

Museums (Re)told:

# The LEGACY REPORT

How the legacies of empire, enslavement and colonialism impact upon the lives and culture of members of Black communities and communities of Colour in Scotland today, and how this is represented in Scottish museums and galleries collections.

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**Museums  
Galleries  
Scotland**  
Supporting Scotland's Museums



# Glossary

## **BPoC**

As an organisation we have decided upon the use of Black people and People of Colour through extended work and consultation with young BPoC across Scotland. This is the terminology that has been overwhelmingly found to be the most comfortable among the young people with whom we have engaged. All terminology and language surrounding race can be contested and preferred by different groups across the world.

## **Safe spaces**

A safe space is where everyone feels comfortable, safe, respected, heard and where all can have trust to fully participate. The establishment of safe spaces during research with young BPoC is an essential element in avoiding further traumatisation, particularly in data gathering processes. Engaging with racial inequality and injustice can be incredibly upsetting, stressful, and triggering for those involved. There are several ways in which a safe space is constructed. For IYS, one part of constructing a safe space is ensuring that the

youth workers conducting the consultation are themselves Black or PoC and that only young BPoC are present in the consultation space while discussing difficult experiences.

## **Lived experience**

People with lived experience are people who have gained personal knowledge and expertise through their involvement in everyday life-events. In terms of race, this is the lived experience of being racialised and can be a variety of experiences from racism and struggle to resistance and joy.

## **Colonial Amnesia**

Colonial amnesia can be understood as the intentional forgetting or hiding of colonial history, often in order to deny the violence of a colonial past. While this critique most often refers to those who are in positions of power, or as a reference to a 'public' amnesia, it can apply to anyone who denies the violence of colonial history.

## **Decolonise**

Decolonisation is the process of undoing colonial practices in content, language, representation, policy, knowledge, power and more. It means confronting and challenging current power structures to create a more equal and compassionate society, based on new types of relationship that are not based on white supremacy. This involves the removal, destruction, abolition, and transformation of public institutions and social structures, especially regarding the political, governmental and military occupation of land and resources.

## **Institutional racism**

Racism that is present in any form of institution, business or organisation due to a collective failure of such institution to provide an appropriate or professional service to people because of their racial, cultural or ethnic identity either intentionally or indirectly. This is furthered through the failure of such institutions to not challenge white supremacy or the coloniality of society. It can be detected in processes, behaviours and laws and is present in different areas of society such as the legal system, employment, healthcare, education, housing, political representation and more.

## **Anti-racist approaches**

Here refers to a number of ideas, theories, policies and practices which one would use to work towards eradicating racial prejudice, oppression and systematic racism whilst promoting intersectionality. Such practices might look like ensuring BPoC have access, are encouraged and supported to positions of leadership in an organisation that has created an environment that is Pro-Black.

## **Trade in Enslaved African People**

The use of the language trade in enslaved African people is a more appropriate and accurate phrase that describes and renders visible the African people who were exchanged, sold, and purchased by white traders.

## **Chattel Slavery**

Chattel slavery as imposed by white Europeans on African people between the 16th and late-19th centuries was a specific type of servitude legally defined as the treatment of African people as sub-human and moveable property. Enslaved peoples were purchased, sold, loaned, mortgaged, used as collateral and inherited by European colonisers. This form of slavery meant that Africans had no legal rights and were thus not protected by the law.

## Executive summary

This report was commissioned by Museums and Galleries Scotland as part of the Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums project (ESSM) and is authored by youth researchers and Intercultural Youth Scotland. The report and recommendations have been generated by a group of youth researchers aged 17-25 and will be presented to the Scottish Government along with the other research strands of the ESSM project. Our strand of the consultation aims to address the underrepresentation of Black People and People of Colour (BPoC) in research and consultation, particularly the exclusion of young BPoC and their views. We also aim to highlight the views of BPoC living in Scotland in relation to Museums and Galleries' approach to telling histories of empire and enslavement.

Intercultural Youth Scotland (IYS) is Scotland's leading non-profit organisation for young Black people and young People of Colour, we lead in youth advocacy and consultation and deliver targeted youth work, employability and mental health services. IYS delivers anti-racist education in Scottish secondary schools and anti-racist training programs for organisations and businesses. As an important cultural organisation for young Black people and young People of Colour, IYS helps to build strong community ties through artistic exchange, and supports young artists and musicians to develop their talents and launch their careers.

## Key findings

- » BPoC in Scotland want museums and galleries to undertake a thorough program of decolonisation and anti-racist training before any new museums are commissioned
- » Support for a museum of empire and enslavement among BPoC in Scotland is split
  - » Many are concerned that such a space could halt decolonisation in existing spaces
  - » Many are concerned that the proposal is tokenistic and will not materially change the experience of BPoC in Scotland
  - » There is however a clear desire from BPoC for Museums and Galleries in Scotland to accurately reflect histories of empire and enslavement and for more space to be created to do this
- » The relationship between BPoC in Scotland and museums and galleries lacks trust and consultation
- » This relationship has been damaged by the display of stolen objects, institutionalised racism in the heritage sector and exclusion of BPoC from Scotland's prevalent historical narratives
- » BPoC feel that histories of empire and enslavement should be told from the perspectives of the victims of those contexts and their descendants

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# Meet the IYS youth researchers



**Roshni**

Roshni is from Leeds and lives in Edinburgh. She is a poet and also works in libraries. She has a degree MA (Hons) in English Literature and History from the University of Edinburgh.



**Jeevan**

Jeevan is British-South Asian. She is currently a Masters student studying History. She specialises in South Asian history, specifically through the themes of race, gender, migration and diaspora.



**Tatiana**

Tatiana is currently a 6th year pupil at a Scottish high school. She has a love for history and is an aspiring medic.



**Hazel**

Hazel is of Guyanese and Scottish heritage. As an emerging writer and creative, Hazel is one third of the team responsible for Intercultural Youth Scotland's new zine 'No Permission Needed'. Hazel is passionate about racial equality in education, and in 2021, as the Scottish BBC Young Reporter, she created a piece highlighting the experience of Black students in the curriculum.



**Jasmina**

Jasmina just graduated from James Gillespie's High School as Chair of Pupil Voice. At James Gillespie's High School, she was a founder of the Humanities and Film Club, she revived the Garden Club and was an active member in the Anti-Racist Club.

## Call to action

As researchers we believe that this report acts as a vital tool to widen the understanding of how the histories of Empire, Enslavement and Colonialism are presented in Scottish museums. We believe that the only way museums can seek to make real change is by listening to BPoC communities and engaging fully with their lived experiences. Several key points were continually brought up across focus groups: education, structural and systemic racism within museums, and tokenism. We firmly believe that these identified themes should be fully addressed by Scottish Museums and Galleries.

BPoC communities in Scotland have expressed major concerns around the need to decolonise education and the national curriculum. Education on Empire, Enslavement and Colonialism should be integrated into the national curriculum and not have to be sought out solely on an individual basis. Indeed, many of the younger focus group participants were shocked to learn the extent of Scottish involvement in colonialism and the Transatlantic Trade in enslaved African peoples. Our research exposes that 'museums and galleries' across Scotland are not doing enough to ensure that these histories, being pivotal and foundational to modern Scotland, are confronted and remembered. Scottish museums and galleries must begin to rectify this and actively support and promote the ongoing campaign for anti-racism in education and the decolonisation of the national curriculum.

Many focus group participants view the present state of Scottish museums and galleries as actively harmful to BPoC communities. This is evident in the language used in their exhibitions; for example, the use of the passive phrase 'collected' when referencing stolen or looted artefacts – not to speak to the very existence of these artefacts in collections. The lack of involvement from BPoC communities in their curation and the overall underrepresentation of BPoC staff in Scottish museums and galleries only contribute to these problems. Museums are seen as places where the trauma of BPoC individuals is perpetuated and made consumable with a white audience in mind. Some participants queried whether the institution of a museum could fundamentally become anti-racist due to their colonial roots.

There were repeated concerns that Museums and Galleries may take up a 'diversity and inclusion' approach rather than addressing structural issues within the industry. Museums and Galleries must reckon with structural issues, such as institutional racism, and take active steps to dismantle these issues.

There was considerable wariness, persistent throughout the focus groups, that BPoC involvement in this report would be tokenistic, resulting in no tangible change. As researchers, we share this concern. It is pertinent that this report's findings and recommendations, and the knowledge and insights of BPoC in Scotland, are not overlooked.

**Scottish museums and galleries cannot allow this to become research without action. We urge you to listen.**

# Methodology

The consultation utilised a participatory approach to collecting qualitative data. We selected a participatory approach as this method seeks to ensure that those involved as the subject of the research are at the core of the information-gathering process. A participatory approach ensures that they can talk about sensitive subjects with people in their social network with increased trust (Janice et al 2011). This makes it an ideal approach when working with those with lived experience of racialization. All of our staff team are BPoC and all of the youth researchers are BPoC. It was vitally important to ensure that our work in this area resisted exploitative research practices as far as possible and provided the communities most affected by the ESSM project a chance to give feedback in a safe space.

Participatory research is based on the principles of ethnographic research and is designed to minimise the power imbalances between the researcher and participants (Mclean 2017). This power imbalance is particularly common in research pertaining to colonialism, empire and enslavement with communities of Colour and is therefore important to counter. By operating directly within the marginalised community being studied, the intention of the approach was to ensure the process of decision making and research was empowering whilst being tied closely to the real-world impact it sought to create. Participatory approaches also help to generate richer narratives of people's expectations, opinions, attitudes and beliefs which can improve theory, policy and practice (Andrea et al, 2011). This research project opted for participatory research because of the advantages listed.

We chose to enact this approach by recruiting five Youth Researchers (from ages 17-25) to co-design the research and facilitate the focus groups themselves with support from a dedicated Youth Ambassadors Lead and Participatory Research Lead. The youth researchers were co-creators throughout the entire research project, with the report's conclusions drawn up by the youth researchers. The researchers were compensated at the living wage for their time throughout the project and were trained in various aspects of research throughout the project. The aim was to create an environment where young People of Colour could participate in informing policy and change in Scotland but also be able to walk away from the project with experience to be able to progress their education and careers. We recruited the group by advertising across IYS social media channels and reaching out to our networks and other youth organisations in Scotland.

Initial work began in July 2021 where Youth Researchers reviewed the Museums and Galleries Scotland Diffley survey and their plans for the national consultation

on museums and galleries. They created a plan to engage with priority communities and identified that it was particularly important to target BPoC communities with intersectional characteristics. The IYS staff team therefore started to recruit focus group participants with a specific focus on representing BPoC Women and Non-binary people, LGBTQ+ BPoC, BPoC over 60 and BPoC from rural areas of Scotland.

Outreach to participants occurred via email and social media. IYS reached out to community organisations in our network to reach communities with intersectional characteristics. MGS also advertised the focus groups. This strategy was convenient as IYS engaged with communities and organisations around our own network and that of museums and galleries Scotland. This helped facilitate the recruitment of people with different lived experience and from priority groups.

After initial training sessions from IYS and MGS staff on the background of ESSM, youth researchers were supported to create themes and questions for participants in focus groups. They conducted two pilot

## Intercultural Youth Scotland

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focus groups to refine their final research questions and take feedback on their approach to facilitation. They carried out several meetings to discuss the feedback and the next steps of the research.

Five Youth Researchers and one Ambassador Lead were trained to carry out the design and review of research questions, the focus group interviews themselves, and qualitative data analysis. Eleven (11) questions were designed by Youth Researchers to be asked in focus group sessions with five (5) of these being core questions and the other six (6) being follow-up questions to prompt further discussion. Depending on the time available, some focus groups covered more questions than others. Nine (9) focus groups gained responses to all of the core and follow-up questions, while five (5) focus groups did not respond to all of the core and follow-up questions. Through the use of an anti-racist research framework, the Youth Researchers were made increasingly aware of the importance of using inclusive and appropriate terminology. Whilst the project brief used the term “slavery,” they chose to use the term “enslavement” after the focus groups were conducted. We did not however, alter the terminology used by focus group participants and used previous terminology in the groups themselves. Throughout the process, the youth researchers gave honest feedback to try and ensure that the content of the report best reflected their collective views and

interpretation of the focus group data; as well as ensure that, from their perspective, the appropriate language is used to discuss empire, enslavement, and colonialism.

In order to ensure that IYS’ safe space policy was in place for these focus groups, the following actions were put in place;

1. A trigger warning was given at the start of each group
2. Facilitators ensured that they were aware of any additional needs that participants or researchers had before focus groups took place to account for disability or additional support needs such as closed captions.
3. Facilitators provided details of how groups would be conducted in advance.
4. Transcript software was used for those who needed text on screen.
5. All questions were written as well as said aloud.
6. Ensuring that participants knew that they could leave the call at any time and could choose to not speak or answer certain questions.
7. Participants were made aware of mental health support available in the event of feeling triggered by the discussions in the group.
8. Facilitators were trained in how to approach potentially racially traumatising subject matter.

**9. Facilitators made sure that participants were aware that they did not need to turn their camera’s on if they did not wish to.**

**10. Ensuring that participants were aware that there was a zero-tolerance policy to any language or behaviour that is seen or felt to be abusive**

Creating safe spaces online can be particularly difficult, given that facilitators can often not see when participants are uncomfortable or sense when an atmosphere appears changes. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions we did not feel that it was advisable to hold these spaces in person. We endeavoured to make the space as accessible as possible to those without internet connections by providing mobile credit to access the call. Participants were paid at the real living wage for their contribution to the consultation and had the option to receive this payment through shopping vouchers.

To select the approach to the analysis, youth researchers received training on different methods. They selected thematic data analysis as the method to analyse the focus group data. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns and themes within qualitative data. It captures important aspects of the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clark 2015). Themes were drawn directly from the conversations had

in the focus groups.

Thematic analysis is believed to be the most appropriate method when working with people with lived experiences to gather their opinions and perspective about an issue (Braun & Clark, 2015). It is an important method of data analysis because it can generate rich data that helps to inform policy and decision-making (Wolferman, 2019).

One of the aims of the project was to empower the Youth Researchers who were actively involved in the entire research process. There were several meetings to test the validity and originality of the findings and they gave their feedback and insights to each chapter developed in the report, helping the IYS staff team write each section. This helped them ensure that the contents were accurate and reflective of their interpretation of the data.

Whenever necessary, the Youth Researchers instructed the staff team to make adjustments in the report. They were central to creating the recommendations and participants were contacted for feedback on the draft recommendations. This feedback was then incorporated as far as possible into the final report before publication. They actively contributed to the whole body of the report by writing the introduction and responsible for planning this report’s dissemination.

A total of fourteen (14) focus group interviews were carried out by the Youth Researchers with a total of 80 participants. The participants self-identified as people with lived experience of racialisation.

Before the focus group interview, all participants were given a consent form and equality monitoring form. Participants needed to return the consent form to be allowed to take part; however, only around 60% of participants returned the equality and diversity form back.



Table 1. Focus group type:

Focus Group	Total Session
General	7
Women and Non-Binary	1
Black	1
Youth	1
LGBT +	1
Ambassadors	1
Pilot 1	1
Pilot 2	1
Total Focus Group	14
Total Focus Group participants = 80	

Table 2. Participant's Age

Age	Total Number
12 to 17	9
18 to 24	18
25 to 34	8
35 to 44	7
45 to 54	3
55 to 64	0
65 to 74	2
75 years and older	0
Prefer not to say	1

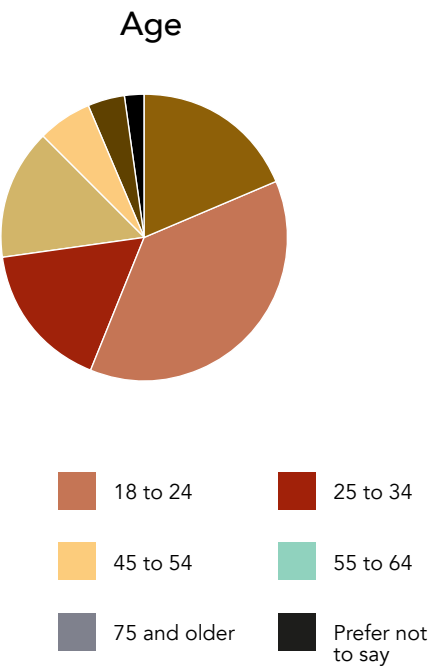


Table 3. Participant's Gender

Gender	Total Number
Man	6
Woman	38
Non-Binary	3
Prefer not to say	1

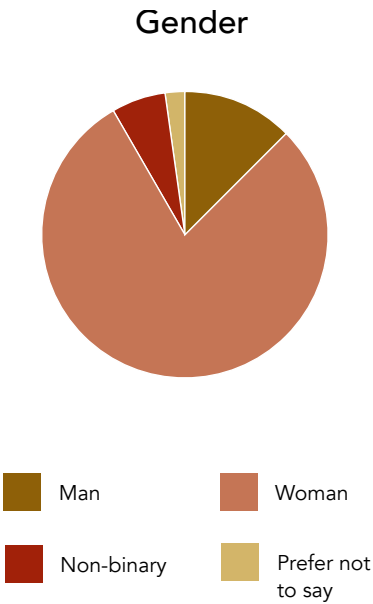


Table 4. Ethnicity

Gender	Total Number
Mixed multiple ethnic group	6
Asian and Asian British	17
Black, African, Caribbean, and Black British	18
Other ethnic group	2
Prefer not to say	5

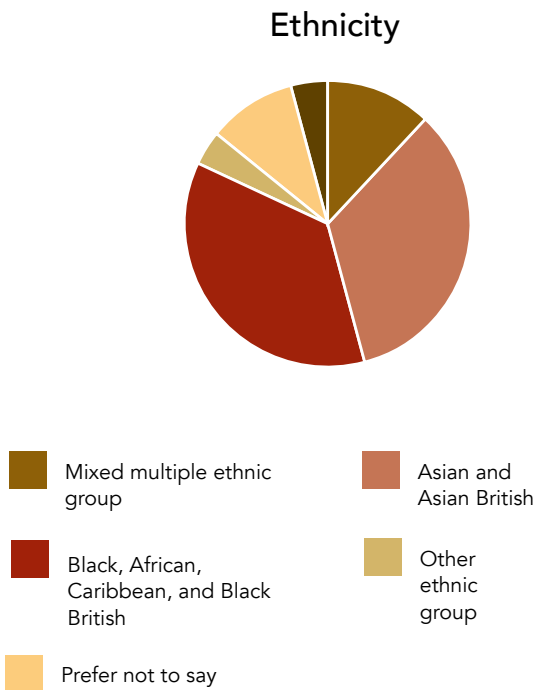
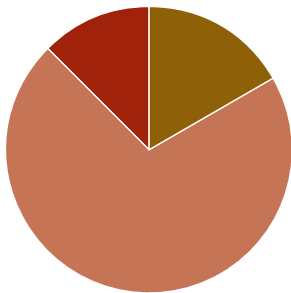


Table 5. Disability

Disability	Total Number
Yes	8
No	34
Prefer not to say	6

Disability



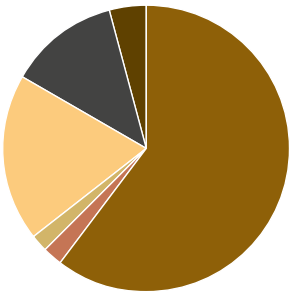
Yes No Prefer not to say

Of the participants that answered the question on disability the majority were not disabled, though a significant portion preferred not to say.

Table 6. Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation	Total Number
Heterosexual	29
Gay	1
Lesbian	0
Asexual	1
Bisexual	9
Prefer not to say	6
Other	2

Sexual orientation

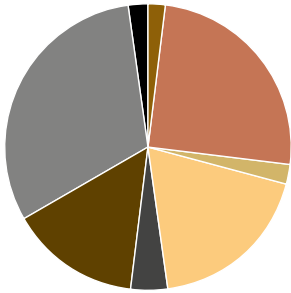


Heterosexual Gay Lesbian  
Asexual Bisexual Prefer not to say  
Other

Table 7. Religious Belief

Religious Belief	Total Number
Buddhist	1
Christian	12
Hindu	0
Jewish	1
Muslim	9
Sikh	2
Prefer not to say	7
No religion or belief	15
Other	1

Religious belief

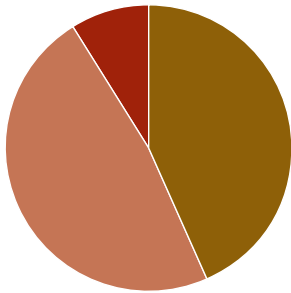


Buddhist Christian Hindu  
Jewish Muslim Sikh  
Prefer not to say No religion or belief Other

Table 8. Local Authority

Local Authorities	Total Number
Edinburgh & Lothians	10
Glasgow & Strathclyde	11
Tayside, Central & Fife	2
Aberdeen & North East	0
Highland & Island	0
Scotland South	0

Local authority



Edinburgh & Lothians Glasgow & Strathclyde Tayside, Central & Fife  
Aberdeen & North East Highland & Islands Scotland South

# Research Limitation

## **Ethnicity descriptors**

While the main goal of this research was to gather BPoC communities' feedback, opinions, perspectives and reflections on their lived experience of the representation of empire, enslavement and colonial history in Scottish museums and galleries, it also aimed to build BPoC communities' capacity by empowering Youth Researchers with enough ability to carry out a research project themselves. This capacity building was challenging at times due to the limited time frame.

Another limitation of this research was that it required participants to self-identify into ethnic categories to break down the data. We acknowledge that many may not have filled out the equality monitoring form as they may not have felt that the ethnicity descriptors (the same as the UK census) match their identity. We considered asking people to self-identify in a blank box so they could use their own words however this would make it difficult to draw

conclusions and increase time spent on the form for participants. There is a clear need to look at these ethnicity categories again and perhaps explore how we can construct our own to reduce homogenization.

## **Community Distrust**

In terms of the community, there were limitations due to a lack of trust when it comes to work related to empire, colonialism and enslavement. BPoC communities' trust in the museum sector has been damaged by institutional racism resulting from colonial practices. Many participants demonstrated concerns around tokenism and the anti-racist credentials of museums and galleries. Some felt that taking part in this research would be a repetition of their negative experiences of similar research whereby BPoC are exploited for their racial trauma and change fails to materialise. Indeed, many of those we contacted who did not wish to take part cited these concerns – including prominent anti-racist activists and organisations. Many

also felt that there has simply been enough research on this topic already, that it is clear what BPoC feel about these issues and that asking again is perpetuating further harm in the community. Where possible we sought to reduce this harm, but we must acknowledge that BPoC are often deeply affected by repeatedly sharing their views on this topic. It is vitally important their views are taken seriously so as to avoid further disillusionment.

Similar concerns were also shared as a result of the public survey, some community organisations did not wish to participate in this research because they did not want to be affiliated with the survey which caused offence to some respondents. The survey represented a separate strand of the wider ESSM consultation and some felt that the tone of questions placed the burden on BPoC to justify or explain their views on institutional racism in the sector and why it was detrimental.

## **Reach and Engagement**

It is also difficult for us to tell exactly how many BPoC saw the research advert and how many people disregarded it because they did not want to talk about enslavement or create further mental health strain. Much of our intended audience is simply tired of having this type of conversation or finds it too distressing. This bled into the groups as some people felt unable to disclose their opinion and be totally open and honest to a system that is itself rooted in colonialism, even if this specific process is part of a project aimed at decolonisation.

All the challenges mentioned above evidence the need for future work where the community has more power and independence to carry out anti-racist research projects and where BPoC can have confidence that change will be made based on their views. This latter point will only be evidenced if MGS and the wider sector respond to the findings of this and related



# 1

## Section one

# Disproportionate communication of colonial history in Scottish museums and galleries

For more than 200 years, Scotland's economy and wealth were closely linked to empire and colonialism<sup>1</sup>. Despite strong links between Scotland and the slave trade both inside and outside the country, this research has found that Scotland's involvement in Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, and the Americas is seldom acknowledged and communicated in museum exhibitions and literature. Instead, participants felt colonial histories are often depicted as glorious. They felt the circumstances through which Scotland benefitted economically by trading goods such as cotton, sugar, tea, jute, herring (etc.) are not communicated in a way that centres the perspectives of BPoC. Participants found that the roles of Scottish traders, soldiers, administrators, and others during the colonial era are celebrated in history, often obscuring the brutality and loss experienced by indigenous and enslaved peoples.

<sup>1</sup> <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>



## 1.1.

# Hidden Colonial History in Scottish Museums and Galleries

Focus group participants believe there is a culture of collective colonial amnesia which can lead western civilisations to cause ongoing harm against BPoC communities. This culture reflects the impact and legacy of colonialism, as BPoC's contribution to Scotland's development is neither recognised nor well-reported in museums, galleries, literature, and the education system.

The group shared the opinion that those contributions have been intentionally hidden to uphold colonial pride.

### Some participants stated:

*There is a huge neglect in talking about colonialism, the slave trade is a topic that typically gets avoided. It keeps the collective amnesia going - the erasure of colonial history in education (Focus Group 14).*

*I agree that the communication is not done well enough. Scotland's involvement in the slave trade needs to be communicated better (Focus Group 11).*

*It is the fact that Scotland actively celebrates colonialism and tries to shove down the discussion all together. (Focus Group 14).*

*Colonialism isn't covered in school. It's a part of Scotland's history - shouldn't block it out (Focus Group 13).*

There was an agreement that stories much older than the empire and colonialism are slightly better communicated in comparison to the slave trade:

*I don't remember it being a section of focus, there's stuff on dinosaurs, science, I remember stuff on Vikings and Egyptians, but I don't remember these histories ever being told. I don't think its evidenced (Focus Group 9).*

*I know more about the Egyptians and ancient Egypt than I do slavery and slaves in the UK. They make it very uninteresting and hidden away when learning about it. (Focus Group 14).*

*Scotland isn't held as accountable. We should know what our country has done (Focus Group 8).*

<sup>1</sup> <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>

The history of Scotland’s involvement in slave trading and exploitation can be evidenced throughout its cities’ architecture and planning but this is often unclear in heritage contexts. Whilst contemporary society cannot be blamed for colonial atrocities, this colonial legacy has led to ongoing harm for BPoC, in forms of collective amnesia, discrimination, and racism. Such legacies perpetuate the marginalisation of colonialism as a relevant historical topic that impacts the lives of BPoC today.

Participants felt the relaying of inaccurate and incomplete information through generations has led to an institutional and systematic negligence in faithfully portraying the history of colonised people. An important point made was that the often-held view of Scotland as victim of English imperialism should not make Scotland unaccountable for its contributions.

*We forget that Scotland was involved in slave trade, colonisation, and empire as they are seen as a victim of English imperialism. They undermine what Scotland actually did in the slave trade (Focus Group 9).*

Scotland’s own victimhood should not detract from its responsibility to account for its disproportionate role in empire, enslavement, and colonialism.

Participants in the focus group argued that:

*...we don’t know what the history is if we don’t know what came before, it is diluted. (Focus Group 8).*

*A lot of time museums don’t address that story at all, not the greater context, or the stories are twisted, they don’t paint them in the best light (Focus Group 10).*

*...only mentioned how the cotton mills benefitted Scotland, not the*

*stories of where the cotton came from. Artifacts don’t say where they are from (Focus Group 3).*

*If we take it into context relatability is very important. There is a younger demographic getting into this and we need to be representative of them so they can get into it (Focus Group 4).*

Most focus group participants agreed that any stories highlighting the role enslaved people played in Scotland’s history – both in cultural development in colonial countries and in the horrors of exploitation, brutality, and violence used against them - are not accurately evidenced or communicated in Scottish museums and galleries.

Participants felt that colonial history is often hidden and neglected by heritage institutions, and when these debates resurge in public discourse, context is often missing.

Several people in the focus group said:

*Never interacted with anything in Scottish museum that relates to that history. But not specifically Scotland’s role in this mess in the first place BPoC’s*

*history is told through the lens of white people. Not enough honesty in terms of level of violence perpetrated against colonised groups. knowledge that they are stolen, how much violence in getting the objects (Focus Group 1).*

*Information there leans towards the good work that the Scottish did, they helped develop India, South Africa, with no mention of what was there before. Nothing about BPoC, nothing about slavery, colonisation. It’s all about the positives of a white persons’ history (Focus Group 7).*

*I don’t think I’ve ever heard anything about the history of Scotland’s involvement in slavery (Focus Group 7).*

*I have never specifically seen anything related to Scotland’s role. Not about bad things that have happened - history without context. No specific recognition of Scotland’s involvement (Focus Group 2).*

*I have been aware of it that people made their money from slave trade. I have been aware, but I haven’t seen it but will like to visit and see it. Both sides of the stories should be told (Focus Group 5).*

<sup>1</sup> <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>



The groups believe there is a need for Scotland to shift historical narratives, to teach future generations an honest and more equal story. For younger generations, historical relatability can be important in understanding their place in history. Participants warned of the dangers in recounting history without context: obscuring the impact of the past on the present.

Although conversation about public statues did not develop directly from research questions, the topic was raised following discussions around history without context. Participants agree that public statues could be used to acknowledge and further resolve colonial ignorance if the institutions responsible can use them as opportunities to convey marginalised knowledge.

*Most people who talk about it don't talk about how there are still statues of slave owners in Glasgow and Edinburgh up there for everyone to see. I don't think there should be statues of people who have been slave owners, they should have statues of people who have gone through it too (Focus Group 8).*

*We have interesting discussions within the Scottish Youth Parliament about changing street names and taking down statues, we said that we need a plaque to explain what has happened here, if you remove these things then it is almost as if you are pretending it didn't happen (Focus Group 10).*

The participants feel there should be more honest and open discussions about the different approaches to this issue. The horrific history behind these statues, street names, (etc.) must be made public. There is clearly a broader issue that goes beyond museums and galleries around cultural recognition of the past in Scottish society. Statues are seen as celebrations and school curriculums are seen as serving factual functions, while museums and galleries are seen as gate keepers of truth and knowledge. While these perceptions may not show the full context of heritage and education, they do matter.

The point was raised that the way history is presented is whitewashed and that BPoC feel the prevailing attitude is that they should be grateful for what is shown:

*...the way that these have been written is that we should be grateful for that (Focus Group 7).*

**“Most people who talk about it don't talk about how there are still statues of slave owners in Glasgow and Edinburgh up there for everyone to see. I don't think there should be statues of people who have been slave owners”**

<sup>1</sup> <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>

### 1.1.1.

## A dishonest, unfair, and disempowering way of telling people's stories

The focus group participants believe there is nothing empowering in spaces like museums and galleries. For example, in the museum space at Holyrood Palace participants felt that there was little or no mention of a colonial past, only the royal family themselves. Many objects on display were certainly the proceeds of wealth generated from the colonial project. No stories of BPoC were evidenced. There are references to suffragettes, but a total lack of education and disregard towards women of colour. The idea of displaying the trappings of imperial wealth without mentioning the harm done during that time didn't sit well with many members of the group.

*I never see anything on the history of the empire, and it is referred to as a glorious empire and they would never hear about what makes it great- the whole empire was reduced to the great or glorious empire and my history is reduced (Focus Group 14).*

*The Slave Trade was the base for a lot of what we have today, it should be weaved into lots of different displays (Focus group 14).*

Some participants even felt that the depiction of BPoC history can be patronizing.

*...when you walk about places like Kelvingrove that have really patronizing descriptions of countries like India (Focus Group 14).*

The glorification of colonists and subsequent demonisation of those who fought against the colonial project deeply affects participants' perceptions of museums and galleries.

As a participant said:

*The glorification of empires of the colonial structures, you never get to see that it's built on blood and genocide. Even though it's built on colonialism and genocide, they can't even put a face to slaves, now you don't even have the audacity of showing their faces or their names, there is a general disregard for the bloodshed and lives lost (Focus Group 14).*

Furthermore, there is a need to capture BPoC history that relates not only to enslavement and colonialism, but also to other contexts and stories that BPoC who migrated to Scotland after enslavement ended are able to identify with and see themselves in, told from their own perspective.

The focus group participants said that from their museums and galleries visits, they have seen some mention of people like Frederick Douglass, the Scottish role in Malawi at the National Library, one display in Kelvingrove Museum about the slave trade, and one on the south Asian story in Glasgow Women's Library, but nothing is profound or in detail from their perspective.

<sup>1</sup> <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>

The traumatic nature of colonial history can often limit BPoC accessing the heritage sector to only seeing themselves represented in terms of violence, tragedy or extreme poverty. Imperial domination has continued in this way and this dynamic repeatedly subjugates BPoC.

*For instance, not having perspective from the communities. Wonder if there is a fine line to making sure that you are doing it right or not (Focus Group 5).*

*White British and European are 'civilised' and 'delicate' and Black culture is 'uncivilised' depicted in the way how you see in films. Everyone lives in a hut etc. Never any photos of cities, running water. Perpetuates narrative we are fed through media. in this mess in the first place because history is told through the lense of white people (Focus Group 1).*

*Black culture and African-Caribbean culture are uncivilised (Focus Group 2).*

Participants also highlighted not only the need for museums and galleries to make space to depict colonial history but also the history of racial ideology to continue to educate the public on the fact that race is a constructed identity marker, that white people began this discourse and that whiteness as well as blackness should be explored in order to decrease the effects of colonial amnesia.

*...the fact that white people don't see themselves as a race, because they can't look at their history and realize their ancestors did that. But we can look at what happened and see our bodies our people taken and stolen. (Focus Group 14).*

Following from this discussion it was recognised that BPoC should have the power to narrate their own stories in the museums and gallery spaces in order to effectively communicate these messages. In this way, we can see that communicating

history is incredibly important to BPoC in terms of setting the record straight about the past, and also that there is a need to do something with the knowledge to move society forward towards racial equality. Museums can be seen as a key site where this 'moving forward' can take place, playing not only the role of record keeper but change maker too.



<sup>1</sup> <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>



## 1.2. Telling our Own Stories Old and Contemporary

BPoC have historically been marginalised and silenced. White supremacist culture often renders BPoC voices oppressed and subaltern. These voices have yet to be heard in a way that instigates significant changes to existing frameworks. BPoC not having the power to communicate their old and contemporary history can manifest in two forms. First, that they are not heard. Second, that they cannot articulate their history in a way that's considered to be valid because they are seen as not having either the skills or academic credentials required to do so.

As participants reflected in the focus group:

*...we lived through it so it should come through - our Point of view...needs the story to be told from the beginning to present. White people minimise our stories and culture to just slavery POCs are more than that (Focus Group 3).*

*POC have been silenced a lot in the past, and that should be avoided in the future. (Focus Group 11).*

*...if we tell our own stories we have the power to communicate it in the way it did happen. Getting into museums might be difficult, if they can see other Black faces it would be powerful (Focus Group 1).*

*I would say that I don't know what exactly the proportion of BPOC curators there are, but I think that it's very important that we hear both sides of the story, there is documented proof of what they were going through, but it's not told. BPOC will have more extensive knowledge and it's better that we hear from them because their countries have been colonised and they have seen it firsthand (Focus Group 8).*



*White people didn't live through it so can't relate to it (Focus Group 3).*

*People who have been affected should be the ones who are narrating that (Focus Group 9).*

*It's important that people know their history because families can show their children what really happened in history (Focus Group 12).*

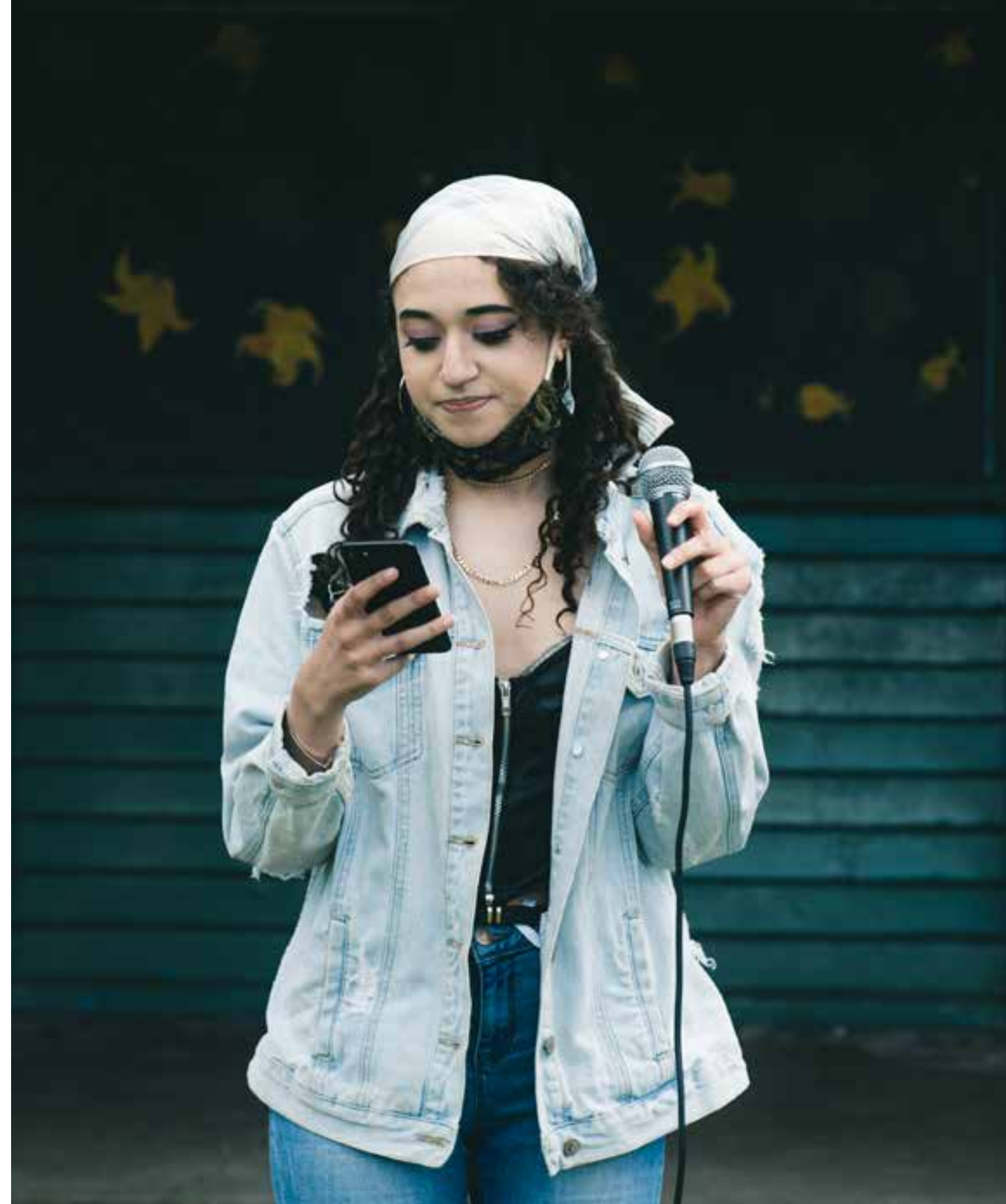
*...it's their role to tell a story and to tell it as faithfully as possible (Focus Group 8).*

<sup>1</sup> <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>

## 1.3. BPoC's Oral Stories

The focus group participants recognise that BPoC oral stories form part of identity, culture, and origin as well as being important historical sources. Oral stories have often been underrepresented in contemporary and modern history as well as museum and gallery spaces. Oral stories are also commonly undervalued because they are perceived as informal and passed from generation to generation.

White supremacist culture is preoccupied with the written, official and verifiable which bleeds into the heritage sector's historic disregard of oral histories as valid sources. But the oral stories of BPoC value lived experience and can provide intersectional histories. Oral stories in this context could shed light on struggles with racial discrimination but also positive experiences of life such as people's contribution to their communities and societies, art and spirituality.





## The exhibited and archived collections held by museums and galleries

It is of course common knowledge that many museums and galleries in the United Kingdom and across Europe hold appropriated objects from countries that have been colonised. Many collections were, indeed, acquired in dubious circumstances from colonised countries. Where this has occurred, it is often not clearly evidenced by museums and galleries<sup>2</sup>. Scottish museums and galleries started their collection of colonial items from the 18th century, a process which lasted for approximately 200 years . A vast majority of these objects reflect the imperial and colonial time and are directly linked to the transatlantic slave trade. Indeed, many of these objects were brought to Britain during the transatlantic slave trade. Many are also items purchased with the wealth generated from the exploitation of colonised countries.

Participants believes that museums' interpretations of the objects on display are based on white people's perspectives and embedded with racist structures. This is due to the inherent violence of colonial history being reduced or even redacted in favor of hero making, or inspiring awe at historic wealth and prosperity.

As participants said:

*...you can find vague, small references. It's never in an accountability way, it might talk about a specific place but never from accountability (Focus Group 10).*

*For a lot of white people, they are just random objects, there is no consideration for anyone else at all, that's what I find uneasy (Focus Group 10).*

<sup>2</sup> Kalibani, M., 2021. The less considered part: Contextualizing immaterial heritage from German colonial contexts in the restitution debate. *International Journal of Cultural Property*, pp.1-11.

<https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>



## 2.1.

### The Taken and Stolen Objects

The participants feel that some colonial cultural artefacts such as African artisanal objects (necklace, hearings, rings, bronze statues, etc), Chinese porcelain, Persian carpets, Indian textiles, religious objects such as The Qur'an, Buddha statues (etc.), have been placed and displayed in museums and galleries with little relation to their origin, local name, the community they belonged to or their cultural or spiritual significance.

Seeing the items randomly displayed without identity and context is seen as disrespectful, and often insulting to BPoC.

As participants in the focus groups said:

*I'm a Muslim and one of the things that really upset me was – we have the Qur'an and we are not supposed to hold it below the abdomen, and when I went to see it in the museum, the book was low down, below the abdomen. There is an awareness of religious*

*practices – but it was the complete disregard of this. That idea that when they do get the chance to display artefacts or religions, it is not respected, it is Eurocentric (Focus Group 9).*

*...we see the icon of buddha being disrespected in restaurants and toilets, I concur with that. The Burrell collection comes to mind for exploitative, but the history of how it came about it exploitative, although I don't come from the south east Asian community, I felt an allyship [sic] (Focus Group 9).*

While there will be some who question if collections held in Scotland do indeed include stolen or looted objects, the focus groups highlighted the view that any objects obtained during the colonial period are inextricably linked with violence and oppression. This includes objects arising from the proceeds from the enslavement of Africans and chattel slavery, for example. Many felt most profound and sensitive

items such as religious objects could have never been lent, given, or sold. Participants also highlighted how the growing discourse about this in the public sphere still misses much context.

*The Glasgow Burrell collections are full of collections that were pillaged from China. This should be told. Some wonderful artefacts in St Mungo's have been pillaged and I feel this is unjust. (Focus Group 5).*

*It used words like 'taken' but there wasn't information on how those items were acquired. I think when we talk about this topic its usually devoid of the context. (Focus Group 11).*

*...uncomfortable to not know about the history of collections (Focus Group 4).*

*We have a lot of stuff in museums in Britain, but it's all come from other parts of the world. These objects have been taken (Focus Group 7).*

It is clear that "taken" is not seen as adequately reflecting the violence of the colonial period, therefore we can

presume that when attempting to place collections into colonial contexts the use of language is particularly important to BPoC. Participants in many cases also saw the display of these objects as inappropriate or disrespectful.

*That is completely disrespectful, some people might say at least they put it there for people to see, they might have just done it for the sake of doing it (Focus Group 9).*

*I think I find the display of items from colonized countries exploitative, (Focus Group 8).*

It is clear from the contributions of focus group participants that museums and galleries must decolonise their own practice, interrogating themselves about why these collections' stories have been hidden, and what should be done with these stolen and looted objects.

<sup>1</sup> <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>

## 2.2. The Repatriation Approach

The question that naturally arises as a result of the conversation around stolen or looted objects is what should happen to them now that we understand that the appropriation of such objects was wrong.

Evidence shows that a significant amount of these objects are not even on display and are stored in boxes<sup>5</sup>. When participants explored the idea of informing communities affected that their objects were being held the below responses came up;

*I don't even think it is a need to inform them they should just be returned point blank. I think by not returning it is not acknowledging history. I think that people aren't really educated that objects are stolen. By taking the objects away and not even saying anything means that people won't even know that they are part of museums. It's all very non-consensual. People don't even know that all museums are like this. I think we fund it by paying to go to the museums*

*and now by writing about them. It seems like it is already rigged. (Focus Group 8).*

*Comes down to repatriating things and giving things back to communities. Benin Bronzes - could they be lent out to museums then making it consensual? (Focus Group 2)*

*Can't have the Queen of England's crown in my country so why can you have mine? ... Ethiopian crown is still here in Scotland. At least ask the nation if it should be repatriated to provide healing. (Focus Group 12).*

*Quickly it starts to come down to repatriating and giving objects back. Then maybe re-lent out but it would be consensual and via the rightful guardians of the people. So, a dialogue about the most appropriate space for where the object should be? If the group no longer exists, perhaps it can go back to the country of its origin. (Focus Group 1).*

There was a strong view that as many objects as possible should be repatriated to their country and community of origin. The focus group discussion around repatriation also generated some different opinions as whether to repatriate or not to repatriate the collections.

Some participants in the focus group said:

*...people are talking up hatred, a lot of the artifacts are there because the indigenous people gave gifts to the brits. The history is confusing. Are the artifacts safe if they are sent back or if they can be sent back. At least here the history is safe and able to be preserved safely. What if they ask the Punjabi community they are no longer interested in the history. (Focus Group 14).*

*I don't think necessarily so, I think in some cases those things may not be wanted back. I don't think everything should be given back per se; they need to be given the option (Focus Group 5).*

However, most of the focus group participants believe that returning the items could be considered the best way forward in terms of a decolonial approach. The repatriation approach clearly must be considered in the process of developing anti-racist structures in museums and galleries.

<sup>5</sup> <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>

## 2.3. Informed Consent

The issue of informed consent was raised due to difficulties in locating stolen and taken items from their communities of origin. This may be because some communities no longer exist or are not aware their objects have been exhibited in Scottish museums and galleries. Many participants shared the common view that if the countries do not give their informed consent, the items' identity and significance will be washed away.

Many focus group participants acknowledged that:

*I feel like many don't even know. I'm from Nigeria, and my specific tribe has many pieces that are in British museums. We are really not taught about these things. I think it's absolutely fair for the original cultures and people to know about what is being done with their stuff. If you don't tell communities then that is shying away from the fact that it has been taken. (Focus Group 11).*

*It's this idea that they can inform a group of people that something that rightfully belongs to them it is being exhibited. In the Museum of Black Civilisations In Senegal, this feel right as it is in Africa. There should be a dialogue about where the collection should be displayed. (Focus Group 4).*

*A yes collectively – we have a responsibility to tell communities their objects are on display. (Focus Group 1).*

*Talk to dissidents and ask permission and was wondering if those people can give full and informed consent before the object is displayed. (Focus Group 4).*

*...should happen before it's displayed. Full and informed consent? Descendants should be contacted. Objects removed from display (Focus Group 1).*

*I was thinking on certain museums I've seen they've taken objects and possessions without consent, that*

**“Talk to dissidents and ask permission and was wondering if those people can give full and informed consent before the object is displayed.”**

*seems manipulative. What's displayed in museums is very manipulative, like skulls from other countries (Focus Group 7).*

Regarding the displaying of human remains, there felt strongly that they should not be on display as they carry spiritual significance with them. The participants believe human bodies should have not been considered as property. Holding them gives the sense of imprisoning people forever. Those are BPoC's ancestors that died, and they deserve to rest peacefully.

Some participants said:

*Human remains should not be put on display - common of human remains from various BPoC cultures which do not respect their burial rites. It feels wrong and potentially cursed (Focus Group 2)*

*Feels strongly that human remains should never be displayed (Focus Group 4).*

*Human remains should never be put on display (Focus Group 1)*

It is clear that the issue of ownership is prevalent when discussing stolen or looted objects. For many BPoC, the display of such objects is seen as a statement of ownership made by museums, galleries and the state. This further alienates BPoC from museum and gallery spaces.

## 2.4. Research on the Provenance of Objects Held

There were strong opinions about the responsibility to carry out collaborative research with BPoC, national and international experts to identify, analyse and document the ownership history of objects held in museum and gallery collections. Participants believe a concerted material effort to decolonise museums and galleries will help identify objects mixed up in archives without relevant identification and information on them. Many of these objects have been in museums' possession for more than a century<sup>6</sup> and their true history in some cases has been intentionally hidden. The participants felt it was important to find out why this happened, and why it generates so much violence to talk about this.

Some participants stressed that:

*Those stories of pillage should be told. The very project of researching how the artefacts came to be in certain collections will itself be a huge in-depth research project. (Focus Group 5).*

*If this research could possibly capture that there's masses of pillaged artefacts from Africa, in the case of St mungo's museum, in Glasgow and China, in the case of Glasgow's Burrell collection (Focus Group 5).*

*A big problem in museum collections is that for so many objects, the provenance research isn't done and so many objects lie in boxes in museum stores with zero information and you wouldn't even know they were here from the outside. You can access some online, but a big part isn't digitised. Such a great issue because the museums don't even know half of the things they have. A big step is to take a look at what is actually going on and work on that. (Focus Group 10).*

Participants are evidently not only interested in objects displayed in museums and galleries but also those stored and archived, there is a clear appetite to know more about

this and to access transparent information about just how many objects there are in Scotland which are linked to colonialism and empire sitting un-displayed.

**“Those stories of pillage should be told. The very project of researching how the artefacts came to be in certain collections will itself be a huge in-depth research project.”**

<sup>6</sup> <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>



## Institutional Racism

Institutional racism has gained particular attention in public debate in recent years because of both the impact on BPoC and because of its wider effect on society and fostering tolerance and respect<sup>7</sup>. Many have called for the use of a multidisciplinary approach to address the issue at all levels. It is important to recognise that racism is often only brought into the public sphere for discussion when national culture is suddenly disturbed by large protest movements such as Black Lives Matter. Racism is often only acknowledged when it causes discomfort to white people<sup>8</sup>. Museums and galleries are not exempt from institutional racism<sup>9</sup>.

There is an ongoing public debate around institutional racism within the heritage sector and many believe it must be dealt with based on a decolonising approach. There is a need to not only represent change in the collections museums and galleries hold but also the structures which allow institutional racism to prevail.

It is important to recognise that although there was not a research question asked in relation to institutional racism within Scottish museums and galleries, the issue was raised organically by many participants.

As participants in the focus group acknowledge:

*[Those in the sector] have to deal with blatant denial and racism (Focus Group 14).*

*There is systemic racism and economic disadvantages (Focus Group 4).*

*Systemic racism that effects BPoC, economic disadvantage. Sense of do you belong in the space? It is predominately white people in the field. It does help in knowing they've considered it but doesn't necessarily make you know the environment will be good for you (Focus Group 1).*

*We hardly see ourselves in the museums and we are watched in the museums and galleries. They don't consult us on their education, and they feel that they try and tell them their mistakes and they dismiss and just not want to interact (Focus Group 14)*

Participants believe it is time museums and galleries recognise that their institutional racism is part of the legacy of colonialism. The prevailing view in the groups was that the ways museums and galleries operate have been perpetuating inherently racist approaches and causing trauma to BPoC.

<sup>7</sup> Mayes, C., Paradies, Y. and Elias, A., 2021. Lead Essay—Institutional Racism, Whiteness, and the Role of Critical Bioethics. *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, 18(1), pp.9-12.

<sup>8</sup> DiAngelo, R., 2021. *Nice Racism: How Progressive White People Perpetuate Racial Harm*. Beacon Press.

<sup>9</sup> Prescod, C., 2021. *The British Museums: the Benin Bronzes, colonial violence and cultural restitution* by Dan Hicks.

## 3.1

### Lack of engagement with the BPoC community

There were many discussions around the lack of engagement with BPoC communities. All the priority communities interviewed almost unanimously felt that museums and galleries neither interact with BPoC nor consult them about artefacts, collections or stories. While many in the heritage sector may disagree with this it is very important to note that this perception was widespread in the groups. Additionally, there is very little representation in the industry of staff from a BPoC background. Only 3% of museum staff are BPoC, and many museums and galleries fail to even collect this data about representation and engagement with BPoC communities in the first place.

The idea of ad-hoc engagement around certain events was considered by some participants to be insulting because of the tendency to hold a single exhibition or celebration, for example in Black History Month, rather than consulting the community about their feelings and expectations beforehand to gauge what action would be appropriate. There is no clear guidance on how BPoC can get involved and add value to the decolonising

process. This may be due in part to a lack of central guidance for museums and galleries on how to engage with BPoC communities in an anti-racist way.

As many participants said:

*Rather than just doing an exhibition for one month of year and thinking that will do. Not going to communities. Lack of engagement and separation (Focus Group 1).*

*The types of jobs in museums are planned for those who wanted a career in heritage, there is very little flexibility and scope and this is discouraging to black people. It can be hard to conduct yourself in these spaces when there are preconceived notions about your background or country or identity (Focus Group 12).*

*Not doing enough work with going to communities and asking them their thoughts. (Focus Group 2).*

*What is the full capacity of the occupation and how can people be involved? (Focus Group 2).*

*I myself do not know a single person with any experience in the museums sector, I feel like you have to see an example of yourself somewhere that to think it's a viable career. I imagine someone white, middle aged, a man (Focus Group 8).*

Some people feel that the structure certainly does not invite BPoC to engage with the system. The statistics shows a very low percentage of BPoC visiting museums and galleries . There was an assumption for some participants in the focus group that museums and galleries are seen as traditionally being a space linked to white upper social class, posh folks.

As people acknowledged:

*I just associate museums with being upper class, really posh. I guess when it's such a white dominated sector, in the Focus group today I felt comfortable because I knew there would be no white people to overpower. I think if museums focused more on getting POC involved, schools need to accommodate it too. It's a cultural thing too (Focus Group 11)*

There is clearly little to no sense of belonging to the museum space for the BPoC participants. The discussion went further and recognised that there is an inequality in accessing museums and galleries.

It is clear that many participants see museums and galleries as gatekeepers of truth and knowledge. The history they see represented there is seen as verified, stamped or authorised by both curators and the state. The perception is therefore that inaccurate or incomplete histories as represented in these spaces are curated intentionally to obscure, that they are part of a conscious effort to subjugate BPoC. Museums and galleries clearly must work to tackle this perception and actively disprove it by engaging communities around collections and exhibitions. Decolonising work done without the inclusion of BPoC communities may not remedy the lack of belonging at all and add to a feeling of alienation.

<sup>6</sup> <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>



### 3.1.1

## Employment Barriers in the Museums and Galleries Sector

Participants also raised concerns around barriers in applying for jobs in the sector. These include: discrimination in general, not having a British name, the right experience to fit in the sector, the undervaluing of BPoC's work and ideas, the difficulty of confronting racist approaches, lack of BPoC in power and language barriers.

Some participants said that:

*There are multiple barriers, institutional discrimination, and systemic barriers. Thinking about intersectionality. (Focus Group 5).*

*Most museums are owned by white people, board of directors, run all by white people. They are the ones that make the decisions, we need more people at that level to make positive change. I would not feel comfortable*

*applying to a job in the museums sector. I am going to be a token gesture; I'm not going to have the authority to make that change we need BAME in these positions to make a change. (Focus Group 7)*

*They can often turn away Black folk whose English is not their native language. They expect all academics to speak and write in the British English language and their slang and accents (Focus Group 12).*

*Two particular thoughts: one being access, that particular sector is viewed as an upper-class job, requiring connections, access to education disproportionately affects BPOC. Second, we know that these environments are incredibly white, I'm sure it's very isolating and ostracizing, I wouldn't be surprised if BPOC wouldn't want to get involved in*

*promoting that, not to mention that your colleagues might not understand your point of view (Focus Group 10)*

*Their names. I'm constantly hearing that when BPoC use their name they get ignored but if they apply with a western name they get interviews ... names that are more palatable usually means them getting the job, having a name like MacDonald means people are getting their CVS's to the top. (Focus Group 14).*

There is clearly a pervasive problem for museums and galleries when considering these responses. BPoC have negative perceptions of employment in heritage and the lack of visibility of BPoC staff makes it harder for to identify with and access the sector. There were particular concerns about elitism and the academic nature of work with museums and galleries. Therefore, there is an obvious need for the heritage sector to both make itself a more attractive option for BPoC but also to ensure it is a safe space to its BPoC employees and to decrease pervasive barriers to access.

**"There are multiple barriers, institutional discrimination, and systemic barriers. Thinking about intersectionality."**



<sup>6</sup> <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/colonialism-and-historic-slavery-report.pdf>

## 3.1.2

### A museum employment scheme aimed at BPoC

Participants were asked about what they felt could decrease institutional racism within the heritage sector and discussed professional engagement in the museum sector through an employment scheme, this matter generated varied perspectives. To some extent, having an employment initiative aimed at BPoC could be seen as a positive approach, increasing the representation of BPoC in museums and galleries, hopefully leading to a decrease in racist approaches in exhibitions, celebrations, programmes, and collections. Additionally, jobs concerned with handling, display and/or potential repatriation and restitution of artefacts and collections which groups feel should have BPoC involvement. Employment initiatives could be a way to encourage BPoC to get a job within the sector. Some participants' opinions are that the whole museum structure could benefit greatly from BPoC's expertise and lived experience in bringing new ideas to decolonise the sector. They also argue that it could increase diversity of visitors.

As some focus group participants said:

*It would be good if museums could represent POC in a more celebratory way, rather than just sharing the sad stuff. I think that could make it better. I think hiring schemes would be good as long as people are supported as much as they could be, if they can be retained, BPoC need to be supported and nurtured in the same way as non BPoC. Similarly, I think it's a good idea because it gives people an opportunity (Focus group 8).*

*Yes, it would be a great idea, under the equality act 2010 you are allowed to positively hire. This would be really positive to BPoC, to be encouraged into the sector (Focus Group 12)*

*Optimistically there are individuals and groups who would benefit highly and improve and bring ideas. Having it as a start if there is nothing like it already (Focus Group 1).*

On the other hand, some expressed concerns about an employment initiative approach. They recognised that BPoC would have to consider whether this type of employment initiative is truly an anti-racist approach and if it would place undue burden on them to change the sector. Concerns were raised overusing this approach, including: tokenistic approaches, the potential for imposter syndrome, the sustainability of the initiative, the existing and unaddressed issues of discrimination in the workplace, and the employee feeling as though they are getting the job based not on merit but their identity.

As some participants said:

*I agree, I feel like if they're doing it, they're not coming from a place of actually caring about PoC struggles, if they do it, it would be temporary and then leave it when it's not trendy anymore (Focus Group 8).*

*People do want to get the job based on their merits so it can be discouraging to apply to these such programmes. Museums and galleries should utilize the Black and PoC communities for the knowledge they are missing. This will bring more hatred between people and difference. The best way is to integrate everyone to come together (Focus Group 12)*

*If you did get the job, you might think that you were only getting the job because you are a POC, I think that would be hard. I agree that a lot of these schemes are tokenistic, I don't think there is a long-term sustainable plan, it's like they've looked at their data and look to fill a gap. I think that would put me off, it would be the opposite of what I wanted to do. I think it would be hard to do anything effectively (Focus Group 8).*

*I completely resonate with that, there is that danger of the imposter syndrome that people get, when people treat you like you're just a 'diversity hire'. For me, you have to take people based on their merit and who is good for the job. I don't know how they nullify their biases, but I think in the long term it's not sustainable. I think it's the shock that the system needs, but the colour of your skin is not the entirety of who you are. It's a starting point, but long term. (Focus Group 9).*

Furthermore, if such an approach is utilised it is important to be aware of how the job role is going to be advertised, who manages the initiative and hiring, what their specific training is, and the support BPoC might require and whether there are safe spaces.



## 3.2

### Mental health strain

Mental health strain was another issue acknowledged by participants. In their view, the practice of institutional racism in museums and galleries causes mental health strain on BPoC. The mental strain felt by people who are racialised is a combination of both colonial and individual daily trauma. It translates into a collective and intergenerational experience. In the work setting, some people said that they might be affected by burnout if they had to deal with all that trauma daily. There is the sense that museums and galleries are spaces that make BPoC feel traumatised.

As one participant raised:

*...it's upsetting to be in that environment seeing the daily way in which your culture is represented, it takes a toll on your mental health. Having specific care due to mental strain - how good would that be? So many issues that you would run into. I worked in NGO for a long time, and I've seen when tokenism comes in - this leads to burnout. WOC in particular get pushed out wherever*

*we try and raise questions. Results in people being traumatized. Never considered a job in the museum sector. Never known what part of the sector to be part of. I don't see this as a place for 'me', I don't see myself included, I see myself being put on display in cabinets. I don't know if I want that to be part of my day-to-day work. Mental health limits. Having it in my workplace would be too much. If there are other areas I could be part of, no idea where I would fit in (Focus Group 14).*

*I wouldn't mind applying to museums that much, but if it was a museum that had a lot of evil people or evil things, if the people idolized those people, I wouldn't want to work with that (Focus Group 8)*

*Museums and galleries are one of those industries that people of colour would feel out of place. It feels like a hostile and uncomfortable place for both visiting and working. (Focus Group 4).*

Another manifestation of mental health strain is related to BPoC's emotional attachment to the artefacts and having to deal with the racialised way their stories are told.

Some people stated that museums and galleries are uncomfortable places to both visit and work, suggesting a feeling of being totally out of place. Expanding from this, most participants acknowledge the importance of safe spaces.

Decolonising museums and galleries, is an opportunity for Scotland to question, unlearn and dismantle all previous approaches which, as products of a colonialism and colonial legacies, have proven traumatic for BPoC.





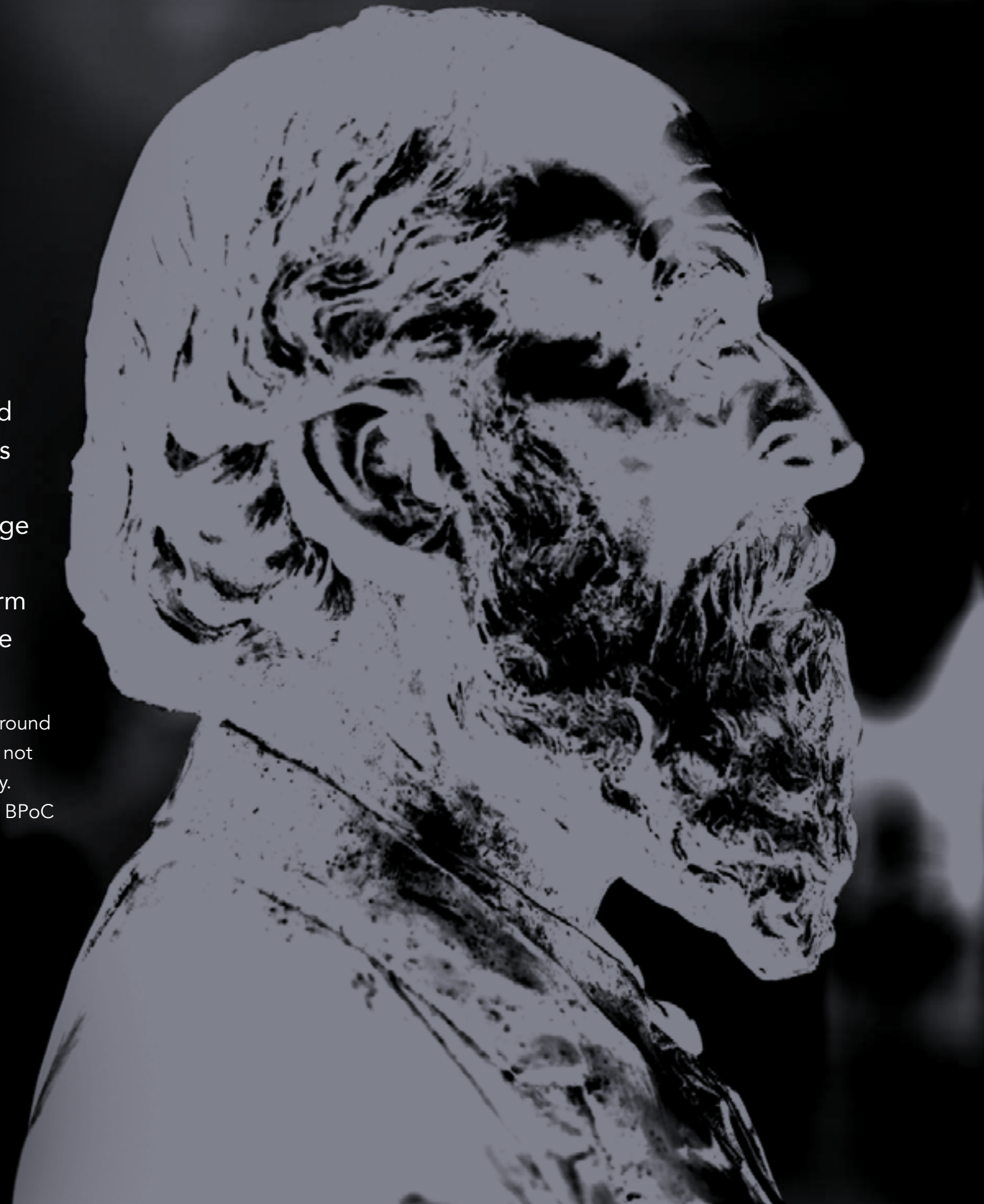
## Accountability within Museums and Galleries

Current literature suggests that museums and galleries have now started to acknowledge the need to implement change in their current structures, spurred by wider public debates around racial inequality<sup>12</sup>. There is a need for museums and galleries to take accountability for their past and move towards actions to decolonise themselves<sup>13</sup>. It is crucial they carry out self-reflection to acknowledge their role in contributing to the omission of history. Furthermore, participants believed that it is important for museums and galleries to acknowledge the harm created while embarking on decolonising itself, it can be challenging to engage with BPoC around these topics without causing further harm.

The focus group discussion around accountability generated strong views. There was intense discussion around museums and galleries being held accountable for longstanding racialised approaches towards telling (or not telling) the stories of colonised people, colonial artefacts and the impact and legacy of this on BPoC today. Participants also felt that museums and galleries have a responsibility to reflect the intersectionality within BPoC communities and their histories and to resist depicting the community as a monolith.

<sup>12</sup> Wajid, S. and Minott, R., 2019. Detoxing and decolonising museums. In *Museum activism* (pp. 25-35). Routledge.

<sup>13</sup> Wajid, S. and Minott, R., 2019. Detoxing and decolonising museums. In *Museum activism* (pp. 25-35). Routledge.



As many participants mentioned:

*Showing the real history and showing how Britain or Scotland benefited from it. For example, Merchant city in Glasgow benefited a lot from the tobacco trade - modern houses are influenced by the availability of money from tobacco, we want to show people that what you enjoy now is a result of slavery. It shouldn't be glorifying the people who made the city, it's not just by your brains, but by exploiting people. How slavery affected the lives of people in Africa, how Europe benefited from it. We have a massive statue in George Square, we have this massive statue that is of a slave owner - showing how these people are implicated in slavery (Focus Group 3).*

*Bits on colonisation and slavery need to be put into every part and theme of the museums (Focus Group 7).*

*It is how it impacts the different areas of our lives, and museums have the power to translate that for the masses (Focus Group 9).*

*Important for museums to cover and showcase a mixture and multitude of diverse and marginalized communities. (Focus Group 12).*

Participants also commented about the way museums and galleries tend to focus on celebrating death and sad stories, instead of people who are alive, more positive stories and those of people facing and overcoming adversity. They emphasised that increased emphasis should be placed on the healing of ancestral trauma, and how this impacts BPoC creative work, and how BPoC can express it in their artwork. Scotland's demographic includes increasingly diverse communities, and the new generation of people need to be celebrated and be exposed to a more accurate history of their ancestors.

As some people said:

*The concept is we aren't stuck in the past. We take the past. Themes of colonisation are still being processed and channeled into our arts. Most museums celebrate the dead, not PoC who are healing ancestral trauma and channeling it in our art. Look at the past and present to build a better future (Focus Group 14).*

*Imagine if we had a museum that offered accommodation for people who are suffering from the results of empire and what if there were immigration advice?( Focus Group 13).*

*A community space is a good start, but it's really important to make it accessible and bring that information into schools. There is always more engagement that can be done, through asking people to talk about their culture and perspectives. There needs to be more work done in museums, looking at workforce. It should be a space that staff are trained to accommodate these triggering and difficult conversations (Focus Group 11).*

*Create a safe space. It's a very emotional place to be. (Focus Group 1).*

This shows that participants want and require museums and galleries to be accountable for creating a space that does not further traumatise BPoC. A space where the trust and support are built and fostered and led by BPoC experts.

One participant said:

*...good if museums had different nights, different speakers, group leaders? How being in a museum made them feel, what they read and learnt, space to discuss, missing from a lot of museums. No space to reflect. Forums, online events, in terms of anti-racist space, translation, multilingual tour guide, something about making one now and in Scotland that can focus on more intersectional ways in which slavery and colonialism have intersected (Focus Group 1).*

## 4.1

### The Role of Schools

While there was no question relating directly to schools the topic was raised in every focus group organically. There is strong support for decolonising the history curriculum and many felt this should be a starting point in the overall process of decolonising museums and galleries. Participants felt a need for museums and galleries and schools to come together and work on programmes and agendas aimed towards this goal.

As participants articulated:

*You need to change the curriculum before you can even begin to make change. (Focus Group 7)*

*Generally, the different places that we learn about the slave trade, like history class in school, they don't really talk about Scotland's involvement (Focus Group 11).*

*I have been trying to ask coordinators there what they have on colonialism and slavery. They asked if there was*

*any way I could help. I thought, I'm not a historian, you should be finding this info out (Focus Group 7).*

*...but it's a question of who can access museums. Not everyone has time or money to access museums. Schools should help to give access to those pupils and families who won't always have access...., museums are very important in how you learn your foundation of history, my concern would be how would you be able to shape the narrative. I think we assume that it would be an equal playing field, but it would be hard to reach seniors (Focus Group 8).*

Participants clearly view schools as an essential space to correct the record around colonial history. While museums and galleries may have limited capacity or authority in the education sector, BPoC clearly feel that this is an essential area where museums and galleries must embed themselves.



## A Museum of Empire and Enslavement in Scotland

Particular focus was given to the proposal for a museum of empire and enslavement in the discussions. The proposal has been suggested as a form of accountability and a way for Scotland and its heritage sector to perpetuate a better understanding of enslavement and colonialism. This is a nationwide project to be built from the ongoing work of challenging current history and museum structures<sup>14</sup>.

Building up from this discussion the participants developed further conversation about what an ideal museum would look like in their perspective of decolonisation.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/projects/empire-slavery-scotlands-museums/>



## 5.1

### The Museum Proposal

In the first instance, participants wanted to know more about the museum proposal to understand its context and root intention. Many questioned why this conversation about the proposal was happening in the first place and the intention of the focus groups themselves. They also had questions around who the proposal was coming from and why now, when this has been a pervasive issue in Scottish society for centuries. Some felt that the proposal could be described as a form of a messiah complex. By messiah complex, the participants in the focus group meant that there is a risk this museum proposal is viewed as an action of white saviourism rather than museums and galleries showing accountability and decolonising their structures. There were issues raised around the community trust about this museum project. As participants noted:

*Who is pushing this? It's not coming from the communities. It's the messiah complex. It comes from the discomfort and trauma. It is almost*

*like fetishising, why do we need that? There are so many more things that could be done (Focus Group 9).*

*Way to think that things are the past instead of engaging with the present too. Immediately, who is going to be in charge of this? Particularly looking at how few BPOC are present in the sector at all and who is in the position of power? Who are the board members, who is in charge? Should be Black and POC lead from the top. Dependent on that intersectional identity (Focus Group 2).*

*I don't want to give my money to a museum if the money is going to a white man. Especially about slave trade, it should be led by a black person or at least a POC. (Focus Group 8).*

There was also concern about the idea that the project could appear as another tick box exercise due to lack of community knowledge and information about who is involved, who is carrying out the work, who

are the funders etc.

Some participants said:

*It feels like a tick box exercise. (Focus Group 9).*

*I think, in theory that sounds like a big milestone but I would also have many concerns about how that is carried out, who is involved, who are the funders. It could go in two directions. I think you should have POC involved, you need to have the specific people from collections involved, but also the 3% in the MGS. You also need to consider that the correct narrative is given, e.g. not getting a Black person to talk about a South Asian narrative (Focus Group 10).*

The participants have also recognised that this museum project could go another way in the sense that it might segregate BPoC narratives and lived experiences from other histories presented in existing museums and galleries. It could create the idea of isolating one part of history from another. The participants felt that information about enslavement, colonialism and empire

should not be isolated into one place and should be distributed around all museums and galleries.

As participants said:

*Agree with that, the idea that it could go two ways. Makes me think of the conversation on Black History Month - it's good but also, does it place Black history as a separate thing to general history. Could a museum mean it could become a problem with the idea that it is one part of history that is not at all connected to the rest. British colonialism and slavery is literally in every part of British history and in streets, food etc. Would risk putting this into a little box, it should go further. How would the authority be shared? We should detach ourselves from the sole model of the museum which is, in itself, Western and colonial, especially with the authority and we need to be careful about the next steps. We need to take the opinion of the people who will visit this kind of museum, and also in Scotland. (Focus Group 10).*

*... I don't like the idea about parts of history segregated from one another. We're taking poc and slavery and segregating it. So much of Scotland as a whole that is built on the back of the slave trade. So much is weaved into history as general. One specific place wouldn't give it justice. It's not just the slave trade and that's it. The effects of the slave trade continue to this day. What would happen to all the other museums which hold items that would be related to such a museum of Empire and Slavery in Scotland? ... if we're segregating this whole thing everyone if we do have it there's still the problem of the disconnect - all the past museums have been so racist (Focus Group 14).*

Many also feel that this is a bittersweet approach that should be very carefully considered as the people in charge should be accountable and prepared to do this work. They suggest that the narrative and framework shared should consider intersectionality and not concentrate only on stories of violence. There should be spaces for BPoC to celebrate their humanity and all positive stories. Furthermore, the whole concept of this museum must be anti-racist, promote the right use of language, and promote an

intersectional approach in relation to such things as gender and disability.

As participants said:

*...reading title is bittersweet. Bitter because of experiences in current museums. It really depends on who hands is it in, the intention? But the sweetness of knowing that it is in Scotland. In this space, very important to people in this space. People need to be able to claim it as their own. In order to involve the intersections, that colonialism covers how it effects consuming, employment market, brings it into the now. More than just plantations, slave owners. How can we explore in modern framework in terms of anti-racist space, translation, multilingual tour guide, something about making one now and in Scotland that can focus on more intersectional ways in which slavery and colonialism have intersected, e.g. the gender binary. Start some new conversations (Focus Group 1).*

*This should be a project this should be a movement that currently changes museums and if this is another token thing on the back of Black Lives Matter. They need to acknowledge and go through the whole sector ... needs to*

*go through all museums not just a flow of tokenism and actually be throughout the whole museum. (Focus Group 7).*

Those who supported the idea of a museum discussed the type of space it would need to be in order to be considered authentic. Many felt the space should be a museum with the purpose of educating and reinforcing anti-racist values. It was suggested that the museum space should not focus solely on past context but also on Scotland today and how Scotland's actions as part of its colonial history influenced and aided other oppressions evolving across the globe, such as Orientalism. Furthermore, many felt it should provide an environment for activism as a means to change Scotland.

*... It needs to be a museum with purpose and education and deterrent. One that doesn't play the context of the past but reinforms about the current need of the modern day. Needs to inform of the past and to stop repetition in the future. It was just who was going to oversee this and how few BPOC are present in the sector and raises suspicion on who BPOC is represented. Considering that in an intersectional way that the people in charge are there to represent instead of undermining.(Focus Group 4).*

*Not just places it in context of past*

*but how the effects are still around in Scotland today. Should be an anti-racist space. Give room to activism and actively work against the structures. Address not just the past but neo-colonialism and colonialism that is still around.*

*Potentially be an issue if it was just presented as facts and not critical about it. E.g., one of those things that happened. Portrayed in a passive way. That takes away the responsibility from the rest of museums in Scotland to depict things properly. Potentially means other galleries do nothing (Focus Group 1).*

*Spaces where people can connect, where these people are today, without it being performative or on a stage. A platform to express and contribute. Back to inclusivity. How can they go from home, online? Focusing on areas of world. E.g. Africa, Caribbean, Scotland, financial repercussions. This is particularly important for Scotland. Understanding where that money goes. Who financially benefits (Focus group 1).*

It was strongly suggested that this museum should work with schools to engage with young people and give a generation the opportunity to learn and apply anti-racist approaches in their daily life and development. As participants emphasised:



*I think there should be a school-based initiative and have school trips, lessons, and a resource pack. Schools often dilute these histories to make it more happy but narratives should be honest but also use specific language (Focus Group 10).*

*My fear is that white people would overpower and not give much voice to POC. In Highers, I know they have included empire in the curriculum and very much sugar-coated it. It's been made compulsory, but it doesn't talk about the part Scotland played. My expectations will be that they should work with schools more. Especially high schools it's very important for museums and kids to grow and learn and know about these things. When I started, I didn't even know that the UK had slaves here until maybe a year or two ago when I read 'Why I'm no longer talking about race'. My fear is that it would be way too surface level and not actually advance the discussion we're having around this. (Focus Group 11).*

The participants also acknowledge that this should be a museum space to combat both old and new injustices. The whole process should be participatory and seek for international experts' support.

Many felt that a museum shouldn't be static or fixed to a geographical area in Scotland.

As some participants noted:

*No, I don't think it should be a standalone building, I think at the very least, it shouldn't stay static either, we shouldn't also forget the highlands but where I am from it was the highlands that were involved in plantation owners. Scotland is more than Glasgow and Edinburgh, we forget that we need to reach Aberdeen, Oban, and the islands up north! I don't think it should be its own building. And this is something I can change my mind happily, having it as whatever museum exists, that's fine because it is a part of Scottish history, and I don't want it to be alone where it can be forgotten. I do think for certain periods it would be good to go around, there should be a projects in every part of Scotland should have it in their main museum. People shouldn't necessarily have to travel miles and miles to hear about such a major part of Scotland's history. All communities benefited from Scottish colonialism. They should include people of colour in the communities effected (Focus Group 13).*

*But you could have different sections*

*that are inclusive to different groups, e.g., disabled - so people can go in and see themselves represented. Having different artists or curators from around the world to do an installation based on the history of slavery and empire. Something new every time. A mix between people of colour and white people because you want the learning to be universal. The Windrush, actually teaching about it. I didn't know about it till this year. How after slavery, that went on. A lot of times Windrush isn't included in conversations about slavery. Also, I think for a lot of people we think slavery happened and then ended. Perfect example is after Nigerian's independence there was huge destruction of factories. We need to be aware of how Britain has benefited after slavery. (Focus Group 3).*

Another very strong discussion around a museum proposal was regarding the museum audience as some groups were concerned about who this museum will attract. Some feared that there is a risk of it attracting more BPoC than any other group and consequently create racist attacks on BPoC communities. As some suggested:

*...who are the audiences that the museum is really going to attract? Is it*

*just going to attract Black and People of Colour or will it attract the white and wider society so that's something that you know that I have concerns about it's like what I said before like having one section in the museum just on slave colonisation, it has to be throughout the museum so that that theme is there because black people and people of colour have given so much in society, so much throughout the generations that it should be in every aspect of life. Encourage to take the children to the museum and the main concern is if it is going to be only to BPOC community. (Focus Group 7).*

Groups discussed that a museum dealing with such subject matter should have resources in place and trigger warnings etc. about the content rather than just going straight into the narratives. Furthermore, they were very concerned about the language used to describe things. This should be deeply analysed, anti-racist and be understood by the entire audience at the museum. A safe space approach would be required.

Some participants reflected:

*Who is writing the descriptions because language is really important? There needs to be transparency. The public*

*needs to understand what change is made otherwise it looks like pandering. I would assume that it has only come about because of the BLM, what has spurred it? This space is needed because the history is needed. Not sure if museums are the spaces to do this. After being educated in Scotland it feels like this could be avoided. People could say this is a 'black museum'. Don't know how traumatic this could be. Because when you can still feel the impact of this (Focus group 9).*

*Scotland has played a huge part, thinking about names and the origins of names, who were the first BPOC people in Scotland – these are things I want to know. We need to ask people what they want to learn. There is book called Roots, that had a very powerful effect, not just our names but our identities, that this is not just a single issue. (Focus Group 5).*

*If there was a group specifically for BPOC, safe space, clubs. Should be accessible to people with wheelchairs adding it to it being about a safe space. Especially for black people if it is about slavery, because black family members can find this very traumatising even if they didn't go through it themselves, if it is acknowledged this would help (Focus Group 8).*

*Furthermore, some participants raised that younger generations must be represented in the museum and that there is a need for fun and interactive ways to access history.*

*I think to have that museum then you have people the younger generation of black and coloured [sic] people that's a way for them to learn about their history that's a way for them to learn you know about their roots so in that way that's a positive thing (Focus Group 7).*

*I think that storytelling is really important. But if the story is told right by BPOC and the countries that were colonised then it would really be a good idea. (Focus Group 8).*

Furthermore, some felt that it was important that a museum should not be an excuse to avoid repatriation of artefacts.

Overall, there was a significant amount of scepticism about the proposal and clearly a large portion of distrust in the intentions of creating a museum and around the project itself. Participants from priority communities are clearly concerned that efforts to decolonise should be led by the BPoC community and are wary of a museum that does not do this. There are concerns around tokenism and the potential for a museum to obstruct the

vital work that must be done to decolonise Scotland's heritage sector. Those who were in support were only supportive in certain circumstances wherein concerns expressed above are actioned such as institutional racism, repatriation of objects and the issue of BPoC leadership,

## 5.2

### An Ideal Museum

There was discussion about what a creative and innovative museum should look like, though it is important to note that some participants outright did not agree that a museum was the best course of action for addressing historic injustice. Many ideas came up such as having events, shows, talks, podcasts, films, showcases, speakers, zine publications, lectures, culturally significant days, celebrations, written and spoken words, having information in different languages, music, food and much more to translate knowledge and share and celebrate culture.

As participants said:

*I feel like people have different abilities when learning, for example, not everyone's preference is reading to learn. Most young people would say that museums are boring because you have to read a lot. So having events, shows, that would encourage them to pay attention. Rather than having someone there explaining*

*and explaining (Focus Group 11)*

*Making the information available in the 6 languages of the UN at the bare minimum. Making sure that it is multi-lingual from the beginning (Focus Group 12).*

*I think music is a big one, in museums they can talk about the evolution of music, talking about how African and white music mix. You can see where it came from. Music is just good, like everyone listens to music. (Focus Group 3).*

*Participants also agreed that museums should avoid performative action and invest in celebration where BPoC community leaders can contribute by speaking about their lived experiences, positive stories and promote activism.*

*Some people in the focus group said:*

*Would be good if museums have different nights on different speakers and group leaders and different*

*marginalized groups can discuss feelings and knowledge, a space where my story is told, and the contribution is made. The communities that live here is represented and what are the ancestors doing now and having space where we can find out more about the ancestors today and not doing performative action. Inclusivity. Not having everything in the physical museum how can this get into schools (Focus Group 14).*

*I think definitely workshops and things online make it more accessible to people with autism, sensory issues (Focus Group 11).*

Many also discussed that a physical space may not be particularly important that their ideal museum is something that is easy to access without having a static site.

*...joy travelling to physical space. But also the joy of a museum without walls. Taking the space to people, pop up, in different spaces, when it's in a place it's a period of time and they focus on*

*that area. Whether street names or place. Have the spirit of the place travel through Scotland. A fresh way to bring this to the people (Focus Group 1)*

*A museum without walls and a moving museum and like a pop up to different cities that are exclusively or predominantly focused on the history of the area and have the spirit of the museum can (Focus Group 4).*

*Maybe not think of a museum as a building, it could be outside, a pavilion, a projector on a massive wall. It could be much more engaging and a good experience and what would get more people in is if we got the affected communities involved in it (Focus Group 2)*

Most agreed that if there were to be a museum, that it should be an innovative and creative space which moves away from traditional structures and comes alive with exhibits where people can listen to, relate to, engage with and contribute to.



## Recommendations

The following recommendations aim to demonstrate practical and theoretical changes museums and galleries should implement to address the current structure within the industry which many believe to be institutionally racist. Each of these recommendations calls for relevant actions to develop a framework to decolonise structures and centre those who have been marginalised for centuries.

It is our view, based on the findings which emerged from the focus group, that recommendations one to eight should be prioritised before embarking on recommendation nine. A full program of anti-racist change should start with decolonising existing structures and build up trust around an anti-racist approach. There is a lot of work that is still yet to be done before building an empire and enslavement museum.



## Recommendation 1

**Museums and Galleries must develop and implement an approach to communicating the history of empire, colonialism and enslavement that is based on an anti-racist framework.**

Museums and Galleries must take part in reflection of their practices and create a framework for anti-racist change.

This could include but is not limited to the following actions point:

- 1.1.** Further anti-racist learning and training at all levels of Museums Galleries Scotland.
- 1.2.** BPoC employment scheme in museums and galleries (as detailed below).
- 1.3.** Recognition of embedded institutional racism within the museum sector and action plans to rectify this.
- 1.4.** Engagement with BPoC communities around both museum practices and collections.
- 1.5.** Reviews of all policies considering anti-racist and decolonial learning.
- 1.6.** While BPoC must be consulted and involved in these processes they should not bear the responsibility for carrying the actions out.

## Recommendation 2

Museums and Galleries should reassess the way they deliver knowledge and information to young people, develop a sophisticated partnership framework with schools and community education institutions to rethink the history curriculum, and adopt an anti-racist approach to communicate the Scottish role in enslavement and colonialism.

To achieve this, the following actions points are suggested:

**2.1.** To gather more evidence around the contribution of colonised and enslaved people to Scotland's economic and social development.

**2.2.** The statues of enslavers, street names and houses need more context to evidence the impact of empire, slave trade and stories of enslaved people both inside and outside Scotland.

**2.3.** To develop a better understanding of colonisation in general, particularly

Scottish involvement in imperialism considering the wider implications of continued settler colonialism in Scotland and the global implications in, for example, Australia, Canada and America in terms of displacement and genocide.

**2.4.** Museums and galleries to create programs and agenda catered to primary and secondary schools to challenge cultural and colonial amnesia.



## Recommendation 3

**Set up safe spaces within established museums and galleries and any future museums and galleries.**

**This should be a space that actively resists violence, and does not trigger racial trauma.**

To achieve this, the following actions points are suggested:

**3.1.** Museums and galleries should carry out dialogue, support plans and risk assessments in order to design safe spaces in a way that avoids further mental strain and trauma when viewing collections related to colonial histories.

**3.2.** Museums and galleries should pursue trauma-informed training to understand the impact that collections related to enslavement, empire and colonialism may have on BPOC people and how to avoid this.

**3.3.** Museums and galleries should work with professionals and affected communities to create therapeutic, safe, and healing spaces where people feel the sense of belonging and empowerment.

## Recommendation 4

Museums and galleries must reflect on the lived experiences and oral stories of BPoC affected by empire, enslavement, and racism more deeply and support diverse perspectives and spaces in the sector where people with lived experience can tell their own stories.

To achieve this, the following actions points are suggested:

**4.1.** Museums and galleries to take concrete actions to amplify BPoC stories.

**4.2.** Create sessions in each museum and gallery where stories of BPoC are shared by them in the first person, ensuring that these stories are not solely about violence and tragedy.

## Recommendation 5

Museums and Galleries are urged to consider the repatriation of Stolen Artefacts as a Key approach to decolonisation.

To achieve this, the following actions points are suggested:

- 5.1.** A review of appropriate collections policies is needed to facilitate repatriation.
- 5.2.** Countries and communities of the artefacts' origin to be informed their collections have been exhibited and archived in Scottish museums and galleries.
- 5.3.** Scottish museums and galleries to work and cooperate with international and national experts to facilitate the repatriation process.



## Recommendation 6

Scottish museums and galleries are strongly encouraged to carry out provenance research about the artefacts displayed and archived.

To achieve this, the following actions points are suggested:

- 6.1.** Both the stories of artefacts displayed and archived must be presented with more detailed information in relation to their colonial context.
- 6.2.** Human remains related to empire and colonialism should not be on display in museums or galleries.

## Recommendation 7

Scottish museums and galleries must take accountability for the role they played in obfuscating history and a comprehensive strategy is needed to tackle this.

To achieve this, the following actions points are suggested:

**7.1.** Scottish museums and galleries to be aware of and acknowledge racism, sexism, ableism, populism, nationalism, and classism (as well as any other oppressive structures) when implementing decolonising processes to avoid the perpetuation of white supremacy.

**7.2.** Intersectionality needs to be strongly considered when designing approaches to decolonise museums and galleries.

**7.3.** There is a need to create a repository of BPoC community work as well as a repository of diverse staff to increase representation within museums and galleries.

**7.4.** More effective engagement work with the BPoC community is needed.

**7.5.** The use of language within museums and galleries needs be reviewed as racist language must be eradicated.

**7.6.** Museums and galleries should model their actions on good practice across the sector such as The Pitt Rivers Museum (decolonisation) and the Black Cultural Archive (community-led history).

## Recommendation 8

Museums and galleries should implement a non-tokenistic employment scheme to increase diversity and representation in the industry.

To achieve this, the following actions points are suggested:

- 8.1.** More actions to provide guidance, museum careers pathways, university degrees and scholarships are needed.
- 8.2.** The HR system in place for this scheme must be representative of BPoC.
- 8.3.** There must be dialogue and assessment in relation to the sustainability of this scheme.
- 8.4.** There should be more dialogue and risk assessment in relation to the emotional attachments to the artefacts and how translating the stories of slave owners could be traumatic for people with lived experience.



## Recommendation 9

Museums and Galleries Scotland is urged to develop a more open and honest anti-racist approach to build trust with BPoC communities before creating an empire and enslavement museum.

To achieve this, the following actions points are suggested:

**9.1.** The current museums and galleries should undertake a full programme of anti-racist change and decolonisation before embarking upon the creation of an empire and enslavement museum.

**9.2.** All actions carried out must have a diversity of staff at all levels all the way up to board members and commissioners, they must be BPoC-, expert-led and provide safe spaces.

## Recommendation 9

Museums Galleries Scotland is urged to develop a more open and honest anti-racist approach to build trust with BPoC communities before creating an empire and enslavement museum.

To achieve this, the following actions points are suggested:

- 9.1.** The current museums and galleries should undertake a full programme of anti-racist change and decolonisation before embarking upon the creation of an empire and enslavement museum.
- 9.2.** All actions carried out must have a diversity of staff at all levels all the way up to board members and commissioners, they must be BPoC-led, expert-led and provide safe spaces.
- 9.3.** Any museum of empire and enslavement should;
- » Have a significant focus on being community-led and provide an opportunity for BPoC to influence the design process and running of the museum.
  - » Tell the stories of rebellion, resistance, and intersectional experiences during empire, enslavement, and colonialism.
  - » Provide a platform to study the history of racism in depth but also whiteness and the invention of race in order to deconstruct race itself as a concept and mode of power.
  - » Resist retraumatising BPoC.
  - » Create more room for meaningful events to celebrate culturally significant days.
  - » Hold shows, talks, podcasts, films, showcases, speakers, zine publications, lectures as strategies to inform and translate knowledge.
  - » Have information in diverse languages.
  - » Utilise QR and VR codes (and other new information technologies) for people to access information and knowledge online.
  - » Invest in activities such as food-sharing celebrations and music to engage with a diverse public.
  - » Be accessible for all people and safe for neuro-diverse people and developed in consultation with disabled people.





**Museums  
Galleries  
Scotland**  
Supporting Scotland's Museums

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