis Nandy (1983), in his unforgettable phrase, calls 'intimate enemies'.

They are what David Scott (1999) has called ‘conscripts of modernity’. They have dwelled for many years, and long before migration, in the double or triple time of colonisation, and now occupy the multiple frames, the in-between or ‘third’ spaces – the homes-away-from-homes – of the postcolonial metropolis.

No single programme or agenda could adequately represent this cultural complexity – especially their ‘impossible’ desire to be treated and represented with justice (that is, as ‘the same’) simultaneously with the demand for the recognition of ‘difference’. The agenda will itself have to be open and diverse, representing a situation which is already cross-cut by new and old lateral connections and reciprocal global influences and which refuses to stand still or stabilise. We ourselves should recognise that there will be many complementary but different ways of being represented, just as there are many different ways of ‘being black’.

Without becoming too specific, what would be the basic elements or building blocks of such an agenda?

First, there is the demand that the majority, mainstream versions of the Heritage should revise their own self-conceptions and rewrite the margins into the centre, the outside into the inside. This is not so much a matter of representing ‘us’ as of representing more adequately the degree to which ‘their’ history entails and has always implicated ‘us’, across the centuries, and vice versa. The African presence in Britain since the sixteenth century, the Asian since the seventeenth and the Chinese, Jewish and Irish in the nineteenth have long required to be made the subjects of their own dedicated heritage spaces as well as integrated into a much more ‘global’ version of ‘our island story’. Across the great cities and ports, in the making of fortunes, in the construction of great houses and estates, across the lineages of families, across the plunder and display of the wealth of the world as an adjunct to the imperial enterprise, across the hidden histories of statued heroes, in the secrecy of private diaries, even at the centre of the great master-narratives of ‘Englishness’ like the two World Wars, falls the unscripted shadow of the forgotten ‘Other’. The first task, then, is re-defining the nation, re-imagining ‘Britishness’ or ‘Englishness’ itself in a more profoundly inclusive manner. The Brits owe this, not to only us, but to themselves: for to prepare their own people for success in a global and decentred world by continuing to misrepresent Britain as a closed, embattled, self-sufficient, defensive, ‘tight little island’ would be fatally to disable them.

This is not only a matter of history. London and other major cities have been, throughout this century, ‘world cities’, drawing to themselves the creative talents of nations far and wide, and standing at the centre of tremendously varied cross-cultural flows and lateral artistic influences. Many distinguished practitioners who chose to live and work in Britain – Ronald Moody, Aubrey Williams, Francis Souza, Avinash Chandra, Anwar Jalal Shemza, David Medalla, Li Yuan Chia, Frank Bowling, and many others – have been quietly written out of the record. Not British enough for the Tate, not International enough for Bankside, I guess. The ways in which the ‘modernist’ impulse in

western art drew inspiration from what it defined as ‘primitive’ is now an art-historical cliché. But the numbers of non-European artists who played a central part in European, and especially British, modernism, is far less widely acknowledged – what Rasheed Araeen called, in his historic retrospective, ‘The (Largely Untold) Other Story’ (1989). The existence of major ‘other modernisms’, with their own indigenous roots elsewhere, passes without serious attention. The incontestable truth of the observation that ‘the search for a new identity expressed in modern forms has been the common denominator of most contemporary art movements in Africa’ is, for western curators and art-historians, still a well-kept secret (Hassan, 1999).

Then, second, there is the enormous, unprecedented, creative explosion by contemporary practitioners from the so-called ‘minority’ communities in all the arts (painting, visual arts, photography, film, theatre, literature, dance, music, multi-media) which has marked the last three decades. Unless this work is funded and exhibited, young talent and promise will simply dribble away. And it needs to be said loud and clear that this is not work which is likely immediately to appeal to the new culture-heroes of the art world – the corporate sponsors – who are already in search of their next Monet outing at some prestigious venue. For a time the work of contemporary artists from the minority communities was patronisingly secured within an ‘ethnic’ enclave, as if only non-European work reflected the cultural idioms in which they were composed – as if only ‘we’ had ‘ethnicities’. However, the movement has long ago breached its boundaries and flooded – but only when permitted by the cultural gate-keepers – into the mainstream. Its visibility has depended largely on a few pioneering figures and the efforts of a whole fleet of small, local and community-based galleries.

Like the rainbow, this work comes and goes. Major practitioners surface and pass quietly from view into an early and undeserved obscurity. Their work occasionally surfaces in mainstream venues – and has an innovative vitality which much ‘indigenous’ work lacks. But they cannot be properly ‘heritaged’. The critical records, catalogues and memorabilia of this great tide of creative work in the visual arts since the 1980s, for example – from which, one day, the histories and critical studies of black diaspora visual culture will be written – existed for many years in boxes in a filing cabinet in Eddie Chambers’ bedroom in Bristol before they found a resting place – in AAVAA, the Asian and African Visual Arts Archive, courtesy of the University of East London. No proper archive, no regular exhibitions, no critical apparatus (apart from a few key journals like *Third Text* and the now-defunct *Ten 8*), no definitive histories, no reference books, no comparative materials, no developing scholarship, no passing-on of a tradition of work to younger practitioners and curators, no recognition of achievement amongst the relevant communities ... Heritage-less.

Third, there is the record of the migrant experience itself. This is a precious record of the historical formation of a black diaspora in the heart of Europe – probably a once-in-a-life-time event – still *just* within living memory of its

participants. Anyone who watched the *Windrush* programmes and listened to their moving and articulate interviews, or saw the images which Autograph (The Association of Black Photographers) helped to research and mount at the Pitshanger Gallery in Ealing or read the first-hand evidence of the political struggles of the period 1940–90 being put together by the unfunded George Padmore series edited by a veteran figure – John LaRose – whose autobiography we await, will know the rich evidence in visual imagery and oral testimonies which is waiting to be consolidated into a major archive.

It needs, of course, to be supplemented by extensive oral histories, personal accounts, documents and artefacts, from which, alone, ‘the black experience’ in Britain since the 1950s could be recreated. We know, from a few bold efforts to build the everyday concerns of migrant people into ‘daily life’ local exhibitions (for example by the adventurous Walsall Museum and Art Gallery), of the rich and complex details – customs, cuisine, daily habits, family photographs and records, household and religious objects – which remain to be documented in these domestic settings, poised as they are on the edge of and constantly negotiating between different ‘worlds’. There is no such systematic work in progress, though the Black Cultural Archives with its recent Lottery grant *may* at last be able to make a small start on oral histories. Some selective attempts have been made to do this for some Afro-Caribbean communities. So far as I know, there is very little comparable work as yet on the Asian experience(s). Heritage? *Which Heritage?*

Fourth, there is the question of those ‘traditions of origin’, so often deployed to represent minority communities as immured in their ‘ethnicity’ or differentiated into another species altogether by their ‘racialised difference’. These ‘traditions’ are occasionally on view in performances by visiting companies, framed as an exotic entertainment. But in general terms, the public is deeply uninformed about them. The complexities of practice, interpretation and belief of Hinduism or Islam as world systems of religious belief are virtually a closed book, even to the intelligentsia. The long, highly complex and refined traditions of Indian music or dance, the key texts, poets and novelists, of these great civilisations, the extraordinarily varied cultural history of the Indian sub-continent itself, are beyond the reach of even the well-educated. Equally obscure are the complexities of tribe, language and ethnicity in sub-Saharan Africa.

These basic building blocks of the new global universe we inhabit confront a blank and uncomprehending provincial ‘Englishness’ as if fitfully glimpsed from outer space. Beyond sea, sun, sand, reggae and ganja, the fantastic intricacies of the ‘transculturation’ of European, African and Indian elements over centuries, which have produced the variety and vibrancy of Caribbean ‘creole’ cultures, is another Great Unknown. Latin America with its highly evolved Hispanic and Amerindian cultures may well be less familiar than the surface of Mars. The ‘peculiarity’ of Afro-Caribbeans – that they are simultaneously deeply familiar because they have lived with the British for so long, and ineradicably different because they are black – is regarded by most of the

British (who have never been asked by their 'Heritage' to spare it a thought) as culturally inexplicable. Here, the National Curriculum and the truncated remnant of History as a discipline which remains, with only its most simplistic relationship to notions of 'Heritage' intact, has done irreparable damage.

And yet many of the creative talents of these communities are still 'framed' within a familiarity with the practices of these richly traditional arts, so deeply are they interwoven with the textures of a lived culture itself; and even new and experimental work draws on their repertoires, idioms and languages of representation. Unless the younger generation has access to these cultural repertoires and can understand and practice them, to some extent at least, from the inside, they will lack the resources – the cultural capital – of their own 'heritage', as a base from which to engage other traditions. They will in effect be culturally 'monolingual' if not silenced – literally, deprived of the capacity to speak – in a world which requires us all to be or become culturally bi- if not multi-lingual.

There is no intrinsic contradiction between the preservation and presentation of 'other cultures' and – my fifth point – the engagement with the production of new diasporic forms. The popular culture of our society especially has been transformed by the rich profusion of contemporary hybrid or 'cross-over' cultural forms – in music, dance, street-style, fashion, film, multi-media – which mark the production of 'the new' and the transgressive alongside the traditional and the 'preservation of the past'. Here, 'modernity' (or postmodernity) is not waiting on some authority to 'permit' or sanction this exploration of creativity in contemporary media and form. This is the leading-edge cultural phenomenon of our time – the 'multi' in multicultural, the 'Cool' in 'Cool Britannia'. For a time, black Afro-Caribbeans were in the vanguard of these avant-garde cultural practices, like cultural navigators crossing without passports between ragga, jungle, scratch, rap and electro-funk. In recent years, they have been decisively joined by the 'disorienting rhythms' of Asian youth. Perhaps this aspect of cultural production needs no 'archive' or 'heritage'. But it is proceeding unrecorded and unanalysed, consigned to the ephemera of its day – expendable. Yet it represents one of the most important cultural developments of our time: the stakes which 'the margins' have in modernity, the local-in-the-global, the pioneering of a new cosmopolitan, vernacular, post-national, global sensibility.

What I have offered is a wholly inadequate sketch – leaving out whole tracts of activity and countless examples. The account is inevitably skewed by my own interests and preoccupations. The detail does not matter. What matters is some greater clarity about 'the big picture'. I have tried to suggest not only *what* but *why* the question of 'The Heritage' is of such timely and critical importance for our folks at this time. 'British' most of us were, at one time, but that was long ago and, besides, as Shakespeare said, 'the wench is dead'. 'English' we cannot be. But tied in our fates and fortunes with 'the others' – while steadfastly refusing to have to *become* 'other' to belong – we do, after all, have a stake, an investment, in this phase of globalisation, in what I might

call 'the post-nation'. But only if it can be re-imagined – re-invented to include us. That is the bet, the wager, the gamble we are here to discuss.

Note

- 1 On this whole question, see Norman Davies, *The Isles: A History*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1999.

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2 ‘The way in which we learn to sing’

The heritage of ideas behind ‘Whose Heritage?’

Matt Martin

‘Whose Heritage? Un-settling “The Heritage”, Re-imagining the Post-nation’, Stuart Hall’s keynote from the 1999 *Whose Heritage?* conference organised by the Arts Council of England (ACE) and held in Manchester, feels remarkable for its foresight in articulating concerns that the UK heritage sector, even today, still needs to process. Peter Hewitt, ACE’s Chief Executive, summarises: ‘The event brought together the full spectrum of cultural, heritage and arts practitioners and policy-makers for the first time on a national level, in order to debate and challenge our concept of heritage in the context of today’s multicultural Britain’ (ACE, 1999). Hall redefines heritage to ‘include the active production of culture and the arts as a living activity, alongside the conservation of the past’ (Hall, 1999). He considers how, by recognising diasporic traditions and creativity as aspects of UK heritage, concepts of British nationhood might be transformed. Audience members in Manchester found this intervention radical and timely, as paraphrased in ACE’s conference report: curator Nima Poovaya-Smith ‘saluted Stuart Hall’s masterly deconstruction of the concept of heritage, and the way in which it is locked into Eurocentric and quasi-imperialistic perspectives’; Gilane Tawadros of Iniva (Institute of International Visual Arts) praised how Hall ‘stressed that Britain’s future now depended on understanding the complexity of what Britain and British culture had become’; and Raj Pal (of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery) valued the ‘reminder that the acquisition of knowledge was never neutral’ (ACE, 2000, pp. 21–24).

Admiration deepens upon realising that this keynote in fact crystallised ideas that Hall had developed over many years. If it is far-sighted to articulate in 1999 a redefinition of Britishness that is still urgent more than 20 years later, then raising such questions three decades before ‘Whose Heritage?’ is downright prophetic. Hall’s ideas arose through pondering how diasporas, particularly from his native Caribbean, challenged fixed concepts of ‘Britishness’ during the 1960s. Hall’s thought was then refined in light of later developments, culminating in the Manchester keynote.

‘Whose Heritage?’ therefore has its own heritage, a genealogy of Hall’s previous work. This chapter traces the keynote’s ancestry through his long-term engagement with a diasporic redefinition of British culture. Interviewing Hall

in 1996, anthropologist David Scott repeats a misconception regarding the chronology of Hall's work: 'Around this time, too, Stuart, the mid-1980s, the question of race also enters your work.' Hall gently corrects him: 'And lots of people say that. In fact, it is not quite true, you know. I begin writing about race in the 1960s' (Hall, 2019). Hall's engagement with diasporic belonging – initially through activism, not writing – actually dates from the late 1950s, when (as part of the *Universities and Left Review Club*) he supported Caribbean migrants in London's Notting Hill against exploitative landlord Peter Rachman. This was Hall's 'first political lesson in black diasporic politics' (Hall and Schwarz, 2017, p. 260).

To follow the concerns of 'Whose Heritage?' through Hall's scholarship, though, we will set out from another keynote. On 31 August 1968, Hall spoke at the University of Kent, opening a conference of the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM), an initiative connecting writers and artists from Caribbean backgrounds with new audiences and with each other. At this point, many Caribbean territories (such as Hall's Jamaican homeland) were only recently independent; others were still within the British Empire. Most conference guests, born and raised in the Caribbean, were still deciding whether to return there eventually. Racist demagogues like Enoch Powell, whose most notorious speech against immigration had taken place months earlier, were questioning Black people's right to remain in Britain at all.

Against this background, Hall's keynote 'West Indians in Britain' envisioned a future where the Caribbean diaspora would transform not only their own identities, but wider society too. This chapter concentrates on three interlinked ideas evident in the CAM address and underlying 'Whose Heritage?': diasporas' role in subverting the class basis of British heritage; how overseas traditions interface with Britishness, challenging culturally exclusionary identities; and the need to keep heritage open to renegotiation in light of new achievements. These themes spring from concerns in 'West Indians in Britain', flow through Hall's subsequent thought (modified by intervening events), then gather in the Manchester keynote. This chapter does not comprehensively survey 'Whose Heritage?', nor all of Hall's output from 1968 to 1999; nevertheless, it should convey how 'Whose Heritage?' emerges from a decades-long thinking process. The chapter concludes by extending this genealogy beyond 'Whose Heritage?', exploring how Hall further adjusted his ideas in response to more recent developments.

A key argument in 'Whose Heritage?' is that national identity had already diversified in terms of class. British heritage was traditionally associated with patronage from wealthy people or institutions, lionising grand projects such as stately homes, cathedrals and oil paintings. However, a recent turn towards social history impelled institutions like museums to accommodate more stories and artefacts from the working class, including quotidian, ephemeral and even intangible heritage. Working-class experience was acknowledged as intrinsic to Britishness. Hall believes this democratisation should extend further, also welcoming diasporic stories into national tradition:

The inclusion of domestic vernacular architecture and the agrarian and industrial revolutions, together with the explosion of interest in ‘history from below’, the spread of local and family history, of personal memorabilia and the collection of oral histories ... have shifted and democratised our conception of value, of what is and is not worth preserving. ... However, by and large, this process has so far stopped short at the frontier defined by that great unspoken British value – ‘whiteness’.

(Hall, 1999, p. 7)

Hall did discuss class at the CAM conference, but he had advocated for working-class culture even earlier, inculcating attitudinal changes that saw working-class heritage gain institutional acceptance in the 1990s. His collaboration with Paddy Whannel, *The Popular Arts* (1964), argues that subliminal signals reinforce class-based distinctions between high and popular culture:

In a variety of ways – a style of architecture, a tone of voice, a manner of dress or address – the practical exclusion of large numbers of people from any effective participation in high culture is sustained. In this situation the school, as much as any other cultural institution, can sometimes make many young people feel that the arts belong to an alien world – that what should be available to all has been taken over by a small group who then, by a number of familiar signals, keep trespassers away.

(Hall and Whannel, 1964, pp. 74–75)

Such exclusion ‘is especially damaging in a democratic society, and applies to both the traditional and new forms of high art’. Instead, the authors propose analysing popular culture in schools and universities and laud its power for conveying political meaning. The year 1964 also saw Hall join Richard Hoggart at the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). The centre’s methodology incarnated Hoggart’s recognition that the working class has, in Hall’s words, ‘as much a culture as the culture of the country house or of the bourgeois palace’; Hoggart affirmed proletarian heritage ‘by describing it, using the tools of intuitive literary critical reading’ (Hall, 2016, p. 9).

Such close reading of culture could uncover unpleasant truths. At CAM’s 1968 conference, Hall described how Black presence in the UK had concretised self-definition of the UK’s established population, revealing national culture’s contingency upon the British Empire’s power structures:

I suppose few people in this country had fully faced up to the degree to which the history of the empire had become so deeply entwined in British society, with class, with the very idea of history itself, with tradition, with many of the feudal rites and rituals ... With the notions of success,

prosperity, advancement and so on, that in a sense, it penetrated the very definition and feelings, the complex feelings which people in this society have about being English.

(Hall, 1968)

When colonised peoples were rarely glimpsed in most of the UK, these relationships remained largely subconscious, but increased immigration during the 1950s underlined British identity's dependency on self-valorisation through the sublation of others. People of colour's new visibility on British streets confronted Britain with 'what it is like to have to define oneself for oneself, in and against others. In the fifties, some of the most potent 'others' were black' (Hall, 1968).

The working class was thus disclosed as self-defining through marginalising its own members of colour. During the discussion after the 1968 keynote, poet Edward Lucie-Smith noted that 'West Indians have mostly come into English society at the bottom of the class structure' so that 'arrival of the West Indian has made differentiations of class all the more visible in England' (Hall, 1968). Lucie-Smith recalled a reading tour of the West Midlands with CAM's secretary, Barbadian poet Kamau (then known as Edward) Brathwaite. Brathwaite often wrote in solidarity with working-class concerns, but his natural voice was audibly middle class. Lucie-Smith recounted how this 'black intellectual threw mostly middle-class audiences into a state of violent social confusion ... it was a class feeling that was exposed much more than colour feelings. It was that voice, the Brathwaite voice, coming out of that body' (Hall, 1968).

Hall agreed that Caribbean people in Britain were 'targets of, not only racial attitudes, but also class attitudes' (Hall, 1968). By this point, the CCCS was already exploring 'cultural patterns which develop when peoples from ... Pakistan, India, the West Indies come together with ... the English, the Irish, the Midlanders and the Scots' (Hall, 1968). In the 1970s, the centre explored how class affected such encounters. Hall's collaborative volume *Policing the Crisis* (1978) dissected media hysteria about Black 'muggers', probing the intersectionality that Lucie-Smith noticed. The book argues that the UK's early 1970s recession left Black communities as a substratum of class hierarchy:

For the growing economic recession meant that the black work-force – because of its structural position in the labour force, and especially young black school-leavers, seeking employment for the first time – was coming to constitute an *ethnically distinct class fraction* – the one most *exposed* to the winds of unemployment. ... What we are witnessing here, in short, is nothing less than the synchronisation of the race and class aspects of the crisis.

(Hall et al., 1978, p. 331; their italics)

Modes of expression among Black British people grew from this doubly marginalised position, constantly challenging it. The struggle was for ‘cultural space in which an alternative black social life could flourish’, incubating ‘“West Indian consciousness”, no longer simply kept alive in the head or in memory, but visible on the street’ (Hall et al., 1978, p. 351).

In 1987, cultural historian Anne Walmsley interviewed Hall while researching CAM. Hall remarked that he had insufficiently considered class factors in 1968. His account of Black creativity had concentrated on high cultural forms explored by CAM, particularly literature. However, most Caribbean immigrants at that time had ‘no connection with students and studying and university, etc.: they were working people’ (Walmsley, 1987). This influenced cultural forms emerging in the 1970s and ‘80s. Performance predominated:

I of course was talking there still to writers and poets: mainly talking about language in a verbal sense. But of course what has happened is that movement, body, music, dance, etc.: ... [T]hose other languages have become very much the vehicles of self-expression and self-exploration for the Caribbean community.

(Walmsley, 1987)

Hall adds:

Popular roots are being re-incorporated into more sophisticated forms. And I think ... we are beginning to get really exciting things in music, in video, in film; but they’re drawing on the existence of those popular cultural forms in the life of the people.

Infiltrating forms that mainstream culture construed as rarefied, Black British popular expression led to ‘dub poetry and the deep patois poetry’ (Walmsley, 1987). Hall was thus pleasantly surprised by one transformation arising through Black presence – the challenge to traditional boundaries between high and popular culture, corroding class structures endemic to British arts.

In ‘Whose Heritage?’, Hall celebrates institutional acceptance of the ‘democratisation process’ that he and Hoggart foresaw in the 1960s, welcoming working-class culture into the national tradition. The next step is to push democratisation further, transcending ‘that great unspoken British value – “whiteness”’ by celebrating diasporic culture. Caribbean communities were subsumed into the UK class hierarchy’s lowest level; however, their arts challenged such structures, asserting working-class heritage’s value. Other diasporas shared this potential. It is therefore apt that diasporas should gain representation in fulfilment of the class-based democratisation that they themselves have done much to institute.

Diasporas in the UK have contributed to a recognition of working-class heritage, invigorated British culture through the exchange of ideas, and

precipitated new genres. Hall, as we saw, mentions this to Walmsley while discussing fusions of Black British popular forms with high culture. In 'Whose Heritage?', he considers wider transculturation between tradition, modernity and diaspora:

Some traditional cultural practices are maintained ... At the same time, the degrees and forms of attachment are fluid and changing – constantly negotiated ... Traditions co-exist with the emergence of new, hybrid and crossover forms of tremendous vitality and innovation. These communities are in touch with their differences, without being saturated by tradition.

(Hall, 1999, p. 9)

Hall notes these same tactics 31 years earlier. At Kent, he explains how diverse populations interact in multicultural, urban Britain, transforming not only their own traditions, but UK culture more generally:

Englishmen can now see forming before them, what it is like to build up the colony. ... It contains many people who are both white and black. ... And the ways of survival in such colonies draw on all the resources which people who have travelled four thousand miles bring with them, that is to say, pull them into the orbit of British life, a whole complex variety of cultural qualities, of political attitudes and so on from the home country and at the same time subject those attitudes and values to really rapid, serious, deep-rooted transformation.

(Hall, 1968)

'Colony' has a double meaning here, indicating space partially occupied by people from overseas, yet subject to the same imperialism experienced in their birthplaces. The Notting Hill of the 1950s, where Hall assisted Caribbean migrants, exemplifies such neighbourhoods. The term, and Hall's description, implicitly compare urban colonies with the Caribbean, a site of creolisation whereby (as 'Whose Heritage?' puts it) 'intricacies of the "transculturation" of European, African and Indian elements over centuries ... have produced the variety and vibrancy of Caribbean "creole" cultures' (Hall, 1999, p. 12).

In 1968, Hall ascribes to African-Caribbean migrants a unique perspective on the UK. The long-term submersion of ancestral heritage under slavery and imperialism had saturated them from birth in colonial language, religion, politics, pedagogy and arts. This erasure was never total; however, British hegemony meant that many Caribbean migrants already felt part of Britain and were surprised to encounter racism upon arrival. Hall argues that cultural intimacy created a gap between expectation and reality. Feeling British while in the Caribbean, migrants were then thrown into the paradox of residing within, while being socially excluded from, the UK. Fieldwork from the period supports Hall; interviews by sociologists John Rex and Robert Moore

in Birmingham's Sparkbrook district 'confirmed the popular notion that West Indians come to England as to their mother country. ... [T]hey expect equal treatment and no colour discrimination. These beliefs and hopes are almost universally destroyed after a few weeks in England' (Rex and Moore, 1967, p. 100). For Hall, the arts are crucial ways to define oneself, to narrate one's role within this alienating environment. He envisions future generations of Black British people creating culture informed by history but emancipated from obligations to it:

It's part of the way in which we learn to worship, part of the way in which we learn to sing, part of the way in which we learn to bring up families and so on; of the complex way in which that both belongs to us and also was, throughout three hundred years of our history appropriated to somebody else, partly ours, and partly somebody else's. And it is only the very deep breaking of links with that complex past, which I think happens not in the first but in the second and third immigrant generations, that we begin to see what the truly immigrated West Indian is actually like.

(Hall, 1968)

In 1968, 'intimate enemies' is Hall's term for this Caribbean combination of familiarity and alienation. 'Whose Heritage?' repeats the phrase but credits it to Ashis Nandy (Hall, 1999). Nandy presumably invented the term independently but ascribes the phenomenon to all colonised peoples: 'The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds' (Nandy, 1983, p. xi). In 1999, Hall adopts Nandy's broader meaning, acknowledging how culture has been overwritten throughout the British Empire. Hall's emphasis thus shifts from Caribbean distinctiveness to seeking common cause with other diasporas. Each community is a 'palimpsest' where 'cultural differences' are subsumed 'under the "canopy" of a sort of imperial empty "global" time' (Hall, 1999). Diverse traditions have undergone attempted displacement by Britishness; their resistance varies according to cultural particulars.

Approaching this realisation, Hall's 1989 essay 'New Ethnicities' reflects on the period of the CAM conference: "'Black" was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, among groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities'. Blackness 'became "hegemonic" over other ethnic/racial difference', becoming 'the unspoken and invisible "other" of predominantly white aesthetic and cultural discourses'. In 1989, Hall complicates this through the 'diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experience of black subjects' seeking 'solidarity and identification which make common struggle and resistance possible but without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities' (Hall, 1996, p. 441). Reifying unitary Blackness in opposition to white racism might seem productive and even necessary, but

it plays into colonialist tropes that Hall identifies in the textbook *Formations of Modernity*:

The world is at first divided, symbolically, into good–bad, us–them, attractive–disgusting, civilized–uncivilized, the West–the Rest. ... By this strategy, the Rest becomes defined as everything the West is not – its mirror image. It is represented as absolutely, essentially, different, *other*: the Other.

(Hall, 1992a, p. 308; Hall's italics)

Hall's 1992 paper 'Our Mongrel Selves' (2017b, pp. 275–282) and his 1994 Du Bois Lectures at Harvard (collected as *The Fateful Triangle* [2017a]) clarify essentialised identity's ramifications, linking it to genocides accompanying 'retreat into an ethnically cleansed, culturally unified, and homogenous conception of the nation ... in the former Yugoslavia' (Hall, 2017a). He sees nationalism resurgent in Britain too, in the "'Little Englandism' of the anti-European Union movement', or the far-right 'British National Party's electoral success in Docklands and the East End of London' in 1993 (Hall, 2017a, p. 151). Countervailing emphasis on intra-group difference within nations and ethnicities is required; Hall therefore generalises his thinking about creolised spaces such as the Caribbean or Britain's urban colonies:

The classic scenarios of diaspora formation have been the 'contact zones', as Mary Louise Pratt calls them, created by Euro-imperial expansion. These primal scenes of transculturation include the plantation economies of the New World and Asia, the world's colonial cities, trading centres, and their subaltern compounds, as well as, more recently, the new, multi-cultural, global city.

(Hall, 2017a, p. 165, citing Pratt, 1992)

This is 'diaspora formation where different cultures not only intersect but are obliged to modify themselves in the face of one another' (Hall, 2017a, p. 166). Moreover, Hall argues that transculturation is not limited to recent centuries. All western nation states are "'diaspora-ised" beyond repair':

They are without exception ethnically hybrid – the product of conquests, absorptions of one people by another. It has been the main function of national cultures, which are systems of representation, to represent what is in fact the ethnic hotch-potch of modern nationality as the primordial unity of 'one people'; while that of their invented traditions has been to project the ruptures and conquests, which are their real history, backwards in an apparently seamless and unbroken continuity towards pure, mythic time.

(Hall, 2017b, p. 277)

In ‘Whose Heritage?’, these ideas upbraid a British heritage ‘intended for those who “belong” – a society ... culturally homogenous and unified’. In contrast, ‘Britain itself was formed out of a series of earlier invasions, conquests and settlements – Celts, Romans, Saxons, Vikings, Normans, Angevins – whose “traces” are evident in the palimpsest of the national language’ (Hall, 1999, p. 6). If Britain was always diasporic, always creolised, then additions of ‘Irish ... Pakistanis, Indians, Maltese, a whole variety of peoples’ (as Hall observed in 1960s Britain’s ‘contact zones’) simply follow tradition (Hall, 1968). Restricting Britishness to supposed inheritors of essentialised nationhood would impose a falsity. Heritage further fractures along fault-lines like nationality (e.g., Scottishness, Welshness, Northern Irishness), religion, class and region. Such revelations might traumatise white people invested in myths of unitary Britishness; indeed, after Hall’s 1999 keynote, discussions addressed white people’s role in transforming nationhood. He explained:

Whiteness is only a problem when it is invisible, when it is the naturalised norm; when it is not a colour but it is the norm against which all other colours are measured ... But whiteness that recognises its own internal differences is a whiteness that we can of course negotiate with. ... We have to get them to try to deal with the complexity of how they became what they are – and, indeed, lost where they are.

(ACE, 2000, pp. 21–24)

Acknowledging diasporic heritage could thus highlight hitherto underappreciated complexities in white people’s backgrounds, transforming their own narratives. Through such shifts, between 1968 and 1999, Hall’s thought becomes even more multicultural. In the 1960s, diversity in British cities suggested potential creolisation, but, simultaneously, anti-racist collectivisation instituted a singular concept of Blackness in opposition to white racism. By the late 1980s, Hall felt that theories of Blackness had obscured diversity within Black heritage, and, in the 1990s, that far more horrific effects were stemming from monolithic concepts of white nationhood. Hall therefore aims to diversify British heritage, demanding not only the accommodation of diasporic culture, but the pluralisation of white British identity. This culminates in ‘Whose Heritage?’, where the necessity of diasporising the entire culture becomes clear.

This brings us to our last theme from ‘Whose Heritage?’ – heritage as a space of constant renegotiation. Hall proposes that heritage is, in Raymond Williams’ words, a ‘selective tradition ... different from the culture as lived’ (Hall, 1999, p. 5, citing Williams, 1963). Such an edited narrative risks an artificially narrow genealogy, restricting concepts of the nation. If this national image is racially exclusive, celebrating some British people’s roots but devaluing others’, then heritage will fuel the marginalisation described in *Policing the Crisis* (1978). If heritage were democratised, reversing exclusions made on the basis of race as well as of class, it would not only promote

justice for diasporic communities but also expand white British people's own horizons of possibility:

The first task, then, is re-defining the nation, re-imagining 'Britishness' or 'Englishness' itself in a more profoundly inclusive manner. The Brits owe this, not to only us, but to themselves: for to prepare their own people for success in a global and decentred world by continuing to misrepresent Britain as a closed, embattled, self-sufficient, defensive, 'tight little island' would be fatally to disable them.

(Hall, 1999, p. 10)

This process plunges the nation itself into self-questioning that Hall, in 1968, attributes specifically to diasporic, working-class peoples. For such groups, this questioning responds to alienation imposed by the self-proclaimed mainstream of British culture. It is an essential strategy for surviving a racist society:

I'm not talking of people like me, who spend our time writing and reading and thinking about it, I'm talking about people who are required to make those redefinitions every day when they set out from their house, every day when they go to work, each time they answer a question from their children; each time the child goes into the school; required to ask the question 'who am I?', 'how did I get here?', 'what resources do I have to cope?' 'how do people come to regard me like that?', 'what is my project in this society?'

(Hall, 1968)

'Whose Heritage?' inverts this dynamic. Instead of diasporas adjusting to survive the UK, Britain must collectively modify its self-image to account for diasporic presence. The nation must jettison distinctions between heritage (as a curated body of past practice) and culture (as an ongoing process of discovery). This change involves learning from Black British communities' emphasis on culture as a means of self-definition, described by Hall to Walmsley in 1987:

I think it's a most fantastic cultural explosion that's gone on in the black community. And they really do understand culture. They really do understand what it means in ways that I think the English don't: they don't use the term, it's not an active concept. But black people here do understand, without culture, they're absolutely historically lost.

(Walmsley, 1987)

These remarks presage Hall's observation in 'Whose Heritage?' that 'the British have always seen "culture" as a vaguely disquieting idea as if to name it is to make self-conscious what well-bred folk absorb unconsciously with

their mother's milk', so that 'works and artefacts so conserved appear to be "of value" primarily in relation to the past' (Hall, 1999, p. 3). Britishness has typically been constructed as monadic, ignoring tradition's potential as David Scott's 'space of dispute as much as of consensus, of discord as much as accord' (Hall, 1999, p. 5, citing Scott, 1999). For Hall, in contrast, Black British creativity epitomises 'production of culture and the arts as a living activity' in an expanded definition of heritage (Hall, 1999, p. 4).

In another textbook, *Modernity and Its Futures* (1992b), Hall addresses how diasporic presence can introduce a society to such cultural fluidity. A diaspora, he argues, can flourish in its differentness, avoiding 'either returning to its "roots" or disappearing through assimilation and homogenization'. This fulfils Hall's 1968 prediction of a Black British culture that acknowledges history without being bound by it; however, as with his reframing of transculturation in 'Whose Heritage?', he now extends the principle to diasporas in general:

Such people retain strong links with their places of origin and their traditions, but they are without the illusion of a return to the past. They are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely. ... People belonging to such *cultures of hybridity* have had to renounce the dream or ambition of rediscovering any kind of 'lost' cultural purity, or ethnic absolutism. They are irrevocably *translated*.

(Hall, 1992b, p. 310; Hall's italics)

'Whose Heritage?' goes further still, applying this ongoing 'translation' to an area's longer-term population as well as new diasporas. For three reasons, though, the roots of 'Whose Heritage?' are evident in *Modernity and Its Futures*. Firstly, since all cultures have diasporic histories, all undergo continuous reconciliation of these background elements. Secondly, intracultural variations may emerge from factors other than historical migration, such as class or faith, and hybridisation can occur between such differentiated groups, potentially intersecting fruitfully with diasporisation. Lastly, by meeting a diaspora within a contact zone, pre-existing residents also experience creolisation.

We have seen how Hall's ideas from the 1968 CAM conference evolve into the content of 'Whose Heritage?'. In light of the Black British creative explosion of the 1970s and '80s, his early validation of popular arts becomes the basis for the institutional recognition of diasporic culture, following on from the acceptance of working-class heritage. Building on the experience of Caribbean creolisation, he perceives transculturation in the UK's urban contact zones. In the 1990s, this revelation extends through history, disclosing all cultures as inherently diasporic, dispelling nationalist delusions and presaging the cultural fluidity of 'Whose Heritage?'. In parallel, Hall develops a view of nationhood itself as needing to be 'reimagined – reinvented to include

us' – the 'us' being people from diasporic backgrounds, but consequently also the diasporic inheritance of everyone in Britain (Hall, 1999).

Throughout these decades, Hall remains optimistic about gradually opening up British heritage to diasporic influences. However, looking beyond 'Whose Heritage?' to Hall's posthumously published memoir *Familiar Stranger* (2017), we find him doubting whether diasporic communities' cultural work has been reciprocated with white British recognition of their belonging. The issue seems acute at the level of national government:

Indeed I feel less English now than when I first arrived. Cultural identity is not fixed. But it is at the same time remarkably stubborn. I guess this is why people – politicians especially – keep posing to those of us who weren't born here and don't in their sense properly belong, the question of our loyalty to Britain, or to England, and to their cultures as a form of belongingness. However, the English themselves don't really seem to know what these cultures comprise; I wonder if the politicians do either.

(Hall and Schwarz, 2017, p. 260)

As an example, Hall cites Conservative politician Norman Tebbit's advocacy in 1990 of the so-called 'Cricket Test', which measures diasporic communities' loyalty to Britain by noting which nation's sports teams they support. Hall locates Tebbit at the 'historical juncture between the politics of Enoch Powell' and 'right-wing populism evident in the UK Independence Party (UKIP) of today' (Hall and Schwarz, 2017). Hall passed away in 2014; he did not experience the UK's 2016 'Brexit' referendum or the resurgent 'right-wing populism' that now accompanies its aftermath. Events since his passing have justified his remark that 'things sometimes get worse, moving in the opposite direction from the days of multiculturalism' (Hall and Schwarz, 2017).

If 'the days of multiculturalism' are over and that epoch's achievements are being reversed, this explains why 'Whose Heritage?' feels as radical now as in 1999. Later chapters in this volume explore how Stuart Hall's ideas could be recuperated to address the UK's current, ongoing crisis. For now, it may suffice to note that, from his 1960s speculations to CAM about Black British identity through his commentary on political and cultural developments in the '70s, '80s and '90s to his cry for action at 'Whose Heritage?', Hall's work traces a trajectory into a possible future, one still realisable by those who share his vision of a heritage fully encompassing the variety, contradictions and provisional nature of British identities. 'Whose Heritage?' remains both a milestone and a crucial signpost on this journey.

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3 Race equality in the cultural heritage sector

Perceptions of progress over the last twenty years and actions for the next decade

Clara Arokiasamy OBE

Introduction

At the 1999 seminal ‘Whose Heritage?’ conference (WHC), the cultural theorist Stuart Hall set out the state of racial inequalities in the arts and heritage sector and the challenges that needed addressing (Hall, 2004). More than two decades later, and despite many cultural diversity initiatives and anti-discrimination legislation, there appears to be little evidence of change. This situation was amplified by the protests of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in 2020.

This chapter sets out a summary of my reflections on the cultural heritage sector’s response to date – in particular, the WHC’s impact in bringing about racial equality and the dismantling of institutional racism in cultural institutions during the first and second decades of the 21st century. It includes a summary of my evaluation of progress made between 1999 and 2009, when I presented it to the Museum Association (MA) conference; outlines perceptions of past and current Black and white employees in the cultural heritage sector of the efforts made to embed racial equality at government and institutional levels between 2009 and 2019; and sets out barriers that have prevented change. I also propose actions needed over the next ten years.

Throughout this chapter I have used the term Black to refer to people of colour. It is a political term that I have grown up with since the seventies.

‘Whose Heritage?’ conference

Stuart Hall’s keynote address at the 1999 conference argued that the “‘nation-state” existed in our own minds simply as an idea: it was shared identity that bound together cultural meanings’. He called for the margins to be brought into the centre of the British story. Hall also identified some key challenges that subverted the cosy and incomplete national story and contributed to ‘marking an unsettling and subversion of the foundational ground on which

the process of Heritage construction has until very recently proceeded'. He identified two prerequisites that were critical for achieving change: the redirection of resources, and the tackling of institutional resistance to write the margins into the centre. He stressed the need to capture migrants' experiences to prevent younger generations growing up culturally 'monolingual' and to embrace the cultural explosions in Black communities.

Progress made during the first decade post-WHC (1999 to 2009)

I delivered my first reflections in a keynote address at the MA conference in 2009 entitled 'Are Museums Serving the UK's Black and Minority Population?' (Arokiasamy, 2009a), in my capacity as Chair of the London Mayor's Heritage and Diversity Task Force. This address was supported by data in reports from two key initiatives set up by the then London mayor Ken Livingstone. The first was *Delivering Shared Heritage* by the Mayor's Commission on African and Asian Heritage (MCAAH) (MCAAH, 2005; Arokiasamy, 2012), resulting from an inquiry into African and Asian heritage in London between 2003 and 2005 as a response to the WHC. It mapped out a programme to embed cultural diversity in London's heritage sector. The second report was *Embedding Shared Heritage* (MCAAH, 2009; Arokiasamy, 2012) by the Heritage and Diversity Task Force, which was responsible for setting out guidance for the delivery of the Mayor's Commission's recommendations on good practice between 2006 and 2009. I also drew on information gathered from my conversations with museum staff and community groups, cultural consultants and activists in the Black community, as well as my personal experience of working in the sector.

In my address I concluded that the WHC had stimulated some one-off, noteworthy initiatives ranging from 'exhibitions, Lottery funding for Black and ethnic minority community projects, to positive action recruitment programmes led by the MA, and the empowerment of local regional museums to respond to race equality through the Renaissance programme' funded by the then Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The many community projects delivered by medium-sized and large cultural agencies, however, were time limited and therefore unsustainable; consequently, they left few or no legacies.

Perceptions of success of the cultural offers differed between the predominantly white providers and funders and the many Black service recipients, academics and activists. Whilst the former stressed engagement with heritage, skills development, capacity building and regeneration as benefits, Jo Littler and Roshi Naidoo argued that poor programming regularly focusing on popular topics such as Black History Month, postwar migration, slavery, dance and religious festivals was a result of inadequate Black representation and a 'total lack of challenging Black presence'. Also, interpretation lacked depth and remained unimaginative and above all 'safe', so that it did not

upset the comfort zone of service providers (Arokiasamy, 2009a; Littler and Naidoo, 2004).

The goodwill, enthusiasm for collaboration and intellectual commitment demonstrated at the WHC to removing racial inequalities at central and local government levels, and within state-funded and independent cultural heritage agencies, had not been translated into good practice. Grant funding patterns had not altered to make a meaningful difference to the Black community's access to heritage: £76 million of Heritage Lottery money had been spent on Black projects out of a total distribution of more than £4 billion, and only £36 million went directly to Black-led projects (Arokiasamy, 2009a).

The period from 1999 to 2009 also witnessed the departures of several of the already few Black staff in middle and senior positions due to restructuring and redundancies, disciplinary action, or a falling out because of Black staff's unwillingness to collude or reconcile with institutional racism. A lack of leadership and accountability among government agencies and cultural institutions, the resistance to making race equality integral to strategic vision and core business, and a lack of board diversity were identified as key barriers to change (Arokiasamy, 2009b).

As a way forward, my 2009 address stressed that the financial downturn at the time should not be used as an excuse to ignore investment in furthering race equality. It also called for the coordination of all work relating to cultural diversity to be established at government level, consultation and audience development initiatives to be replaced with equitable partnerships with – and accountability to – Black communities, and urgent remedial work to redress the cumulative impact sustained since 1999.

What changes has the second decade post-WHC (2009 to 2019/20) witnessed?

Brexit, the Windrush Scandal, George Floyd's death in the USA and the global Black Lives Matter protests, decolonisation movements, culture wars and the Covid-19 pandemic have brought race, migration and racial inequalities to the fore. They have also empowered Black communities across the UK to articulate in a frank way their lived experiences of enduring structural racism stretching back centuries and emboldened them to publicly reprimand the government and cultural institutions' poor track record to date.

The anger and concern expressed through these events were sufficient evidence that racial inequality had not only worsened but was being ignored in the cultural sector and that only superficial changes had taken place over the last twenty years. I, nonetheless, felt it important to gauge the mood and perceptions among current and former employees of cultural agencies about the race equality developments that had been delivered over the last decade, their impact on Black people and what improvements were needed for the future.

I invited twenty-five people involved with the cultural heritage sector to be interviewed about their views on efforts made in integrating race equality into the planning and delivery of cultural services and creating a diverse workforce since 2009. Twenty took up the invitation and were interviewed between late August and the end of September 2020. It was a mixed group in age, gender, ethnicity and discipline.

The four white interviewees worked with museum services. They held senior roles in academia, a professional membership organisation, a funding agency and a non-departmental public body (NDPB), all on permanent contracts.

The rest of the participants were of African, Asian or mixed heritage origin and their careers spanned the arts and heritage, local government, higher education and independent sectors in different parts of the UK. Their employment status could be described as full- or part-time curators currently employed in museums and galleries or local and regional government; middle managers employed in NDPBs; freelance curators and visual and performing artists currently working in arts and heritage organisations and theatres; arts and heritage consultants once employed in cultural heritage institutions in full-time middle and senior management positions; and part-time lecturers.

Participants' ages ranged between 25–35 years and 55–65 years. A few had been at the 1999 WHC, and others were familiar with Stuart Hall's work. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours. As several respondents were then either employed or consulting in the cultural heritage sector, they requested anonymity for fear of any possible consequences.

All twenty individuals were asked for their perceptions on the following three key areas:

1. If any notable changes had taken place over the last decade in relation to race equality either in services or workforce development in the cultural heritage sector.
2. What were the barriers to progressing change in workforce and service delivery, if there were any?
3. What changes could be expected in the future in light of the impact of BLM protests and other developments on policy makers and providers and the sustainability of change resulting from them?

For many respondents, the conversations provided an opportunity to reflect freely on race and culture and the trajectory of their working lives within that context over the last decade and especially after the BLM protests. They provided candid responses based on experiences in their workplaces specifically and the sector generally. Several of the Black interviewees in particular wanted their experiences, views and comments documented as they felt race issues had been 'ignored' and 'whitewashed for too long'.

Progress made over the last ten years

Whilst there was a broad agreement between Black and white participants on the extent and type of progress made over the last decade, there were marked differences in their views on barriers, impact and solutions for the future.

One white interviewee summed up the previous ten years (2009–2019) as ‘more of a story of lack of progress instead of progress made’, which resonated with many of the Black and white respondents. Although there had been attempts to diversify the workforce and services, the consensus among all interviewees was that they were modest, uncoordinated and unsustainable, and that transformational change had not taken place. The reasons given varied between the age, ethnicity and occupation of those interviewed and between the heritage and arts sectors.

Discussion on positive developments to date produced a list of initiatives that both groups of respondents were either aware of or involved in. They agreed that the appointment of Black senior staff to key cultural organisations such as the Young Vic, Bush, Eclipse, Brixton House, Belgrade and Strictly Arts theatres and the Birmingham Museums Trust and Wellcome Collection were improvements on previous performance. They also welcomed the recruitment of Black trustees to some national and regional cultural boards and the museum sector, including the MA board and the appointment of Dr Aminal Hoque to the Royal Museums, Greenwich. Although, a few months after my interviews with participants, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DDCMS) vetoed the Chair of the Board’s request for Hoque’s term to be renewed, giving as one of its reasons Hoque’s ‘‘liked’’ tweets hostile to the government’. This resulted in the resignation of the Chair, as he felt unable ‘to defend the minister’s decision’ (Higgins, 2021; Harris, 2021). Some commentators attributed his academic work involving decolonisation as an additional possible reason for the non-renewal (Harris, 2021).

The increase in the number of Black staff in front of house, curatorial and marketing roles and the various traineeship and leadership programmes including The Clore Leadership Programme, Arts Council England’s (ACE’s) Change Makers and Transforming Leadership schemes (ACE, 2018a) and Elevate, aimed at increasing the resilience of diverse-led, non-National Portfolio Organisations (ACE, 2018b), were presented as further evidence of progress.

The work of Museum Detox, a national volunteer Black professional network and support group established by and for Black staff across all domains in the arts and heritage sector (Kemp, 2017; Museum Detox, 2022), was seen as a unique and important achievement. Its members have become advocates for diversity in recruitment, governance, curation, audience development and interpretation. The group has established a number of successful partnerships with national and regional museums and arts-related agencies, including the Royal Society of Arts (Khanchandani, 2018), helping them to embed cultural

diversity in their workforce planning and services. It appears to be the ‘go-to’ project nationally for advice or approval on race and diversity for many cultural agencies.

Also identified as worthy of note were the MA’s Decolonisation Guidance Working Group and the Pitt Rivers Museum’s ‘experimental and action-oriented research’, in particular its programme to devolve restitution to universities and local authorities beyond London (Pitt Rivers, 2021). The National Trust’s report acknowledging the links between its historic properties and collections and colonialism and slavery (National Trust, 2020) and its handling of accusations of ‘wokism’ from its members were flagged as good examples of an anti-racist stance.

ACE’s Creative Case for Diversity (CCD) programme launched in 2011, an investment in National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs), Major Partner Museums and museum development providers to reflect the diversity of the nation in arts and culture, and its Equality Action Plan to guide the implementation of equality, diversity and inclusion in activities and programming, workforce, governance and audience were held up as yet more examples of the sector’s efforts to embed cultural diversity in the sector (ACE, 2015a).

However, several Black interviewees were quick to point out that, while these achievements were laudable, most of them had their drawbacks too and provided some examples. Three in particular stood out. Museum Detox was seen as a valuable support system for Black staff experiencing racism at their workplace, as it provided a safe space for its Black members to discuss their concerns, was effective in drawing attention to the impact of racism and racial inequalities on Black employees, audiences and the wider community, and helped its membership with career progression. Several Black respondents were either current or former members. Whilst they were grateful for Museum Detox’s interventions, some felt that it had probably outlived its role as a change agent. A Black curator stated that ‘it had become a brand’ and that white managers who had attended Museum Detox’s training sessions or had collaborated with it on diversity projects regarded themselves as sufficiently aware and informed on race equality issues. This had the effect of ‘diminishing Black employees’ agency’ in defining anti-racist practice or challenging exclusive practices, or in seeking effective management of their complaints of discrimination and redress for their grievances. Another Black manager stated that Museum Detox was a capable team, but it was ‘not involved long enough in the organisation to effect change like a permanent curator or senior manager; legacy is not built in, it’s a fun project and a tick box exercise’.

The second example was the over-reliance on decolonisation to resolve institutional racism. It is seen as unrealistic and a downside of the wider decolonisation agenda being pursued in the sector. Black respondents felt that the term had come to replace cultural diversity and inclusiveness and therefore was at risk of becoming just as meaningless as previous terminologies. Also, debates among some African states and past colonies on the need to interrogate the use of the term within a European context – in particular, whether

colonisers were the right people to define and interpret decolonisation – was not being explored with similar rigour in the West. Participants hoped that the MA's working group currently tasked with drawing up guidelines for museums would ensure that this aspect was included in their deliberations.

While the aim of ACE's CCD programme was considered commendable, some Black interviewees concurred with a fellow Black respondent that it 'does not go far enough' to ensure a robust embedding of cultural diversity in NPOs' organisational structures and practices, and that they submitted complete data. They also wanted the current penalty for non-compliant organisations – 'talking sternly to' – to be replaced with 'more strict punitive measures' and highlighted that the model, originally designed for arts-based organisations, was not completely appropriate for museums. Another Black respondent pointed out that most of ACE's diversity programmes did not target Black communities exclusively; they usually covered several of the protected groups listed in the Equality Act 2010. Some white practitioners were more knowledgeable and confident – and their comfort zones were less challenged – when managing and resolving equality issues relating to other protected groups rather than those presented by Black communities.

The most striking changes shared during the interviews, however, came from Black professionals and activists who worked outside of formal heritage organisations. Many had worked in the arts and museum sector at some point, ranging from a period of one or two years to more than a decade, but had left because of restructuring resulting in redundancy, lack of career opportunities or 'being eased out'. Some found themselves at odds with the organisational culture, which they found stifling of their creativity and interpretation of cultural diversity, including organisations set up specifically to challenge racism, support mainstream Black visual and performing artists' work and promote diverse communities' involvement. They found the criteria for grant aid to these organisations limiting, or the interviewees simply wanted to remove themselves from a 'racist work environment'. A number of these individuals mentioned that they had been hired back by the heritage sector as 'collection activists' and had led on audience development and co-creation activities on time-limited, short-term contracts or consultancy arrangements. But the others, in particular the younger Black participants, had gone on to create innovative visual and performing art and heritage and educational projects, which were informed by race, identity and equalities underpinned by their own and Black communities' histories, heritages and lived experiences, in a variety of settings. The projects described were radical, original and experimental in nature and involved entrepreneurial acumen, including crowdfunding, as much as artistic license. They varied from plays, writings and spoken word to critiquing traditional curatorial practices, ethics and racism in the formal sector, setting up radical collectives such as The White Pube (n.d.) and organising DIY Cultures festivals exploring intersections of art and activism and Zine fairs (Ahsan, 2017). Financial and career risks associated with this kind of precarious existence were considered

worth taking if it meant not working in a 'toxic environment lacking career and development opportunities'. Some of the Black respondents found the DIY Cultures' Zine fairs to be liberating, offering Black and white artists 'the space to come together as equals' and tell their own stories, unlike the sector's inclusion fora, which remained 'predominantly white led, cliky and reinforced race and class hierarchy'.

The projects were undertaken as personal ventures or through collective and collaborative arrangements with fellow Black artists, curators, local people and white supporters, thus echoing the 'cultural explosions' in the Black communities that Stuart Hall referenced in his WHC speech. Hall had urged the arts and heritage sectors to embrace them and create repositories to safeguard their creative contribution for future generations. Regrettably, that does not seem to have happened. So, what has prevented change?

Barriers to progress

Perceptions of factors preventing change differed between white and Black respondents. All the white participants acknowledged that there had not been much progress made over the last decade, especially in the workforce when compared to the improvements achieved in services: activities, programming, exhibitions and audience development. However, as one white manager stated, it was unclear whether this was 'really due to ignorance or the inability to grasp things or simply racist' on the part of the organisations. On further exploration, they attributed the lack of advancement to the government's 'austerity measures leading to a shrunken heritage sector with poor pay and lack of opportunities over the last ten years'; drastic reductions in local authorities' and national museums' budgets; problems related to the casualisation of the labour force; and the huge demand for museum studies courses, leading to more qualified people than jobs.

Other obstacles cited by white participants included the lack of vacancies at higher levels resulting in the inability of Black staff to move into senior posts, although this 'would trickle through with time', unconscious bias and sometimes a mismatch between the skills needed and those available among Black candidates for the few jobs that do come up.

Some of the white senior leaders in the heritage sector came in for criticism too, especially those who had assumed roles as race diversity champions on behalf of the sector, for not being able to translate their 'lefty liberal rhetoric about poor race equality records and their pledges of improvements' into actions. A white manager stated that senior management working groups in the museum sector tasked to investigate inclusion or issues raised by BLM, for example, were made up of white staff and 'those who needed to be in the room were not there'.

Other reasons for the lack of progress among the white group included poor workforce data gathering for submission to DDCMS, which had discontinued around 2009–2010; the ineffectiveness of the Equalities Impact

Assessment (EIA) on the grounds that it was not mandatory in England and, as a voluntary and tick box exercise, it lacked the rigor to contribute to evidence-based race equality policy making; the preference among some museums for ‘clinging on to retentionist and circulationist policies’ instead of the restitution of artefacts, which was likely to lead to softer approaches to decolonisation and cultural diversity; and a lack of will among the sector’s leadership and the government. Systemic and casual racism, resulting largely from ‘unconscious bias’, were seen by all white participants as only a part of the problem.

In contrast, all Black participants felt strongly that ‘institutional racism’ was a major factor preventing progress in services and employment. They drew attention to three key manifestations of systemic racism, starting with governance. Boards were considered unrepresentative in race or class of the communities they were meant to serve. They were largely made up of ‘white middle-class experts who were out of touch with the reality of racial inequalities’. One Black respondent from the museum sector undertaking a research degree summed up the views of participants thus: ‘Trustees’ vision for redressing racial inequalities and discrimination are mediocre, full of rhetoric and failed diversity policies repackaged in different guises and therefore not capable of facilitating radical and transformational change’; the organisations would be better served by local appointees with a real understanding of local demographics and the diverse communities’ needs. Former Black middle and senior managers currently working as consultants felt they had the skills and knowledge for board appointments, yet no one had approached or encouraged them. They also dismissed the recruiters’ claims that there was insufficient talent among Black communities as a ‘lame excuse’. One remarked: ‘The sector is preoccupied with training Black people for governance roles, this smacks of double standards’, as none of the white trustees were expected to meet such requirements. This echoed my findings in 2009 (Arokiasamy, 2009b)

The lack of anti-racist personnel policies and practices was cited as the second key area of concern. Black interviewees felt strongly that human resource departments and management lacked the skills to develop and implement innovative and sustainable recruitment and retention policies aimed at dismantling institutional racism. At the very least some of the Black respondents would have liked to have seen some serious targets (not quotas) set for Black employees and felt that a small portion of the billions in lottery money distributed to date could have been used for this purpose in a sustainable way. Instead, the focus has been on either ‘parachuting in Black curators from abroad’, who did not understand the nuances of race relations in the UK, or traineeship schemes. The latter, offering alternative opportunities to Black candidates at entry level in the museum sector, dates back to the MA’s Diversify programme in 1998. Since then, several other, similar schemes have been implemented by cultural agencies with varying degree of success (ACE, 2015b). Two former participants of training programmes felt that they

acquired knowledge and skills from the training and placement work experience but were disappointed that it had not led to permanent appointments and 'left some with flailing careers'. Consequently, they failed to see the value of such schemes.

Black lecturers in the group with experience in higher-education arts and heritage courses stressed that an overhaul of recruitment processes of staff and students for bias and 'decolonisation of the course contents' was long overdue. One young respondent summarised her experience of heritage-related degrees thus: 'Often you are the only Black person on the course, so it can be isolating ... and the course benefited more from my knowledge and perspectives on cultural diversity and other multi-cultural issues than I did from the degree.'

Black interviewees recounted some personal experiences of the impact of poor personnel policies in prioritising, protecting or promoting race equality when responding to austerity measures, restructuring exercises, setting strategic direction, or handling political and public backlash on cultural diversity. An experienced curator of exhibitions and 'co-curation' at a professional body had been made redundant as part of a savings exercise after ten years of service, even though she was one of only two Black employees in the organisation at the time. The younger emerging professionals attributed the need for two degrees to secure basic-grade employment (such as an assistant curator post), being pigeonholed into cultural diversity work, working on temporary contracts continuously, and repeatedly failing to get shortlisted to poor human resource planning. They were disillusioned by their experiences and either left the sector or became independent consultants, which they felt allowed them 'choices in terms of opportunities, terms and wages and the freedom to be creative' in applying lived experiences and gave them a necessary respite from 'racism at the workplace'. A young Black artist, residing and working in a neighbouring European country at the time of the interview, stated that he was 'better recognised, rewarded and encouraged to express radical and innovative ideas without being stifled by grant conditions or policed by employers' since he left the UK.

The third barrier presented by Black participants related to the culture of the workplace and comprised three strands: the presence of advertent and inadvertent racist behaviour and attitudes; the 'intransigence' to changing the national narrative; and a lack of leadership to ensure race equality was embedded into structures and processes.

All Black participants had either experienced or witnessed structural and casual racism, which had made the work environment sometimes 'toxic and a challenging space'. Examples ranged from the shock, discomfort, challenge and tensions felt at being the only Black person in a unit in a national institution (despite the community outside being highly multi-cultural) to being mistaken for another Black person frequently emphasizing the invisibility of Black people at work and witnessing Black colleagues' reluctance to report harassment for fear of not being believed and/or losing their job. A few

months after I had conducted these interviews, staff at the Barbican centre presented a book to their senior management – a compilation of more than one hundred incidences of racism – accusing the organisation of institutional racism (Barkare, 2021). It reinforced the concerns raised by the Black respondents during the interviews and showed how widespread the problem was in the cultural sector.

The second strand related to institutional resistance to the centring of Black peoples' histories and heritages in the national narrative that had been brought to the fore by the latest trend to decolonise the UK's cultural heritage. Black participants were concerned that much of the work in this area was reported to have taken place without any 'authorised guidance'. Nor had there been the appetite for a thorough review and a robust inclusive approach among those tasked or who volunteered to lead, who were generally white colleagues, which often contributed to tensions and disagreements on concepts and interpretations between Black and white employees. One Black participant referred to this resistance as an example of entrenched 'cultural intransigence' to recognising the UK's 'Empire and slavery history'.

The transient nature of race equality developments in cultural organisations, due to the lack of leadership, was presented as the third strand. It was amplified by remarks from an experienced Black middle manager: 'Museums haven't figured out if they want to change', and it all depended on 'who makes the decision and who is involved'. Decisions on race equality were usually 'farmed out to consultants of colour' on time-limited contracts; therefore, they were 'not involved long enough in the organisation like a permanent curator or a manager' to define, resource and implement recommendations, thus suggesting that senior staff lacked the interest or commitment to ensure race equality was built into visioning and core business.

Many of the views expressed during the interviews were not new. As several Black participants pointed out, they resembled the deluge of comments expressed on social media during and after BLM protests by both Black and white protestors and activists, which triggered shock and reassurances to staff and the public by some cultural institutions. ACE and the National Heritage Lottery Fund stated that they would review their policies and practices (Heritage Fund, 2020) and report their findings. So, will those reassurances translate into meaningful actions during the next decade?

Hopes for the future

A mix of cautious optimism, pragmatism and radicalism characterised participants' views about the kind of change they would like to see over the next ten years. Both groups felt that the BLM protests were catalysts for change, and a white participant's comment that it showed that the 'woke generation' were forthright in expressing their unwillingness to endure institutional racism resonated with others. They also noted that Black and white

young people had ‘made it clear that proactive action is needed’ and it was ‘no longer enough to just remove barriers’.

However, suggestions for the amelioration of racial inequities did not yield major proactive and transformational actions among the white group. Instead, they opted for a reformist approach and suggested improving existing measures that were already in place. This could have been partly due to the individuals not having the time to think through a more considered response. Either way, they appeared to believe that a very robust, comprehensive decolonisation programme with quality controls and guidance on the restitution and repatriation of artefacts should be able to solve many of the racial inequalities in services and audience development. Workforce development and board diversification were considered to be more urgent and necessary to create transformational change in the future. Enhanced and targeted traineeship programmes and governance training, an overhaul of recruitment policies for unintentional bias and the retention of Black staff, and the training of employees to remove casual racist behaviour in the workplace and of politicians to raise awareness were regarded as measures that should redress many of the employment and governance problems identified to date. The new All-Party Parliamentary Group for Museums and the National Museum Directors’ Council were seen as structures that could provide leadership in persuading DDCMS to set out clearer direction and hold leaders of national and regional cultural organisations accountable for change, underpinned by proper research and data gathering and equalities impact assessments.

Black participants on the other hand wanted radical change. There was unequivocal agreement among the majority of the interviewees that the removal of structural racism could no longer be left to the plethora of traineeship schemes, white privilege quizzes, Museum Detox and other existing measures that had not produced the desired outcomes. One person referred to these as ‘sticking-plaster’ solutions. They viewed an abolitionist approach involving the dismantling and recasting of cultural organisations’ structures and processes and the ‘unpacking of the epistemology of culture, heritage, museology and art to reconstruct within a race equality framework’ as the only way forward. Points made reflected many of the views expressed in *The White Pube* article (Muhammad, 2020), except they were delivered without the anger that is so palpable in the piece. However, the participants were not sure who would be capable of championing such a transformational change, as they had little or no confidence in the existing leadership in the sector and successive political parties who had ‘failed Black communities for the past twenty years in every respect’. The pandemic had magnified this failure.

There was also a real concern among many Black participants that the momentum, urgency and white allyship that the BLM protests had created was on the wane, as it had ‘gone all quiet’, and there was little or no evidence of the solidarity symbols, knee-jerk reviews and statements from cultural agencies being translated into action. This, along with the impact of the relentless culture wars and the ‘retain and explain’ policy (*The Art Newspaper*,

2021), triggered by the toppling of the Edward Colston statue in Bristol, being played out in the media and at political levels, were thought likely to dilute the impact of BLM and the sector would ‘once again return to its status quo position’. When challenged that ‘anti-woke’ sentiments appeared to have support among some Black people too, the remark from one respondent chimed with the mood of several other Black interviewees: they were self-serving individuals who ‘had reached a new level of sophistication’, did not represent the mass view, and were part of the ‘gatekeepers’; more concerning was the fact that ‘they are often the preferred choices for board appointments’ and as advisors to guide on diversity because they spoke the ‘right language’. One of the older participants commented: ‘They keep us out as we know their past neglect ... it’s all about erasure of our memories and histories’.

The ‘empowerment and mobilisation’ of Black audiences and communities to call out racism and demand change and the funding of more radical, independent projects and collectives such as The White Pube capable of a new and relevant critique of the state of the UK’s arts and heritage sector (Puente and Muhammad, 2018) and its narratives were other suggestions put forward. A few mooted the development of a parallel Black cultural heritage sector but rejected the idea rather swiftly on the grounds that securing funding from the state would not be easy and it would be equally difficult to lure patronage from philanthropists, ‘including rich Black donors who generally appear to prefer to support the establishment’. Also, Black employees have not had the same opportunity to network with donors as their white counterparts. More importantly, such a move would marginalise Black people further and defeat what Hall promoted: the rewriting of Black heritage into the centre.

Conclusion

Information from the interviews clearly shows that the cultural heritage sector has implemented a range of diversity initiatives over the last decade aimed at removing the racial inequalities identified in my address in 2009. An increase in the numbers of Black appointments at senior and board levels and to other posts and the engagement of Black practitioners in programming, the co-creation of exhibitions and the promotion of a decolonisation agenda are noteworthy. However, both Black and white respondents felt that this progress was not far reaching or transformational enough to alleviate or remove institutional racism in the sector. Several of the concerns and symptoms of racial inequities in employment and services identified by the London Mayor’s Commission and Task Force between 2003 and 2009, and those that I had documented and published subsequently, including commentary on racism and inequalities in the civil service (Arokiasamy, 2014), appear to remain.

Black respondents made clear that many of these initiatives were not integrated into the organisations’ long-term visioning and strategies with adequate on-going core funding for implementation and robust accountabilities

for monitoring and reporting on impact. They continue to be stand-alone, add-ons and time-limited projects often designed to meet external funding criteria or created out of goodwill by individual organisations wanting to improve on their cultural diversity image and performance. Black employees are brought in at the last stage to implement the projects, and advice is sought from voluntary groups like Detox when deemed necessary with no obligation to act on it, thus demonstrating that cultural services, including decolonisation programmes and research, continue to be defined and managed predominantly by white staff resulting in a disconnect between the cultural institutions' perceptions and understanding of cultural diversity and institutional racism and their Black staff and communities on the ground.

It is regrettable, despite its limited impact to date in reducing structural racism, that the sector appears to continue to invest, almost obsessively, in training programmes and outreach. This money could have been better spent on creating jobs for Black staff and devising proper human resource planning structures and policies to retain them in posts. It is also intriguing why some of the billions in lottery money distributed to date was not allocated to creating a long-term and sustainable dedicated employment programme for Black communities, especially as they have not had a fair share of this public money that they have paid into.

The progress made since the WHC and the benefits for the Black communities are not commensurate with the time period that has elapsed. Twenty years is a long time in an individual's or community's life in terms of enduring institutional racial inequities in careers, earnings, pensions and access to cultural services and their effects on emotional and physical wellbeing.

The current situation must not continue for yet another decade, as this would further alienate another generation of Black people (and the white allies who want change) and become yet more evidence of the entrenchment of the sector's lack of will and resistance to dismantling structural racism.

Although the white respondents were confident that a systemic reformist approach would be sufficient to equalize the situation, Black interviewees were consistent in their view that this method has not worked for three decades. Consequently, the only way forward is to adopt an abolitionist approach comprising the deconstruction of existing structures, processes, interpretations and narratives to make way for a new anti-racist model built on accurate histories and narratives negotiated and told by Black and white people. This is a longstanding demand and I recall the concept being promoted during the nineties and early noughties and its resurgence in a more audible way, internationally, during the 2007 Commemoration of the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act and since. Apart from the patchy responses of individuals and projects, the decision makers have not engaged with it.

It is now up to all cultural agencies, including research and academic establishments and lottery funding distributors, to make an impactful transforming shift with the Black community in a genuine partnership. Any such transition must ensure that transparent accountability is not confined

to internal monitoring and impact assessments but more importantly that these assessments are published and the leadership of the organisations are held accountable for their performances through contractual arrangements; this should include the regular giving of evidence to the House of Commons' Select Committee for DDCMS by cultural agencies and Black communities and not just select Black spokespeople and celebrities.

The appointment of new leaders and champions with anti-racist competencies and commitment is critical to removing the complacency that has dominated the sector for more than a quarter of a century, and staff must be encouraged to call out racism with protection.

Black people's agency to define, manage and critique the UK's cultural heritage, including their own, is as much their human right as other communities and is enshrined in the UN's International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (UN, 1966). It is wrong for individuals, organisations and governments to dismiss it as 'wokism' and/or contest it through convenient culture wars!

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Part II

**Challenging ‘Whose Heritage?’
as Historical Production**



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4 Mothers milk or regurgitated fish?

Resisting nostalgia and embracing dissension in British heritage

Don P. O'Meara

The first liberty I will take from Stuart Hall's 1999 paper is to present a view that 'is inevitably skewed by my own interests and preoccupations' (1999, p. 13). The second is the interchangeability of the terms 'British' and 'English'. Hall discusses this frequently in his work: 'I deliberately conflate English and British here to show how the former sometimes does, and sometimes does not, include the latter. It's one of the trickiest of ambiguities underwriting the discourse of British national identity' (2018, p. 195). One element I will distinguish is between the English Empire (the gradual colonisation of the islands of the north-west European archipelago, i.e., Britain and Ireland, by a centralised English state) and the British Empire (the overseas expression of the English Empire).

In 'Whose Heritage?', Hall considered British heritage from the perspective of multicultural Britain. I wish to invert this and consider British heritage from the perspective of the internal history of England and how it resolved (or did not resolve) English imperialism as a universal Britishness. In this sense I will probe one element of Hall's discussion: that Britain is 'a society which is imagined as, in broad terms, culturally homogeneous, and unified' (1999, p. 6). This image is a relatively recent development and glosses over the internal tensions present in the formation of the British state. Hall described this process as 'the ways in which the nation slowly constructs for itself a sort of collective social memory ... selectively binding their chosen high points and memorable achievements into an unfolding "national story"' (1999, p. 3).

In conclusion, I propose that the belief in a false homogeneity and unity has impaired the ability of the wider British public (of all backgrounds) to understand the context of modern social changes. This has been particularly harmful since 1945, where the arrival of migrants from across the former British Empire and the social and political changes that have taken place (largely unconnected to the arrival of these migrants) have racialised the interpretation of social change in Britain.

Whose history?

The past 20 years have seen an ongoing debate on the nature of the British Empire in the British national story. This is particularly noticeable in the official celebration of Britain's role in the abolition of slavery and its role in spreading liberal democracy. This is exemplified by Neil Fergusson's book *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, where the British Empire is seen as a necessary tool in the civilisation of the world:

The nineteenth-century Empire undeniably pioneered free trade, free capital movements and, with the abolition of slavery, free labour ... It spread and enforced the rule of law over vast areas. Though it fought many small wars, the empire maintained a global peace unmatched before or since.

(Fergusson, 2003, p. 334)

Fergusson's view has been directly criticised including by Jon Wilson (2016) and Pankaj Mishra (2011), and there has been a more general criticism of this position by historians such as Paul Gilroy (2004). These different viewpoints are more than academic debate, as appeals to historic precedent and the utilisation of historical evidence to justify government policy and public debate make an understanding of the historic basis for contemporary understandings of British heritage an important consideration.

Britishness and Englishness: 'Whose Heritage?' in its time

The 1990s may come to be regarded as the halcyon days of liberal capitalism in the West, as the perceived vanquishing of the Soviet Union and the expansion of liberal democracies gave rise to a positivism best articulated in Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). Hall's subheading 'Re-imagining the Post-nation' appears to owe much to this zeitgeist (Nussbaum and Cohen, 1996; Held, 1997; Beck, 1999; Wang, 2002), including by those he had worked with directly (Held, 1990). In Hall's case, the post-nation referred to the rise of multinational corporations and their ability to supersede national governments (Hall, 1996, pp. 222–237; Hall, 2011, pp. 705–728) rather than the positivism of Fukuyama.

This period also saw the development of a new kind of distinctly English identity as distinct from an overarching British one (Aughey, 2007). While Welsh and Scottish devolution referendums in 1997 offered devolved government to these nations, it also highlighted the lack of independent regional government in England. In the view of some commentators, this led to frustrations that eventually found expression in the 2016 Brexit referendum (Wellings, 2019), described by one commentator as "the revolt of English nationalism" (O'Toole, 2018).

When ‘Whose Heritage?’ was published, the UK was two years into the New Labour government, which had celebrated a landslide victory in 1997 to their election song ‘Things can only get better’ by D:Ream. Before the end of their first term in office, the so-called War on Terror began with the launch of Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001. Aside from ‘Whose Heritage?’, two other important publications appeared at this time: *The Macpherson Report* into the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1999 (Macpherson, 1999), and the report of the Runnymede Trust titled *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (which Hall contributed to directly) in 2000 (Parekh, 2000).

These incidents occurred while New Labour was engaging in a process that would be called ‘Rebranding Britain’ (Lee, 2001). In this environment the War on Terror created a renewed public debate on the nature of Britain and Britishness, particularly in relation to its Muslim communities. The millenarianism of the British Establishment erupted at the beginning of the War on Terror but was already developing before this, as seen in popular books such as *After Britain* by Tom Nairn and the book and TV series *The Day Britain Died* by Andrew Marr, both published in 2000.

This renewed angst, and New Labour’s push for demonstrating patriotic Britishness, included the inaugural Veterans Day/Armed Forces Day on 27 June 2006 and, more controversially, ‘CONTEST’, the UK counter-terrorism strategy, developed in 2003 and made public in 2006. Of the ‘four Ps’ (Prevent, Pursue, Protect, Prepare), ‘Prevent’ would become the most well known and, within it, the promotion of ‘British Values’ played a central role.

In Hall’s words: ‘The Heritage inevitably reflects the governing assumptions of its time and context’ (1999, p. 6). Therefore, as the concepts of ‘Britishness’ and ‘British Values’ have been worked progressively into government policy, and with the renewed debate on the global legacy of the British Empire, it is worth exploring some of the historical origins of universal Britishness and how this has been deeply contested from within the nation.

Historical Britishness: the origins of the English Empire

Since 1284, ‘England’ has been frequently synonymous with the countries of England and Wales, which were united under one crown by the Statute of Rhuddlan. The English annexation of Wales was reinforced by the *Laws in Wales Acts 1535 and 1542*. Using language that did not bode well for multiculturalism in the Tudor state (and, indeed, within the future United Kingdom), the 1535 Act declared: ‘Some rude and ignorant people have made distinction and diversity between the King’s subjects of this realm and his subjects of the said dominion and Principality of Wales, whereby great discord, variance, debate, division, murmur and sedition hath grown between his said subjects’ (27 Henry VIII, c. 26). Thus, the English language was made the official legal language in Wales, where most people did not speak it.

The legal position of Wales as a separate country was finally put to rest with the 1746 *Wales and Berwick Act* (20 Geo. II, c. 42); references to 'England' under the law would henceforth by default mean 'England and Wales'. This was then repealed in 1967 by the *Welsh Language Act* (1967 c.66, Section 4), and once again 'Wales' and 'England' became separate terms under UK law. In 1993 the *Welsh Language Act* placed the Welsh language on an equal legal footing with the English language within Wales for the first time in over 450 years (1993, c. 38).

The expansion of Britishness into Scotland advanced after the succession of the Stuart monarchy to the English throne in 1603. In 1603 King James was king of two independent countries (being simultaneously James I of England and James VI of Scotland) and styled himself 'King of Great Britain' (Larkin and Hughes, 1973). This situation was formally resolved in 1707 with the passing of both *Acts of Union* (1706, c. 11, and 1707, c. 7), which stated that 'the Two Kingdoms of Scotland and England, shall ... be United into One Kingdom by the Name of Great Britain'.

Just under 100 years after the Anglo-Scottish union, with the passing of *An Act for the Union of Great Britain and Ireland* in 1800, the nation now became 'the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland' (40 Geo. III, c. 38). Within 120 years another official name change was required, and the state became the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland with the passing of the *Government of Ireland Act 1920* (10 & 11 Geo. V, c. 67). Arguably, since its creation Northern Ireland has often been treated as a detachable appendage of the UK in everything from social and political matters to even something as simple as UK Olympic athletes competing as 'Team GB'. Another constitutional anomaly, often not appreciated by the general public, is the fact that the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey are not in the UK but rather are self-governing British Crown Dependencies.

A British emperor?

The phrase 'British Empire' also has opaque origins and cannot be pinned down as having a fixed beginning or end. Various Anglo-Saxon kings used the term 'emperor', which we might now see as somewhat fanciful. Thus Athelstan (895–939) titled himself 'King of the Anglo-Saxons and Emperor of the Northumbrians'. The title was used sporadically until the arrival of the Normans in 1066 and thereafter dropped for almost 500 years.

Henry VIII began to use the term 'empire' after his break from Rome in 1533. *The Act of Restraint of Appeals* (24 Hen. VIII, c. 12), which allowed for the annulment of his first marriage, declared in 1533: 'It is manifestly declared and expressed that this realm of England is an empire'. This was less an expression of expansionism than it was a statement of independence from judgement by an external authority (i.e., the Pope). Forty years later John Dee (court astronomer and advisor to Elizabeth I) is credited with first using the

phrase ‘British Empire [*sic*]’ to justify England’s claim to the North Atlantic (Canny, 1998, p. 62). James I/VI initially wished to style himself “Emperor of the Whole Island of Britain” after he became King of England in 1603 but was forced to back down by parliament, which was nervous of the king’s perception of his own power.

It would be almost 200 years before another monarch, George III (reigned 1760–1820), was offered, and promptly rejected, the title of emperor after the *Act of Union with Ireland*. It is likely he rejected the pomposity of the title, which would be in tune with his reputation for a comparatively simple lifestyle, for which he earned the nickname ‘Farmer George’ (Black, 2007). It would be over 70 years before Britain would finally gain an imperial ruler.

In 1876 Queen Victoria was given the title of Empress of India. Far from a statement of global ambition, this was conferred by Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, partly in an effort to ingratiate himself to the queen and partly in response to Queen Victoria’s angst that her daughter (also called Victoria) would soon become the German Empress and thus eclipse her mother (a mere queen). The title of emperor was finally dropped by George VI on 22 June 1948.

The British Empire at home

The internal English colonisation of Britain was still taking place when the British Empire began its overseas expansion. Far from being a monolithic entity spreading across the globe, the British Empire was developing at the same time as Britain was still riven with divisions. The 1706/1707 *Acts of Union* between England and Scotland are seen as a key milestone in this unification, but they did not resolve internal sectarian and ethnic tensions within Scotland (between the culture of Upland Catholic/Gaelic Scotland and that of Lowland, Presbyterian/Anglican Scotland) and between Scotland and England. In 1715 and 1745 Scottish Jacobite armies would invade England, providing an uneasy century for the new Hanoverian royal family. It was only in the later 18th and early 19th centuries that Scotland gradually made its cultural peace with England, with an establishment consensus codifying a national culture that has been described as ‘a retrospective invention’ (Trevor-Roper, 1983). During this period a similar process was taking place in Wales in relation to the search for an ‘authentic’ Welsh culture (Morgan, 1983).

Ironically, while Scottish Highland culture was finally being promoted and celebrated by Anglo-Scottish elites, the Highland Clearances (a process of moving tenants off their land and replacing them with more profitable sheep farming in the late 18th and early 19th centuries) were leading to mass emigration and the depopulation of the Scottish Highlands. This historical process would become a lightning rod for renewed separatist Scottish nationalism in the later 20th century after the publication of Prebble’s seminal work *The Highland Clearances* in 1966.

The English colonisation of England

This outward projection of English political influence was not undertaken by a nation-state fully formed as we know it today. In the early medieval period England was frequently culturally drawn to Scandinavia, particularly when it was ruled by the kings of Denmark in the early 11th century (1013–14 and 1016–42). After the Norman conquest, Norman and French influences would predominate through the ruling dynasties, successively the houses of Normandy, Blois, Anjou and Plantagenet. With the accession of Henry IV in 1399 England had a king who, for the first time in over 300 years, spoke English as their first language.

Hall quotes Norman Davies in saying ‘the English seem unaware that anything fundamentally has changed since 1066’ (Davies, 1999, as cited in Hall, 1999, p. 5). A classic example of this consistency can be seen in the monarchy, with 44 changes in the head of state since 1066. Frequently, this outward projection of stability has not been accomplished as smoothly or consistently as popularly imagined. From William the Conqueror in 1066 to Charles III in 2022, the passing of the crown from father to eldest son (the process of *primogeniture*) was only accomplished on seven occasions, whereas eight changes were accomplished by rebellion (and three of these by the out-right murder of the preceding monarch). This also includes the period of the English Republic, where the monarchy was abolished completely (1649–60). In all other cases the transfer to younger sons, nephews, cousins, sisters and daughters created an uneasy chain of history at odds with popular perception.

Equally, in England the social and political environment was never as settled as sometimes imagined. Rebellions included the period known as the Anarchy 1135–54, the 1173–74 revolt against Henry II (with the rebels lead by Henry’s own wife and three sons), the Second Baron’s War 1264–67, the 1399/1400 Epiphany Rising against Henry IV, and the 1483 rising against Richard III known as Buckingham’s Rising. The state of civil war known as the War of the Roses (1455–85) was finally ended when a minor Welsh family by the name of Tudor seized the throne, establishing one of the best-known English dynasties, and undertook one of the most significant cultural transformations ever seen in England.

The transformation of the Catholic Church from universal church to oppressed minority took less than a generation – from the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII in 1536 to its active suppression by his children Edward VI and Elizabeth I. This religious transformation was possibly the most rapid, and far reaching, cultural revolution Britain had ever seen (or indeed has seen since). Resistance to this process included the Prayer Book Rebellion in western England in 1549, the result of which probably left 5,000–6,000 dead in battle. The Spanish Armada, which sailed against England in 1588, lead to a resounding English victory, though with fewer than 1,000 killed in the battle itself (many more would die from disease and shipwrecks in bad weather). The former (internal) conflict is hardly remembered in the popular

consciousness; the latter (against the external threat of Spanish Catholicism) is still a pop culture reference over 400 years later.

The religious strife would continue through the 17th century, including the Civil Wars (1642–51), and would culminate in the transfer of the kingship to the House of Hanover in 1714, a process that relied on passing over 55 better claimants due to their Catholicism. A series of Penal Laws (enforced from c. 1691–1778 and gradually repealed from 1778–1829) denied Catholics a series of rights, including franchise, public office, university education, inheritance rights and normal property rights. Anti-Catholic violence in England took place sporadically in the 18th century but culminated in violence from 2 to 9 June 1780, known as the Gordon Riots, when as many as 700 were killed in anti-Catholic rioting in London (Haydon, 1993). It is telling that, in the popular imagination, the violence of the French Revolution, and in particular the storming of the Bastille in 1789 (where perhaps 100 died), is far more deeply impressed on the British popular memory than comparable violence closer to home (which at different times resulted in serious violence against a range of non-establishment groups, including Jews, Quakers and Baptists, amongst others).

This selective summary is intended to demonstrate the contested nature of the development of Britain over many centuries. As Hall said, ‘What the nation “means” is an on-going project, under construction’ (1999, p. 5).

Protecting the heritage of Britain

Hall invoked ‘cathedrals, churches, castles, and country houses’ (1999, p. 5) as emblematic of England. Far from being just a picturesque backdrop, these are also sites of some of the great conflicts of English history. Cathedrals and churches did not survive unscathed from either the Reformation or the Civil Wars. When walking peacefully through Durham Cathedral today, one would hardly think that it had been a makeshift prison for over 3,000 Scots captured after the Battle of Dunbar in 1650, or that over half had died in the cathedral and been buried in mass graves near its entrance (Gerrard et al., 2018).

Today, the ruins of monasteries and priories are common sights in the English countryside and have become both popular tourist attractions and a focus for bucolic and Romantic artistic inspiration. In the 1530s, the Dissolution of the Monasteries was often violently resisted and included a series of local uprisings, such as the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 and the Prayer Book Rebellion. The destruction of the monasteries’ architecture was accompanied by a great loss of historical records and the deliberate destruction of paintings, sculptures and religious artistic objects, objects formerly venerated and now denounced as idolatrous and blasphemous.

Likewise, the English country house is a familiar backdrop in TV and film. On the surface they stand for the consistency, and longevity, of English history and culture. Their history in the 19th century, however, was characterised by the record bankruptcies of houses unwilling or unable to adapt to new

economic and social changes (Perry, 1972, p. 32). In the 20th century many fared little better, with rising wages, falling rents and post-World War II inheritance taxes pushing many to demolish, sell or donate their houses. It has been estimated that 1,200 country houses were demolished in the 20th century, reaching a peak of almost one per week in 1955 (Worsley, 2002).

Even Hall's invoking of 'hedgerowed landscapes' (1999, p. 5) is perhaps not as peaceful an image as it first seems. Kett's Rebellion in 1549 against the enclosure of land in Norfolk began with the destruction of hedges erected by wealthy landowners and ended after two battles and around 3,000 deaths (Wood, 2007). The 1607 Midland Revolt arose as a popular discontent against the enclosure of common land and the erosion of common rights by gentry and larger landowners (McDonagh and Rodda, 2018). The protests grew, leading to a pitched battle in which as many as 50 died, and the leaders of the rebellion were executed. Less dramatic resistance to enclosure, in the form of civil protest, vandalism and occasional rioting, would be a common feature of rural 17th- to 19th-century Britain, as holders of common rights clashed with the privatisation of England's green and pleasant land. The lack of national memorialisation and memory of these incidents seems to fit well with the view that to dissent from the British state is a minor form of treason (Gilroy, 2004, p. 65).

British heritage and new communities

It does a great disservice to the complex history of Britain to present it as consistent, unified and peaceful. At a time of great global change, the purpose of heritage should be to help people understand their world in context rather than imagine they are far from a perceived golden age. It must be impressed on new communities that British heritage is not a monocultural block, finished, full-up and receiving no more edits. The need for adaptability and change is highlighted by Gilroy, who cautions against the attempt to conserve culture at a single point in time: 'Civilisations are not closed or finished cultures that need to be preserved' (Gilroy, 2004, p. 65). It has always been a source of contention, and it has always adapted to change. There is still space in the national memory banks.

Hall highlights three military incidents as being characteristic of England: Trafalgar, Dunkirk and Mafeking. Trafalgar can still be remembered, but perhaps space can be made for the Black sailors who served in it (Costello, 2012). There were at least ten serving on the HMS *Victory* with Admiral Nelson himself, men such as George Ryan, Jonathan Hardy, John Francis and John Thomas. Can one show 'Dunkirk Spirit' and also remember the hundreds of men of the Royal Indian Army Service Corps who were stranded with the rest of the British Expeditionary Force? Men such as Jemadar Maula Dad Khan, who received the Indian Distinguished Service Medal, with his citation announced in the *London Gazette*, 29 November 1940, which recounted: 'When approaching Dunkerque, Jemadar Maula Dad

Khan showed magnificent courage, coolness and decision'. Can we remember the Siege of Mafeking and also remember the 300 Black Africans who took part in the defence of the town (20 per cent of the total defenders)?

One of the initiatives Hall suggested was the recording of the migrant perspective as an important oral history project while the early Windrush generation were still alive. Britain is a place where people always come in search of new opportunities. However, I would argue that the popular consciousness has forgotten a much greater mass migration: the 2.5 million (mainly white) British residents who left Britain after World War II. On a TV broadcast Churchill appealed to these migrants, saying, 'Do not desert the old land', but in private (according to newspaper reports) he described them as 'rats deserting a sinking ship' (Barber and Watson, 2015). Again, this perhaps does not fit into the national narrative of what a migrant looks like – or the hagiography of Winston Churchill.

Since 1999 there has been, arguably, a renaissance in the popular perception of Black history in the UK. The earlier work of historians such as Paul Gilroy and Peter Fryer has been added to by historians such as David Olusoga and Miranda Kaufmann. The greatest contribution of current Black history promotion will be (we hope) the creation of a new generation of historians, particularly those from minoritised communities, seeking to overturn existing narratives and re-imagine British history (both internal and external) from a global perspective. Already, examples of this sort of research are emerging from wider studies of the global nature of British history, such as Priyamvada Gopal's work on British India (2019), Priya Atwal's research on Sikh History (2020) or David Veevers' work on the history of the British in Asia (2020). Closer to Britain, Corinne Fowler's recent work on English countryside history has done much to popularise the inseparable connections between Britain's rural aristocracy and growth and exploitation within the empire economy (Fowler, 2020).

A greater understanding of how the British Empire is viewed in its former colonies will be vital if Britain is to remain a global nation: 'To prepare their own people for success in a global and de-centred world by continuing to misrepresent Britain as a closed, embattled, self-sufficient, defensive, "tight little island" would be fatally to disable them' (Hall, 1999, p. 10). Perhaps there could also be a greater understanding if historical events outside Britain were not viewed in isolation. In 1381 the Peasants' Revolt arose in England due to economic hardship, excessive taxes and inequality before the law, essentially the same injustices that lead to the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in 1865. If people knew that, in November 1688, a statue of King James II in Newcastle-upon-Tyne was pulled down in protest and rolled into the River Tyne, then perhaps the statue of Edward Colston being rolled into Bristol Harbour would be understood as part of a long history of popular protest in England. If the public had a greater understanding of the role of civil dissent in British history, then the 1817 Pentrich Rising, the Cato Street Conspiracy of 1820, the anti-Corn Law agitation in the 19th century, the Brixton Uprising

in 1981 and the Black Lives Matter movement would be understood as all within the spectrum of the history of British civil disobedience, not incidents of disconnected criminality.

A second transformation must also be a greater engagement with the British public to understand their history in context. In the Department for Education guidance on 'Fundamental British Values', these values are listed as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and respecting those of different faiths and beliefs. This is an admirable list, but one that has not always been applied to either the citizens of the UK or the wider British Empire. These 'Fundamental British Values' have all been debated, fought for, struggled against and justified over many centuries, within an already diverse and complex nation: 'struggled for by some of the English and bitterly resisted by others' (Hall, 1999, p. 6).

In his introductory remarks in 'Whose Heritage?', Hall uses the imagery of a mother nursing her baby to denote the passive nature of cultural transmission in mainstream British society. In this context I must take issue with Hall's imagery. The transmission of heritage in Britain has never been passive. Rather than the domestic setting of mother and baby, cultural transmission can be conceived as a seagull regurgitating a pre-digested meal down the throat of its noisy, hungry chick. Tension arises not from what you are being fed, but rather in being given half-digested fish while someone tries to convince you that it is warm milk.

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5 Beyond our system of objects

Heritage collecting, hoarding and ephemeral objects

Errol Francis

Introduction

This chapter responds to Stuart Hall's (1999) critique of museum institutional practices particularly in relation to the 'objects' that are so fundamental to the theory and practice of 'heritage'. 'Objects' is a word that Hall uses only once by name but is very much implied in his arguments throughout the essay. Hall's reference to 'heterogeneous assemblages of the cabinets of curiosity and wonder' clearly reference objects as the basis of European aristocratic collections before the advent of public museums. Such collections, Hall argues, 'adorn the position of people of power and influence'. He goes on to speak about the 'exercise of power to order knowledge, to rank, classify and arrange, and thus to give meaning to *objects and things* through the imposition of interpretive schemas, scholarship and connoisseurship' [my emphasis]. The chapter foregrounds the problematic of how objects in heritage collections dominate and influence our primary understanding and experience of material culture. Discussing a wide range of academic and professional critiques, it probes a number of issues that continue to arise from the collecting, acquisition, display, status and conservation of objects and what role they could possibly play in a redefined theorisation and practice of heritage that does not operate in the nationally exclusive and imperious ways that Hall critiques.

The problem of objects

It may seem self-evident, but one of the urgent and contemporary problems confronting heritage institutions is the very objects that they conserve, and which constitute the very *raison d'être* for the existence of most museums. This is because, as we have seen in the recent global Black Lives Matter protests, museums are now highly contested cultural spaces, and the status of the objects in their collections is being questioned in terms of their provenance, display, interpretation and continued conservation or preservation as the material assets of 'national heritage'. This was amply illustrated in the tumultuous events in Bristol, UK, in June 2020, when a Grade II-listed

bronze public statue of its first elected mayor, Edward Colston, a 17th century slave-owning member of the Royal African Company, was pulled down by protestors and thrown into the River Avon (Siddique and Skopeliti, 2020).

As if to emphasise the cult of preservation and conservation to which Hall refers as a quintessentially British inflection of ‘heritage’, the statue was promptly retrieved from the river by the Bristol authorities. In 2021, after undergoing a restoration process that involved the stabilisation of the graffiti that was daubed on the effigy by protestors, the Colston statue was put back on display in the city’s M Shed museum. The statue was displayed in a supine position against a backdrop of the Black Lives Matter placards that were used on the day it was toppled.

This trajectory of events recalls Baudrillard’s critique of objects:

Fundamentally, the imperialism that subjugates nature with technical objects and the one that domesticates cultures with antiques are one and the same. This same private imperialism is the organizing principle of a functionally domesticated environment made up of domesticated signs of the past – of ancestral objects, sacred in essence but desacralized, which are called upon to exude their sacredness (or historicalness) into a history-less domesticity.

(Baudrillard, 1996, p. 84)

Thereby Baudrillard reminds us of the links between the essential components of an imperialism of objects and their cultural domestication – or, one might say, their neutralisation by means of strategies of antiquity. The events in Bristol were an ample illustration of these very ‘ancestral objects’ – the statue of Colston being worthy of preservation by Historic England with its Grade II listing and its retrieval, restoration and display by Bristol Museums. Colston retains his effective status as a sacred ‘City Father’, indeed an implicit reference to the breeding, or genealogy, to which Hall referred as the ‘well-bred folk’ who are the primary audience of this ‘history-less domesticity’ – a lineage that was aggressively contested by the people of Bristol.

The conflict in Bristol over the Colston statue represents a struggle against the continuing fetishisation of an object in opposition to the social relations in which it was produced and is presently contextualised – an issue that was addressed by Sherman (1994) in his analysis of contemporary museum culture. Sherman reminds us that there is an approximation between the ever-expanding accumulation of objects in museum collections and the anarchical production of commodities that characterise bourgeois capitalist society. He explains how, consequently, they monopolise our fields of vision and thus constitute a major strategy of institutional power that is specifically cultural. The notion of commodity fetishism in museums, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, is also about life versus lifelessness, to which Sherman also refers in his reference to Adorno’s (1967) *Valéry Proust Museum*, in which the philosopher describes museum objects as essentially mortified within institutions

that are more like mausolea, 'the family sepulchres of works of art. They testify to the neutralisation of culture.' 'Museums', Adorno writes, 'deprive objects of the life proper to them' (Adorno, 1967, p. 175).

I will argue that this fetishisation of objects gives way to, or indeed creates the conditions for, what postcolonial writer Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010) calls 'epistemic violence'. An episteme, of course, is a system of knowledge, such as museology (and the related disciplines of, for example, history, archaeology and anthropology). I will argue that not only is the interpretive lack of acknowledgement of the links between collections and colonial violence a failure of curatorial scholarship, but, as Spivak writes:

The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung and heterogenous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other.

(Spivak, 2010, p. 35)

This 'othering' is effected partly by means of the fetishisation of objects over their conditions of production – and especially how they were acquired and collected by museums. Therefore, in the context of what surely is a veritable struggle over the status of museum objects, we will attempt to interrogate this objectification in terms of three critical modalities that are of primary importance in a postcolonial analysis of museums. First there is collecting and hoarding, then interpretation as a form of disinheritance and, third, a pointer as to how we can get beyond this system of objects. In this third modality, I foreground, as Hall suggests, 'production and circulations of new work in different media' (1999, p. 3) and the experience of the human subject over the inanimate object.

Imperial hoarding

Hall (1999, p. 3) notes how, in the British usage of the term 'heritage' and its associated practises, there is an overwhelming 'emphasis given to preservation and conservation: to keeping what already exists' – as opposed to the making and showing of contemporary art. An essential aspect of this 'keeping what already exists', of course, is the collection as the material context in which the object exists but not from where it originates – in short, its acquisition and ownership. There has been much discussion about the difference between hoarding and collecting. For example, after distinguishing the phenomena of collecting and hoarding, Belk (2014) seeks to provide an understanding of why they are so differently regarded. Collecting is not only socially judged to be good but an ordered process of acquisition and classification, whereas hoarding is anarchic, chaotic and thus reviled as a pathology. Despite arguing that they are different activities, the author acknowledges that there is an area of overlap where both activities blend into one another.

However, in probing the objectification of museums, nowhere is the problem around the status of objects more acute than in relation to imperial hoarding – the acquisition of objects during the periods of colonial rule, to which we may also refer as *looting*. Here, one encounters an imperative to accumulate material culture that is virtually indistinguishable from the exploitation of human or natural resources in colonial territories. This is because many of the objects that adorn museums are, in effect, trophies of empire and conquest. Its relationship to violence was emphasised by the 2020 protests in reaction to the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis and the subsequent attention to public statuary and the colonial looting of material culture. In Hicks' (2020) *The Brutish Museums*, whose publication coincided with the tumultuous Black Lives Matter protests that followed the Minneapolis killing, a whole chapter is devoted not only to the subject of looting and museum collections but also their relationship to the genocidal violence and colonial conquest that accompanied the seizing of the entire cultural heritage of the Kingdom of Benin, a state in what is now Nigeria. Hicks' analysis of the sacking and looting of Benin builds upon an already existing literature around the colonial looting of cultural assets such as Arvanitis and Tythacott (2014). Even by the end of the 19th century, writers such as Lugard (1893, p. 273) were using the term 'looting from natives' to describe the actions of colonial occupiers in Africa.

Therefore, the idea that the objects are a hoard or loot rather than, more neutrally, a collection is an important distinction. For example, Kuklick (2009, p. 89) speaks about Berlin museums having 'hoarded ethnographica from the colonial territories', and Trilling (2019) writes about a collection of eleven wood and stone tablets originating from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as being 'hoarded' by the British Museum. Therefore, the alternative use of 'hoard' or 'loot' rather than 'collection' (see also Steketee, 2017 and Frost and Hart, 1996) is an important nuance that speaks to imperial acquisitiveness and the continued retention of, and failure to retribute, a large number of possessions. As in the pathological understanding of the term hoarding, we want the hoarder to part with the objects to which they have tenaciously held. In speaking of imperial hoarding, we must of necessity invoke the political State as an agent of looting and hoarding since many museum collections, such as the Benin Bronzes, are the result of war, conflict and imperial violence perpetrated under the authority of colonial rule.

The controversy of the Benin Bronzes

The Benin Bronzes, the most high-profile example of objects not only linked to imperial looting and hoarding but also to the connection between museums and colonial violence, are central to the debate around restitution. The collection of reliefs, actually made from brass and bronze, are some of the most extraordinary examples of metal casting in the world, many of which were made between the 13th and 16th centuries using the sophisticated

lost-wax method with an astonishing level of detail and artistry. They are a group of over a thousand metal relief plaques that once adorned the royal palace in the Kingdom of Benin, in the Edo state of what is now modern-day Nigeria. The British Museum has a number of the panels on display in its Africa Gallery out of a total estimated to be around 900.

In the Edo language, the verb *sa-e-y-ama* means ‘to remember’, but its literal translation is ‘to cast a motif in bronze’. At the court of Benin, art in bronze perpetuates memory; traditionally, the first commissions of every Benin king are sculptures in bronze and ivory for his father’s memorial altar (Gunsch, 2018, p. 45). The ancient Kingdom of Benin had been in contact with Europeans (Portuguese, Dutch, Swedes and British) from the end of the 15th century because of its rich potential for trade in humans as well as material commodities (Rodney, 1969). The kingdom was ruled by a king, the Oba, and in the late 19th century was part of what the British called the ‘Niger Coast Protectorate’; in 1897 the reigning Oba was Ovonramwen Nogbaisi (Irele and Jeyifo, 2010).

At the end of the 19th century, the Kingdom of Benin had managed to retain its independence due to its wealth and power. In 1897, after the abolition of the slave trade, the British wanted to build trade in commodities (such as palm oil, ivory and rubber). They tried to enforce a treaty, but the Oba instructed his people not to cooperate with the British and enforce tariffs. In retaliation, military action was launched by the British to coerce the kingdom into submission (Obinyan, 1988).

In January 1897, an attack was launched on Benin led by Acting Consul-General James Robert Phillips, but it was ambushed and almost completely annihilated by a Benin counter-strike force. Shortly afterwards, in retaliation and revenge, what became known as the Benin Punitive Expedition was launched under Rear-Admiral Harry Rawson with the objective of completely destroying Benin City, capture the Oba and send him into exile. Every building in the city, whether domestic or public, was sacked and razed. The resulting inferno engulfed and destroyed most of the city and many civilian lives were lost (Maxwell, 1897). What followed was looting by the British on a grand scale; all the city’s artistic heritage was seized, with some given to individual officers and others taken by the British government to sell to offset the cost of the expedition. A large amount of this cultural loot was distributed to various UK museums and sold off to European collections. Currently, Benin Bronzes are held by many UK institutions, including the British Museum, the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford University and Bristol Museums (Hicks, 2020).

In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020, it should be noted that a number of museums and heritage collections in the UK, France and Germany, with the notable exception of the British Museum, have announced they are returning objects looted from Benin. The newly rebuilt Humboldt Forum Berlin announced it will hold an exhibition in 2022 that will include around half of Berlin’s collection of Benin bronzes as Germany lays the groundwork to return them to Nigeria (Hickley, 2021). The University

of Aberdeen released a statement saying that the sculpture it holds depicting the Benin Oba was looted from Benin City in 1897 in an ‘extremely immoral’ manner and the university was therefore returning it to what is now Nigeria (Bakare, 2021). Jesus College Cambridge has returned to Nigeria a Benin Bronze statue of a cockerel (McGivern, 2021). The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which holds one of the largest collections of Benin Bronzes in the United States, announced in 2021 that it too would return just two of the 160–300 works estimated to be held in its collection (Greenberger, 2021). These announcements and actions are certainly welcome news as far as the politics of restitution goes, but the problematics remain around the status of objects in museums and how we interpret them.

(Mis)interpretation and the violence of disinheritance

In considering the interpretation of objects, I want to discuss an item in the collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford University that performs this disinheritance not only with regard to how an object is acquired but also how it is described. The ethnographic museum was founded in 1884 by British Army General Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers. Amongst many of the controversial items in the Pitt Rivers Museum collection, which includes a number of the Benin Bronzes, is an object described as ‘a quilted coat ... known as a *jibbah*’. It is a colourful woven cotton garment originally worn by an Ansar, a Sufi warrior and follower of Muhammad Ahmad, in northern Sudan in the late 19th century. It is split down the front to enable it to be worn both on horseback and on foot. The description on the museum label goes on to say:

There is a bullet hole in the chest and, since it is well established that the majority of Madhist (previously termed ‘Dervish’) armours in British collections were retrieved from the battlefield, it is very likely that this *jibbah* was taken from a dead soldier after the British rout at Omdurman in 1898.

The hole in the garment, near the heart, must have been fatal, but the garment was taken by whom? We are told that it was ‘collected by Harry Hamilton Jackson [and] given to the Museum in 1919’, but who was Jackson? The conflict to which the notes refer is the 1898 colonial Battle of Omdurman in Sudan, when an army commanded by the British General Sir Herbert Kitchener defeated the forces of Abdullah al-Taashi, the successor to the self-proclaimed Mahdi, Muhammad Ahmad, led by Abd Allah, who had dominated Sudan since the British capture of Khartoum in 1885. This was an anticolonial struggle specifically against the Anglo-Egyptian rule of the country that continued up to its independence in 1965.

The Battle of Omdurman was a veritable slaughter, with more than 11,000 Sudanese killed, including a large number of civilians, compared to just 140 of

Kitchener's force. The conflict saw the first use of the hollow-point expanding bullet, which had greater accuracy and penetration and caused greater damage to soft tissue, resulting in horrific injuries. Was this man shot with such a bullet? There was controversy after the battle over the killing of the wounded and looting from the dead (de Moor and Wesseling, 1989). Was the donor of the jibbah, Harry Hamilton Jackson, a British army officer, judging by the historical accounts of the Battle of Omdurman? Was the donor of the jibbah the killer of the person to whom the garment belonged, if not the looter from their corpse? These questions arise from the display itself and from the gaps in the interpretation notes.

This historical background is in marked contrast to the anodyne notes that the museum offers. The sanitised account of spectacular violence gives very little historical contextual information to the viewer about the circumstances of the object's acquisition and how it ended up in the collection. The focus upon the aesthetic construction of the garment over the historical circumstances seems like a cold refusal to engage with its humanity, the intangible and subjective aspects of the object. However, it is to be acknowledged that the museum is trying to grapple with this problem in its 'Labelling Matters' programme to rethink the ethics of representations, review the definition of labelling and find new forms of interpretation that challenge the traditional narratives around its displays.

Yet, I would argue that there still remains a type of epistemic violence; it is an interpretive process of othering whose effect is to produce silence, forgetting and alienation – not to mention disinheritance, a denial of nationhood. Yet when one considers the military background surrounding this object and the circumstances in which it was acquired – that it may have been taken from the body of a dead soldier by the person who killed him – ethically and morally one wonders whether it should be on display at all. This is, as with the Benin Bronzes, a failure of curatorial scholarship that now seems like a question of morality, and again raises the question of restitution. Can we imagine such an object displayed in this way in a British army museum? As Kendall Adams (2020) notes in her account of a Maasai delegation from Tanzania and Kenya that visited the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, in 2020 to negotiate the return of their cultural heritage: the museum should be 'an arbiter of healing' rather than a site of violence.

Intangible and ephemeral objects

This section is intended to address the third modality of ephemerality and intangibility and links to the preceding discussion about the connection between heritage spaces and violence, both actual and epistemic, as well as imperial hoarding and looting. It also reconnects with Adorno's observation about the mortifying tendency of museum objects.

Stuart Hall observed that contemporary art can respond to issues such as the difficulties around addressing the colonial past, or indeed the postcolonial

present. I consider this within what Hall observes as the particularly British inflection of heritage, which seeks to conserve and preserve, – in particular, his call for a contemporary art that is ‘transgressive alongside the traditional and the “preservation of the past”’ (1999, p. 13)

Kara Walker is an American contemporary painter, silhouettist, print-maker, installation artist and filmmaker who, since she emerged in the mid-1990s, has consistently explored themes around race, gender, sexuality, colonial violence and identity in her work. Her practice addresses the status of the art object as potentially ephemeral and not necessarily needing to be preserved. Her artistic practice also tackles the history of colonial violence, often within a museum context. Her works speak to the lacunae in museum collections and the inability of their interpretative systems to describe the history and experience of colonialism from the point of view of those who experienced it: perpetrators as well as victims.

She is best known for her room-size tableaux of black cut-paper silhouettes, which recall the genteel art of 18th-century black-paper silhouette portraiture. Her works, allegorical tableaux of the American antebellum South, often depict extremes ranging from the tragic to the comical and absurd (George, 2008). Walker often depicts stereotypical characters in slave plantation contexts whose figures engage in various forms of macabre, violent and sexual behaviours.

***Fons Americanus*, 2019**

The work I want to discuss here is not Walker’s silhouettes but her increasingly large-scale sculptural practice involving fleeting and ephemeral installations. In her 2019 Hyundai Commission for the Turbine Hall at London’s Tate Modern, Walker decided to respond to the Victoria Memorial. The monument, which stands outside Buckingham Palace, the principal London residence of the UK monarch, is an elaborate bronze and white marble statue designed by Thomas Brock and Aston Webb, constructed between 1901 and 1924 to celebrate the reign of Queen Victoria. Few monuments in the UK are as unabashed as the Victoria Memorial in its celebration of the imperial power and the colonial dominions that were in possession at the height of the British Empire.

It should be noted that the title of the piece, *Fons Americanus*, contains a wordplay on the Latin meaning of *fons*, which may be a fountain, spring, well or baptismal font. Yet the word *Fon* may also refer to the largest cultural group in Benin, Nigeria, and it is also a synonym for their language (Stokes, 2009, p. 228). Therefore, this phonetic association produces a link with the Benin Bronzes and the violence of omission in the continued hoarding of these looted artworks by various UK and European museums. With the impassioned elucidation of historical trauma that Walker’s sculpture performs, one is reminded of the limited potential of the display of objects from the past, as opposed to interpretations of the present. Here, again, one



Figure 5.1 Kara Walker, *Fons Americanus* (Tate, 2019), Tate Modern. Installation view, Errol Francis, 2020.

is reminded of Stuart Hall's repeated calls for British heritage to engage with the modernism of Black artists to address the cultural lacunae in museum collections.

Fons Americanus was a 13-metre-tall working fountain constructed from cork, metal, and wood coated in Jesmonite – a coarse water-based casting resin invented as an alternative to fibreglass (Gilroy-Ware, 2020). The running water of fountains, from the sacred baptismal font to the secular civic fountain, traditionally evokes life, and in Christian iconography water is associated with purification and the rituals of baptism. However, Walker's fountain references violence and death as well as resistance and triumph over dominion

and oppression. The figure of *The Captain* takes pride of place at the front of the sculpture and recalls Black individuals who rebelled against European colonial forces such as Haitian François-Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture (1743–1803) and Jamaican Marcus Garvey (1887–1940), who challenged French and British colonial rule. At the apex of the fountain, Walker places a variant of the goddess Venus as a Black woman expressing water from her breasts – a play on the winged victory that crowns the Victoria Memorial. About this, Walker said: ‘The amniotic fluid at the beginning of this journey is now transformed into mother’s milk and lifeblood. Mother, whet [*sic*] nurse, whore, saint, host, lover – she is the daughter of waters’ (Tate, 2019). Black men desperately swim in the pool of the fountain, invoking an image of the Middle Passage, the notorious voyages of the slave ships from Africa to the Americas through the shark-infested Atlantic Ocean, into which many Africans were thrown by their captors. Thus, Walker references paintings such as J.M.W. Turner’s (1840) *Slave Ship* and John Singleton Copley’s (1778) *Watson and the Sharks*, which show perilous voyages upon violent seas.

Fons Americanus recalls Renaissance representations of Venus emerging from a seashell, and racialised violence is suggested by a tree with a noose hanging from a branch. In doing so, Walker evokes images of European beauty alongside the ritualised atrocities in the history of the lynching of African Americans by white supremacists. These visual gestures join up the experience of slavery at the hands of Britain as well as the United States across what has been called the Black Atlantic. These are two sides of what was euphemistically named the Triangular, rather than the *Transatlantic*, Slave Trade, the system of exchange in which industrial goods were traded for human chattel, and sugar, rum and spices came back to Europe on the final leg of the voyage. As Walker said: ‘[This] is an allegory of the Black Atlantic, and really all global waters which disastrously connect Africa to America, Europe, and economic prosperity’ (CBS News, 2020).

Black Lives Matter and the politics of heritage

The timing of Walker’s installation could not have been more poignant or politically relevant given the politics of heritage that played out, both internationally and in the UK, during the summer of 2020. The exhibition was originally planned to close in early 2020 but was extended due to the Covid-19 pandemic that started just after the show opened. Though closed during the national lockdown that followed, the exhibition was extended over the period in which George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis and the subsequent global protests, including the protests in Bristol and the toppling of the statue of slave trader Edward Colston, which sent shock waves through the arts and heritage sectors. When the exhibition reopened, it served to intensify the relevance of the debates about imperialist statuary. The Black Lives Matter protests amplified Walker’s response to a monument to Queen Victoria, who

reigned during the period of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its subsequent abolition and who presided over the expansion of the British Empire to the largest the world has ever seen. As Tate curator Achim Borchardt-Hume was reported as saying: 'It feels very timely ... we are in a moment where, both in the UK and also in the States, the conversation around what happens to monuments in the public realm is everywhere' (CBS News, 2020).

In this regard *Fons Americanus* was a powerful response to the epistemic violence of othering and forgetting, whether this is being effected by means of curatorial lacunae in the imperial collections or the silence of the dominant historiography about the colonial past. By these means, Walker tackles Hall's assertion that there is 'no intrinsic contradiction between the preservation and presentation of "other cultures"' (Hall, 1999, p. 12) in the way that her monumental sculpture reinscribes not only a postcolonial response to British and American heritage but the very institution in which her work is being shown.

Transience and ephemerality of the object

Art historians have made much of the ephemeral nature of Walker's paper silhouettes. For example, Seidl (2006, p. 141) notes how Walker's paper cut-outs reference 'transience and interpretive openness evoked by the medium of paper', whilst English (2007) has commented on how the temporal impermanence of the paper medium, and other disruptions of time and space resulting from perspective and other visual distortion in the cut-outs, allows the spectator to experience trauma as an ongoing experience.

This focus on transience and ephemerality can also apply to Walker's large-scale sculptures and in particular to *Fons Americanus*, which was made of non-permanent materials and has now been destroyed. Thus Walker's large-scale impermanent sculptures become a critique in themselves about the limits of traditional heritage objects, whether in the UK or USA, to engage with a history that has simply not been visualised in terms of collections of objects. It is as if the impermanence of the sculpture reminds us of the unreliability of objects as historical truths, and their own entropy and death ultimately becomes a question about the need to preserve them. It is a reminder not just of what Hall identifies as the preoccupation of British heritage to preserve the past, but also a re-enactment of the temporal fragility relating to the objects we seek to conserve.

Even though *Fons Americanus* has been destroyed or recycled into other objects, what seems more long-lasting are the intangible subjectivities and insights that the artwork has generated, the lived experience that it references and a history that is more oral than it is visual. It is a work that contained within it a critique of heritage, as an art object that itself could have been preserved in the museum-mausoleum, but which readily gave itself up for its own dissolution.

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6 Historical methods implicated in the making of ‘The Heritage’

Leonie Wieser

This chapter interrogates history-writing as implicated in the socially unequal dynamics of ‘heritage’ – the aspects of the past marked as valuable for the present. The process of creating knowledge about the past is argued here to constitute an act of social valorisation that interacts with present societal issues. While Hall and other heritage scholars focus on the arts and culture complex, in the background of these validations and authorisation processes is a system of historical methodology and epistemology, upheld by history-writing in academia as well as museums. This history-writing informs the knowledge presented to the public in museums and heritage institutions, making it crucial to elucidate this process further.

Building on Hall’s analysis of processes of representation as the ‘symbolic power to order knowledge, to rank, classify and arrange’ (2005, p. 24), this chapter analyses academic and non-academic methodologies of knowledge-making about the past as part of ‘The Heritage’. It examines how these representations of the past erect or dismantle boundaries of belonging within present society by signifying actors as important or, crucially, as unimportant by disregarding them. In analysing the historical research methods as value-laden rather than neutral, it adds to an understanding of the ways in which knowledge-making actively contributes to social inequality. As Stuart Hall argues, ‘The Heritage’ is in need of structural transformation. This chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of the structures of knowledge-making about the past and proposes action for both heritage institutions and individual actors within those institutions.

I investigate how knowledge is made about past experiences of migration, based on my primary research with academics, museum staff and a Black-led women’s charity in the North East of England between 2015 and 2018. I examine, firstly, how the process of history-writing, of researching and *knowing* the past in the present, constitutes a process of valorisation and has concrete effects on present discourses of belonging, inequality and intercultural relationships. I then analyse three specific cases of knowledge-making about women’s role in past migration and examine how individuals act within specific institutional contexts. I close by proposing that this valorisation is

strongly linked to structural frameworks of knowledge creation and make specific recommendations for more equal history-making.

History-writing as valorisation

Stuart Hall understands heritage as a 'discursive practice' that pertains to 'the whole complex of organisations, institutions and practices devoted to the preservation and presentation of culture and the arts' (2005, p. 23). This practice authorises and validates aspects of the past for the present, facilitating the creation of boundaries of 'belonging' (Hall, 2005; see also Smith, 2006; Ashley, 2014). Histories have been considered in terms of their impact on the present and on contemporary ideas of belonging, especially from scholars within museum and heritage studies. The past plays a role in establishing who forms part of the imagined nation (Smith, 2006; Whitehead *et al.*, 2015; Littler and Naidoo, 2005), issues around social justice and human rights (Sandell and Nightingale, 2012), and who can actively shape and participate in these conversations (Lynch, 2013).

Historical knowledge-making also plays a role in bestowing value on individual people in the past and the present, assigning importance to actors and groups and the issues they are facing. Current debates on academic and public history have further highlighted that previously marginalised histories bring a shift in focus on not just who matters but also the context that matters – with researchers such as Otele and Fowler bringing attention to colonial connections previously ignored (Otele, 2019; Huxtable *et al.*, 2020). The deep and engrained impact of these colonial connections on the present has been very clearly shown in these debates.

The impact on the present has for a long time been explicit or implicit in the practice of those writing on marginalised and racialised histories (Bressey, 2010; Collins, 1991). Academic historian Tony Kushner highlights the role of historians in social inclusion through the historical knowledge created – in his example on the representation of minority groups (2001; see also Pente *et al.*, 2015). He points out the gaps and misrepresentation that can ensue when relying uncritically on the official documentary record, such as census, home office records and newspaper archives, which are so often considered central to the writing of history (Jordanova, 2006). Museums rely on object and archive collection to present historical knowledge in exhibitions and have in recent years recognised the limitations of these collections, especially in representing experiences of migration (Gouriévidis, 2014). Bottom-up accounts, on the other hand, often question official accounts and propose alternative histories, potentially drawing on alternative sources, practices and performances (Ashley, 2014). Often, research methods and collection practices are therefore deeply implicated in who and what is written about in histories and represented in museums.

Several historians, interviewed for my research, remarked on the way academics create and contest ideas of who was important in the past, and

who was *valued* (Historian 1, 2016; Historian 2, 2016). They also maintained that their research was about making these people's voices heard (Historian 1, 2016), asserting their presence as important (Historian 2, 2016), and identifying and critically appraising previously neglected voices and contested or conflicted experiences (Historian 3, 2016).

I was astonished ... that even academics would say to me 'These people are just not important. ... they are a complete sidenote.' And I don't believe this to be the case, I think we need to challenge ... kind of master-narratives of history, and try and bring in more diverse understanding of who's played a role in the past.

(Historian 2, 2016)

These statements considered research important in terms of what is known about people in the past – who is considered or *valued* as actors.

The Black feminist thinker Patricia Hill Collins also strongly links historical knowledge to societal value (Collins, 1991). Her work recovers traditions of Black women's thought, arguing that the suppression of dissident voices functions as a tool for control which 'makes it easier for dominant groups to rule' (1991, p. 5). Through the recovery of these neglected traditions, Collins contests knowledge systems that marginalise Black women and their ideas. The Black-led women's organisation investigated in my research followed Collins' analysis to highlight the 'historically inaccurate representation' as having direct effects on society as a whole, as well as on those misrepresented. One of the project coordinators stressed the social effect of knowledge about *everybody's* historical contributions. She stated that a Eurocentric understanding of history – the exclusive valuing of the achievements of Europeans – was a barrier to mutual respect and to 'humanity being the human family'. In this, a lack of knowledge of the past of non-European historic achievements is linked to the lack of appreciation of non-Europeans in the present (BAM 2, 2016). This conviction of the link between knowledge about what people have done in the past and social life together in the present was shared by her colleague, who saw knowledge of women's actions in the past as fundamental for society.

Basically, it's about working towards a way of people living and being together, and it's like how can you do that if you have a really obscured sense of what has happened in the past.

(BAM 1, 2016)

A lack of understanding of who has played a role in the past – that it was not just the historical actors we constantly hear about – was seen as detrimental to equitable societal exchange.

These examples clearly highlight how knowledge about the past affects individuals, society and inequality in the present, contributing or inhibiting

positive exchange. The value that research bestows on the past has present consequences. These reasons for undertaking historical research have clear political implications, involving a critical analysis both of academic scholarship and of attitudes current in present society.

Limitations and opportunities for history-makers

In order to explore how historical processes function to create 'The Heritage' in actual public history practices, three examples of knowledge-making about the past and the methods utilised by them will be examined here. The cases explored here all consist of attempts to make knowledge of women's past experiences of migration to Tyneside in the North East of England and the networks and communities that these women created. The first example involves an academic historian, Laura Tabili, and her work on mobility in South Shields, a coastal town on the mouth of the Tyne; the second is a museum exhibition on migration to Tyneside; and the third is the community project BAM! Sistahood! on women's post-war migration to the North East. By focusing on female migrants, all these histories assert these actors as important, challenging previous exclusions (see Whitehead et al., 2015; Littler and Naidoo, 2005) and explicitly portraying more inclusive histories. They all bear their own potential and challenges, which are partly connected to questions around who is an active participant in the representations (Lynch, 2013), and show that it is not purely the representation of those previously omitted that is important but also *by whom* this is done and crucially *how*.

Global migrants, local culture: Women's role in building local networks

The work of academic historian Laura Tabili offers highly detailed and in-depth knowledge about women's histories and community-making in relation to migration. Her book *Global Migrants, Local Culture: Natives and Newcomers in Provincial England* (2011) analyses global migration and its impact on South Tyneside between 1841 and 1939.

Tabili states her motivation for her academic history research as follows:

I feel so strongly that certain things have been neglected in the academy. And voices ... that haven't been heard, and I think immigrants just haven't been heard at all, they've been overlooked, maligned, they're being maligned again, you know, in the United States and in Europe.

(Historian 1, 2016)

In her work, the academic historian remains very faithful to the existing record and uses available documentary source material, but she is able to focus attention on women's stories neglected by many other academic historians. She conducted a complete examination of the households including foreign-born

residents in seven census records from 1841 to 1901 of overseas-born residents of South Shields as well as of naturalisation files between 1879 and 1939. Her analysis suggests migrants in the port town were part of everyday networks of neighbours, business and work relations and religious networks, such as churches or synagogues. Tabili's research highlights that many migrants lived in local households, and it demonstrates a high level of inter-marriage, especially up to 1901. She suggests that overseas migrants lived in South Shields amongst, and co-habited with, members of the 'local' population and clustered along occupational lines (2011, p. 66–67), with few homogenous migrant households (2011, p. 102). Most overseas-born residents at that time did not establish visible communities. German and Jewish residents established occupational, kin and confessional networks, with both groups migrating as families, Jewish residents establishing ties across the region, and both establishing religious congregations (2011, p. 78). Tabili asserted that migrant women were central to these communities:

Large numbers of women born overseas correlated with the development of German, Jewish and Scandinavian communal institutions in South Shields. This suggests such women proved critical to the survival and stabilization of migrant networks that remained culturally, albeit not geographically, distinct within local society.

(2011, p. 164)

However, how individuals themselves identified is difficult to know. In most instances, the archival material recorded the voice of officials. In Tabili's approach, past migrants' voices emerge – when they write to the authorities, for example, in naturalisation applications. These documents presented changes in national allegiances to the authorities, with one applicant declaring that his 'connections to the German empire are severed' and another stating the benefit of naturalisation to his children 'whose sympathies and interests are wholly British' (2011, p. 137). Tabili acknowledged that the migrants' 'voice' was mediated by state demands, as 'the [naturalization] process itself restricted individuals' expression in formulaic ways' (Tabili, 2011, p. 126). Tabili also discussed the partiality of the record, stating that sources 'rendered visible only a fraction' of events and relationships (2011, p. 124) and noting the 'humbling recognition that the documentary record conceals as much as it discloses' – often it was not possible, for example, to tell the birthplace and skin colour of those recorded (Tabili, 2011, p. 50).

Many of the naturalisation applications showed the integration of migrants into local networks, especially through marriage (2011, p. 152). Tabili's investigation highlighted women's roles as gatekeepers into local society, either in their capacities as landladies or wives: 'Although most assumed this role informally, their personal choices proved critical to migrants' relations with the state and society' (2011, p. 156). For example, she showed that the marital status of an applicant impacted on naturalisation decisions, and that

applicants' personal lives as well as their wives' behaviours were scrutinised by officials and played an important role in the Home Office's decisions to grant or deny naturalisation applications. Her research also highlighted marriage as a form of integration and showed its importance for the development of social and kin networks (2011, p. 156).

Tabili's examination mentioned the 'wildly disproportionate sex ratios' amongst migrants, and she specifically dedicated chapters to migrant and local women's roles (2011, p. 128). By acknowledging that she largely explored *male* experiences of migration, Tabili highlighted the gendered aspect of migration and integration. Tabili utilised the accepted methods of the historical tradition – of archival research and documentary analysis – to at the same time contest and challenge gaps. Her active endeavour to question and problematise the records enabled her to look at existing material in a new way, using archival sources creatively to give partial accounts of migrants' experiences. Only by looking closely and taking specific measures, such as expanding samples and interrogating absences, was Tabili able to weave women and migrants' stories into the fabric of 19th- and 20th-century life in South Shields and thus assert their importance as historical subjects. This method also held limitations, with migrants' voices only discernible in the highly mediated and formalised manner of official documentation and very little by way of migrant women's own perspectives on their experiences. Methods employed in approaching migrant women's historical experiences in first-person accounts is explored in the next two cases.

Destination Tyneside: Orangewoman Ann Montgomery

Destination Tyneside is a permanent migration gallery in the Discovery Museum, a regional museum in Newcastle. The migration gallery, which is on the top floor of the museum, opened in July 2013. *Destination Tyneside* was developed from archival material already held by the museum and archive service, research and projects previously conducted by the museum, and contemporary material collected as part of the exhibition creation process. The first part of the gallery tells six migrants' stories from the 1840s to the 1900s, while the second discusses post-1945 migration. The display's mission statement expresses the value of knowledge about migration to add an 'informed perspective' in the aim to 'promote tolerance, alter perceptions on immigration and contribute to social cohesion' (Little, 2013, p. 2). The informed historical perspective is thus not merely about accuracy and facts – about displaying knowledge of what happened in the past – but strongly infused with its instrumental value in changing attitudes to migration and contributing 'to social cohesion'.

Based on the museum's collections and in collaboration with some of the migrants' descendants, the exhibition attempts to tell first-person narratives and give voice to past migrants (Museum 1, 2016). Life-sized video figures give a close view of the experiences of historical migrants to Tyneside. One

example is the story of Ann Montgomery, who left Ireland for South Tyneside as a child in 1866. She later married a fellow Ulster Protestant and was among the founders of the Hebburn Orange Lodge and Hall.

In the exhibition, Ann Montgomery's display case presents various items connected to the Orange Order, an Irish Protestant Unionist organisation. The video figure offers an imagined narrative to understand the cultural objects in the case and claims the importance of this Protestant Unionist cultural identity for herself and her family. In her video figure's narrative, she strongly espouses values derived from a Protestant work ethic:

Our family has settled in well here, amongst the Irish community. I married a strong sober man, from Tyrone and we have twelve children. At the moment we have ten of us living in our small home. But we manage fine. Taking great care of whatever living we have coming in.

(Discovery Museum, 2013)

The story focuses on her role within the Irish Protestant community and her contribution to its cultural expressions with her strong commitment to supporting her own cultural community – 'proud Orange men and Orange women like us' – and building a community venue:

My husband is a lifelong Orangeman. And I'm busy myself as a member of the local Hebburn Orange Lodge. But we need somewhere to meet! And an Orange Hall. We have our heart set on a good building. But the Sinn Feiners are after it too. So we must act quick! ... Together, penny by penny, we can raise enough to get that hall!

(Discovery Museum, 2013)

The strength of this depiction lies in representing a migrant woman, demonstrating the impact she made on her local area, and attempting to show her perspective. In the historic record, however, first-person accounts of women's migration are hard to find. The strategies utilised to fill gaps in this record encompassed several limitations. In relying on the curation team's own imagination, a particular version of a story is put forward, with other aspects left out. For example, this rather inward-looking portrayal disregards other historical facts, such as the integrative role of many community organisations (Buelmann, 2014).

One of the outreach officers described attempts to create stories, especially about marginalised groups, from the official records available as difficult (Museum 2, 2016). The exhibition curator also acknowledged the problem of assigning a representative function to individual characters:

I'm aware of that issue of – people see one story ... and that's the flipside of using personal stories to engender empathy that you risk people

thinking, that is the experience of all people from that country or culture or what have you, and that's not the case.

(Museum 1, 2016)

The display examined here was strongly impacted by the museum's desire to portray diverse actors and their contributions as part of the region with the aim of fostering social cohesion. Ann Montgomery's representation at the Destination Tyneside gallery showed the problems with the lack of adequate museum collections, and the strategies curators employed to counteract this. This example exposes the high level of discretion they have to act: while desiring to represent the experiences through the sources they hold, the well-meaning museum narratives can easily misrepresent too.

The wish to contribute to a 'tolerant' present society – itself a contested term – guides the representation here, resulting in a comfortable, but simplistic, story found more widely in displays from these years (Naidoo, 2005). It eschews wider questions, either about hostility or integration – or anything that might lead to a critical questioning or understanding of the present. Connected to this, the display demonstrates a central issue previously criticised (Lynch, 2013): the non-migrant curator representing migration experiences, within largely homogeneous institutions, as will be explored further below.

BAM! Sistahood!: Women's role in building community organisations

The lack of women's own perspectives in official historical documentation in academic and public history-making was a central point for the community project BAM! Sistahood! This project was run by the Angelou Centre, a Black-led women's centre in Newcastle upon Tyne. From 2012 to 2016, it received funding from the then Heritage Lottery Fund for the heritage project BAM! Sistahood! focusing on Black and minoritised women in the North East of England. The women who participated in the BAM! Sistahood! project came from diverse backgrounds, mostly from the South Asian, African and Arabic diasporas. Its location within a community-based organisation with an established practice of participation, learning and empowerment exemplified knowledge-making that understood itself as contestatory and 'from below'.

BAM!'s response to the biased nature of the official record was the creation and use of *new* sources to tell histories. BAM! used much of its time and financial resources on the development and creation of these sources, such as through photography, art and oral history recording. The main sources used by the BAM! project to make knowledge about the past were testimonial – for example, the oral histories or the writing of object descriptions for displays or recordings in the archive, emphasising participants' self-representation and

voice. The project saw the value of women's self-representation in widening viewpoints, especially in light of their previous exclusion – the coordinator explained the need to enable the representation of 'any disenfranchised or marginalised voice' (BAM 1, 2016).

Social networks were one central theme that many oral histories explored. Many interviewees remarked on the type of social support that a close community provided. In the film *Movement*, some of the elder women's stories discussed their arrival and connected these memories with leaving their families in India and living with their husbands' families:

When I came, I was unhappy and felt alone. I had left all my brothers, sisters and parents. I used to go to other people's house. We used to visit the family. Here, we had to stay indoors, because of the snow. Then I got used to it – and I didn't know any English as well!

(BAM! Sistahood!, 2016b)

Other interviewees echoed this story of isolation. Many elder Indian women talked about not having families or not being able to visit neighbours and relatives as they did in India. Another interviewee, who was born in the UK, detailed similar experiences of isolation: 'My parents came to this country and we had very little family here ... we didn't have any other family, that was it, one auntie, who was my mum's eldest sister. So there were no grandparents, from either side' (BAM! Sistahood!, 2016b). Another interviewee, who came to England as a child with her family, states, 'We were always targeted by other, white, children' (BAM! Sistahood!, 2016b).

In this context, several of the interviews described the value of an active group of women who came together to support each other. One participant from Sierra Leone explained the importance of groups beyond the family to their approach to child-rearing:

In Africa, we – there's a culture that ... – a child is brought up not by the mother, but by the community, and we extended that here.

(BAM! Sistahood!, 2016b)

The oral history film *Founders* recorded a variety of activists' memories of the North East and the interviewees discussed their actions and reflected on changes in the past decades. One of the oral history interviewees explained that women came together in the 1980s and '90s to 'tackle some of the inequalities' and highlighted that many women did not have access to basic services, as universal and women's services lacked cultural and language expertise to accommodate Black and minoritised women's needs. She bemoaned that it was necessary for their women's groups to start campaigning, stating: 'Every human being has a right to basic services. Why do we need to struggle and fight for our rights?' (BAM! Sistahood!, 2016a). One of the activists outlined the vision the women had as a group:

Being part of a very determined group of women who had this vision about having a place where Black women could come and be trained, be educated, ... reach a point where they could work.

(BAM! Sistahood!, 2016a)

Exhibition displays, oral histories and artistic expressions were based on multiple and partial perspectives that did not form a complete and unified group identity but acknowledged differences within the group while also building understandings of the shared issues that many of them faced. Accounts based on lived experience and on historic migrants' own voices widened the focus and depth of interpretation. This showed how participatory accounts added new perspectives and expertise on personal experiences as well as on societal processes.

In this case study, previously marginalised women presented their own stories in the exhibition space. Their actions were highlighted as having contributed to the region and its communities and thus valorised. The methods used were based on the creation of new sources and testimonial evidence, widening viewpoints and expanding the voices heard in historical arenas. One limitation, of course, is that oral histories and testimonial accounts can only be recorded within living history and are not a solution to the gaps in documentation before the 1930s, in most cases. However, the diversification of viewpoints is not only applicable to the historical experiences represented, but also to the perspectives that history-makers bring to their research work and the understanding that present experiences can bear on past experiences and events.

Knowledge-making about the past in a structurally unequal present

The making of history was shown in all three examples above as an active process reliant on historically constituted documentation as well as on individuals' responses to these sources. A clear focus on women's experiences of migration was, in the museum case, based on content imagined by the non-migrant curator; in the academic case, on the voices and gaps from the archives; and in the BAM! case, on the voices of present migrants. In the latter two cases, this involves the at least partial self-representation of migrant women, mediated through the academic historian and the collaborative heritage process respectively. The museum case on the other hand is an external, somewhat stereotyped view on migration and community building. All three types of researchers had specific aims and priorities to create new histories and propose new shared concepts of belonging, clearly seeing the history-makers' role in social inclusion (Kushner, 2001). How this belonging was conceptualised and understood, however, was linked to how critically the researchers engaged in the knowledge-making process. In particular, the methods embraced by the BAM! group consciously and explicitly contested accepted frameworks, proposing new methodologies and epistemologies that

were often based on experience and testimony. These highlight the selective nature and the political aspects of history-making, contesting the business-as-usual of history and heritage practice. Tabili's account too repeatedly refers back to the limitations of the record, as well as current fissures, while the museum display aimed to tell a more straightforward narrative of a new and inclusive region, which does not interrogate the structural settlement (Littler, 2005). Neither the academic nor the museum account shifted who the active creators of histories were, who could decide what was important and what should be represented (Lynch, 2013; Pente et al., 2015).

As Hall has noted, 'The Heritage' is a designation of a 'particular settlement of structured social inequalities' (Hall, 2005, p. 27). Individual actors and groups navigated a specific structural context of history and heritage-making. Inequality pervades institutions of knowledge production, and histories are written in a structurally unequal present. University and museum workforces, especially at senior and content-producing levels, remain vastly unrepresentative of wider society. As of 2018, 93.7 per cent of academic staff in history were from White backgrounds and only 0.5 per cent were from Black (Atkinson et al., 2018). In museums, Black or minoritised people were vastly underrepresented in permanent staff, senior management and boards in 2017/2018 (Arts Council England, 2019, p. 18). Specialist roles, which include content roles (curation and collections), also had a particularly low percentage of Black or minoritised staff, with 3 per cent in this period (Arts Council England, 2019, p. 25). A widening of voices amongst present researchers is needed in order to pluralise approaches to the past. A limited knowledge community (Naidoo, 2005; Hall, 2005) is highly damaging to individuals and groups, as well as to intercultural societal exchange in the present.

For historical content alone, this institutional context is extremely problematic, since individuals, as has been shown, have a huge amount of discretion when dealing with the historical record, other sources and the making of knowledge about the past. Change in staffing would, as this research has suggested, result in new perspectives on and interpretation of topics, as called for by contemporary writers such as David Olusoga and Olivette Otele (Olusoga, 2020; Otele, 2019). A firm commitment through a reprioritisation of resources – both money and time – could enable this diversification by implementing the recommendations of various reports from organisations that have been identifying solutions for several years (e.g., Atkinson et al., 2018; Equality Challenge Unit, 2016; Heritage Fund, 2021). This would raise the quality of debate in academic and museum communities through contestation by new and varied viewpoints – as in this case, by contributing understanding of the value and need for community organisations for migrants, their role in integration and negotiation, their existence in response to exclusion and a lack of accessible services, and historical women's specific role in the maintaining of cultural communities, thereby adding to a more rounded, if never complete, account of migrants and their experiences past and present.

Exclusion in wider society and exclusion in knowledge institutions have a relationship that is mutually reinforcing. A diversification of knowledge-making is not simply achieved by changing the personnel make-up of authorised institutions. Time and money, and changes to governance structures, also need to be deployed into a culture change, bringing about revised understandings about what and whose knowledge matters, in the past and the present (Olusoga, 2020). Challenging the hierarchies and changing the make-up of those who are in control of decisions on *knowledge* about and the *value* of the past is central to enabling a more equal exchange and better-informed conversations both about the past and the present.

This chapter has highlighted the way that methods and epistemologies of history-making perpetuate knowledge inequalities and social inequalities. Unravelling the processes as well as the institutional and structural background is thus extremely important when examining history and heritage and the making of knowledge about the past. This knowledge-making is, as remarked by Hall, a distinctly political process that is not independent of present power relations.

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7 **Whose Heritage? Deconstructing and reconstructing counter-narratives in heritage**

Sandra Shakespeare, Qanitah Malik and Edinam Edem-Jordjie

Presented in this chapter are two essays, ‘Blurring Field-Box Boundaries: Documenting through Community Participation’ (Malik, 2021) and an excerpt from ‘The Transatlantic Slavery Connections of English Heritage Properties: Knowledge Transfer and Country House Reinterpretation, Osborne House’ (Edem-Jordjie, 2021). If the political events of recent history have taught us anything about heritage, it is that the answer to the question of the heritage of Britain differs radically depending on who you ask. Malik, born in Lahore, Pakistan, is concerned with connecting to a deeper, more aware self. The value of interaction with other artists to build community is what brings her back to her practice. Edem-Jordjie holds an MA in anthropology and museum practice from Goldsmiths, University of London.

The essays critically challenge the heritage sector and their imperial epistemologies that remain deeply problematic to the process and practice of decolonisation. Presented is an interrogation and disruption that actively addresses the historic repression of silenced voices in our collections and across sites of heritage. Interrogating the ideas and thinking of Stuart Hall’s critique on a ‘national story’ (Hall, 1999), their essays offer new possibilities to inform strategies. Both essays call for a change in the hierarchies of power governing collections management, the categorisation of cultural heritage, interpretation, and representation.

This call reflects my own practice with Museum X CIC and the Black British Museum Project – a direct provocation in response to the ideas expressed by Hall and a continuum of ideas of cultural identification: ‘Black’ and ‘British’. Indeed, creating a new museum has been an opportunity to rethink, redesign, and reimagine what a decolonised museum can be in the constantly evolving narratives on cultural and nationalistic forms of identity.

These essays, from the Whose Heritage? Research Residency Programme run by the Black organisation Culture&, are themselves a resistance to authority and the authoritative point of view that Hall uses as a persistent provocation in his work. It is vital to my praxis with the work I do to support emerging researchers who interrogate our own sense of self in the work that we do. The question ‘why?’ is crucial in the process and practice of decolonisation, the

understanding of who we are, and why stories of our histories have been constantly and deliberately erased, rendered invisible in the archive and museum collections. The authors presented here have engendered a shift in museum practice: Collections Trust has responded to the recommendations by Malik (2021) to inform a new strategy for the Management Collections framework for museums. English Heritage are working with Edem-Jordjie's (2021) essay reports to support the online interpretation of five historic sites exploring links to the transatlantic slave trade.

Hall's persistence is a legacy reflected in the approach and methodology employed by the Whose Heritage? Research Residency Programme. To reference Bonsu:

Abrogating didactic notions of heritage and culture, Hall's critical analysis of cultural identities continues to allow us to think of the world differently; a cause of optimism not for a utopian world, but for a critical intervention in the here and now.

(Bonsu, 2019)

Culture&: Whose Heritage? Research Residency Programme

In January 2021 I joined the team of Culture& as a consultant to manage their Whose Heritage? Research Residency Programme. Culture& is a Black and ethnic minority-led, independent arts and education charity formed in 1987 and based in London. Its mission is to diversify the UK's arts and heritage sector through training and audience engagement. Culture&'s training arm is New Museum School (NMS). They work in partnership with arts and heritage institutions and artists to develop programmes that promote diversity in the workforce and audiences. Since 2019 they have successfully delivered New Museum School training programmes for young people to access skills and opportunities within the arts and heritage sector. In 2021 they launched the New Museum School Advanced Programme, an MA in conjunction with the University of Leicester. Students attracted to NMS come from a range of diverse ethnic backgrounds that are typically underrepresented in heritage and arts sectors.

In 2020, a perfect storm of Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter (BLM) impacted hugely on the lives of the New Museum School 2019/2020 cohort socially, emotionally, and economically, including their career opportunities. Whilst struggling to adapt to new ways of working under lockdown, New Museum School trainees were also looking to find ways to channel their passion and effect real change. This cohort felt frustration at the UK arts and heritage sector's limited interpretations of objects, collections, sites, and monuments, and anger against the inequality of opportunity that still exists within the sector, preventing diverse individuals from securing sustained careers in the industry. Decolonisation practice is nothing new. The school has

a history of the collective efforts of Black activists, scholars, and liberators – such as La Rose, Howe, Harrison, and Professor Gus John – all relentless in driving change in the decolonisation of mind and praxis/practice across education and arts for almost 60 years.

The focus on Stuart Hall in the Culture& programme provided a framework for emerging researchers to test the pedagogic environment of arts and heritage institutions. What aesthetic filters and institutional conventions told the researchers where they ‘belong’ in the archives and where was this knowledge placed? Where was cultural knowledge acquired in collections and what was the value placed on cultural expertise? For example, Tabitha Deadman presented her work with Art UK, an invitation to queer the archive, to question and evoke repressed voices in art in ‘Bi visibility: Marie Laurencin and multiple gender attraction’.

To illustrate the deconstructing and reconstructing of the ways that heritage knowledge is produced, I present here the words of two of these new, young researchers, Qanitah Malik and Edinam Edem-Jordjie.

Blurring Field-Box Boundaries : Documenting through Community Participation

Qanitah Malik

Stuart Hall’s critique of museum practices and what constitutes British Heritage (Hall, 1999) questioned the power that is exercised in ordering and classifying information, thus giving it certain meanings. In this essay, I examine South Asia Collection’s (SAC) documentation and online catalogues for language, generalising assumptions/vagueness, and narratives/values prescribed to objects and collections. I showcase how problematics of language, missing content, and misrepresentation of cultural semantics can be addressed through collaborative, respectful, and sustained engagement with stakeholders. Finally, drawing from Hall’s ideas, I highlight how heritage collections can redefine and rethink their documentation practice, research, and engagement.

The SAC was started by Philip and Jeanie Millward in Norwich. It is cared for and managed by the South Asian Decorative Arts and Crafts Collection Trust, whose purpose is to ‘record, conserve and promote the arts, crafts and cultures of South Asia’ (South Asia Collection, 2021). The Millwards acquired objects during travels to South Asia and UK auction houses, and now the collection is also growing through public donations.

I conducted my research from March–June 2021, during which I textually analysed publicly accessible materials at SAC and visited their facilities. I conducted open-ended structured interviews with representatives from my case studies and with SAC staff. The case studies were chosen through desktop research and snowball sampling.

Acknowledging institutional history

My work highlights how collections can acknowledge institutional history and address stagnant, outdated narratives that perpetuate unequal power dynamics within the heritage collections. One of the persistent concerns with object acquisition is meticulously tracing its travels and documentation, in addition to understanding biases of the collector, as this influences the representation and narratives within records (Turner, 2016). Through the documentation and publication (on websites and social media) of collector biases and object travels, collections can offer more transparency in order to build trust with the public and communities involved. During fieldwork, I sensed ambivalence among sector practitioners regarding transparency and the regular evaluation of documentation guidelines. This can be rectified through the documentation and publication of organizational history and documentation policies. Organisations such as Collections Trust (CT) can play a role by highlighting ways that museum professionals can become more aware of reflexive collecting practice, the classification of information, and, ultimately, the kind of values the museum is upholding for its audiences.

During an interview, Hannah Bentley, ex-Collections Documentation Manager at SAC related that she was responsible for revising documentation policy every two years and fact-checking object histories. This process involved referring to paper records, interviews with donors, auction house catalogues, and travel information from the Millwards (personal communication, 24 June 2021). From decolonial perspectives, of concern are contextual details of object biographies. The Museum Documentation Association, now Collections Trust, Catalogue Card Instruction Manuals from 1981 state, ‘in the case of data which you do not wish to analyse, simply record it as a block of information’. This further perpetuates the cataloguer’s bias and does little to demonstrate complex information.

Enhancing object-descriptions through multiple sources is highlighted through the work of [Re:]Entanglements (2021), a project led by Paul Basu with partnerships in the UK, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Their work on ‘decolonising’ Northcote Thomas’s ethnographic archive (dispersed across University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, British Library Sound Archive, Pitt Rivers Museum, Royal Anthropological Institute, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and UK National Archives) revealed the challenge of documenting complex information and plurality of meaning. Two points emerged from an interview with Basu that dispel the myth of neat methods: first, that improvising, building relationships, and developing a complex network of stakeholders is key as there is no single source community; and second, that being genuine, sensitive, and commonsensical can circumvent extractive relationships and the co-optation of information (personal communication, 3 June 2021).

In line with Basu’s reflections, collections can ensure external research is built back into the database and acknowledge multiple descendant groups

and communities that go beyond the object. They can explore multi-layered stories to acknowledge the spiritual, cultural, historical, and in/tangible value prescribed to collections, which must then be incorporated into documentation practice and procedures.

Documenting more thoroughly

Hall argues that documentation practice is ‘power to order knowledge, to rank, classify and arrange, and thus to give meaning to objects and things through the imposition of interpretive schemas, scholarship and connoisseurship’ (Hall, 2005, p. 24). Further, publicly accessible material can be generalized and vague, assuming certain ‘epistemic totality’ (Crilly, 2019, citing Mignolo and Walsh, 2018), with reductive classification systems.

Museums have addressed language issues by working with universities. For instance, the Horniman’s *Rethinking Relationships* (Horniman, 2020) addresses issues of misrepresentation, outdated information, and lack of collection provenance, linking them to key moments in the history of the collection through workshops with stakeholders. Sustained relationships were built with both researchers and communities, which involved guiding researchers to carry out their own provenance research. Resources and tools were also provided for community members to digitally access collections and input their responses on the future of collections. Guidance and information was provided about the history, nature, and conduct of museum collecting, how terminology and context may be outdated, incorrect, offensive, or inappropriate (for example, under-recognition of a breadth of cultural groups within a community or overlapping people in various cultural groups). During an interview with J.C. Niala, the project’s lead researcher, we talked about symmetric respect and care for community and western approaches to archival collections, and conditions under which knowledge can be legally and ethically preserved, published, and changed over time. In acknowledging and seeking advice from communities on language/terminology, we can be more sensitive in documentation and representation (personal communication, 20 May 2021).

There is an inextricable link between language and classification, which informs the arrangement, categorisation, and object-descriptions in paper records and their lingering shadow on the documentation trail (Turner, 2016). One of the interviewees abruptly observed that modern digital systems may retain classification hierarchy from paper documentation. Documenting complex information requires consideration of (a) non-reductive classification models that may employ non-hierarchical, non-Anglicised, less control-heavy, and more collaborative ways, (b) a phased and/or case-by-case consideration of customised protocols for cataloguing, (c) training/resources to incorporate ‘unstructured’ data into a structured database system, and (d) including multiple perspectives in documentation. By layering object names/associations and seeking advice from communities on language/

terminology, i.e., how it is stored, we can achieve more sensitivity in documentation and representation. New collections management software can support non-Western languages and scripts.

For collection catalogues that risk aestheticising sensitive cultural and religious material and repackaging it without contextual information, museums can follow the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology's approach (2022), which acknowledges inaccurate, out-of-date, and inappropriate descriptions/representations and invites public emails for their identification. The application of this approach to SAC's initiative 'India and Pakistan Remembered' could benefit its in-house collections so that oral documentation functions as a free-standing project and a tool to present information.

Although multi-channel digital information flow presents documentation and retrieval issues, organisations can develop tools and protocols so that engagement and research are both plugged back into the database. It must be recognized that 'documentation is not at odds with access' (Lawther, 2020).

Rectifying inappropriate/outdated content and creating spaces for engagement

Gerry Hey, Head of Collections Management Systems at the Natural History Museum, states that their 'audit week' allows curators to address 'accuracy and update critical aspects of collections' (personal communication, 13 May 2021), and CT can advocate similar approaches to other museums. Acknowledging problematic words, language, and preferred terms, flagging content, and updating and ensuring the transparency of documentation policies is crucial (Rutherford, 2021) and should be a regular practice. During an interview, Wayne Kett, Curator of Great Yarmouth Museums, outlined how he removed problematic language from the Time and Tide collection (2021 and created a terminology database for the museum. It is essential to advocate updating term-lists while retaining the object-record's trace on the documentation system.

Museums can re-evaluate what they deem valuable by giving the same importance and resources to collections that have historically been excluded from the great list of valuables. Many objects described through their physical and skill/craft attributes have been divorced from their lived spirit and history. Inspiration can be drawn from projects such as Black Artists and Modernism, 'which seeks to forget the artistic object in favour of questioning how BAME artists feature in twentieth-century art narratives and documentation' (2022).

To engage in the broad-based ethics of co-creation, museums must acknowledge multiple descendant groups and outline ethical guidelines for collaborations. This goes hand-in-hand with honouring a community's right to access, developing 'radicalness of empathy' (Christen and Anderson, 2019), and fostering voluntary, non-coercive relationships as suggested in the Making African Connections Project (McGregor et al., 2021) and Protocols for Native American Archival Materials (First Archivists Circle, 2007). Further,

museums must adopt a values-based approach to documenting collections, similar to community archives, a process where we're all at the table (Zavala et al., 2017), augmented by a non-custodial model of stewardship whereby the community, not the museum/collection, is the owner of the material.

Some enabling steps towards this include making more under-represented histories accessible online; creating equal spaces for audiences and community researchers to provide information/context around collections; and taking flexible approaches to documentation, for example through the addition of notes-fields, additional tagging, and linking terminology lists to the collection management systems. Good examples of this approach can be found in projects such as 100 Histories of 100 Worlds in 1 Object (2021) and the Atlantic Black Box Project (2022), which focus on the 'collective rewriting' of history through 'story, community and conversation' (Atlantic Black Box Project, 2022).

Conclusion

It is this very purposeful and engaged responsibility that will move the field toward a slow archives, whereby the products – be they records, metadata or finding aids – are no longer the focus of archival practices. What becomes central in slow archives is relationships with communities of origin.

(Christen and Anderson, 2019)

Decolonial approaches to museum collection documentation must go beyond the politics of representation and identity. A productive approach is keeping an open mind in our daily practice and learning through other initiatives, projects, and engagements. Our communities have a say in what values are ascribed to collections and require space within heritage collections. The museum and the archive are steeped in colonial legacy that cannot be tidied up completely. For now, we situate ourselves in their limits and re-think their possibilities as public spaces. The case studies examined above allow for the creation of these spaces. Both small and large collections must do the same in order to effectively approach, represent, and host cultural heritage from the very perspectives of its stakeholders.

The transatlantic slavery connections of English heritage properties: Knowledge transfer and country house reinterpretation, Osborne House (excerpts)

Edinam Edem-Jordjie

In his seminal essay 'Whose Heritage? Un-settling "The Heritage", Re-imagining the Post-nation', Professor Stuart Hall spoke of British Heritage as a 'peculiar inflection where works and artefacts so conserved appear to

be of value primarily in relation to the past' and stated that 'to be validated, they must take their place alongside what has been authorised as valuable on already established grounds in relation to the unfolding of a national story whose terms we already know' (1999, p. 1). This 'national story' helps define our national identity through the linking of objects, people, places, symbols, and images with 'meanings about the nation with which we can identify, meanings which are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it' (McLean, 1998, p. 1). A lot of the things that make up this national story, the traditional myths we believe, the objects we preserve, the national heroes we revere, the places we value, etc., they all largely speak of a version of British history that Hall famously argued was built on a Eurocentric, localised ideal. Historical evidence paints a very different picture.

Hall's essay was a call for action to challenge this version of British history, to demand a reinterpretation of British heritage and our national story that is inclusive, globalised, and cosmopolitan. A call that English Heritage strove to answer through the commissioning of a project that investigated the connections between some of the country houses entrusted into their care and Britain's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, and the associated links to the history of colonialism throughout the Caribbean region, continental Africa, and the wider British Empire.

Country houses – whether they are the site of a historic event, the inspiration of a piece of famous literature, or simply a beautiful home that once belonged to the extraordinarily wealthy – have, especially in recent decades, come to be seen as an important part of the British national story. Their value is placed in the belief that these places are quintessentially local and British, despite historical evidence proving otherwise.

As part of the national story, these places speak profoundly about what we value and how we present our history as a nation. Historically, they have contributed to the creation of a national narrative that has largely omitted the negative and globalised aspects of our history such as our imperial legacy, leading to the Eurocentric, localised image that country houses typically portray. This is something that English Heritage is seeking to address and change.

This project started with research undertaken by Professor Corinne Fowler and Dr Miranda Kaufmann that uncovered the links some heritage places have to Britain's imperial legacy and resulted in an interim report, a book, and a joint initiative with the National Trust titled 'Colonial Countryside'. Building on this work, this report aims to transform the online interpretation of some of the country houses entrusted to the care of English Heritage. Through the recovery, foregrounding, and reinterpretation of archival content, this report illuminates and raises awareness of the diverse, intricate, and long-standing connections between key sites of English heritage and the British Atlantic world.

In doing so, I hope to make a valuable contribution to the work being done by English Heritage to dispel some of the myths embedded in the narrative

around country houses that continue to uphold troubling legacies today, such as the idea that this country did not have a Black presence until the arrival of Windrush. This report is about showing that British history and our national story have always been globalised. The Osborne House report that follows is an example of this research.

Osborne House report

‘It is impossible to imagine a prettier spot’, said Queen Victoria of Osborne House, her scenic retreat located on the idyllic Isle of Wight. With its spacious grounds and natural gardens on the coast, the house is a shining example of the country houses that have become so emblematic of England’s heritage, an opulent portrayal of the Victorian elite. However, a look behind its picturesque façade reveals hidden connections to the complex history of British imperialism, as well as some hitherto not widely known realities about the lives of Black people in Victorian England.

A particular point of focus is the hidden Black presence at Osborne – not only in relation to the provenance of selected artworks and cultural objects within the collections but also to evidence of the lives and experiences of people of colour with direct links to this historic house as former visitors and residents. Through the recovery, foregrounding, and reinterpretation of archival content about Osborne House, this report illuminates and raises awareness about the diverse, intricate, and long-standing connections between key sites of English heritage and the British Atlantic world.

Colonial connections

With its location on the sparsely populated Isle of Wight, it can be easy to forget that Osborne House is not far from the busy British port of Southampton, known then as the gateway to the world. Whilst the house’s expansive grounds on the coast enabled the royal household to live a life of relative seclusion, its proximity to the busy port and the ease of access it afforded to the world meant that the royal household was able to easily reap the economic benefits of the ever-expanding empire, which Victoria herself saw as civilising and benign (Hibbert, 2000, p. 249).

Queen Victoria’s reign oversaw Britain’s ‘Imperial Century’, so-called because of the rapid expansion of territorial governance and dominance in world trade (Hibbert, 2000, p. 249). By the end of the 19th century, the British Empire covered approximately one quarter of the world’s land surface and nearly half a billion people, which was one fifth of the world’s population at the time (Drescher, 2009; Sen, 2016). The century also saw large numbers of settlers from the British Isles migrating to British dominions such as Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, where British rule had severely diminished the indigenous populations (Drescher, 2009, p. 388).

With the empire, Britain was able to establish and maintain economic dominance. It afforded Britons the ability to easily acquire raw materials such as cotton and sugar cane, turn them into goods inexpensively, and sell them freely in a global market covering every continent. This, combined with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, enabled products to be produced at a speed and on a scale never seen before. By 1851, Britain was the world's dominant exporter and first global industrial power, producing much of the world's coal, iron, steel, and textiles (Sen, 2016; Drescher, 2009). Every week, ships arriving to and from ports such as Southampton would be carrying merchants, traders, soldiers, emigrants, etc., alongside these goods, making Britain a very wealthy nation.

At the same time, Britain relied on a system of indentured servitude, mainly from the Indian sub-continent, to staff plantations across the colonies as a substitute for the enforced labour provided by formerly enslaved Africans. From 1840 to 1870, it is estimated that over one million Indians were transported to British colonies in the Caribbean and Africa, with a smaller portion to Britain itself (Sen, 2016, p. 3). At Osborne House, for example, there were a number of Indian servants attending to the royal household during this period.

Britain's continued reliance on goods produced by slavery and the system of indentured servitude meant that, even with abolition, the country continued to rely on exploitation to generate the great wealth that financed the wars, invasions, and excursions the country undertook in its mission to become the world's foremost colonial power by the end of the 19th century (Drescher, 2009; Sen, 2016).

Queen Victoria, like many of the British elite, benefitted from this wealth, and it was used to fund the creation of properties and organisations that enriched them further. In the case of the monarch, she was able to privately invest in properties across Britain and the Americas, including the early skyscrapers in New York, which were said to have 'helped her pennies grow' to tens of millions of pounds (Hibbert, 2000, p. 340; Kuhn, 1993, p. 1). She became so wealthy that, unlike her predecessors, who bequeathed nothing but debts to their successors, she was the first British sovereign to bequeath private fortunes and properties to her family and successor (Kuhn, 1993, p. 20). This wealth was also used to fund the creation and renovations of Osborne House as, unlike the Crown Estates of Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle, it was financed entirely by the monarch's personal funds and therefore privately owned.

Sarah Forbes Bonetta

It is often thought that the historic presence of Black people in Britain began and ended with Britain's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. Two frequent visitors to Osborne House, Sarah Forbes Bonetta, a Yoruba orphan from Nigeria, and her daughter Victoria Davies are evidence of the contrary.

Unique figures in British history, their stories reflect a position of privilege that most living in Victorian Britain could only imagine, whilst at the same time highlighting how absent Black women have been from the little that has been written and retained in archives about the longevity of the nation's Black presence.

Born as Omoba Aina in Oke-Odan, a village in the Nigerian administrative area now known as Yewa South in the Ogun State, Sarah was raised as a princess of the Yewa (formerly Egbado) tribe (Bressey, 2005, p. 3). She resided in Oke-Odan with her family until 1848, when she was orphaned during a war with the nearby Kingdom of Dahomey at the age of five (Bressey, 2005, p. 4). The kingdom, which is located in the area known today as Northern Benin, was an important regional power because of its organised domestic economy built on conquest and slave labour.

The war left many of her fellow tribe members dead or enslaved and led to Aina being captured and enslaved by Dahomey's ruling monarch, King Ghezo. Her royal background designated her as an important prisoner and she was spared from being sold into the transatlantic slave trading system. Instead, she was kept as a slave of King Ghezo's court, where she remained for the next two years, until the arrival of British Captain Frederick E. Forbes of the Royal Navy in 1850. Forbes was visiting Dahomey on a British diplomatic mission set up to persuade African leaders to end their involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, following the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act (Bressey, 2005, p. 3). On his final visit, Forbes was unsuccessful in his negotiations with King Ghezo to end Dahomey's participation in the transatlantic slave trade and was instead presented with a number of gifts, one of which was Aina. Out of moral concern for her likely fate of execution, Captain Forbes accepted her on behalf of Queen Victoria and returned to Britain in July 1850, with plans for the British government to be responsible for her care (Wills and Dresser, 2020, p. 119).

At this time, the majority of Black people in Britain were soldiers, domestic servants, and former enslaved Africans who had been emancipated following the abolition of slavery a few years earlier. Due to the racist beliefs that were used to justify the subjugation of Black people during the slave trade and colonialism, many Black people suffered social prejudice and lived in poverty. As a ward of the British State, Aina was in a position of privilege that most in Victorian Britain could only imagine, yet her treatment whilst she was in England would show the unique dichotomy she faced as a Black African individual living amongst the British elite.

Upon her arrival in England, she was renamed Sarah Forbes Bonetta after Captain Forbes and his ship, the HMS Bonetta, much like the way that enslaved Africans were renamed after their owners. She remained with the Forbes family for a few months and, during this time, Forbes put together a proposal to present to the government for her care, describing her as intelligent, good mannered, and able to speak English fluently. He eventually won approval to present his case directly to Queen Victoria and, in November 1850,

she was presented to the queen, who was said to have become so enamoured by the ‘poor little Negro girl’ that she paid for Sarah to be educated at the Annie Walsh Memorial School in Freetown, Sierra Leone, as her ward (Bressey, 2005, p. 4). She was chosen to be educated in Sierra Leone as it was widely believed that England’s climate was fatal to the health of African children due to the number of children who had died en route to England during Britain’s involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. She returned to England in 1855, aged twelve, and was entrusted to the care of Rev Frederick Scheon and his wife, who lived at Palm Cottage, Canterbury Street, Gillingham (Bressey, 2005, p. 9). On her return, the queen hosted her at Osborne House several times for periods ranging from days to months.

In 1862, she was granted permission by the queen to marry the Sierra Leone-born Captain James Pinson Labulo Davies in Brighton. Following her marriage, she split her time between Lagos and England and gave birth to three children. Her eldest was called Victoria Davies, named after the queen, who was also her godmother.

Despite her closeness to Queen Victoria, Sarah’s family faced many financial difficulties, culminating in Captain Davies being taken to court in early 1880 on charges of fraud. Though he won, the stress of the case and their financial difficulties took a toll on Sarah’s health. In May 1880, she left Lagos for Madeira, a Portuguese island in the Atlantic Ocean, to recuperate and escape the stress. However, after receiving word that all the property she owned, not secured to her in the marriage contract by her trustees, had been handed over to her husband’s trustee in bankruptcy, her health deteriorated further, and she died of tuberculosis on 15 August 1880 (Bressey, 2005, p. 11).

Upon her death, Sarah’s financial difficulties left her children as reliant on the generosity of the queen as she herself had been. Shortly after Sarah’s death, her eldest daughter, Victoria Davies, left for England to meet with her godmother, Queen Victoria. At the queen’s expense, Victoria Davies attended Cheltenham Ladies College and was later given an annuity by the queen, which allowed her to remain in England and maintain a close relationship with the queen (Bressey, 2005, p. 12). She continued to visit the royal household at Osborne House, which at this point was Queen Victoria and Prince Albert’s main residence, throughout her life. They were so close that when Victoria Davies had her first child, the monarch’s youngest daughter, Princess Beatrice, became the child’s godmother.

The collections

A walk through Osborne House will reveal how some of its ornate furniture, artefacts, and portraits are reflective of hidden geographies that tell the story of the power of the British monarchy and its empire. The Durbar Wing, for example, which was completed in 1892 to house Princess Beatrice and her family, contains various architectural stylings and pieces of artwork that

speak to the queen's status as Empress of India (Wills and Dresser, 2020, p. 121). Dozens of portraits of people from India line the walls of the Durbar Corridor. Some of the people depicted are named, such as Maharajah Duleep Singh, the deposed fifth King of Lahore who, as a result of the second Anglo-Sikh war in 1848, was sent to Britain in exile (Wills and Dresser, 2020, p. 121). The corridor opens into a large room known as the Durbar Room, which was designed by Lockwood Kipling, father of the author Rudyard Kipling, in a Northern Indian architectural style. The focal point of the room is an intricate piece of plasterwork designed by Indian plasterer Bhai Ram Sing, which depicts a peacock, a significant symbol in Indian mythology.

Throughout the house, pieces of artwork and furniture reveal similar links to Britain's colonial history, such as the portrait of Prince Alamayou, the only legitimate son of Tewodros II, the Emperor of Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia). Following his father's suicide after Abyssinia's defeat against the British in the Battle of Magdala, the prince was brought to England by Tristram Charles Sawyer Speedy, an army officer and explorer in 1868 (Dresser and Hann, 2013, p. 122). Similar to Sarah Forbes Bonetta, Prince Alamayou was presented to Queen Victoria at Osborne House, where she expressed great interest in him. However, this is where the similarity between Alamayou and Sarah ends. Unlike Sarah, he got to keep his name, had an official portrait painted of him, and was schooled in England until he died of pleurisy aged eighteen (Wills and Dresser, 2020, p. 122). Perhaps this speaks to the differences between how girls and boys were treated, or indeed whether it mattered if the person of colour came from a British colony or not.

This portrait is one of the only connections that Osborne has to the African diaspora that is emphasised. Other depictions of a Black presence have little to no descriptions or reasons for their presence. Down the Equerries' corridor, for example, there is a painting called *The Embarkation*, which includes a 'black boy', an 'Arab man', and a naked, brown-skinned 'servant'. On a wall of the Durbar Room entrance hall, there is a portrait of a black boy dressed in what appears to be a uniform, but there is no text accompanying the portrait to indicate who this boy is and why his portrait is hanging in Osborne House. As for Sarah Forbes Bonetta and her daughter Victoria Davies, no contemporaneous portraits of them line the walls to indicate their past presence.

Conclusion

Much of modern Britain was built on slavery, and Osborne House, a former royal residence, is no exception to this. For many, Osborne has simply been a beautiful royal backdrop to a wonderful visitor experience, a country house known worldwide for its architectural style and opulence. However, with its colonial connections, links to British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, and hidden Black presence, it is also a place that can speak profoundly about the past and who we are as a nation. There is a reason why many of

these histories were hidden and, in uncovering them, we can help to dispel the myths and narratives that uphold troubling legacies today.

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Part III

Challenging ‘Whose Heritage?’ through Arts and Self-reflection



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8 In the shadow of Stuart Hall

Dawn Walton

This is an edited text from the keynote speech given by Dawn Walton, then Artistic Director of Eclipse Theatre, on 24 May, 2019 at the national symposium 'Whose Heritage? A (Multi) Cultural Perspective' that took place in Newcastle Upon Tyne, England, which inspired many of the chapters in this book.

'Good afternoon. It is a real honour to be here in the shadow of Stuart Hall.' That's a line from *salt.* by Selina Thompson [2017]. And it's a production I actually just directed a new performer in and opened at the Royal Court in London. I'll get back to that later.

A bit of housekeeping. I'm old school. I am politically Black. Sorry. But when I say Black, and I will do it all the way through this, Eclipse is clear that we are being inclusive of those who are marginalised for their race or ethnicity. I believe in solidarity with all my heart, so I think we're stronger together. I'm not asking you to define. You define how you want to. If you tell me 'Oh this', I'm going to reflect that back to you. That's how I roll. Okay.

I first read 'Whose Heritage?' [Hall, 1999] after reading 'Whose Theatre?' [Young, 2006] in 2006. That was a report written by Lola Young, and it represents the findings of the Sustained Theatre Consultation, which took place in November 2005 and looked at the future infrastructure and development needs of the Black and minority ethnic theatre sector. It makes a number of recommendations to ensure the further development and long-term success of Black and minority ethnic theatre. The recommendations are based upon the following areas: buildings for the future, leadership, international critical dialogues, and historical archives. Any of that sound familiar? I tell you what, I can pretty much guarantee that very, very few of the current cultural leaders of the major institutions would have ever read either of those documents. So, I'll tell you the more important things in life. I have nine kids [laughter]. All of them are my nieces and nephews [laughter]. What? They're my kids. They're aged twenty-two down to three years old. And one of my aunty duties is to try and give those kids a rich cultural heritage. What they choose to do with it later is entirely up to them. But while they're little they don't have any choice and I'm going to give them some. I think these things start with where you live. And most of them live in London. And so generally what I do is a

London walk. When they get to about four, that's when they get their first little London walk. That's generally the age I start. It has cost me a fortune, actually, because the walk is free, but dinner – these kids have expensive tastes. My fault. On the walks I do encourage them to ask questions. Here's a really typical conversation I'll have with all my kids:

- *What's that building Aunty Dawnie?*
- *Oh, that's Tate Modern.*
- *Is that ours?*
- *Yes indeed. It very most definitely is yours.*
- *Can we go in there?*
- *Yeah. Come on. Let's go.*

And so on. I didn't have this as a kid. My folks were working hard. Their hard work gave me the privilege of London walks. So, I came into the arts much later in life. Mostly because I was pissed off. Frustrated. Actually, really, really angry is the truth. I was angry about injustice. I was angry about inequality. I was angry about the complete lack of fairness I was experiencing all around me all over my life, from school up. So I found myself in the arts. I realised the irony. But, becoming a director and then becoming an artist, I discovered the most useful thing I've ever found to do with my anger, with my frustration. I can make work and have a conversation that way. And sometimes the audience leave thinking about the world that little bit differently.

I understand institutions. I was trained in institutions. Royal Court Theatre, National Theatre, Young Vic. I even ran a department at the National. I ran The National Theatre studio for maternity cover. That gave me a year at The National in the big chair. *War Horse* (Stafford, 2007), just so you know, in my tenure, was a stick and a box and a load of actors running around the room galloping [laughter]. And look what happened after that. But there was a thing that happened in the institution that I suddenly became aware of. I was aware of the fact that I wasn't a director. I was aware that I was a Black director. Which actually I don't have a problem with. So if I'm going to be a Black director, I'm going to do it on my terms. I'm going to be the baddest Black director you've ever seen. So I started a company. And that company is Eclipse.

Somebody mentioned something about initiatives earlier. I hate initiatives. I think they're a waste of space. Eclipse *was* an initiative. It was an Arts Council initiative. A bit of a toy amongst a bunch of theatres bouncing it around from one place to the next, and, when I arrived as artistic director, I had no intention of running an initiative because they don't do anything. They run for a few years, everybody gets bored and they peter out. There's no planning. There's no real reason for the thing to happen other than to appear to be doing something as opposed to really doing something. I won't run initiatives. So I took the initiative and I made it a company. Fund it or don't fund it, but it's a company. And I went and registered it. I got it all sorted. Eclipse was constituted in 2010 and we unashamedly forefront the Black British experience. We tour, we move the work around the country. I don't think anybody

tours quite as much. No Black organisation tours quite as much on the middle scale as Eclipse does. We are northern based. I set up Eclipse in Sheffield. We are the city of steel. The idea is that we focus our attention on the population that is double marginalised in the regions.

I started my company with a basic principle: Eclipse Theatre Company is all about audiences. If you have public or state funding, why are your audiences so exclusive? See? I told you I was pissed off about something, and that was the thing I was most angry with. So when I started my company, I wanted to take this on, reverse it, disrupt it, mash it up, whatever way you want to put it. That's what I was going to do. So Eclipse is all about audiences. That's the first thing. And guided by some of the ideas discussed in 'Whose Heritage?', I set about it. So the first thing is if you want to change the audience you have to change the work. In 'Whose Heritage?' Professor Stuart Hall says it follows – we heard this this morning, didn't we? It was like, 'Ugh'. Well I'm still going to say it – it follows that those who cannot see themselves reflected in its mirror cannot properly belong. In theatre, Blackness or Black culture is only expressed in terms of other or otherness. Or you get this really limited narrative strand that goes you were a slave, this dude called Wilberforce saved your ass, you disappeared off the face of the country, you don't exist anymore. Then you came back on a boat called Windrush [laughter] and now all your grandchildren are gangsters [laughter]. That's the narrative. And it's kind of funny, but it's really not.

Theatre is attempting to address this narrow view with cross casting, but, to put it plainly, people lose it when Black actors are cast in a costume drama, don't they? If you look below the line in *The Guardian*, you read that stuff. They all have a problem with it. My favourite was Angel Coulby when she was cast as Guinevere [in the BBC television series *Merlin*]. It was decried as historically inaccurate. Well, bearing in mind this is a world where the essential character talks to a magic dragon [laughter]. And then there's the other approach, which is the reimagining of basically Western cultural classical theatre or, as I very, very affectionately call it, Black Shakespeare. But all of this is a sticking plaster. It's hollow and it's a cynical way of staying the same. The imagined past, the glory days of old, must be maintained. This is what needs to be disrupted.

The way forward is new work from Black artists speaking for ourselves, and I thought, well, I can make some work, work that can exist to make a permanent change. So I launched Revolution Mix. Revolution Mix is a movement that's spearheading the largest ever national delivery of new Black British productions in theatre, film and radio. The key thing about this is that it is a jumping off point of five hundred plus years of Black British history. It's a movement. We work in movements because everything I try and design works in movements so that it has a built-in legacy. And you'll see what that is shortly. It's built to continue beyond the original tranche of work. It's not meant to be like a short-term thing. So, sixteen Black writers from outside London – mostly from outside London, not all of them, got to include London, it's just one of the five regions. Six middle-scale, one small-scale theatre, pieces of theatre. Do you know the difference between middle scale and small scale is small spaces, bigger spaces, I hope. It doesn't always work that way with Black

work. Radio. It's about being inclusive, and my father in his later years lost his sight and I was like, well, where's his work – film. Because when I was originally touring we only had enough money to tour once a year, then all these audiences I generated, I knew they were going online to find themselves, so I started making film to develop a digital platform.

So the writers all gathered in Sheffield and we researched these five hundred plus years of history. And this is an interesting thing when you start looking at that history, when you start looking at the heritage this way. The further back you go, the more outside London you are, actually, which I think is really fascinating. And there was a big cluster of stories in Yorkshire where we're based, which I thought was really interesting. So the first piece we made was a Yorkshire piece. That and the fact that we had some funding from Yorkshire Heritage Lottery Fund. There was a Black men's walking group in Sheffield. It's a real group, they're really beautiful, they go walking because the Peak District is twenty minutes up the road. And they created a space for themselves to go and do something that traditionally Black people apparently don't do. This simply isn't true. And I loved the idea of this walking group, and when I got to Sheffield they'd been going for about ten years. So they were pretty open, so anyone could go with them as long as you can get up early on a Saturday morning and go on these walks. And I was on one of these walks, I was walking up a steep incline. I am not fit. So I was looking at my feet hoping I'd get to the top, and I was panting quite hard. And I said to one of them, and one of them was being really generous as well and just talking and just talking and telling me things as I was walking up the hill, and I said, what is this road, it's really straight, and he said it's the Roman Road. And in that instant my brain saw giant sandals next to my feet. The feet I think I saw were Septimius Severus's. I know it's an arty thing to say, but that's what happened. And from that came the idea of *Black Men Walking* [Testament, 2018]. I invited a group of artists to come and work with me to create this idea and one of those artists was Testament, a Black artist based in Leeds whose work I had seen for one night only in the library in Leeds. I invited him to come along and be part of this journey.

The story of *Black Men Walking* is about a walking group that go out on an unusual Saturday when they shouldn't have gone. And they knew they shouldn't have gone. Three of the men go walking. They're going because they need the walk and they're troubled when they travel. And as they walk they meet a young woman, a young working-class Black girl who's randomly out there. She's also troubled, and what begins is a sort of intergenerational, an all-Black intergenerational conversation about heritage and belonging. While they walk, the oldest member of the group is having, we think, visions. We're not sure. But in his visions the histories come, and the histories are Septimius Severus, the Roman emperor, peers, the ivory bangle lady from York, whom some of you may know, from 4 AD, John Moore, Freeman of York, and so on. And the histories come in the form of music with a style that is a fusion of Hip Hop and Gregorian Chanting. Yeah [laughter]. Who'd have thought.

There were many interesting moments making this work. When I was working with the designer Simon Kelly, we talked a lot about heritage. We talked about belonging and the ownership of the land, and about what validates you, your existence in history, this idea of curating and museums. And this idea that you all talked about – what is curious in the British usage of the word heritage is the emphasis given on preservation and conservation to keep what already exists as opposed to the production and circulation of new work in different media. But we're also really interested in this idea that you don't exist in history unless there's something that's found with you. So the ivory bangle lady, we knew who she was and had a sense of it, not just because of the deconstruction of her bones, but she had little stuff with her that suggested she was minted. So we had a pretty good sense she was a princess, and she has a little purse with money in it. She was rich. And so on and so forth. So as part of the design we created a museum glass cabinet piece that just sat outside the show, and we didn't tell anybody about it, we didn't signpost it or anything, it just was there. And most people didn't notice it on the way in. They quite often just put their drinks on it, actually, as they were going into the show, which we just thought was really funny. But of course, when they came out, having seen the show, they suddenly noticed the significance of this piece, and in the piece were artefacts from the characters in the show as if it was a hundred years ahead. And then suddenly her earrings, his walking stick, all beautifully aged exactly the same as they were on stage, but aged as if it had been dug into the ground, existed as a piece of work outside of the theatre. It had these little queues of people going, 'Oh my God, I need to see what that is, that's so and so, that's his passbook', and so on and so forth, 'that's his lanyard'. We are here. We do matter. We do belong. That was the message of that piece.

There are a number of barriers to creating this kind of work and putting on this kind of work, touring this kind of work. There are any number of barriers, and Revolution Mix was really carefully designed to try and overcome those barriers, those ideas that Black work is a risk, that it's a financial risk, that there's no audience for this work and that – I can barely make myself say it – the quality might not be there. So I thought I'd share some of the results. There was a fourteen-week tour across thirteen venues. There were eighty-four performances, seventy-two of which were sold out. Eighty-five per cent occupancy versus a national average of fifty-nine per cent. Twenty-one per cent self-identified as – it's not my favourite phrase – BAME versus a national average of four per cent for a tour of this type. Fifty-eight per cent of the audience booked more than two months in advance. This is the audience that apparently only books at the last minute. Twenty-seven per cent of the audience were new to those venues. Forty per cent of the audience had travelled for more than an hour to get to the show. And there were five-star and four-star reviews. So there's no problems with quality. There's no problems with audience. And there's no financial risk. We created a document that we share online, a publication called *The 'R' Word*, which is basically a twenty-eight-page report condensed down to six plates.

People tell you that certain types of culture don't exist or can't be part of the heritage, can't be part of the culture, it's simply not true. And you can draw your own conclusions as to why I call it *The 'R' Word*. Revolution Mix so far has produced *Black Men Walking*, it's produced a radio drama, an afternoon play – *The Last Flag*. It's produced a middle-scale tour that came here to Newcastle – in fact, *Black Men Walking* came to Newcastle as well – called *Princess and the Hustler* [Odimba, 2019]. And there was a film called *Samuel's Trousers* [Chillery, 2020]. *Princess and the Hustler* is really important because it's another history, a hidden history. It's about the Bristol Bus Boycott, which is a Black civil rights story. When people think about Black civil rights they tend to think something happened over there, because of course there was no need for civil rights in the UK. It was really cool here [laughter]. But there was, there was a seminal piece of civil rights that happened in Bristol and it changed the law. It led to the first Race Relations Act. So it's an important story because it changed the British landscape. *Samuel's Trousers* is based on an incident that happened in the life of a Black actor based in Sheffield in the 1860s.

The funding for Revolution Mix was awarded in 2014. It was three years' funding so it's done. But actually we developed the work and the work continues to be produced. In addition, there's now funding to develop a new piece of work every year, so the legacy work is in place and Revolution Mix goes on. The next production will start touring from January next year. It's called *The Gift* [Okoh, 2020]. It starts in 1860s Brighton, then it jumps to contemporary Britain and the last scene is with Queen Victoria. Two women. That's all I'm saying. It's a comedy.

The next bit that I think is really important is the audience development programme that we have alongside the work. The audience development is a key part of us engaging with our audiences. We used to have an audience development programme where somebody, actually me, usually, in between, went around the country and met people and created events, etc., and it occurred to me that, actually, in amongst those audiences we'd meet artists, and in amongst those we'd meet people who were already galvanising and creating community and organising people to go and share in cultural events. We engaged those people, one in each city, and gave them a job. Because most of those people have to do that for free. There's an assumption it's a free thing that people will do. And we actually pay those people a fee and we galvanised them and brought them all to Sheffield and trained them in particular skills and now they all work as part of the workforce, as audience development for Revolution Mix. They created their own events. It's their heritage. They create their events in their city and we fund that.

There's also been a trajectory, with the audience having gone from inspiring the work in *Black Men Walking* to being in the work in *Princess and the Hustler*. *Princess and the Hustler* had a community chorus attached so people could actually take part in the show, play protestors and play beauty queens at the end. The journey with the work and engagement of the stories continues to grow for those audiences.

The last thing I want to talk about is Slate: Black. Arts. World. We have been creating events across the country, as I say, these cultured ambassador events, and at these events were artists, marginalised artists across the North, who had no engagement with the institutions, had no real resources but yet were making incredible work in one-off moments, in one place, one night only, maybe hiring a space, effectively in the underground. But the work was good. And I don't know where they got my number but they did, so they started ringing me and asking for help and I didn't have anything to help until a source of funding came about. That report that I talked about at the beginning had resulted in a sum of money being given to a theatre company many years ago and, for whatever reason, that money was taken back. So that fund sat there for many years with the Arts Council not daring to do anything with it other than keep it for Black artists, because people were watching what they were doing with that money. That money became available as the Sustained Theatre fund a few years ago and there was an invitation for companies to start consortia, to create a consortium and apply for funding. Eclipse applied for funding and we got the money, which led to us creating Slate: Black. Arts. World. It's the engagement of six Black arts professionals based all over the North. We focused on the North because we're aware that this area is the biggest geography with the least amount of funding. So if you think about the pecking order, the people at the most marginalised were Black artists. Black independent artists. And it's in the independent sector where the real revolution is happening. What's interesting about the work is that it's entirely a cross art form. The Black arts sector doesn't necessarily create work that conforms to conventional notions of theatre, and that work tends to push the boundaries of form. One such artist is Selina Thompson, who was at university in Sheffield and then lived in Leeds for many, many years. I actually saw Selina's work in the Edinburgh Festival in 2014 and that was that, and then I arranged to meet her for a conversation in November that year. The conversation we had was at Goldsmiths, which is my alma mater, and the occasion was the naming of the Professor Stuart Hall building, which was quite a beautiful day. The keynote was delivered by Angela Davis. So in the shadow of Stuart Hall we discussed heritage and the arts. I was thinking about Revolution Mix, Selina was thinking about the transatlantic slave route triangle and the UK's place in it. That work went on to become *salt.*, and I have had the huge privilege of working over the last three years on that piece in various iterations. Two artists, two generations, both inspired by the words and provocations of Professor Hall. Thank you.

Q&A

On audience development

It always matters to me who does it. And that's the difference. The conversation that people might have with people in my organisation in a safe space and the conversation they may have with an institution or building are very

different conversations, I would argue. So it matters who goes out and does the audience development. It matters who's developing the artists. It matters who the dramaturg is. It matters who the director is. It matters. It matters. It matters.

The audience development we do comes from the Black and Asian touring companies from the 70s, the 80s, the 90s. I don't pretend I'm doing something different. I've recalibrated it and I've organised it in a different way and exploded it and made it bigger, but where I learnt it, where I looked was I went to see the people, the pioneers, how did they do it? That's where I started. That's why it works.

On self-care

We were taught that, for the best reasons in the world, you worked twice as hard and all those things. But actually it's damaging, and so we shouldn't do that. This next generation, the contemporaries of Selina Thompson, they embed [self-care in their practice]. Working with Selina and making *salt.*, I learnt a lot. One of the things I was learning is how to put care and respite into a production and for the audience that are viewing it because we're not really in the business of triggering people with traumatic things. You still have to talk about those things but you have to think about how you share that work. And that generation is where I'm hanging because they know how to do it.

On representing Black experiences

The thing that's really interesting about the journey of Revolution Mix and Slate is about who gets to deliver. When we started Revolution Mix we gathered sixteen writers in a room and something extraordinary happens in that room because it's safe. We're not having to explain ourselves, we can just be, we can talk to the work. They're all making their own pieces of work, but the space was such that you could have that conversation freely. I've been having the same conversations in publishing, I've been having the same conversation in journalism, I've been having the same conversation and thinking about ways to influence those things through a programme like Slate. It's only going to change when the people that are part of the delivery change. That's a battle that we're all fighting.

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9 The Black British presence on television in Barrie Keeffe's *Play for Today* (BBC1) dramas and beyond

Tom May

This chapter offers a historical, cultural analysis drawing on Stuart Hall's argument in 'Whose Heritage?' that those who cannot see themselves reflected in the mirror of 'National Heritage' cannot properly belong. In the canon of 1980s television, the period dramas *Brideshead Revisited* (1981) and *The Jewel in the Crown* (*TJITC*) (1984) are, to paraphrase Laurajane Smith, the usual suspects: a selected, naturalised 'legitimate national heritage' that smooths over internal national conflicts (2006, p.11, 126). In this dominant British cultural mode of preservation and conservation, the nation is continually presented as what Hall termed 'a closed, embattled, self-sufficient, defensive, "tight little island"' (Hall, 1999, p. 10). Conversely, *Play for Today* (*PfT*), the BBC's flagship single-play strand of that era that dramatised topical social issues, provided to some extent the sort of new work Hall claimed was ignored. This chapter analyses the more critical, if compromised, representations of race, class and national identity in Barrie Keeffe's neglected *PfT*s 'Waterloo Sunset' (1979) and 'King' (1984), which attempted to reimagine Britishness in 'a more profoundly inclusive manner' (Hall, 1999, p. 10). These were foundational works prefacing the recent resurgence in Black-produced television dramas.

Institutions that engage with 'heritage', broadly defined, select and exhibit past artefacts, but how they do so can variously include or exclude the range of people in their polities (Simon and Ashley, 2010, p. 247). *Which* cultural products or practices are exhibited, *how* they are presented and their level of interactivity can influence whether heritage institutions can enable diverse groups to conduct constructive dialogue in public (Simon and Ashley, 2010, p. 247). The televisual archive is a rich source of this representational heritage, the stories of the past, but access to it is controlled. Streaming services offer limited releases and regularly alter access to the televisual archive: in the same month, for example, BBCiPlayer, BritBox and Netflix removed the comedy series *Little Britain* (BBC, 2003–07) due to its offensive portrayal of Black characters, including the use of blackface.

Organisations such as the BBC have a mandate to appeal widely, part of which involves bringing varied audiences together to enjoy and reflect on material from British screen archives. The BBC, as a BBC Teach (2021) press release indicates, is widening access by granting educational establishments access to its Digitised Broadcast Archive. In a Britain currently experiencing severe discord and division, such education could contribute to a greater understanding of our televisual past alongside inter-generational dialogue. The *PfT* strand, whose representational strengths and limitations are discussed below, could be shown and interrogated in schools alongside an analysis of problematic 1970s sitcoms and seminal, Black-led dramas from 2020 to explore our television's, and nation's, complex historical evolution.

Recent TV dramas such as Steve McQueen's *Small Axe* (BBC1, 2020) and Michaela Coel's *I May Destroy You* (BBC1, 2020) mark a resurgence in Black-led cultural production that expands upon the topical social realism prevalent in British TV drama from the 1960s to the 1980s and Black-led predecessors such as Michael Abbensetts's *Empire Road* (BBC2, 1978–79) and Trix Worrell's *Desmond's* (Channel 4, 1989–94). Writer-director McQueen recalls how, when growing up, he tuned in regularly to the 'rich [...] interesting' dramas *PfT* offered on Thursday nights (Cripps, 2009, p. 2; Sepinwall, 2020). Furthermore, McQueen's use of 16mm film for the final *Small Axe* drama 'Education' was a conscious aesthetic decision to emulate his memory of how *PfT*'s filmed dramas, with their raw, grainy look, had made him feel close to the characters and the topical events they were embroiled in (Hunt, 2020; Sepinwall, 2020). *PfT* can be seen as part of a televisual heritage that unsettles the myth of a conservative past. The potential exists to use the televisual archive to learn from the successes and failures of TV drama representations over time, and thus support inclusive and complex productions today.

Representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people in the UK media, film and television

In the history of how Black people have been represented within the media, film and television, there has been a systematic, unspoken practice whereby – comparably to literature – films or TV dramas have been tailored to the white viewer's perspective or gaze (Morrison, 2013). Black writers or directors have invariably had to conform to appealing to the white gaze in order to progress within the industry. Media constructions of Black individuals and communities in the UK post-Windrush tended to elide or denigrate their presence and experience. Hall et al. (1978, p. 322) note conservative media outlets' misrepresentations of a real crisis of class struggle through their cynical use of racialised images of Black criminals to divide and conquer, exploiting white working-class readers' sense of their 'experienced reality'. By 1978, the othering of Black people as one of several groups constituting the 'Enemy Within' had become normalised in the UK (Hall, 2017, pp. 150–153). Gilroy

(1982) and Sivanandan (1983; 1985) detail extensive police-community conflict from 1970–83 in Leeds, Bradford, Birmingham and London, where the increasingly authoritarian Metropolitan Police targeted and criminalised Black communities. Within their landmark analysis of the media-abetted construction of a ‘mugging crisis’, Hall et al. (1978, p. 50) noted senior police officers’ call in *The Times* for a return to the ‘good old days’ of long sentences and harsher prison conditions.

In ‘Whose Heritage?’, Hall (1999, p. 5) quoted David Scott on how a ‘tradition is never neutral’. Nor was the widespread critical adoration for lucratively exported British television dramas such as Granada’s *Brideshead Revisited* and *TJITC*. Set in the ‘good old days’ of the distant past, these literary adaptations reflect Patrick Wright’s (2009) insight that heritage provides an alternative to the present. Like the Merchant-Ivory films, which Andrew Higson (2014, p. 125) sees as expressing a ‘wistful nostalgia’, they fail to engage critically or analytically with contemporary modernity. The ‘conservative nostalgic gaze’ that Higson (2014, p. 124) perceives as encouraged by the Merchant-Ivory films is akin to the uninterrupted white gaze that viewers are urged to adopt towards *TJITC* (Malik, 2002). While this is complicated by India-born Ismail Merchant’s ethnicity, Mary Katherine Hall argues that Merchant-Ivory’s film adaptation of *Howards End* (1992) takes a hierarchical, conservative class position in how it ‘reifies and sacralises’ high culture (2003, p. 225). For Sarita Malik, nostalgia is pervasive on British television, with ‘Black presence accredited with “dividing Britishness”’, while *TJITC* represents ‘extreme nostalgia’ and subtly rearticulates colonialist discourses (2002, pp. 145, 181).

This privileging of the white gaze extends to the number and quality of roles available to Black actors. Throughout 1984, Preethi Manuel monitored 670 dramas broadcast on British television, finding that only 2.3 per cent of the 8,733 actors appearing were Black actors, cast in ‘stereotypical roles’ or associated with violence and totally lacking in ‘wholesome’ or ‘heroic qualities’ (1986, pp. 10–11, 54–55). Sarita Malik refers to how many Black characters are nurses, chauffeurs, waiters, and hospital orderlies – actors cast, as Carmen Munroe claims, to ‘dress the set’ (Malik, 2002, p. 140). Malik recounts how writer and filmmaker Alrick Riley abandoned his TV acting career as he was ‘always playing muggers and thieves’, charging 1980s and 1990s soap operas with the tokenistic casting of Black actors in insubstantial parts. These roles rarely showed them at home so as not to ‘offend’ audiences with ‘ethnic distinctiveness’ (Malik, 2002, pp. 140, 148). As noted below, writer Barrie Keeffe dramatised economic inequalities, the policing crisis and experiences of the Windrush generation and their children. Keeffe progressed from including Black actors as foils to a white working-class star to giving them greater primacy, while representing working-class solidarity and conviviality across both ‘Waterloo Sunset’ and ‘King’.

Stuart Hall played a central interventional role in changing the media climate. Hall had 20 years of experience as a writer, presenter and commentator

on BBC radio and television; his first BBC appearance was as a presenter of *British Caribbean Writers* (21 April 1958). Hall also contributed to the Campaign Against Racism in the Media's work on the BBC's Open Door access strand to critique racism in television, presenting 'It Ain't Half Racist, Mum' in 1979. Throughout the 1980s, BBC Drama made gradual, if inconsistent, progress; as this chapter will show, the producer Michael Wearing enabled regional and working-class voices and went on to produce BBC dramas involving Black and Asian lead actors, writers and directors.

Within this context, this chapter will analyse whether two *PfT*s by Barrie Keeffe perpetrated or challenged stereotypical representations of Black characters in this period. This draws upon Stuart Hall's account of Donald Bogle's classification of prevalent stereotypical Black roles in American films, including the 'Uncle Tom', who are 'enslaved and insulted' but who 'remain hearty, stoic, generous, selfless and oh-so-kind' (2013, p. 239). Keeffe's plays, informed by a tradition of progressive realism, are exemplars of the process Hall explains whereby cultural texts attempt to 'trans-code': subversively reconfigure negative stereotypes by reappropriating them for new meanings (e.g., 'Black is beautiful') (Hall, 2013, p. 259).

***Play for Today* and Barrie Keeffe**

Play for Today (1970–84) was a long-running strand which began as *The Wednesday Play* (1964–70). Around 23 one-off dramas were broadcast annually, in a regular BBC1 primetime slot directly following the news, which emphasised its contemporaneity. BBC managers and critics considered it the most prestigious dramatic vehicle for exploring difficult social issues and experimenting with form.

PfT gave playwrights and actors from the regions and nations of the UK space to articulate their voices and outlooks. Viewing figures varied greatly and, while it didn't gain the audience loyalty of a soap opera or costume drama, the strand averaged 5.6 million viewers (May, 2022). Some episodes gained over 9 million viewers; venerated examples such as Jeremy Sandford's 'Cathy Come Home' (1966), widely credited with increasing consciousness over homelessness, ensured it became a shorthand for 'topical, populist and hard-hitting scheduling' that provided talking points for many millions of British viewers (Malik, 2002, p. 137). Some researchers have found that these plays influenced public opinion and government policy to some extent (see Malik, 2002; Toon, 2014; Ransley, 2017). Lenny Henry laments the passing of *PfT* and similar strands that offered a primetime platform for new writing when he was growing up: 'Whenever an ethnic minority writer was showcased ... I remember that everyone in the family was dragged in front of the television because this was important – this was one of our stories' (2014a, p. 32).

PfT was known for its social realism, and Barrie Keeffe is one of the more neglected in academic literature of the strand's many openly left-wing

playwrights. Keffe was born in London into a working-class background with Irish roots (Coveney, 2019; Anon, 2019). He was a journalist at the Stratford Express from 1964–75 and was inspired to write plays after seeing Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop at Stratford. Keffe described seeing Robin Chapman and Richard Kane’s *High Street, China* in 1963, set in working-class Northampton, as being ‘the first time I realised the theatre could articulate East End life’ (Lahr, 1981, p. 106). Joan Littlewood had also been a patron of the Negro Theatre Workshop, which Black actors Edric and Pearl Connor had founded in 1961 (Bourne, 1998). Keffe worked extensively across mediums, typically with London settings and themes such as disaffected youth, delinquency, alienation, violence and popular culture. Following his first play for ITV in 1972, Keffe wrote four *PfTs*, including the controversial comprehensive school-set ‘Gotcha’ (1977) and the crime drama ‘Nipper’ (1977), while his screenplay for the feature-film *The Long Good Friday* (1981) depicted emergent Thatcherite individualism.

Keffe’s *PfTs* were the sort of challenging present-set dramas about social realities meant to serve a domestic audience that had been neglected (Hall, 1999, p. 3). *PfT* emerged from the vogue for social realism on stage via the Royal Court, at the cinema through the British New Wave, nurtured on television by Sydney Newman’s vision for *Armchair Theatre* (ITV, 1956–74) and informed by American TV plays such as Paddy Chayefsky’s *Marty* (NBC, 1953). As David Rolinson (2011) argues, *Armchair Theatre*, *The Wednesday Play* and later *PfT* provided mass audiences with a more democratic representation of working-class experiences to supplant the previously hegemonic middle-class drawing-room dramas.

Keffe’s ‘Waterloo Sunset’ (1979) and ‘King’ (1984) are evolving depictions of an increasingly diverse contemporary Britain, informed by his trenchant insights into social class that build on Joan Littlewood and Sydney Newman’s traditions. These *PfTs* were chronologically either side of Keffe’s one-act chamber play *Sus*, a polemical dramatisation of the everyday brutality of police stop-and-search first staged at the Soho Poly in June 1979, and which contributed to the repeal of the ‘Sus’ law (Coveney, 2019). *Sus* was one of several Keffe plays that inspired Black British playwright Roy Williams, who saw Keffe as ‘writing about me and my mates at school ... He captured how we were feeling – our anger. Not just our anger, but the humour, the life, the energy’ (Hattenstone, 2010). By 1978, Keffe had established a mainstream profile in the television industry, having had four well-received television scripts made and transmitted by ITV and three by the BBC. Thus, it was unsurprising that producer Richard Eyre commissioned Keffe, who he knew and whose work he admired, to write a new *PfT* (Eyre, 2020).

Producing ‘Waterloo Sunset’ and ‘King’

‘Waterloo Sunset’ concerns Grace Dwyer’s escape from a deadening old people’s home and how she gains renewed life through her experiences with a

Black family in Lambeth. The narrative of 'King' centres on the aftermath of train driver Mr King's retirement.

In 'Waterloo Sunset' we are introduced to Grace, played by actress and publican Queenie Watts, who has been consigned to an old people's home by her uncaring, self-made businessman son Thomas (Tony Caunter). He reneges on his promise to take Grace on her first holiday for a decade. Thus, she absconds from the home, taking a train to London to revisit Lambeth where she lived with her late husband, Alf, a Communist Party member involved in the 1930s Hunger Marches.

In 'King', which evolved from Keeffe's 1980 stage play *Black Lear* (Crucible, Sheffield), the title role is played by Guyanese-born British actor Thomas Baptiste. Keeffe loosely translates Shakespeare's *King Lear* to contemporary London, with Lear becoming Thomas E. King, a Jamaican settler who arrived on the Empire Windrush in June 1948. Keeffe's inspiration for 'King' was 'being in a post office queue and seeing a Jamaican man drawing his pension', which made him realise that 'the Windrush generation were reaching retirement' (Keeffe, 2017). His resultant script was described by Michael Wearing, the producer of 'King', as a 'very, very powerful piece of writing', grounding a 'loosely classical theme' within 'a sort of general social psychological reality' (Manuel, 1986, p. 43). Thomas E. King sweeps platforms and drives trains on London Underground's Central Line, with his depot located, significantly, in Stratford, East London (Keeffe, 1984). King is mourning the premature death of his wife, Malley, in 1973, which we see in flashback.

Wearing's commissioning and Keeffe's characterisation were relatively progressive. While, with 'Waterloo Sunset', Keeffe attempted to 'trans-code' negative representations, with 'King' he was to provide a more complex realism by writing three central roles for Black actors. Thomas Baptiste had been the first Black actor to appear in Granada's soap opera *Coronation Street*, in January 1963. There he played bus conductor Johnny Alexander, within what Bourne terms a 'believable working-class' couple who live in cramped conditions with two children (1998, p. 191). Keeffe provided actors Ella Wilder and Josette Simon with substantial roles in 'King': he gives the characters of Linda and Susan some of the perceptive 'oppositional Black gaze' discerned by Heneks (2020, p. 145). They were able to vividly enact conflicts and differences within the Black community.

While Keeffe's narrative dictated the ethnicity of the characters in 'King', Wilder and Simon were the *only* Black women performers in TV drama roles at that moment, compared to 489 white men and women, as Manuel's April 1984 survey of British television demonstrated (1986, p. 11). It is also telling that Baptiste felt his body of work was neglected, saying in 1991 of his *Coronation Street* role: 'What I feel sad about is when Granada celebrates the Street's birthdays, I am forgotten. I am not remembered in its history, in the books they publish, or in its celebrations, yet I was the first Black actor to appear in the programme. It's like I never existed, and that is a corruption of history' (Bourne, 1998, p. 192).

Reading 'Waterloo Sunset'

'Waterloo Sunset' was broadcast on Tuesday 23 January 1979 on BBC1 at 9.25pm. White protagonist Grace escapes from her nursing home and revisits her old local pub in Lambeth. She witnesses regulars – both Black and self-described British – arguing over North Sea Oil and a World Cup match. Barman Jimmy (Robbie Coltrane) repeatedly uses racist slurs against the Black clientele, a sentiment echoed by an elderly woman (Jeanne Doree), who claims Lambeth is the 'dustbin of the world' and has changed 'for the worst' due to Black immigration. Keeffe conveys that 'real authentic material concerns' underlie the racism, implying that North Sea Oil revenues are not being directed to benefit the working class (Hall, 2017, p. 157).

Next, Jeff (Larrington Walker) is slashed with a knife by white youths in an underpass, a scene that presents the grim social results of the Powellite populist racism propagated by the British media. Director Richard Eyre avoids aestheticising the attack: no musical underscoring, excessive editing or detailed lingering on the violent act. Grace patches Jeff up in his Lambeth tower-block flat, where he lives with his sister Marie-Louise (Floella Benjamin) and her two children. Over a shared cannabis spliff, Grace and Jeff bond in laughter. In the following days, Grace babysits and takes the children on an outing.

At a party celebrating Jeff's birthday, Grace tries, as she explains in voice-over, to 'show what side' she's on by naively blacking up her face to express her sincere identification with the Black British. Marie-Louise and Jeff affirm, calmly, that they love Grace for who she is, and Jeff politely asks her to wipe it off her face. Marie-Louise gets Grace a drink and calls for some music, as 'we're here for a party!' A reggae song plays and dancing recommences. The party is abruptly raided by the police; the belligerent sergeant (Alan Ford) claims the house is being used for 'the purposes of prostitution'. Marie-Louise's children are to be taken into care for the night, and the WPC (Linda Beckett) scornfully dismisses Grace's protests: '*Home in a brothel!?*'. Following the police raid, Grace remains in Jeff and Marie-Louise's tower-block flat, where she feels at home. Finally, her son Thomas apologises to Grace and drives her to live with him. Out of the car window we see racist National Front graffiti on a wall: 'NF BLACKS OUT'. Grace recalls Jeff's account of the colours of Rastafarianism and her association of the colour black with her late husband's anti-fascism in the 1930s. She finishes: 'How come we're supposed to be so different? We share the same dream. Dream of happiness.' This is followed with a freeze-frame of Grace's uncertain face as the credits roll accompanied by Bob Marley and the Wailers' song 'Crisis' (1978).

The Black British community tends to be coded as illicit and counter-cultural, but in 'Waterloo Sunset' Grace clearly prefers Jeff and Marie-Louise's working-class lifestyle: the interaction revitalises her. Black British culture is demystified as Jeff articulates his Rastafarian culture to Grace and they bond in shared talking, listening and laughing, embodying Paul Gilroy's 'chaotic pleasures of the convivial postcolonial urban world' (2005, p. 151).

'Waterloo Sunset' is a moving drama committed to addressing issues of racism, but it still uses common 'othering' tropes associating Black British culture with drug-taking and prostitution (Hall, 1999, p. 9). Floella Benjamin complained in the media about how, in all three of her TV roles in 1979, she was cast as a prostitute, including as Marie-Louise: 'I've said to producers and directors why can't you give me straight parts? They reply, "It's not realistic my love. The public won't accept it"' (Bourne, 1998, p. 185). This familiar representation reflects how TV creatives' aspirations towards 'realism' led them to regurgitate public and media perceptions that Black people were disproportionately criminal (Schaffer, 2014). Perhaps responding to these weaknesses, Keeffe's next *PfT* gave Black characters complete centrality.

Reading 'King'

'King' was broadcast on Tuesday 3 April 1984 on BBC1 at 9.25 pm, during *PfT*'s last official series. 'King' opens with Baptiste's voice-over as Mr King reflects upon his retirement as a train driver. He embodies the mindset of the first-generation settlers, who kept a low profile amid 'muted optimism about the hope and dream of long-term Black and white assimilation' (Hall, 2017, p. 146–147). We are introduced to his daughters: first, Susan (Ella Wilder), an NHS nurse, then Linda (Josette Simon), fashionably attired in furs and a blue hat. Susan is signified as serious and caring, Linda as vivacious and materialistic.

King's family visit a posh French restaurant in London's West End. King gives a long, valedictory speech, boasting of his achievement and pride in his work and in his daughters. He then tells Linda and Susan – with Linda's boyfriend Stevie (Clarke Peters) present – that he is giving them the deeds to his house, its mortgage fully paid off. The Cordelia-like Susan is uneasy with his grandiose display of patriarchal beneficence, while, in her flattery of her dad, Linda resembles the manipulative Goneril and Regan in Shakespeare's tragedy.

King proposes a toast 'to England! The Mother Country!' However, Susan cannot assent: 'Hmm, *some mother...*! I'll drink a toast to *you*, dad, but I won't drink to *England*'. According to Keeffe's script, 'She sees England as her home, but a place in a present state of uncaring thrift and meanness which oppresses its poor and its sick' (Keeffe, 1984, p. A). They argue, King interpreting her concern regarding social inequality as 'Black Power talk'. These family fissures reflect the fault-lines running through Thatcher's nation. This initiates a rift with her father, while the duplicitous Linda gains the deeds to the house. Later, Linda refers pejoratively to her father as an 'Uncle Tom', using this descriptor to sharpen Susan's criticism of King's unquestioning, 'grateful' attitude to the England he idealises.

King's ostentatious toast causes Susan to brand her father a 'vain man', who has now assimilated into being an English patriarch, bestowing the gift of property upon his daughters, for which he demands their love. Later, in

a scene at the shunting yard of his old depot that echoes *King Lear*'s storm, he asserts desperately: 'I'M A MAN, I tell you!'. King's identity as a 'man' is newly uncertain; his foolish lack of understanding of his daughters' true natures resembles Lear. At the end, a partial but important reconciliation takes place between Thomas and Susan. Keeffe does not end his tragedy with a literal Shakespearean death but his script indicates that King is 'stripped of his illusions of Englishness and fatherhood' and preparing for his return to Jamaica (Keeffe, 1984, p. B).

If 'Waterloo Sunset' constitutes an idealised, trans-coded perspective on Black culture as 'Other', 'King' decentres race as an issue. The Kings are represented as part of Britain's and Thatcher's property-owning society. Rather than being stereotypes, King's daughters reflect different facets of Britain in 1984: Linda is a successful florist, while Susan is a dedicated NHS nurse. Both reflect a younger generation that is willing to challenge racism, unlike their father.

Its representation of Black Britain in television at the time is reflected in its casting and production. The top four billed actors in 'King' were 57 per cent of its total cast, all Black Caribbean, Black British and African-American actors, marking an improvement on 'Waterloo Sunset', where 38 per cent of the cast had been Black actors, including half of the top-billed actors. However, none of the key behind-the-camera roles of director, producer or writer were Black creative people, a situation still largely unrectified in the British film industry, as Clive Nwonka (2020) has documented.

Keeffe's writing demonstrates an evolution from an idealistic, anti-racist parable to a Shakespearean tragedy that foregrounds working-class Black British lives and a significant contribution to the national story of Britain from 1948 to 1984.

Reception

Television critics in the mainstream London press reacted to 'Waterloo Sunset' and 'King' in ways that demonstrated an aversion to the committed anti-racism of the former and subdued praise for the subtler representations of the latter. Following the broadcast of 'Waterloo Sunset', reviews by the critics were mixed and revealed their biases as white Londoners as to what they considered realistic or otherwise.

Conservative reviewers criticised the play as an unreal, excessively sentimental 'monstrosity' (North, 1979, p. 194) and as prone to 'Left-wing ... pieties' (Purser, 1979, p. 13). Grace, Jeff and Marie-Louise's shared working-class solidarity clearly affronted critics who endorsed the status quo of capitalist Britain, wherein ethnicity is used to divide and rule workers. More liberal voices praised its realism: the 'meticulous accuracy' of Floella Benjamin and Larrington Walker's performances and the 'vital' Watts providing 'the authentic voice of SE1' (Holt, 1979, p. 19) within an 'unabashed story about the sour realities of black life in Lambeth' (Kretzmer, 1979, p. 10). Five

senior BBC managers strongly commended it (BBC TWPR, 1979, p. 17–18). However, Head of Serials and former *PfT* producer Graeme McDonald thought it unfortunate that Black characters, although sympathetic, were once again portrayed as ‘involved with drugs and prostitution’ (BBC TWPR, 1979, p. 18). ‘Waterloo Sunset’ reached an audience of 7.5 million, with a 36.4 per cent viewing share (BBC Audience Research, 1979).

Critics received ‘King’ more positively, especially Thomas Baptiste’s performance. Peter Davalle (1984, p. 31) highlighted Baptiste’s ‘huge performance’ as the ‘fiercely British’ King, and Michael Church (1984, p. 15) his ‘splendid acting’. *The Observer*’s Julie Welch (1984, p. 24) celebrated Simon and Wilder’s ‘accomplished’ performances, though Ian Penman (1984) criticised Keeffe in essentialist terms for writing outside his own experience. In a critical stance suggesting complacency over race in Thatcher’s Britain, some critics applauded its avoidance of depictions of contemporary racism. BBC managers gave ‘King’ measured approval and it achieved an audience of 3.6 million, a viewing share of 20.3 percent (BBC TWPR, 1984; BARB, 1984). ‘King’ attained an audience Appreciation Index of 63 and ‘Waterloo Sunset’, 77; both figures exceeded the strand’s average. While its audience was less than half that for ‘Waterloo Sunset’, ‘King’ provided further evidence that dramas with Black-led casts could perform solidly in a primetime slot.

Echoing Malik’s claim about Black actors being absent from para-texts, Baptiste’s *PfT* lead appearance received less publicity compared with that of Watts; Watts was a well-known white actress and celebrity famous for working-class portrayals, while Baptiste was a Black character actor with no name recognition. Neither Baptiste, nor Simon, nor Wilder were interviewed. By 2020, Black creators Michaela Coel and Steve McQueen *were* extensively interviewed in para-texts about their TV dramas, which drew on their own experiences as well as the wider lives of Black British people.

Representational issues and new Black British stories

A pattern of negative connotations about Black people, whom television dramas marginalised and represented stereotypically, was described by Manuel (1986). ‘King’ is more polysemic than Manuel allows: it *fulfils* Manuel’s recommendations for more Black families and characters that constitute ‘plural and diverse representations’ (Manuel, 1986, pp. 59–60). Producer Wearing justified representations of Mr King as a train driver in ‘King’ as *realistic*, referring to London Transport’s recruitment of West Indian settlers in the late 1940s, and how this was crucial in stimulating audience identification with him early in the drama. Furthermore, Wearing claims that, while King *is*, initially, a ‘recognisable’ type, he was also presented as ‘a completely subtle individual human being’ (Manuel, 1986, p. 46). Keeffe successfully ‘trans-codes’ the King family by enabling them to display character growth and voice opinions. None of the characters are presented in stereotypical

ways: they function as complex British citizens of 1984. Furthermore, the Kings *live* – unlike Cordelia and Lear, Susan and Thomas King do not die.

‘King’, along with *Empire Road* and *Desmond’s*, laid some groundwork for recent Black British productions. Steve McQueen’s and Michaela Coel’s expansive television dramas for BBC1, *Small Axe* and *I May Destroy You*, respectively (both 2020), have transformed the landscape for Black creatives. McQueen narrates Black British personal and community experiences through five filmed dramas primarily set in London from 1968 to 1984, creating a space where Black British people are ‘playing their own history’ (Olusoga, 2020, p. 32). Roshi Naidoo (2021, p. 17) writes about the Black perspective and gaze of the series: ‘Each film was a testament to what happens to actual, real, living people when they encounter a world that refuses to see them’.

Cumulatively, *Small Axe* conveys its protagonists’ needs for an education in Black people’s history while expressing the paramount necessity for Black people to become community advocates who act to change history. In ‘Mangrove’, McQueen dramatises the key roles played by Darcus Howe (Malachi Kirby) and Altheia Jones-LeCointe (Letitia Wright) in winning justice for the Mangrove Nine, following the police harassment of a Black-owned café and community meeting space. In ‘Education’, Lydia (Josette Simon) and child psychologist Hazel (Naomi Ackie) campaign just as forcefully and efficaciously for Black children who are let down by ESN schools (where pupils were defined as ‘educationally subnormal’). As Lydia, Josette Simon swaps the toughness of her businesswoman in ‘King’ for the focused tenacity of an activist. Comparably to ‘Waterloo Sunset’, ‘Mangrove’ and ‘Alex Wheatle’ represent the police as primarily hostile and racist or mired in institutional racism, as in the story of Black PC Leroy Logan (John Boyega) in ‘Red, White and Blue’. With *Small Axe*’s eclectic reggae-led soundtrack and the remarkable ‘Lovers Rock’, McQueen offers a corrective to the predominant emphasis on Black people’s house parties being raided in dramas like ‘Waterloo Sunset’ by immersing us in the visceral pleasures enjoyed by Black teenagers at a party in West London in 1980 that is *not* raided by the police.

Michaela Coel’s contemporary-set *I May Destroy You* dramatises consensual and non-consensual sexual experiences with attentiveness to ethical complexity. Writer-director-actor Coel explains that the show was inspired by her experience of having her drink spiked on a night out and being sexually assaulted by a stranger in 2016, and her research involved talking to more people with similar experiences (Graham Norton Show, 2020). Deftly utilising unpredictable tonal shifts and television’s episodic, serial potential, Coel explores trauma, social media, environmentalism, transgender identity, loneliness, language and memory, alongside class hierarchies within the publishing industry, with seriousness and ebullient humour. For lead actor Paapa Essiedu, *I May Destroy You* is a meditation of Black twentysomething London life (Sunday Brunch, 2020). At its heart are the tumultuous, deep friendships between Arabella Essiedu (Michaela Coel), Terry Pratchard

(Weruche Opia), Kwame (Paapa Essiedu) and Ben (Stephen Wight), enacted within a dynamic and experimental dramatic form using sound design even more expansively than *Small Axe*. Coel's and McQueen's 2020 dramas are the new stories of Black Britain that fulfil the BBC's remit to include original, diverse voices.

Conclusion

Viewed today, it is clear that 'Waterloo Sunset' and 'King' contributed to clearing a path for the intense current debates around representation and structural change within television and the media. They confirm and challenge the picture that Lenny Henry presented of British television in his BAFTA Television Lecture (2014b), where he called for a 'fair and honest reflection of our society, not a fictionalised version of who we are'. These *PfTs* reflect Henry's claim that Black people's screen representation in the 1970s and 1980s was poorer *in comparison to* the UK's regions and nations (BAFTA Television Lecture, 2014b). However, they also highlight *PfT*'s incisive exploration of how class works in society, and they foreshadow architect David Adjaye's perception that race and class are inextricably linked in Britain (Henry and Ryder, 2021). They point to the continued need for public service broadcasters to provide ring-fenced money to widen Black people's representation on screen and behind the camera (BAFTA Television Lecture, 2014b). Current intense debates around representation and structural change can be traced back to the pathfinding work of Keeffe, Abbensetts and others.

The representation of Black Britons in 'Waterloo Sunset' and 'King' sets Keeffe apart from his contemporaries. While Keeffe's attempts to trans-code Black stereotypes sometimes reinforced them, his *PfTs* presented Black characters within nuanced Black familial and community contexts. He placed the 'heritage' of Shakespeare in dialogue with diverse contemporary Britain. In the more rounded 'King', race was not figured as a 'problem' or an 'issue'. Baptiste, Wilder and Simon rendered the Kings as individuals, as a family and as complexly engaging in the national political conversation, and he brought uncomfortable truths into the national British story. In 'Waterloo Sunset', Grace's identification with Black British culture exemplified Keeffe's vision of working-class openness, which was informed by Joan Littlewood and inspired Roy Williams. It depicted police racism within the national story in a manner educative for audiences, and which touched a nerve for naive critics. Within a primetime television drama time slot, Larrington Walker and Ella Wilder delivered utterances of exceptional symbolic power to criticise blackface and Thatcher's uncaring political economy.

Televisual history is a 'productive terrain for re-constituting the vitality of public life' (Simon and Ashley, 2010, p. 254) and, paraphrasing Stuart Hall, Keeffe 'un-settled the heritage' by challenging Black British representation in television. Instead of gathering dust in the BBC archives, 'Waterloo Sunset' and 'King' should be made widely available to inspire new work and provoke

discussion of British representational history among students and citizens. Keffe's portrayals of how race and class intersect should be part of Hall's collective social memory as vital terminals on the way towards Steve McQueen's and Michaela Coel's dynamic televisual interventions, and the future of fully representative television. Such work offers an alternative to this 'tight little island' of 'uncaring thrift and meanness', encouraging a generous, convivial archipelago.

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Dedicated to the memories of Thomas Baptiste (1929–2018) and Barrie Keffe (1945–2019).

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10 Narrative cannibals

Who speaks for whom? Heritage, documentary practice and the strategies of power

Tina Gharavi

As a filmmaker, I have been investigating how to bring to the public a political viewpoint that may be considered revealing, honest, and self-reflexive about the essence of storytelling and the stories that form who we are. In my work, I am concerned with the ethics of representation, power, and the veracity of the image in contemporary narrative. My practice is concerned with ‘unheard voices, untold stories’; in other words: who is allowed to speak? Who do the stories belong to? Who is the intended audience? What are the consequences of telling the stories of others? And when does storytelling become an insidious ‘narrative cannibalism’ (Gharavi, 2013, p. 1)?

In a post-colonial world, is it necessary for storytelling to evolve so that it reveals the power relationships between subject, author, and audience? I will consider the political landscape for contemporary stories: is there a dominant narrative hegemony that is guarded and must be maintained? Who are its gatekeepers? In considering Stuart Hall’s challenge to centre the voices of ethnographic subjects, this chapter highlights the ways in which documentary stories may best reflect concerns set out in his ‘Whose Heritage?’ keynote speech (1999), not only in relation to the contextual landscape and what is authentic and represented as ‘heritage’, but by analysing the documentary form and my own practice.

All of the above will be explored under three broad categories: context and theory, personal experience, and, in conclusion, a consolidation of my thoughts and experiences as presented in *The South Shields Declaration*. This is a five-point plan for filmmakers that takes inspiration from Werner Herzog’s *Minnesota Declaration* (1999) and may help to negate ‘narrative cannibals’ and steer filmmakers to create work without stealing the voices of others.

Context and theory

Stories and documentary

Stories are political; they shape who we are, who we say we are, and who we will be. They have a special power, spell-like, that can either keep us in chains or liberate us. As the author Ursula Le Guin reminds us: ‘There have been

great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories' (1979, p. 31).

Stories also have owners: without them, it would be near impossible to comprehend the experiences of someone foreign to us. Contemporary documentary filmmakers must consider fully the ethical issues of representation to avoid becoming 'story cannibals'. This is because, in the telling of other people's stories, we risk consuming their voices, rendering them mute, and making their narratives our own. Already established in fields such as post-colonialism, ethnography and anthropology is an awareness of this balance of power within the paradigms of storyteller-and-subject, subject-and-audience, and storyteller-and-audience.

Documentary is a story form and a form of heritage, a legacy of a past that signifies that certain stories are for our generation to tell or collect. But with regard to documentary truth, Stella Bruzzi tells us:

Although documentary as a cinematic form usually has an implicit claim of 'truthfulness', it is generally recognized that documentary can never be entirely 'realistic', in that it cannot represent real events in a manner that is indistinguishable from the events themselves.

(2000, p. 68)

Often the work exposes the storyteller and their subjective perspective as much as the story itself while exploring the complex power paradigms of storytelling. However, amid the politics of storytelling and narratives in a post-race society there is little exploration into the imbalance of power. As Ta-Nehisi Coates says:

America's struggle is to become not post-racial, but post-racist. Put differently, we should seek not a world where the black race and the white race live in harmony, but a world in which the terms *black* and *white* have no real political meaning.

(Coates, 2022)

How can we do this when stories are managed and owned by dominant groups?

In my doctoral research (2013), I examined the concept of 'story-thieves' or 'narrative cannibals', the 'suckers' who steal other people's causes as their own – often disempowering the subjects and misusing their power by colonizing a space which is not theirs. As a filmmaker, finding appropriate forms of exploration has been a challenge. Appropriating the dominant language can only repeat ingrained prejudices and uphold hierarchies and past ideologies. Experimentation, therefore, becomes a necessity if we are to achieve what Stuart Hall summarised as 'the local-in-the-global, the pioneering of a new, cosmopolitan, vernacular, post-national, global sensibility' (1999,

p. 13). However, the form chosen must also communicate to, not alienate, the viewer. This is the paradox of filmmaking on the margins. I am consumed by how to communicate in original tongues; to avoid the language of the dominant ideology without alienating an audience. After all, as the title of Audre Lorde's famous essay tells us, 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (Lorde, 2005)

Crisis of representation

Storytelling is essential: psychology tells us that narrative is an important tool in memory, construction of identity, and the ability to process the world. The story defines our relationship with past and present. As a result, stories can be used to re-imagine and conquer the past.

Euro-Canadian academic Paulette Regan, a representative of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, invokes storytelling to describe how settler Canadians have much to account for:

Settler violence against Indigenous peoples is woven into the fabric of Canadian history in an unbroken thread from past to present that we must now unravel, unsettling our comfortable assumptions about the past. At the same time, we must work as Indigenous allies to 'restory' the dominant culture version of history; that is, we must make decolonizing space for Indigenous history – counter-narratives of diplomacy, law, and peacemaking practices – as told by Indigenous peoples themselves.

(Cited in Corntassel and T'lakwadzi, 2009, p. 2)

Taiiaki Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, academics who both come from First Nation communities, elaborate:

There is a danger in allowing colonization to be the only story of Indigenous lives. It must be recognized that colonialism is a narrative in which the Settler's power is the fundamental reference and assumption, inherently limiting Indigenous freedom and imposing a view of the world that is but an outcome or perspective on that power.

(Corntassel and T'lakwadzi, 2009, p. 3)

Often, stories are all that a community or an individual has. We know they are political, that they create meaning and, when fragile, can be abused. Arendt tells us, 'Poetically speaking, [history's] beginning lies ... in the moment when Ulysses, at the court of Alcinous, the king of the Phaeacians, listened to the story of his own deeds and sufferings, to the story of his life, now a thing outside itself, an "object" for all to see and to hear. What had been sheer occurrence now became "history"' (1977, p. 45).

Whose truth? The big lie of documentary

Often in documentary, I use fiction – and slip between forms and genres – in an effort to bring to the fore that what is being watched is a constructed form; that documentary can rarely be objective truth; that documentary does not have a monopoly on truth; and that, in many ways, it is the most deceptive of media.

Issues of the veracity of the image have haunted the discipline since the start of photography and image-making. ‘All great fiction films tend towards documentary, just as all great documentaries tend toward fiction’, declares director Jean-Luc Godard (Henderson, 1974, p. 43). Or, as Wolf Koenig puts it, ‘Every cut is a lie. It’s never that way. Those two shots were never next to each other in time that way. But you’re telling a lie in order to tell the truth’ (Benzine, 2014). Documentary is no more reality than a portrait is its sitter, or a hologram its subject.

With the advent of editing, manipulating reality became a feature of the documentary form. Films that contained ‘enhancements’, such as *Nanook of the North* (1922) by Robert Flaherty, were troubling because they sought to make reality more real while presented to audiences as documentary. And questions about representation and the ethics of storytelling continue to the present. Regarding truth, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* offers: ‘The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, not the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original’ (1978, p. 21). Said argues that storytelling/narrative is a component of representation and manipulating reality: ‘From the beginning of Western speculation about the Orient, the one thing the orient could not do was to represent itself. Evidence of the Orient was credible only after it had passed through and been made firm by the refining fire of the Orientalist’s work’ (1978, p. 279).

In *Nanook of the North*, Flaherty chooses to ‘imagine’ a romanticized life of the Inuit, deciding what to leave out, what to include, and what to fabricate. Record numbers of audiences flocked to cinemas to watch as ‘Nanook’ (who, in fact, is named Allakariallak) and his family (played by a woman not even his wife) struggled against the elements, hunting with spears that, in reality, they had long given up. The film had an immense impact on what audiences believed was the ‘heritage’ of the Inuit because it was presented as an authentic documentary (see Kaganovsky *et al.*, 2019). When we accept that there are multiple possible angles of storytelling, we can understand the choices being made as political choices. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us, ‘Indigenous peoples across the world have other stories to tell’ such as ‘the history of Western research through the eyes of the colonized’ and ‘counter stories are powerful forms of resistance which are repeated and shared across diverse indigenous communities’ (1999, p. 2).

Although documentary as a cinematic form usually has an implicit claim of ‘truthfulness’, it is generally recognized that documentary can never be

entirely 'realistic', in that it cannot represent real events in a manner indistinguishable from the events themselves. This is partly due to practical constraints, but also because of the ambiguous nature of the term 'realism'. As Linda Williams puts it, 'Truth is not "guaranteed" ... yet some kinds of partial and contingent truths are nevertheless the always receding goal of documentaries' (1998). Accommodating some of these notions, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has recently broadened its definition of documentary to accommodate the filmmaker's changing role and genre trends, defining them as non-fiction films that deal 'creatively with cultural, artistic, historical, social, scientific, economic or other subjects ... as long as the emphasis is on fact and not on fiction' (Anon, n.d.).

Filmmakers take on the role of the arbiter or interpreter of truth when using creative methods. They use a style and language that suits their aesthetic and political aims. The use of fiction in documentaries has increased, prompting the creation of a new sub-category, the docu-fiction film, which is embodied in several of my own productions.

Personal experience in documentary practice

In my documentary films (*Closer*, *Mother/Country*, *People Like Us*) I use recreations, re-enactments, and fiction film techniques such as beautiful shots, music, fluid/manipulative editing. I both resist and use the seductiveness of fiction film techniques by often interrupting them for the viewer. In my early film *Closer* (2001), I leave in clapperboards, edit shots that repeat, and attempt to make the viewer conscious of the artifice. In this sense, the work can appear formal and very self-reflexive, constantly reminding the audience that what they are watching is ultimately a representation, and that they are active in the construction of meaning.

Returning to Stuart Hall's challenge to centre ethnographic subjects and their voices and express a more authentic heritage, in *Closer* I attempted to 'erase the author' by asking the subject, Annalise, to collaborate with me in the making of the documentary. My attempt to engage Annalise was about finding a means by which the filmmaker and subject collaborate to create an 'auto-portrait' of the subject. As the filmmaker, my role here was as explorer, taking the journey with the subject of the film and filming the journey as it unfolds. I was narrative building in the context of an (often unsettling) heritage. The film is the product of grappling with the tools available as a filmmaker and the need to find a new language for constructing documentary truth.

Though I am invisible (for the most part) in the film, my presence is implied through the revealing of process and artifice: reminding the viewer that there is a filmmaker involved in what they are watching and reminding us that we are not alone with the subject – there is always a filter. The triangulation of subject-filmmaker-audience is made transparent in order to offer a more satisfying 'truth'. We accept that there is construction – we can even see the crew

included in the shots – and we are sure that ‘truthfulness’ lies not in the component parts but in their cumulative effect.

My methods take inspiration from Werner Herzog’s interventions as a director. In 1999, when Walker Art Centre in Minneapolis ran a month-long tribute to Herzog, he presented *The Minnesota Declaration: Truth and Fact in Documentary Cinema* (1999), a 12-point breakdown of his principles regarding truth and fact.¹ In essence, Herzog suggested that truth should be found through fabrication, imagination, and stylization, and it is over a decade since he argued against cinema vérité. The declaration famously referred to a specific ‘deeper strata’ of truth in cinema, that of ‘poetic, ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization’ (Herzog, 1999).

Herzog gained notoriety for his fantastical films and his willingness to push his crew and himself to unprecedented lengths in order to tell stories. He often explores the boundaries between fiction and documentary practice, as well as seeking ‘ecstatic truth’, which is like ‘the feeling of being an observer dragged into the scene’ (Zawelski, 2006). A master of illusions², Herzog sees films more akin to the circus than to theatre. He uses fiction not as docudrama re-enactments but as flawless pieces of montage to offer the truth-telling within the very story. Emotional truth, situational truth, and personal truth are told through metaphor rather than via actuality. The audience is drawn in to accept what is felt, not just what is seen as truth.

In my personal work, then, these principles have played a part too. However, I am more preoccupied with the politics of storytelling than *how* that truth is told. For me, the starting point is storytelling and representation. Who gets to speak for whom? What stories are told? And how do we tell the story of ‘the other’?

Story thieves

When I arrived in the North East of England in 1996, one of my resounding memories was visiting the studio and gallery of the Amber Film Collective (AmberSide, n.d.) and seeing the exhibition *Coalfield Stories* of the trapped and dirty faces of the working-class mining communities. This exhibition exemplified the complexity of the issues within documentary truth-telling and storyteller-and-subject, subject-and-audience, and storyteller-and-audience positionality. What I witnessed in these photographs was a cultural appropriation and a cruel, storytelling mockery. None of the images was ennobling or powerful. They were sentimental, two-dimensional, and often patronizing: a feeble social realism. The personal identities of the photographers were hidden, their relationships with their subjects mysterious. The identities of those depicted suffered eternally as their portraits of misery hung in galleries. There was a poverty, not only of the subject but also of the images. This was one of my earliest recollections of how the North East could be

depicted,³ and it was losing a PR campaign at the hands of its supposed champions. This was, for me, cultural cannibalism.

To be clear, I am not denying the photographer the right to tell this story. But I am balancing it with the right of the subject to his image and seeking an ethical framework in which we can consider the role of the photographer and the power of stories. The grim depictions of North East stereotypes, dumbed down and uncomplicated, would thus grow, fester, and leave a legacy that the region would spend decades trying to shake off. It was that, as Van Leeuwen opines, 'Typification comes about through the use of visual stereotypes, which may either be cultural attributes or physiognomic attributes. The more these stereotypes overshadow a person's individual features, the more that person is represented as a type' (2001, p. 95). This is how image-makers contribute to stereotype creation. As the novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie reminds us, 'Show a people as one thing – as only one thing – over and over again, and that is what they become' (2009).

Such portrayals romanticize and glorify poverty, offering 'a tourist's' view of these communities. These characters become not individuals but actors in a social agenda at play for Amber. These representations were not of these men or the community but of what the photographers wanted them to be. What they chose to see them as. These were not poor miners telling miners' stories. I would contend that it is because Amber largely comprised a group of Southerners that they produced a very narrow portrait of the lives of the Northerners. Their creative decisions alert us to the issue of viewpoint, but also to the power of the single narrative; about the right to tell the story and who has the storyteller's privilege.

'We need to broaden our perspective and to recognize that it is not the "other" that needs to be contextualized but also the *self*', Martinez reminds us (1992, p. 154). What does the social anthropology of the work of Amber tell us about Amber themselves? Their identities and relationships with their subject remain murky and invisible. Nichols argues for an understanding of the division between storyteller and subject, 'The separation of Us from Them is inscribed into the very institution of anthropology and into the structure of most ethnographic film. They occupy a time and space which we must recreate, stage or represent' (2001, p. 46). The clarity of 'us' and 'them' in Amber's work remains ambiguous and therefore highly problematic.

What responsibility do filmmakers have for the effects of their acts on the lives of those filmed? Theorist Emmanuel Levinas answers, 'Violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves' (1969, p. 21). For me, the answer lies in considering how those who are represented are engaged in the process of representation, in empowering those who are depicted at least to have a chance to respond. As Stuart Hall said: '“Consensual” views of society represent society as if there are no major cultural or economic breaks, no major conflicts of interests

between classes and groups. Whatever disagreements exist, it is said, there are legitimate and institutionalised means for expressing and reconciling them' (2013, p. 58). In other words, who tells the story controls the narrative and how it is told.

James Clifford offers a solution: 'Once "informants" begin to be considered as co-authors, and the ethnographer as scribe and archivist as well as interpreting observer, we can ask new, critical questions of all ethnographies' (1986, p. 17). This does not mean we cannot tell the stories of others. We can tell stories and explain our relationship and viewpoint: telling the story of ourselves in relation to others.

Whose story is it anyway?

We should be conscious of the power struggle that often exists in the stories that people tell. To offer a brief ideological overview, Pierre Bourdieu argues that those dominant in the social space are 'also situated in dominated positions in the field of symbolic production' (1985, p. 729). Karl Marx tells us that those who own the means of *material* production control the means of *mental* production (Levin, 1980). Elaborating, Basil Bernstein writes:

Control over, orientation of, and change in critical symbolic systems ... are governed by power relationships as these are embodied in the class structure. It is not only capital in the strict economic sense, which is the subject to appropriation, manipulation and exploitation, but also cultural capital in the form of the symbolic systems through which man can extend and change the boundaries of his experience.

(1977, p. 172)

In short, we should be aware that the dominant culture often tells the stories of those who do not have power. And when representing the powerless Other, Baudrillard suggests, 'In order for ethnology to live, its object must die; by dying, the object takes its revenge for being "discovered" and with its death defies the science that wants to grab it' (1994, p. 7). So by being recorded, the subject dies. This is what I too have observed. The storyteller, by consuming, extinguishes the subject, and this is accelerating, as filmmakers 'buy' story-rights to the life of their documentary subjects. Tom Isler in 'Whose Story is It, Anyway? Obtaining a Subject's Life-Story Rights' states:

Increasingly, documentaries are being viewed not just as properties to distribute but as development material for producers looking to make feature film adaptations, stage productions or television series. More and more, documentary filmmakers are obtaining life-story rights from their subjects so that they will hold all of the cards when producers come calling.

(2008, p. 48)

Filmmakers are buying stories, and not only taking the power of depiction but commodifying them for mass consumption. What is the human cost of this? Taking a person's story is akin to stealing their voice.

Hijacked history: The Yemini of South Shields

In my own work I wanted to devise a documentary practice that did not involve stealing voices. *Last of the Dictionary Men*, a touring exhibition, photographic commission, interactive documentary, and documentary film (Youssef et al., 2013), is the story, both fragile and vital, of Yemeni seamen in South Shields, North East England. Thousands of Yemeni seamen migrated there in the 1890s, made it their home, and have been living and contributing to Britain ever since.

Over a three-year period, I collaborated with the remaining fourteen first-generation seamen in South Shields in order to record their endangered stories and represent them in an appropriate context. *Last of the Dictionary Men* presented oral history and documentary in an unconventional manner. Having collected their stories, I realised I could not edit them. As these men were individuals and their stories had not been told, I felt neither qualified nor justified to edit their stories. I therefore chose to present the material in full, played through a vintage TV set on a plinth the height of the man.

Not only were these people telling their own stories, but the project also offered new forms of representation – new ways of seeing, hearing,



Figure 10.1 Peter Fryer's image of Mr. Obaya at the boarding house in South Shields.

and understanding a complex contemporary documentary landscape. It is communicated in a manner that is authored by members of the community, in a way that depicts them respectfully, and in a light that they would hopefully recognize and appreciate. The project allows the participants to shape the way that they are represented by ensuring at every stage that the work was 'acceptable' to those whose story it depicted.

For me as filmmaker, what made the greatest impression was the men's openness and willingness to share their stories. I came to care deeply about these individuals, who themselves believed their stories to be unremarkable and unimportant. I felt their story was important, both in terms of migrant history in North East England and as a positive story of Muslim integration into British society. My hope was for the project to promote pride and recognition for this early diaspora, unsettling the narrative around radical and religious diversity in the North East.

The story of the British-Yemeni community in South Shields had been manipulated by those who had little knowledge of, or sympathy for, these residents. Our detailed documentary research countered the on-going repetition of the false claim that South Shields had the first race riots in the UK, rediscovering the groundbreaking work of academic Richard Lawless and speaking with Professor Fred Halliday, an expert on Yemenis in Britain.⁴ Fortunately, we were able to set the record straight and ensure



Figure 10.2 Image by Youssef Nabil as part of the *Last of the Dictionary Men* project.

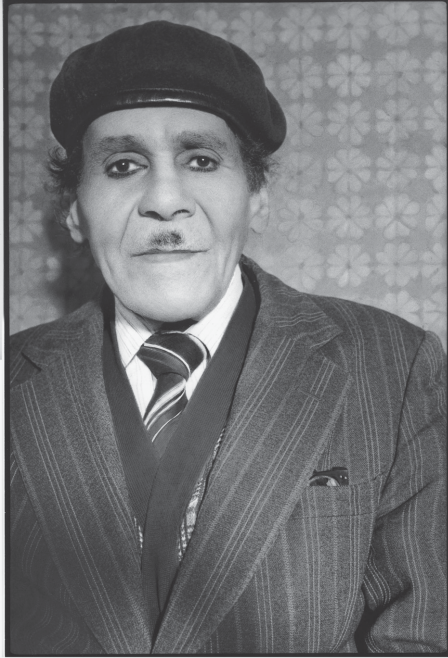


Figure 10.3 Image by Youssef Nabil as part of the *Last of the Dictionary Men* project.

the British-Yemeni community would be remembered for their positive contributions.

This is what this endeavour was about: collecting, preserving, addressing, and exchanging stories that could so easily have been lost. It was by engaging with this community that we have been able to depict it so fully, with rich nuances and an authentic viewpoint that the community has been able to embrace and get behind. *Last of the Dictionary Men* is an innovative exhibition that cuts across issues of British identity, empire, and what it entails to engage with a community and preserve a history (Youssef et al., 2013).

Is documentary the new memoir?

The narratives of return, to one's beginnings or origins, are many. My own – *Mother/Country* (2003) for Channel 4 (UK) – is one example, and my hope is that it demonstrates how documentary can be a powerful project to heal and address the separation that first- and second-generation immigrants experience when in a new culture. In this instance, the 'new culture' was also a hotbed of racism and anti-Middle-Eastern sentiment that had escalated after 9/11 and the beginning of the American 'war on terror'. Alternative narratives were needed urgently, and I believed that a power shift could be



Figure 10.4 Image of photographic workshops with the Yemeni-British sailors.

sought by giving a medium, a language, and a platform to the alternative Middle-Eastern narratives that I knew existed but were sadly being ignored or muted. To unveil the truth, it needed to be worked through in fiction. And sometimes, the fiction itself was more powerful than the supposed actuality. First, I sought a group of collaborators.

The group that came to work on the project mainly comprised Iranian asylum seekers and refugees. I believed it would be wrong to take on the stories of others without proposing an exchange; I wanted to give something back to those who took part, so those who wanted to join could also learn to make films. Iran is a very visual culture – from its miniatures, to its carpets, to its rich cinematic history – and those who joined the group were keen to tell stories and find means of expression. So the project took on a new direction that combined the two, and one where development money had to be raised. Cameras were needed, as well as an office and a project coordinator, but, by early 2002, a group of people had been recruited and tasked with learning how to make films and share stories of their experiences as migrants.

Significant changes occur if we give the microphone to the subject. If they can speak, they can make us realize, for example, that the dominant narrative is wrong. Thus, we founded The Kooch Cinema Project in 2001, which brought together members of the Middle Eastern community in North

East England to enable migrant stories to come to light. ‘Kooch’ is Farsi for ‘nomad’ or ‘migratory’. Facilitating, supporting, funding, and even distributing their films has been exhausting, difficult, and frustrating. I have come up against the fear that people and institutions have about what might come out of these types of projects. Yet with no documentation, no evidence of their status, their narratives become their only defence against misrepresentation – and worse, erasure.

Conclusion: *The South Shields Declaration*

My earliest films were an attempt to create processes so that the filmmaker could disappear; the author is just a cypher. Documentary film has been challenged for ‘reconstructing an account of an event from diverse data in order to make a single, reasonable, typical, “true” account’ (Heider, 1976, p. 12). ‘Ethnographic truths are ... inherently partial – committed and incomplete’ (James Clifford, cited in Wagner, 1986, p. 7). What happens in the triangulation of audience, narrative or subject, and filmmaker? Surely the author is the conductor and the arbiter of this relationship?

Margery Wolf, writing about a Taiwanese woman shaman in the 1990s, compares her work across several forms. She reflects on working three decades earlier in a Taiwanese village and concludes:

I now have three texts describing in different ways what happened in the little village of Peihotien some thirty years ago. One is a piece of fiction written by me alone; another consists of unanalyzed field notes recording interviews and observations collected by any of the several members of the field staff; and the third is entirely in my voice written in a style acceptable to referees chosen by the *American Ethnologist*. Each text takes a different perspective, is written in a different style, and has different ‘outcomes,’ yet all three involve the same set of events.

(Wolf, 1992, p. 7)

More and more, I have become interested in the role and visibility of the author in my own practice and their contract with the audience and their responsibilities to the subject. My entire body of creative work has engaged with Stuart Hall’s question of ‘Whose Heritage?’, and the question continues to act as a rudder for my work. The examples I have discussed deployed a series of documentary techniques with which I have striven to let people tell their own ‘heritage’ stories.

Stories are the very essence of who we are. In the documentary *The Celluloid Closet*, which concerns the treatment of LGBT characters in film, the actor Susan Sarandon remarks:

Oh, movies are important and they’re dangerous because we’re the keepers of the dreams. You go into a little dark room and become incredibly

vulnerable – on one hand all your perspectives can be challenged, you could feel something you couldn't feel normally. It can encourage you to be the protagonist in your own life. On the other hand it can completely misshape you.

(Epstein and Friedman, 1995)

Fundamental to my work is truth: Who is speaking for whom? Who are we allowing to speak? What language is used for the construction of meaning and how do we allow this diversity of language and stories to co-exist? As Danny Boyle said of his film *127 hours* (2010), 'I am not interested in what is just factual, but what is truthful' (Horn, 2014).

The tour through some of my own works is presented within an ethical framework that negates the 'narrative cannibals' and offers potential methodologies for making film without stealing the voices of others. We can no longer colonise a story any more than we can a people.

To conclude, and in order to meet and match my goal, I will, like Werner Herzog, offer my own declaration, the result of experiences in my storytelling journey to date, my five promises for storytelling.

The South Shields Declaration

1. **Be honest:** Tell your own story – don't steal – and make the relationship between author and subject clear for the audience.
2. **Stories have owners: Do no harm!** Protect the vulnerable. Empower those whose stories you are telling. Leave a legacy. Make your archive and materials readily available and donate copies of your work and research to libraries. Share this knowledge, particularly with the relevant communities. Ensure those who are vulnerable are empowered by your work. Ensure that there is no single narrative and, where you can, share the spotlight with those whose stories you are highlighting.
3. **Honour the viewer's trust:** Don't pass off your work as 'absolute truth'; make the audience aware (where possible) of its subjective position. Ensure viewpoint is explicit in your work.
4. **Be inventive:** Explore and expand the language of storytelling. Challenge the old gods – and the new.
5. **Support stories from the margins:** Support initiatives that address the issue of diversity in media and groups that campaign for increasing participation and representation. Fight for equality and representation. Develop this directly: don't only work with your own tribe. Ensure you do not cannibalise another's story.

Notes

- 1 Herzog revisited the declaration in 2017, adding six further points: <https://walkerart.org/magazine/werner-herzog-minnesota-declaration-2017-addendum>.

- 2 For example, in Herzog's 2019 film *Family Romance*, he sways between documentary and fiction, using a handheld camera to document a story concerning a Japanese business that specialises in 'hiring out' close family members and friends to those without them.
- 3 A photographer such as Tish Murtha is both the product and the acclaimed recorder of Northeast Social Realism. She was briefly associated with Amber, but eventually this relationship broke down. See: www.tishmurtha.co.uk/.
- 4 Fred Halliday: <http://b-ys.org.uk/journal/obituaries/halliday-fred>.

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11 Searching for new perspectives on heritage

The transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans

Beverley Prevatt Goldstein

Introduction

Stuart Hall (1999, p. 10) demanded that ‘the majority, mainstream versions of Heritage revise their own self-conceptions and rewrite the margins into the centre, the outside into the inside’. As a student, parent, and community teacher, my experience was that hearing in schools, in England, about our people being enslaved was a distressing and humiliating experience. I was therefore concerned that rewriting the margins into the centre could be similarly damaging to the marginalised. This chapter goes beyond my experience and explores whether damage is inevitable and how it can be avoided or minimised.

The initial section of the chapter explores, through seven texts, different options for teaching the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans (TTEA) in schools (Bracey, 2015; Doharty, 2019; Gift, 2008; Harris and Reynolds, 2014; Historical Association Teacher Fellowship, 2019; Traille, 2007; Whitburn and Yemoh, 2012). The numbers in each study are small, but, collectively, the texts, with their different themes and approaches, enable an understanding of which approaches can bring the history of Black people centre stage in education and heritage with minimal collateral damage, particularly to the marginalised, which is the concern of this author. The latter part of the chapter concludes with an example linked to the education, heritage, and culture sectors to illustrate the process and challenges of adopting the most promising approaches more widely.

The transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans (TTEA)

My perception that the TTEA was dominating the discourse on the Black experience increased my concerns. The Secondary National Curriculum (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2007) had made teaching on the TTEA mandatory, and while this changed with the National History Curriculum (Department for Education, 2014), enslavement remained the only suggestion on diversity for 11–14-year-olds. Harris and Reynolds found

that ‘for Black students (of African descent), the only time they will encounter Black people in the past will be in the context of slavery’ (2014, p. 484). While the recent reports of the National Trust (Huxtable *et al.*, 2020) and Historic England (Dresser and Wills, 2020) appropriately include substantial sections on the contribution of the profits from enslavement and its abolition to their historic estates, this can inadvertently reinforce a narrow understanding of the role of Black people in British society.

The following section will consider how enslavement is presented in education and its impact by exploring seven sources, the first three reflecting the most common presentation and the latter four, differing broad presentations.

The most common presentation in education and its consequences

Traille (2007) analysed the responses of 124 African-Caribbean and non-African Caribbean students, aged 13–17, to their history teaching and conducted a focus group with 12 African-Caribbean students, aged 12–17, and their mothers. Harris and Reynolds (2014) drew on survey data collected from 102 students and focus group discussions with 42 students, from two secondary schools, to understand how students aged 12–14 from different ethnic backgrounds related to the history curriculum. Doharty (2019) analysed the content, style, and impact of the history teaching on students in two classes (aged 12–13) in a secondary school with a majority South Asian population.

All demonstrated that, from the array of teaching topics relevant to enslavement, three are most frequently chosen: the journey of the enslaved between the west coast of Africa and the Caribbean/USA/Brazil (the Middle Passage); the plantation; and the abolition of enslavement promoted by white men such as William Wilberforce. Doharty (2019) suggests that this approach indicates a convergence of interests, in that it maintains white interests in portraying people of African descent as victims and white men as saviours while satisfying the call for the inclusion of Black history. All the authors recorded this portrayal as deeply painful to the descendants of the enslaved.

This combination of topics, selected from a limited knowledge set, was often conveyed with minimal awareness of ‘race’ and racism, and with little understanding of the emotional impact of the subject on Black students:

We did a history skit ... it was just slavery ... all the people ganged up on me ... you’ve got to be the slave ... And the teacher didn’t pick up on it. She went through the whole topic very unsympathetically ... I don’t think she felt I might feel uncomfortable for one second. And I did. Very.

(Traille, 2007, p. 34)

‘I felt DEAD’; ‘Not a human’; ‘Not normal’; ‘My identity was taken away from me’.

(The responses of children of African and South Asian descent playing the part of a ‘slave’ at a ‘slave’ auction, Doharty, 2019, p. 119)

There was an exception to this too-familiar reaction. Empowering anger surfaced in Harris and Reynolds' Black focus groups, 'they changing like, bad things into good things like they needed to do slavery ... no they didn't (said forcefully) ... because they weren't treating us like, fairly' (2014, p. 477). Racially aware facilitators and Black groups, as in the Harris and Reynolds focus groups, may have enabled this expression of anger. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in Doharty's study above, being in the majority is not necessarily sufficient to withstand the impact of the power structures and their dominant ethos.

Omission

Educating on the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans could seem so painful to those of African descent, particularly to the descendants of those enslaved, and so complex and contested to the educators that omission could be considered an option. Traille has suggested that, if we cannot change the attitudes and awareness of the teachers, 'mere inclusion is ineffective' (2007, p. 35). Should we try to bring the margins into the centre if we cannot change the attitudes and awareness of those controlling the messaging and teaching?

Omission of the TTEA would obscure a fundamental process in world history, a process that contributed to one of the greatest declines in world population, to the inequitable development of countries and continents, to colonialism, empire and coloniality, and to the introduction and embedding of racism (Williams, 1944). The TTEA is not only Black history, it is British history, as demonstrated by the full title of the Abolition Act 1833, 'An act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British colonies; for promoting the Industry of the manumitted Slaves, and for compensating the Persons hitherto entitled to the Services of such Slaves'. The margins are in the centre, albeit unrecognised, misrecognised, and frequently pathologized (Naidoo, 2016). Margins and centre are inter-dependent constructs. The challenge is re-presenting the margins as centre in education, heritage, and culture, and re-presenting with the authority and perspectives of those marginalised. Students, even while troubled by the teaching on the TTEA, wanted to know about their histories and ancestors 'as long as they are teaching it well' (Traille, 2007, p. 34). To adopt the path of omission would seriously limit the possibilities of art, culture, and heritage to educate, enlighten, and heal, and it would also deny the possibility that educators in the diverse sectors can change, can learn. The following examples include educators on the journey of 'teaching it well'.

Teaching it well

Gift (2008), through the UNESCO Transatlantic Slave Trade Education Project, builds on interviews with 33 teachers, two administrators and four secondary school students in the Americas and Caribbean (Barbados, Brazil, the

Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and the USA), Africa (Benin, Senegal, and Gambia) and Europe (England and Denmark) and on a small sample of students' assignments to demonstrate diverse approaches to, and the effects of, teaching the TTEA. A team of teachers on the Historical Association Teacher Fellowship Programme on Britain and Transatlantic Slavery developed 14 working principles for engagement in teaching on the TTEA (2019).

Gift's 15 themes, while a broad mix, again centre on the Middle Passage, the plantations, and abolition. However, there are three outliers: resistance by the Maroons, the successful revolution led by Toussaint L'Ouverture in Haiti, and Africans in Western Europe. The teachers in Gift's study broadened, adapted, and revolutionised their education project. Two introduced the importance of using the term 'enslaved' rather than 'slave', others of demonstrating the inequitable impact of the TTEA on the economy and infrastructure of Africa and Europe, of acknowledging the depth and range of resistance by those enslaved and the racism that underpinned and flowed from enslavement, and of challenging its current legacy. The analysis and discussion by Gift revealed not only a range of content but also a range of pedagogies, from de-escalating emotions to stimulating learning through feelings and building empathy.

The lack of clear cross-referencing in Gift's report makes it difficult to attribute which themes and pedagogies contributed to a particular impact on students. But her country specific data suggests which themes and pedagogies did not leave the descendants of the enslaved with unresolvable anger and pain and rejecting of their history and African ancestry.

The African-descended students who were fully engaged in the learning on the TTEA, who achieved understanding and pride in their heritage, and the non-African-descended students who moved towards a greater understanding were in Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and New Orleans (USA). Here, 'students remarked quite openly that they were proud to be descendants of enslaved Africans whereas at the beginning of the Project they were openly embarrassed at their blackness' (Gift, 2008, p. 158). In Trinidad and Tobago, an island riven with rivalry between African and Indian descendants, the students at a Muslim girls' school, after this teaching, 'empathized with the Africans, felt anger at the destruction of African civilisation, but also felt great pride in the contributions of Africans to the New World' (Gift, 2008, p. 157).

Gift identified that many of the USA and Caribbean teachers scored highly on 'providing students with avenues to express their emotions ... guiding students through their emotions' and 'encouraging students to develop their points of view based on knowledge' (2008, p. 175). Most were also aware that 'the trade has left us, up to today, with an overriding belief that some people are more important than others' (2008, p. 96).

African-descended students who were rejecting of their history and identity lived principally in Jamaica and in England. Gift suggests that the content

in England, Denmark, and Barbados may have lacked sufficient focus on the resistance of the enslaved Africans. Additionally, the pedagogy of some of the teachers in these four countries prioritised emotional distancing, protecting white sensitivities and community cohesion.

Teachers' awareness of 'race' and racism and an emphasis on resistance, coupled with a style that enabled emotional expression and encouraged a critical engagement with evidence, appeared to have the most positive impact. Notwithstanding the disproportionate coverage of the Caribbean, particularly Trinidad and Tobago, and the diverse teaching styles and priorities within countries and commonalities across countries, the evidence suggests that the defining feature was less the level of resources (with limited internet access in Trinidad and Tobago) than the level of racial awareness. A higher proportion of teachers in the Caribbean and in the USA demonstrated an awareness of 'race' and racism compared to those in England and Denmark. The living experience of enslavement and its legacies – present in the Caribbean and the USA, denied in England, and invisible in Denmark – is likely to have been a contributory factor to this racial awareness.

My own experience in the Caribbean and the evidence from Harris and Reynolds' focus groups (2014) had led me to assume that the response in the Caribbean to learning about enslavement would be pain and empowering anger. Time had obscured my memories of distancing from an African past (as some students both in England and in Jamaica did in Gift's study) and of the strength of the ideology of white supremacy in the Caribbean. Pain, empowering anger, confusion, sadness, pride, interest, and engagement were all there, but even the most positive approach had an uncertain impact. Two teachers were concerned that the positive results would not last, noting the quick reversion to 'black' name calling and the negative portrayal of Africa on the television. The most positive approach, even with a numerical Black majority and local Black leadership, struggled with the legacy of enslavement and of current globalised power structures.

The Historical Association Teacher Fellowship (2019) recommended the teaching of enslavement under three broad headings: mass commercialisation, terror and violence, and resistance. Five of their seven pedagogical principles considered aspects of 'race' and racism, sometimes combining this with emotional awareness, dialogue, and critical engagement with the evidence. While there is no avenue for gauging the response of students, the principles of the Historical Association Teacher Fellowship are broadly in line with the positive approaches found in Gift's study.

Locating the TTEA within broader world history

There is a growing call for the embedding of Black history within broader world and British history (Fryer, 1984; Olusoga, 2016). Whitburn and Yemoh (2012, pp. 17–18), in analysing their school-designed GCSC course

‘Multicultural Britain since 1945’, challenge the centring of Black history around the TTEA:

There seems no more justification for presenting the experiences of the horrors of slavery as the beginning of Black Peoples history than there would be to begin the history of England itself with the English people’s establishment of such horrific practices.

As well as including early African history and achievements alongside early British history, their references to the TTEA and focus on recent heroic acts prioritise resistance, ‘race’ awareness, attention to emotions, critical engagement with evidence, and transformative teaching (dialogue and nurturing agency and hope).

Shaping Futures, a project in Northamptonshire, ‘was based on the premise that Black history should not be restricted to the study of slavery’ (Bracey, 2015, p. 104) and included four other topics, two of which are highly relevant to Northamptonshire (‘Walter Tull, a Local Hero’ and ‘Northamptonshire in a Global Context’). Learning from Traille’s 2007 study, its teaching on the TTEA eschewed a victim focus and included work on pre-enslavement Africa and resistance to enslavement. These two examples demonstrate a middle way between omission and enmeshment – the TTEA being taught with ‘race’, racism awareness, and emotional awareness, and forming part of a broader Black history that is itself part of British and world history.

The seven studies above on the TTEA suggest that it is possible to ‘teach it well’ if ‘race’ awareness, emotional awareness, and resistance by the marginalised are present. These studies also show that a pedagogy that includes a critical engagement with the evidence and a commitment to dialogue, agency, and hope increases the possibility of a positive outcome for all, including the descendants of the enslaved Africans. However, the impact of even this positive package was limited by the racialised dynamics within schools and wider society as demonstrated by Gift’s 2008 study. Damaging content and process could also be mitigated by changing the context, as in Harris and Reynolds’ 2014 study. Both Traille (2007) and Hawkey and Prior (2011) have reinforced the importance of context. Traille (2007) has warned that celebratory stories that do not resonate with a negative reality may have limited impact, whilst Hawkey and Prior (2011) have identified how the home environment impacts on the learning in school. In presenting the margins in the centre without damaging the marginalised, the context of the content and process needs to be addressed and, where necessary, challenged.

Transferability of good practice? An exploration of the booklet ‘African Lives in Northern England’

The production and promotion of the booklet ‘African Lives in Northern England’ (Prevatt Goldstein, 2021) is discussed below to illustrate the potential

and challenges of incorporating ‘race awareness’, emotional awareness, resistance by the marginalised, critical engagement with the evidence, and transformative aims when re-presenting the margins in the centre in other projects and sectors.

Bridging sectors – education, heritage, and culture

The principal purpose of this booklet was to challenge racism through education. In this it was following a Caribbean cultural tradition promoted by Thomas (1969), Williams (1944), Rodney (1972), and Beckles (2021). This booklet challenged miseducation not through pathbreaking historical and economic analysis, as in the texts above, but through its manner of revealing and portraying heritage (defined as ‘signification and valuation of the past’, Ashley and Frank, 2016, p. 501). The booklet aimed ‘to provide ... an alternative narrative to the history of Black (African and Asian diasporic) in Northern England, focusing specifically on African ... bringing our stories centre stage, not enslaved victims, walk on parts, bystanders, or undifferentiated Black bodies’.

The booklet was designed – through accessible language, length, and cost – to educate widely. It was launched at the Durham Book Festival and promoted to communities at three central libraries in the region, to staff and students at two universities in North East England, in secondary education at a prominent sixth form college, and in primary education where it was accompanied by online resources. The focus throughout was anti-racism through a new understanding of heritage. In one region the booklet was part of the annual history festival, in another it linked to Black History month. In two regions, networks were developed to further research local Black history with an emphasis on Black agency, not victimhood. Creatively building on the booklet, members of the Artists’ Union England and Anti-Racism in Education led anti-racism workshops in the schools.

The booklet sought to acknowledge the margins as centre. No longer should people of African descent see themselves as peripheral but rather they should claim their place as historic and current residents and builders of Northern England. The aims of the booklet were to enable those linked with the African diaspora to recognise their centrality to the Northern story, to provide all with a more accurate history that recognised the African contribution to Northern England, and to challenge racism, as people from the diasporas, African and others, were/are not guests or a burden but established inhabitants and contributors. These aims led to ‘race’ awareness, resistance by the marginalised, critical engagement with the evidence, emotional awareness, and a dialogic approach being embedded in the production of the booklet.

‘Race’ awareness

The case studies on the TTEA with the most positive outcomes had demonstrated ‘race’ awareness in action, described as ‘racial literacy’, ‘the

capacity to understand the ways in which race and racisms work in society [and] having the language, skills, and confidence to utilise that knowledge' (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020, p. 7). The booklet's guidelines to its authors explicitly recognised that racism, individual and structural, was prevalent in Northern England, that the history of African-descended people was little known or appreciated, and that Northern England's attraction to the topic of enslavement enshrined those of African descent as victims. The booklet named racism in its sections on seafarers, doctors, and authors, among others. It emphasized the role of people of African descent in challenging enslavement, e.g., of the seven people in the booklet who had been enslaved, five were outspoken orators against enslavement. Racial literacy also influenced the range of people in the booklet. There were two stereotypes that required challenging: that the achievements of African peoples were mostly in music and sport, and that it was only because of their achievements that people of African descent should be valued. People from 12 different professions were acknowledged in the booklet, and, within the limitations of the archives, ordinary lives, such as that of William Fifefield, a ferryman, were included.

The booklet moved beyond 'racial literacy' to equality literacy by stating in its guidelines to authors that 'as far as possible women should be included', and it sought to be open on the sexuality of its characters. It did not achieve this. Of the 53 main characters only 11 are women. There are only two characters whose records suggest that they may have been gay. While the African-descended population in Northern England prior to 1948 was predominantly male, this is only a partial explanation. These absences and that of disabled people is a limitation of the booklet but also a reflection on the undervaluing of these groups in wider society then and now and their absence in the records. The production of this booklet suggests that it is possible to incorporate 'racial literacy'/equality literacy in education, heritage, and culture projects, but that it is both challenging and limited by the wider context.

Resistance by the marginalised

Resistance was a major theme in the case studies on the TTEA that avoided a negative impact, and it guided the selection of characters for the booklet. The booklet included Africans such as Mary-Ann Macham, Ellen and William Craft, and Frederick Douglass, each of whom, with ingenuity and at significant risk, escaped from enslavement; Africans who spoke vehemently against enslavement, racism, war, or poverty, such as Olaudah Equiano, Celestine Edwards, Charles Duncan O'Neal, Martin Luther King Jr., Muhammad Ali, and Archie Sibeko; and Africans who struggled and achieved despite racism, such as Pauline Henriques, Robert Wellesley-Cole, and Sade Sangowawa. Often, just existing and leading an ordinary life, as with William Fifefield (a ferryman) and John Kent (a policeman), required resistance to the debilitating material and emotional effects of institutional racism. Acknowledging and re-presenting the margins as centre in any sector requires their simultaneously

marginalised location to be acknowledged and their diverse forms of resistance, both quiet and overt, to be recognised.

Critically engaging with the evidence

Whitburn and Yemoh wrote of ‘disciplinary rigour both in selecting content and in fostering students’ own historical thinking’ (2012, p. 23). Traille describes this historical thinking thus: to ‘evaluate all versions of the past critically and comfortably’ (2007, p. 36). All the information in the booklet was carefully sourced and referenced. But inevitably, and as expected, later sources of information were uncovered. The foreword stated that ‘all sources are subject to memory, perspective and interpretation’ and encouraged historical thinking, e.g., Hastings Kamau Banda was recorded not only as the well-loved doctor working in Northern England and the doctor who led Malawi to independence but also as the president ‘who instituted a very repressive regime’. The section presenting the two versions of Michael Yanni’s story concludes with a reminder ‘of the caution needed when interpreting both oral and written history’.

The explicit aim of the booklet ‘to widen the general understanding and appreciation of Black lives in northern England’ did not distort the evidence. Selection was influenced by the priority of including women and people across the whole of the North East and Cumbria and demonstrating diversity, rather than homogeneity. Nevertheless, the limited length allotted to each story (300 words) and the accessible text required obviated an in-depth exploration of the everyday racism experienced or the compromises made. This may have minimised the tension between an emancipatory aim and critical engagement with the evidence, a tension that needs to be managed in any project presenting the margins in the centre.

Emotional awareness

Varying levels of emotional awareness were demonstrated in the case studies on the TTEA, from minimal in the research by Doharty (2019) and Traille (2007) to an awareness of the impact on white students and/or the impact on the descendants of the enslaved in Gift’s 2008 study. These differences influenced the strategies used by the teachers to promote learning. For example, to protect the sensibilities of the white students and reduce the anger of the Black students, the activities of white abolitionists were emphasized. Alternatively, to foster a sense of self-worth and Black pride, resistance by the enslaved Africans was emphasized.

The booklet sought to engage all in moving towards anti-racism through a story honestly told, with no one damaged or humiliated, based on a critical engagement with the evidence. Hence evidence of a welcoming Northern England, of the good will of the Quakers and Abolition Societies, and of the generosity of the Richardson women in purchasing Douglass’ freedom

ran alongside the evidence of enslavement and racism. This was not about balance. It was about doing justice to a complex story, confident that the evidence of resistance, of strength, of achievement, of contribution by those of African descent would resonate with the readers of African descent and influence all.

Dialogue

Dialogue, joint decision-making, and changing attitudes and behaviours were aspects of transformation highlighted in the studies on the TTEA with the more positive outcomes, notably in Whitburn and Yemoh (2012) and the Caribbean and New Orleans sources in Gift (2008):

Here you can have your own opinion and discuss things ... Every lesson we are talking and saying what we think.

(Whitburn and Yemoh, 2012, p. 23)

Some (African descended children) compared their experiences in the community to the experiences of enslaved children and many of them became resolute in their determination to improve their own lives.

(Teacher in New Orleans, Gift, 2008, p. 153)

While the booklet and its promotion had been designed to counteract racism, little thought had been given to the impact of producing the booklet on the project team. The production and discussions were a journey for the whole team, e.g., clarifying for some, and consolidating for others, the distinction between the use of the words 'Black' and African, and the importance of the language around enslavement. Dialogue, joint decision-making, open discussion, and peer review were integral to the production process. Twelve people of diverse backgrounds, professions, and racialised groupings, while having much in common, had differing priorities for the booklet: some prioritised the sharing of new knowledge, others anti-racism. The guidelines were a tool for expanding the common ground while centring racial literacy.

The booklet itself was envisaged as a dialogue, with 'sharing our journey' explicitly stated in the Foreword and the Afterword encouraging others to continue the journey. The eight talks immediately following the booklet's publication were part of the dialogic process. Nevertheless, compromises were made in managing the tension between dialogue and emancipatory aims.

Transformation?

While the evidence is promising that the booklet slightly shifted attitudes and behaviour, this requires further research. Following a talk on the booklet, the head of English at one primary school with a considerable proportion of Black children wrote, 'Both the writing and reflections from the kids on

immigration as a positive force is a real credit to what you achieved' (letter to author from an English Lead primary school in Newcastle). Four children responded that they had previously thought racism was 'no big deal' and now they knew better. The zine 'Don't Stay Calm', produced by sixth form students following creative workshops based on the booklet, suggests that it encouraged a heightened awareness and commitment. However, the evidence from Gift's 2008 study on teaching the TTEA suggests that these positive changes may be short-lived unless widely reinforced. Fouseki *et al.*'s study 'Forgetting to Heal: Remembering the Abolition Act of 1807' (2010) highlights the importance of the overall context and shows that the celebratory stance of the media and government overwhelmed museums' efforts to tell a more balanced narrative on the abolition of the slave trade.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored, by studying the teaching of the TTEA, how Black history or acknowledging the margins as centre can occur without damaging the marginalised. The author concluded that racial literacy, emotional awareness, critical engagement with the evidence, dialogue, transformative aims, and centring resistance by the marginalised were critical to inclusion without damage. A practical example from the education, heritage, and culture sectors (the process of publishing the booklet 'African Lives in Northern England') was then provided to illustrate the possibility and the challenges of including these approaches more widely. This chapter suggests that there may be approaches that can teach the TTEA without damaging the descendants of the enslaved and that can be translated into wider projects in the education, heritage, and culture sectors without harming the marginalised.

However, there are caveats. Further research, further reflection, and changing contexts may suggest different approaches. The tension identified in managing dialogue and emancipatory aims, critical engagement with the evidence and transformation may be overwhelming in some projects in the education, heritage, and culture sectors.

There were also unanticipated insights. The author journeyed from her exasperation at the enthusiasm the North East had for the topic of enslavement to a recognition that it was so fundamental to the current world order that it could not be ignored. It had to be both carefully taught, as identified above, and embedded in its much broader historical context, such as African history prior to the TTEA and resistance, historical and current, by those of African descent to racism and other inequalities. This changed the author's way of thinking, as demonstrated by the language shifting from bringing the margins into the centre to recognising the margins as centre while marginalised.

The journey also brought the author back to a realistic appreciation of the limitations of even the most positive and least damaging approaches. Racism

and inequality are so embedded and so profitable to the beneficiaries that deeper, broader, whole-sector, and all-sector changes are needed. Only with increased equality in its context can the ‘best’ approach enable the marginalised to have full agency in the centre. While we do this, and until we do this, we need to value and continue with the approaches that rewrite and re-present the marginalised in the centre, without causing us/them further harm.

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Part IV

Final Provocations



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12 Brand new second hand

Production, preservation and ‘new’ diasporic forms

Etienne Joseph

Lead In

On 22 March 1999, the same year as Stuart Hall’s (1999) ‘un-settling’ appeared in print, a next type of motion was also emerging. Rodney Hylton Smith, an artist better known as Roots Manuva, released his debut album *Brand New Second Hand* – and it was (almost) like nothing we had ever heard. Riffing on itself, the album’s title was taken from a 1976 song performed by Peter Tosh. Tosh’s version was a harsh, misogynistic reproach to a woman of whom, the song’s lyrics infer, carnal knowledge was common knowledge: ‘You’re just a brand new second hand!’ (Tosh, 1976). Much had taken place between Kingston, Jamaica, 1976 and Stockwell, London, 1999, however, and Smith’s offering bristled instead with talk of London streets, sound systems and elite conspiracies, but all with a lilt that was as much Kennington as it was Kingston. Described by the music press as British rap with Jamaican heritage, *Brand New Second Hand* was a product of both these lineages, its title pointing towards the balance of innovation, remix and cultural re-ignition held in its sonic signature. To listen to any one of its 17 tracks was to immerse yourself in a heady brew of inner-city concrete, South-Asian-owned corner shops, hand-built speaker boxes, Irish moss and hard-dough bread toast. Smith’s vocal delivery was unmistakably London but filtered through a mesh of forced transatlantic travel and half a millennium of uncompromising resistance.

Beyond its title, this chapter is, to a certain extent, inspired by Roots Manuva’s *Brand New Second Hand* – specifically, its dual process of the channelling and reinvention of what came before it. In this context, it provides a mechanism for stimulating consideration of Hall’s observations regarding preservation, conservation and the production and circulation of new work. Drawing on my own archival, visual and sonic practices of dub, sampling and mixtape culture, I initially invoked the album here as a series of quotations framing a vignettted movement through elements of Hall’s conceptualisations of ‘the heritage’ alongside my own reflections, objections and injections. The rampant forces of neoliberalism quickly put paid to this approach, however, with demands of exorbitantly high fees for the quotation

of even tiny fragments of Smith's work being issued by a US-based publishing corporation.

An exploration of the stifling action of free-market capitalism on the re-use, remix and redeployment of 'the heritage' would not be out of place here, considering Hall's emphasis on the referencing and incorporation of what has come before in the production of new work. I have, however, opted to sacrifice such a discussion in the interest of clarity, choosing instead to focus on my original objective – the disruption of strictly materialist approaches to heritage and memory work, and the exploration of how the performance and re-performance of diasporic African cultures in the UK might support our collective endeavour of cultural preservation. In order to stay on the right side of the law, the lyrical quotations that formerly framed the various sections of this chapter no longer appear, the titles of these sections, lifted directly from Smith's seminal work, being the only remaining vestiges of my initial intention. The choice not to re-write the chapter entirely stems from my will to preserve, in whatever way possible, the spark of inspiration for this essay that came from my sonic engagement with a so-called 'British-Jamaican' artist,¹ an artist whose work was not only contemporaneous to Hall's essay, but whom I believe embodies, in very practical terms, Hall's ideas regarding 'cultural repertoires' (Hall, 1999, p. 12) and their redeployment. Listening to *Brand New Second Hand* helped stimulate my thinking through of living (and sustaining) engagements with Pan-African heritage and, following Hall, it is vital that cultural repertoires remain explicit and accessible in the grounding and forging of new works. I would encourage readers to listen themselves to Smith's debut album.² Its sonic signature will provide additional context to this essay that no amount of text is able to.

Movements (Pain and Elevation)

The cold-blooded murder of George Floyd in May 2020 was yet another global landmark in an unbroken, centuries-long stream of Afriphobic oppression. In the UK, some of those who agreed that the lives of people of African heritage *do* matter took aim at 'the heritage'. The unceremonious removal of the statue of Edward Colston, a notorious trafficker of enslaved Africans, from his pedestal in Bristol and its submersion in Bristol harbour reignited a culture war that continues to rage. Side-stepping the question of whether or not the media coverage of this 'war' is mostly a distraction set up to draw attention away from the larger political and humanitarian failings of the ruling political party (hint: it is), I would instead like to set out my stall by considering the notion of culture that has underpinned this debate. Cancel culture cuts many ways, and innumerable attempts to cancel African cultures fill the imperial archive.³ I will not waste words here painstakingly (or, indeed, painfully) setting out arguments explaining why the contestation of material culture celebrating the spoils of genocide is justified. That is hopefully already quite clear. Instead, I would like to take the opportunity to question the

Eurocentric notion of culture as it is understood in the context of 'the heritage'. It is a question that drives to the very heart of the discussion we are embarking on. Moreover, it is the unspoken question subtly underlying Hall's un-settling of the heritage itself. The late Ugandan poet and cultural critic Okot p'Bitek said it best:

It was the Romans who turned culture into a *thing* ... something separate and distinguishable from the *way of life of a people* ... something that can be put in books and museums ... the history of the books exists only as corpses in the graveyard called the library. Occasionally some curious fellow would refer to them ... but this type of history is not lived in society. It has no impact, influence or importance for the living of life here and now. It is not celebrated in song and dance nor in poetry ... history, like all other arts, is an integral part of culture and should be carried inside the head to enliven the entire body of the individual in society.

(p'Bitek, 1986, p. 22)

For p'Bitek, culture was not, and could never be, encapsulated in any material object. Indeed, whether his sardonic wit was directed at Western imperialism itself or diasporic Africans hanging Yoruba masks in their LA apartments 'reeking with unbelief and aimlessness in life' (p'Bitek, 1986, p. 22), his fundamental point was that culture is a living, breathing, perpetually (re)enacted entity that makes precious little sense when reduced to timelines, glass cabinets, white spaces and static displays of inanimate objects.

Viewed in this context, the phrase 'cancel culture' can yet absorb new meanings. Interestingly enough, the very institutions currently smarting under the pressure from the UK's Department of Culture, Media and Sport to 'retain and explain' (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2021) are themselves, by their very existence, invested in a mode of memory working that is unwittingly cancelling culture. The bricks, mortar, displays, stores, staff and strategies of 'the heritage' are, by dint of their investment in their own artificially prolonged physicality, ideologically opposed to 'the heritage' as a living, breathing force in society.

And so to Hall. His 'un-settling' of 'the heritage' couches this conflict in different, but not dissimilar, terms:

What is curious in the British usage is the emphasis given to preservation and conservation: to keeping what already exists – as opposed to the production and circulations of new work in different media, which takes a very definite second place.

(Hall, 1999, p. 3)

Preservation and conservation both imply keeping, but not necessarily living. The living, in Hall's estimation at least, is lower down the agenda set by the modern-day keepers of 'the heritage'. The year 1999 is a comparatively long

time ago, and although heritage ‘engagement’ and ‘learning’ have boomed over the past two decades of the codification of heritage praxis, they continue to be outshone by the conservative drive and are, in themselves, suspicious in their annexing of active potentials away from what is considered ‘real’ heritage work.

This chapter proposes that diasporic Africans’ living cultural forms should be thought of as ‘brand new second hand’. It draws heavily upon what Diana Taylor (2003) terms the ‘repertoire’ (a concept I prefer to refer to as the living or embodied archive) as a means of both carrying and transmitting a heritage that is simultaneously about the past and the here-and-now. Answering Smith’s call to ‘elevate’, the first thing I want to suggest here is that Africans in the diaspora (or indeed on the continent), and others with whom our journey resonates, cannot rely on what Hall terms a ‘retrospective nation-alised, tradition-alised’ conception of culture as a lodestar for the continuing development of our heritage praxis. The unbelonging and misrepresentation (Hall, 1999, p. 4) that have thus far defined our engagement with ‘the heritage’ have been painful for sure, but they may yet serve us well in evolutionary terms. The denigration of our methods as somehow anti-historical, rather than being a source of renewed trauma, can instead serve as an incitement to elevate and to innovate on our own terms – Smith’s ‘motion divine’ (Smith, 1999) .

Strange Behaviour

Initiating this motion requires that we first acknowledge, assess and transcend the elephant in the room. What *is* with this strange behaviour? I am here less concerned with the persistently unbalanced manoeuvrings of ‘the heritage’ as it operates on the post-Brexit island of (Great?) Britain and instead more interested in the compromised reasoning faculties that our voyage on the good ship *Britannia* as migrants and the children of migrants seems to have induced. According to the 2011 census, 86 per cent of the population in the UK were white, with 80.5 per cent being defined as White British. Of the 14 per cent who were non-white, 7.5 per cent defined themselves as Asian, 3.3 per cent as Black and 2.2 per cent as having multiple ethnicities (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Whilst we surely are people of the global majority, we are most certainly in the minority within this environment,⁴ a fact of which the various acronyms we are collectively assigned relish to remind us.

The roots of ‘the heritage’ in this country, and indeed across Europe, are to be found in colonial exploitation, curiosity, exoticism and an insatiable desire for power and control. I am an archivist. Although evidence of my profession can be found stretching into an African antiquity (Zinn, 2012; Posner, 1972), the founding texts and principles upon which the roots of the modern practice of my discipline are built emanate, without exception, from the collective minds of nation-states steeped in colonialism and imperialism. The ‘Dutch Manual’, Hilary Jenkinson’s *A Manual of Archive Administration*, the

French principle of '*respect des fonds*' and the more recent Australian records continuum model (Jenkinson, 1937; Duchein, 1983; Ketelaar, 1996; Upward, 2016) are but a few of many possible examples. The British Empire was primarily a 'paper empire, built on a series of flimsy pretexts that were always becoming texts' (Richards, 1993, p. 4). Each of these nations saw an explosion in the volume of documents in need of an archive as a combined result of the administration of annexed territories and the developments that the riches squeezed from these colonised populations afforded their 'mother country' economies. The imperial connections at the base of museum practice are perhaps better known and need little explanation here. Hall himself references the 16th- and 17th-century 'cabinets of curiosities' stuffed full of exotic loot from far flung 'trading' posts that, in time, would become the cornerstone of some of Europe's most esteemed national institutions – organisations and sites that latterly have been labelled 'crime scenes' by reparations activists familiar with their position both as the progenitors and progeny of Britain's imperial endeavour (DTA.LIVE Radio and Stanford-Xosei, n.d.).

Hall's 'un-settling' asked us to consider two major challenges to this 'traditionalised' heritage – democratisation and the dissolution of Eurocentrism, with a particular focus on heterogenous descriptive and representational practices, the implication being that a democratised and inclusive heritage landscape is the goal that we unbelonging memory workers at that 'propitious moment' at the turn of the millennium should be seeking (Hall, 1999, p. 8). Heterogeneity is often used in the social sciences to denote non-uniformity or difference. Perhaps, in this present case, we should also consider its lesser-known medical usage as a descriptor for bodies originating from *outside* their host organisms – an analogue for our perceived position in 'the heritage' and in this country more broadly. We might be notionally 'British' if we were born here or gained citizenship as a dubious trade-off for colonial subjugation, but we are also *Black*, or *Brown*, or otherwise at odds with the standard of whiteness necessary to truly inhabit this country as a fully recognised person. Hall was correct to prophecy that democratisation and representational heterogeneity would continue to unsettle, reform and advance heritage practice in the UK. It has indeed done so for the more than two decades since he delivered his paper. Twenty-three years on, however, we still find ourselves in the invidious position of what Walter Rodney termed 'proving our humanity' (Rodney, 1969, p. 51) within the corridors of institutional power. As unpalatable as it may be to hear, there is a chance that this position may never be significantly altered.

In this light, Hall was wrong to cite the revolutionary work of Amílcar Cabral within the context of his reflections on a 'deep, slow-moving revolution' (Hall, 1999, p. 8). This invocation blurs the lines between reform and revolution in a misleading way. Kwame Ture reminds us that reform makes it possible to identify problems in a system and superficially address them while leaving the structural premises at the foundation of that system firmly in place. A revolutionary, however, observing the same structure determines

that the foundations of the structure must be torn out and a new structure put in its place (Carmichael and UCLA Communication Studies, 1973). As one of Africa's great revolutionary leaders, Cabral and his *Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC) were fighting an armed struggle to reclaim *their own countries*, for the majority, from the forces of Portuguese colonialism. It was a revolutionary struggle because it sought a wholesale replacement of the colonial system with one in which indigenous people were treated as people, and it was a justified revolution because, as the colonising entity, Portugal was a nation in oppressive overreach.

The same, however, cannot be said of our current situation in the UK's heritage ecosystem. For all the reasons outlined thus far, the very idea of a revolution, at whatever speed it is being said to progress, seems untenable. It is faintly ridiculous to propose that a minority population, some of whom are still suffering humiliating deportations, will rise up and revolutionise structures and ingrained ideas almost as old as the first meeting of our respective cultures. Even in allyship with the many well-meaning practitioners of European heritage within the sector, to say that such a task is daunting is a gross understatement. I, like many others, only finished paying off the compensation awarded to the enslavers of my great, great grandparents through my UK tax contributions a blink of an eye ago, and I was reminded of this by a 'fun fact' tweet from HM Treasury.⁵ Funding a revolution can be challenging when your capital is tied up paying reparations to 200-year-old enslavers and their beneficiaries, and the possibility that such a revolution would be resourced by the same system it seeks to depose is nothing if not humorous.

African artefacts still sit uncomfortably in national museums. In the ironically titled 'Museum of the Home', statues of enslavers retain pride of place, with artists of African heritage being invited to ignore the insult to the memory of their ancestors and 'use the statue and the history of the museum's buildings as a platform for discussion and creative response' (Museum of the Home, 2021). It seems that old habits die extremely hard – and have maybe even been lent the power to transcend death altogether. In 2020 the UN resolution 'A global call for concrete action for the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action' was adopted by the UN General Assembly (United Nations, 2020). The response to this resolution provides a sobering backative for my thesis. Of the 193 members who voted on this resolution, 106 voted in favour, 14 voted against and 44 members abstained. In the short but telling list of nations, actually in black and white, who formally registered their stance *against* the elimination of racism and reparative actions we find Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. In this socio-political milieu we must honestly ask ourselves if we can seriously expect equity to be in any way forthcoming?

As an archivist of African heritage, it is important for my mental health to consign myself to the disappointing but realistic fact that reform and 'inclusion' is my current lot within the industry to which I give my labour. This does not have to be as dispiriting as it sounds. There is much that can be achieved and much to learn. Hall's demand 'that the majority, mainstream versions of "the heritage" should revise their own self-conceptions ... representing more adequately the degree to which "their" history entails and has always implicated "us", across the centuries' (Hall, 1999, p. 10) is a justified one that offers many gains on all sides. That said, it is important that we do not conflate this integration with a revolutionary illusion, or any other flights of fancy that do not correspond to the reality people racialised as Black experience daily. Whilst revolution appears a world away within the current national external environment, it is, in contrast, a very real possibility *internally*, within the hearts and minds of African heritage memory workers, and *externally* in the places and spaces beyond institutional walls. By leaning into our own communal spaces and ways of being, and our own ancestral storehouses of experience evidencing those historic journeys coded into our own psychobiology, we might yet touch upon those aspects of praxis offering potentials for a radical redefinition.

Motion 5000 (Feeling With Inner Eyes)

Genetic determinism, the idea that an organism's phenotype can be determined by genotype alone, is a myth 'which no scientist or intellectual of any note has ever believed to be true' (Sarraf and Woodley, 2019). It is, however, broadly accepted that our genetic inheritance, in conjunction with myriad environmental factors, plays a key role in the unfolding of our lives as sentient beings on this Earth. The emerging scientific field of epigenetics, still vigorously debated, advances the theory that behaviour and environment can affect the way that genes work, potentially altering their expression and impacting upon the chemical balance, and thus the state of wellness of the body and mind. Whilst much more work remains to be done, recent experimental findings have contributed to 'converging evidence supporting the idea that offspring are affected by parental trauma exposures occurring before their birth, and possibly even prior to their conception' (Lehrner and Yehuda, 2018, p. 243). Much of this work has been focussed around trauma, with Dr Joy DeGruy's work on Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome being the most well-known theoretical framework amongst the global African family (DeGruy, 2017). On rewatching one of Dr DeGruy's lectures, it struck me that the idea of transgenerational transmission connected several dots that had, until then, been abstract feelings in my sphere of awareness. I want to focus here on the idea of the mind, the body and the spirit as a transgenerational archive – a base from which to amplify the radical incitement to feel with internal insight that inspires this particular interlude – and apply this transformative counsel

to the field of African heritage memory work. In doing this, I am keen to move beyond the narrow (but understandable) vista of trauma and include the affective, and ultimately mnemonic, potentials of other intense, but not necessarily traumatic, experiences.

My affinity with this mode of exploration is undoubtedly due to my engagement with African/diasporic ways of knowing rooted in precolonial African philosophies. I have elsewhere cited the Kôngo technology of individual and collective ‘rolls of life’ (*tuzîngu*) capable of holding the intangible records of all the deeds of an individual and their respective community (Fu-Kiau, 2001, p. 36). The majority of readers will also be familiar with the esteemed position that ancestors hold within traditional and neo-traditional African/diasporic societies. Mbiti talks in some depth about what he perceives as different stages of the transitional journey to the ancestral realm. He speaks of the connection between the living and the dead, of the ability of the living to connect with and immortalise the dead through transgenerational acts of memory, including pouring libations, and of the capacity of the living to construct for the dead ‘personal immortality in the physical continuation of the individual through procreation, so that the children bear the traits of their parents’ (Mbiti, 1975, p. 25). Several continental African traditions also embrace the possibility of the direct reincarnation of a departed ancestor, often within their family or clan lineage (Stevenson, 1985).

Referencing the ‘richly traditional arts’ of African and South Asian cultures, Hall’s un-settling asserts that ‘unless the younger generation has access to these cultural repertoires and can understand and practice them, to some extent at least, from the inside, they will lack the resources – the cultural capital – of their own “heritage”, as a base from which to engage other traditions’ (Hall, 1999, p. 12). Framed by the science and the spirituality touched upon here, this statement is simultaneously true and false: true in that, of course, direct, tangible lived experience with one’s culture, or cultures of origin, is bound to increase connection with that heritage; and false in that, following Mbiti’s analysis, it is never really possible to fully lose access to such resources, at least from a spiritual perspective. There is a stage of the process of ancestral transition in which ‘the last person who knew the departed also dies and the latter ... becomes completely dead as far as family ties are concerned’ (Mbiti, 1975, p. 25). However, within the same few paragraphs Mbiti also acknowledges that the person, whilst no longer a tangible living memory within their direct family line, continues to live and remains contactable in the state of ‘collective immortality’ (1975, p. 26). The point I am making here is that, whether we choose to perceive life through the lens of the emergent Western science of epigenetics or the centuries-old eyes of continental African traditions, there are modes of accessing, recognising and transmitting our past coded into our bodies, our families, our communities and, ultimately, the very fabric of our beings. As Hall rightly suggests, a conscious, experiential understanding of this heritage can improve one’s ‘cultural capital’, but the deeply ingrained and biologically evidenced relatedness

between the living and the dead mean that our 'forgotten' cultural repertoire lies persistently within our collective consciousness, waiting for the appropriate moment of re-ignition, rediscovery or sometimes simply recognition.

The idea of recognition is a subtle but important one. Jeano Edwards' work (which our Decolonising the Archive project had the privilege of digitally mounting as part of our DTA.SPACE residency programme) explored this in some detail with a multidimensional installation comprising film, text and audio. Opening with the question: 'Can there be a global blackness that connects, articulates and synchronises experiences and histories?', his Resonance project coined the term 'praxervation', which was defined as 'preservation coupled with the idea of praxis ... a self-updating system that continuously responds to changes and development happening within a given cultural network by referencing the mechanisms employed within the past cultural tradition in order to develop new practices' (Edwards, 2018, p. 21). Edwards' project designed and delivered a living praxervation process in collaboration with transnational musicians of Jamaican heritage. However, despite this intentionality, his film work referenced the clear connections between the neo-traditional/ancestral mechanisms of Kumina practitioners and the practices *subconsciously* employed by younger generations of Jamaican musicians across the Atlantic in the UK.⁶ Community, collectivity and the circle were recurring motifs in both settings.

Refocusing our attention on the overarching title of this chapter, Edwards' Resonance elicits several useful insights. First, like Roots Manuva's debut offering, much of what we create as African diaspora producers is 'brand new second hand'. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are consistently tapping into our ancestral storehouse, updating, refashioning and repurposing techniques, knowledge and experiences to produce 'new' work. The Akan people of Ghana label this act '*sankofa*' – a Twi word describing the act of learning from the past to inform the future (Temple, 2010). Second, such acts of creation/activation and circulation must be considered not simply as generative of novel knowledge/experience/material but as forms of living preservation in their own right. Where Eurocentric conservative paradigms require fixity as a fundamental marker of success, re-emergent African preservative strategies must be broad enough to encompass fixity *and* mutability. Further supporting the case for this living preservation are recent experimental findings offering 'substantial evidence ... that emotional events are remembered more clearly, accurately and for longer periods of time than are neutral events' (Amin *et al.*, 2017, p. 16). Living practice has an increased potential to stimulate emotional and affective responses; therefore, a living, vibrant heritage practice functions both as a current of transmission and organic preservation.

The preceding does not consign our material and documentary heritage and existing approaches to preserving it to the dustbin. On the contrary, the radical opportunity presented to the documentary and artefactual memory worker here is to insert and activate what Mbiti terms the 'dead names' of the material

archive into a vibrant, living memory stream, a current within which these fragments of what Mbembe has labelled ‘traces of the deceased’ (Mbembe, 2002, p. 22) are enlivened and once again integrated into the unending cycle of death and rebirth. Mbembe makes fruitful connections between life, death and the archive. For him the archive resembles ‘a cemetery in the sense that fragments of lives and pieces of time are interred there’ (Mbembe, 2002, p. 19). Contrary to my thesis here, his thinking was tightly bound by ‘the inescapable materiality of the archive’ (Mbembe, 2002, p. 19) – a take on the archive I would argue is partial, but too important to be passed over entirely. It is here that I am forced to take pause for thought. Excepting a handful of excellent but perpetually under-resourced, Black-led repositories and well-managed private collections, the required capacity for the preservation of our diasporic material heritage has not yet been reached, at least not on UK shores. Whilst I would argue that self-determination is preferable wherever practically possible, this is possibly the ripest area for collaboration between African heritage communities and institutions – either in the form of well-crafted, equitable storage agreements preserving community ownership and full control of their material assets or capacity building, initially through sharing knowledge of basic material preservation techniques. The digital also offers us numerous, and perhaps more accessible, sovereign possibilities, but to complete any of these thoughts here would breach the boundaries of this chapter.

Juggle Tings Proper

How then can all this information be used practically? First, it is incumbent upon us to replace our common understanding of the word ‘information’ with an appreciation for the concept of in-formation. In-formation implies ‘a process that actually forms the recipient’ (Laszlo, 2007, p. 13). Memory work is not simply about the intellectual act of remembering, but rather the encoding of active memory into our beings through living actions. History should not be an academic exercise, but rather a living memory practice that we literally, and figuratively, pour libations to, strengthening the ties that bind us to our ancestors, their experiences and our ancestral practices. Each act of remembrance constitutes a living spark, igniting practical actions and achieving practical goals in the present. Githere’s theory of Afropresentism is helpful here:

Afropresentism is you channelling your ancestry through every technology at your disposal – meditation, conversation, love, the Web – and turning absolutely everything into a portal that takes you precisely where you need to be, in this moment, towards the next. Until finally, the space between the dream and the memory collapses into being your reality – now.

[Githere, n.d.]

For those of us forged in an African experience, our ancestors' historic participation in the resistance and eventual overthrow of imperial power might today manifest as an independently owned hosting server and streaming channel enabling the sovereign practice and transmission of our cultural norms and values.⁷ Or, more ambitiously, the establishment of a collaborative, egalitarian, self-sustaining community on land occupied for that purpose. It is important to note that the artistic work quasi-structuring this piece falls somewhat short in this regard. Its publication via a white-owned record label reminds us, if such a reminder was necessary, that ideas and actions regarding Pan-African self-determination remain supremely relevant. Recalling my thoughts regarding minorities and majorities at the outset of this discussion, activating the deep, potentialised and, indeed, actualised memory of Pan-African collaboration in the manner expounded by the Garveys (Amy Jacques, Amy Ashwood and Marcus), Leonard Howell, Walter Rodney, Kwame Nkrumah and countless others in our near history can serve to address this issue. Global diasporic interconnections provide a much-needed counterbalance to our existing compartmentalised minoritisation in the UK. My organisation purposefully operates in this way. In-formed by our common Pan-African archive, we forge transnational diasporic connections, enabling the exploration of praxis and the development of capacity and, perhaps most importantly, offering the mutual recognition and respect so often lacking in our lonely journey on this cold island.

Juggling tings proper is not limited to political acts or overt resistance, however. It is also the purposeful incorporation and activation of new and emergent forms that themselves 'praxerve' their historical antecedents in the dissemination of our heritage, but with a consciousness of the lineage from which they derive their potency. Here I am in agreement with Hall that 'there is no intrinsic contradiction between the preservation and presentation of ... "cultures" and ... the engagement with the production of new diasporic forms' (Hall, 1999, p. 13). Indeed, what has been argued here is that these elements, the new and the ancestral, form one unbroken, if sometimes fuzzy, line between where we have been, where we are and where we have yet to go. In his paper, Hall references music, dance, fashion and film. However, it is important that we do not conceive of culture in these narrow terms. 'Culture is philosophy as lived and celebrated in society (p'Bitek, 1986, p. 13), and, by this measure, everything from our re-emergent ancestral religious practices to our versioned linguistic inflections, movements and cuisine are to be included. Heritage being our focus, it is natural that we may approach these new forms with an urge to connect them to what has come before. There is no expectation for society to do this en masse, but, as memory workers, it is important that this deeper in-formation is accessible to those with a will to engage with it and those who wish to use it to share and story their own particular presents.

Big Tings Gwidarn (Blessings)

What I have tried to highlight in this short essay are the observations, contradictions and ambitions that Hall himself highlighted two decades ago – connecting these to my developing methodology for thinking about, and working with, the ‘ourstories’ of people of African heritage.⁸ In ‘versioning’ the work of an artist who themselves sampled, conceptually and sonically, from their own lineage in order to frame my present narrative, I have hopefully demonstrated the idea of the living connections that I argue exist between our individual and collective histories and the here and now.⁹ The word ‘hopefully’, however, cannot be used in conjunction with my prognosis of the deep and ongoing issues that exist in British society, and by implication its heritage complex. I have a profound admiration for the many optimists, of all cultural backgrounds, dreaming and working towards equitable resolutions and indeed revolutions. I remain willing to be convinced, but to date have found richer reward in a combination of self-determination and the occasional equitable collaboration when the way is open. Indeed, if a golden age of equity should ever be ushered in within these national borders, then the experiences, knowledge and understandings of those of us who have worked to build and define alternative methods of practice and praxis will provide vital sustenance for the future development of new, egalitarian systems. Should this not happen, however – or in the meantime – the expansion of our horizons temporally, spiritually, socially and geographically through some of the mechanisms I have outlined here offers its own rewards, independent of any trinkets that may be conferred upon us by the British heritage complex. Like Hall in his ‘un-settling’, many of the points raised in this chapter could, and should, be explored in much more detail than the boundaries of this current volume allow. What I too have offered is ‘a wholly inadequate sketch’ (Hall, 1999, p. 13), omitting the scores of references and countless in-depth examples necessary to fully explore the territory that I have briefly surveyed. Circling back around to hope, I am hopeful that, in sharing my thoughts here, they can be assimilated, remixed, versioned and otherwise adapted to provide sustenance for all who are willing to tap into the stream, and especially for African heritage memory workers grappling, as I am, with these issues. There are Black people in the future (Wormsley, n.d.). Make room for the blessings.

Notes

- 1 An artist who I would describe as being of African heritage.
- 2 Listen to *Brand New Second Hand* via Bandcamp: <https://rootsmanuva.bandcamp.com/album/brand-new-second-hand>.
- 3 The vaguely defined phrase ‘used to describe the consequences of social transgressions’ (Wiseman, 2021). Originating as a term used to describe the assertion of the values of marginalised communities in the face of the wrongs of powerful and privileged social actors, ‘cancel culture’ has gradually been weaponised by the

right in a manner that elides the accountability the phrase was intended to emphasise and instead stokes the fires of binary right vs. left arguments designed to distract from the real issues at hand.

- 4 I find myself adopting this term more and more as people of African heritage, indigenous people, and people of colour represent over 80 per cent of the world's population. This wording points out the demographic inaccuracy of the euphemism 'minority' deployed with such frequency within state and corporate communications.
- 5 In 1833, the negotiated abolition settlement between the British state and groups defending the interests of the 'owners' of enslaved Africans brought emancipation, but with a system of apprenticeship extending the period of unfree labour and a grant of £20 million in compensation, to be paid by the British taxpayers to the former 'owners' of the enslaved (Hall *et al.*, n.d.)
- 6 Kumina is an African-Jamaican practice that includes secular and religious ceremonies, dance and music developed from the beliefs and traditions brought to the island by Kongo enslaved people and indentured labourers from the Congo region of West Central Africa during the post-emancipation era.
- 7 Although we must remember that digital real estate can never be quite as valuable as the real thing.
- 8 'Ourstories' is a term I have heard quoted by a number of African heritage practitioners, most notably Esther Stanford-Xosei, designed to reclaim representational power by figuratively taking collective control of our story by replacing the patriarchal 'his' with the collective 'our'.
- 9 The evolution of Dub music during the 1970s was characterised by a growing appreciation for the instrumental 'version' that was customarily pressed on the B-side of a vocal Reggae vinyl single and often prefigured by an exclusive mix given to Sound System operators to play on one-off acetate pressings known as dub plates. A 'version', as its name suggests, is an alternate version of a recorded artistic performance, departing from the original through the innovation of the mixing engineer and their choice to omit, accentuate or otherwise effect particular elements of the original composition. In the context of my comments about neoliberalism and reuse at the outset of this essay, it is striking that the lack of strict laws surrounding music publishing and manufacturing in Jamaica during the 1960s–1980s gave rise to one of the most generative, innovative and influential periods of creativity in the history of popular music. Dub techniques, born of the popularity of the version, are acknowledged to this day as having fundamentally shaped the development and technological palette of modern music production.

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13 Crisis of authority

Rebuilding the heritage narrative in Stuart Hall's post-nation state

R. M. Lewis

The questions – ‘Who should control the power to represent’ ‘Who has the authority to re-present the culture of others?’ – have resounded through the museum corridors of the world, provoking a crisis of authority.

(Hall, 1999, p. 7)

This essay seeks to explore and challenge Britain's authority, as a conceived nation-state, to preserve and perpetuate often mythological heritage narratives.¹ Through the lens of Stuart Hall's 1999 'Whose Heritage?' speech and subsequent essay, I will propose that there is a need to rebuild or indeed eradicate the structures and institutions that often subsume or negate the heritage narratives of Black and minoritised communities to perpetuate their own power and the mythologies of the nation-state. In 'Whose Heritage?', Stuart Hall's analysis of race, identity, culture, and representation centralises the role that institutional and systemic discrimination has played in the invention of the nation-state where racism and injustice are woven into Britain's historic fabric. By utilising Hall's analysis of the contemporary nation-state and the representation of historical narratives of empire within this context, I will advocate for recourse to and adoption of international obligations as a structural route towards changing Britain's heritage narrative alongside a political and symbolic shift away from a singular and mythical nationalism. I do so with a hopefulness and elevated belief in a new generation of heritage and museum activists who continue to raise awareness of the violent history of the British Empire and disrupt the power that is too often wielded by wider cultural institutions to exclude the heritage and voices of the marginalised.

The myth of origin – whose heritage?

It's never [before] been an historical artefact because statues on public display ... aren't artefacts, they are totems of power, and it's now a historical artefact and it has multiple meanings and multiple layers to it. It speaks to multiple periods in its history and Bristol's history.

(Olusoga, 2021)

The acquittal by jury of the Colston Four in Bristol on 5 January 2022, following a 19-month court ordeal, heralds a significant shift in an often racialised national debate about the way that British heritage is represented. The four white-presenting protestors, the oldest of whom was 33, had been active participants in the toppling of Edward Colston's statue and its ceremonial 'dumping' in the same harbour that Colston would have traded from in the 1700s.² Along with thousands of fellow Bristolians, the Colston Four had taken part in Black Lives Matter protests in June 2020 following George Floyd's murder in the US, which sparked international outrage, anti-racist activism, protest, street resistance, and civil unrest. For Bristolians living in the most diverse city in the southwest of England, this protest was long overdue, particularly for local Black and minoritised communities, who had lived their lives against the backdrop of Edward Colston's legacy of racialised violence and exploitation. A prolific and prominent enslaver, Colston operated as a merchant in the city in the late 17th and early 18th century and served as a Tory member of parliament. It was, however, the Victorians, at the height of their global imperialist ventures, that inflated and traded up his reputation by erecting a statue in 1895 to further mythologise his legacy as Bristol's most benevolent philanthropist.

Like other statues of enslavers in Britain and around the world, the bronze figure of Edward Colston can be seen to represent the hyper-masculinised tropes of empire and the nation-state. The nostalgic symbols of a former golden age, these statues continue to be used as an ideological tool to promote British power on both a national and international stage. As Anne McClintock has observed, the narratives that surround the history of empire remind us that 'nations are not simply phantasmagoria of the mind but are historical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed. Nationalism becomes, as a result, radically constitutive of people's identities though social contests that are frequently violent and always gendered' (McClintock, 1995, p. 353). At this intersection of power, race, gender, class, and nationalism, a nation-state's legislation and its mechanisms of governance are bolstered by political and social notions of heritage. Heritage becomes an instrumental way to engage the hearts and minds of a nation, whereas legislation and institutions are a way to (punitively) regulate and control the behaviour of its citizens.

The cultural and racist fallacy of a British indigeneity or myth of origin constructs the notion of a pure white British race and informs how that heritage is represented and who represents it. As Paul Gilroy explains, 'blacks are represented in contemporary British politics and culture as external to and estranged from the *imagined community that is the nation*, those representations are, like the "racial" essences on which they rely, precarious constructions, discursive figures which obscure and mystify deeper relationships' (Gilroy, 1995, p. 153; emphasis added). If the nation-state is based on an 'imagined community that is the nation', then a naturalised myth of origin, particularly in relation to a racial or cultural origin, will be founded on who both

the nation-state and its heritage narratives choose to exclude. And Britain has profited from centuries of imperialism and colonial conquests by fully exploiting and utilising the power of binaries that exclude to extract – i.e., patriarchal British superpowers versus the feminised ‘other’, and wealthy nations of progression and development versus the poverty and inadequacy of ‘other’ racialised worlds and people.

In its post-Brexit polarisation, contemporary Britain still promotes a heritage that purports to represent British indigeneity and sovereignty, one that is harmonised by blue passports and, as a nation-state, is once again proudly re-masculinised by its independence from the nations of Europe who have clearly gone ‘soft’.³ As the legislation for a sharp Brexit was passed in December 2020, so submerged parts of the British Empire violently re-surfaced. The death toll of migrant refugees crossing the seas from ‘Fortress Europe’ to Britain’s shores has continued, and the nation-state demonstrates an ever-diminishing sense of responsibility for their imperialist past in response to the loss of life. We have seen this wilful cruelty extend to the Nationality and Borders Act, which was passed through parliament with cross-party approval in April 2022, and the Home Office’s subsequent plan in May 2022 to send migrants to Rwanda, particularly those who dare to cross the French Channel. Where legislation becomes an interpretative tool of structural equality, so the measures of accountability are weakened.⁴

When we consider heritage in a national context, the nation-state plays a key role in defining constructs of racialised, gendered, and class-based identities through a plethora of cultural lenses. If heritage – British heritage – is built upon a presumptive adoption of white sovereignty and a set of myths about, and nostalgia for, empire in an era of authoritarian regression, how can this speak to the contemporary human experiences of a cost-of-living crisis, ecological devastation, and an international pandemic that has killed millions of people?

Subjects of the state: Neoliberalism and new labour narratives

It is important to remember that the nation-state is both a political and territorial entity.

[Hall, 1999, p. 4]

What came to be known, misleadingly, as ‘the British way of life’ is really another name for a particular settlement of structured social inequalities.

[Hall, 1999, p. 6]

Hall’s ‘Whose Heritage?’ speech was written against a political backdrop of New Labour rhetoric in which neoliberalist ideologies had come to full fruition and the UK was profiting from the exponential riches and business boom being produced by the culture industry. British museums and galleries were also benefitting from an increased injection of funding and resources that

were part of New Labour's endless ambition for national economic growth. Hall regarded an increase in funding for the arts (and thus the funding of heritage work) as 'one of the most important cultural developments of our time' (1999, p. 13), but the source of this funding and the rationale behind it does pose an ethical problem. Along with this national investment in the reinvigoration of the arts and heritage sector there was a renewed international appetite at the turn of the 21st century for a version of Britain that lived up to its 'Cool Britannia' image. This deliberately skewed nostalgic representation of Britain's historical past was fuelled and perpetuated world-wide, with Britain's imperialist ventures (past and present) once more generating invaluable financial assets and benefits for a country recovering from 22 years of a Conservative government and Thatcherite privatisation.

The continued and seemingly endless free-market wealth streams and investment in the culture industry to a degree unimagined under Thatcher's government was interwoven with New Labour's equalities discourse and agenda. Labour's progressive EU-inspired institutionalisation of human rights, public sector equality duties, and international obligations culminated in the Equalities Act of 2010 and the state's consolidation of LGBT+ rights, represented by the widespread public support for the UK's first same-sex marriage in 2014. And yet – underneath the surface of this free-market economic joy – Babylon burned as the 'West's' violent authoritarian powers were once again unleashed. This was demonstrated by the international and state response to 9/11, Britain's central role in the Iraq War, and the subsequent rise of Islamophobia disguised as Eurocentric libertarianism. In her 2004 book of essays in response to 9/11, *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler outlines the ways that this gave the US, and I would argue the UK, the excuse to heighten 'nationalist discourse' and 'anti-intellectualism' in the face of what they determined to be such 'moral outrage'. The myth that the empire has no blood on its hands is rooted in the heritage narrative of any imperialist nation. Oppression, as intersectional Black feminists have taught us, is always interconnected and intersecting.

In her essay 'Third Wave Feminism and Black Women's Activism', Pragna Patel (former Director of Southall Black Sisters, a frontline Black and minoritised led-by and for organisation working to end violence against women and girls) outlined the interlocking complexities of a nation-state that has a totalising involvement and power over the rights of marginalised people: 'The state for us has never been an abstract concept. It has real existence which defines our roles and position in society; it negotiates our existence as women within our families' (Patel, 1997, p. 261). In her analysis of the role of the state in institutionalising violence against women and girls, Patel adds another layer to Hall's understanding of the state in relation to heritage. Throughout her career she has outlined the ways that 'law and social policy takes as "natural" or given certain power relations between groups' and that it is these power relations that 'produce and perpetuate' such inequalities (Patel, 1997, p. 261). One clear example of this, which she cites in her essay,

is the catalogue of racist assumptions behind immigration law and the hostile environment, which has of late been increasingly imposed on Black and minoritised communities.

Hall describes the ways that the narratives of the past often haunt ‘progressive’ legislation and that this could be where a reluctance for institutional change is embedded. The current Conservative government’s (as of 2022) lack of commitment to – and in fact erasure of – British rights-based legislation leaves us to consider whether we need to move towards a better utilisation of international obligations such as CERD, CEDAW, and international law.⁵ However, contrary to the current Conservative narrative about taking back control of its borders and legislation from Europe, Britain’s legislative obligation and commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights (an international treaty that the UK has signed) and European Court of Human Rights has not yet been severed by the UK leaving the European Union.

The furthering of neoliberal politics under New Labour (Hall being one of the earliest public critics of the regime) in the late 1990s and early 2000s did untold damage to working-class and Black and minoritised communities in Britain. The Blairite years propounded an individualistic free-market capitalism, spearheading consumerism and ecocide in equal measures. Under Lord Freud’s guidance, New Labour dismantled the welfare system, heralding the way for zero-hours contracts while increasing the wealth of Britain’s richest people, the issue of the socio-economic exploitation of workers in the arts and heritage industry being well documented over the past decade (e.g., Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Littler, 2013).

Neoliberalism also arguably further propelled structural inequalities in the heritage sector, which, as of 2019, was a £30.1 billion heritage industry (Historic England, 2019). This publication goes on to cite how the heritage industry, which employs 464,000 people, ‘generates demand and property price premium’ (Historic England, 2019, p. 20). Between 2009 and 2019 (just one year after the global financial crash of 2008) there was a £10 billion rise in income and revenue for the heritage sector. With capital comes power. In its report, Historic England goes on to boast that ‘England’s heritage sector generated a larger GVA (gross value added) than the security industry, defence industry, aerospace industry and the arts and culture industry in the UK’ (Historic England, 2019, p. 30).

The power of representation and visible identities

A shared national identity thus depends on the cultural meanings which bind each member individually into the larger national story.

[Hall, 1999, p. 4]

We should think of The Heritage as a discursive practice. It is one of the ways in which the nation slowly constructs for itself a sort of collective social memory.

[Hall, 1999, p. 5]

In 'Whose Heritage?' Hall elaborates on the elitist 'truth telling' that is so intimately tied into the institutional representation of heritage and the roles of museums and other institutions such as the V&A and National Trust in the perpetuation of this 'selective tradition'. Hall calls upon his audience to reimagine what is valuable about Britain's past, culture, and subjects, whilst simultaneously remembering that it has also deliberately excluded so many from their place in that history. Yet he still viewed the groundswell of arts and heritage projects in a positive rather than cynical way, because they had the potential to institutionalise cultural memories that may otherwise have been lost.

Stuart Hall considered there to be an ever-expanding plurality of identities under the catch all umbrella of the term multiculturalism, where 'history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity ... is contextual' (Hall 2005, p. 226). In his essay 'What is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture?' (1992) Hall ascertains that popular culture does not represent the 'true truth of our experience' and that 'by definition black popular culture is a contradictory space. It is a sight of strategic contestation' (Hall, 1992, p.26). In his analysis of black popular culture, Hall – quoting Paul Gilroy – went on to question the racialisation of culture into a binary of Black versus 'British' 'cultural positionality', concluding that culture, particularly popular culture, 'is an arena that is *profoundly* mythic' (Hall, 1992, p. 32). As a result of this, he quite rightly predicts in 'Whose Heritage?' a possible struggle between communities and the state to reclaim a sense of ownership over the representation of their heritage within relational power structures.

A contemporary example of this are the well-publicised internal spats that 'preservation institutions' such as the National Trust have had in relation to their initiatives following the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. These projects, which have included linking National Trust country houses to enslavement and plantations, have resulted in public complaints, racist graffiti, endless newspaper commentary, and trustee resignations. This 'culture war' media furore has challenged an imaginary static sense of identity that is associated with nostalgic green fields and an intangible idea of 'Britishness' (Riley, 2021). Whilst the focus has been on a parliamentary and public rift about the UK's ever deepening 'culture wars' (former Tory Party Chair Oliver Dowden being one of the loudest proponents), there has been less attention paid to the impact that this has had on the continued racialised deletion of Black and minoritised heritage from institutional narratives.

As a response to the issue of Black and minoritised communities' lack of visibility and their 'strategic contestation' in popular culture, Stuart Hall asserted the need for a new politics of representation (as resistance), suggesting that Eurocentric white critical theory, including liberal feminism, failed to recognise the diversity of Black and minoritised identities and upheld the construction of racial categorisation as fixed 'trans-cultural' or 'trans-national' identities. Hall posits that the "'black body'" in the representation of radicalised difference should not be mistaken for a return to a de-historicised, transcendental, biologically fixed, essentialised conception of racial identity'

(Hall, cited in Read, 1996, p. 21). Unfortunately, some contemporary heritage discussions now focus on the representation of race solely within a hierarchical context of social and political privilege and the broader concept of there being immutable, essentialised identities, which Hall as a Marxist and internationalist would have denounced. This form of representational race politics, often associated with ‘identitarian’ ideologies, is also a signifier of capitalist neoliberal individualism where, for example, individual representation in the boardrooms is promoted rather than root and branch systemic and structural change. This is not to be confused with the formation of self-defined spaces based on shared identities as a means of social and political empowerment, collective allyship, and resistance. Like Audre Lorde, Hall believed that social and political struggles should connect rather than divide racialised and other marginalised communities.

Over the past few years Britain has witnessed a surge of opposition to exclusionary heritage narratives and the protraction of an ever-authoritative nation-state. Britain’s history of civil disobedience, protest, and revolutionary subcultures has been taken to a new level by Millennials and Gen-Z in their pursuit of liberation and structural equity for marginalised communities, which is taking place intensely in both digital and material spaces. The increased diversity of Britain’s demographic over the past two decades has also resulted in Black and minoritised young people further mediating, contributing to, and defining what British culture and heritage is and will be in the future. This increased visibility of social and cultural diversity was championed by Hall as a way out of the heritage industry quagmire – a way to challenge a set of exclusionary heritage narratives and associated intangibilities that often reified and reflected a mass of racialised, and class-based, social inequalities. For where there has been an identified normalisation and pathologisation of absence in heritage narratives, there must be a consideration of how to address this absence.

Unravelling the liberal colonial discourse of the institutions

The institutions responsible for making the ‘selective tradition’ work develop a deep investment in their own ‘truth’.

[Hall, 1999, pp. 5–6]

The British Empire was the largest imperium of the modern world. The very notion of ‘greatness’ in Great Britain is inextricably bound up with its imperial destiny.

[Hall, 1999, p. 6]

In his work, Stuart Hall continually challenged large cultural institutions to reconsider what they needed to do structurally to divest themselves of their power alongside the decolonisation of the public-facing museums and galleries. The continued stagnation of parts of the culture industry in

addressing the need for equitable systemic change, despite injections of cash and capital, reflects a widespread institutional reluctance to make meaningful changes and to shift the resources and funding back into communities. This lack of a movement towards structural change is often reflected in heritage institutions' internal policy and practice, despite them working within a public equalities framework. This came to a head during Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, when structurally white-led cultural institutions released what could only be seen as highly performative anti-racist statements without any real commitment to tangible internal structural change.

The centralisation of state power and increased surveillance in Britain since Hall's 1999 speech has had a direct impact on the country's cultural and heritage institutions. This is due to the conditions attached to state funding and, very importantly, the mechanisms (multi-sectoral policies, procedures, protocols) by which institutions and systems implement national legislation and policy. Hall's Marxist analysis of labour and exploitation and his political socialism are critical to his reimagining of the heritage sector, racial equality, and social change. In 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic erupted and shut down the cultural industry in one fell swoop, many of the white-led culture heritage and arts institutions received bailouts and furlough support. And yet, despite making Black Lives Matter statements, they still failed to prioritise their retention of minoritised workers, particularly those in customer service or hospitality roles, the majority of whom were already on low or minimal wages and zero-hours contracts. In April 2021 the Museum Association reported 4,100 redundancies in the museum sector alone. These workers were of course the first to be made redundant, whilst directors, executives, and managers continued to be paid their regular salaries throughout the pandemic working from home.

Hall's positioning and analysis of capitalism through a critical race lens was crucial to his theoretical work around the nation-state. Bob Jessop in *State Power* theoretically articulates Hall's political position in 'Whose Heritage?', stating: 'Nationhood is a crucial element in the institutional matrix of the capitalist state', as it continues to play a role in 'constituting time and historicity' (Jessop, 2008, pp. 134–5). Hall grappled with the legacy of empire as both a Marxist cultural theorist and social activist; 'Whose Heritage?' speaks prophetically about the difficulties of repurposing a nation's narrative when it is still steeped in the traditions and bloody 'valour' of colonialism and empire. Two decades later, Britain is still yet to reconstruct the racialised narratives of its nation-state and respond to its crisis of authority as the heritage industry tenuously emerges from the pandemic. So how can the heritage sector revise the discourse of its national heritage narratives, divest its power, and share ownership of their archives with marginalised communities? In response to the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, arts and heritage institutions have arguably become more outward facing and now actively engage more with Black and minoritised communities, often through 'out-reach' work (one wonders why they didn't do this before), but many critics,

like myself, still express serious concerns about the ability of these institutions to move beyond performative promises.

In the *Archaeology of Knowledge* Michel Foucault sets out the ways in which the archive can function as a set of rules and regulations to govern discourse, that the reciprocal functioning of the archive can often lead to the replacement of one set of powers with another. Foucault believed that the archive could be historically transformed whilst appearing simultaneously in multiple discourses. Hall, often in agreement with Foucault, argues that simultaneity opens up the possibility of there being multiple heritage narratives – that is, heritage narratives that are polyvocal and allow spaces of contradiction. Many heritage and cultural institutions in the UK are still struggling with what Hall (2001) saw as the austerity of archiving and the complexities of moving their mammoth basement collections into accessible online archives whilst attempting to make these archives both representative and authentic. There is, of course, also a symbolic power in the ordering of knowledge to rank, classify, arrange, and give meaning to objects and things. This imposition of ‘interpretative schemas, scholarship and an elected authoritative connoisseurship’ (Hall, 1999, p. 4) is itself a remnant from the days of empire. The heritage sector’s field of knowledge is still contextualised by colonialist extraction and haunted by the manipulation of interpretive knowledge production – its social histories often deeply entrenched in trauma and the memory of that trauma.

Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake* (2016) defines the ever-present struggles of archiving Black heritage and advocating for strategies of resistance and consciousness, in antithesis to institutional oppression. For as much as archives may represent versions of structural inequality as a prerequisite part of historical continuity, their very existence also perpetuates these inequalities. In her ‘wake work’ Sharpe deconstructs the positioning of the archive as being authoritative, tangible, certain – despite anti-blackness and white supremacy being so deeply rooted in these cultural, social, and political institutions. Sharpe reminds us, as Hall did, that there are as many ‘fictions’ in the narrative representations of Black and minoritised people’s histories in the archive, hidden away, as there are in state-led and public social narratives. As Sharpe goes on to explain, ‘I am interested in how we imagine ways of knowing that past, in excess of the fictions of the archive, but not only that. I am interested, too, in the ways we recognise the many manifestations of that fiction and that excess, that past and not yet past, in the present’ (Sharpe, 2016, p. 13).

Conclusion: ‘Versions of history matter’

The Heritage inevitably reflects the governing assumptions of its time and context. It is always inflected by the power and authority of those who have colonised the past, whose versions of history matter.

[Hall, 1999, p. 6]

Hall wanted to transform cultural institutions via the equitable redistribution of wealth and power. It feels hopeful that in 2022 the culture industry and some of their static institutional spaces continue to be disrupted. Grassroots community groups are reclaiming public space and inventing ways that communities can actively define heritage and take ownership of their cultural and social archives, rather than being minimally 'engaged' by institutions in piecemeal ways. This garners a belief I have that, following the Black Lives Matter protests, we are witnessing the resurgence of grassroots social centres and community heritage projects akin to the wave of energy that emerged following the Seattle WTO protests, and the environmental, No Borders, and G8 activism in the UK at the turn of the 21st century. It is the same energy of community collectivism and care that created surplus foodbanks and people's cafes during the Covid-19 pandemic, many of which are still feeding economically excluded communities suffering disproportionately from the state-imposed cost-of-living crisis today. Beyond reparation, I would suggest that the creation of and continued investment in community-led by and for projects and organisations is surely the only way to structurally address these interlocking inequalities. It doesn't seem coincidental that the resurgence of a socialist people's movement that erupted internationally to fight against the acceleration of transglobal capitalism occurred in the same month and year (November 1999) that Hall gave his landmark 'Whose Heritage?' speech; there was clearly revolution in the air that month.

In 'Whose Heritage?' Hall warns us that heritage can too easily become a selective set of traditions that serve to reiterate the repressive agenda of a nation-state that harshly edits together a purposefully constructed racialised narrative to control national truths and cultural memories. A month after Edward Colston's statue had been toppled and hauled into Bristol harbour by protestors, the white artist Marc Quinn controversially replaced it with a black resin and steel rendering of local activist Jen Reid's iconic Black Power stance entitled 'A Surge of Power'. Many, including the Windrush artist Thomas J. Price, regarded Quinn's monument to be performative, a representation of the kind of cultural colonisation that the protests sought to resist and eradicate. The statue of Jen Reid remained in place for 24 hours before being removed by Bristol City Council under the authority of Marvin Rees, Bristol's first mayor of Black African heritage, who stated that Quinn had no permission from the council to erect the statue, a move that perhaps suggests he too was cynical about Quinn's motives for erecting the monument. Now situated in the M-Shed Museum in Bristol, Edward Colston's statue is laid out horizontally on its deathbed, its face still daubed in the protestor's red paint, reiterating Hall's assertion of the 'radical awareness by the marginalised of the symbolic power involved in the activity of representation' (Hall, 1999, p. 8). Defaced and toppled by the people of Bristol, the dormant and uncertain future of the statue could indeed be seen to represent Britain's current crisis of authority as it awaits its final resting place.

In the cultural wake of a global pandemic, mass loss of life, and Black Lives Matter, we are witnessing the transformation of Britain's fragmented national identity and a creative re-envisioning of the heritage sector. As we stand at the precipice of un-muted radical change in the arts and heritage sector/industry, the key messages of 'Whose Heritage?' have never been timelier as the crisis of authority pendulum swings back and forth between the visionary acts of radical street activism, as witnessed in Bristol, and the authoritarian repressive measures of neo-fascist populist democracies. The fall of the Colston statue reminds us that our civic power can fundamentally rewrite the heritage wrongs and mistruths upon which a nation-state is often constructed and symbolically (re)imagined. But we must always be mindful about how quickly it can be taken away – for repression and resistance often go hand in hand. In the words of Jewish feminist lesbian writer and radical archivist Joan Nestle, there has never been a more important moment to 'choose the history that we say is ours, and by doing so ... write the character of our people in time' (Nestle, 1987, p. 11).

Notes

- 1 I will use the term 'British'/'Britain' throughout this essay to denote these islands and mainland England, Wales, and Scotland, which also heralds a colonised commonwealth and over 6,000 islands. I will use the term UK to include Northern Ireland but recognise that, to many in Ireland, Northern Ireland also remains colonised by the British.
- 2 The Colston Four are Rhian Graham, 30, Milo Ponsford, 26, Sage Willoughby, 22 (caught on CCTV passing the ropes around the statue to pull it down), and Jake Skuse, 33, who was accused of orchestrating the plan to throw it in the harbour (Siddique and Skopeliti, 2020).
- 3 Germany's Chancellor Merkel was considered to be 'soft' on immigration when she and her government supported over one million Syrian refugees, in line with the UN's recommendations. Immigration in times of nation/state building in the 20th century has been considered a political anathema, despite the exploitation and use of migrant people's labour.
- 4 The year 2022 has witnessed legislation and proposed changes to the law that include what many human rights organisations such as Liberty, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch regard to be repressive, retrogressive laws that undermine fundamental human rights. These include the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act; the Nationality and Borders Bill; and the Online Harms Bill.
- 5 CERD and CEDAW are acronyms for the UN's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Although the UK adopted and ratified CERD in 1969, it has not adopted CEDAW into domestic law.

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14 The power to represent

*Degna Stone with Jo Clement, Rowan McCabe,
Afdi Nomo-Ongolo and Young Writers' City*

Some of the poems in this chapter contain racist language and other phrases that readers may find offensive.

All this talk, all these words, can get a little tiresome. When you're able to pick up and put down a book, it's easier to get your focus back if you find your attention lagging, but during a day-long symposium you need to inject a little something to stir things up. Something to reactivate the parts of your brain that are still human. That was the thinking behind the creative interlude during the Whose Heritage? symposium on 24 May 2019. A pause. An opportunity to look at things differently. A break from the simmering rage that underscored the presentations. Some respite from the questions: Are we still here? Are we still talking about this shit 20 years after Stuart Hall laid out a pathway towards a guardianship of the 'heritage' that involves *all* who build lives on this 'tight little island'?

In addition to dancers and musicians, we invited poets to bring work that responded to the themes of Stuart Hall's 20-year-old keynote speech. Their poems are included in this chapter. The poets provided a palate cleanser from the morning's heaving thinking. Or perhaps it is better to describe them as an aperitif; the poets weren't there to provide a neutral flavour but to whet appetites and lead us into lunch. We've been saying the same things for the last several decades, but we're still unable to build on the knowledge generated in the past. We're unable to move forward. A different way of communicating is needed. By creating a moment with a different texture, the words spoken could land a little more firmly, could sink in a little deeper.

Power

At the time of the symposium I was entering the final year of Slate: Black. Arts.World. (Slate), a three-year artist development programme created by Dawn Walton (see Chapter 8) and her team at Eclipse Theatre Company, which was based in Sheffield at the time. I was one of six 'Enablers' working to support Black artists living and working in the north of England to develop sustainable careers in the creative sector (Eclipse Theatre Company, 2020).

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And by ‘Black’, Eclipse meant politically Black in the old-school sense of the 1970s and 1980s. It wasn’t our intention to foist that definition on the artists we worked with, but it was an easy catch-all that the funders and partners could get behind. It was also a term that created friction both with those who felt it was another act of erasure and those who felt the power of the term was diluted when it extended beyond people of African heritage. Hall noted that the problem of defining people ‘primarily by their otherness – ... their nonwhiteness’ was ‘a negative figuration, reductive and simplistic’ (Hall, 1999), but this problematic definition was what we had to work with. At the time I ended up using the equally imperfect signifier ‘people of colour’ in my conversations with artists, which is the term I will use elsewhere in this chapter. I remain hopeful that a better set of terms will manifest in the future. Better still, that we reach a place where these ‘othering’ terms are not needed.

A large part of my role as an Enabler was to support artists, but another part of my remit was to seek to change the culture of mainstream organisations that would often limit diverse representation to ‘seasons’ that they could market to ‘diverse audiences’. Slate was funded by Arts Council England, who devolved some of their power in the form of a substantial grant to Eclipse (amongst several other arts organisations) from the Sustained Theatre fund.¹ Eclipse then devolved a part of that power to the Enablers, who, with the support of a consortium of cultural organisations, would work in different parts of the region to increase visibility, develop and strengthen relationships, and create the environment for change.²

When we started work on Slate, Walton shared the story of the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park, USA, to articulate what she hoped would be achieved (Monbiot, 2014). Over time the presence of the wolves caused a trophic cascade, changing the behaviour of the other animals in the park, changing the landscape and changing the course of rivers. By inserting ‘Enablers’ into the cultural landscape, Eclipse wanted to create a trophic cascade that would change the sector for the better.

In order to do that, we, like the wolves, needed to be at the top of the food chain. But. We were freelancers of colour working for a small, Black-led arts organisation in northern England – nowhere near the top of the food chain. Slate had limited power to make real and lasting change in the context of a programme that was only funded for three years. After all, we still had to work within the cultural sector’s existing structures, and many of the artists I was having conversations with felt that the harm done to them by white institutions was being replicated. The only difference was that those perpetuating harm had Black and Brown faces too. Not everyone felt that way, not every Black artist struggles to get their work out into the world on their own terms. It was often the artists who were living and creating work at the intersections – artists who were disabled, LGBTQ+, living with trauma or living in poverty – who were most likely to experience harm.

My experiences during Slate illustrated that power cascading down becomes more diffuse as it travels until it finally reaches the artists, who remain pretty

powerless in the face of unchanging systemic structures. Is ‘power’ the right word though? What do we actually mean when we talk about power? Control? Security? Acknowledgement? All of these things? Perhaps if we could pin down a definition, we’d be able to correct the imbalance of power experienced by freelance artists working in the arts and heritage sector. Do we even need ‘power’ if we are properly represented?

Another of Eclipse’s innovative programmes was Revolution Mix, which began in 2015. In a 2016 interview with Theatre Voice, Walton discussed her observation that the Black narratives predominantly seen in British theatres could be boiled down to three areas: gang crime, immigration and slavery. Revolution Mix sought to highlight 500+ years of Black British experience and address the lapses in our collective memory when it comes to *what* English heritage is and *who* has been present in this landscape over the centuries (Theatre Voice, 2016). In 2018 the Revolution Mix play *Black Men Walking*, inspired by the Black Men Walk for Health group (a walking group based in Sheffield, England), proudly asserted, ‘We walked England before the English’ (Testament, 2018). By correcting the perception that Black British identity began with the arrival of HMT Empire Windrush and asserting that people of colour are an integral part of British heritage, Eclipse was giving the artists and audiences we worked with on Slate a solid foundation from which to challenge the way people of colour are represented in mainstream spaces and narratives.

Represent

The UK government and its various agencies seek to redress the inequalities experienced by people who share one or more of the following ‘protected characteristics’: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation (Equality Act, 2010). Every ethnicity is represented within the visibly and invisibly disabled, just as every ethnicity is represented in every gender and every sexuality.

During the first two years of Slate, I’d spent time listening to what artists wanted, what they needed and what was standing in their way. One theme that kept coming up was the expectation that they had to represent more than just themselves as individuals. That their successes and failures were used to evaluate risk when institutions and venues were looking to programme work by other artists of colour. They felt an overwhelming burden to write about their experiences as narrowly defined by stereotypical aspects of their ethnicity. That they were expected to create semi-autobiographical work; work that explored race or the experience of migration. Work that helped mainstream audiences to understand more about the darker skinned inhabitants of this island. Not only that, artists often found that their work was pitched as part of a ‘season’ focusing on under-represented voices.

When planning the poetry session at the Whose Heritage? symposium I kept thinking about who I am and what that meant in relation to the other people I wanted to share the stage with. With just a 45-minute slot there wasn’t

enough time to ensure that a true multiplicity of voices was represented, and I was aware that it's always the same people who get invited. People who are already in your network, people you already know. An imbalance of power in this situation is inevitable, only in this case I controlled the context and the narrative of representation.

It's rare for an artist from an under-represented background to have the luxury of getting on stage and representing no one but themselves. Consciously or sub-consciously they are being compared with other artists who share their 'protected characteristic'. The burden placed on our shoulders is one that requires us to always 'represent diversity'. But how can a single person represent diversity?

My agenda was to unsettle the idea that representation simply looked like more Black and Brown faces on the stage. I wanted to make two things clear: one, ethnic diversity isn't always visible; and two, the 'white working-class' voice is as much a part of this conversation as my Black working-class voice. Although it is not listed as one of the 'protected characteristics', class intersects with race and ethnicity; every ethnicity is represented amongst the working class. My working-class origin is every bit as important to me as my ethnicity, but it is my skin that is seen first, my skin that dictates how I am treated. Yet the experiences I had growing up on a council estate, living in real poverty with low expectations that my ambitions were within easy reach, impact and intersect with experiences of being a Black person in England. My education and current profession might obscure my class status, but my skin is my skin is my skin.

I make this latter point about class because the politics of representation is not immune to hierarchies, and there is often a narrative that pits the 'white working classes' against other people who are traditionally under- or mis-represented. A narrative that conveniently forgets that the working-class is not homogenous. In reality, it is the working classes in their entirety who are most often kept out of positions of power (Runnymede Trust, 2019). All ethnicities, all genders, all sexualities, all religions, disabled and able-bodied – all working-class people. Yes, it is stating the obvious, but every time a fresh salvo in the government-inflamed 'culture wars' is fired, the obvious always seems to be forgotten; divide and conquer is the tried and tested formula for controlling the masses. A strategy that insists that in order for someone who looks like me to get a seat at the table, i.e., a say in how things are run, someone else is going to lose their opportunity to take a seat. A strategy that dogs the working class and our attempts to create systematic change where we are all accepted as belonging to this land and deserving of our place in it. Challenging this idea is not simply about placing more chairs around a bigger table. We should just admit that 'a seat at the table' is a shit metaphor and that we need to stop thinking about a static, stagnant space where an interminable game of musical chairs plays out.

We need to resist the steady attempt to overemphasise difference (cultural, physiognomy) in ways that sow division. Each of us has a different history of how we ended up on this island, but we all want to live meaningful lives that have a positive impact on those around us. We all want the fact of our

existence to be acknowledged and respected. It's not enough to hide behind the idea that the UK is a tolerant country. We don't want to be tolerated. We want to be embraced.

The poets

The second half of this chapter presents the work of the poets. For me, there was no expectation that they would be representing anyone other than themselves, though, in the context of the symposium, their presence highlighted the people who are often left out of the conversation or whose experiences are misrepresented.

Rowan McCabe

McCabe's poems explore the world through a working-class lens. In his introduction, he spoke about the literary canon being more readily associated with writers from the middle and upper classes. However, discovering the rich history of local poets such as Joseph Skipsey, Tommy Armstrong and Ripyard Cuddling allowed McCabe to see that he could write poetry about topics he could relate to in the language he used every day.³ It is perhaps this grounded background that informs his approach to poetry and its place in people's lives. As 'the world's first door to door poet', McCabe literally took poetry to people's doorsteps: 'Knocking on strangers' doors, he asks what is important to them; he then goes away and writes a poem about this, free of charge, before bringing it back and performing it on their doorstep' (McCabe, n.d.). From working class homes in Arthur's Hill in Newcastle upon Tyne to the gated properties in nearby Ponteland, he spoke with people from all backgrounds, engaging the occupants in conversations and offering them something for nothing. Well, not quite nothing, something for a little of a person's time, something for a chance to glimpse what the world is like through that person's eyes, something for a chance to connect. In exchange, McCabe delivered a gift of a poem back to the same doorstep a little while later.

The poems he shared during the symposium spoke to those who hold the purse strings, those who hold positions of power.

Poems by Rowan McCabe

Austerity Is Over, or, It's Hard To Tell What the Weather Is Like When You Never Go Outside

"Austerity is over."
That's what the headlines say.
The government have sorted it,
everything's OK.
No need to stress about the rising

rent that I can't pay.
Austerity is over.
Oh what a happy day.

Austerity is finished,
crack open that Bordeaux.
Don't fret about the cost of it,
it's my treat, I know
I'm down to my last twenty quid,
it was meant for the electric.
But who needs light at a time like this?
Austerity has ended.

No more dank and dangerous towers,
the clouds are raining diamond showers,
the bailiff's just came round with flowers.
Austerity is over.

Austerity is history,
let's all give solemn thanks.
The doctors and the nurses
working twelve hours back-to-back
have pitched up on a sandy beach,
with not a care at all,
and all they're inundated with
is endless volleyball.

Austerity has had its day.
It's such a special treat.
Won't someone tell that homeless man
who's begging in the street?
For soon he will be living
in a mansion grand and golden.
Oh dear, what rotten luck, it seems
we've missed the boat, he's frozen.

The schools have too much classroom space,
we're all on double living wage,
my mental breakdown's just been saved.
Austerity is over.

And on a float made out of skulls
with red balloons and streamers,
looking proud, and rightly so,

here come the country's leaders.
Their clothes are so expensive,
life must be on the mend.
Oh aren't you pleased we voted
for a bunch as kind as them?

A Deer in a Licence Plate Shop

What I saw that day was
very difficult to explain.
Nothing compares to the image of a deer
running into a licence plate shop.
I thought it was a dog,
as it shot across the busy street
causing a white van to screech to a stop.
But no,
this was an actual deer,
in a busy inner city suburb,
bolting towards the glass door,
pushing it open with its horns,
stumbling inside.

I remember getting off my bike.
I remember rushing over to the window,
peering in;
the deer, pogoing around the small square of floor;
the licence plates on the walls;
the shopkeeper behind the counter
static in disbelief,
his big toe standing on a very sharp pin.

A boy and girl of about my age ran over.
I remember saying something like
Maybe we should phone the RSPCA?
The girl suggested the police.
I'll never forget the sound of that voice:
Aii, basically,
this deer's just gone
pure akka and ran into a licence plate shop in Heaton.
There was a very big pause.

It was at the door now,
gazing at me with
eyes like dark sides of the moon.

It began frantically trying to escape,
rushing into the glass,
over and over; it bust its nose,
a brush leaving a thick stroke of blood.
I felt every single thud.

What exactly does one do
when a deer runs into a licence plate shop?
What is the protocol?
I looked around.
The boy,
the girl,
the shopkeeper.
No one had the answer.
So we all just...
watched it happen.

As the rescue team arrived,
I realised we are all deer,
perpetually running
into licence plate shops of our own making.
We are bears in office blocks,
giraffes in portacabins,
bluffing it.
But sooner or later
we're going to take the wrong turn,
get trapped in something we can't possibly understand,
seize up in the headlights,
or run desperately into the glass.

Jo Clement

As well as being a poet, Jo Clement is also an academic. It would be easy to misread her ethnicity. Her physiognomy and profession might lead you to make assumptions that are distant from her embodied reality. Diversity is more than skin-deep, and Clement's Gypsy heritage is a vital part of her poetics. Gypsy is the term Clement uses to describe her heritage and it is the term used by the UK government (House of Commons, 2019), but, as I don't share that heritage, I will switch to the term Roma.

In the introduction to her poems, Clement called to mind Hall's description of racialised people who are only seen through the Western gaze:

No proper archive, no regular exhibitions, no critical apparatus (apart from a few key journals like *Third Text* and the now-defunct *Ten 8*), no

definitive histories, no reference books, no comparative materials, no developing scholarship, no passing-on of a tradition of work to younger practitioners and curators, no recognition of achievement amongst the relevant communities ... Heritage-less.

[Hall, 1999, p. 11]

Her work addresses the brutal history of the Roma people in Britain, which can be traced back to 15th-century Scotland, and explores 'how a heritage which is never self-perceived, or self-penned, might survive'.

Clement spoke about finding Roma people represented in the literary canon in William Wordsworth's scornful poem *Gipsies* (1807). She wrote her *Knots* poem in riposte whilst walking up Silver Howe in Grasmere. If heritages are to be represented accurately, it is essential that the under-represented create their own archives, using their own definitions to tell the full narrative of their connection to the land. The final poem that Clement shared shows what happens when others do the naming.⁴

Poems by Jo Clement

Knots

Blushed with blood and false summits, outcast,
I keep a familiar distance. Without wind cheats

or the right shoes, I have words with mountains.
Accent bending in the wind, I eke aloud

Wordsworth's *Gipsies*, the lines hung over me
hawk-like, as his cloud-double slips the Screes

toward Appleby. Our luck lands blackly there too.
He saw us as spots, a spectacle, knots.

The same fight picked in private fields.
Is it time to move on? Let me sit this stone

on the marker's pile. Tell the capital I am a Traveller
under open sky and yes, our bonfire's still raging.

Homecoming

rivered like trout there's this flash lad
on his hoss
spading hooves

his waterway gymkhana
deep as a tall mare

banks hooked on pebbled gaits

as he drowns thunder with heels
cannon bones firing

two fingers up to the council
distant reivers

hair slicked back
no saddle all bridle

then stomach led to withers
curb chains drape into her mane

as he speaks in private of diving

for a spell

and ear-close they go under

pressed into the anvil black
sunk like a stone

'til a bubble breaks
then a hand or an ear

he crests
stood on the mirror of himself

barefoot and dripping
in black-wet denim

all teeth and chest shining

half-boy
half-hoss

all bray

Self-portrait as 100 Travellers

Here. No good. Nomad. Roma.
 Rover. Rom. Dom. Rai. Raider.
 Reiver. Truant. Turnpike. Trash.
 Tatter. Tinner. Tinker. Toad.
 Trickster. Tinsmith. Tar-macker.
 Boater. Tea leaf. Pedlar. Potter.
 King. Cuckoo. Knot. Outlaw.
 Tresspasser. Straw hat.
 Scrapper. Johnny. Faa. Moone-
 man. Fly. Fitter. Flitter. Migrant.
 Sharper. Harper. Dipper. Sleeper.
 Soothsayer. Heathcliff. Hawker.
 Knacker. Clogger. Lock. Idler.
 Thief. Jailbird. Lovell. Boswell.
 Lee. Waggon-carried. Wayfarer.
 Crooked. Filthy. Floater. Vagrant.
 Vermin. Band. Muse. Wanderer.
 Journeyer. Vagabond. Smith.
 Gadabout. Me. Flashy. Scum.
 Will o'the wisp. Lowlife. Rambler.
 Pathfinder. Drifter. Carny. Chav.
 Dog. Dregs. Carmen. Maggie.
 Meg. Dove. Ratter. Pilgrim.
 Pedlar. Seer. Witch. Rabble.
 Ragle-taggle. Rag-and-bone.
 Gitano. Egyptian. Postrat.
 Gyprat. Gypsy. Gipsy. Gyppo.
 PIKEY. Gone

Afidi Nomo-Ongolo

Poet, musician and cultural activist Afidi Nomo-Ongolo performs under the name Radikal Queen. When I invited her to share her work, I knew she would be uninterested in indulging the idea that well-meaning-culture-and-heritage-types should be let off the hook for repeated failures to address inequality and misrepresentation. Given the slow progress made on the roadmap outlined in Hall's speech, Nomo-Ongolo's voice in the conversation was essential. Someone needed to speak truth to power and call out the 'bullshit' of centuries of dishonesty in the treatment of Black and Brown people. In the end it was clear that, for the most part, the 'powerful' had chosen to stay away from the room, or had sent subordinates – people who would relay what had been discussed but who had no direct power to change or enact policy.

Nomo-Ongolo wrote something new in response to Hall's speech and the occasion of the symposium. She was writing and re-writing during the morning's speeches, responding to what was being said – and what was not said. Responding to who was in the room and who was not in the room. Her poem presents a challenge to the easy history that is taught in schools, which consciously suppresses any narratives that question the beneficence of the British Empire. As Hall states:

The emblems of Empire do, of course, fitfully appear in the Heritage. However, in general, 'Empire' is increasingly subject to a widespread selective amnesia and disavowal. And when it does appear, it is largely narrated from the viewpoint of the colonisers. Its master narrative is sustained in the scenes, images and the artefacts which testify to Britain's success in imposing its will, culture and institutions, and inscribing its civilising mission across the world. This formative strand in the national culture is now re-presented as an external appendage, extrinsic and inorganic to the domestic history and culture of the English social formation.

[Hall, 1999, p. 7]

Nomo-Ongolo's poem makes it clear that British heritage, English heritage, is dependent on 'the palimpsest of the postcolonial world' (Hall, 1999) – the heritages it has sought to either subsume without acknowledgement or to depict as inferior.

Poem by Afidi Nomo-Ongolo

Bangwa Queen

- a tale of missing histories

At first I was gonna try a gimmick
to force you to see me
I was gonna ask the able-bodied present to stand
while I sit
for a few minutes
in order to communicate the essence
of different perspectives.

For instance: if the rapist flings some coins
from the stolen purse
back at their victim
is that the same thing

as philanthropy? Or remorse?
If not, why is the money coming back to Africa from violent, military
governments called 'aid'?

In the end, I decided it's futile
to try and convince someone of your human status
if they have already made a social contract
to deny your autonomy.
If they've been trained to dehumanise you.

You see: missing histories present as invisible disabilities
within modern imperialist society.
But I only have a few minutes to discuss the bullshit
of several centuries, to speak of the dishonesties
that are consistently swept under this particular (probably
Kashmiri) rug.

So let's talk british heritage, eh?

british heritage places that which was freely commissioned and given
alongside the forced 'donations' from Black and Brown nations.

And these involuntary extractions continue to this day
and are justified
by the prestigious institutions that see work from people who look
like me
as 'inspiration',
whilst simultaneously dismissing and denigrating us,
all while we are imitated.

My evidence?

Oh well. In this room alone
I count at least three organisations and people
who have appropriated the fruit of my creative womb
to benefit a non-Black congregation.

They just snatched up my ideas in the interview or meeting
and passed them off as their own.
My bright birds are now embalmed and enthroned within the
grey palace
of their new owners' lacklustre imaginations.

I partly blame the BAME-ness
the BAME.

An imposed label that erases my Blackness
and allows everyone else
full access and permission to profit from my voice, and my Ways.

When you are mere anonymous 'inspiration', your skilled iridescence
is seen as a non-sentient manifestation of Beingness.
Like an unschooled sunset bursting with free beauty.

Free booty.

Like the one you call 'Bangwa Queen', complete with scare quotes,
because how could SHE be royalty?
AND you think she is just a 'figurine'!

Her real name is Ngwindem, meaning: 'most high priestess of god'.
We in fact already told you this,
but we aren't counted as real people by your limited scholars.

Ngwindem is the embodiment of an ancestor goddess who lived
among us.
She rested in the Grasslands kingdoms of a nation neighbouring my
own people in Central Africa, the Mbetu.

Then the deceitful german scientist who first called her an 'ethnographic
artefact' stole her, and sent her back to his european museum.
His team took advantage of those five days they were graciously
invited and granted access to Agonyi's kingdom.

They looted temples and stately houses and all without shame!
Hai! Is THIS your civilisation??

With regards to heritage, the relevance
is that we are seen by imperialist academics
as unevolved hominids
and this belief that spouts uncontested from the Golden Bough
of western european invention
bolsters their lie of racial superiority.
I say they are culturally invested
in our creative degradation.

So the kidnapped Ngwindem was renamed as your Bangwa Queen
and in the 30s was seen as 'primitive art',

then through Man Ray's modernist camera lens and borrowed
perspective
she was re-introduced in the 50s
to represent western ideas of savage, unthinking sexual expression.
He saw this as THE defining aspect
of African womanity, of our womanness.

And Ngwindem has been sold so many times
that she has been declared the most expensive example of African art
on the planet...
but not due to her inherent value or beauty.
It is because of the illustrious reputations
of all of her previous creative enslavers.

Now I have
Questions.

What does it mean
that british museums
define british culture
as the accumulated weight
of stolen treasures?

Why is it that demanding transparency
in lieu of colonial lies
is interpreted as the desire
to topple Nelson's column?

Nah.
The column is fine, just make sure that little plaque
also tells us that he was an enthusiastic white supremacist.
The evidence shows
that he fully supported the enslavement of Black people
in Caribbean concentration camps.
Nelson counted the depraved serial rapists who ran those accursed
plantations
amongst some of his closest friends.

You see: this is the true legacy
of the brutish empire.

And yeah. I know why you were not taught this.
Your truth hurts.
The fact is that Churchill, like his less celebrated german contemporary,

set up concentration camps for the destruction of African
communities.

And selling and buying African bodies like mine
is how your people stole
the seed capital for your industrial revolution.
It's time we looked at our heritage within the lens
of accurate historical context.

Our ethnographic artefacts populate foreign museums,
and this appears to be what I hear being defined
as british heritage.

Surely british identity can do so much better
than this most gruesome aesthetic?

To be honest – I was surprised to be invited to speak here
to sit at this officially sanctioned table.

The likes of me are usually dismembered and served in the cultural
buffet, later
while our fates and faces are discussed and decided
by those defined as whiter, I mean wiser, and more objective.

I do not accept this system, or its categorisations
as I have de-centred from a paradigm
that only sees me and mine
as plundered victims
and serves our arses as the main mother-fucking meal.

You can smell it.

But still the servers of my flesh and blood have the nerve
to ask me to hold their hands and IMAGINE
a world of purple people.
Sci-fi revisionism makes the purple people always so positive and see!?
The appointed tokens prove it!

They are the axes fashioned from the brown forest of our peoples,
whose job is to facilitate the cultural devastation, the artistic
appropriation,
all in their roles as the most suitable replacement for our true leaders.

Death-dealing and theft are reframed as capitalism.
Cultural appropriation is re-labelled 'appreciation'.

The stolen booty is remembered
as one of life's free donations.

In the end the british definition of heritage will be decided by voices
that will never live within the choices they are speaking on.
And although Ngwindem has been famous for well over 100 years
it appears you still refuse
to say her name.

Missing histories. And within that: another missing Herstory.

Ngwindem! Ngwindem! Ngwindem!
Ancestor goddess, who still breathes.

Young Writers' City (represented at the symposium by Amani Nashih)

I knew the youngest generation had to be part of the conversation and I wanted their voices to ring in the air. My generation (and earlier generations) had royally fucked up our opportunity to create significant and lasting change. Even the Millennials have been left shamefaced by the activism and anger of Generation Z. It's often the youngest who have the clarity to see the world for what it is and the energy to demand change, and they are often the ones left out of the conversation. Only one generation knows what it means to be entering adulthood now, navigating the challenges, hurdles, pitfalls and chasms of opportunity. We knew what it *was* like, but not what it *is* like.

Amani Nashih shared a poly-vocal poem written by fellow students at her school in the west end of Newcastle. The poem was written as part of Young Writers' City, a project that encourages students from the underserved areas of Gateshead, Newcastle and Sunderland to write and speak their experiences.⁵ To be unafraid of using the language that surrounds them. To be unafraid of saying how shit things still are for kids growing up visibly different from the perceived norm.

The poem, *Colour Blind*, communicates the experiences of working-class kids who are othered and abused because they are not white in a majority white country.

Poem by members of New Writing North's Young Writers' City programme

Colour Blind

written by Angelica, Lucie, Manaar, Zara, Shakira and Tessy

Colour blindness is silence
Colour blindness is denial
Colour blindness is an obstacle
Colour blindness is forgetting
Colour blindness fixes nothing
Colour blindness is looking the other way
Colour blindness makes you feel better at my expense

See my colour
See my colour
See our history
See my colour
See our tears
See my colour
And see the assumptions you have already jumped to
See my colour
And see we are enslaved in labels
See my colour
And see the stories you have told about me before I have taken a breath
to tell my own

My skin colour matters
If we pretend that it doesn't then we can also pretend that
No one shouts across the street at me,
'Are you legal?'
'Hey nigger!'
'Do you have a bomb under your hijab?'
'You're a Paki!'
'Allahu Akbar!'
Or 'Go back to your own country!'
That's number 1. Everyday.

What's my normal?
My normal is people thinking I can't speak English and talking about
me, in front of me, as if I can't understand.

What's my normal?
My normal is the man in the corner shop filling up my cup of slush,
whilst asking me, 'When are you ever going to get away from my
country?'

What's my normal?

My normal is an old man coming up to me, laughing, and saying,
'Yo dance for me nigger.'

What's my normal?

My normal is being blamed for the twin towers collapsing to crumbs
on the ground.

What's my normal?

My normal is having to have 'the talk' from my Mum. The time comes
in every black child's life having to teach me how to respond to the
police. 'My name is Angelica I'm 15 years old. I am unarmed and
I have nothing that could harm you.'

What's my normal?

We are twice as likely to live in poverty. We are more than twice as
likely to be murdered. And our brothers are statistically more likely
to end up in prison than at a top university.

What's your normal?

What is your normal?

I am labelled illegal

I am labelled a terrorist

I am labelled unwanted

I am labelled a thug

I am labelled a trouble maker

I am labelled a slave, a cotton picker

I am stoned and mocked with the fabrication of a lie that all men are
created equal.

Conclusion

The symposium took place before the Covid-19 pandemic ground the world to a halt. Before the murder of George Floyd led to a global reckoning on race and white supremacy. The voice of the younger generation has become stronger in the intervening years, and I remain hopeful that the clear-eyed way with which many young people view systemic inequality means that the power to change the world for the better still exists.

Most of the poems presented here speak about racism in one way or another. It is perhaps worth noting that it is only the poet who is not racialised who doesn't. Maybe that would not be the case if the symposium was restaged now, when 'whiteness' is becoming a larger part of the conversations about race and racism. It is also important to acknowledge that, even as we try to provide space for greater representation, someone will always be left out.

That does not mean that we throw our hands up and say at least we tried. We must learn from our omissions, find out who is being kept out of heritage narratives, find a way to remove the barriers that prevent their access and make sure we have created the conditions that welcome and support them.

The poets were invited to the symposium to shift the narrative and change the tone. Their poetry gave a jolt to minds that might have settled into passive listening mode. Sometimes listening is not enough. A poet's job is to say what needs to be said using only as many words as are needed. Not a word more. In a room where often there is too much talk, distilled language can help us to tap into truths that might otherwise be lost. We could all do with being more careful with the words we use and how we use them to shape the narrative about who we are. Not a preserved and conserved heritage, but ever changing. Informed by the actions of our ancestors and by the interactions of the current inhabitants of this island.

Notes

- 1 The Sustained Theatre fund was a £2.1 million fund administered by Arts Council England to support the development and increase representation of Black and minority ethnic theatre makers across the theatre sector in England.
- 2 Slate involved a consortium of ten cultural organisations: Bradford City Council, British Council, East Street Arts, Forced Entertainment, HOME, Hull Truck Theatre, Live Theatre, Oxford Playhouse, Pilot Theatre and Unity Theatre.
- 3 Working-class, north-east poets. Joseph Skipsey (1832–1903) and Tommy Armstrong (1848–1929) were both coal miners. Ripyard Cuddling (1924–2014) was a welder at Swan Hunter shipyard.
- 4 In 2003 the Firlie Bonfire Society, Sussex, paraded an effigy of a caravan bearing the registration plate 'PIKEY' and slogans 'Fair?' and 'As You Likey Driveways'. They then publicly set it alight. A Traveller family with young children was prominently painted on the caravan windows. At the request of the Commission for Racial Equality, the society apologised for what it said was 'emphatically not a racist comment'.
- 5 Young Writers' City is a project run by New Writing North, the leading writer development agency in the UK. It aims to give young people the chance to express their ideas, thoughts and opinions through creative writing.

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