

Empire, Slavery & Scotland's Museums Glossary

The terminology used for the purpose of the [Empire, Slavery & Scotland's Museums \(ESSM\) project](#) has been agreed by the Steering Group and is explained here.

ANTI-RACISM

Anti-racism is a commitment to actively change the policies, behaviours, and beliefs that spread racist ideas and actions. Anti-racism is based in action and is about taking steps to remove racism at the individual, institutional, and structural levels. See below: Racism

BAME

BAME stands for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic, and is a designation used within some of the pieces of research in the ESSM consultation.

BPOC

BPoC stands for Black People and People of Colour, and is a designation used within some of the pieces of research in the ESSM consultation.

COLONIALISM

A practice where a powerful country directly controls a less powerful country or territory (the "colony") and uses the colony's resources to increase their own power and wealth. Colonisers impose elements of their culture, including religion, language, economics, and other cultural practices, on those they rule. Colonialism is an expression of power that relies upon oppression, extraction of resources and silencing other ways of being and knowing.

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

Cultural democracy refers to an approach to arts and culture that involves everyone in deciding what counts as culture, where it happens, who makes it and who experiences it. It is rooted in the idea that all people have a cultural life and a fundamental right for it both to be respected and to also have a voice in the vital decisions— around culture and otherwise— that affect the quality of their lives.

CURRICULUM/CURRICULA

The "curriculum" refers to the subjects studied in a school, college, university, and other formal education, and what each subject includes. Curricula is the plural.

DECOLONISING/DECOLONISATION

Historically, the word “decolonisation” has referred to the political processes – including varied forms of anticolonial resistance – that ended direct colonial rule. In this context, decolonisation is about people subjected to foreign domination actively taking control of their lives, territory, and institutions as well as their cultural and national identity.

Today decolonial thinking and practice recognises that—despite a UN resolution in 1960 that declared the necessity of bringing colonialism in all its forms to an end—nearly 2 million people worldwide still live in non-self-governing territories.

Decolonisation is also widely used in non-political contexts, including in museums. The Museums Association says, “decolonisation” is not simply the relocation of a statue or an object; it is a long-term process that seeks to recognise the integral role of colonial mentalities in museums – from their creation to the present day. Decolonisation requires a reappraisal of our institutions and their history and an effort to address colonial structures and approaches to all areas of museum work.

DUTY-BEARERS

In general terms, duty-bearers are publicly funded organisations. Duty-bearers have duties to ensure they enable people (rights-holders) to attain their human rights, and that they change their approaches where they are preventing people from realising their rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Organisations which are not publicly funded should also strongly consider their responsibilities to enable people to attain their human rights, to engage with good practice.

EMPIRE

An empire, or imperial system, is where a central or main power rules over other territories outside of the main power’s original borders. “Imperialism” is a term that is related to this, usually meaning the creation and maintenance of unequal relationships between nations. The British Empire was a system of dependencies (a territory that does not have full political independence) or colonies across the world, which were under the rule of the British Crown and government for about 300 years.

ETHNICITY

An ethnic group or ethnicity is a grouping of people who identify with each other based on shared qualities such as a common set of traditions, ancestry, language, history, society, culture, nation, or religion. Ethnicity is separate from, but related to, the concept of “race”.

HISTORIC SLAVERY

When referring to "historic slavery" in the ESSM Steering Group's Recommendations report we are distinguishing from more modern forms of enslavement. Historic slavery includes "chattel slavery": a form of slavery in which the enslaved person is legally classified as a piece of property (rather than a human being) belonging to their owner. An enslaved person under this system has no rights, and they remain enslaved for life. Any children born to an enslaved person is also then enslaved for life. One form of chattel slavery includes the transatlantic trade in African people, who were then enslaved in the Americas under the chattel slavery system. Chattel slavery was also implemented by the British in Mauritius and the Cape.

ITEM (REFERRING TO HOLDINGS WITHIN SCOTTISH MUSEUMS)

The term "item" refers to objects, specimen, and samples, but also to ancestral (human) remains and sacred items; the use of the term "item" here, does not diminish their importance. The Steering Group recognises that many museums operate from a position of objectification: what museums classify as "objects" or "collections" are not seen as such in multiple cultures but are recognised as having their own agency and potential personhood. The holding of these should be addressed by Scottish institutions as a priority.

LIVED EXPERIENCE

Lived experience is defined as 'personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people.' In terms of racism, this includes the lived experience of being racialised.

MUSEUMS

This project is specifically focused on how museums can address the legacies of empire, colonialism, and historic slavery. According to the Museums Association (the UK professional members body) 'Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard, and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society.' Within this document, the Steering Group has chosen to refer to "museums"; this is intended to include organisations with historical collections of objects and galleries with collections of works of art.

MUSEUMS GALLERIES SCOTLAND

Museums Galleries Scotland is the National Development Body for the Scottish museums sector. Museums Galleries Scotland supports 442 museums and galleries, through strategic investment, advice, advocacy, skills development, and other means.

NARRATIVE

A “narrative” tells a story or describes a series of events. Racist narratives are stories or descriptions of events that spread racist ideas.

PRIORITY COMMUNITIES

During the ESSM consultation period, the project used the phrase “Priority Communities” to refer to People from communities who have been negatively impacted by the structural forms of discrimination and racism that can be connected to the legacies of empire, colonialism, and historic slavery. This terminology is used within the ESSM consultation reports included in this document.

“RACE”

“Race” is a social construct (i.e. human invention) based on skin colour and facial features (shape of eyes, nose, lips, hair texture, etc.). “Race” is not scientifically supported; however, its impact on people is very much a reality.

RACIALISED

The concept of racialisation refers to the processes by which a group of people is defined by their “race.”

RACISM

Racism is a belief that one group of people is inferior or superior to another because of their “race”. Racism/Racial injustice or discrimination is the unjust treatment of people based on this idea of superiority of one group over another.

RESTITUTION & REPATRIATION

Restitution is the process by which cultural objects are returned to an individual or a community. Repatriation is the process by which cultural objects are returned to a nation or state at the request of a government. Calls for restitution ask for the return of objects acquired through conquest, plunder, and theft, as well as the reassessment of objects that were taken through legitimate, but systemically unfair, trade deals. These

calls for restitution and repatriation are designed both to right historical injustices and recognised as potentially offering economic benefits.

RIGHTS-HOLDERS

In general terms, all human beings are rights-holders under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A human rights-based approach ensures that public participation (especially the participation of those whose rights are least realised) involves active, free, and meaningful engagement.

STRUCTURAL RACISM

A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing, ways to perpetuate racial inequality. Racism in Scotland is structural. This means it operates across different levels of life - personal, social, and institutional. Because of this, the impact of racism affects people across their life experiences. It affects working life, family life, friendships, and physical and mental health.

UNETHICALLY ACQUIRED

Museum possession of a collection carries certain ethical obligations to the places and people where these collections originated. This is stated in the International Council Of Museums Code of Ethics: 'Museum collections reflect the cultural and natural heritage of the communities from which they have been derived. As such, they have a character beyond that of ordinary property, which may include strong affinities with national, regional, local, ethnic, religious, or political identity. It is important therefore that museum policy is responsive to this situation.' Unethically acquired museum items may include (but are not limited to) items that were stolen, taken under duress, or removed without consent of the owner; the ethics in question refer to current, rather than historical, moral standards