

ASSUMING TRUST WITHOUT EARNING IT: THE LIMITS OF AN ANTI-RACIST POSITION WITHOUT ONGOING DECOLONIAL PRACTICE

JOHANNA ZETTERSTROM-SHARP AND RACHAEL MINOTT

Introduction

In June 2018 the Horniman Museum and Gardens (Horniman) opened its new permanent anthropology gallery, the World Gallery (Figure 1). It was created, and is often spoken about, as an anti-racist gallery, reflecting on the things that unite us as humans – having children, sharing a meal, telling stories, or remembering the dead. The intention is to celebrate difference, highlighting that as humans we may live in or understand the world in different ways, but that such difference is valid and important with the hope that this will encourage visitors to reflect on their own lives and what makes them distinctive, and to encourage cross-cultural empathy and understanding. What follows is a critical conversation between Johanna Zetterstrom-Sharp (JZS) one of the curators involved in the World Gallery and Rachael Minott (RM), curator of Anthropology with a focus on social practice at the Horniman. Writing in 2019, one year after the gallery opened, we reflect on what its intentions were from conception to delivery, where it needs to go now, who needs to be involved, and what issues it must address to remain relevant.

We are particularly interested in the moments of friction where anti-racist and decolonial agendas brush up against each other, and the limits of well-intentioned liberal institutions, such as the Horniman, in navigating such frictions. To what extent, for example, are anti-racist ambitions attainable given the deep structures of institutional and professional practice that, along with museum buildings, collections and networks remain deeply rooted in their colonial origins? How can our museums ever ensure these ambitions are realised with such an unrepresentative workforce? Finally, to what extent are they able to guarantee the equal rights and access an anti-racist position maintains given the long history of exclusion and cultural erasure that has supported the creation of such opaque and hierarchical spaces? Museums remain spaces of distrust for many; this discussion asks whether we can ever gain that trust in order to fulfil the aspirations of democratic inclusivity that museums such as the Horniman seek.

We have chosen to hold this discussion as a conversation between two practitioners. We do so to acknowledge that whilst the issues of institutional ethics that concern us both have been written about widely in academic literature, we believe that it is a fundamental challenge to practice, and not only theory, that needs to be addressed in order to carve a future role for our museums. By focusing on practice at the Horniman

we explore how a well intended and, in many respects, successful gallery also re-inscribes historical and contemporary privileges, ongoing colonial violence, and deep-seated disciplinary silences. We do this to recognise that, like the project of decolonisation, museums and their permanent galleries are and must remain unfinished projects. The capacity of museums to enable true equity is presently limited by their incapacity for real and permanent change, and thus we rely on a commitment to responsive flexibility and critical openness. We also preferred to host this as a conversation in order to make our positionality clear and to try to avoid a veneer of logical neutrality as we discuss things that are emotionally engaged on many levels (Kassim 2019).

JZS will begin by introducing the thinking behind the World Gallery and how this developed, followed by RM's thoughts on her role as a social practitioner and curator working with this space. We will then continue by unpacking how discussions on race and racism remain absent from an anti-racist gallery, and the cause and effect of this absence. We will conclude by looking forward and asking how we should continue to use the space, who should be represented, and whom we should be speaking to. We do this to highlight that anti-racism is more than an ethical position, but amounts to ongoing reflection, dialogue, openness to critique, and commitment to change as a result.

JZS: The World Gallery opened in 2018, but is the product of six years of work during which we sought to open up access to our collections, first through an Arts Council England project called *Collections People Stories* (CPS), and secondly through a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant more specifically focused on the anthropology gallery redevelopment. CPS was primarily focused on a collections review which included scanning all museum catalogues, physically reviewing and re-cataloguing over a third of the entire Anthropology collection and providing much better access to collections data online. It was also centred on developing new practices around community engagement and wider community and academic partnerships. I was appointed as one of two curators specifically associated with this project along with a project coordinator, and we were able to welcome far more people than we currently are to engage with our collection through visits to the stores, public talks and workshops since this was the primary focus of our roles. We also set up parameters to record these visits in our collections database and created functionality to record multiple knowledge creators associated with objects.

It was a successful project on many levels but reflecting back, this was never conceived of as a decolonizing project. Having said that, some aspects of its practice might support a decolonial agenda, such as creating spaces for multiple voices in our catalogue and placing greater resource in the development of partnerships that were initiated from the outside. For example, we were able to co-develop a subsequent project with Congo Great Lakes Initiative (CGLI), an organisation set up by Didier Ibwilakwingi Ekom to research and promote Congolese heritage in the UK

predominantly for people of Congolese descent, after CGLI approached the Horniman for a tour of Congolese collections on display¹. I think museum practitioners need far more space and resource to respond proactively to partnerships initiated and led by external organisations, which CPS allowed for.

However, by not addressing colonialism directly in a project centred on anthropology collections and possible partnerships, we enabled the most unified narrative of our collection—the violence and racism of colonial entitlement to ownership—to be sidelined. I believe that as a result we continued to prioritize partnerships that supported existing understandings of who our key knowledge makers and stakeholders already are, predominantly UK-based academics and white liberal residents of South London, without asking how this affects our continued engagement with coloniality and its associated privileges at the Horniman.

I think it is fair to say that the World Gallery deals with colonialism indirectly. It was primarily conceived of as a space that would give prominence to anthropology's aspirations to build cross-cultural dialogue and understanding, whilst challenging notions of normativity. It was in this sense that we hoped for the Gallery to be an essentially anti-racist space—one that foregrounded and respected different ways in which people live together and understand the world around them, and one that enabled cross-cultural lines of empathy and understanding. We chose not to focus on the biographies of our collection, or in most cases its provenance, but rather to try to illuminate the people who made or used the objects similar to the ones we have. The Gallery is divided into two floors, with the bottom floor being the most populated. It is regionally organized so that we have five continents: Africa, Asia, Oceania, Europe and America. In each continent the world is further categorized into four discrete sections, which focus on a narrative which are for the most part contained by a particular geographical region and moment in time.

We were aware that such an approach has been heavily criticized over the years for both ethnographic reductivism and representations of timelessness. As such, it was important that we were specific about temporality; it was also important to engage in a contemporary globalized world, under-represented in our collections, through further collecting and gathering of stories. I think this is where we engaged most successfully with external partners, such as artists Alafuro Sikoki Coleman and Temsuyanger Longkumer whose works *Woyingi* (Figure 2) and *Tattooed Memory* (Figure 3) sit in the Lagos and Naga sections of the gallery respectively. Of key significance was the need to ensure that Europe was prominent in the gallery reflecting both our collections and the need to deploy the same constructed lens to represent the cultures that themselves invented spaces like ours.

It is worth noting that we consulted informally throughout the process within our existing networks. This was a mixture of predominantly UK based academics, people professionally engaged with heritage or arts from within and outside of the UK, and people who have a more personal connection with objects on display being from or of

the same culture being represented. The decisions made about which of these external knowledge providers are visible, and on what terms, are interesting. For example, we highlight consultation with the Nigerian Commission of Museums and Monuments for the display of looted artworks from Benin City directly in the interpretive label, although in reality their interest in the redisplay and resulting input was minimal. Likewise, consultation with practitioners of English magic for the charms case is not mentioned in the gallery, despite this forming a day-long workshop and being beset with its own particularities and agendas. Clearly the public articulation of consultation or collaboration has a power of its own which dictates how it is used in a gallery space such as this.

A crucial challenge for us was to create a space that would engage the significant numbers of visitors who come to the Horniman site in our anthropology collections; something that our former gallery, African Worlds, had in recent years consistently failed to do. I believe that galleries or public museum initiatives that do not manage to gather an audience fail at the first hurdle, however ethical in practice or critical in outlook (Zetterstrom-Sharp 2014). The question remains of course—who is that audience? At the Horniman we are aware that we consistently exclude people of colour (PoC) by failing to gain their trust and create a space they want to be in.

This for me is our most important challenge as we assess the future direction of our practice and use of the World Gallery. Anthropology as an academic discipline has historically considered itself to be anti-racist in both its purpose, its capacity for self-critique, and its underlying principles of radical activism. In reality, however, it is a space dominated by core-readings written by white men and women who by today's standards were openly racist in their practice and the knowledge created as a result. This is a reminder that a declared position of anti-racism is not neutral or guaranteed, particularly when voiced from a position of institutional and personal privilege. I think it is important to recognize that whilst the World Gallery was created in line with an anthropologically informed anti-racist agenda, racism has underpinned the colonial and academic engagements that have created the majority of its displayed collections. Despite this, the words race, racism, or racist are nowhere to be found in the gallery itself; I think this says a lot about our professional and institutional innocence with respect to the underlying legacies of the colonial culture that created and, in many respects, maintains our workspace.

RM: Colonial structures, like curation, are most successful when they cannot be perceived; when things appear to naturally come together; where the mounts and supports are basically invisible; when you find the audiences behaving as you would like: that's when you know it's working. Decolonial work is about noticing these practices, developed during the height of European colonialism, and understanding their effect and the initial intentions behind these actions. My practice is about critically engaging with museum methodologies to understand how decolonial thinking could be

implemented to affect change in a manner that would undo some of the violence and exclusion that came from the creation and management of empires. Mostly this involves collaborative practice and a concerted effort to decentralize whiteness. However, it also includes self-critique and reflection, and a wholehearted challenge to the idea that museums can be neutral, and that our biases do not affect how we pursue the representation of history and global cultures. As such it is revealing to note this absence of discourse on race in the World Gallery, especially in regard to discussion of colonial violence. Being tasked to engage with the World Gallery after it had been completed with a focus on developing engagement with underrepresented groups was, to me, a specific call to engage with the colonial legacy of exclusion.

I found that the structure created by the curators led to opportunities for the inclusion of new stories as it centred on multiplicity and diversity in human responses to the same world. It uses themes as a way to incorporate multiple ways of grouping objects and creating narratives. There is a freedom in using a structure like this within a 'permanent display' in that it challenges the very idea of permanence as stories can be swapped, adapted and updated. However, while a lot was done throughout the gallery to counter negative stereotypes in the interpretative text—which I perceived as the anti-racist agenda—it often also reads as a rebuttal. There is an imagined audience, and it is not the people who are being spoken about.

Our initial papers at the 2019 Museum Ethnographers Group Conference were a response to a callout that highlighted that trust in these spaces is needed when we aspire to 'present, represent, advocate, interpret and empower other ways of being' (Museums Ethnographers Group 2019). However, my provocation was that we could not expect the trust of diverse audiences whose culture is absent and silent in collections, largely because anthropology as a framing device has created gaps that ignore recognizable cultures that make up the city in which we are located. The very idea of 'diverse audiences' is a result of multiculturalism, modernization, cultural interchange and migration over centuries, and the recognizable living cultures we see today are blended cultures that have emerged through adaptation and integration. While anthropology in the museum space focuses on encounters and cultural survival, there is a tendency to avoid talks of mixed cultures or of mixed families. I have spoken previously of the use of illustrative dichotomies that simplify complex human narratives and replicate dangerous stereotyping (Minott, 2019), particularly for those who feel they are in the middle of two or more stories.

Stories of integration and adaptation are personal and intimate human narratives. While the gallery focuses on intimate narratives such as family life or caring for the dead, the language used to describe these narratives remains somewhat distant and impersonal. I argue that this is because it reads as a person from the outside explaining a culture to someone else on the outside of that culture. The familiarity that breeds intimacy is lost; this is not a case of an ancestor sharing their knowledge with a descendant; this is a scientist sharing their knowledge with an audience. There is little

critique or reflection on the process or methodology of information gathering, so what remains is a pseudo-neutral, pseudo-intimate tone that ends up feeling fascinating and insightful but removed and theorized. For me this is the distinction of anti-racist versus decolonial work. Decolonial is human centric, personal and decentralizes and destabilizes 'whiteness' as equated with neutrality.

Within the gallery the area that engages with decoloniality most successfully is the European section, in particular the cases on 'English Luck and Protection' and the section on movement and exchange across the Mediterranean through the interpretation of Boat 195 (Figure 4). The English narrative creates a self-reflective moment for white British visitors. Treated with the same tone as the rest of the gallery, it creates the opportunity for these visitors to have a moment of introspection and awareness of how the familiar is made other in spaces such as these. England is destabilized from its usual positioning as the invisible centre; a natural neutral starting point. If it feels incorrect or strange in its framing through this presentation, visitors may better understand that all of the stories represented may not be received as a true representation by those represented. Yet it is a small narrative that emerges in the depth of the gallery: this is not a section used to set up a self-reflexive experience but is left to be encountered.

Boat 195 is the hull of a ship that set off from Libya carrying 253 people who were all safely rescued off the coast of Porto Palo di Capopassero, Sicily, on 17 August 2013. You can feel the anti-racist agenda most strongly in the accompanying interpretation (Figure 5), developed with members of the Horniman Youth Panel as well as participants from Pan-Intercultural Arts and Refugee Youth: two of the Museum's partner organizations. Participants were supported by support workers and psychologists from these partner organizations in developing the interpretation, which took the form of a poem written by Yonatan and Seher, two of the project's young participants. The poem reads:

I can feel the fear inside me. I am unstable, shaking with uncertainty.
The voices inside me are shouting, screaming but I can't see a thing.
They must be switching for the night shift.
The noise is making children cry,
yet I can't do anything but hold them.
A light flashes, blindly bright in the darkness.
It is coming for my passengers.
Bringing them to safety, security and much needed kindness.

The video accompanying Boat 195 in the display shows both the harvesting of the hull, as well as a video documenting the three workshops devised in collaboration with artist facilitators John Martin and Debora Mina to develop this interpretation. The video unpacks the process of writing these poems and reveals that despite the mitigation for the participants welfare, many felt the process made them return mentally to their own journeys across the Mediterranean. The video is deeply personal, and you are able to see

the faces of project participants, know their names, and hear their voices through interpretation delivered in multiple mediums and largely using the words of those being represented (albeit with a heavy museum structure influencing its form). However, this also reads as a moment of attempted empathy building and humanizing, which means it is still not for the people the story is about. Looking through the project documentation I repeatedly encountered notes by participants commenting that the object reminded them of their journey; something they simultaneously wanted to remember and forget. Through this I think we are able to understand the violence of museums in the requirement of these Refugee participants to relive their trauma for our storytelling purposes. This is made abundantly clear when seeing visitors who are also Refugees engage with the display and visibly react to the trauma of the object as it connects to their lived experience. For me this is the ultimate problem of an anti-racist ethos; in pursuing empathy one tries to humanize, but to see yourself humanized is to be reminded that to many you aren't².

Despite some success, these flirtings with decolonial techniques sit uncomfortably in contrast to what I feel is the least successful section of the gallery—Horniman's Vision. This area on the first-floor balcony creates an uncritical frame for the Museum today as a reflection of Fredrick Horniman's initial intentions and perspectives. Considering the aim of this section at project conception was to create a space to 'learn about the social and political issues around Victorian collecting and relationship with the British Empire', this feels like a wasted opportunity..

JZS: At early concept development, we discussed the need to encourage reflection on the fact that a curated gallery is not a neutral presentation of facts but amounts to a particular and often privileged narrative or perspective. Horniman's Vision was intended to showcase Frederick Horniman's perspective and is currently the only section that deals explicitly with the colonial provenance of the collection on display. It is organized in three sections; Horniman's private collection at Surrey House, the opening of the Horniman museum in 1901, and Frederick Horniman's journeys through south-east Asia and north Africa. These present Frederick Horniman as a tea trader, traveller, Quaker humanist and connoisseur of beautifully crafted objects from around the world.

One of the reasons this section is so problematic is that it became about reiterating the ethical aspirations of our institution, reflecting how Frederick Horniman's humanist vision—equality and valuing a shared world—may be understood as the founding principles that frame the Horniman Museum today, and in particular the agenda of the gallery below. Our ethical aspirations for the present and future thus framed our presentation of the past, whitewashing his identity as a tea trader whose wealth was built on the exploitation of PoC. This is something that lies deep within our institution, for example framing our founder as a 'Victorian philanthropist' who used his personal wealth 'to educate and enrich the lives of the local community' (Horniman Museum and Gardens, 2018).³

The difficulty of breaking out from our coloniality through the disruption of architectural spaces or disassociation with overtly racist principals or actions of museum founders is a common problem. In March this year Rachael and I visited the new Africa Museum in Tuveuren with our colleague Sarah Byrne and were taken on a tour by curators Hein Vanhee and Bambi Ceuppens. With increasing weariness, Bambi concluded her tour by commenting that despite her and her colleagues' efforts and decolonial ambitions, 'King Leopold always wins'; the heaviness of the institution bore down on and framed everything they did (*pers comm.* March 2019). Our institutional identity at the Horniman, bound up in Frederick Horniman and his Quaker roots, has arguably made our own anti-racist message more convincing. Rather than memorialize a man who oversaw the death of an estimated 6 million people (Leopold II), the architects of the Museum chose to install a nice mosaic on shared humanity and a plaque, announcing Horniman's commitment to free education for all. As the Horniman's Vision section of the gallery demonstrates, however, it also means that we have been able to claim that our stated commitment to equality is and always has been central to our institutional identity. It permits us imagine that race is, and never has been, present at the Horniman and allows us to own a position that we have neither adequately fought for, nor earned.

As a relevant example, along the far wall of the gallery we have a timeline that charts significant moments for the Horniman family and the history of Horniman's museum, initially known as Surrey House Museum until the new museum building opened in 1901. This includes a caption that interprets a photograph (Figure 6) of Frederick Horniman surrounded by a group of artisans, performers and religious leaders from what was at the time Burma, now Myanmar. The caption reads; 'Frederick often hosted workers' outings and school visits at the Surrey House Museum. In 1896 he entertained a group of Burmese craftsmen and performers who were demonstrating their skills at Crystal Palace'.

This text was informed by the Horniman Museum's sixth annual report⁴, which describes the two hours spent at the Museum, concluding with the taking of this photograph. The final museum label does not address the fact that this group was contracted by two art handlers, Mr Robert Fowle and Mr. J. S. Fairlie, to construct and perform in a recreated 'Burmese Village' at Crystal Palace. The Palace continued to be a space in which PoC were routinely brought over from the colonies, contracted to perform in popular living exhibitions in which they had little direction or say, for a British public after the Great Exhibition of 1851 (Nichols and Turner 2017). The extent to which this group might really be considered 'guests' in equal terms to the British men who organized the visit is of course questionable. It hardly needs mentioning that the only individuals in this photograph named in the annual report, apart from two Brahmin men standing directly behind Horniman—Moung Neware and Moung Gyee—are the white men and women who frame the group. It is worrying that this failure to

acknowledge the presence of PoC, and their exclusion as individuals with agency from archival records is repeated and re-inscribed in new labels written for the gallery.

A focus on Horniman's Victorian eccentricism not only centres our founder and his network of British missionaries, dealers and traders, but it also dismisses the presence of the labour force that enabled their travel and underscored their wealth. Whilst upholding an institutional commitment to humanism, this section of the gallery clearly demonstrates but does not articulate that Horniman's humanism was enabled and centred by his whiteness. Likewise, when his humanist sentiments drove him to make a public gift of his collection, this gift was imagined to enrich the lives of other, less privileged, people who were also white. It is no coincidence that the neo-classical mosaic that greets visitors as they arrive to the Horniman depicts humanity as a white woman, surrounded by other white men and women who collectively define an idealized conception of what it means to be human. Tellingly, humanity as characterized in this mosaic—figures representing Art, Music, Poetry, Endurance, Love, Hope, Charity and Wisdom - are arguably also the standards by which humanity is measured and represented in the gallery. What of anger? By failing to create a space for anger do we dehumanize people whose lives remain deeply implicated by colonialism, and who rightly feel angry as a result?

An ethical agenda that on the one hand articulates and advocates for universal equality, yet on the other measures people's intersection with such equality on the basis of their race, consciously or not, lies central and is particular to white European engagements with the world for the last 200 years. I think it is pervasive and deeply embedded within museum practice, and something that we retain an innocence and lack of conscience about (see Wekker 2006 for relevant conversation about white innocence).

RM: We are constantly confronted with this absence of discussion of racialized identities, and thus the absence of critical discourse on race. For me this is a symptom of equating whiteness with neutrality and while this may not register for people who identify as white, it feels deeply exclusionary to those that do not. Underrepresented audiences, particularly here referring to PoC, are not underrepresented purely based on lack of visibility of images and objects relating to their cultural heritage but are also underrepresented by those who speak for and to them. This is a larger problem deeply intertwined with the question of representation of PoC in the museum sector's workforce, as identified by ACE statistics from 2017/2018 showing 12% of the workforce at ACE National Portfolio Organisations and 5% at Major Partner Museum's identified as BAME (Arts Council England, 2019).⁵

Even though the Horniman's imagined 'core' audience can generally be read as white European (and more specifically liberal but with unconscious biases about global cultures which the Museum hopes to challenge), the institutional desire is to reach a more diverse audience. This impetus for museums to access 'hard to reach communities' who do not visit because of barriers to access, has emerged from the idea that museums

can be a site for social change, a space to understand shared histories, a communal resource, and so a space in which audiences from all backgrounds should feel ownership of and comfort in engaging. The emphasis on engaging excluded audiences should also be understood a result of long-term advocacy from communities of colour, as part of a larger anti-racist battle for equal rights: a battle that has included the loss of life in fights for the protection of cultural heritage (Bennoune 2016). As such, in stating that the intention behind our practice is to be anti-racist, we enter into a dialogue with resistance—a dialogue with a long history of fighting inequality. By using this terminology, we are also asking for our own history of misdoings to be challenged. We commit ourselves to deep-rooted change and frank honesty about the institutions within which we work.

This work is built on activism that challenges and subverts the risks that have historically been used as reasons not to fund or not to engage with something that could be deemed controversial. Within museums this idea of risk is often combined with concerns over funding to create an internalized image of the core audiences we do not want to put off—wealthy and powerful stake holders—who might be offended by content that challenges white-cis-male-heteronormativity. This is the risk that makes us feel uneasy about calling someone white, but comfortable using the catch all BAME for all non-white persons.

Our understanding of risk is not often articulated or unpacked and the need to address our behaviours as a response to it continues to be a long-fought battle—a battle with many players. Those who feel exclusion and inequality, but actively challenge it, have influenced legislative changes by funders who now require museums to expressly engage with diverse audiences or risk the funding they depend on for economic survival. Funding bodies, as well as sector organizations such as the Museums Association, are explicitly stating the need to do this for best practice and for successful funding bids. As such, wealthy and powerful stakeholders that may previously have been lost by platforming diverse and critical narratives are now threatening to leave if those narratives and audiences are not given space. Statements such as ACE's Creative Case for Diversity are being used to monitor change and encourage diverse project work and cultural content.

This means that the economic impetus for diversifying audiences is now arguably superseding the moral impetus. Despite articulations of the social benefits of multiculturalism by many museums' funders, and a focus on 'collaboration' with the 'benefit to underrepresented communities' held as criteria for success, it is the economic impact or risk to economic stability that is being mobilized to make further institutional change. Languages used in museums conflate the two to pursue economic benefit while espousing the morality of representation. The moral argument could cynically be perceived of as a marketing strategy to try and gain the interest, attention, and participation of PoC in this work, for which they are necessary participants for success: a trust building tool within a business plan. Less cynically, the economic

argument might be understood as the catalyst for faster change supporting what drives us emotionally. In reality it is probably a mixture of the two with those who truly believe in the moral argument enabled to pursue it because of economic demand, and those who will use the moral argument because it is the only means of pursuing the economic benefits of including audiences who have historically been excluded and undervalued.

JZS: The fact that there is now a clear economic impetus to force engagement and change is important; an internally constructed moral impetus cannot be trusted on its own since, as our colonial history clearly demonstrates, ethics are far from neutral. This is particularly the case when the parameters with which new ethical practice is assessed, have been created and maintained by the same structures that such practice seeks to address. Museums, and ethnographic museums in particular, have consistently reflected inward on their practice, consulting predominantly between institutions, within professional circles, or academia to drive new ways of working in the long-term. I say long-term because I want to distinguish short-term project-based consultation or collaboration, from challenges to deeper institutional practice. For example, whilst the World Gallery as it currently stands was the product of a series of short-term collaborations, its success in the long-term as an anti-racist space is reliant upon a continuous challenge to practice which I think needs to be driven from the outside as much if not more than it is internally. This is in terms of interventions into the space itself, including the way it is used, and the ways in which its aspirations are matched by the institution as a whole. International conversations that have foregrounded indigenous activism within settler-states and issues around political and cultural self-determination have been positive in driving long-term change, but they have not addressed the issues around race, exclusion and assumed or intended audiences that we are talking about here in relation to UK museums. Neither have they adequately listened to or respected the long-standing activism for equality mentioned by Rachael that has sat in tension with established academic critiques: activism which is now shaping policy and funding initiatives.

I think one of the main reasons that our discipline struggles to effectively use our moral compass to resolve these issues is the equation of whiteness with neutrality that Rachael highlights above. Museum ethnography has long defined itself in decolonial terms. This is partly as a result of enthusiasm around models of collaborative international practice mentioned above, billed as decentring traditional authority through collaborations or co-production with source communities. But also, the work on provenance research that has reunited collections with the colonial contexts in which they were taken. The anti-racist agenda of this work has been focused on critical engagements with racism in the past and attempts to recontextualise people's treasured things through a more respectful or retrospective lens of the present. This respect is crucial, but it does not deal with the fact that the majority of the people that set this agenda, including me, have little personal connection with or understanding of the

emotional impacts of continued coloniality in the present. Nor does it address the question of who the intended audiences of this critical work are. The World Gallery is neither alone in its assumptions about who its interpretation is speaking to, nor in a broader institutional difficulty in recognising who is excluded as a result. There is a sense that as an institution, we have already arrived ethically where we need to be, we just need to make sure that people who are considered to be ‘hard to reach’ know about it.

For me, this highlights that anti-racism is an ethical position that relies absolutely on long-term decolonial practice in order for it to have any tangible outcome with regards to gaining trust. Central to that practice is recognizing that the institutional structures in which we work are inherently white spaces, which as they stand will continue to be places in which forms of discrimination and exclusion are experienced. Our job is to work as hard as we can to constantly reach out to people, particularly those who are not part of that structure, to find collaborative and compensated ways of both acknowledging this and trying to fight against it. Critically, this work is reliant on long-term changes to the ways in which forms of knowledge are valued and given legitimacy within our structures through recruitment. I think Rachael makes a crucial point above where she highlights that decolonial work is ‘human centric, personal and decentralizes and destabilizes ‘whiteness’ as equated with neutrality’. When museums have attempted to be publicly open and transparent about the construction of knowledge in exhibitions and programming, this has most often focused on the practical structures that frame knowledge, such as cataloguing systems, storage, or histories of collecting; less so in terms of authorship and positionality. Again, I think this highlights the assumed neutrality of a disciplinary position that has historically been dominated by white researchers and academics and is thus limited in its ability to adequately recognise the absences and exclusions that are embedded as a result.

RM: The Horniman was a gift to the people of Forest Hill in 1901. However, we must now cater to the people of Forest Hill in the twenty-first century; the 2011 census showed this to be 53.6% White and 44.4% BAME. If we look more specifically, 14.3% of Forest Hill’s population is of Caribbean descent, and Jamaica emerges as the next most common place of birth after England. A clear absence at the Horniman has been a failure to respond in an embedded way to these changing demographics.

This demographic is a result of a complex colonial and postcolonial history that includes waves of Caribbean migrants during the ‘Windrush era’, yet we have a World Gallery with no Caribbean content. Considering the cultural influence of the Caribbean to this area - seen and felt in the music and food consumed, language spoken, and families who make up our communities—this absence feels like purposeful exclusion, particularly as this wasn’t always the case. Temporary displays (*Amazon to Caribbean* 2005–2007, *Making Freedom* 2015) and the Horniman Jerk Cookout Festival 2007–2009 catered to those looking for Caribbean content and culture. It is worth noting that

in the period 2008–9 the Horniman’s visitor surveys showed that 39% of audiences were BAME, this has declined over the years to the 18% BAME visitors recorded in 2018.

The exhibitions mentioned above were both temporary, with *Amazon to Caribbean* operating as a touring exhibition and *Making Freedom* hosted at the Horniman in 2015 after being designed and curated by the Windrush Foundation in 2013 to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the emancipation of enslaved people in British colonies. Tellingly, the Jerk Cookout Festival was postponed in 2010 and has yet to run again as it was ‘too popular’ with over 20,000 attendees, and the event received critique from residents about local disruption. The racial subtext of these complaints has since been highlighted, in particular the association of a large number of Jerk Chicken fans with social disturbance to the suburban-residential setting of Forest Hill (Pitcher 2014; 52). Cancelling a festival because it is too successful calls into question the purpose of museum spaces. As Johanna mentioned above, surely the aim is to get as many people to visit the museum as possible? This for me demonstrates the internalized idea of risk as it relates to our relationships with an assumed core audience, which we seek to diversify from, yet remain concerned we might lose. This assumed visitor is the normal, neutral point in our minds. They frame all other work we do and particularly frame our reactions to critique. These actions lay in tension with our claim to represent diverse groups of people and places.

My focus on the Caribbean is very personal. As a mixed-race Jamaican, I am constantly searching for what is familiar to me about my culture in ethnographic museum spaces. I have never seen the Caribbean represented in these spaces beyond pre-Columbian artefacts or referenced through a few Haitian or Cuban objects contextualised in relation to Africa. For someone from the Caribbean to enter a gallery that talks about different cultures with a shared humanity and foregrounds what we can learn from other ways of being, I can never understand why blended cultures, mixed race narratives, and cosmopolitanism, are so rare to find. I lament the exclusion of how I know the Caribbean to be, as it could be such an excellent microcosm for the discussions we wish to have. Wayne Modest argues that because the Caribbean (and Jamaica in particular) is a microcosm for modernity, but before modernity is registered to have begun in Europe;

[T]he material culture of the modern Caribbean [is] largely absent from anthropological (and in fact history) collections both in the Caribbean as well as in museums across Europe’ (Modest 2012). The exclusion of the Caribbean in these terms is also reflected in the exclusion of many other global narratives of migration and modernity that are not centred in the West.

Not being able to see recognizable cultures in galleries is a larger problem we face in marrying our collections with the ambitions of reflecting and engaging with our local demographic and being more accessible in general. The representation of the American continent in ethnographic galleries is a good example. I cannot think of any displays that represent European engagement with the Americas—a region of enormous global

influence—beyond violence or wonder of first contact. The longevity of this contact is missing. Neither can I think of one that shows Black America or Latin America; nor the interaction of Hispanic, African and indigenous populations. I cannot recall any display that would be recognizable to someone off the street when you asked them about the Americas and Americans today.

This is reflected in our World Gallery at the Horniman. The American encounters section explores Inuit life, the Native American people of the Plains, the First Nation's peoples of the North West Coast, and the Waiwai of the Amazon. I would argue to a non-specialist visitor it would be very difficult if not futile to use this encounter to make sense of the Americas as they exist today, and how the interwoven history of Europe and the Americas has affected the way Europe exists today. There is too far a stretch from the narrative of the Plains to get to Trump's America. It is the erasure of the long history of immigration to and from the Americas that creates this chasm.

Contemporary representations of cultures around the world are more than images of indigenous people retaining and reclaiming pre-colonial forms of knowledge and practice. Colonial legacies are not a footnote in the narratives that take us neatly from pre contact, to first contact, to today: it affects the narratives we tell so deeply because it has changed the world so fundamentally. The reality is that living cultures globally are far from 'pure' or prescribing to an idea of 'authenticity'; they are largely practiced by people with mixed heritage who have been exposed to, influenced, and inspired by other global practices.

The critique of this regional representation sort of goes across museums and so is fundamentally about our practice. As a sector we need to address the fact that those who are absent from our displays because we avoid narratives of immigration, are the audiences we seek to engage with today, because of immigration. It is also in the denial of race and the realities of racial identities and racism that one arrives at our modern reality with no understanding of how it came to be. Without acknowledging white supremacy and racism as influencers of the museum sector and the discipline of anthropology we will constantly refer to excluded groups as hard to reach, or not culturally engaged. We will be unable to see the connection between multicultural Britain and the need to diversify audiences. But if we do not have the appropriate collections, and our discipline makes it difficult for us display the nuances of cultural integration, then why do we seek audiences made up of members of these excluded groups?

Conclusion

The one-year anniversary of the World Gallery in July 2019 coincided with the release of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) proposal for a redefinition of museums as: 'democratizing, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the past

and the future.’ The definition goes on to explain that museums should see their roles as ‘safeguarding diverse memories’, ‘guaranteeing equal rights and access’ and should be players in fights for social justice, global equality, and planetary wellbeing (Andrew 2019). This definition has been criticized within the ICOM community for representing ‘a statement of fashionable values’ (Mairesse in Noce 2019), echoing a widespread defence which characterizes shifts toward languages of social justice as momentary and reactionary—a flash in the pan. Mairesse’s request for a ‘simpler’ definition—characterizing museums as an ‘object’ and setting out their ‘functions’—is illuminating in its reading of museums as objective neutral spaces that can and should be de-political but also in its insistence that the neither the ‘object’ nor the ‘functions’ of museums are up for debate. In this discussion we have sought to illustrate that the ‘object’ of museums—their buildings, collections, workforce and embedded practices—often sits in tension with one of their intended ‘functions’ as open public institutions.

Museums are and always have been political. The definition ICOM seeks to revise states that a museum is a place that ‘acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits...the heritage of humanity...for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment’. The question is whose humanity is actually being represented here? Museums have historically defined themselves as liberal spaces of equality, access and public education, but equality, access and education for and by whom? Despite recent claims that museums can be universal spaces of value for humanity as a whole, they are and always have been spaces of exclusion because who is equal, whose access is desirable or possible, and whose knowledge is valuable, remain deeply subjective. This discussion has reflected in particular on the way in which colonialism and structural racism have and continue to influence this subjectivity.

ICOM’s ambitions for redefinition are welcome; they reflect a wider policy level realization that the model of liberal inclusivity that museums were built on does not necessarily serve the diverse and mixed publics that they are situated within. However, the aspirations on which these ambitions for wider access rest on are far from realized. We have argued that the Horniman’s new World Gallery may also be regarded as an aspirational space, but one whose success rests on the way in which it is used, critiqued, and intervened in going forwards. It is not enough to state an anti-racist or decolonial position through text panels and exhibits; this must be continually worked on through honest reflection on the ways in which our practice meets or subverts these ambitions. Anti-racism is meaningless unless we can talk openly about race. This includes the way in which the construction of racial identities created the conditions in which many of our objects were collected and framed, but also how race continues to operate in the museum today through a workforce that represents and creates knowledge about PoC, whilst remaining predominantly white.

It is this historical fact that underlies embedded assumptions about who we speak to when we speak about mutual difference and respect. The way in which broad public access, and how practically to achieve it, was imagined in 1901 does not match up to

what such access should mean today. Whilst this is acknowledged at a legislative level, it also poses some fundamental and practical questions about what it is that museums are, what they do, and how they or who should do it. At the Horniman is it clear that we need to consider our local demographic and marry up the idea of diverse audiences with those on our doorsteps. This is about more than representation within existing formats. We need to back it up by ensuring that we speak to and with this demographic, and not just about it, learning how to react to criticism from our perceived core audiences when their expectations lie in tensions with others. The success of the Jerk Cookout Festival demonstrated that the right programming can create a space of value for Forest Hill's significant Caribbean population. However, this also highlighted how changes to the way in which an institution functions as a public space in order to accommodate different possibilities of public use can lead to complaints from communities who are already best served by the institution. We suggest that we need to be better able to contextualise such complaints, and to accommodate the risk associated with changing practice in order to better reflect our ambitions for more diverse audiences.

As we have stated above, a permanent gallery should never be considered a permanent statement. Notwithstanding the impossibility of creating a space that uniformly upholds ethical ambitions—in particular because of our institutional and personal positionality—we also need to be aware that as conversations develop, our response must too. This is partly about a commitment to challenging and being challenged on existing content. It is also about creating space and resource to respond to external collaborations, to platform critical interventions, and to host open conversations about the gallery and its contents with a commitment to backing up those conversations with action to make it a flexible and changing space. Understanding that this agenda rests on funding, we need to prioritise it within the flexible aspects of the gallery and its wider associated programming that we already have funding for. We also think it's necessary to push this agenda through additional project funding, focusing on the way in which such projects can be used to develop new and challenge existing practice. Crucially, we cannot and should not do this work alone and we need to think through answers to questions about who it's for, who it's about, and whose voice is represented, when deciding new content or reviewing old content for the gallery. We need to ask what our personal limitations are in understanding the emotional impact of our work, and whose input we need in order to better understand this impact. It is no longer sustainable for museums like the Horniman to assume they are trusted ethical spaces without accepting and taking seriously the fact that they are also places of mistrust, of violence, and of unrecognized emotional labour. If we, like the authors of ICOM's proposed statement, aspire to genuine redefinition of our purpose in order to create truly 'democratic, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue', change must run deeper than an acknowledgment of violence and a nod to self-determination. For the World Gallery the challenge is in embedding its statements within the very fabric of what we do and how we do it, and not only what we say.

Acknowledgments

This is a revised version of two papers given at ‘Trust, harm and ethnographic displays’, the annual conference of the Museum Ethnographers Group, held at the Horniman Museum, 25–26 April 2019.

Notes

1. The Horniman subsequently worked with CGLI on their initiative in partnership with UCL Department of Anthropology to bring together collections data on Congo and develop new narratives around it, see www.cgli.org.uk.
2. Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan, a poet who performs under the name the brown hijabi, articulates this beautifully in her poem ‘*This is Not A Humanising Poem*’ performed at the Roundhouse Poetry Slam in 2017 <https://thebrownhijabi.com/poems/>
3. It is interesting to compare The Horniman’s very uncritical online presentation of the Horniman family’s wealth with the recent statement released by the Tate written by the Centre of the Study of the Legacies of British Slave Ownership, highlighting Tate and Lyle as an indirect benefactor of the Slave Trade: <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/history-tate/tate-galleries-and-slavery>.
4. ARC/HMG/GOV/003/1898, accessible at: <https://www.horniman.ac.uk/collections/browse-our-collections/object/199676>
5. The [Culture Change Toolkit](#) released to provide guidance in reaching a diverse workforce more representative of the country as it exists today.

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About the Authors

Rachael Minott is an Artist, Researcher and Curator. Recently appointed as Inclusion and Change Manager at the National Archives, and former Curator of Anthropology (Social Practice) at the Horniman Museum and Gardens. Rachael is also a member of Museums Detox, a professional network for Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Museums workers and a Trustee for the Museums Association.

Johanna Zetterstrom-Sharp is Deputy Keeper of Anthropology at the Horniman Museum and Gardens, and a Lecturer in Anthropology at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Address for correspondence

Rachael Minott, 34 Glebe Close, Pitstone, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 9AZ
Raminott13@hotmail.com

Johanna Zetterstrom-Sharp, Horniman Museum and Gardens, 100 London Road, Forest Hill, London, SE23 3PQ
JZetterstrom-Sharp@horniman.ac.uk