Looking Backwards, Moving Forwards:

The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre and Education Trust, Community Activism, and Public History Programming

Named Authors:

Safina Islam, Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre.

E. James West, University of York.

Introduction:

The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE (Race Archives and Community Engagement) Centre is a specialist library located in Manchester which focuses on the study of race, migration, and ethnic diversity. The Centre is named in memory of Ahmed Iqbal Ullah, a Bangladeshi schoolboy who was stabbed to death by a fellow pupil at a Greater Manchester High School in September 1986. Ahmed's murder led to the establishment of the Macdonald Inquiry into Racism and Racial Violence in Manchester, which concluded that the attack was racially motivated and criticised a broader culture of racism and racist violence within the city's schools.[1] The Centre was founded in 1999 by Lou Kushnik, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Manchester, with support from Ahmed's family and local activists such as Paul Okojie.[2] Other prominent early contributors included Jackie Ould, who helped set the direction for its education and community projects.

The RACE Centre was originally housed in Precinct Library, part of the University of Manchester's library network, which was located on its Oxford Road campus. In 2009 it moved into the Sackville Street building, a Grade II listed structure built at the end of the 19th century, which had originally served as the main base for the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology.[3] In 2014 the Centre relocated again, this time from the

[1] The inquiry took its name from its chair Ian Macdonald, a leading barrister and a specialist in race relations law. "Murder in the Playground: Report of the Macdonald Inquiry into Racism and Racial Violence in Manchester Schools" (London: New Beacon Books, 1990).
[2] "About Us," *Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre,* http://www.racearchive.manchester.ac.uk/about
[3] "Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre," *University of Manchester Staffnet*, 3 September 2009.

University of Manchester's Sackville Street campus to the lower ground floor of the refurbished and recently reopened Manchester Central Library.[4] While the Centre remains part of the University of Manchester library network and special collections, it has also been integrated into Archives+, a partnership of archival and local history organisations backed by the Heritage Lottery Fund and based at Central Library.[5] Significant Centre collections include the papers of the Commission for Racial Equality, the Macdonald Inquiry papers, the papers of anti-deportation activists such as Steven Cohen and Farhat Khan, and holdings for local organisations such as Manchester Refugee Support Network and Ananna, a Bangladeshi women's organisation.[6]

The RACE Centre is also home to, and works hand-in-hand with, the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust, a registered charity which was founded in 2001. Supported by Manchester City Council, the Trust helps to coordinate public engagement and public history projects with local communities that rely on, and often help to further enhance, the Centre's resources and archival collections. Trust and Centre staff work collaboratively to support local schools in developing an anti-racist curriculum. They create learning resources for use in school and community settings, organise public events, exhibitions, and activities to share knowledge of, and produce new knowledge about, racial and ethnic 'minority' communities in Britain, and work with local communities and community groups to collect life stories, photographs, and other documents, ensuring that the hidden histories of marginalised communities in Greater Manchester are preserved.[7] The range of communities that the Centre and Trust staff work with is a major institutional strength; one that helps to draw out the diversity of individual and collective experiences whilst highlighting important commonalities between different groups.

This roundtable uses the twentieth anniversary of the Trust's founding in 2001 as an opportunity to draw together a range of figures who have played a major role in the development of both the RACE Centre and Education Trust, and who continue to help steer

[4] A report on the move and its impact was conducted by the author during his time as the Centre's Researcher-in-Residence. West, "Manchester Central Library Relocation Report" (Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust, 2014).
[5] "About," *Archives Plus,* http://www.archivesplus.org/about-archives
[6] "Archival Collections," *Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre*, http://www.racearchive.manchester.ac.uk/collections/archives
[7] "Education Trust," *Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre,* http://www.racearchive.manchester.ac.uk/about/education-trust

their development. It explores the context behind the Centre's creation and some of its early public history initiatives. It discusses some of the Trust's major projects, including "Exploring Our Roots", an intergenerational project which produced oral histories with people of Sikh, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian, Chinese, West African and Caribbean descent in Manchester, and "Coming in From the Cold", an ongoing project which focuses on increasing diversity in archives and supporting BAME communities to develop and deliver their own heritage projects.[8] It asks former and current staff to reflect on the idea of 'public history' and its implications for the interconnected work of both Centre and Trust. It also explores how the Trust's core mission and ethos has shaped the development of its public history initiatives.

This roundtable is a condensed version of a longer conversation that was conducted virtually on March 2, 2021. This initial conversation was supplemented through subsequent email correspondence with individual participants to expand upon or clarify specific points.

Roundtable Participants:

Safina Islam – a community engagement and inclusion specialist and the current head of the RACE Centre and Education Trust, and the chairwoman of Ananna, Manchester Bangladeshi Women's Organisation.

Lou Kushnick – founder of the RACE Centre and a former Professor of Sociology at the University of Manchester.

Jackie Ould – former RACE Centre Director and Education Outreach Co-ordinator.

Jo Robson – freelance archivist at Education Trust. Former Library Manager for the RACE Centre and archivist for the "Coming in From the Cold" project.

Selina Ullah – Advisory Board Member and Trustee. Ahmed's sister.

E. James West – former RACE Centre Researcher-in-Residence and a Lecturer in US history at the University of York.

[8] "Oral Histories," *Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre*, http://www.racearchive.manchester.ac.uk/collections/oral-histories

James: Can you briefly outline the background to the Centre's formation in 1999?

Lou: We had an enormous number of books and resources, and the question was how were we going to use it. The opportunity came about to create a centre where the material would be open to anybody from the community. Selina's role and the family's role was absolutely crucial because they had to agree [to] the naming of the original centre in memory of Ahmed.

Selina: Our connection happened via radio, I think it was soon after the Stephen Lawrence murder case, and they'd just won the appeal.[9] Manchester Piccadilly radio contacted me and were asking about similarities [between the murders of Ahmed and Stephen Lawrence]. I think Lou heard that interview, and that's what got him inspired to do something.

Lou: We launched in February 1999. Herman Ouseley [a former member of the House of Lords and the former chair of the Commission for Racial Equality] had agreed to do it several months in advance, and it turns out that it was the week of the publication of the McPherson Report [an inquiry into Lawrence's murder and racism within the Metropolitan Police]. Selina and Fatima [Ahmed's mother] were there on the launch day. Mr. Ullah had recently suffered a heart failure so he couldn't be there and he died soon afterwards, but he did say that he saw this as the second positive thing to come out of Ahmed's death after the family set up the family trust [which led to the construction of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Memorial School in Sylhet, Bangladesh].

James: How did the Trust come about, and what is the relationship between the Centre and the Trust?

Lou: The Trust came about because we had to raise our own money, so we agreed to set up a private charity, to be independent [in order to apply for public funding from sources such as the Millennium Awards Scheme]. The management committee of the Centre became the

[9] Stephen Lawrence was a Black British teenager who was murdered by a gang of white youths in southeast London in April 1993. Lawrence's murder, as well as the handling of the case by the Metropolitan Police and the Crown Prosecution Service, drew widespread condemnation and led to the MacPherson Inquiry, which concluded that the Met was institutionally racist. Lawrence's murder also prompted commentators to reflect more seriously on other racist murders which occurred during the late 1980s and early 1991 in Britain, including Ahmed's murder in 1986 and the killing of Rolan Adams in 1991. "The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry," UK Home Office, 1999; Brian Cathcart, *The Case of Stephen Lawrence* (London: Penguin, 2012); Roger Hewitt, *White Backlash and the Politics of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

trustees of the charity. The Education Trust was designed to challenge racism, to promote anti-racism work, and to do the outreach work.

Jackie: They [the Centre and the Trust] were completely joined at the hip. The big difference, which I don't think was visible to anybody from the outside, was that once we managed to get proper contracts for the university staff in the Centre, Trust staff never had that job security because it was always dependent on grants. But we worked together, everything was done jointly, and I don't think anyone from the outside would have known who was Trust and who was Centre.

James: Is that still the case today?

Safina: When I joined [in 2019] there was definitely a difference in how the two staff groups identified themselves to me – 'I'm Trust', 'I'm Centre', 'I'm university', etc. The issue of terms and conditions and turnover or uncertainty for Trust staff still exists to a certain extent, but in terms of the work and the aims we feel like one organisation and one team. It's been very much about this shared aim of making Black and Asian and global majority histories more visible, and also making them much more mainstream within cultural and archival organisations. One of the things we know is that without the Trust we wouldn't have been able to access those stories in the way that we have. We wouldn't be able to work in an agile way with community groups.

Jo: I would say there's a slightly different emphasis – the RACE Centre has the collections and stores and manages and uses the collections, and the Education Trust works with the various communities and uses the archive – it's a bit difficult to draw a dividing line but there is a slightly different emphasis on each side.

James: Either now or during its formative years, are there organisations that the RACE Centre has looked to as models of good practice for centring the histories and experiences of racial and ethnic 'minority' groups in Britain? I'm thinking of Runnymede [the Runnymede Trust, a leading race equality think tank] or the BCA [the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton], for example.

Jackie: We have had communication and joint working with both Runnymede and BCA over the years and conversations with the Institute for Race Relations [a London-based anti-racist think tank] and the Padmore Institute [the George Padmore Institute, a London-based archive and research centre] as well. We saw them all as sister organisations rather than as 'models of good practice.' There is much for all of us to share but very little time and opportunity to do it as we are all constrained by the imperatives of project working, with external funding driving staff time and effort. I think it would be really useful if there could be more regular liaison as this would potentially empower the black archives sector to challenge the structural bias of the heritage industry more effectively.

James: What was one of the first big projects that the Centre was involved in?

Lou: We were able to get money from Progress Trust, which was the key to our survival [the Progress Trust was founded in 1994 to help develop heritage initiatives through Manchester's BME communities]. The first big project was to get children's books. Jackie and Julie [Julie Devonald, a former Project Manager at the Centre] went to Multiracial Books in Bradford, and to New Beacon Books in London. They created the best single library for children's anti-racist books in the country, because they got stuff from New Beacon that the Bradford Multiracial Library didn't have, and they got stuff from Bradford that New Beacon didn't have.

James: How did you, either individually or as a unit, understand the idea of public history during that period?

Jackie: I think my first hearing of the concept of public history was when Michael Wood was appointed by the university to be the Professor of Public History [in 2013], and I thought, that's interesting, what does that mean? I don't think me and Lou ever thought what we were doing was something that could be called public history, certainly I thought what we were doing was uncovering, revealing, sharing hidden histories and histories that had been hidden for structural reasons to do with class, gender, race. It was about our political understanding of what mattered in history. It was also rooted in my experience working in schools and my awareness of the huge lack of Black British materials for that work.

James: A slightly different question then, what did the kind of early work you were doing within local communities look like?

Lou: People would come in to the Centre and would want to know what's happening, what's the story, and the only thing we had was the Sikh Family Project [the SFP was originally set up in the early 1980s as a one-year Community Enterprise Programme to help young Sikhs learn and understand about their heritage and to combat the impact of racism. The original project included the collection of photographs and interviews with 42 people].

Jackie: The concluding documents had been given to us, although we didn't at that time have any of the transcripts or oral history recordings that the Sikh family history project had done. We also had some of the documents from an African-Caribbean heritage project that had been organised in the community. But those were pretty much all we had at the start.

Lou: Jackie came up with this brilliant project ["Exploring Our Roots"] which she got funding for, where she would use these stories, the hidden histories, with young people in secondary schools.

Jackie: We worked with school groups, and we worked with six different communities over about three years. The secondary school students would be responsible for communicating and interviewing elders in the community, sort of discovering their own histories. They became the historians. The kind of questions we were asking, between family members, were just not the sort of questions that normally got discussed around the dinner table. Young people were finding things out about their family histories that they actually didn't know and that were really important for them to know.

Lou: The material would then be processed to be available [through the Centre], but it also got them involved and got the communities involved. The great thing was that the communities were leading this – elders were contributing photographs and memorabilia, at every project there would be food, drummers [and other festivities]. All of this was organic to what we were doing.

Safina: With regards to "Exploring Our Roots", that project is still so well used by masters students and third year history students, because it's such a good example of intergenerational working in terms of exploring history and asking those questions that

don't normally get asked. I think that when Jackie did it, that was quite a pioneering model of how to work, and I don't think anybody else since has done it as well, to be honest. It's stood the test of time, it's still very relevant, and it still describes histories that nobody else does in textbooks.

James: But that wasn't something you necessarily saw as 'public history' at that time?

Jackie: I saw it as collecting the experiences of marginalised peoples in order to educate everybody else by producing resources out of it. It was fundamentally anti-racist in purpose.

Jo: I don't think I've ever used the term public history, and like Jackie I was a bit confused, what are we meaning by public history? What we do is try to centre the people and their stories in what we do.

Safina: I think it is a really important distinction. My recollection of the Centre and Trust before I started working here – it wasn't about public history, it was about stories not told, histories not told, but in particular for me it was a place that was in my city and in my region that told stories of my identity or stories that I could relate to. I think more recently, my first engagement with public history was with David Olusoga's appointment as a Professor of Public History [at the University of Manchester in 2020]. This notion that these histories of people who aren't always seen as a mainstream part of society are now part of public history - when I came in, we had a lot of external people, or even historians from within the university, who kept talking about 'our audiences' as if the work that we were doing was only for specific parts of the community. That doesn't really make sense. The whole point is that we are trying to tell everybody these stories and where these communities came from and what their struggles were.

James: It sounds then like, at least in your experience, the application of that term is problematic

Safina: When these marginalised stories do become 'public history' they are often whitewashed, so it centres the white experience, or uses a Eurocentric lens, but it doesn't tell you the full story and it doesn't centre our experience in that story. So one of the things

that I think is really key that the Centre and Trust has always done is using communities' own words and their experience to centre what we collect. We would go out and ask, 'what's important to you, what do you want to tell?', and that's what's recorded. I think that's still very different to a lot of archives or cultural institutions that try to tell those stories.

James: Is 'public history' even a useful term to use?

Safina: It's only useful to us if it comes with the funding, the recognition, the value, the equality that the rest of 'public history' comes with. And the reason for that is that now its assumed, and a lot of this has happened in the past twelve months, that a lot of this history is now in the public domain. But it's still not on curriculums at GCSE level and at A Level. Black Studies and Asian Studies is still not part of what students can choose when they're going through their UCAS forms, maybe if they get to third year at university they can pick a module on it. Universities still aren't funding lecturers to teach those subjects, and therefore the historical research that goes with it, and the funding for the archives and historical institutions that collect it isn't drip-fed through. It's not useful if you're not getting the whole life-cycle of how everything that feeds these discussions happens.

Selina: Absolutely, and I think it has to be understood in public policy terms as well – only when in it is embedded into processes and procedures that's when you start to get the change. Where is that dedicated space for understanding public history and what that means? Because once you start talking about public history it's quite an egalitarian concept, it's everybody's history, it's owned by everybody, and everybody can add to it, whereas history as we understand it is written by the powerful, the victors, so there is a power imbalance. Public History, if used properly, is levelling and empowering, but in order to achieve that potential it needs the structural support, that policy shift, the investment, leaders thinking differently, university leaders saying, "we're going to decolonise our materials, our archives, our history, the way we teach." It's a big ask, if you want public history in the truest sense, otherwise we're paying lip service.

James: How much of this do you think is a question of how public history is defined or valued inside and outside of academia?

Selina: It's an interesting point - I've just joined a Facebook group, "We Grew Up in Manchester", and I think that is public history: ordinary people are posting photographs, the streets they grew up on, the people they placed with, things like that. I grew up un Chorlton-on-Medlock [a neighbourhood in South Manchester] and on this page you can see what it used to look like in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and then the mass demolition of the 'slums' and the high-rise flats coming in. It's a generational thing, it's not part of our history or culture anymore, but through this group, local people were putting their history up and sharing it. I think that maybe, if academics want to have control of history, they are framing whose voices are worthy of being collected and told, whereas generally I think people are doing it without realising they are part of public history.

James: As the work of the Centre and the Trust has expanded, have its core aims changed with regards to historical outreach and public engagement work?

Safina: With more recent projects [such as "Coming in from the Cold"] it's still about centring community experiences and using their narratives to describe their history and what's important about their history. It is very much more about keeping that ethos. Another thing that we've tried to maintain, that was very much built into the original organisation, was not having an expectation that supporting a group means that we will take in their archive. Where that material sits is up to that group, and it might be more important that it sits in their local archive or their local cultural organisation. So our role is very much about making that history and heritage visible and accessible, it isn't necessarily about making sure that we survive. The core vision that Lou and Jackie and those pioneers had about getting those stories out and supporting those stories is what we've tried to stay true to. The Centre and Trust have a shared mission and vision – and that is very much about making those histories visible, not necessarily making them visible so that we get all the funding and all the work.

James: When it comes to collecting and disseminating these histories, to what extent do you see the Centre an activist organisation, or to what extent do you individually see yourself as activists, however you define that term?

Safina: I'm completely an activist, I'm fine with that label. I think within academic circles, and particularly library and archive academics, it has a slightly different connotation. But I think sometimes just the histories that we collect and the way that we do it is seen as an act of resistance and an act of activism. Whether we label it as that or not, it definitely gets viewed as that.

Selina: I think it has to be. I think that the fact that its anti-racism, promoting equality, promoting diversity, it means challenge, you have to challenge the status quo, you have to go into uncomfortable spaces, and listen and be the repository of that information and disseminate it. It's also about anger, and hurt and injustice, and being able to share that is very important. I think there is still a journey for us to continue on, I don't think we've reached the end yet, where we will be perhaps stronger in some ways in projecting those voices in sharing those stories, and holding others to account. I think we will get to that point, but this is all about building the coalitions, building up the materials, the voices, the stories that will get us to that position naturally, I don't think it's something we have to force, I think it will be a natural process.

Jo: The work that we do in the heritage and archive sector, the way that we challenge practices that are long-held, I would see that as part of this idea [of resistance or activism]. Particularly our trainee programme - getting people from different backgrounds into the archival sector.

Jackie: When I devised "Coming in From the Cold", a central element was the need to diversify staffing in the archives sector by providing recruitment and training opportunities. This sector generally is very white and employment opportunities few and far-between so it is difficult for black trainees to get enough experience to compete for the occasional jobs that do become available. Raising awareness in the wider sector of race issues was and continues to be an objective of the project.

Lou: Another example is "The Distance We Have Travelled" [an oral history and learning resource project organised around interviews with Kurdish, Afghan, and Somali refugees in

Manchester]. The origin of that was that we were approached by a local branch of Refugee Action [a UK charity founded in 1981 which advocates for a fairer asylum system], at a time when newspapers such as the *Daily Star* and the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail* were rejecting the idea of an asylum seeker or promoting the idea that refugees and asylum seekers were 'illegal'. So we worked with them and developed a project, and the HLF gave us funding for that. But it came out of the need to provide an alternative vision and language, to value human beings. That was a way that we could use our expertise and commitment to try to address this issue in an alternative way.

James: Does that commitment or that ethos ever create challenges?

Jackie: Within the projects, for example in "The Distance We've Travelled," sometimes our objectives were compromised or limited by the larger political situation. For "The Distance We've Travelled" we were in the middle of collecting stories from Kurdish people in Manchester when the government decided that it was safe to return Kurdish people to Iraq. The Kurdish people we'd interviewed said we couldn't use their interviews because suddenly they had become very scared, because it was legally acceptable for the police to use the kind of material we were collecting as a means of persecuting people and deporting them. So that was a really bizarre experience and made the continuation of that project very difficult.

Lou: Things have changed, partly within the university, because once we got funding for the resource centre and staff, we then had to have a proper chain of command. Then the question was where in the university would we fit, and they decided we would fit inside the library, and that created more difficulties because then you had the questions of fitting into the library's hierarchy, and Jackie had to deal with all of that, and now Safina. There have been major issues at various points, particularly when Jackie was retiring. The question was [in looking for her replacement], what were the terms? How would the job be advertised? Who would be on the interviewing committee? These were serious issues.

James: What about broader challenges to the Centre's public outreach work?

Jackie: In terms of the larger issues, I think I became increasingly aware of the narrowing down of opportunities for us to do work in schools. As time went on it became harder and harder, the curriculum became narrower, and the schools had to manage their own money. I felt in the early days we were able to build really good relationships with schools: they wanted us, and they wanted to do and were willing to do projects. By my final year [in 2018], schools were less engaged and less enthusiastic, and that, to me, was depressing.

Lou: The other thing, with regards to public history, is that we're now entering a time with a government that is absolutely determined to use divide and rule, to use cultural warfare, against people who want to change society. They are constantly creating crises, whether it's 'cancel culture' or whatever, constantly arguing that the appropriate history which should be taught, and that should be provided by museums and libraries and galleries, is one that does not question in any way the beauty and decency of Britain's historic role and 'civilising responsibility', and that any attempt to change that image somehow makes you traitorous or an extremist. The next four, five years, that's their political agenda, they're not going to deliver good things, but they're sure as hell going to make people hate each other. So it's going to make it more and more difficult in the future for projects – to do it and disseminate and so on, because they're trying to set the agenda in a very narrow framework.

James: As a counterpoint to that, over the past year there does appear to be a vocal subsection of British society who have pushed to see issues about racial inequality and historical representation more openly discussed, whether that's seen through the impact of Black Lives Matter, or the Edward Colston Statue controversy, or other flashpoints. Have these more recent developments impacted the Centre or Trust?

Lou: Now we're entering a situation where finally the library is recognising how important the work of the RACE Centre is, when for years they just thought we were at best one of the outliers who were just difficult to manage or that were not very important. Now they now recognise the centrality, given the university's commitment to social responsibility and so on.

Safina: I've seen changes in dialogue and discussion, and how people approach anti-racism work more than I've ever seen prior to this. There have been quite a lot of people who, all of

a sudden, have 'always' done anti-racism work and have 'always' collected these stories. I've seen so many publications or organisations that also want to tell this story, and actually we're in a really different place now. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 [on BME communities], and the impact of Black Lives Matter, and the protests that happened last year - the interesting thing is what has brought it into the public light and how that now has become public history, but it's a movement that's been going on for a long time. The amount of interest we got as an organisation in the last year has been unprecedented. A lot of it was people not wanting to do the work - people who didn't want to do a literature search on reading lists around black history or Black Lives Matter. So, there's still a lot of superficial and performative requests around this. But it made communities that were racialised minorities go from invisible and excluded to highly visible - we're now accepted as part of the public domain around discussion and dialogue, and I think that's a really important difference, and I think that's a really big change in the last year.

Jo: [in terms of school engagement] it's probably starting to change after last year, because I know we have been offering more sessions in schools. Linford Sweeney [a community historian and the founder of *Inspired Histories*] has been doing sessions with different schools and there been a lot of interest. We've started another project, bringing a freelancer in to create some educational resources from our materials. I do think that's a very recent change, and it will be interesting to see how it unfolds.

James: What do you think has been the Trust's biggest contribution to local history debates since its founding?

Jackie: I think we have showed that collecting and archiving, preserving the stories, the hidden histories of communities in our city has validity and has purpose, and I don't think anybody else was really doing that we did it. That's really important, and lots of people have done it since, but we were among the first.

James: What has, and what continues to make the Trust an important organisation for getting the public to engage with histories of race, ethnicity, and immigration?

Lou: Unlike many organisations, which had limited funding or insecure funding, we never ran after money at the expense of our values, and that I think enabled us to continue the ethos and maintain our contacts [within local communities]

Selina: I think the fact that it's grounded in communities, it's bottom-up, it's not something that's happened top-down. The Centre and Trust have experienced the struggles of the communities that they working with, so there's empathy and understanding, and also there isn't a power construct as such, which makes it unique. I think the other fact is that despite the changing environment, the Trust has stuck to its core beliefs, it hasn't changed to fit in with a funding regime or a new political master. The Trust has stayed true to its message since its inception.

Conclusion

The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre celebrated its 21st 'Birthday' in 2020, and the following year marked two decades since the formation of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust. Using these landmarks as an opportunity to draw together past and present staff and trustees, this roundtable provides a welcome opportunity to reflect on, in the words of one the partnerships most significant early projects, "The Distance We Have Travelled."

As the Centre and Trust settle into their third decade in existence, their staff and trustees remain committed to the shared vision of their founders – to help preserve the life stories of Black, Asian, and racialised 'minority' communities in Greater Manchester, create new resources for use in school and community settings, and promote an anti-racist curriculum. Over the past twenty years, the Centre and Trust's archival holdings, community projects and outreach initiatives have all significantly expanded. This development contributed to and has been further enhanced by a move from the University of Manchester Campus into an exciting new home at Manchester Central Library in 2014, and the Centre's integration into the University of Manchester Library system and special collections. In 2019, the "ground-breaking work" and "national importance" of the RACE Centre was acknowledged

in the University of Manchester Library's new vision and 10-year Strategy document "Imagine 2030."[10]

Alongside spaces such as the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton, the George Padmore Institute in Finsbury Park, and the Institute of Race Relations Library in Camden, the RACE Centre is part of a broader network of archival and educational institutions concerned with recovering the histories of racial and ethnic 'minority' communities in Britain. Moreover, as one of the relatively few major institutions of this nature to be located outside of Greater London, the RACE Centre plays a vital role in complementing (and complicating), the often London-centric lens through which these histories have been preserved and studied, and promoting popular engagement with and understanding of histories of race, ethnicity, and migration across Greater Manchester. These efforts remain hard-fought and hotly contested. As a number of roundtable participants articulate, activism remains central to the work of both Centre and Trust. At the same, efforts to remain true to their founding ideals have occasionally created challenges with regards to funding and project implementation. In this regard, the issues discussed by roundtable participants here are indicative of the often-precarious line that the RACE Centre and similar institutions are regularly forced to navigate - between maintaining their relationship with and commitment to local communities, and making necessarily strategic decisions with regards to grant acquisition and project framing and delivery.

Perhaps the most important themes which underpin this roundtable discussion can be articulated through two questions: 'what is public history' and 'who is public history for?' As a number of participants acknowledge, applications or understandings of 'public history' at university level are often different from those of more community-oriented institutions. The work of the RACE Centre and Trust provides an important example of the value in a collaborative, community-focused approach to telling histories; one which often appears to sit in contrast with the more extractive forms of knowledge production and dissemination that are regularly produced and re-produced within the academy. Similarly, while participants welcome an apparent recent shift in public receptiveness towards documenting and celebrating the histories of racial and ethnic 'minority' communities in Britain, they also

[10] "Imagine 2030," *University of Manchester Libraries,* available at: https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/about/imagine-2030

note that, as these histories move into the mainstream, they are often whitewashed to better fit within existing historical narratives and perspectives. Academics and universities would do well to avoid seeking out histories that they think they know or expect to find, and instead focus on documenting and preserving the kind of histories that racial and ethnic 'minority' communities want to tell.