Engaging Curators: Curator Perspectives on Audiences and Developing Postcolonial

Ethics in the Small Museum

JILLIAN SUTHERLAND

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements of Bath Spa University

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Art and Design, Bath Spa University

October 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The roots of UK museum traditions have been identified and exposed through museological scholarship and practice and have been subject to developing postcolonial and decolonial critiques over the past fifty years: museums are primed for revisiting themselves and rethinking how they respond to twenty-first century concerns. This study investigates how the curators of small museums in the South West of England are navigating their obligations towards a postcolonial public. Set against a backdrop of conflicting views from sector discourse and guidance, the pressures and expectations for museum professionals to meet audience-related demands are increasingly complex.

Shedding light on how curators, whose decisions are often seen as representing a museum's voice of authority (Chandler, 2009; Procopio, 2019), the thesis examines how some curators are navigating their responsibilities in small museums in a regional context and provides a discussion of the internal and external factors contributing to their respective approaches to practice. Scholarship regarding small museum practices in the UK is scarce, therefore this study supports the development of curatorial work and research for, and about, small museums.

After observing the trajectory of museum studies literature and a noticeable 'turn' in attention in scholarship towards the social impact in museum displays, the study provides a discussion of the ways in which museological developments relate to theories located in postcolonialism. This research thus sits within an emerging area of discourse, following postcolonial theory and pushing beyond new museology. In this space, literary theory, museum criticism, historic traditions and contemporary debate collide, revealing the tensions between traditional and contemporary audience engagement concerns in curatorial practice, in the words of curators.

Through qualitative interviews and grounded theory methods, the study adopts postcolonial theory as an interpretive framework to interrogate and analyse how the curators operate their choice and control in an environment replete with nuanced dynamics of power, hierarchy, expectations, and limitations. Theoretical models are presented to 'map' the interpreted behaviours, experiences and curatorial approaches

identified and demonstrate the impact of perceptions, influences and museological traditions on practical, curatorial, approaches to audiences. The models, such as the 'Spectrum of Curatorial Practice', are presented as the result of 'aggregated hypotheses' based on the qualitative data generated (Glaser and Strauss, 1965) and are positioned within the context of an emerging paradigm of museum practices and museological discourse observed at the time of this study.

As a result, this research provides a discussion of the complicated relationships involved with individuals, objects, custodians, society, knowledge, ethics in curating, and the manifestations of 'race' within such dynamics and identifies a need for change in both internal and external perceptions of museum curatorial practice and its functions. In additional to highlighting the restraints some curators experience concerning audience-related practices, it further examines how – and whether – small museum curators can respond to contemporary museum contexts through taking opportunities to support post- and de-colonial developments in curatorial practice.

The 'Engaging Curators' study contributes to furthering our understanding of the ways cultural organisations, such as small museums, and their decision-makers, such as curators, in peripheral areas of the West are responding to a postcolonial world, and explores how contemporary social concerns, old assumptions and inherited notions continue to leave physical and metaphysical marks. Finally, through engaging with postcolonial scholarship and by navigating concepts of minority research and diasporic history in England, this research recognises the potential for developing more social, ethically engaged, and 'racially reflexive' curatorial practices.

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This research examines curatorial practice in the small, regional museum in the South West of England, and aims to provide insights into how curators in this setting perceive, navigate and respond to engaging with their audiences. A need for improvements to museum engagement practices in general has been under discussion for over fifty years, from interaction with visitors, to evaluation methods, to meaningful exhibitions and workforce motivations (Shettell & Reilly, 1966; Bicknell & Farmelo, 1993; Hooper-Greenhill, 1995; Marstine, 2013; BOP Consultancy & The Museums Consultancy, 2016). In addition, the origins of Western museum traditions have been subjected to developing critical museological, postcolonial and decolonial critiques over the past five decades, as this thesis will demonstrate. Museums thus appear primed for revisiting themselves and rethinking how they respond to twenty-first century concerns. Such discussions about museum practice however, are set against a contemporary backdrop of conflicting views from sector discourse and guidance. From the denial of a greater responsibility towards societal engagement in museums (Appleton, 2007), and leaving issues of 'diversifying audiences' open to interpretation (Aldridge et al., 2022), to rendering smaller museums as unworthy subjects of critical research (Candlin, 2016), alongside others arguing for decolonising museology in theory and practice (Soares, 2020), pressures and expectations for museum professionals to meet audience-related demands are increasingly complex. Therefore, the study also investigates how ten interviewed curators from small museums in the South West of England are navigating their obligations towards a postcolonial public.

Shedding light on how curators, whose decisions are often seen as representing a museum's voice of authority (Chandler, 2009; Procopio, 2019), the thesis examines how some curators are navigating their responsibilities in small museums in a regional context and provides a discussion of the internal and external factors contributing to their respective approaches to practice. Scholarship regarding small museum practices in the UK is scarce, therefore this study supports the development of curatorial work and research for, and about, small museums.

1.2. Audience engagement and museum curating

In the modern museum the curator's role is changing dramatically from its traditional roots of carer and keeper of collections to something far more dynamic that encompasses many additional tasks such as managerial responsibilities, exhibition design, providing educational resources, or training volunteers (Kaitavuori et al., 2013). As a result of both historical repute and contemporary developments museum curators are often included amongst the key decision-makers within their organisations. Some have argued that a long-running tension fluctuates between curators and educators, who find themselves in conflict over whose role is more significant to museum learning (Dobbs & Eisner, 1987). Others assert that collaborative working and co-curation is the key to successful contemporary museum practice (Simon, 2010). While some may cling to the traditionally perceived role of the museum curator as isolated, Kaitavuori et al. (2013, p. xi) suggested that early curators "were often the public face of the museum". They claim that the role of a curator has, in fact, shifted from solely caring for collections. This study aims to explore whether and how curators on the ground have indeed shifted their practices alongside the observations made about them in museum scholarship. Alongside changes in curatorial remits, issues of access for visitors and the efficacy of their learning and engagement have increasingly risen to prominence in museum practice in recent decades. Davis (2007) claimed that, in response to more ethical concerns:

"Museums and art galleries have made increasing efforts to encourage all members of the local community to use their galleries. This has resulted not only in better provision for people with disabilities but also in more innovative use of collections and expertise via lectures, demonstrations and outreach activities" (cited in Watson, 2007, p. 37).

While this sounds positive, questions arise regarding how embedded such engagement initiatives are within museums and galleries, and how they impact internal attitudes towards the public, and who has access to museum collections in formats such as lectures and outreach activities.

With public engagement now a hotter topic than ever before, a nationwide call-to-arms is in effect, prompted by the government, for social, educational and cultural institutions to include and appeal to as many different types of people as possible (Mancino, 2016). Consequently, museums are expected to respond to prescriptive policies designed to guide what engagement should look like and to measure how well engagement has been achieved, such as the Accreditation Standards laid forth by Arts Council England. As a result, difficulty arises in articulating museum priorities as the need for engagement grows (ibid., 2016, p. 148). Where larger national institutions, or metropolitan museum initiatives are held in high regard throughout the sector and often looked to as trailblazing examples of progressive strategies, this project aims to explore and highlight valuable sector developments in the South West of England, an under-represented region densely populated with a variety of diverse small and independent museums.[1]

The 'Engaging Curators' research project aims to investigate how museum curatorship is responding to audience engagement and the expectations and pressures that accompany the concept, with a particular focus on the South West region of England. It seeks to explore how the concept of engaging with audiences factors into curatorial practice, such as in the planning of displays, interpretation, and other areas of curatorial work, taking the historical and contemporary significance of the role of the museum curator into account.

Museum engagement with audiences in England has been the subject of countless studies, projects, collaborations, funding opportunities, and consultant-produced evaluations since the rise of Visitor Studies literature in the 1990s, and the museum sector itself has identified a need for change. Traditionally perceived as the leading professionals in the field, highly respected and valued for their expertise (Viau-

---

[1] For example, Dan Hicks, Curator at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, talked about the need for regional museums being more widely looked to in terms of their practices, placing emphasis on the potential for greater impact with changes in permanent displays (Association for Art History (2020). The Future of the Blockbuster: A Need for Change? Thursday, 22 October 2020 [Online event].

Courville, 2017) curators may hold the greatest influence over their organisations, and potentially in the wider sector. Curators are, by this rationale, in the strongest position to instigate changes, particularly in small museums where they have greater independence and decision-making abilities. Changes in museum practices, it seems, can begin with curators. Therefore it is not only fair, but imperative that small museum curators should be examined and held accountable in regard to their public responsibilities. Furthermore, if they truly recognised the social value of their museums, they should be *enjoying* engaging with their audiences.

This thesis taps the smaller, regional museum for a contemporary pulse; it interrogates how the curators of small museums are navigating their obligation to growing, multiple, publics in a postcolonial time, and seeks to disrupt the traditionally accepted, wilfully inherited, and taken-for-granted canon of hierarchical curatorial practice. My study therefore contributes to a large, extant body of critical museum studies that has steadily developed since the 1990s and characterised by museum scholars such as Hooper-Greenhill (1995), Sandell (2003, 2007); and others such as Duncan (1995), Lubar (1995); MacDonald and Fyfe (1996); and Karp et al. (1992). My research is also intertwined with the wave of postcolonial literature which has maintained buoyancy since its distinct rise in the 1980s in critically interrogating the West's pervasive dominance of culture, maintenance of problematic ideologies, and the lasting impact of European colonialism on social life in England. Yet this study also sits within an emerging area of discourse; following on from postcolonial theory and beyond new museology, a space which can be thought of as postcolonial museology. In this space, literary theory, museum criticism, historic tradition, contemporary debate, myths of rurality, tropes of urbanity, and individual curatorial practice, collide. A decolonisation movement has been claimed to have started around 2000 and has been gradually manifesting within heritage practices and scholarship since then (Knudsen et al., 2021, p. 8). However, the extent to which this has translated to museum exhibits or curatorial habits in the small, regional museum in England has remained underexplored.

As this thesis will show, regional small museum curators have varying levels of freedom, choice, and discretion regarding the social responsibilities of their roles,

particularly through the narratives and versions of history they disseminate to the public in their practices. The power, control and authority often attributed to the interviewed curators is manifested and experienced in a number of ways and their perceptions of their roles and audiences appeared to be influenced by several contributing factors. These factors ranged from traditional expectations, inherited internal dynamics, and personal experiences, as will be examined within the thesis.

1.3. Motivations for the study

My interest in museums stems from my involvement in arts organisations in the South West of England for the past decade, where I developed a proclivity towards interrogating how exhibits are formed, by whom, the interpretation that is displayed and how audiences are considered during these processes. I have often worked with, or alongside, curators who have in my experience invariably kept their practices close to their chests, particularly when it comes to working with others – be that colleagues, volunteers, or audiences.

In my roles in the field, I have also engaged with visitors, often conversing with them about their thoughts on what is being displayed and I began to find that the intentions behind displays in art galleries and museums were not often concurrent with the experiences of visitors. I explored this concept in greater depth in my MA dissertation, which examined local, international, and historical contexts for discussing audience reception to contemporary art exhibits (Sutherland, 2014 [unpublished]). I concluded in that research that curatorial engagement with audiences was lacking and in need of redress if museums and galleries are to meet growing demands for inclusivity in their programming. I also identified a need to further examine the apparent disconnect between the two groups: curators and audiences. Inspired by my personal and professional interests, a central question to this study is how curators perceive, experience and engage with audiences in their own practices. I have chosen to engage curators directly in conversation, in order to provide insights into this area of museum work in England that is not typically elucidated in discourse nor professional practice. This study therefore responds to the distinct lack of scholarship pertaining to small museum culture and practices in England. Therefore, my research aims to advance our

understanding of small museum curatorial practice in an English, regional context by combining practice-based knowledge with primary qualitative data gathered in the field.Museum scholars have identified a need to apply sociological methods to research in the sector, and recognise where existing attempts have fallen short. The call for more ethical representation in the arts is part of a much deeper set of issues that are debated and contested within the cultural landscape of England at present. For example, there has been a growing interest in museums in the media and in political activity, particularly with regards to debates around the 'decolonisation' of Britain's national heritage and pressure from some members of society demanding that systemic racism in our cultural institutions be addressed, alongside others who are unwilling to break with England's imperialist roots. In 2020, right-wing community groups, news media, and the Conservative government instigated, and continue to stoke, social division about what constitutes 'heritage', the appearance of national identity, and cultural rights.[2] These narratives are, however, contested by scholars and featured in other mainstream reporting, such as in The Guardian (Olusoga, 2020a and, later, Gayle, 2021, and Younge, 2021).

At the heart of such apparent civil unrest is the British public, or, in put it a different way, the museum's audiences and 'non-audiences' of Britain's museums. Representation of topics and objects in England's museums therefore plays into contemporary concerns around the messages that are communicated and received in different areas of museum practice, including how we present historic facts and the responsive actions museum professionals take. Many questions are raised when considering the above, such as why this is occurring now; how museums are responding within their teams, buildings and displays, in addition to exhibiting virtual virtues; and whether or not, and how, smaller museums in England will be able to diversify, or decolonise, themselves. When hierarchic traditions go unnoticed this

---

[2] For example, the pressure group, 'Save our Statues', (saveourstatues.org.uk); also see: Museums Association (2021), *Changes made after Colston exhibition hit by blockbooking protests.*

demonstrates the pervasiveness of the 'epistemic violence' associated with more conventional approaches to museum interpretation.[3]

This begs the question, what messages do our museums communicate to audiences through their displays: visually, conceptually, explicitly and implicitly? When reconsidered critically, other questions arise, such as: What are the ethical implications of our museum displays for our visitors? (Gazi, 2014), Whose heritage and knowledge is being prioritised and whose is being silenced in the process? (Dotson, 2011). This research responds in a number of ways. It supports the diversity of 'voice' in sociological research, museum studies, and academic representation. Furthermore, it contributes to postcolonial museum theory and practice through engaging with questions of museum ethics, thereby responding to emerging 'decolonial' museum practices; minority research and diasporic lines of academic enquiry.

The data for this thesis was gathered between January 2019 and January 2020, before the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus in England, the national lockdown and subsequent temporary closure of public institutions, and prior to a surge of Black Lives Matter protests around the globe in the summer of 2020. Therefore, it is vital to understand that the survey responses and curators' opinions during interviews were given to me in a different social climate. While the expectations for museums have not regressed particularly, the curators and their museum colleagues may indeed have answered the questions differently in light of the fallout of 2020, and at the time of writing this, in 2021.

1.4. Defining the 'small museum'

Defining what a 'small museum' is notoriously difficult, with some taking the amount of staff as the measure, using annual income as a base, or focusing on voluntary-run ventures for example (Thompson et al., 1984). For Candlin (2016) one of the difficulties is finding them to begin with, as many small museums are located in countryside

---

[3] 'Epistemic violence' is often discussed in postcolonial scholarship and refers to the practice of silencing through knowledge. The term and its implications for museums is discussed in more depth in section **7.3.1.** of this thesis.

locations which require personal transport to even visit them, in addition to having limited signage in public centres.

Arts Council England defines a national museum in the following terms. It is: "directly funded by a department of government"; "holding and acquiring a collection of national and international significance"; "providing excellent engagement opportunities through exhibitions, displays, learning, and research opportunities"; and providing "expertise regarding its subject matter to other museums, galleries and collections" (2014a, p. 19).[4] This suggests that scalability correlates with capital, government support and reputation. In the Arts Council's guidance, 'scalability indicators' help museums applying for Accreditation – a UK standard for good practice in museums and galleries – to define their organisation type. As National Museums do not require accreditation, there are three tiers of organisation type (types one to three), over three categories, namely *independent museums*, *local museums,* and *university museums*, (Arts Council England, 2014, pp. 15-19). They acknowledge that the Accreditation Standard is not a 'one size fits all' system, and that museums might "sit between two types" (ibid. p. 15). Due to the parameters, they specify, in particular, workforce, management, operating budget and visitor numbers, types one and two are most applicable to 'smaller' institutions. "Museums in the South West range from small, community museums in coastal and rural areas to large inner-city museums and galleries" (South West Museum Development, 2017).

In their Annual Survey of Museums Report 2016/17, the South West Museum Development Programme determines museum size by the number of visitors received, the smallest being under 10,000 total annual visits.[5] Using the Arts Council scalability indicators as a guide – as museums applying for Accreditation would do – and taking into account visitor numbers, a 'small' museum could therefore be defined as follows: i) receiving between 10,000-30,000 visitors per year; ii) operated by a workforce made up of some paid staff and volunteers; iii) with an operating budget of up to £250,000

---

[4] See Arts Council England (2014) *Accreditation Guidance – An Introduction.*
[5] South West Museum Development (2018)

per year.[6] Neither source used number of staff, size of building, or collection size in relation to scaling a museum. Therefore, the definition of 'small' used herein, is intended to apply to museums receiving in the region of 30,000 on-site visitors per year, on average.

As my own practical experience has been located in one geographical region, and in institutions that do not have national or large city-status and are 'small' by comparison, I conducted my research in the South West of England where I initially encountered the phenomena. Small museums might not spring to mind when we think about the sector generally, yet with over 500 museums in the South West of England alone, perhaps it is time their staff and practices received more attention, particularly in light of the issues described above (Devon Museums, 2020). The South West Museum Development 2020 report introduced the term 'micromuseum' into their classification of museum size, which covered those with an average visitor yield of under 10,000 per year. The report claimed that 49% of South West museums are, by this definition, 'micromuseums'. Studies have taken place in the USA regarding small museum practices (such as Guthe, 1957; and Orosz, 1990) and some work has been done to throw the spotlight onto the peripheries of England's museum landscape, pulling the focus away from the well-lit nationals and big city galleries that are normally prioritised (for example, Candlin, 2016). However, there is a significant gap in studies of small museum curatorial practice specifically. Differentiating between my study and others who have engaged curators in conversation will be addressed in Chapter 2: Literature Review.

1.5. A sociological study

In sociology, interpreting thought or the perspectives of others, such as responses from interviews conducted in a study, can be understood as a "practice of discounting the face value of statements, beliefs, and idea-systems, by reexamining [sic] them within a new context which supplies the "real meaning"." (Merton, 1973, p. 9). A major concern in this piece of research therefore is the set of complications that arise from

---

[6] South West Museum Development (2020)

structural and cultural explanations of curator perspectives on audience engagement and the consequential impact on society through their practices in small museums in the South West of the UK. Responsive to Richardson and Lambert's (1985) five theoretical approaches to issues of 'race' in sociology (1. 'moral'; 2. 'biological'; 3. 'psychological'; 4. 'cultural'; and 5. 'structural') my perspective is that the phenomena under discussion – the curatorial relationship to audiences in the small museum – is both cultural and structural; is simultaneously informed by notions inherited from the moral traditions of 'race', which are historically rooted in the biological notions of racial difference asserted via imperialist ideologies of the Western colonial era (ibid., p. 3). As a piece of sociological research then, my thesis also aims to respond to the call to "move beyond the mere documentation of racism towards a search for its major causes" (ibid., p. 70). The research is also posited as postcolonial, in that: it views our current moment in British society as part of an historical era whereby former colonised countries of empire are independent from colonial rule; that British society is operating within a post-colonial state whereby the nation is multiracial; and finally, that we in Britain are collectively affected by racialised ideologies that perpetuate imbalance and division through latent and active mechanisms that stem from the colonial period which manifest in social thought, systemic processes and modes of knowledge and cultural production today.[7]

Richardson and Lambert stated that a tenet of the structural approach to a sociological study concerning 'race' is an understanding that "the basic social structure (the key institutions, patterned social networks, and especially the stratification system) crucially affects the nature of race relations and the life chances of racial minorities" (1985, p. 5). Du Gay and Pryke (2002, p. 1) asserted that culture is formative to our assumptions, experiences and perceptions, "structuring the way people think, feel and act in organizations." Museums are key institutions of culture and knowledge, both of

---

[7] "Race actively worked as the reorganizing principle" of people during Western colonial domination and its metaphysical manifestations remain in the present (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 104). In the article, *Metaphysical Empire, Linguicides and Cultural Imperialism,* Ndlovu-Gatsheni describes the 'mental dislocation' caused and experienced through physical and metaphysical cultural imperialism.

which form, contribute to, and display elements of our national social structure. By this rationale museums large and small, urban, and rural, inevitably reflect and affect notions of 'race' in the UK. Inherited and iterated delusions of 'race' inform our daily cultural exchanges and social interactions (Richardson and Lambert, 1985).[8] Therefore, a 'racialised' social reality is inevitable. From a sociological perspective, the intended tasks of this researcher are to interrogate the given assumptions about non-racialised museum practice, as identified in the data, in relation to curator perceptions of audiences and to explore the roots of these assumptions, evidence how they are manifested in the curatorial practices of those interviewed, and to expose the implications of the phenomenon.

1.6. Language and terminology

Some statements in this thesis may appear personal in tone, and others may be interpreted as significantly critical statements when compared to other texts. Therefore, I would encourage the reader to approach the thesis with the following in mind, regarding the language, critical analysis, and writing style used in this thesis; and would also encourage consideration of the reader's own positionality in the process.

Depending on the audience, postcolonial writing may not feel palatable. Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), for example, used direct language and wrote of his own experiences, tearing down a façade for many with regards to seeing 'race' and understanding difference from the perspective of a black man living in post-colonial Europe. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), his words could be interpreted as promoting violence as a form of resisting racism and countering the effects of

---

[8] Richardson and Lambert (1985) claimed that: "cultural racism has its roots in the dim colonial past, but the racist stereotypes developed during that period are transmitted to succeeding generations as part of the general folklore, and it is by inculcating this cultural tradition that white people develop prejudices against [black people]." (pp. 4-5). Ideas of what, and who, constitutes as accepted and normal in Western society have been acknowledged elsewhere as being based in "mainstream Eurocentric notions" (Williams, 2016, p. 151). Furthermore, to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p. 97) decolonial thinking, writing, and research takes place in spite of "the social engineering work of Empires" and against the backdrop of the "systemic and epistemic challenges haunting us at the universities".

colonialism. However, postcolonial research and writing is critical by nature. Ashcroft et al. ([1995]2006, p. 2) argued that:

> "Post-colonial theory involves discussion about experiences of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responding to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. [...] post-colonial studies are based in the 'historical fact' of European colonialism".

Therefore it is inevitable that, to some, discussions of such issues could be deemed controversial, painful, or unexpected. Furthermore, attempts to disrupt the normative assumptions inherent in Eurocentric narratives in museums, for example, could give rise to defensive interpretations in certain readers, and could risk misinterpretations of the presented arguments, particularly to any with a vested interest in opposing postcolonial, decolonial or antiracist research. Thus, the reader is encouraged to approach the thesis with an understanding of the significance of its criticality in some sections, whilst remaining cognisant of the fact the findings and arguments have been constructed from a postcolonial stance and have not been presented in unsubstantiated ways.

The thesis is also influenced by Thiong'o's (1984, 2013, 2019) ideas about the 'metaphysicality' of Empire and the conversational manner in which he communicates complex topics.[9] The way in which we write and communicate does not necessarily equate to our ability to cognitively engage with concepts, theories and language. Chow (2014, p. 15) alluded to this when they wrote:

> "the intellectually sophisticated ways of coming to terms with language as known to some of us – with their stresses on error, failure, defacement, disappointment, nonarrival, and so forth – have a vital parallel in the process of racialization, the shadowy tones of which are typically borne by those who

---

[9] That is, the psychological, emotional, linguistic, and spiritual (Thiong'o, 2013, 2019); Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

are deemed inferior. Should not these shadowy tones, what I have been calling skin tones, be finally grasped as a form of prosthetics, something that can and must be undone and unmade?"

Tuhiwai Smith ([1999] 2012) brought our attention to the use of 'othering' in language in Western academic practices, in terms of how people are written about, and write, from a perspective in proximity to whiteness. Tuhiwai Smith's perspective encouraged me to see how I, as a woman of the Caribbean diaspora, am positioned in typical Western texts, from her reflections on her own reading of texts as a woman of Maori heritage:

> "When I read texts, for example, I frequently have to orientate myself to a text world in which the centre of academic knowledge is either in Britain, the United States or Western Europe; in which words such as 'we', 'us', 'our', 'I' actually exclude me. It is a text world in which […] I belong *partly* in the Third World, *partly* in the 'Woman of Colour' world, *partly* in the black or African world." (2012, p. 37)

Tuhiwai Smith (ibid.) also observed that diasporic, or indigenous, representation is a problem in Western academic writing itself, which:

> "privileges sets of texts, views about the history of an idea, what issues count as significant; and, by engaging in the same process uncritically, we too can render indigenous writers invisible or unimportant while reinforcing the validity of other writers. […] Writing can be dangerous because sometimes we reveal ourselves in ways which get misappropriated and used against us."

Further to this, as I elaborate on in Chapter 3, Methodology, the reader can consider my inclusion of varied sources, some non-academic, and the language used in this thesis as contributing to my own decolonial journey where I continue to use and develop reflexivity and personal experience as tools to begin 'decolonising myself' – in this case through my writing, which as a diasporic individual, I see as my right. Cultural writers and scholars, for example, such as Lorde (1984) and Freire ([1970]1993) have encouraged former-colonised peoples and the oppressed to take opportunities to

communicate back to their oppressors, from their perspectives, and they explore the revolutionary potential of such an approach.

While I do not include personal opinions in the way that Fanon did, nor make any revolutionary claims, the statements, analysis, and conclusions made in this thesis are thus presented from my perspective and position. The language and methods I have used to conduct and communicate this research are supported by my adherence to established qualitative research methods, and corroborated by the literature, as explored in more depth in Chapter 2, the Literature Review, and throughout the thesis.

I will now set out the terms and concepts frequently referred to throughout this study, and clarify my interpretations and use of them, some of which will be further explained in Chapter 2: Literature Review.

Postcolonialism can be most comprehensively understood as a state of affairs, a moment in time, an historical development, a theoretical discipline, a literary genre and literary concept. A postcolonial perspective involves understanding and seeing the roots of modernity as based on European languages and culture as the status quo, and seeks to challenge this. It is also a realisation and acceptance of the fact that Western modernity was built on black and brown bodies. (McLeod, 2000; Ashcroft, 2006). The concept has developed in recent decades, evolving from its original iteration in literary theory to other areas of research, such as sociology (Ashcroft et al., 2006, p. 5). The authors then identify several areas of interest to which postcolonial theory is most usually applied: 'Race, ethnicity, indigeneity'; 'Environment'; 'Globalization'; 'Diaspora'; and 'The sacred', the latter of which refers to the beliefs and religious practices of the colonial diaspora and the complexities surrounding them due to such encounters. Out of postcolonialism, comes decolonisation: the rebuttal to the 'norms' of modernity, when modernity is understood to be rooted in imperialist ideologies and colonial practices. Decolonisation is also an historical moment (Sadaratnam, 2020), marking territorial independence from colonialism, and simultaneously the period of time marking the formation of nation states in place of European footholds in colonies. However, decolonising can be viewed as a process: postcolonial theory in action. For

example, practical steps towards anti-racist and anti-imperialist approaches to engaging with society.

Throughout this thesis I use the term 'diaspora' to describe the diverse, ethnic, and multicultural populations present in Britain today. Scholars of colour have also used the term in a variety of ways (Dawson, 2007; Bhopal, 2018; Andrews, 2019), and often mean those of African descent who were dispersed from the continent during colonialism. However, in my definition, Britain's diaspora can be understood as those who are not typically deemed 'white' or 'English'. My definition also recognises these populations as both part of Britain's colonial diaspora, and its *national* diaspora at present, including immigrants from other countries, citizens and 'illegal'. Thus, I hold the assumption that our society is inherently racialised. The racialised state I am referring to however, extends to the British population as a whole; 'white' indeed, is also a 'race', and a 'race' of which there are many shades. West Indian, South Asian, African, Irish, Romanian, Polish, Chinese, Welsh, English; we have all been racialised by colonialism. Bhopal (2018) maintains that, stemming from the stratification of people during British colonialism, there remains *acceptable* and *non-acceptable* kinds of whiteness in Britain today, of which Gypsy and Traveller communities, for example, are thought to exemplify the latter. Therefore, as I will be examining how values and perceptions of audiences are manifested by and within small museum curatorial practice, it will be important to consider the implications of their responses for Britain's diaspora. A further issue to explore, therefore, is how the interviewed curators not only perceived audiences, but how and whether they perceived *diasporic* audiences and how this is reflected in their practices. I may also use the term 'people of colour' to describe those who are not racialised as white.

1.7. Engaging with postcolonialism and decolonial practice

From methods of categorisation and approaches to archival information, to how culture is studied and valued, developments in the fields of sociology, art history and museum studies continue to highlight the need for cultural institutions to apply critical reflection to their practices (Association for Art History, 2020; Connected Sociologies Curriculum Project, 2021; Courtauld Institute of Art, 2021; Harvard Art

Museums, 2021; University of Edinburgh, 2021).[10] Discussion of a history or trajectory of decolonial – indeed, postcolonial practices – in Britain's museums remains relatively unexposed. This may well be because practical engagement with decolonisation in English museums is a relatively new topic of interest. However, research into small museum practices in England, is also limited, and of the postcolonial 'small museum', a distinct lack of research persists. Drawing on developments in museology and postcolonial theory, I contextualise the curators' approaches, perspectives, actions, and abstinence towards engaging with audiences in their individual practices and demonstrate how this evidences that the participating small museums are operating in a postcolonial world.

As the thesis will explain, this simultaneous acceptance and denial of postcoloniality was manifested in the curators' responses in this study in a variety of ways which, consequently, work to reflect both the problems and opportunities in postcolonial thought. Building on this body of evidence, I then posit the potentialities for small museums and the practices of their curators, such as those under study here, and mark an emerging opportunity for the development of a postcolonial set of ethics within those practices. Some of the curators expressed a desire and hope for the succession of their individual institutions and for the future of museums more generally. This thesis will argue that the future of small museums in Britain needs to be a postcolonial one, specifically in terms of ethics. By 'postcolonial ethics' I mean ethics of museum practice that are engaged with, in, and informed by, approaches, assumptions and actions that are congruent with tenets of postcolonial theory and

---

[10] Some of many examples of growing debates around decolonising research and museums, and online discussion forums that burgeoned during the Covid-19 pandemic include Co-Creation Network (2021), *Engaging with Bath's Uncomfortable Past through walking and creativity,* University of Bath; Connected Sociologies Curriculum Project (2021) *What is the colonial global economy?* The Sociological Review; Courtauld Institute (2021) *Looking back, Looking Forward: Decolonising the Museum*; Harvard Art Museums (2021) *De-centering, re-centering: forging new museological and historical narratives*; and University of Edinburgh (2021) *Cultural Memory Seminar - Slavery in the Age of Memory: Engaging the Past, Ana Lucia Araujo.*

simultaneously that take place within a current, postcolonial moment in social understanding and historical existence.

My interpretation of a 'postcolonial ethics' has developed in line with interdisciplinary concepts. For example, close resemblances can be found in Critical Race Theory (CRT), 'post-critical museology' (Dewdney, et al., 2012) and 'new social history' (Gable, 1996). These adjacent theories support the idea that contemporary social and public engagement work, across a variety of research fields, practical industries and cultural institutions, requires the exploration, interrogation and critical challenging of the systemic manifestations of white supremacy within social life in Britain today – including the lived experiences of Britain's diasporic residents. Essentially, the tenet that they all appear to have in common is a desire for anti-racist practice, which I determine is consistent with a postcolonial approach.

An immediate caveat of postcolonial ethics is to grasp that the acknowledgement of white supremacy needs to happen for engagement with the topic of anti-racism to happen. The acceptance that white supremacy exists must supersede its denial and the ignorance of systemic racism that currently persists in public discourse.[11] A second, is that we must learn to accept that racism in Britain is nuanced and intersectional, in addition to being interconnected between those differences and racialised groups. The purpose of such an approach is not to ignore white struggle nor is it to deny white humanity – that would be hypocritical and counterintuitive. Rather, it is to *de-centre* whiteness as equating to normality and correctness. A third, is willingness to try to understand the reasons and processes behind racist inequality in the UK, and a fourth is to recognise the effects of this traditional status quo in both forming and maintaining our social lives and sense of identity. Through this kind of critical, ethical, and reflexive engagement, we can attempt to decipher and recover the broader historical space that

---

[11] For example, in a 2015 study of anti-racist scholarship and education practices, Ledesma and Calderón said that adopting a CRT approach "requires an engagement and articulation with the material, structural, and ideological mechanisms of White supremacy.", (p. 206).

we all inhabit; we can strip away Britain's constructed mythology of and for itself;[12] and we can mobilise this in order to produce new knowledges, support change and enact anti-racist practice. This is postcolonial ethics.

1.8. Research questions and methods

To explore curatorial attitudes and approaches to audience engagement in small museums in the South West, multiple questions were considered such as: Are curatorial staff rethinking collection displays in a more responsive, contemporary and inclusive way? How can curators take an interpretive approach that is suited to the twenty-first century?[13] I have established that the most pertinent areas to explore in this research are related to the perceptions of curators towards audiences, their practical responses and approaches towards audience engagement, knowledge of the challenges and limitations they experience; the social, cultural, and economic factors that impact the curators. Therefore this study uses a mixed methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative data gathered from museum professionals in the region under study. The findings will be contextualised using postcolonialism as a theoretical framework in order to examine the ethical consequences of curatorial practice in a postcolonial museum context. My **research questions** are presented as follows:

Research Question 1: What do small museum curators in the South West of England think about audiences?

Research Question 2: What are the small museum curators doing to respond to audience engagement demands and expectations in practice?

---

[12] Clifford (1987) acknowledged that nostalgic familiarities in Western culture are constructed 'paradigms', and Tuhiwai Smith alluded to the replication of 'myths' about indigeneity and colonised peoples that continue to be perpetuated in Western academic writing and journalism (2012, p. 37). Myths, often presented as collective memories and common truths about Western society displayed in museums, have also been observed as facilitating "truth represented by fiction" (Bal, 1992, p. 594), hence my use of the phrase 'constructed mythology'.

[13] "We [museums] are guilty of historical misrepresentation." Curtis (2019) *Museums should honor the everyday, not just the extraordinary*, was a short TED talk about museums' independent power to change narratives, messages, and representation.

Research Question 3: How are the small museum curators navigating and experiencing issues of audience engagement?

Research Question 4: What are the external and internal factors that contribute to, influence, inhibit, or change, small museum curatorial engagement with audiences?

Research Question 5: How might considering small museum curatorial engagement with audiences in a postcolonial context change our understanding of the challenges, perceptions and practices of small museum curating, based on these examples from the South West of England?

The first question provides a primary source of data: curator perspectives. The second question helps to evidence what curatorial audience engagement practices are being carried out, and the third question will provide context based on the experiences of the curators within their individual venues. Question three may also offer insights into internal dynamics and working practice of smaller museums. Questions four and five incorporate sociological elements and engage with the implications of the research for museological scholarship and ethical museum practice.

My answers to these questions will be based on the capturing of direct opinion and perceptions of curators, conducted through ten semi-structured interviews with senior curators of smaller institutions around the South West. Ten curators participated in semi-structured interviews between July 2019 and January 2020. From herein, direct reference to the responses of the participants will be indicated as 'the interviewed curators' and individual names have been replaced with pseudonyms. The names of the museums and exact locations in which they worked will also remain anonymous. The interviews were conducted following a pilot study in the form of a survey. The survey was distributed throughout the region, and was completed by 32 museum staff members from South West museums. The results, and how they have been used, are discussed in Chapter 3.

1.9. Scope and parameters

Evidencing racism in Britain is not the focus of this thesis, however, and the reader is encouraged to understand that the researcher accepts the following assumptions:

- racism in Britain exists

- we are all part of a racialised society, whereby people of *all* races including white, are subject to varying levels of social treatment, prejudice, trauma, opportunities, and expectations according to those differences

- cultural, educational, and 'knowledge' institutions in Britain, which include museums, are also part of a system that is racialised

These assumptions are concurrent with several sociological theoretical approaches that concern 'race' in society, such as critical race theory, black studies, black feminism and postcolonialism. Theories as such are based on the exploration of ideologies of 'race' and share the perspective that society is racialised, and a collective tenet is that their work is "premised on the sociopolitical agenda to challenge the hegemonic structures that sustain inequity and injustice". (Almeida, 2015).[14]

For a small, local museum, in-depth 'participatory' practice, such as that instigated by the curator, Nina Simon whilst at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History for example, may not be suitable nor achievable (Simon, 2010). Similarly, a smaller institution's collective voice may not be positioned to academically converse in issues like decolonisation, for example, in a highly critical and public way – such as a person like Dan Hicks of the Pitt Rivers Museum (and an Oxford University professor), might. Hicks' outspoken book, The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution, 2021, for example, is boldly described as "a call for western museums to wash their hands of colonial blood".[15] These are two potentially extreme

---

[14] Almeida's article on 'Race-Based Epistemologies' (2015), provides a helpful introduction, overview and critique of the formation of race-based research theories and the inherent risks associated with their application.
[15] Pluto Press (2021)

examples of non-traditional approaches to museum practice. However, perhaps there is space to consider varying levels of change that can be introduced to museum practice - approaches more suited to and appropriate for independent museums located in peripheral areas, as opposed to those in larger cities that might have greater public status, more opportunities for research, or more stringent rules to follow.

Questioning the efficacy of curatorial engagement with the public may be perceived as being at odds with their expected duty to care for objects. Levitt described that viewing museums in terms of accountability "can be seen by some museum professionals as a threat to their professional judgement and stewardship of cultural assets and other resources." (Levitt, 2008, p. 228). Others agree that the prioritisation of engagement may be detrimental to the collection itself. For example, Conn (2010) thought: "collections are entering a precarious position in museum life – vulnerable to being overshadowed, or even replaced, by technological, entertainment, and engagement efforts." (Conn, cited in Mancino, 2016, p. 149). It may be possible that collections-oriented practices can be improved, rather than compromised, through adopting more critically engaged, socially aware, and inclusive approaches to interpretation and displays, so long as the circumstances, practicalities and concerns of the individual institution are taken into account. Considering this raises questions around whether curatorial practice could be doing more to engage with audiences and society in the small museum, a central concern of my study.

1.10. Summary of chapters

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter I will explore the ways in which curating has traditionally been researched, highlighting the differences between types of curatorial scholarship, as well as establishing the study's connections to the social sciences. I will briefly discuss the trajectory of museum studies literature, and explain how museums and curating relate to postcolonial theory.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter 3 will focus on the research design implemented in this study: the rationale and motivations behind the decisions I made and the utilisation of grounded theory methods. I also explain the research ethics protocols followed and measures taken to ensure the data and analysis could be undertaken as reliably as possible.

Chapter 4: Curator Perceptions of Audiences

This chapter provides a contextual introduction to the participants of this study and their museums in the South West region. I present empirical examples to evidence the perceptions and expectations held by the interviewed curators about small museum practices, how they experienced their roles, and their assumptions they have about audiences and audience-related work.

Chapter 5: Curator Engagement in Practice

Chapter 5 examines the barriers and challenges to audience-related practices, as expressed by the interviewed curators, and the impact of internal and external factors on their audience engagement capacities. It is also concerned with the ways in which curatorial engagement with audiences manifests in the small museum in practice and the ways in which the curators evidenced and communicated this. I present a spectrum of practice, whereby the different approaches to audience-related work, as described by the curators, in order to illustrate the complex and nuanced set of contributing factors to this.

Chapter 6: Division and Hierarchy: objects and facts, people and ethics

In Chapter 6 I examine the curators' accounts in relation to broader social, and postcolonial, contexts. The chapter also looks towards the ethical implications of the ways in which the curators approach some key aspects of their practice, relating to national heritage and identity, social history, the impact of location, and some of the racialised aspects of museum practice.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: Developing Postcolonial Ethics in the Small Museum

In conclusion, the final chapter seeks to problematise the interpreted outcomes of the research in postcolonial and ethical contexts, illustrating how some small museum curatorial practices, as exemplified by the interviewed curators operating in the geographical region of the South West of England, either appear to support, or may continue to negate, the development of a postcolonial ethics for English museum practice. It will also demonstrate how the conclusions drawn are informed by history, societal climate, curatorial expectations, and the terrain of the museum sector. I identify some of the potential and underlying problems of small museum practice, with particular regard to some perceptions of audiences in the profession. Finally, I discuss the implications of curatorial control and choice in terms of ethics, when considered in a postcolonial context, and posit the implications of utilising 'racialised' reflexivity in contemporary curatorial practice.

Chapter 2. | Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the interconnectivity between museology, sociology and postcolonial theory. It also highlights the concept of decolonising museums and its relevance to small museum practices in the South West of England. It will also situate small museum curatorial practice in England in scholarship to date, marking the significance of this study and its contribution to museological and sociological research.

Firstly, I will discuss how curatorial practice has been researched traditionally, and in comparison to this research. I will then situate small museum research in British and sociological contexts, highlighting the key research themes that have emerged in the literature. This leads into a discussion of the trajectory of museum studies, from 'old' museology and its tenets, tracing the development from practical and object-oriented studies to more socially and ethically concerned critiques. A prominent feature of this study is how the findings relate in a postcolonial context, therefore it contributes to a developing field of postcolonial museum research, sociological enquiry into the practices of small museums in England, and 'curatorial criticism' (O'Neill, 2007, p. 37).

2.2. Curatorial practice research

The position of museums in the UK is becoming increasingly recognised by scholars and museum practitioners as being situated within a postcolonial social sphere (Chambers, et al., 2014; Kirchberg, 2016; Kolb and Richter, 2017). Alongside this seemingly recent development, is also the acknowledgement that museum curatorial practice not only generally operates at a distance from postcolonial thought, but that, for museums and their curators to engage in postcolonial praxis, a critical, collaborative, and interdisciplinary approach is required (McGrath, 2002).

Critical interrogation of small museum curatorial perspectives with regards to audience engagement in practice has, to date, been an underdeveloped area of research in the UK, and is something my research has set out to explore. However, identification of awareness of and engagement with 'postcolonial' issues in small museum practices

became evident in the interviews I conducted with ten curators from small museums in England, on the topic of audience engagement. Research on this additional phenomenon is even more scant in studies of UK museums. To examine the arising issues more closely, this thesis utilises a postcolonial reading of curatorial perspectives on audience engagement. Consistent with this approach, I engage with the fields of sociology, museology, and postcolonial theory, to discuss the ethical implications of the curators' perceptions on their individual and collective practices, and to further our understanding of the limitations of and potentialities for developing postcolonial thought into practice in the small, regional, English museum, in a postcolonial context.

Investigations into curatorial practice have tended to focus on curators of contemporary art. A study comparable to mine was conducted by O'Neill (2007). His thesis consisted of numerous interviews with contemporary art curators about changes in their independent practices, alongside practical exhibit case studies and a historiography of contemporary curatorial practice debates in Britain and Europe from 1987 to 2007. The interviews culminated in the published book, Curating Subjects, (2007). Similarly, Thea (2009) also explored developments in art curatorial practice through conducting of ten interviews with contemporary art curators, and practising curators have contributed to this body of work, such as Obrist (2011). The focus of this curatorial scholarship is predominantly about the world stage of contemporary art practice, with bienniales, blockbuster exhibitions, and the art market arising as key themes. Postcolonial developments have been engaged with in these texts, provided by the dialogue of prominent international curators, like the Nigerian curator, Okwui Enwezor (1963-2019). In terms of curatorial developments in museums, Niemojewski (2016, p. 10) claimed that the art historian and curator, Harald Szeemann (1993-1995), re-appropriated the role of museum curator in the 1960s, developing it from a static and institution-bound curator to independent auteur.

The existing studies differ from mine in several ways however. Most notable is that mine converses with museum curators rather than art curators, none of whom hold the same amount of international fame or institutional clout as their subjects do, and my participants were working within one or more small institutions at the time of

interview, rather than operating independently. Instead of an international setting, the curators in this study have limited exposure and operate in a regional context, the South West of England. Where O'Neill gathered perspectives from his participants regarding broader developments in art curating, my study specifically focuses on curatorial interventions and interactions in response to audience engagement. O'Neill described his semi-structured interviews as "evidential historical accounts" pertaining to developments in practice (2007, p. 13). The interviews in my study are concerned with giving the curators freedom to express themselves, to give them an outlet to talk about navigating audience engagement demands in practice. My study can however be considered as, to use O'Neill's term: 'curatorial criticism', "in which the curator becomes a central subject of critique" (2007, p. 37).

2.3. Small museum research in the UK

A recent investigation into small museums in England was produced by Candlin (2016), who remarked: "small independent single-subject museums – which I call micromuseums – certainly transformed the sector, they attracted very little scholarly attention." (ibid., p. 1). Based on visits to small museums around the UK, her account provides an introductory historical background to the prevalence of smaller venues that popped up from the 1970s onwards, in addition to some of the challenges they face with particular regard to funding bodies and achieving recognised museum status. While I appreciate the focus Candlin placed on giving small, English museums a spotlight, her claims of their transformation of the sector were not explicitly substantiated in her work, beyond expression of her regard and fondness for them. Candlin believed that small museums were not worthy of academic study nor should they be held to the same standards as other, more regulated, museums. Furthermore, not only is their study "utterly impractical" and "unproductive" (ibid., p. 13), she implies museum researchers may be wrong to criticise their practices at all:

> "For commentators who review models of museum practice, highlight innovative institutions, and are committed to improving ethical and educational operations, there is literally nothing to write about. One could, of course, detail the venues' failings with respect to professional standards but

these museums are not institutions. They are run by a handful of people, often for no or little economic reward and finding fault in their work would have a very personal tenor." (ibid., p. 14), (my emphasis underlined).

Although not presented as an academic study, Candlin's approach exemplifies a clear lack of reflexivity, and one can infer from her book that she upholds the assumption that the general visitor is white. For example, when recollecting her visit to the Vintage Wireless Museum in West Dulwich, Candlin described an interaction with the owner: "A 1938 cabinet radio that has automatic tuning locates the nearest station and immediately begins broadcasting a Bollywood soundtrack. 'Take-away music' he remarked." (ibid., p. 37), yet provides no further commentary or discussion of the racialised implications of the owner's statement. Reflecting on her visit, Candlin claimed that concepts of class, gender, age and history, were influential to the museum's formation. However, one can also observe the omission of 'race' and national traditions from those formative conditions (ibid., p. 42):

> "the museum and the collections are situated with respect to a particular individual and, crucially, one who is placed with respect to class, gender, age, and to the history of twentieth-century British manufacture. It is somebody's collection and it has been formed under particular economic and social conditions."

Had the author considered multiple perspectives – alongside their own – this account of the museums chronicled may have been markedly different and less biased towards their own Northern, and white-racialised, roots. Candlin's account of the small museums of Britain is predominantly formulated from descriptive analysis, personal experiences, interactions with museum staff, and her preferences, rather than interpretative analysis. Though she does not make claims to the latter, the fact that she did not acknowledge her own positionality demonstrates the reflexive neglect – and consequently a significant limitation – in this work. It is congruent, however, with her own belief that small museums should not be examined with scholarly rigour. In contrast, I share Weil's conviction that small museums can - and should - be viewed critically and held to account in terms of ethical responsibility (1995). For all their

nuances, small museums are still museums and no longer private clubs regardless of their size. It would be unethical, a false advertisement – and bizarre – for any other explicitly public organisation, be it voluntary, charitable, or corporate, to simply disregard their commitments, or expect to be exempt from practicing the kind of work they have agreed to do. Candlin did, however, acknowledge the disparity in recognition between curatorial work and that of other museum staff, indicating an institutional divide between curators and other museum stakeholders (2016, p. 43). This traditional divide, where curators appear to be held in regard and recognition above others in the museum profession, has been acknowledged throughout museological scholarship (Dobbs and Eisner, 1987; Pollock et al., 2007; Viau-Courville, 2017). As Kaitavuori (2013, p. xi) confirmed: "the division of labour between curating and educating has been described as caring for objects versus caring for people".

Some have called for curators to recognise the benefits of engaging with audiences (Lumley et al., 1988; Falk and Dierking, 1992, p. 37; Lavine, 1992). One of the perceived benefits amongst these authors is the positive impact that consideration of audiences, curatorially, may have on museum practices in general. For example, Lavine (1992, p. 140) stated that curatorial engagement with audiences "could lead to fundamental, curator-driven renovations of museum practice." How curators might enact positive and ethical changes in museum practice will be considered in this thesis, particularly the ways in which the participating curators saw themselves in relation to the phenomena of hierarchy, tradition, expectations, and audiences and the actions they choose to take in practice.

2.4. Sociology and museum studies

It is recognised that there is no clear-cut body of literature where sociological research is applied to the study of museums that might provide an entry into my study (Fyfe & Jones, 2016), although Kirchberg (2016) claimed that existing museum-related branches of theory, such as museology, may contain sociological elements albeit not explicitly ascribed. Writing in 1993, Zavala spoke of the potential for the study of museums, noting that "even though they share many elements with other cultural discourses, [museums] are still awaiting their own interdisciplinary research tradition

despite their inherently interdisciplinary nature." (Zavala, 1993). According to Kirchberg (2016), the study of museums from a sociological perspective had not yet made it into mainstream museological research – either in Britain or more globally – and she claims that when museum research has entered into the sociological realm, its lines of inquiry have not been particularly social, but rather have had a more organisational or commercial agenda. The rigour of evaluative practices for example, whereby museum visitors are often organised into categorical data segments such as those typical of engagement surveys, has also been criticised for neglecting to account for intersectional cultural characteristics and prioritising objective rather than subjective results (Hanquinet, 2013).

One example where museology has adapted a museo-sociological thread of inquiry, can be seen in the rise and prevalence of 'visitor studies' in the 1990s, a brand of museum research concerned with the visitor experience. Prominent topics of study, such as audience learning styles (Bicknell & Farmelo, 1993; Hein, 1998); museum visits as experiential processes (Falk & Dierking, 1992; Henry, 2000), and the significance of evaluation methods (McManus, 1996; Pekarik, 1997), are testament to that. Hood acknowledged the growing interest in visitor experiences in her account of the practice at the time, in 1992:

> "Merely analyzing demographics and participation patterns will not reveal what people care about in their leisure experiences […]. Sometimes museum staff get so caught up in the idea that people should come to the museum to learn that they forget that most people go to the museum to have a good time, in whatever way they define that phrase. It may include learning; having a challenge of new experiences, sharing the event with people they care about, participating actively, doing something worthwhile for themselves, and others, and enjoying comfortable, enhancing surroundings." (Hood, 1992, p. 21).

Like Hood, a growing number of museum scholars in the 1990s also saw the value of research in, about, and for, the museum profession, and that it needed a departure from the notion of museums as private cabinets of curiosities and recognising them instead as relational sites of social interaction, cultural production. Some,

incorporating cultural studies, critically questioned the nature and origins of museums, particularly with regards to the concepts of 'nation', and 'community', and established that museums are also sites of politics, power and ideology (Duncan, 1991; Pointon, 1994; Bennett, 1994; Zukin, 1995). Lawrence (1993, p. 117) noted that 'visitor studies' in fact began around 100 years ago, in the 1920s: "Museums began evaluating their practices in the 1920s, when many were under pressure to justify funding. Stress on their educational role had begun to be writ large in their rhetoric." This raises the question of whether museum curatorial practice has been influenced by the museum studies that have developed since the 1990s. Critics of the lack of coherence or rigour in existing applications of sociological methods to museum research advocate a more inclusive, collaborative, subjective-value-led approach to curating, in addition to reinforcing the underlying need for critical, sociological and reflexive research about, and conducted by, museums in the UK, as I will now describe.

Established in 1966 in England, academics from the Museum Studies department at the University of Leicester have led the charge in supporting and producing museum studies that engaged with wider societal issues, and their work has been formative to the museum studies landscape of scholarship we have today. Across the 1990s and 2000s, a wealth of publications were produced by scholars, such as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill and Richard Sandell, on the topics of museums and their societal and epistemological impacts. In 2003 Gordon Fyfe, Kevin Hetherington and Susan Pearce launched the journal, Museum and Society, which sought to combine social sciences, humanities and museum practice, the legacy of which continues today (Museum and Society, 2021). The emphasis on 'people' as well as objects in museum culture from the 1960s coincided with critical movements in the arts, such as a resistance to traditional and formal aesthetics (Spalding, 1986); and the emergence of post-structuralism which unravelled the idea of the innately-gifted auteur by drawing attention to the ways in which collateral socio-cultural elements are formative to creativity and expression (Bourdieu and Darbel; 1969). However, contemporary curatorial research continues to support and perpetuate the concept of a curator as an autonomous, authorial figure, and insists that the practice of curating is creative,

outspoken and experimental: "the new curator dexterously thrives in the neoliberal global economy" (Niemojewski, 2016, p. 11).

The post-1960 developments in discourse can be summarised as part of a 'social turn' (Buurman, 2017).[16] The emphasis on the experiences of visitors and the accountability of museums to their publics, rather than the didactic success of museum exhibits and subsequent commercial and reputational status, inspired a wave of evaluative methods, analyses and speculations in the 1990s, all of which underwent varying levels of critique, problematisation and recognition of the sector's neglect in more mainstream sociological and cultural research. This burgeoning research into visitor experience in the 1990s was to continue on in the following decades. It was an iteration of the earlier and noted work of Shettel and Screven, whose 'systematic study of museum visitors' began in 1968, although interest in visitor studies has been traced back to the late nineteenth century (Bitgood & Loomis, 2012).[17]

The shift in attitudes to research that was more critical and interrogative of museums, curators, and their responsibilities, noted to have emerged in the 1960s (Viau-Courville, 2017), was best captured in Peter Vergo's 1986 signalling of a new phase of museology, termed: New Museology. When considered together with developments in the social sciences in the 1980s, which was becoming increasingly concerned with feminism, and the rise of postcolonial theory, the social turn to new museological practice can be viewed as part of a transdisciplinary wave of critical and humanistic scholarship concerned with our cultural institutions and publics. Specific to this thesis, museological and postcolonial discourse are understood as both theoretical and historical backdrop for the museum curatorial practice explored in the curator interviews I conducted.

---

[16] Buurman (2017 acknowledged a number of socially-oriented 'turns' that occurred since the 1990s, in particular in the field of curating.
[17] Bitgood and Loomis (2012) provide a comprehensive overview of the development of what is known in the museums sector as 'visitor studies', with particular regards to Chan Screven's 50-year-long influence on our understanding of museums and their audiences.

Forays into this subject matter did take place earlier. Bourdieu and Darbel's study of art consumption and relationships between the public and art, published in 1969, was a landmark investigation into taste, art galleries, the public, and curatorial practice in France. Art history was also impacted by this sense of social awareness, exemplified in Barrell's examination of politics and culture in British art between 1700-1850, (1992), and captured more broadly by Harrison et al. (1993). The 1980s in particular saw commentary on British, and specifically English, cultural and art practices (Thompson, 1984; Blatti, 1987; Lumley, 1988; and Vergo, 1989), although this was often presented in the form of instructional guidance for museum professionals and scholars, rather than as sociological works. Nevertheless, this literature did involve some critiques of practice and curatorship, and engaged with the impact of museums on visitors and society as a result. A broad trajectory of museological literature can be understood as follows: strata and classificatory based, influenced by the reputability of science, anthropological research and the developing canon of Western art history, to collector and object-focused, sometimes in the form of autobiographies and memoirs (Gombrich, 1955; The Museum of East Asian Art, 1993; Levy, [1977] 2003). Connoisseurship, taste and practical recommendations for museum professionals were also topics explored in relation to museums in the twentieth century (Shettel and Reilly, 1966; Bourdieu and Darbel, 1969; Thompson et al, 1984). This resulted in the socially motivated and evaluative museum studies in the 1990s, signifying emerging critique which expanded to include issues of globality (Coombes 1994; Sandell, 2007) and critical discussions of the ethical implications for museums and society (Duncan, 1991; Macdonald and Fyfe, 1996; Edson, 1997; Marstine, 2013). Twenty-first century museum discussions are increasingly concerned with the tensions between disruption and censorship and a turn towards collaborative practice, decolonisation and activism (as found in: Simon, 2010; Ashley, 2014; Kolb and Richter, 2017; Janes and Sandell, 2019).

2.5. Museology: old, new, now

Vergo ([1989] 2000), defined 'museology' as: "the study of museums, their history and underlying philosophy, the various ways in which they have, in the course of time, been

established and developed, their avowed or unspoken aims and policies, their educative or political or social rôle." He also described the need for sociological inquiry into museums, calling for "a radical re-examination" of their functions and encompassing the developments that were to begin in the 1990s in Britain (Vergo, [1989] 2000, pp. 3-4). Thus, the 'new museology' he presented was to break with the traditional study of museums, which predominantly dealt with issues of custodial responsibility, enlightenment-influenced stratification styles, operational processes and acquisition etiquette (as seen in Thompson et al., 1984). This discourse was relegated to and is now associated in the field of museums with 'old museology'. In the new museology then, Vergo and his peers sought to open lines of critical inquiry into the function and purpose of museums in Britain, rather than methods of museum practice, in response to a wider sense of critique towards museums that they observed. New museology itself has since been critiqued for perpetuating a sense of 'othering' as it generally continues to address issues of representation from a Eurocentric perspective. Engagement with cultural difference in the field of museology is increasingly concerned with the prominence of indigenous voices, examining whether 'community' engagement is making any real changes to more traditional curating practices and points to reflexivity as a contemporary, global, curatorial approach (Soares, 2020, pp. 53-59 & p. 65).

Considering the concepts of museology has been a fruitful aid in interpreting the responses of the interviewed curators, particularly as many of them exhibited attitudes and channelled expectations in their own practices that very clearly descended from the inherited traditions associated with 'old museology', as this thesis will demonstrate. Indeed, many cling to the hierarchical legacies of the didactic museum and authorial museum curator, and some even still look upon the early era of Britain's museums with a fondness. Arnold (2006, p. 258), in his monograph about the practices of the early English museum for example, proposes that we revert to some of the principles of seventeenth-century curatorship, concluding that the scientists who helped form England's museums in the seventeenth century were his 'heroes'. Museum practices from the seventeenth through to nineteenth centuries in particular, upheld and reinforced imperialist, anthropological pseudoscientific claims that people

of colour were closer to animals than human, which supporting that civility was exclusively found in white Europeans (Coombes, 1994; Prösler, 1996; Procopio, 2019). Arnold's view unashamedly contrasts with contemporary conceptions of society and sidesteps any ethical accountability to diasporic stakeholders or anti-racist museum practice. It also demonstrates a case of privilege, where one is able to ignore prejudicial practices as they are deemed to happen outside of one's own environment.

2.6 Museum studies and postcolonial ethics

Thompson (1984) provided an early contribution to what can now be understood as the sociological element to museology. Of the scholarship that occurred in the 1990s, some of these interrogations have a postcolonial flavour, such as Coombes's *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination* (1994) which explored the problematic ramifications of English museums' contributions to our understanding of African culture and peoples through their (mis)presentation. The Epilogue of Coombes' book is, in fact, entitled: Inventing the 'Post-Colonial', and she discusses the problematic nature of defining and progressing the 'post-colonial'.

Hooper-Greenhill (1995) and others explored the responsibilities that museums have, including English museums, towards their visitors in terms of what messages are communicated and how; raised questions around expertise and plurality of voice; and focused on how museums might attempt to bridge the divide between audiences and collections, in *Museum, Media, Message*. Macdonald and Fyfe's (1996) *Theorizing Museums: Representing identity and diversity in a changing world*, engaged with the globalised status of museum practice, and aimed to elucidate the ways in which museums can – and should – be responding to an environment of multiple voices and experiences. Studies from this period progressively urged museums to reconsider their function and social responsibilities (such as Weil, 1995), and museology took on a more ethical and sociological focus, most notably to be found in Edson's (1997) *Museum Ethics*.

Sandell (2002) in *Museums, Society and Inequality,* raised distinctly postcolonial questions around 'difference', paying attention to the dynamics of 'race', later

expanding this line of questioning alongside other prejudicial issues, such as disability, in *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference*, (2007.) Spalding's (2002) critique of curatorial practice, *The Poetic Museum*, also engaged with the ethical neglect in practices associated with traditional curating. Between 1984-2002 therefore, a wealth of exploration into the ethical, sociological, and postcolonial aspects of museum curating in Britain can be found.

However, this body of literature eluded the curators of the small museums I interviewed, as it has, I suspect, many other practicing museum professionals who have not found the time or interest to give it attention. Edson posited that: "The problem with some museum workers could simply be that they do not see room for improvement [...]. They do not choose to react to the challenges around them" (2007, p. 172). Marstine (for example, 2005 and 2014) has since built on Edson's enquiries into museum ethical practice.

Watson et al. (2007) explored the ideas around museum responsibilities to their audiences by focusing on a selection of global museum case studies written by various museum scholars, some of which engaged with 'race' exhibits, but which take place in Westernised countries such as Australia and Canada. Merriman (cited in Watson, 2007, p. 335) described a London-based project, where recognition of diverse communities was overt, evidencing progressive change in the sector:

> "museums are realizing that, in order to maintain their claims to be responsive to the needs of their communities, they must make themselves relevant to the diversity of populations that make up their constituency. Second, some museums are beginning to realize that, in the interests of historical balance, they must begin to represent the previously neglected presence and contribution of minority ethnic communities in their areas."

The issue here is that smaller, peripheral institutions, may not see such diversity in their own constituencies, and therefore remain exempt from exploring 'historical balance'. The larger question then, is what – or who – might prompt a change in

established practices and attitudes in small museums. My study contributes to this line of enquiry.

2.7 Relating postcolonialism thought to museums

Postcolonial thought in museum studies in Britain can be traced back to the period between 1980s-1990s, alongside the 'cultural turn' (Du Gay and Pryke, 2002) and emphasis on visitor experience and agency (Farmelo and Bicknell, 1993; Hooper-Greenhill, 1995). This timespan marks the beginning of a significant period of questioning around the social function, accountability and effectiveness of organisational practices and cultural institutions such as museums, including to whom they serve and the ethical implications of this (Du Gay and Pryke, 2002; Grey, 2014). The period also demonstrates a turn from instructional museum scholarship (old museology) to critical interrogations, covering global, social, prejudicial, ethical and, in some cases, postcolonial, concerns.

Postcolonialism can be understood in a number of ways, but it can be simply defined as 'after colonialism' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). Its most significant tenet is the concept that our current state of affairs cannot be understood without acknowledging the impacts of, relationship with, and consequences of imperialist thought and the West's colonising practices throughout history (Elam, 2019). Postcolonial theory began as a literary movement in the 1980s of which Spivak (1982), Said (1978), and Bhabha (for example, 1983), were ground-breaking proponents. For Spivak, who occupies both a position of marginality and a place in Western academia, it is precisely this occupied 'middle' from which postcolonial theorists can, and should, operate. Spivak's arguments lean towards making changes and differences from within the established system, which one can not fully reject so long as one is a part of that system (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012).

Spivak introduced the concept of questioning the established dichotomic canon of Western versus marginal literature, and deconstructing what constitutes each side, and she posited that postcolonial thought requires a process of deconstruction, rather than, say, replacement or erasure of what has come before. Spivak's approach has

often sought to raise questions, rather than answer them, about our inherited Western notions of history, heritage and the cultural products and knowledge and sets of ideas that have been valued and accepted synonymously, such as the literary canon (Spivak, 1982, 1988; Jackson and Mazzei, 2012). Edward Said is most known for his coining of the term 'orientalism' in 1978, where he discussed European representations and prejudiced misrepresentations of the East in visual culture and its use, in both the Western imaginary and in physical terms, to legitimise a fetishism and homogenisation of Eastern countries and cultures, as a means of obtaining power and dominance (Hall et al., 2013, pp. 249-257). However, in 1994, Said also wrote about the significance of narrative in England's modern perceptions of itself as a nation, which is replete with nostalgia for a constructed reality, moulded during the process of British colonisation and reified throughout the nineteenth century. Said (1993, 1994) essentially argued that the influence of imperialism on modern society must be recognised as the two are intertwined. For Bhabha, an arising problem that helps to maintains a level of apparent stasis in us coming to terms with the West's imperial past, its effects today, and, most significantly, its impact on people, is the phenomena of ambivalence. Ambivalence, he claims, is the enemy of any kind of decolonial change (Bhabha, 1983, p. 18):

> "it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalisation; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed."

An example of an ambivalent strategy is the concept of being 'colourblind', where the 'race' of somebody is ignored, overlooked, and unacknowledged, bypassing any issues of 'race' altogether. This is increasingly acknowledged as a counterintuitive process, and one that can only benefit the person whose skin colour happens to be the lightest shade. 'Colourblindness' is criticised as a practice of avoidance and ignorance of the social symbolism and connotations of one's 'race', and therefore counterproductive towards positive change. Furthermore, the issue of multiculturalism, if portrayed through the lens of 'colourblindness', denies intersectional features of life for people

of colour and renders "social inequalities invisible" (Hill Collins, 2000, 2009, p. 26). So long as those with the dominant social status remain ambivalent to those with minority status, the 'fixity' of keeping the division between those groups will continue. Bhabha (1983) also made the point that the exact function and impact of such ambivalence is something that requires more attention, of which it has had little in the past.

2.8. Acknowledging racialised positionality

The idea of the disavowal of 'race' and its impact has also been explored by Frankenberg (1993), in her interviews with white women in America, and Crenshaw et al.'s (2019) discussions around countering the 'colourblindness' problem. Frankenberg pointed out that white individuals often see racism as something external to themselves and resolved that collective action may be conducive to changing our senses of selves and our racialised identities, which includes attempting to understand and navigate the meaning and implications of 'whiteness'. Similarly, Crenshaw et al.'s argument is for us to accept the visibility of 'race' in society and its structures and reposition ourselves to 'see' our environment as historically racialised so that we might consider how to counter it. The issues raised through postcolonial thinking apply to the museums in this study in that they are cultural, social, and historical institutions in the West, that present a series of material and narrative representations about heritage and identity, for the public to consume.

A significant question for the study then, is not only how the curators perceive audiences and respond in practice, but how they perceive audiences in a postcolonial reality. On the constructed nature of 'race', Mills points out: "Western narratives have not told this story as a tale of political oppression. Either it has not been represented as political at all, but part of the natural order […] the distinctive reality of racial oppression as a political system has been ignored and marginalised." (Mills, 2000, pp. 448-449). Alongside their practical considerations of engaging with visitors, this study aims to examine how the interviewed curators perceived and responded to the wider social context in which they work, including their input into and control of the narratives their museums represent to the public (Edson, 1997).

Postcolonial thought also requires a realisation and acceptance of the fact that Western modernity was enabled by the exploitation and subjugation of black and brown people, the countries and cultures of whom were considered external to modern progress (Bhambra, 2011). Skin colour was an essentialised and contributing factor to the rhetoric of the West's perceived supremacy, whereby those without European features or complexions were subjected to discrimination and dehumanisation. In 2019, Procopio provided an overview of the racialised origins and implications of Western museum culture through tracing the practices of The Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, USA, from 1893 to 1969. While her piece is critical of the racist origins of curatorial practice in an American science museum, it also highlights the pervasiveness of white supremacist ideology[18] in museum culture more generally and, when considered as part of a larger body of postcolonial enquiry, it raises questions about how racism and racial supremacy continue to be manifested today, through visual representations in media, the historical narratives presented in museums and from the issues that arise during social events. To consider such matters 'postcolonially', is to recognise the construction of 'race' and its continuing impact as rooted in imperialist ideologies (Arendt, 1951; Gates Jr., 1985).

2.9. British postcolonial studies

In the UK, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy have been at the forefront of postcolonial theory. Hall is most recognised for his contributions to cultural studies, a branch of sociology that interrogates visual and cultural representations, and attempts to contextualise the resulting symbolism that we associate with what we perceive, particularly in relation to visual media. The interrogative nature of cultural studies also involves looking deeper for underlying causes and problems with representation, such as issues of racialisation and prejudice, and crosses over with the aims of postcolonial theory by its nature. Hall is considered to be one of the UK's most prominent postcolonial theorists, and the ideas he raised have directly engaged with the difficult topic of 'race' relations in Britain. In 1978, for example, he exposed the ways he saw British culture

---

[18] The perpetuation of a system of ideas, narratives, and rhetorics of 'white' as the dominant and superior 'race'.

reducing problems of 'race' to private and personal spheres, thus noting our collective and limiting failure to see how entrenched racialised matters are in our social interactions and daily lives (Hall, 1978). Over forty years later, this very acknowledgement remains largely unaddressed and continues to be a contentious – and resisted – topic in politics today, as exemplified in the controversy around the 2021 Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, where some scholars questioned the validity of the report (Chakrabortty, 2021).[19]

Gilroy also embarked on discussions around British identity, and what can be thought of as the 'neo-colonial' impact, that is, the modern iteration of economic, political, geographical, and psychological colonisation that continues to occur in this post-colonial era (1987, 2005). Indeed, for Gilroy, understanding Britain's colonial roots is conducive to addressing our current problems, but that often when this approach is adopted, the result is a protective layer of whitewashing to temper the truth (2005, [no page number available]). Gurminder Bhambra, a Professor of Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies in the UK, has argued for a reappraisal of history in support of interconnectivity between countries and cultures, rather than separation and the elevation of some, and she encourages critique and interrogation of the West's contemporaneous self-removal and imposition onto historical accounts, in addition to examining the colonial impact on sociological research practices (2007, 2014, 2021). My research draws on the contribution of these scholars in establishing a postcolonial lens through which to view, understand, and problematise the responses from the

---

[19] Since the time of submitting this thesis (November 2021), the government response 'Inclusive Britain' (2022) was published, which did acknowledge that racism in Britain exists. The report generally argues that the reasons for many social disparities between ethnic groups "are more likely to be caused by factors other than racism and discrimination.". Some of the evidence-based claims they offer appear to support a somewhat colourblind, meritocratic, position, whilst acknowledging that opportunities are not equal. Suggestions that the terminology of racism (such as 'white privilege') are open to debate, are placed next to sweeping statements such as "the vast majority of people share a positive commitment to ending racism" and "we all share a commitment to tackling negative disparities and building a fairer society for everyone.". There is not scope to analyse or critically discuss the report here, but it is clear that the topic of 'race' and its manifestations in contemporary British society remains an important and unresolved socio-political discussion.

interviewed curators about how they engage with audience-related work, and perhaps to recognise whether some of the common strategies, such as whitewashing, may be contributing to the experiences, perspectives and practices of the curators interviewed in this study.

2.10. Decolonisation

Through engaging with postcolonial theory, one also encounters the idea of 'decolonisation', an offshoot of postcolonialism that offers forms of rebuttal to the inherited 'norms' of Western modernity. Whilst maintaining their mutual significance, Knudsen et al. (2021, p. 9) differentiate between postcolonialism and decolonialism as follows: "Postcolonialism often hones in on symbolic marginalization, linguistic othering and aesthetic forms of resistance, while many decolonial thinkers emphasize the resultant global geopolitical hierarchy still persisting in our contemporaneity." The term has also increasingly appeared in Western museum discussions and discourse, and includes a series of debates around topics such as the repatriation of objects (Hicks, 2020), the display of human remains, and accurate representation of colonial and diasporic histories. Indeed, Kolb and Richter (2017, p. 5) described the concept of decolonising arts institutions as "one of the most urgent topics of our times".

Decolonising is part of postcolonial theory in that it aims to decentralise imperialist and colonial ideologies and frameworks: politically, economically, and conceptually; in institutions, in education, and in society, and is about transposing and transforming power relations from mono-lateral and monolingual to multilateral and multilingual (Sadaratnam, 2020). It is also in support of a connective global and international sense of humanity, rather than a hierarchical one with Western European values at the top and consequently requires new processes of re-humanising, re-normalising, and acceptance (Freire, 1971). Decolonialising, which I interpret as postcolonialism's verb, often requires action, such as 'decolonising' one's perspective (Thiong'o, 1986). To understand postcolonial theory, is to engage with its conceptual and theoretical line of thought. To decolonise is to act upon that line of questioning. Knudsen et al. (2021, pp. 7-8) acknowledge that decolonisation features several key assumptions: 'pluriversality' which, rather than a national or local remit, adopts an international and transnational

sense of heritage, place and social experience; a 'performative action element', whereby a process of decolonising becomes an active agent in practice; and 're-futuring', which focuses on a reduction in racial inequalities and an increase in diversity, through practices and thinking, the latter of which succinctly connects with contemporary museum ethical concerns. Considering how we may collectively progress towards a more hopeful and equitable future, museums have a social responsibility (Watson, 2007, p. 13), and should practice an ethical approach to work in order to "create a more just society" (Marstine, 2013, p. xix). As Karp wrote in 1991, "If the museum community continues to explore this multicultural and intercultural terrain consciously and deliberately, in spite of the snares that may await, it can play a role in reflecting and mediating the claims of various groups, and perhaps help construct a new idea of ourselves as a nation." Elsewhere, improving or helping society has been described as the very function of culture itself (Bourdieu and Darbel, 1991, p. 110). Decolonial debates in the UK are often centred around recognising – and working to negate – the lasting impacts of British colonialism and the imperial and Eurocentric superiority complex which is understood to be the root of systemic racism and racial inequality in British society.

2.11. Resistance to postcolonial theory

Some of the key strands of postcolonial theory, then, can be considered comparatively to the ethical responsibilities that museums in England have towards their audiences, and it will be important to bear these assumptions in mind throughout this thesis.

The assumptions are that: postcolonialism promotes a pluralistic outlook; supports a collective and interconnected interpretation of historical narratives and events; refers to a state after colonialism and the remnants of the past manifested in the present; and is concerned with deconstructing our inherited historical interpretations and cultural representations that promote imperial ideologies that stem from the colonial endeavour. Consequently, these tenets allow us to question the ethics of representation and audience engagement in small museum curatorial practice with an understanding that they operate in overtly racialised environments.

The current moment in museology, and indeed museum practice, is increasingly coming into contact with decolonising and postcolonial debates. 2020 for example, saw cultural institutions declaring support for the Black Lives Matter cause.[20] So it may be that museums and curatorial practice, alongside sociology, are participants in the latest revisiting of the racialised context of British society.

The focus on opening up historical narratives in order to more broadly represent England today however, is not without its dissenting voices. The call for what can be described as more ethical approaches in the arts, can appear to threaten expertise or put traditional technique at risk of erasure in an undesired act of rewriting the past. Some, for example, think that it is widely understood and accepted (as normal) that art history has never been broadly representational, and therefore notions of inclusivity are viewed as a questionable trend (Grosvenor, 2020).

Others have implied that placing social empathy and aims above object care and collections development is an example of the supremacy of "cultural leftism" (Appleton, 2007, p. 115). Appleton's scathing critique of socially-focused museum work presents discussion around counternarratives in museums as absurd. She explains that, from the 1960s in Britain, a surge of politically-charged voices sought to break down the rationality of the traditional museum, vying to undo the true purpose of the institution: "Expressed in various forms – postcolonial and feminist theories, post-modernism, Foucauldian theories of power relations – the cultural left undermined every attempt at objective truth and universality." (2007, pp. 115-116). The real threat, according to Appleton, is to the collections, as she stated: "Once a museum puts the perceived needs of the people at the heart of its work, the collection will quite naturally lose its importance and value." (ibid., p. 117).

In these cases, the argument is clear: art history, museum collections and practices, need not be changed by sociological – or social – concerns (Grosvenor, 2020; The Art Newspaper, 2020; & Appleton, 2007). Such firm standpoints however neglect the nuance of the museum's message, inhibit exploration of the deeper issues connected

---

[20] See, for example, Adams, (2021) *Black Lives Matter: One Year On.*

to objects, and deny the social, and public, duties of museum work. Whether a balance between the two sides can be found will be considered in the responses of the interviewed curators. The growing interest in decolonising museums suggests that curatorial responsibilities can no longer be carried out as a siloed activities, hidden from the demanding eyes of the public, sociologists, historians, and postcolonial scholars.

Another form of resistance to structural change within, or through, the museums sector is manifested in the sense of invisibility placed on smaller institutions, when compared to their larger counterparts, such as national museums, and a lack of ethical and critical enquiry into such places as a result. An example of this is manifested in a perceived lack of support from sector organisations and funding bodies Candlin (2016, p. 11). The extent to which curatorial practice is changing in light of social engagement demands, responsibilities, and opportunities, and how the interviewed curators feel about the topic will be explored within this thesis.

Postcolonial theory may make claims to promote ethical, democratic and anti-colonial approaches, however it has also been criticised for operating within, and utilising the advantages of, the imperialist, Western, system it claims to disrupt, which could thereby negate its aims. Nevertheless, looking to postcolonial theory and approaches to museum practice, analysis, and scholarship, provides opportunities to step towards making the invisible visible and breaking the silence that persists in the sector (Chambers, 2017, p. 242).

2.12. Representation of colonial narratives

Colonialism is an historical example of imperialist ideology in action. Yet the historical 'end' of Western colonial dominance did not mean that imperialism also ended. Postcolonial theory recognises that the old ideology "continues apace" (McLeod, 2000, p. 8). An example of the enduring legacy of colonialism into the modern era is the independence achieved by colonies of empire, such as India and Pakistan in 1947, and Jamaica and Trinidad as recently as 1962 (Ibid., p. 9). It stands to reason that the collective psyche of the Asian and Caribbean diasporas in Britain today is emblazoned

with our postcolonial heritage. The felt effects of imperial ideology and the impact of colonialism on the individual was explored with great vigour by Fanon (1952, 1963), who communicated the pervasive power of representation on our understanding of the world and ourselves.

Let us consider the relationship between representation and lived experience in terms of the colonial historical narratives presented in British museums. There has been a tendency to report on the history of the British Empire and its colonial rule in our museums with a sense of pride and valour in the achievements made. Historical narratives in our towns and museums have celebrated white-skinned individuals, such as the philanthropists who contributed to the financial and social affluence in towns across the country, like Edward Colston (1636-1721). Alongside a rhetoric of honour and fortitude, the story of colonial Britain has also emphasised the nation's involvement in the abolition of slavery, of which William Wilberforce (1759-1833), a prominent British government official, has been long-credited as a proponent. Upon a fuller exploration however, albeit not a difficult one to conduct due to the wealth of commonwealth literature, diasporic, and critical texts that can be accessed, one finds that there was a history of rebellion and protest from the colonies, throughout the 200 years of the Western colonial practices that force-migrated and enslaved people (Gopal, 2020). This is not forgetting African American individuals such as Ida B. Wells (1862-1931) and Ellen Craft (1826-1891) and William Craft (1824-1900), who visited the South West of England during their own campaigns in the nineteenth century.

According to McLeod: "Colonial representations will tend to support a view of the world that justifies the continuing legitimacy of colonialism." (2000, p. 144). Although he was describing the principles of undertaking a postcolonial reading of literature, this critical line of questioning can be applied to the practices of museums. For example, the history of black resistance and protest from the post-colonised diaspora has also continued to the present day, and is a formative part of Britain's heritage and identity (Dawson, 2007; Andrews, 2018, 2019) yet have not historically featured in museum narratives with any prominence. These untold histories are, however, currently gaining traction in some English museums. For example, in 2021 Liverpool's International

Slavery Museum has pledged, alongside National Museums Liverpool, to expand stories relating to Black History in Britain and colonial legacies, through exhibits and programming around their collections (Museums Association, 2021).

2.12.1 Decolonising museums in the South West of England

Two regional examples are found in in the town of Bath, Somerset. In 2021, Bath Abbey and the Holburne Museum revealed two displays engaging with the colonial context of their venues. The former, was an exhibition entitled 'Monuments, Empire & Slavery', which ran from 26th May to 30th September 2021, revealing "the links between some of the people commemorated on the Abbey's ledgerstones and wall tablets, and the British Empire." (Bath Abbey, 2021). They claimed that the exhibit was produced in response to the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 and that this demonstrates their commitment to developing practices against racism (Bath Abbey, 2021). The latter was a permanent redisplay of a plantation ledger from Barbados that was in the Holburne Museum's collection and was once owned by the collector's family. The display, the first of its kind at the venue, presented Holburne family links to the slave trade, to plantations in the Caribbean, and provided some social history, highlighting diasporic individuals with connections to Bath and Somerset. In a film featuring responses from young people from Bath, one of the visitors revealed that the display had made them reconsider the entire museum (Holburne Museum / Malthouse Films 2021). This demonstrates the power of making a small change to a museum's permanent collection displays, in a postcolonial direction, and provides an example of the transformative potential of such narratives with regards to audience impact. Unlike Bath Abbey, the Holburne Museum did not make it clear if their display was produced in response to Black Lives Matter, but made the exhibit available online and consequently programmed decolonisation-focused creative writing workshops in connection to the display (Holburne Museum, 2021). Elsewhere in the South West, Bridport Museum and Lyme Regis Museum in Dorset published statements on their websites that acknowledged the relevance of their locations to the slave trade, both acknowledging the lack of attention the topic has received prior to 2020:

"Even if it was not a slave port, it doesn't mean that Bridport was not entangled with slavery. There has been shockingly little research on Dorset's involvement with the slave trade and that history's effect on continuing racism within local towns and villages" (Bridport Museum, 2020)

"Dorset still has an olde worlde image, an idyllic land of thatched cottages and shepherds, cut off from the rest of the world. […] In fact the county has a long history of trade with far-off places, and people from all over the world have been settling here for hundreds of years. The history of this is only just starting to be studied." (Lyme Regis Museum, 2020)

This shows a growing awareness of postcolonial concepts within the museums sector in England, however such interventions are not without their issues. Bath Abbey's exhibit is temporary; the Holburne Museum's display, though permanent, is limited in scope, providing a brief historical overview; and the online statements made do not evidence how those stories will be further explored or presented in practice. One could interpret their actions as performative to the moment. Describing a situation where a small museum from another English region appeared to acknowledge awareness of its imperial connections, Wintle (2017, pp. 106-107) recounted: "when West Berkshire Museum offered its Tibetan collections to a war-torn Liverpool Museum in 1950, it was typical of many smaller museums that had decided to move away from collecting and caring for world cultures exhibits in favour of a new emphasis on local social history, assuming that "local", "British" history did not include the "other". This could be understood as a form of 'whitewashing' – a means of erasing, or silencing the diasporic voice, so as to maintain – or reiterate in this case – a white-dominant narrative. Wintle continued: "In these ways, museums acted as devices through which those involved could retain their former imperial identities."

Decolonising museums requires long-term, sustained commitment to improvement and development which may prove difficult for smaller institutions with limited capacity or the direction to prioritise such topics (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012 & 2020).

2.12.2. Implications of postcolonial theory for museums

Postcolonial theory also requires undertaking a process of reflexivity about one's own internalised assumptions and expectations, and the impact of our actions: whether we choose to uphold and perpetuate imperialist values, or take action to support positive change (Blauner, 1969; McLeod, 2000, p. 17). In the case of the museum profession, reflexive engagement with interpretive practices is relatively under-examined, particularly in relation to curatorial practice. If adopted, it may allow for critical interrogation and constructive development of the narratives and ideologies curators may be inadvertently supporting. McLeod describes postcolonial reflexivity as a means of "rethinking" (2000, p. 34). Taking a postcolonial approach to museum work in England may benefit museum staff and audiences through deepening our collective understanding of national identity; inspire further acts of 'rethinking'; and provide fuller and richer stories, supporting a pluralistic, rather than universal, sense of history. Reconsideration of the museum's presentation of diasporic histories and engagement with audiences in a postcolonial context is a feature of this thesis and was raised during the interviews with curators about their own practices. Given the climate of limitations in which small museums are thought to operate (Thompson, 1986; Watson et al., 2007; Candlin, 2016) acts of thinking and reflecting are achievable tasks and do not require funding.

Thiong'o (2016, 00:35:00), who was primarily concerned with the impact of colonialism on African literature, described the aftermath of colonialism as a "metaphysical empire", whereby the language and ideology of colonialism has outlived the physical manifestations of empire. This language, he explained, consists of narratives, social imagination, ideas and culture (Thiong'o, 2014). Thus, the narratives of England today and our collective imaginations and identities are imbued with the remnants of empire. Through the narratives presented in our museums, ideologies are perpetuated, reinforced, supplied, and supported.

My thesis, at its core, is concerned with how curators of small museums respond to audiences in their practices in the South West and aimed to examine the sociological

implications of them. However, prompted in response to the presence of 'race' in our interviews, the thesis has taken a specifically critical stance.

2.12.3. Decolonising sociology and challenging 'single-story' narratives[21]

Claims to universality in heritage and research have been criticised for sustaining notions of white supremacy, as Connell (2018, p. 404) stated: "in practice this epistemology provides an alibi for Eurocentrism." There is a privilege in being able to engage with and explore other narratives in Western knowledge institutions: the benefit of a distinct level of freedom to express ideas and change, or disrupt, the conceptual 'canon', whether it be redefining a concept such as 'modernity', 'diversity', or even history.

Describing the difficulties of working with 'monolithic narratives' in psychology in the USA, Quiros, Varghese and Vanidestine (2020) argued for the need to acknowledge racism, 'race' and 'whiteness' in trauma mental health practices, as a way to address and disrupt a profession and field of research that is predominantly dismissive of structural, cultural, and political inequity. The result of such ambivalence to racism as a source of psychological trauma is just that: ambivalence to racism as a source of psychological trauma. Utilising Critical Race Theory, they accept the premise that we all occupy a racialised society, which therefore should be interrogated if our aims as researchers or practitioners are to be of use to that society. The point of departure, they recommend, is to not only acknowledge 'race' in research and practice, in order to expose "the ways race and racism has become ordinary in the lives of PoC", but to acknowledge whiteness, thereby understanding that all people are part of the same racialised society, spaces, and systems (2020, pp. 163-165). Put simply, without associating something with 'whiteness', there is no 'non-whiteness'. In Britain, whiteness is distinctly distant from being associated with words like 'ethnic', 'marginalised', 'minority', or 'non-', (perhaps with the exception of travelling communities and immigrants who are racialised as 'white' but are marginalised for

---

[21] 'Single-story' is a reference to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2019 TED talk entitled, 'The danger of a single story'.

their differences to the white majority) and is more likely – to generalise common assumption again – to be synonymous with 'normal', 'usual', 'majority', and in some cases, 'English'. Whiteness has its own set of visual codes, cultural indicators and social effects, as do all of the Western classifications articulated within the construct and context of 'race'.

In accordance with postcolonial scholars who have explained 'race', and whiteness, operate as visual and social systems of representation in society (Hall, 2013) and have warned us of the dangers of viewing others with invariance, or as stereotypes (Bhabha, 1983), we realise that telling a one-sided story in perpetuation can have dangerous, real-world consequences on people's lives. However, adopting a single-solution, or set of theoretical rules – such as critical race theory, postcolonialism, or feminism – to combat or address such an invariant epistemological stance, poses a similar, hegemonic problem: that one theory can solve one universal truth. This would, paradoxically, neglect the plurality of perspectives supported and encouraged by critical race theory, postcolonialism and feminism.

Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi (2008, pp. 2-12) recognised that "social sciences developed alongside the practice of racial stratification, in fact, they were developed as part of the system of racial stratification.", and they claimed their book, White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology, to be a "collaborative effort to attack White supremacy in contemporary research on race as well as in the methods most sociologists employ to examine, according to the logic that parades as "objectivity," the so-called race effect." They concluded that to consider 'race' in sociology is not to 'essentialize' but is more about becoming conscious. Therefore to be 'race' conscious is to embrace an epistemological shift away from traditional, restrictive, and white-biased methods. Elsewhere, 'indigenous'-produced research has been discussed in sociology and higher education, exemplified in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's Decolonizing Methodologies (2012); and the dominance of Western default language and terminology used in research has been questioned by scholars in a variety of fields (for example, Chow, 2014; Madowitz and Boutelle, 2014).

Progress in this area, that is, engagement with diasporic populations in research and cultural practices, as Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi (2008) have noted, has also often taken place as part of larger social movements in time: "The critique of what has been known as "the sociology of race relations" has thus been intrinsically connected to the politics of resistance and decolonization projects".[22] The contribution of this research therefore sits within a wider academic and social shift towards acknowledging and 'seeing' race (Crenshaw et al., 2019).

2.13. Decolonising my research

My intention is to take an approach to producing this research that reflects my perspective as a minority researcher. A woman of Indian-Caribbean descent working in the museum field in the UK, in addition to pursuing doctoral research into curatorial practice, are two truths that are in effect, an inadvertent act of decolonisation. 'Decolonising myself' for the purposes of this study meant recognising 'race' and choosing to respond to what 'race' implies in my research, and how it was/is manifested in the data I gathered. A first step was to reflect on the facets of 'race' within the context of the academic field/s I operate in (social sciences and museology) and within the confines of my professional practice (English museums). Secondly, it meant acknowledging and navigating the issues of 'race' that have been made visible, explicitly, implicitly, and historically, and then interpreting what those issues mean and say about the data, about my academic field, and about my practice. The research became personal. I explore the ways in which I navigated this in Chapter 3.

By breaking the traditional and imperially-formed white, male spaces of both academia and museums in Britain, then, I am an inherent decoloniser. Furthermore, my study can be understood as a contribution to British diasporic scholarship and minority-produced research. Conversing with postcolonial literature and authors concerned with decolonising, provided me with the necessary support as a minority researcher to work through my reflexive difficulties about my own position in relation to the people I had interviewed, of which nine out of ten were white, and the impact of some of their

---

[22] [page unknown].

statements. Inevitably, this impacted my interpretation. Other minority and diasporic writers have engaged in similar processes of self-reflection, particularly in literature, fiction, and poetry, such as Achebe, Thiong'o, Fanon, hooks, Lorde, and Zephaniah, as well as in research (for example, Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Another example is the British poet, musician and public speaker, Akala. In his polemical book, 'Natives: Race & Class in the Ruins of Empire', he demonstrates his reflexive understanding of his own positionality with regards to the postcolonial Britain he is critiquing (2019, pp. 287-308).

Merton described sociology as "primarily concerned with the relations between knowledge and other existential factors in the society or culture." (1973, p. 9) Contextualising my research 'problem' in sociological terms, the question can be simply understood as follows: how do small museum curators (insiders), perceive and value audiences (outsiders)? For the question to be explored in a sociological study, there are several assumptions that first need to be established. Firstly, the phenomenon must be deemed to exist. This relies upon the premise that there are insiders and outsiders in one's topic of study, and therefore an imbalance is present as these groups are not equal. This imbalance is the phenomenon. In this research, the curators interviewed embody the insider group, with "privileged access to knowledge" of their field, and the audience, including Britain's diaspora, is the outsider group; the phenomenon is driven by the perspectives of the interviewed curators i.e. the data (Merton, 1973, p. 105). The outsiders (the visitors) operate in a different place in the social and cultural structure of museums to curators. According to Merton's sociological paradigm (1973), different social spaces are subject to different perspectives, which can lead to conflicting perspectives and ultimately a sense of 'distrust' between social groups. Sociology, he posits, is the mechanism one can use to make sense of that distrust. In this case, the two groups (curators and audiences) existentially inhabit the same wider societal ecosystem in England, which, in line with postcolonial assumptions, has been historically informed by imperialist and white supremacist ideologies. This stance provides the contextual, social, backdrop to this study.

2.14. Summary: Literature review

A decolonisation movement has been claimed to have begun around 2000 and has been acknowledged as occurring in heritage practices and scholarship ever since (Knudsen et al., 2021, p. 8). However, the extent to which this has translated to English museum exhibits or curatorial habits is unclear and underexplored. As established, practices of decolonisation seek to disrupt the commonly accepted canon of Western progress, modernity, dominance and superiority, and to re-understand that we are part of a global environment. To rethink curatorial practice in such a way, for example, is to open up traditional, inflexible, and established ways of working to critique, to allow for possibilities that may shift the social benefit, even function, of the modern, small museum towards a state of equitable, pluralistic, anti-racist and global sense of acceptance of difference. The idea of inflexible processes in cultural institutions like museums resonates in postcolonial discourse with concepts of hegemony and fixity: however hegemonic or fixed a system appears to have become, it is susceptible to deconstruction and transgression, precisely because it requires continued efforts to maintain its current state (Bhabha, 1983; Hall, 2011, 2017, p. 334).[23] It is thus the recognition of the fallibility of colonial ideology that facilitates its deconstruction. Taking the lead from postcolonial theory, we might begin to recognise some of the metaphysical empire present in the practices of the interviewed curators, who represent smaller, independent museums in a region of England, and to begin to question and interrogate whether, and how, the remnants of colonialism can be disrupted in such places in the interests of ethical contemporary museum practice.

---

[23] As Bhabha explains, "An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (1983, p. 18).

Chapter 3. | Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter will clarify the rationale for this study in more depth, explaining the research design and methods that have been used. The empirical data was gathered using two methods: first, a quantitative pilot survey, then a series of semi-structured interviews with ten curators working in small museums within the region of the South West of England. The following explains how these methods were used, and how the participants were selected, alongside accounting for research ethics protocols and how this study utilised grounded theory methods. I will then explain the modes of analysis I utilised and highlight the challenges I experienced in conducting this study. Finally, after demonstrating the ways in which these challenges were navigated and impacted the resulting study, I pose a six-point rationale for turning to postcolonial theory as a means of situating my findings.

3.2. Rationale for the study

Two starting assumptions for this research were that: i) curators may have the potential to instigate the changes in museum practice due to the level of influence they have in their organisations; and that ii) their involvement in audience engagement work may be influenced by a traditional projected hierarchy. The general phenomenon under study here is an aspect of small museum curatorial practice: how curators in small museums perceive and respond to the concepts of audiences and audience engagement in their practices.

An aim of this study to interrogate whether small museum curators may have the potential to instigate audience engagement changes, the findings of which could contribute to a re-evaluation of how we view expertise and shifting balances of power between museums and their audiences. Museum ethics and museum research texts collectively call for participatory research methods, participatory museum practice, and ultimately argue the need for a participatory society (Clegg and Rhodes, 2006; Simon, 2010; Marstine et al, 2014). My research asks whether museum curators still

possess the traditional power they have traditionally held as long-standing, respected, qualified professionals, and aims to address whether, and how, curators are using their control to impact audiences. Exploring curators' attitudes is therefore paramount to this research, in assessing curatorial perceptions of audience engagement issues, and for identifying the ways they engage, in practice. Although this type of research helps to fill gaps in knowledge as acknowledged in visitor studies (Falk & Dierking, 1995) and contributes to new discourses, curatorial influence and responsibility in museums is lesser explored in scholarship. Complementary to existing research then, my study will contribute unique insights into the curatorial experience, in particular relation to small museums.

I also aim to understand the work of curators in small museums in the South West through examining the societal backdrop in which this profession is situated. In order for my research to understand and interpret the perspectives of curatorial staff, it must also investigate the effects of the immediate environment in which curatorial teams operate: the museum. If curatorship is a product of the museum environment, then the study must also consider the museum within the context of society and situate the responses of the interviewed curators thus. Epistemologically, this study can be understood as interpretivist in that it is concerned with understanding the relationships between curators and their audiences, as described by them, and the sociological implications of these relationships. An interpretivist approach to research is concerned with people's interpretations, experiences and understanding of the phenomenon being researched, and whereby the researcher interprets the interpretations of others. Explanations to the research questions formulated at the start of a qualitative study are posited and theorised using this data (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 28 & p. 36). A common alternative approach to interpretivist methods is positivism, which is generally associated with quantitative studies that support the objective testing of hypotheses, rather than generation of one or more theories based on subjective data (Silverman, 1998).

Mason describes an ontological perspective as relating to one's views on "interactions, actions and behaviours and the ways people interpret these, act on them, and so on,

as central" (1996, p. 61). My ontological position is known in qualitative research methods as constructivist, due to the underlying assumptions that the phenomena being studied are subjective, part of socially constructed environment influenced by interactions and external factors, and that multiple meanings can be interpreted (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 40 & Bryman, 2012, p. 380). Others associate constructivist approaches with supporting social change and the use of mixed methodology (Alasuutari, 1998).

Additionally, this is a qualitative study that utilises the principles of grounded theory, whereby inference and theories are generated by the data. As part of an iterative process, the direction of enquiry may shift, depending on emergent themes and issues that arise from the data. My study identified emergent themes in the data generated that were relevant to the original research questions, and therefore the findings from the curator interviews are based on my interpretation and analysis of the issues raised, in accordance with the grounded theory approach.

3.3. Research Design

This study utilises a mixed-methods research design, common in sociological research (Creswell, 2014), and encouraged in museum studies (Zavala, 1993), and will comprise of both quantitative and qualitative data in order to strategically investigate and answer the core questions involved as thoroughly as possible. The purpose of the quantitative pilot survey was to establish whether museum curators operate with higher levels of control compared to other museum professionals, thus grounding the line of enquiry. The survey formed the first stage of data capture and was pertinent to the research problem in that it provided a means to test my preliminary assumptions regarding the perceived status of curators, prior to engaging them in dialogue. The quantitative findings thus informed the second stage of data capture, which was gathered in the form of ten semi-structured interviews with curators from the sample locale, the South West of England. The purpose of the interviews was to directly address my research questions, which required evidential accounts of curatorial practice from those concerned with the study's line of enquiry. I will now discuss the research design and my approach to analysis in more detail.

3.3.1. Selecting participants

I received support from the Chair of the South Western Federation of Museums and Art Galleries at the start of this research in December, 2017, who disseminated invitations to participate in the survey, which was affiliated with approximately 150 member institutions within the South West at the time. 41% of the 32 who completed the survey were from small museums, receiving up to 30,000 on-site visitors per year, which correlated with my definition of a small museum as outlined in Chapter 1.

The survey produced some interesting data, particularly the free-format comments written by respondents describing the relationships with their curators and organisational challenges, however, only the most pertinent have been used in this thesis, namely the response to the ranking of museum professionals in terms of perceived esteem within their organisations. The remaining data are therefore not presented here. However, there is scope to develop a deeper analysis of the survey responses for the purposes of future research concerned with the perceptions of other museum professionals in the South West region, particularly in relation to how they engage with curators.

In order to establish participating curators for the interviews, Museums Association's *Museum and Galleries Yearbook* (2004) provided a starting point to locating small museums in the South West, as the directory listed museums in cities and towns in England. Some of the entries included the average number of attendees, so those with less than 30,000 attendees per year were identified, as per the parameters. In some cases, the listing included names of curators, and therefore provided a point of contact. The 2004 edition was the only accessible copy due to the researcher not having membership of the organisation, for which the fees were substantially high. However, due to the information being over ten years out of date, Visit Britain was also consulted.

The Visit Britain data, from 2017, provided a list of museums per county, along with the average number of attendees. This information was then crosschecked against the South Western Federation of Museums and Art Galleries' list of membership

organisations in order to identify museums within the parameters of 'small', i.e. located in the South West region, with up to 30,000 average visitors per year (South Western Federation of Museums, 2019). The regional distribution of the ten participating curators were as follows: Bath and NE Somerset – 4 curators interviewed; Bristol (County) – 3 curators interviewed; Devon (South) – 1 curator interviewed; Dorset – 1 curator interviewed; Gloucestershire – 1 curator interviewed. Invitees from Somerset, Cornwall, South Gloucestershire or Wiltshire either did not respond or declined to participate in the research. Therefore, the sample of perspectives and opinion gathered during interviews does not claim to be representative of curatorial practice across all small museums in the South West of England, nor England for that matter. Rather, the opinions presented herein are best understood as representative of a selection of perceptions gathered from a group of willing participants who had the availability to commit to being interviewed, and an interest in the topic of audience engagement, from locations around the South West of England. Due to the process of selecting participants for this study, which required the three criteria of: (1) curators at museums with; (2) up to 30,000 annual visitors per year; and (3) in the geographical location of the South West, my method of sampling is known as 'purposive' (Bryman, 2012, p. 422). Purposive sampling is appropriate for small studies focused on researching experiences and perceptions and is often included in grounded theory designs (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 167). The logic behind this method of sampling is to select participants with the appropriate knowledge and experience to speak to the matter in question: "people are chose 'with purpose' to enable the researcher to explore the research questions or develop a theory." (ibid., p. 225). Selecting participants for the study in this way ensure the data will be relevance to the area being researched, to the research questions, and allows for in-depth exploration.

A further facet of purposive sampling applies in mixed methods research where, for example, quantitative findings are utilised to inform the basis for subsequent qualitative data gathering. Consistent with this method, findings from my survey also helped to shape the interview questions for participating curators, as explained below.

3.3.2. Methods

3.3.2.1. Pilot survey method

A pilot survey was conducted, aimed at non-curatorial museum professionals and was designed to gain insights into how curatorial staff engage with stakeholders and their teams, from the perspectives of non-curatorial colleagues. The primary reason for this survey, and the sole data subsequently used, was regarding how curatorial staff were perceived in terms of esteem, in order to confirm whether traditional division between museum roles persists. The survey method used was an online quantitative questionnaire using scaling questions and multiple choice questions, and was created and completed using the online survey instrument Survey Monkey, a valid instrument to use for the purposes of this study (Evans et al., 2009).

3.3.2.2. 'Engaging Curators' survey: analysis and findings

The 32 respondents were made up of volunteer guides, front of house staff, marketing and development staff, and their locations, where stated, were in the counties of Somerset and inner and outer Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, Dorset, Devon, and Gloucestershire. 44% of respondents claimed to be from independent museums, and 59% had more than one curator, with 37% having a single curator on staff. The data sample from the survey was particularly relevant to this study, as it represented similar-sized museums to the interview participants, thereby providing appropriate contextual information to inform the interviews. The raw data was extracted from Survey Monkey into a coded data matrix in an Excel spreadsheet. From this, I utilised descriptive analysis methods to identify the frequency distribution and subsequent percentage frequency (Vandrame, 2018). This allowed me to summarise the data as percentages, as presented here.

A copy of the survey can be viewed in Appendix i). Inspired by the methods used in Davies's (1952) sociological study of occupations in terms of their prestige and Bourdieu and Darbel's (1969) enquiry into cultural practices and museum visits, question four on the survey asked respondents to rank the positions of museum roles

within their organisations. The ranking scale featured ten areas of work, the positions of which could be ranked from 1-10 by the respondent in terms of esteem. Curatorial staff were ranked as being held in the 'highest esteem' (35%) within the organisations of the respondents, with Education and Fundraising staff in second (16% each). This confirms and reinforces my preliminary assumption prior to the study of the hierarchical placement of curatorship at the top of museum organisations. This internal hierarchy has existed since the development of early public museums in the UK and demonstrates that a separation of roles remains.

In terms of validity, some of the questions, despite being required to progress through the survey, were left blank, indicating that the data instrument chosen was subject to some level of error. It also means that the survey results cannot be conclusive, as not every field was completed. The term 'prestigious' was not explained or defined in great depth, aside from 'most valued', therefore the results could reflect a more general, overarching stereotype of separation and status associated with curatorial roles in the field in general, and might not be indicative of the reality at the institutions in question. Although the survey stated it was for non-curatorial staff, four of the respondents claimed to be curators themselves. In addition, one respondent was from Birmingham, a location outside of the South West parameter I had set and six left their locations blank. Therefore, these factors may have also affected the overall data in terms of accuracy.

3.3.2.3. Interviews

I used a semi-structured interview method, to provide the interviewees with an opportunity to speak candidly about the topics under discussion, and to improve the opportunity to gather rich data (Bryman, 2012, p. 471; Mason, 1997, p. 39-41). An interview guide was used to keep the questions and conversation relevant to the research questions. Prior to the interviews, which were conducted between July 2019 and January 2020, consideration was given to Mason's qualitative checklists (1997, pp. 10-18 & p. 35), which provided useful guidance in ensuring the interview questions would be suitable and effective in addressing the overall research problem. From initial reading of extant museum literature, as described in Chapter 2, I identified the

following eleven categories from which I might begin addressing small museum practices in relation to audiences and curating. These were:

i) curator engagement with (awareness and/or use of) visitor data

ii) curator perceptions (subjective experiences and perspectives) of, and engagement with (practical application) audiences

iii) the curator relationship to the wider sector expectations and demands

iv) personal expertise (qualifications) and views on expertise

v) evidence of collaborative practice; engagement with other stakeholders in the curatorial process

vi) curator knowledge and/or application of 'museology' concepts and/or curator engagement with museum studies literature

vii) curator perspectives about small museums in relation to society

viii) internal small museum dynamics and hierarchy

ix) curator perceptions of museums in relation to, and curator interpretations of, 'community'

x) curator perceptions and interpretations of diversity, inclusion, and 'non'-visitors

xi) general factors and/or experiences in small museum practices in the South West that may promote further understanding of small museum practices

A copy of the interview schedule used can be found in Appendix ii).

3.3.2.4. Interview analysis: coding, themes and abstraction

With regards to the coding process, several sources applied. I utilised Braun and Clarke's advice (2006), Watts's breakdown of 'tiered' analytical stages (2014), Elliot's guidance on allowing for personal reflection (2005), and Charmaz's (2008) use of grounded theory, particularly checking the data against an 'abstract situational map'

to ensure the research generated remains focused on sociological matters (2006, p. 120). I refer to this as a 'contemporary' grounded theory approach. My process can be broken down as follows: i) Writing notes on the interview guide sheet during interview, and directly after on the back; ii) Listening back to each recording and taking memos, both verbally by recording myself, and writing; iii) Transcription from audio recordings, verbatim;[24] iv) Editing each transcription in order to have a 'clean' record of data per participant (for example, I removed filler words like 'um' and sections of dialogue that would make the museum or curator identifiable).; v) Reading the data prior to coding – described as achieving the 'first-person perspective' (Watts, 2014, p. 5) whereby the researcher attempts to apply empathy and understanding to the interviewee's responses.; vi) Notes made during the reading process, in the margins of printed transcripts, provided me with an outlet for my initial observations, allowed for me to return to points and re-read where I had not previously understood the curator's point, in addition to pointing me in the direction of initial codes. As mentioned, in some cases this was difficult for me but particularly when finding contradicting statements from the same person. Contradictions in the interviews, however, occurred in many other curator's dialogues, which struck me as a point to consider in the later analytical stages.

From initial coding 74 separate codes were identified, generated across all ten transcripts. Several themes, or trends, across the interview data were identified due to the regularity with which the curators referred to the topics, which will be discussed throughout the remainder of the thesis. Abstract coding reduced these to seven major categories of the curators' perspectives: 1) type of curator; 2) professional background; 3) audiences and stakeholders; 4) terrain of the museum landscape; 5) personal practice; 6) potentialities of and for small museums; and 7) limitations of and for small museums. The resulting abstracted codes respond to several sociological concerns relating to dynamics of power and prestige, opportunities and inequalities, structural processes, standpoints and differences, individual and collective actions, choices and constraints, meanings and actions, and moral responsibility (Charmaz, 2008, p. 138).

---

[24] This was conducted using the online platform 'OTranscribe'.

3.3.3. Research ethics and organisation of data

3.3.3.1. Research ethics process

The research proposal received ethical approval from Bath School of Art & Design Research Ethics Committee, Bath Spa University on the 24th July, 2018, and was subject to a risk assessment. I consulted the guidance provided in the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010), the BSU Handbook on Research Integrity and Ethics (2016) and the Universities UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity (2012). I also completed a short series of online Epigeum ethics courses, provided by Oxford University Press, in 2018 which covered working with participants and research integrity in social sciences.[25] I will now confirm the ethical protocols used for each set of data.

3.3.3.2. Positionality in relation to the participants

The museums and galleries I have been involved with in my own career are located in the South West of England and therefore I was aware that some of the participants may either be my acquaintances or may have prior knowledge of me. For example, I conducted the pilot interview with an acquaintance. Even so, the resulting data has been treated in the same ways as the others, and I have been careful to apply the same level of critique to that person's responses as with those of the other curators interviewed, in order to uphold the integrity of this research. Some of the curators had knowledge of me prior to this research, due to my professional museum roles in the region, and contacted me directly.

3.3.3.3. Anonymity of participants

To ensure the greatest level of anonymity possible, the use of real names of the interviewed curators and their institutions are not disclosed herein. When reproducing any quotes from the discussions alternative names of participants and pseudonyms

---

[25] *Research Integrity – Social and Behavioural Sciences,* completed: 16.05.2018; *Human Subjects Protections,* completed: 17.05.2018

such as 'Museum X' have been used. Participants were informed, through the consent form and guidance sheets, that the results, data and ideas raised in the interviews will be used for the purposes of this research only and would not be published outside of the thesis with the exception of conference papers and academic journals. If further publishing occurs, the same standard of anonymity will be kept. The interviews only proceeded when permission was granted by each curator. With regards to the replication of extracts from the transcripts throughout the thesis, I accept that the experiences and opinions shared by the interviews are subject to my interpretations (Mason, 1996, pp. 39-42). The interview extracts included have been produced verbatim, and where they have not been replicated, I have aimed to represent the accounts of the interviewees as faithfully as possible.

3.3.3.4. Survey: ethics protocols and organisation of data

The survey was online, with the option provided to send a paper copy if desired, and included a disclaimer explaining that: the data would be kept anonymous; would not ask for the name of the respondent or their institution; and explained the intended use of the data gathered. Those invited to participate in the survey were also sent a participant information sheet. The majority of the survey utilised a Lickert Scale, where answers could be completed with values between 1-5, in the form of multiple choice questions. It also contained open fields where the respondent could write freely and the option to include an email address should they be interested in participating in any follow-up research. (The participant guidance sheets for both the survey and the interviews are included in Appendix iii)). Due to this, the data was entered into a matrix in a password-protected excel document, and stored on a private, password-protected laptop in my residence. Similarly, the online survey was only accessible through one, password-protected account.

3.3.3.5. Interviews: ethics protocols and organisation of data

Interviewees were provided with a Participant Information Sheet to inform them of the project's intentions and the topics that would be discussed. They were also sent consent forms to read and complete prior to the date of the interview, and the majority

emailed them back with digital signature. Some read and signed the form in person, and handed them to me on the day. The consent form also confirmed the participants' rights to withdraw from the study and ensured that permissions for open discussion and recording of data for research purposes was voluntarily approved and understood. Audio recording was necessary for the interviews. The interviews took place in public venues, either at the Bath Spa Newton Park Campus, or on site at the participant's museum. Therefore, the consent form also included a request to provide me with the necessary information to comply with the host venue's health and safety regulations and any venue-specific guidelines. A copy of the consent form can be viewed in Appendix iv). Participants were sought by contacting South West museums through channels that their institutions have already subscribed to, namely the South Western Federation of Museums and Art Galleries, and professional social media groups, and through my own regional network of museum professionals. Invitations were sent by email, along with a digital participant information card.

Transcriptions of the interviews and details of participants are stored in password-encrypted word documents on the same private laptop, along with the personal recording device used to record the interviews. The audio files have not been replicated and at no point during the recordings did any of the interviewees state their name. Any printed documents relating to the participants, such as the transcriptions, were anonymised prior to printing. I transcribed the interviews myself, therefore no third party has been involved in the data gathering or analysis processes.

3.3.3.6. Analytical framework

Assigning a fixed 'framework' to subjective thought processes might appear akin to applying a strict set of rules to one's mode of understanding, however, applying a theoretical model to research can be understood as helping to construct a map of reality (Svoboda, 2015). Sociological 'maps' are not intended to propose universally applicable explanations of reality, rather they provide insights into specific aspects of social reality from a particular perspective, and one is guided through a subjectively interpreted set of representations and meanings. When understood in the research context, the framework provides guidelines, directions, and necessary parameters,

without which the data and interpretation presented would be limitless and unnavigable.

The methods applied within a piece of research depend on the topic, research questions, positionality of the researcher, and the goals/intentions of the research. In this thesis, I am not proposing that a postcolonial theoretical model is applicable to all small museums in Britain, nor do I make claims that the concept of a postcolonial museology is universally useable within the practice of all museum curators in the South West. This research can therefore be considered as providing a sociological map that explores ideas from, implications for, and the applicability of postcolonial thought in the small, English, museum. The body of the research presented is my interpretation of the perspectives of interviewed curators on 'audiences' in the small, English, museum. Emergent themes in the data were identified as engaging with significant concepts that are typically explored in postcolonial theory: 'race', ethnicity, language, colonial history, and global connections. As Agee (2009, p. 440) confirmed: "Well-crafted qualitative research questions can address sensitive topics and pursue issues that are of importance to a field of study." Dynamics of power and control, sameness and difference, exclusivity and inclusivity, Western knowledge formation, and knowledge distribution mechanisms, are issues that emerged from the data, and also resonate with issues pertinent to a postcolonial critique. Concurrently, I have applied postcolonialism as a theoretical framework to conceptualise, situate, and make sense of, the curator perspectives and professional practices described at their respective small museums, with regards to their uses of narrative and perceptions of audience. As utilised in the grounded theory method, the identification methods when 'reading' the data and the contextualising processes, have been iterative, and the resulting thesis has been built from the 'ground' up; rooted in the data harvested from ten qualitative interviews, one quantitative survey, my professional experience in the field, and scholarship relating to museums, audiences, postcolonial theory and sociology.

3.4 Validity and Credibility

In this subsection I will explain the credibility and validity of my proposed models and theory building.

3.4.1 Paradigms and models

The models (Cycle of disengagement, *5.3.4;* and Spectrum of curatorial practice, *5.4.*1) presented herein are a mapping of interpreted behaviours based on the data gathered and are offered as a means to analytically explain the practical and behavioural approaches of the small museum curators encountered with regards to their perceptions and approaches to audiences through their work. They are not presented as essential truths, but rather interpretated aggregated hypotheses within the context of an emerging paradigm of museum practices and museological discourse observed at the time of this study. The emerging paradigm identified is not intended to apply to small museum curatorial practice holistically. At the same time, models as such mine do provide a form of reality to the reader, one perceived and presented by the researcher. As Svoboda (2015, p. 474) explains:

> "If we accuse a model of not being realistic, we are not comparing it with reality; we are comparing it with another model – the model which we *believe* is the accurate map of reality. […] We rely on our *paradigm*; however, as Kuhn (1996) points out, paradigms may shift. There are many examples of "essential truths" that were abandoned later on. Should not that be a reason for caution against realism? In a sense, there is no "realism", but only "paradigmism".

The 'emerging paradigm of museology' that my models represent is theoretically positioned after new-museological models of practice and are produced from drawing upon postcolonial theory as a framework of concepts to inform and situate the interpretations from the data in relation to a wider decolonial interest identified within the broader museums sector in the UK and cultural debates within the social sphere.

Grounded theorists, Glaser and Strauss (1965), claimed that this approach, that is, exploring the data and phenomena as interrelated to multiple factors, is an inevitable process for the qualitative researcher, who will continue to pursue multiple sets of data that contribute to a series of integrated hypotheses in an attempt to answer the research questions posed. In the case of my research, significant data relating to 'race'

emerged from the curator interviews which influenced my interpretations and analytical approach – I was channelled towards postcolonial theory to find 'answers' and respond to this data. Glaser and Strauss (1965) acknowledged this process: "strategic memorable events generate new categories and hypotheses, or cast doubt on the efficacy of certain [coded] categories […]. Those memorable events are either analyzed immediately after they occur, or keep recurring in memory with nagging persistence until systematically analyzed" [page unspecified].

3.4.2 Theory building from the data

I used multiple participants, the comparison of which enabled the identification of similarities and differences between the data. As Glaser and Strauss (1965) explained: "From these similarities and differences are generated the theoretical categories to be used, their full range of types or continuum, their dimensions, the conditions under which they exist more or less, and their major consequences." The models produced in my research reflect such a continuum.

Identification of the comparative behaviours, attitudes and approaches in the interviewed curators helped to produce abstracted generalisations. For example, 'Ava' raised the trustees as a limitation to her capacity and progression, and 'Mia' described a lack of interaction with colleagues due to where she was situated in the building. We could generalise that the issues raised by two individuals collectively referred to problems with internal dynamics in their respective small museums. In this case, the coding category could be: 'internal dynamics: challenges'. A category such as this in the coding stage would therefore prompt other comparisons across the data, such as whether these issues were shared, or if there were advantages mentioned by the curators with regards to the internal dynamics of their small museums rather than challenges, thus helping to produce 'generalised relations' between categories. Whether positive or negative however, the working dynamics relating to the curators and their colleagues are shared internal structural conditions and therefore represent iterations of the same circumstances (Glaser and Strauss, 1965). To build theory is to do more than compare negative and positive instances of internal events that occur in

the same conditions which, in the example provided, would be 'how small museum curators experience their internal working environments in comparison to each other'.

Glaser and Strauss (ibid.) posited that credible qualitative research practices seek out the "*external* structural conditions under which positives and negatives exist, and, then, suggest differentiating factors in the cases based on comparison of those sets." Utilising the process of comparison *and* consideration of external factors, allowed me to generate findings grounded in the 'interrelatedness' of the data to the social environment, historical context, to museological developments, and to my own experiences as a researcher and professional in the field of museums, as opposed to simply documenting curatorial behaviours in isolation from those factors that are significant to social research. Taking this approach ensured that my analysis correlated with the intended research questions, further grounding the validity of this study. The models the thesis presents were formulated through this process and show, in simplified and comprehensive formats, the threads which have been brought together to underpin this research. My models and analysis demonstrate examples of valid, integrated theory, corresponding to grounded theory methods (Glaser and Strauss, 1965).

3.4.3. 'Triangulation'

The process of 'triangulation' in qualitative methods is described as a means of ensuring valid and reliable findings via consulting with multiple modes and sources of information (Creswell, 2014, p. 201) and also an aspect of substantive theory building in qualitative research (Berg & Lune, 2014, p. 6). In establishing the concept of a curatorial divide, I took care to check this phenomenon existed in several ways. Firstly, empirical: the concept was prompted by my own experiences working in the field of museums whereby the curators I interacted with were separate, often elevated, from others. My experience of sector organisations also contributed to this, most prominently by the South Western Federation of Art Galleries and Museums Annual Conference, 2018. Secondly, as detailed above, the survey was designed to 'test' this notion by asking other museum professionals, to anonymously rank where curators appeared to fit within their organisations. The results, as explained above, confirmed

the majority of non-curatorial staff across the surveyed participants witnessed a hierarchical divide between curators and others in their workplaces. Thirdly, engaging with scholarship: as confirmed in the Literature Review, the separation of curators from other museum peers and audiences has been widely acknowledged throughout the museological studies that have taken place since the 1980s. And finally, some of the curators interviewed in the study voiced their own experiences of the divide, or otherwise, demonstrated it through their described actions and behaviours. This process of revisiting the same questions and concerns, from multiple sources, can be understood as providing triangulated validity to this thesis.

3.4.4. Generalisability and transferability of sample

Watts (2019) stated that, in qualitative analysis, it is possible to generalise for twenty respondents or less, so long as the conclusions drawn do not claim to represent the population, or in other words, every curator of a small museum either in the South West or in Britain. It is also typical of qualitative studies with designs such as mine to feature no more than twenty participants, as the focus of the research questions is specific to a selected group and not the general population (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 169), which in this study is small museum curators in a regional location.

Therefore, the analysis in this thesis will be delivered on the basis of 'revealed qualities' that the ten participating curators shared, and/or differed on, and will be discussed in relation to concepts, categories, theoretical prepositions and modes of museum and curatorial practice. The findings will not allow for definitive conclusions that refer to general populations of people, nor will the models presented be applicable to all curators or generalisable for all small museums. As mentioned (in subsection 1.4) what constitutes a 'small museum' is not firmly defined elsewhere. With utilisation of different methods and a different researcher, the outcome of this research would undoubtedly differ. Data collection, analysis, and coding are continual and interconnected processes whereby the researcher's interpretations and thoughts are present throughout, implicitly (Glaser and Strauss, 1965). My descriptions and interpretations throughout the thesis will refer to the 'interviewed curators' to

demarcate the participants in this study from the general population and to reflect the purposive sampling of the data.

As yet the models presented in this thesis have not been tested against the work of other curators, such as from small museums in other locations, or from other types of museums or heritage organisations in the same region – archaeological, university, or scientific museums, for example. However, this signifies scope to test, transfer, or apply, the models and conclusions in this study in different curatorial practice contexts; to expand their analysis, and potentially to develop the models in a way that may point to constructive examples that might support a revised forms of contemporary curatorial practice and ethics (Svoboda, 2015, p. 477). As such, the theoretical concepts I present in this research, such as 'racialised reflexivity', which are based on my analysis grounded in the data and literature I engaged with, can be directly tested and applied to real-world situations, and I continue to develop these findings in my professional practice as a museum curator, researcher and academic.

3.5. Challenges: undertaking 'racialised' research

Consideration of one's personal narrative in social research is a recognised aspect of narrative analysis methods in social research (Elliott, 2005). It can also be seen as a way to disrupt the traditional pattern in Western research epistemes to discount personal experience in studies of race – studies which simultaneously take place within a racialised society, where "we often find studies on race that reflect more about dominant hierarchies of power than about people's experiences within them." (Almeida, 2015, pp. 84-85). While I do not claim to use narrative analysis, as a racialised British ethnic minority and a minority researcher, my experiences of encountering racialised comments in the data and navigating topics concerned with race during conducting this study, I acknowledge that reference to some of my own circumstances may be implicitly present throughout the thesis.

3.5.1. Effects on the 'minority researcher'

The combination of the three factors identified (ethnic minority, minority researcher, and conducting a study in which the majority of participants were racialised as 'white'), created a space which I occupied, that is, a state of: ethnic racialisation, institutional racialisation, and societal racialisation (I am part of Britain's diaspora). Having established my position in a sociological study concerning the museum profession in a racialised society then, I can be understood as a female minority researcher, positioned within a tri-racialised state. During the research I experienced difficulties that can be described as emotional and psychological in attempting to analyse and interpret some of the data in this tri-racialised state, particularly in the coding process. These difficulties, which impacted me in practical ways, occurred during several key processes pertaining to conducting a qualitative study, namely: researcher reflexivity, coding of data, and ethical considerations, and demonstrates some of the general challenges experienced by researchers in the coding process.

3.5.2. Coding challenges as a minority researcher

In qualitative enquiries, researchers are encouraged in the available guidance to first pay close attention to the transcript – usually every line – then to read and re-read, taking multiple passes to clarify a researcher's interpretation of the meaning of the statements made, through several stages of descriptive coding, interpretative coding, and analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2008; Bryman, 2012; Urquhart, 2013; Creswell, 2014; Watts, 2014). The models for coding suggested in qualitative research often follow the same basic principles, however differ in advice as to the correct number of stages – and levels of analyses – to undertake. Strauss and Corbin identify three types of coding, *open, axial,* and *selective*, and outline the procedures for each across no less than ten subchapters (1998). In their instructions on *thematic analysis,* Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest six analytical phases to coding, and a fifteen-point checklist to ensure you have followed each stage with sufficient rigour. It appears to be generally understood that, having completed the respective stages of coding according one's selected model, the researcher might want to re-read and potentially re-code the data. The confrontation with such an array of

guidance and the resulting confusion that arises in the process has been widely recognised as problematic for the novice researcher (Charmaz, 2008; Elliott, 2005; Watts, 2014; Elliot, 2018), and such resources take care to acknowledge issues in the researcher experience such as lack of confidence, time constraints, and knowing when to stop.

In a critique of the strictness dictated to researchers in traditional qualitative guidance, Watts (2014) argues for more creative, rather than rigid, methods to approaching data analysis. He recommends adopting a 'first-person perspective' at the initial descriptive coding stage, which involves putting oneself in the participants' position, 'seeing things through their eyes', and resisting the temptation to psychoanalyse or judge the participant as an individual. However, in this instance, Watts' neglect to account for a researcher encountering sensitive or difficult data, offers a seemingly straightforward and unproblematic solution to a significantly larger issue that arises in the majority of Western qualitative guidance for researchers: ignoring the presence of 'race' in research. The lack of recognition of racialised effects in research is also demonstrated by the absence of the term 'race' (or its variants) in the indexes of the textbooks cited above, with the exception of Charmaz (2008, p. 28), who acknowledged: "differences between interviewer and research respondent in race, class, gender, age, and ideologies may affect what happens during the interview."

Repeatedly encountering situations where one is forced to – respectfully and quietly – listen to, accept, and identify with unapologetically prejudiced views is exhausting. That is not to say that the curators interviewed were inappropriate, with the exception of one comment and one gesture, both of which were directed towards me. Yet even in those instances, the curators were not overtly offensive to me. On the contrary, our interactions were convivial and, overall, very respectful. The processes of transcribing from audio recordings, and the reading and re-reading of the data that qualitative coding requires, made me aware of the racialised nature of my encounters – predominantly after the fact. Referring to my field notes made directly after each interview, reminded me of the direct references some participants made to my 'race', and engaging in close readings of the data, as expected in a qualitative study, became

somewhat of an arduous endeavour. Part of me felt it was a tall order to complete it all, and long breaks (weeks, in some cases) were required in order to manage engaging with some of the transcripts in full. In those cases there was an urge to stop reading; a reluctance to empathise with my white interviewee's words, and it was tempting to exclude such voices from my research. However, there would be no research without their words, their candour and enthusiastic participation, and the project may be rendered unethical and un-useful.

The effects of such encounters on a person of colour – whether it be an overtly racist action or an implicitly racialised statement – is aptly articulated by Eddo-Lodge here (2017, pp. 221-223): "Unlike white people, people of colour don't often ask me for advice on what I think they should do to fight racism. Instead, they ask me if I have any good strategies for coping. […] I know how much [engaging in 'race' work] can paralyse, how the feeling of hopelessness works to utterly crush creativity, and passion, and drive […]. We have to fight despondency. We have to hang on hope." Engaging with diasporic literature, such as that of Eddo-Lodge, a British journalist of African descent, was both supportive and formative to my emotional wellbeing during the process of conducting my research and encountering racialised themes in scholarship and in the interview transcripts. I found a sense of solidarity and unity from poetry (Lorde, 1984), fiction (Achebe, [1958] 2010; Zephaniah, 2020), polemics (Baldwin, [1965] 2018; Akala, [2018], 2019) and historical accounts of diasporic history and society in Britain, written by diasporic scholars (such as Olusoga, [2016], 2017; and White, 2020). I found solace in black feminist theory (hooks, 2003; Hill Collins, 2009) and, more significantly, empowerment and strength in engaging with these works. Engaging with diasporic literature and global scholars (such as Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012) therefore may prove beneficial to other minority researchers, due to the empathic nature found in their insights, providing reflexive support that is otherwise missing, as I will explain in the next section. Utilising such sources to rethink, 'diasporically', too, could be a helpful step for museums – and curators – wishing to decolonise themselves.

3.5.3. Reflexivity challenges to the minority researcher

The challenges, emotional labour and personal tolls that accompany a researcher working with difficult data have been explored elsewhere (for example, Elliott, 2005; Fenge at al., 2019) however, seldom are the challenges for the *minority as researcher* a focus – or feature. Where 'minorities' are discussed, the status quo is to do so in the context of a non-ethnic minority conducting the research and encountering ethnic minorities as part of their study. Disappointingly, there is a tendency to conflate the ethnic minority encounter in qualitative research with 'difficult', 'disturbing', and 'sensitive' topics. A prime example of this is to be found in the article, *'The Impact of Sensitive Research on the Researcher: Preparedness and Positionality'*, (Fenge et al., 2019). The authors acknowledge the emotional labour and psychological trauma sometimes experienced by researchers in qualitative research, stating that: "it may be difficult to manage or plan for the unknown emotional tasks when the researcher comes into contact with challenging data within the research process.", and they highlight the lack of support for qualitative researchers in dealing with "the psychological and/or ethical challenges encountered through disturbing narratives and data."(pp. 2-3). The aim of their study was to investigate experiences of researchers who encounter "sensitive topics and/or marginalized groups" in their work (ibid.), and the article argues for the need to support such researchers in this matter. Overall, the article inadequately addresses the minority researcher however, as it appears to uphold an assumption that 'the researcher' is not racialised. One can infer from this that 'the researcher' they refer to is white:

> "Milner […] identified unforeseen risks **posed to researchers undertaking research with minority ethnic groups** "when they do not pay careful attention to their own and others' racialized and cultural systems of coming to know, knowing, and experiencing the world." It is important that researchers critically reflect upon "the self" in relation to the communities and people involved in their research. This includes adopting a reflexive stance toward their power or positionality in relation to this, and any potential challenges this poses to them in terms of their role as researcher." (ibid.) [My emphasis in bold]

Although they encourage critical reflection of oneself, the 'support' being offered by these authors is to the white researcher of 'others' in less privileged positions and none-the-less demonstrates that calls for support for researchers still fail to include us, the diasporic.

Reflexivity is closely linked to ethical concerns, and is significant to a researcher recognising bias, experiential influences, and researcher/participant dynamics. Ethical expectations in research that involves participants are generally geared towards the protecting the interests of the participant but not the researcher. Examples of ethical requirements for a research project include anonymity of participant identity and accurate and fair representation of the participant's words (Watts, 2019). To resolve the issue of how best to manage and interpret my data, acceptance of the racialised context was required, in addition to reflecting on my own racialised identity and my relationship to whiteness. This practice is largely unsupported in mainstream researcher reflexivity advice, but relates to what others have referred to as the 'race-of-interviewer effect' (Hatchett and Schuman, 1976 ; Rhodes, 1994; Sin, 2007; Törngren, 2012).

3.5.4. Relevance of recognising 'race' to the study

Recognising the racialised nature of my data, indeed, led me to look to postcolonial theory, initially in order to make sense of it. The choice to utilise postcolonial thought as the theoretical framework for this research however, was not arbitrary, as the concepts explored in postcolonialism are relevant to the data generated and to my research questions, as previously indicated. Engaging with concepts of postcoloniality is also relevant to the minority researcher conducting a tri-racialised study. Experience of the 'other' as researcher and generator of knowledge, has been widely discussed in a growing body of decolonial literature that examines Western research traditions, epistemologies and prejudices, much of which is being produced by diasporic and international scholars such as Sin, (2007); Mignolo, (2009); Bhambra, (2011); Maldonado-Torres, (2011); Törngren, (2012); Almeida, (2015); Connell, (2018); Quiros et al., (2020); and Meghji, (2021). Maori scholar, Linda Tuhuwai Smith (2012, p. xi) explained that, for indigenous peoples in the postcolonial world, the word 'research'

is "probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" due to the negative associations with Western colonial and anthropological research practices. 'Decolonising' is perhaps best understood as a verb of postcolonial thought. Where postcolonial thinking requires recognition and acknowledgment of the problem - breaking the silence - decolonising is concerned with action.

Recognition of a 'racialised' social context has also appeared across museum scholarship in the last decade (Edwards and Mead, 2013; Muñiz-Reed et al., 2017; Bayer et al., 2017; Procopio, 2019) as discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review. However, reference to reflexive critique of the methodologies and procedures they have utilised during their own research processes, is wanting in many of these studies. As indicated, ground is being made in decolonial research scholarship and practice. Still, questions remain around the implications of my experiences as a minority researcher in Britain, and the lack of resources to support minority research/ers. The tools to conduct minority-led research about white people, are not readily available; the guidance and discourse on researcher reflexivity and dealing with difficult data is almost invariably positioned from the white researcher perspective, where the dynamics addressed focus on white scholars researching minority participants.

3.5.5. Benefits of 'racialised' reflexivity

In addition to the difficulties encountered, engaging with postcolonial theories enlivened the practice of reflexivity with a sense of innovation and experimentation and complemented the iterative and buildable qualities and fluidity that are normally associated with qualitative research. Elsewhere, scholars are supportive of the need for white researchers to engage with the concept of whiteness and their own racialised experiences (Frankenberg, 1993; Bhopal, 2018). Applying reflexivity in this way, may offer the 'hope' to counter the 'despondency' described by Eddo-Lodge for minority researchers, as well as supporting the needs of non-minority researchers as presented by Fenge et al. (2019).

Conducting research about whiteness, or racialisation specifically, was not an intention of my study, however the curators encountered in the South West of England, and nine

of the ten curators interviewed, were white, thus it became a contributing factor to my interpretation. The topic of minority research in Britain, and the notion of tri-racialised circumstances, are therefore valuable and significant areas of future scholarly investigation that would benefit higher education practices, support developing decolonial research theories, and open new lines of critical enquiry for structural sociologists. In recognition of this, Almeida (2015, p. 99) stated: "the embodied experiences and liminal positions of racialised scholars are pivotal not only to the decolonization of knowledge production, but also to our efforts to challenge the production and normalization of power and privilege." To expand on this, if my approach to reflexivity can be thought of as a decolonising act, it imbues the processes of researcher reflexivity with more flexibility and opportunity than common guidance appears to allow for, or currently recommends. It also allows for the individual researcher to acknowledge and engage with their own needs in the contexts of their position in academia, broadly speaking, which can be further narrowed to facilitate a fuller understanding of their position within their institutions, their fields of study, and provides an opportunity to recognise and navigate their position in wider society.

3.6. A six-point rationale for postcolonial theory as an analytical framework

1: **Origins** The origins of social research are rooted in imperialist ideologies; the origins of museums are rooted in the same. Postcolonial theory directly engages with this.

2: **Data-led** My participants brought up the topic of 'race'. Following the principles of what I refer to as 'contemporary' grounded theory, as described by Charmaz (2008) and the thematic analysis approaches and strategies she encourages, utilising postcolonial theory is in response to issues raised by the data and is deployed in order to make sense of them (Merton, 1973).[26]

---

[26] "In their original statement of the method, Glaser and Strauss (1967) invited their readers to use grounded theory strategies flexibly in their own way." (Charmaz, 2008, p. 9).

3: **Reflexive consequences** Postcolonialism and diasporic scholarship provides a way to understand and interpret the personal impact and resonance with my own experiences as a 'woman of colour'.

4: **Scholarship** The prevalence of 'white-supremacist' historical narratives and social behaviours has been identified and critiqued (Arendt, [1951] 2017; Frankenberg, 1993; Azoulay, 2020). Postcolonial scholarship has attempted – and continues to – challenge and unpick our understanding of the status quo of social life and has directly linked its current state to colonialism and imperialist projects.

5: **Postcolonial theory requires decolonial action in research** Scholarship has long-highlighted a need for a decolonising approach to research itself, in light of postcolonialism's reveal of the origin and operation of Western 'modernity' as rooted in imperialism and racism (Gates Jr at al., 1985; Bhambra, 2011; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012; Connell, 2018; Azoulay, 2020). Furthermore, philosophers, theorists and diasporic writers have expressed a need to 'decolonise' their work and practices and have called for wider adoption of this approach (Thiong'o, 1986, 2019; Hall, 1999).

6: **English museums are a part of a globalised decolonising debate** Decolonisation is a continuing field of study, emerging social movement and issue of political contention (for example, Hicks, 2020; Procter, 2020; Olusoga & Yasmin, 2021; McGivern, 2021). Museums are bound up in the progress of globalisation and therefore there are inherent ethical problems and dilemmas (Edson, 1997; Marstine et al., 2013). Postcolonial theory directly engages with the encounter between the West and 'the World' (Bhabha, 1983).

3.7. Summary

In this chapter, I have established my research as a sociological and museological enquiry, and I have demonstrated my rationale and intended usage of social research methods and theory to underpin my research into curator perspectives on audiences in the small museum. I use a contemporary grounded theory approach with a mixed-methods research design, comprising of a quantitative survey of 'pilot' data, and a

series of ten semi-structured, qualitative, interviews with curators from small museums across the South West of England, the pilot interview of which has been included in the data. Using a postcolonial critique is identified as a relevant and appropriate form of social research specific to this research and the data, and therefore a postcolonial theoretical framework is adopted to understand the implications of, and identify the complications that arise from, curatorial practice in small museums in the South West England.

I have highlighted some of the challenges of conducting social research about Western institutions, within a Western institution, and the problems with contributing to the Western canon of modern thought. In response, I have proposed that this thesis will attempt to address some of these problems through a variety of departures, problematisations and critiques, and is written with intent in support of pluralism, decolonisation, anti-racism, and minority perspectives in research. Furthermore, the decision to utilise postcolonial theory was made after long, often uncomfortable, periods of reflection on, with, and about, the data and their relationship to the researcher. The resulting framework provided sufficient emotional access to the topics explored and facilitated an adequate amount of psychological capacity for me as a minority researcher, to work through the data and arising issues in a meaningful, constructive, and personally achievable way.

In this thesis, 'postcolonial museology' is presented, understood, and utilised as a branch of sociology that is concerned with museums, curatorship, postcolonialism, decolonisation, cultural formations, and society in Britain. Postcolonial museology departs from old-museological research, yet is in line with some extant new-museological themes and aims.[27] This thesis contributes to an emerging line of decolonial and activist enquiry in museology and museum ethics, and has implications for the practical application of decolonial and anti-racist museum curatorship; it may also be useful to those with interests in decolonisation in research methods, cultural institutions, and education curriculums in the UK.

---

[27] I use the term 'old-museological' to refer to the traditional practices associated with early British museums.

Chapter 4. Curatorial Perspectives on Audience Engagement

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will introduce the backgrounds of the interviewees in order to provide a personal and professional context to the individual curators. Much like a museum visitor brings their own personal experience to the museum context (Falk and Dierking, 1992, 1995), each interviewee's curatorial context was influenced by their individual experiences, perceptions, choices and agency. In turn, I will demonstrate how these personal and professional interests impacted how each curator interpreted their roles and their understanding of audience-related work. I will then evidence the interviewed curators' perceptions of their audiences, explaining the mechanisms they appeared to use in order to ascertain and uphold these assumptions. From this, we may begin to understand the nuances of the curatorial experience in smaller institutions in South West England, explained through the varied ways in which the interviewed curators perceived their roles in relation to their audiences. The contributing factors to their perspectives will be explored in Chapter 5, which discusses their practices in more depth.

4.2. Small museums and a South West context

Small museums have been described as providing a "tour of the history of Britain", and often "a revelation" due to the first-hand knowledge a visitor may experience from staff whilst there (Redington, 2002, pp. 1-2). The nature of South West museums, according to Redington, can be deduced as displaying Britain's localised industrial past; including celebrating feats of engineering and invention, and their Roman influences; traditional pastimes such as cricket or theatre; or a focus on the private collector. A smaller proportion feature displays about historic religions and mythology, natural history, and military history (Ibid.). It has been noted that smaller museums, particularly those that are voluntary run, "are not necessarily interested in visitors as such, and have little interest in the tourist market which sustains larger independent museums" (Cossons, 1984, p. 86). Differing perceptions of small museum practices from museum scholarship indicate that approaches to curatorial practice within the

smaller institution are varied, complex, and therefore open to interpretation to an extent by those who work in them. There are also several kinds of small museums, which is reflected in the corpus of the interviewed curators. Denford et al. (1984, p. 93) posited that the number of small museums in the region of the South West was likely to be much higher compared to elsewhere in England.

According to 2011 census data, demographically, 88.6% of the population in the South West region were born in England, inhabited by a white majority ethnic group, recorded to be 91.8% (Gov.uk, 2021 & Qpzm LocalStats UK, 2020). The pulling down of a nineteenth-century statue of celebrated philanthropist and notorious slave-trader, Edward Colston (1636–1721), in the centre of Bristol during a Black Lives Matter UK protest in 2020, thrust the city and the South West of England into an international spotlight. Given a white-majority population and in light of recent events, South West curators and their museums could be considered as having an even greater responsibility to involve white audiences in decentring myths about British heritage and addressing white-biased narratives. There is potential for regional museums to review 'audience engagement' as an opportunity to welcome core – and new – audiences into a socially intersectional and inviting museum landscape. It must be noted however, that the interviews with the participating curators took place prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and surge in attention to the Black Lives Matter cause.

Some have posited that visitors may spend more time amongst the displays at smaller venues compared to larger ones (Falk and Dierking, 1992, p. 56 & pp. 249-257), suggesting that the levels of audience engagement at the museums under study should be substantial.

4.3. The interviewed curators

All museums in the study were independent organisations with charitable statuses, with the exception of one which was classified as a 'community art project'. The interviewed curators occupied the most senior curatorial positions within their museums and reported to a governing board of trustees and/or a director.

The interviewed curators came from a variety of museums, with collections ranging from local history to single, specialist subjects, and the spaces they occupied were equally varied, from historic houses to a non-traditional, repurposed, community site.

Of the ten curators interviewed, six had qualifications and training that directly related to the profession of museum curating.[28] Two had followed academic paths that were technically unrelated to curating, for example, building conservation, or arts marketing, although were still in the field of humanities, and art and design. Four of the 'qualified' curators were working in a popular tourist towns in the South West, where a variety of different subject-based museums existed, of varying sizes.

4.3.1. Finn and Jasper: local history museums

Finn and Jasper had no qualifications, training, or experience in the field of museums. They were both retired, and the sole curators at their volunteer-led local history museums, which were based in a small town and a village in the South West of England. Their respective collections were formed of historic objects from local industry, local families, and local veterans – much of which had been donated by residents or visitors. Cossons argued that local history museums serve a distinct purpose, due to the emphasis they place on "local value and meaning, that they involve the participation of a group within the community in the curatorship of its own past" (1984, p. 86). As will be shown, Finn and Jasper perceived their audiences differently to each other, but maintained this sense of curating the past for their local communities.

4.3.2. Ava, Emma and Charlotte: city-based single-subject independents

Some small museums contain collections that are centred around specific subjects that happen to have local significance (Denford, cited in Thompson et al., 1984, p. 93). Ava and Emma's venues were single-subject, independent, small museums. Ava's was founded by a sole, male, collector who donated specialist objects to the museum,

---

[28] In the interests of respecting the anonymity of the participating curators and museums, exact locations, names, and details of the collection that might reveal their identities have been omitted.

which was centrally-located within the town. Emma's museum was located on a main street just outside the town centre, and housed a traditional one-man collection of one general style of art objects. Charlotte was based at a historical venue central to one of the larger cities in the South West, and her collection included a library. As 'Collections Manager', it was Charlotte's responsibility to take up the mantle of curator, and her team consisted of volunteers under her management.

4.3.3. Evelyn, Mia and Isabel: outlying single-subject independent museums

These museums were located in the outskirts of a city or town. Evelyn's museum was set up by international collectors and Mia's was founded by a special interest group. Their collections centred around single subjects, of which Evelyn's featured some international indigenous work. Mia was the sole curator at a remotely-located art museum, outside a small town, and worked closely with the director of the venue to manage and exhibit a collection based around paintings and art objects relating to a single theme. Isabel was an externally funded freelance curator and part of a small paid team which she managed, but the rest of the museum staff consisted of volunteers. Her venue's collection consisted of a broad spectrum of paraphernalia relating to the specialist topic, housed within a former chapel. At the time of interview, the museum was undergoing an extensive archiving process of its collections which had not been done previously.

4.3.4. Sophia and Olivia: a multisite organisation and a mini museum

Other types of small museums in England are part of larger organisations (Denford et al., 1984, p. 93), either through local authorities or local trusts – as was Sophia's. The two curators who had trained in adjacent fields prior to curating, Sophia and Olivia, worked in very different curatorial capacities: Sophia had been in her role for over a decade and had become a subject specialist in the process, and Olivia was running a new independent museum venture in her town for the residents, externally funded, whilst maintaining other part-time heritage roles to keep herself financially supported. The venue under discussion in Sophia's interview was part of a larger multisite organisation, and her curatorial responsibility was for several museum sites relating to

different aspects of the town's history, although was most closely linked to one due to her expertise in the subject area.[29] She was the senior member of three curatorial staff at the time of interview. In contrast Olivia's venue was a location-based museum site whereby a community venue had been repurposed and it featured a very small exhibit of objects donated by local residents. Olivia managed a team of local volunteers and worked in collaboration with more senior community members. Emma, Evelyn and Sophia were from varied organisations, however their locations were in proximity to each other in the city mentioned previously. They were part of small curatorial teams of paid staff, which consisted of at least one assistant curator below them. Ava was in the same area but was the only curatorial member of staff, indicating that the economic affluence of a location does not necessarily generate the same conditions, such as staffing structures or resources, in a small museum.

I will now examine the approach the individual curators took to their work, which appeared to reflect both personal and professional interests.

4.4. Curating in a small museum: motivations and perceptions

Ava and Emma were the more career-focused curators. Ava arrived at her position due to academic career motivations, stating that "it was a post-PhD job." The two main attractions for her were the museum's subject matter, of which she is a specialist, and secondly, having worked for larger museums previously, Ava claimed that a small institution appealed to her: "I thought coming to a small museum would allow me to be involved in every area of a museum's operation, and it would give me in-depth understanding".

Emma also had a prior academic interest and had planned to pursue a career in museums. Prior to her role as curator at her small museum, Emma had studied History of Art at university. She also volunteered and received curatorial training, and then pursued an internship at a different organisation, giving her an early grounding and

---

[29] The exact number of sites and themes they explored have been omitted to protect the curator's anonymity.

interest in museum work. Both curators were self-motivated in pursuing their respective career progressions, however Emma was also motivated by her interactions with others. She stated: "I'd volunteered at [a museum] doing their temporary exhibitions and kind of really enjoyed the exhibition side of things." For her, both the practical training and the enjoyment she experienced as part of a group of volunteers, were formative to her career ambitions: "I learned loads of skills that kind of have [...] proved really important." Ava's desire to be more involved suggests a practical element to her interest in curating, and a receptivity towards understanding and experiencing other areas of museum work.

Evelyn had multiple experiences in different museum areas prior to undertaking her curatorial role, including volunteering at a local museum and working in archives. She started at her small museum in an Assistant Curator role, progressing to senior level, and had been in post for several years. A craftsperson enthused by objects, Evelyn too enjoyed the practical side of curating:

"I mean it is a really good fit for me, just with my kind of background and interest in [this area of] history, I'm also a ['maker'] so the collection, you know, really is like, is like a dream collection [...]. So it's, you know, ticking all those like personal interest boxes for me".

She had "always wanted to work in a museum" and found that a smaller institution suited her personally, due to the variety in her work and her daily interactions with colleagues. She explained:

"I wouldn't want to work anywhere larger than this. [...] I like that I was talking to [my colleagues] this morning and saying, 'bit worried about the exhibition, I think on Monday we'll come and paint'. I like that I'm painting some days, that, you know, this afternoon I've got a senior management meeting, we'll be talking about fundraising for, like, strategic capital campaigns. I like that I've got that real cross-section of things to do. I like that the workshop's just through there and I can go and spend an afternoon with a box of objects if I want to."

Describing her responsibilities as a "cross-section", Evelyn's experience supports Ava's assumption that small museums might offer more opportunities than a curatorial role in a larger museum. For Evelyn working at a small museum was preferable: "I think, you know, if I worked somewhere like one of the nationals to just be a curator or an interpretation officer or an exhibition person [...] I would not be happy in that role. I think that would frustrate me." Unlike Ava, Evelyn saw herself as unusual due to her enthusiasm for engaging with people, which was something she didn't associate with a typical curator:

> "I think I'm quite odd *[laughs]*, I, don't think I fit that, traditional kind of, curator role. [...] I really love talking to people about objects or ideas [...] and I love igniting that enthusiasm in someone else. My mum was a teacher, I never wanted to be a teacher, I never wanted to go into formal education, but I love the idea of learning and I love the idea of, kind of, learning in an informal environment."

Her perception of a "traditional curator" was someone who does not engage with others. It may be that this preconception had been changed through her work in a small museum. Another interpretation could be that Evelyn was attempting to distance herself from an 'old'-museological type of curator. In any case, she was keen at this moment to evidence the idea that she is interested in people and audiences as well as objects.

Isabel's background and interests appeared to have a significant impact on the approach she took to curating, in particular her interest in social history and supporting the perspectives of minority communities. She explained:

> "most of my career has been about supporting people from areas of high deprivation to have a voice [and] communities that rarely have their voices heard, so I, did lots of work around - and still do - around children, people in areas of high deprivation who are often ignored [...]. I diversified into heritage, so we started working with people in communities so that people who rarely had their social history highlighted got their social history heard, and in doing

so provided those communities with additional confidence in who they were and where they'd come from and what their community meant to them."

Similarly, Olivia's motivations were socially and historically informed. Her aim when she started the project of repurposing the community venue into a museum was to share the history of her neighbourhood with others for communal benefit. Experienced in building conservation, Olivia combined her professional experience with enthusiasm for her local community:

"I was interested in this area because it's the area I live in [...] I got quite excited about it and I wanted other people to appreciate where they lived [...]. I've just wanted people to know that they lived in a special place. [...] and that [some neighbourhoods] have very interesting origins and are underappreciated and undervalued."

For her, sharing and appreciating her community was an impetus for her starting the project. Though their roles were very different, Isabel and Olivia described themselves as "project coordinators", explaining that curating was just one part of what they do. This indicates that both participate in non-curatorial tasks in their respective museums, but also suggests that their personal community interests had fed into their approaches to, and perceptions of, curating.

Finn was one of the lesser qualified curators in position. He had started as an IT volunteer, at his small museum, and had subsequently volunteered to be its curator after the one prior had vacated the post. He claimed that local history was his motivation for getting involved: "My main interest in all honesty is the local history, the informational side of it." For Finn, his enthusiasm was pertinent to his role. Similarly, Jasper, also a voluntary curator, thought of himself as an enthusiast more than a qualified curator. However, where Finn seemed to rely on his own confidence to rise above his lack of qualifications and colleagues, Jasper placed more emphasis on his passions for local history as the driving factor in him becoming involved at his museum, where he had initially started off as a voluntary steward before becoming the curator.

"I intended to [get involved with this museum] all along. [...] I take the responsibility of curator, but I don't feel very professional about it. I don't feel that I'm very, I haven't got the experience or anything like that so anything I've brought to the museum is just enthusiasm and just local knowledge generally. I've got no background in museums or, how to conserve anything."

Jasper expressed doubt at his qualifications for the role and therefore saw his experience and enthusiasm as providing the knowledge and expertise where more academic or traditional experience was lacking.

4.5. Interpretation of role: preconceptions versus expectations

Finn previously stated that he knew "precious little about care and conservation", but also claimed that his museum's 'constitution' would describe his role as "looking after the collection, full stop. Almost." When asked if he could break down what his role at the museum is, he listed the areas of work that he does not get involved in, confirming that his job excludes maintenance, finances and marketing. As curator of his museum Finn claimed he was able to adapt his role as needed, but that "there are various parts of the set-up which I deliberately have nothing to do with." He interpreted his role as: "a temporary steward of the heritage of this local area, to pass on *hopefully*, sometime, to somebody else of the next generation to do it."

Olivia saw her role as managing a community project that she facilitated: "I was the one that actually went, 'No, let's - we don't want a book swap - let's actually do this museum idea.'" Others, like Mia and Sophia, went into detail about the processes their work involves:

Sophia: "So, a lot of day-to-day things, answering public enquiries, following up on things that people have requested, working through backlogs of basic day-to-day things like documentation backlog, you know, repackaging, re-boxing of things, which always falls to the bottom of the list because something else always comes above it. [...] I'm the strategic lead for, the curatorial side of all of our [museum sites] so, I'm responsible for the five-year exhibition programme

[…]. I'm also responsible for, the Accreditation process, of collections care and management, I'm quite heavily involved with building maintenance […]. I'm an active lead for all the fundraising for all the museums in the organisation, I draft a lot of the funding applications or work with colleagues on all of the funding applications that we submit, and then the execution of those projects"

Sophia also directly manages several other paid staff members, such as the assistant curator, and museum site managers.

"I think our jobs are to care for the collections that we have in our trust, and to tell the stories about them. So absolutely, that collection care and interpretation are the bedrock of what we do. Neither one nor the other is more important. […] But they are both absolutely vital, you can't have one without the other […] it's quite hard when someone says, 'Oh', you know, 'but people aren't gonna be interested in that', and you're like, 'Oh, but it's *really* fascinating'. But, a good curator should be able to make people interested in anything."

As part of a three-person team, Emma explained exhibitions take up the most of her time. She listed her collections management responsibilities, which were monitoring objects, cataloguing, acquisitions, loans, and following compliancy procedures both internally and externally (pp. 8-9). Charlotte explained there are two strands to her curator role: collections management and community engagement. She manages twelve collections volunteers who carry out research, which she verifies, and help with cataloguing the library, database work, and transcribing letters as part of projects that Charlotte designates to them.

"My collections management role involves looking after the library, museum and archives. So we have a collection of over nine thousand books here, and over fifteen hundred objects, plus the additional archive material. […] I manage a team of twelve volunteers, who are engaged in various different projects, a lot of which is, cataloguing the library, and sometimes there are set projects I set different volunteers. So they'll be transcribing letters, or, using our Modes

database [...] There will be different research enquiries coming in which, they help with, too [...] they send me research, I verify if it's accurate. [...] the community engagement role, is very much looking at taking the stories we have and sharing them with different audiences and setting up new initiatives, projects, events"

Like many of the others, Charlotte saw collections management as a key component of her curatorial role. However, as she explained, her motivations and perspective have shifted towards valuing the people she works with over her collections-based tasks:

"there's so much, so much stuff here, it's a lifetime's work to be in here and sort out [...] archives and backlogs and stuff. [...] sometimes you are working on it and you get to the end of the day and you really, you start to think, 'what's the main purpose of aim of it?' and I guess [laughs] I guess the collection side should technically say, 'Oh well we need all this, we need all the documentation sorted, we need to have everything really neatly catalogued, we need to make it accessible online', and then the other part of you says, 'I've had volunteers come in and they've given up their time, and sometimes they've given up it for very personal reasons, they, they're caring for someone and they need to have something that they enjoy'. And, then you start to realise, it's not really about that list for the archives, it's about, like how, how I can support them, and make sure this is an enjoyable experience and that they're, inspired by what they do here and that makes a difference to their lives."

In this statement, Charlotte debates between logical and emotional answers and she ended the statement by saying "it needs both". Charlotte's views here are aligned with the visitor research that took place from the 1990s onwards in UK museums, which included ideas around museum staff coming together in more collaborative ways of working, towards "shared strategies for success" (Mastai, 2007). This body of research came into wider consideration in practice with a turn in museology towards the social and cultural aspects of museum dynamics, which some have identified as beginning in museums across the world in the 1970s (Lewis, 1984), and the sector in Britain

responded accordingly by promoting visitor experience in museum practice and scholarly research.

Another experience raised amongst the interviewed curators with regards to the remit of their roles, was the concept of 'doing everything', which can be understood as demonstrating the difference between the expectations and preconceptions they had of what it means to be a curator in a small museum and the reality of their work 'on the ground'. As I will demonstrate, the differing priorities and workloads of the interviewed curators did seem to affect their capacity to engage with audiences, and their approaches to audience engagement strategies in their work.

4.5.1 'Doing everything'

The remit of the curators across the data set involved expected duties as well as some that may not be associated with the 'old' museological stereotype of a museum curator which one might expect to involve object care, research, writing interpretation, collating documentation and exhibit planning, as essentials. Thompson's *Manual of Curatorship*, 1984, for example, expresses the traditional view of the curator by dividing curatorship into four main categories: context of the museum, collections management, visitor services and management.[30] Collectively, the responsibilities revealed by the interviewed curators covered the following: schools, staffing, strategic decision-making, fundraising, loans, marketing, outreach,

---

[30] In the manual, collections management was broken down into documentation, research, conservation and storage. Visitor services encompassed educational responsibilities, exhibitions, retail, exhibits, and the interdepartmental relationships associated with those areas of museum work. Management and administration included finance, HR, trustee boards, health and safety, which might be covered today under the term 'governance'. The first section, entitled 'The Museum Context' included a survey on collections and museum collectors, the differing natures of national and smaller, independent museums, in addition to a potted history of museums in Britain up to 1920 (1984, pp. 7-53). The manual also included a short chapter on Ethics (Duggan, 1984, pp. 98-104) and a 'Code of Conduct for Museum Curators' in the Appendices (1984, pp. 530-540), which engaged with the ethical issues surrounding curating, and offered suggestions for best curatorial practice. Due to the traditional and modern approaches presented in the manual at the time, the guidance provided can be best understood as straddling old and new museological theories.

supporting volunteers, training, cataloguing, greeting visitors and other Front of House duties, facilitating/organising events, cleaning, research, visitor data management, evaluation, accreditation, accessibility issues, reporting to management/trustees, object conservation, communications, exhibitions, bookings, sales, catering, washing-up, auditing, database management, managing environmental/building issues. Indeed, the majority of the curators commented on the concept of having to 'do everything'.

Finn had spent time during his six years as volunteer curator at his museum deliberating on his role, and had decided that the collection was his top priority. He referred to engaging with audiences as a 'bit', that was not as significant a responsibility as managing the objects under his care. His emphasis on succession also indicated that he would be likely to pass this approach on to his successor. He also confirmed that the remit of his museum is concerned with the heritage of the local area. It appears that Finn has been in a position to make a decision about his own attitude to curating, which does not seem out of the ordinary.

> JS: "Would you say that your role, in essence, revolves around the collection?"
>
> *Finn*: "My view is, and I've had time to hone this view as we've gone on, is that, *that* is my primary responsibility. […] The… bit about making it as accessible to the public, and as wide a range of the public as possible, is vitally important but not *as* vitally important as the role of collections management in my view."

Although, in the next line, he demonstrates that he is required to undertake more audience-focused work than he perhaps would prefer. He stated: "In *reality*, 80-90 per cent of my time is skewed towards the audience engagement side rather than the care and conservation side." His use of the word 'skewed' suggests that this is not something he has chosen to pursue, but has undertaken it out of necessity rather than desire. This also suggests that the reality of Finn's curatorial role was not aligned with his preconceptions or expectations. By contrast, Sophia and Evelyn both saw being involved in multiple areas of museum work as enjoyable, due to the variety it brought

to their roles. However, they also acknowledged that increased involvement also puts pressure on them:

> *Sophia*: "like with all good small organisations [I do] a bit of everything. […] the best [part about working in a small museum] is, you do everything, so you never have a day when you're *just* sat at a computer, and that means that your day is – your job is always varied and interesting. Sometimes boring, but all jobs can be boring."; "Erm, the *worst* things are, you do everything! […] There's just not enough hours in the day to do everything that we want to do, and the frustration of knowing that, that if there were, we could be doing *so much* in the museums, like there's *so* much potential. But we don't have the time to just solidly focus on one thing, we're always constantly balancing across many things and having to prioritise which museum comes first and that's quite hard."

> *Evelyn*: "I've accepted that I can't do everything, as much as I would like to do everything."; "[The best thing about working in a small museum is] the range of tasks, getting to do lots of everything. Definitely. I love it."

Evelyn accepted that she had to give up some control, and explained that she has curatorial volunteers, precisely because she can't do *everything.* Ava explained: "when I first joined the museum, I was responsible for everything. So, organisation, all the policies and plans, forward plan – everything. Collections care, visitor experience, so, everything." She explained that this has changed since April 2019, when the trustees decided to reallocate her managerial responsibilities to a new manager, and that her sole focus was then on being the museum's curator: "at the moment I can focus on collections care, exhibitions and research." Ava appeared to be relieved when her responsibilities were reduced to three clear curatorial remits and, when asked, her advice to other small museum curators was to take heed of the temptation to attempt to do too much. She said: "Don't try to do everything. Because you'll kill yourself!" Similarly, Jasper admitted that such a level of responsibility was undesirable: "I don't want it all to be just me!". Emma also recognised this pressure and thought that having

to do everything could have negative and potentially harmful effects on a small museum curator, such as putting the individual's wellbeing as risk:

> "I think the hardest thing is there is not enough people to do the stuff, with the kind of ambition that we're trying to do. I think the hardest thing is resources. We just do not have enough resources. […] you just find that, there's like a risk I think of burning out because you're, trying to do everything."

Isabel's response to 'doing everything' however, was more concerned with the impact on others, instead of the impact on her personally. She described her role as like: "juggling, and, the balls do drop, you know. So you've got too many balls in the air and they do drop. Because, there's a limit to how much you can look after people."

Jasper accepted that he was hierarchically positioned above others and interpreted his role as an overseer to his peers:

> "I sort of dabble in a bit of each [area]. But the main thing is, the day-to-day running and making sure that the people who are doing the parts that I'm not doing are able to do it, and they're not sick, holidays and things like that."; "I'm spearheading nearly all of the ideas and changes. […] Made sure the vision, the whole lot, was, more or less, the same."

By contrast, Finn drew attention to himself as standing out from the other volunteers, reinforcing his legitimacy as the person to be the curator at his venue, rather than others. He knows "the bigger picture", which in his mind, sets him apart.

Sophia and Finn were from opposite ends of curatorial practice in terms of their backgrounds and the museums they worked in. However, they shared a sense of reverence for their own successes being achieved through self-motivated, hard work. Sophia saw herself as self-made, describing her career success as due to being "self-driven" and "taking opportunities":

> "I have spent my entire career in the same organisation, which I think is quite unusual outside of the big heritage organisations in England. [A] lot of it was

sort of self-driven [...] I wasn't planning on working in museums, it just kind of happened, and now I can't imagine working anywhere else. But it was also kind of taking advantage of opportunities when they came up, really. [...] And a huge amount of self-educating and on the job learning. So, I have no museum qualification, but, I learnt everything through doing it."

Finn expressed a similar view, and saw his contributions as key to the development of his museum:

"I had no background, no qualifications or anything in working in museums or history or anything like that. [...] I learnt from scratch basically, when I became curator six and a half years ago. [...] I know precious little about care and conservation, er about the, the proper theories of research or display or anything like that - I am [an] enthusiast. And I think what makes me slightly different there from the rest of the volunteers is that I've developed the bigger picture about how it all slots together. [...] So my background, I suppose to sum it up is that I arrived here totally by fluke. I'm curator by serendipity, or bad luck, whichever way you want to [look] at it"

The emphasis on being 'self-made' can be compared with a neoliberal, individualistic outlook in wider society. This attitude relies upon the concept of the individual being responsible for educating and bettering oneself, thereby pulling oneself out of disadvantageous positions such as poverty, ill health, and poor education. However, it also denies the vast imbalances in educational and vocational opportunities available to members of English society. Sophia appeared to be in an advantageous, and privileged, position in numerous ways. Though not a qualified curator, Sophia had completed a doctorate in a related topic, had "noticed what was lacking in roles" where she was employed, and had been able to create a long-term role for herself, in her current organisation. The role she designed was directly tailored to her own interests and relied heavily upon her own expertise – expertise that she had gained through her independent academic pursuits and heritage preferences.

In contrast to Sophia, Mia described herself as a new curator, and confirmed that qualifications did not sufficiently prepare her for her role. She had achieved an MA in Curating but felt underprepared for the responsibilities that came with curating in a small museum. She explained:

> "Being in such a small museum there's no real training as such, you're just thrown in at the deep end. It's up to you to work out what happens when and how to do it, so yeah [the local peer forum] was my first port of call, going to them and saying, like, 'What do I do!'".

For Mia, seeking external advice from her colleagues through a local, independent group for museum professionals was essential to her overcoming the initial challenges of her role.

This introduction to the curators' perspectives on the remits of their roles demonstrates the similarities and nuances of each person's perceptions towards a commonly shared expectation that they must be held accountable for multiple responsibilities in their roles – some of which were not perceived to be curatorially typical. Candlin (2016, p. 17) acknowledged the phenomena of having to take on multiple non-traditional tasks in smaller museums, asserting that: "After all, staff have numerous duties, often another job entirely, and are under no obligation to spend hours explaining the collections unless they so choose." Her observation suggests that small museum curators can choose how to spend their time. For some of the interviewed curators, such as Finn and Sophia, this was certainly true, whereas for others, such as Ava, who was under strict instruction from a board of trustees, this was simply not the case. Making claims to a lack of capacity amidst a seemingly flexible environment could be seen as an excuse, allowing exemption amongst small museums in England from engaging with the fundamentals of their roles, which are to hold collections in trust for public benefit (ibid., pp. 9-10). There appears to be a disconnection between working to fulfil each museums' social aims and having to answer to imposed restrictions from funders, fuelled by the limitations of practical capacity for the curators. The contributing factors pertaining to a small museum

curators' lack of capacity and the impact of stakeholders on their experiences will be considered in the following chapter.

4.6. Curator perceptions of audiences

The significance of curators engaging with their audiences is increasingly encouraged in museological practice, as confirmed in Chapter 2, and the issue has been long-debated in museum practice: "All museums need to identify the audience with which they are communicating." (Warhust, 1984, p. 81). I will now evidence some of the ways in which the interviewed curators perceived their audiences.

4.6.1. Visitor data as a means of understanding audiences

One of the ways in which some of the interviewed curators described their audiences was by referencing the visitor data and evaluation that their museums had carried out. Gathering visitor data as a means of evidencing perceived 'success' of an exhibition or project, or even a museum's overall offer, is encouraged by funding bodies in the sector, yet is something that curators or other employees in a small museum would rarely be able to conduct without training. Often, they do not have the capacity to conduct in-house evaluations, hence a reliance on external consultancy firms which can be costly, and the role is completed half-heartedly, and not treated as a priority. Results can often go ignored, or undervalued, or even unused because they simply don't know how to use it and do not actively seek out the means to understand it (Falk & Dierking, 1992; Hooper-Greenhill, 1995; Davies and Heath, 2014).

When asked to describe the core audience at her museum, Ava used terminology associated with audience profiling firms in the museums and cultural sector, rather than providing a personal interpretation of the visitors, which she identified as 'Commuterland Culturebuffs'. Prominent examples of the deployment of such terms are the international company, Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (MHM) and The Audience Agency, a charity funded by Arts Council England. Both examples provide a spectrum of audience categorisation for museum professionals attempting to understand who they are currently reaching as audiences, and aim to help museums learn how to target

their programming to the characteristics of such people types. The MHM website (2021) features a questionnaire entitled 'What segment are you?' where one can answer a quiz-style set of questions that establish what category of audience you are. You will be designated to one of seven demographic 'personality types', as formulated by MHM: 'Entertainment'; 'Enrichment'; 'Perspective'; 'Expression'; 'Release'; 'Essence'; and 'Affirmation'. In a few bullet points, MHM then provide advice on aspects such as where to find these types of people, which translates to how to market to them, the kinds of messaging they respond to, and how to build relationships with them.[31]

> "Basically, those people are interested in arts and cultures in general, or are interested in music, theatre, museums and art […]. They prefer classical things, so nothing too contemporary, too extreme [or] that would be too scary for them […].They like, baking, knitting, if you imagine that type of people, they live in suburban areas, they have, relatively more dispensable income and, they have time, but they are quite busy, so they are involved in quite a lot of other things, volunteering, this here and there, quite involved in the community."

In the above extract, Ava's perception of audiences mirrored the language and stratifying methods of audience profiling. She explained that her museum had participated in a programme where an external consultancy came to help them understand their visitors more, and this clearly had a significant impact on how she saw her visitors, down to hypothetically knowing how they spend their time. It appears that Ava adopted these assumptions based on consultancy advice, as opposed to referencing her own experiences of her visitors. This raises questions around whether this sort of data is useful to a curator, or whether it provides a quick fix to understanding who exhibits and programming are actually reaching. Ava's understanding of her audience it seems, was reliant upon external data.

---

[31] For an example, see the overview of the 'Affirmation' segment type, Mhminsight.com, 2021. (Available here: https://mhminsight.com/files/affirmation-pen-portrait-dGbG-258-10208.pdf)

Isabel confirmed that she had a clear understanding of who her visitors were, due to the evaluation data she had: "I know exactly who they are […], we analyse them frequently, from our questionnaires […] it's quite complicated." However, she wasn't able to respond to the question without consulting her visitor data which implies some gaps in her actual understanding of them. She described the latest round of data gathered. This was based on the UCL Wellbeing Umbrella, which offers a 'toolkit' to museums looking to understand the impact of outreach initiatives in particular on audiences, and claims to measure the "psychological wellbeing as an indicator of the mental state of the individual." (UCL, 2013, p. 3).[32] Isabel's museum used it to capture the experiences of their museum visitors through assessing their views on their own wellbeing and how it was during their visit. This is a fairly innovative technique I suspect not commonly used in smaller institutions in the South West, and none of the other curators mentioned it. There is certainly an interest here on Isabel's part in trying out new techniques as researched and provided by the sector. This also enabled the museum to carry it out themselves, rather than conduct an evaluation series from scratch, or hire a paid consultant to do it. Yet, through telling me this in response to being asked to describe typical visitors, it was unclear how Isabel was demonstrating her own experience and knowledge of visitors. She claimed:

> "we interviewed people as they came in and then as they exited to see if their wellbeing had been affected by the museum. And on two scores, there was an increase. […] The visitor numbers [were] a little bit low for it to be significant, but, definitely worth repeating and looking at again."

Isabel did not articulate the significance of using the UCL Wellbeing Umbrella. It is unclear what the increase in two scores meant, and she admitted that the numbers were not enough to make the study significant. Therefore, this could be seen as an attempt by the curator to fill a gap in knowledge with statistics that are of no tangible value. It also shows the levels of trust that curators may place in the processes of gathering and using visitor data, without fully understanding its meaning.

---

[32] See Thompson and Chatterjee (2020) *UCL Museum Wellbeing Measures Toolkit.*

Sophia's attitude towards visitor evaluation methods came across as slightly dismissive when she said: "we've done all the kind of qualitative and quantitative research", suggesting a lack of enthusiasm, and potentially indicates a lack of understanding, about collecting visitor data and its value. She elaborated to say: "it's interesting across [our different] sites. So, 'Cove Manor' is a first-time to [the city], often foreign, a box-ticking visitor I would say". Her perception of the audiences at two of the other sites in comparison, was that they are: "a slightly more interested visitor [...] a visitor who seeks us out, which I think is because the [our museum sites are not] necessarily on the main thoroughfares or in the main places, despite the fact that we're not actually that far out [...] it's a visitor, that *really* wants to visit." I think Sophia means 'more discerning' than your average – 'foreign' – tourist, and it implies that Britons and locals, perhaps even just English-speakers, are above internationals and foreigners in her esteem. Perceived as being off the beaten track was an often-mentioned hindrance of the small museum by their curators, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5. Although here, I think she means because they are not as noticeable or maybe marketed as heavily as 'Cove Manor', and their visitors have to work harder to visit the other sites. Her description implies that the museum sites aside from Cove Manor, the largest attraction of the four museum sites within her organisation, are quite specialist. They have specific topics, in all of which the curator is an expert. They engage with specialist groups and academic institutions, and their visitors only visit them because they have prior specialist interest, understanding of the topics or, presumably, their own expertise in those topics. This suggests that if a visitor does not have any prior knowledge or interest in their respective subject matters, they might not visit. Sophia talked about this positively, and I think she admires her existing visitors for the intellectual capital they bring to her work, which reflects well onto her as curator. However, the range of museums within the organisation, perhaps with the exception of the larger, manor-style attraction, appear to be a closed circuit in terms of audience engagement and access.

Evelyn more openly expressed that the visitor survey they conduct does not provide useful insights for her, as a curator, stating that it:

"really doesn't provide me with any useful information […]. It's like, 'where have you come from?', 'how long did you spend here?', 'what was your favourite bit?', 'what was your least favourite bit?'. […] we're just making assumptions or just kind of generalising when we're writing up stuff and trying to hit it right."

Having recognised the lack of value in their existing data gathering methods, Evelyn chose to respond by reading literature about visitor evaluation in order to improve the survey. Evelyn's desire to change the process demonstrated a level of awareness of the shortcomings of visitor data, which resulted in action, rather than the complacency that Sophia demonstrated.

The museums with paid curators were the ones who tended to produce and use pieces of visitor evaluation research, and the most likely to engage with external profiling consultancies. The museums that were volunteer-run were the most likely to use visitor comments, and the least likely to use external help. Jasper mentioned that he uses a visitor comments book, however, his focus was on the positive feedback and not how to use the data constructively:

> "we've got a visitors book, and we get really good feedback on that…and…we encourage *all* ages to put in there, so even if we had somebody with children we ask them if they'd like to put something in, and then you can often pick up on what *they* thought was the, the most interesting thing."

Olivia, who was the paid curator and developer of the mini-museum project, used online visitor comments but also expressed her limited ability to undertake the evaluation work required to submit to the project's funding body:

"we have someone who is evaluating our project who's done quite a lot of interviews with people who've been involved, in the project and people who've visited over the first weekend. So, it will be evaluated in that way. […] I don't have any specific way of doing, an evaluation of enjoyment […] at the moment

115

- other than 'Trip advisor' and 'Google' reviews, which I'm trying very hard to get people to do. Well you know, whether they're positive or negative you know, I just want to know, is this a successful idea?"

This reinforces a lack of proper use and understanding of visitor data in smaller museums, and supports the notion of organisations providing positive comments as evidence to funders that their work is 'successful' in engaging with audiences (Marstine et al., 2013). Coffee (2013, pp. 165-166) described the visitor comments book as an "essential gift" to museum professionals, and Macdonald (2005) highlighted the potential value of engaging with visitor comments. However Coffee also acknowledged that organisations are not often encouraged to interpret the comments they are presented with any further than to merely seek out that which acknowledges their own good work.

Formally evaluating projects and exhibits in terms of their success are increasingly expected within the sector (Davies and Heath, 2014), however Marstine posited that audience profiling methods and the ways in which they are used in museums can often be seen as a method of ticking boxes rather than taking a committed approach to developing audience engagement (2013, p. 10). While some of the interviewed curators used feedback to make changes to their displays, such as Isabel and Ava, others simply referenced the data when asked to describe their visitors, and consequently failed to demonstrate its practical application. Some of the curators were able to describe their audiences from first-hand experience, such as Jasper and Finn, whereas others appeared to have less contact, such as Ava and Emma, and therefore had less knowledge of their audiences. This demonstrates that the interviewed curators on the whole had awareness of audiences, mostly through visitor data gathered at their museum, as opposed to first-hand interactions with them. Curatorial reliance on visitor data could raise further questions about how ethical stratifying assumptions about audiences are, and how useful such data is to curatorial practices in the small museum in particular, for example, the efficiency and effectiveness of their usage. It may be the case that visitor data is used as a crutch for a lack of audience knowledge.

4.6.2. Diverse or diasporic? – the "foreign" visitor

Sophia differentiated "foreign" visitors and tourists, from "interested" visitors, distinguishing a perceived separation between audiences. In this locale international visitors fuel the local economy. Ava, whose museum was located in the vicinity, had also shown a lack of enthusiasm for tourists: "they come once, and then we'll never see them again!". This shared apathy towards international visitors could simply be indicative of an inability to maintain tourists as a long-term visitor corpus. The association with "foreign" and 'uninterested' however, is unclear, but could reflect a wider attitude in heritage towards short-term tourists. Some have argued that demarcating certain audience members as simply 'tourists' denies the human experience inherent in cultural activities, such as visiting museums, dismissing the experiences of some by favouring the experiences of others (Smith et al., 2012). If a curator was to purposefully ignore tourists in South West museums, or negatively stereotype them, this potentially has further-reaching consequences for international visitor experiences to the area in general, and their experiences of English heritage.

Demographically, Sophia confirmed: "we're still very aware of the fact that the majority of our UK visitors are white, middle class, but that's the museum sector in general." Sophia has begun to think about who is not visiting her museum, whom she referred to as "non-users". By mentioning that her visitors are white, she acknowledges the 'race' of her audiences, showing that she and her organisation are, and have been, aware of the racial divide in visitors to their museums. This also prompts the question of whether the interviewed curators would have mentioned the 'race' at all in the presence of a white interviewer. "Still aware" suggests this is an on-going issue that continues in her organisation, that she has known about. Sophia also showed awareness that the visitor data at her disposal was limited, stating that: "the one thing that we find quite hard to do is, is the non-user. So, is to find out about people, that don't come, and that aren't coming".

Sophia's claim that this is representative of "the museum sector in general" appears to reflect her belief in this state of affairs as reflecting just how things are, or in other words, the 'norm'. Taken at face value, she did not communicate a desire to change

that norm. Accepting a 'white-majority' audience as the norm without further comment, such as acknowledging the need for it to change or expressing an understanding about the significance of this matter, could be seen as alleviating responsibility to address the problem, and/or evading any critique or guilt that could be aimed at the museum – or the curator – by saying that it's a much wider, bigger problem (Frankenberg, 1993; Bhopal, 2018). In simple terms, this could be described in museum ethics as exhibiting curatorial 'self-interest' (Edson, 1997, p. 30), or 'showing off' by refusing to engage with a much wider story of social division (Bal, 1992). Complicity in maintaining the status quo, whilst recognising a state of inequality, signals a problematic view in terms of the ethics of a contemporary museum practice that requires engaging with complex relationships between museums, people and objects (Marstine, 2013, p. xix). Further still, if curatorial attitudes were to negate a typical 'norm' and 'otherwise' attitude towards audiences, this could potentially 'delink' "from the imposed dichotomies articulated in the West, namely the knower and the known, the subject and the object", as encouraged in decolonial thinking (Mignolo, 2017, p. 42).

4.6.3. Emphasis on youth: "the holy grail of museum visitors"

Another factor that appeared important to the curators when describing their perceptions of audiences, was an emphasis on young people and engaging with 'youth'. There were contrasting views amongst the curators, with some seeing the downsides of young visitors, such as Ava who viewed them as disruptive, and others advocating for them as a top priority.

Sophia explained:

> "we get the most young people here, and that's something we're quite interested in building on here. But also for the first time, because [for] our exhibition at [the large high profile site], we purposefully chose a fourteen- to twenty-four-year-old age bracket as our target audience […] particularly for the social media that we're doing on that exhibition […] because we're all very aware that that's the holy grail of museum visitors"

Having mentioned the issue of 'race', as previously highlighted, Sophia subsequently proceeded to describe how engaged her museum is with young people. This could have been a pre-emptive response designed to counter the fact that her audience is not racially diverse. In my professional experience in the field, I have encountered situations where museum staff see having a lack of racially diverse audiences as a failure and may take the guilt of not being representative of wider UK society as an embarrassment due to an overriding (felt) implication that they are complicit in racism. It may be the case that to avoid such a confrontation within themselves or their organisations, a perceived engagement with other types of audiences as a successful replacement take precedence (e.g. 'at least we are doing this'). It is my interpretation that this suspicion about individual and institutional compliance with racism is, in fact, accurately raised and should be considered in more depth, particularly with regard to the meaning and interpretation of what indeed constitutes a diverse audience. I cannot conclude the same for Sophia, however, her decision to mention 'race' (referring to her white-majority audience) and then talk about engaging with 'young people' appeared to separate the two factors: 'race' and age.

Brent (1997, pp. 74-82) alluded to a common conflation of multidimensional aspects of 'community' in public policymaking (such as marginal characteristics, ethnic diversity and age) whereby, in the interests of inclusion within a (community) space, the creation of division often goes unseen. He described this homogenising effect as a failure to see difference and an inadvertent pushing together of those differences in a false and forced image of unity as something identifiable under a single community umbrella. Conflating, or replacing, engaging with different kinds of audiences for example, such as 'racially diverse' *or* 'young people', creates an either/or situation that simultaneously denies similarities, differences and 'multi-dimensionality', in the pursuit of an inclusive museum visitor population. Furthermore, this potentially evades a wider problem of social division. If small museum curators are to think locally about their audiences, "then an appreciation of the differences within and between them must be the starting point." (Hoggett, 1997, p. 15). In museums, this includes seeing 'race' across all audience groups, including 'young people'. A further consideration is

what engagement with 'young people' as a group entails i.e. what is being considered when these types of audiences enter museums and in what ways meaningful exchange is being facilitated (Griffin et al., 2017).

"Thinking through race", or the conscious considering of 'race' was identified in Frankenberg's (1993, p. 142) interviews with white women on 'whiteness', as either "an ongoing part of their lives" or "occasioned by the interview itself". Although I had not posed any questions centred around 'race', it could have been the case that Sophia was attempting to draw attention to her awareness of it. Subsequently considering 'youth' engagement as a successful alternative to addressing engagement with people of different 'races', could be seen as demonstrating the kind of homogeneity Brent described, or a form (conscious or subconscious) of evading 'race' and its power relations as recognised by Frankenberg (1997, pp. 149-157).

Sophia's emphasis on the young, as "the holy grail" of visitors, neglected to mention racialised diversity, therefore an assumed 'norm' based on her testimonies is that the youth she is referring to is of a white majority and, given her descriptions of those who tend to visit, not foreign. Although she had described being involved in talking with focus groups during a consultancy project, it was not made explicit how Sophia had actually interacted with visitors.

Finn also acknowledged the obligation he felt to engage with younger audiences, saying that:

> "I suppose we always ought to say we want to attract those from a younger generation, because they're the future, customers, that we want to see so, making sure we're sowing seeds with children from families, children who are with schools, children with other organisations".

He also mentioned that a difficulty in this was having staff and facilities equipped to handle such visitors, noting that "it's *easier* for most of our volunteers to talk to visitors the same age and background". This signifies that it is commonly understood amongst the curators that young audiences are indeed seen as desirable.

Jasper thought that all museums in general should value younger visitors, stating that that they are: "for the *children,* it's educating them so, that they're in touch with the past." For him, it was children through whom the most valuable connections were made from his museum experience. This spoke to his personal interest and his own understanding of what functions a museum should perform, specifically in enabling connectivity through local and family histories: "I mean I've taken my *own* grandchildren to the museum before I was involved, and showed them a picture of me in there, in the school photograph, and then you think - it's just a school photo […]then you start realising, wow at my age, I'm *part of the museum,* I'm *part* of the history of this town!". This was especially important to him, and he really seemed passionate about the impact on local families:

> "we are getting parents who bring their children along but you know, when we find out, 'Oh yeah I came, with my school last week' or two weeks ago or something, 'and I've brought my mum along' or, you know, mum and dad, or gran or whatever. And I think that's brilliant"

This means of repeat visiting for Jasper seemed particularly validating and rewarding and appeared to fulfil his idea of how museums should be. Mia expressed a desire to work with younger people more in the future, and most of the others mentioned families among their target audiences. However, such ventures were presented as hypothetical, 'wish-list', projects and not something they were actively promoting, although they did reference family workshops in their programming. The issue of speaking in hypotheticals will be discussed further in the next chapter. Isabel on the other hand admitted that there was nothing currently on offer that might attract families or children, but she did see the value in engaging with younger age groups, as exemplified in the following account:

> "So there was this little girl, she's only eight, she's filling out one of our questionnaires – earnestly. And I thought, 'Ooh, I'll go up and I'll say to her, 'really want your ideas in how we can make this better for children, I'm really interested'. And she said, 'Oh, it's just such a lovely museum, there's nothing you need to change'. […] There was a little boy behind me eavesdropping

everything, and I said, 'Oh what about you? Have you got any ideas for me, how I can improve the museum for children?' and he waved his little arm down the main corridor and went, 'There is nothing for me here'. […] And I went, 'Ooh'. And do you know? He's absolutely right. At the time, for his height, there was nothing, [be]cause he wasn't tall enough to look into the cases. And actually, at his level, it was very dull. So, we have put some stuff in the lower level now"

Isabel listened to the feedback from her young visitors and responded by changing the display layout. These examples demonstrate a situation where interaction between a curator and their audience resulted in a curatorial change in practice.

Another example of this was found in Ava, who underwent a substantial rearrangement of her permanent collection displays from chronological to thematic, based on consultancy information and visitor feedback. She quotes visitors here, although described their feedback as "complaining". However, she listened to audience demands and common questions and put a response into her own curatorial practice:

"I made the decision to display them thematically, really based on visitors' feedback. […] they'd keep complaining about how the old display didn't make any sense to them. […] The most common questions we got were, 'What does this mean?', so they want to know more about the symbolism. And the other […] was, 'What was this used for?'. So the first floor […] now talks about the original functions of the objects."

She explained her visitors frequently commented on the craftsmanship of the objects, and how they arrived in the South West. Ava responded by designating a space in the displays that "highlight the techniques" and "the detail of the objects", and another that shows "how objects moved […] around the globe", through trade routes and exchanges. Ava considered herself to be disconnected from school children, however, noting that: "I probably cannot tell you a lot about them! […] Because that's [the Learning Manager's] responsibility!" This shift in attitude towards audience for Ava, depended it seemed on which part of the audience was under discussion. The younger

visitors were deemed to be someone else's responsibility – the learning team's – and presumably it was the adult visitors whom she had made the display changes for. Later, Ava was talking about how important repeat visitors are for their museum. When asked about how her work is contributing to attracting more loyal visitors, she divested her own responsibility in response, claiming that she would need to "check with the [Marketing Manager]". Isabel and Ava exemplify how some of the interviewed curators used audience feedback to make curatorial changes, yet their practical approaches differed from each other. Isabel demonstrated a socially engaged mode of curatorial practice, whereas Ava's response signalled uncertainty as to whether her own practice was making a difference to her audiences.

This connection between marketing and audiences was also made by Finn. Finn claimed to be heavily involved with audience work at his museum, however contradicted this by equating 'audience engagement' with marketing, which he claimed he did not do. This suggests a level of discomfort at the *meaning* of 'audience engagement' and indicates that Finn views his audiences as a set of customers, rather than visitors. This is further demonstrated when he asked me directly what it meant and his subsequent response:

> Finn: "the customer-facing type stuff tends to take up a vast amount of time, and I *think* that's what you mean by audience engagement, isn't it, to a certain degree?"
>
> JS: "I suppose I would describe audience engagement as, a term that describes the impact that you have on your visitors that come here, and also, your relationships that you build with them and your communication with them – that's what I would describe personally as audience engagement-"
>
> Finn: *[talks over me]* "-Yep, I say, the the the bit that I don't do in there is the marketing side."
>
> JS: "Mhmm."

Finn: "So I. To a certain extent I am rreactive *[rolls 'r']* to people wanting to come here, rather than going out and pulling them in. The, the only subtle difference is probably the schools where we have to have a proactive policy, otherwise we wouldn't see them."

Finn's hesitancy in confidently talking about his involvement in 'audience engagement' work, coupled with his eagerness to interrupt me after asking a question, indicated to me an overall lack of understanding of the term and that Finn had not formed any particularly strong opinions about or interpretation of the matter. From the above, it seemed that Finn saw engaging with audiences as greeting duties on the front desk or contributing to in-house group visits. He admitted that he was not proactive in seeking out visitors, and that this was not seen as part of his job. The language used, 'customer-facing', also suggests that to Finn, audience engagement might mean marketing to customers, rather than considering the visitor experience in relation to his curatorial work, such as audience response to the exhibits, for example. In an industry that relies upon visitors for financial support, this is hardly surprising, yet such a standpoint appears to place the social responsibility of museums to their publics in a lower position of importance. In the two cases, Ava and Finn, the curator's perception of their role in relation to audiences was selective, suggesting that they have different perceptions of different visitors.

4.6.4. Desirable and undesirable visitors

Some of the curators alluded to the desirability of certain visitors through describing the positive values, or detrimental qualities that particular visitor types appeared to bring to the museum. Aside from describing visitor feedback as "complaining", Ava also equated their physical presence with "pests", due to the physical impact on the conditions of the collections caused as a result of the visitor presence: "They're pests! [Laughs] Right? We bring in germs and dirty things and we shed our skins and, you know, but you obviously cannot have a museum without visitors!" For Ava, school children and families (with children) in particular seemed to disrupt the vision she had of the experience at her museum, and she expressed a desire to separate them from their core visitor group:

"For us, again and again we get from visitors, is the sense of tranquillity that they [find] in [this museum], and it matches pretty well with the aesthetics of [this type of] art anyway, so for us it's quite a good match[…]. But in order to protect that tranquillity, there are things we probably *can not do*, you know, like, how do we separate school visits, and family visits which can be quite noisy, from the 'Culturebuffs'?"

This shows that the adult visitors, or 'Culturebuffs' to use the audience consultancy term allocated to them at Ava's museum, were deemed a priority over other groups by her. This could be explained by Ava's trust in the consultancy process, and the fact that she was influenced by their input to view different groups as either detrimental or supportive to the museum's overall offer, which she viewed as providing a tranquil space.

For Finn, it was the ageing population of his visitors and volunteers that presented him with reason for concern and, to an extent, some embarrassment:

"It is probably fair to say, even though I don't particularly want to say it, that the general [visitor] profile is of a certain age. […] It tends to be an English-speaking audience that we get. Probably because that's the sort of people that holiday around these parts and it's the ethnic makeup of [this town's] area as well […]. the bit I don't like saying, is it's, people like me, who go to the museum that I've curated. […] I don't want it necessarily to be that way, it's a fact of life. So, we can pander to the younger generation as much as we like really, but, if we go over the top in that direction I have a worry that we might lose the people that actually do come in."

His acceptance that an older cohort is "a fact of life", suggests stasis, rather than an openness to changeability and growth. Finn confirms his reluctance is due to the risk to his existing visitors, should he "pander" to the youth too much. He also saw the future of small museums as difficult as a result of volunteering going out of fashion:

"I'm seriously concerned about where the next generation of visitors comes from, because […] volunteering is disappearing from the natural psyche, and going to museums may well be disappearing from the natural – sorry the national psyche."

The ageing population that currently visit and volunteer are likely to be in a position to retire with enough financial safety to be able to recreationally volunteer at a museum such as this one. This kind of economic stability is rarely associated with poorer communities, including younger generations, and also requires a level of social stability – such as seeing others like themselves when they visit, or experiencing displays and narratives that they can relate to. Given the social, economic, and geographical barriers to visiting museums, as acknowledged by the Arts Council England (2020), there may be other reasons for a decline in visitors and volunteers at his museum that Finn has neglected to consider. This demonstrates the positionality of a curator like Finn, himself a white, retired male, who chose to take on the role of voluntary curator at his local museum and highlights a lack of reflexivity that many of the other curators also possessed. Perpetuating a cycle of immobility, Finn works to satisfy his existing – undesirable – visitors, rather than actively reach out to the "next generation", which he prioritises, over his underlying concerns for the succession of the museum, for fear of losing visitors.

Tourists were a visitor group that Sophia saw as problematic. Describing one of the four sites of her organisation, she expressed: "'Anton House Museum' is in the centre of town, but it's not on the main thoroughfare and tourists are lazy. Tourists are really lazy […] but then at the same time, you're like, well if they're lazy and they don't wanna come to us then we'd rather not have them." To her, if they can't make the effort to find and visit this museum, tourists aren't the desirable market in Sophia's opinion. This contradicts an earlier statement she made, where she claimed it was a "massive shame" that they were not accessing enough people. Sophia put this down to a lack of marketing. This indicates that certain people – tourists in this case – are, in Sophia's eyes, considered lazy and therefore undesirable. Tourists are not considered amongst the people she wants the museum to reach. In a similar way to Ava, Sophia also

appreciated the quiet and "special" qualities of 'Anton House Museum', however, noting that: "when there's not many people there it has that real – it's quite special […] it's quite unusual to be one of very few people in a place nowadays. So, there's sort of something about how it makes people feel when they're there." The benefit of a quiet space could be interpreted as conducive to positive engagement and enjoyment of the museum experience in smaller institutions, to follow the perspectives of Ava and Sophia. This has become particularly significant in the way museums had to operate during Covid-19 closures, where visits were by appointment and numbers were limited. Some claimed that quieter, restricted access museums were boosting to the local economy (Ritchie, 2020). Another interpretation of this however, is that "quiet" can signal exclusivity, which has implications on the concept of who gets to access such spaces, for example, which people get to enjoy the "tranquillity" and who gets to feel "special". Conversely, some disagree with the exclusivity that museum visits such as this provide and perpetuate, coming back with the response that museums should not be "for quiet contemplation by the few, but loud conversation with the many." (Birkett, 2020).

At another point in the interview, Sophia shared her interpretation of what 'diversity' in audiences means:

> "I think [this city] is a really difficult place […] when funders are expecting you to, be diversifying your audiences, and they don't seem to kind of, on the surface see that, that could just be people that are currently not coming to your museum. That doesn't necessarily mean, social deprivation areas, or ethnic minorities, it could just mean people that for whatever reason are not coming."

The city in question is significantly white, middle-class, wealthy, and considered by many as an exclusive location, which could mean a significant lack of people to engage with other than white, middle-class and wealthy. Sophia also occupies racialised, class-based, and educational advantages in terms of her access to museums, historical information, and portrayal and inclusion in dominant narratives. Therefore, she would likely experience a sense of belonging and access rights to those spaces. Due to her positionality, and as senior curator, it appears that Sophia is able to *choose* what a

diverse audience might mean, for her museum. 'Diversifying your audiences', in the above statement is potentially what Sophia deems it to be and what she chooses it is not. In this curators' case, addressing issues of diversity as prompted by funders might not necessarily equate to those people who face financial, educational or racial barriers to accessing museums and the services and benefits they provide. For example, Sophia described a conflict with a trustee about whether to involve a local school from a deprived area of the city:

> "it's very frustrating we have a trustee that [when it] comes up, [is] like, 'Well we'll work with that school in [the well-known deprived area]'. And you're like, *[Sophia whispers]* 'Oh my God'. […] Because they're like, 'you know we should be, looking at inclusivity and, thinking about financial barriers that are stopping people to come to museums, and we'll do some work with that school in [that area]' and you're like, *[she whispers again]* 'Oh my God'. The – that no concept of kind of, how you go about partnership working and, we have to be doing work that people are interested in coming to as well"

It seems that Sophia takes the view of the trustee as outdated in their views on inclusivity. Yet, the reasons for why Sophia thinks it inappropriate to work with a local school in a deprived area, potentially eroding social, economic, and geographical barriers, are not made explicit beyond the hypothetical difficulty of forging such a partnership. Sophia's response was one of disbelief and embarrassment at the trustee's proposed idea. She also implied that the school children being discussed are unlikely to be interested in the museum. This demonstrates a form of selectivity in audience types and evasion of certain circumstances that might facilitate engagement with those audiences, in her position as curator, or in other words "a selective engagement with difference" (Frankenberg, 1993, pp. 142-143). In her interviews with white women, Frankenberg described this choice to 'evade' situations (which were racialised situations in Frankenberg's examples), as still demonstrating a form of engagement with the topic, but showing a *selective* engagement to avoid or ignore certain differences (ibid.). Essentially, as interpreted from the two statements above, the curator chose to interpret 'diversity' as having the potential to mean something

other than, or in addition to, ethnic minorities and people from economically deprived areas. Furthermore, the curator acted upon this by not working with the school suggested by the trustee. She may have not wanted to appear to be pandering to an expectation (and her 'frustration' at the trustee seems to indicate this) however, her actions demonstrate a level of control through her exercising of choice: it was her decision. This shows a level of privilege and control on the part of the individual curator in deciding who has access to a museum space.

Having considered this, it appears to show a relatively un-inclusive stance taken by a curator about a particular audience that would likely experience barriers to accessing their museum. Interest and engagement are not possible without the granting of access and opportunity. Much like the tourists, these appear to be further examples of 'undesirable visitors' for this particular curator. It is not clear what kinds of people Sophia thinks are not coming to her museum, nor for what reasons. We also cannot conclude what kinds of audiences she prefers or values in their place. On the one hand, Sophia's choice to not engage can be seen as denying that school a right to access and a right to choose whether the museum is interesting to its children or not. It could also suggest that further judgements were made about the school children's level of education and potentially abilities to engage with the existing content. On the one hand, the curators' assumption that the school children would not be interested and therefore did not need to be engaged with, could have been reached for a number of undisclosed reasons, and may not necessarily indicated that she wants to exclude those particular children, or that school, from visiting.

This aspect of Sophia's curatorial approach – on the surface at least – does not appear to actively promote a particular *antiracist* vision of diversity, and she did not claim to be pursuing that. However, circumstances where diversity and inclusion can be interpreted by a white curator, in addition to no mention of 'race' at all in this particular situation, could correlate with Frankenberg's (1993) observations of white women engaging with 'race' as optional – where 'race' is not 'seen', engaged with or considered. Frankenberg (ibid., p. 143) postulated that ignoring 'race', 'whiteness' and taking a 'colourblind' approach can lead some: "white women back into complicity

with structural and institutional dimensions of inequality […] selectivities that apparently embrace cultural and other parameters of diversity, but do so in ways that leave hierarchies intact.".[33] Elsewhere, Bhopal (2018, pp. 22-27) argued that 'whiteness' itself and its impact should be recognised as an identity marker, against which other characteristics are compared, which would potentially bring 'whiteness' into discussions of diversity definitions:

> "Intersectional identities come to the fore after whiteness makes its mark, the identity of whiteness is however, the first determinant of how groups are positioned, followed by other markers such as class, gender, religion, age and sexuality, among others. I am not suggesting that class does not play a part in the positioning of groups within society, I am merely suggesting that its intersection with whiteness produces a different discourse from which judgements about individuals are made."

Sophia's freedom to interpret what 'diversity' means also reflects a persisting rhetoric in the wider museums sector of selectivity with regards to the meaning of 'diversity'. The Association for Independent Museums *Open Up Museums* guide to diversifying audiences for UK museums (Aldridge et al., [2019], 2022), for example, which claims to "support museums through the process of successfully turning words and ideas about diversity into action" (ibid., p.2), does not define 'diversity' but rather encourages museums to "define your vision for diversity" (ibid., p. 15). The guide prompts users to interpret the concept for themselves, through asking: "what does diversity mean to you?" and providing a step a to create a museum vision statement that "champions inclusion, shows how you value diversity, and how you are seeking equity." (ibid., pp. 15-16). The guide does not treat 'race' and 'diversity' as synonymous, and does not guide museums on how to formulate their interpretations, either way. This tells us that, given a curators' circumstances and preferences, in

---

[33] Frankenberg's (1993) analysis of the construction of 'whiteness', which was based on qualitative interviews, used the term 'race-cognizance'. This is closely linked to my own ideas raised about 'racialised reflexivity', whereby the characteristic of 'race' is actively included in the individual's thinking and practices, including the acceptance that white is also a 'race'.

addition to guidance from sector organisations, the concept of 'diversifying audiences' is clearly open to interpretation in small museums in the UK. The 'diversifying audiences' initiative is framed in *Open Up Museums* as a gentle guide for museums to start thinking about broadening their audiences. It mentions 'race' as part of intersectional and protected characteristics (p. 29 & p. 33), which could be seen as exemplifying its recommended commitment to equality, however the separation of 'race' from 'diversity' could also be an attempt to distance the organisations involved from any discriminatory accusations in being actively anti-racist or prejudiced towards others (Frankenberg, 1993, pp. 145-148).

In the interests of postcolonial ethics, or anti-racist curatorial practices, the issue of selective diversity is certainly problematic as the risk of continued exclusion of certain types of people exists. As Bhopal (2018, p. 22) alluded to, traditionally white-majority policies and people are "less likely to change systems that benefit and work for them", and Hill Collins (2009, p. 296) also acknowledged the embeddedness of 'race' evasion, stating that "structural forms of injustice that permeate the entire society yield only grudgingly to change". Considering museums as exclusive, white-majority spaces, the points of 'diversity' and who or who cannot claim access or agency in the museum space being left open does raise questions about the consequential impact on internal attitudes and dynamics, the perpetuation of traditional, imperialist values and for wider museum ethical accountability, if left unchanged. But this could also mark an opportunity: if topics such as diversity are optionally adopted and capable of being redefined, curatorial interventions in the interests of greater diversity can be made. If some small museum curators are essentially able to choose – or control – *who* accesses their museums through their programming decisions, they could fundamentally change the diversity of their audiences for the better.

4.7. Flexibility and selectivity

We can infer that the fact that the museums are small was significant to the interviewed curators' motivations in leading them to their current positions within the museum profession. The small museums appeared to offer varying levels of flexibility for the curators, allowing them to be selective about their own levels of involvement

in areas of museum work. It may also be that working in a small museum environment changed their expectations and preconceptions of how a curator can be. The desire to buck against tradition was shared amongst the majority of the interviewed curators, which could also explain their willingness to participate in this research project. The interviewed curators were able to shape their roles to suit their interests, preferences and comfort zones. This suggests that small museums may allow for more curatorial flexibility, control, and creative freedom in comparison to larger museums, as demonstrated through Ava and Evelyn's comments in particular.

The small museums also provided opportunities and access for the interviewed curators to pursue their own motivations and passions. Whether for history, community engagement, or a particular collections subject; enthusiasm was rewarded where qualifications were lacking. In this sense, it seems that the small museums enabled a level of accessibility, autonomy and control to the interviewed curators, demonstrated through their abilities to exercise the power of choice. In addition, some of the curators experienced increased interaction with colleagues. For many, these qualities made working in a smaller institution more appealing than their larger counterparts. However, the flexibility enjoyed by these curators was dependent upon multiple privileges. To undertake a voluntary post, for example, one must have had the financial stability to do so; Finn and Jasper were retired. Furthermore, their museums were local to them, meaning that they either lived within walking distance or had access to transport: geographical accessibility was made easier. Finn, Jasper and Olivia were accepted members of their local communities, which provided another level of privileged access that allowed them to undertake their respective positions. It is also apparent that some of the interviewed curators extended their levels of power and control to select what kinds of visitor to engage with, and whether to engage with audiences at all.

The concept of 'doing everything' was described by Sophia as both the best and the worst thing about being a small museum curator. Where some enjoyed the variety of opportunities to be involved in multiple areas of museum practice in their small museums, most found the reality of their roles differed to their prior expectations once

in post. For some this was a challenge and the curators appeared to deal with in different ways, such as: seeking external support (Mia); communicating with colleagues (Evelyn); avoiding certain responsibilities (Finn); and divesting responsibilities (Ava). For the latter, it was the audience-related responsibilities that seemed to be the most difficult for them to engage with.

4.8. Summary

As we have seen, several mechanisms were utilised by the interviewed curators when describing their audience perceptions, such as a reliance on visitor data to demonstrate their knowledge, whilst others were able to provide first-hand commentary on interactions with visitors, showing the varied ways in which different curators considered their audiences. It may be that audience segmentation practices, such as those rolled out by external sector agents such as MHM and the Audience Agency; and 'diversity' guidance that leaves too many gaps, are influencing the curators' tendencies to stratify their visitors in the ways mentioned above. It may also be a sign of complacency in their ways of working, supporting the idea that their existing visitors should remain their priority, second only to the collections. As demonstrated, even if the 'desirable' visitors are prioritised, *how* to engage with them may not necessarily be an area that is considered in the curators' own practices, but rather left as the work of others at their museums. Yet not all of the interviewed curators appeared to separate visitors as clearly in terms of value in this way. On the contrary, some even appeared to prioritise audiences over objects, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

So far, we have established that the individual interests, backgrounds and circumstances of the interviewed curators significantly influences their experiences and perceptions of small museum curating, in some cases altering preconceptions. The small museum environment nurtures and challenges their curatorial practice in ways different to larger organisations, as they described. The small museums rewarded their curators with varying levels of personal privilege and access, and power and control, which directly contributed to their perceptions of audiences and in some cases, their decisions.

There still remain unaddressed questions at this point, such as how curators are navigating a landscape of diversifying and social engagement demands, pressure from funding bodies, seemingly limited guidance from the wider sector (in terms of specificity) and how and whether they work with others in their organisations and teams.

Chapter 5 will therefore discuss the ways in which the concept of audience engagement featured in and bore an influence on their practices, alongside a deeper exploration of the contributing factors that informed their approaches to small museum curating.

Chapter 5. | Curatorial Engagement in Practice

5.1. Introduction

This chapter is concerned with curatorial engagement with audiences in practice, and will consider how the interviewed curators demonstrated engagement in their work, as they described. This chapter will also observe how they communicated and expressed themselves in response to the question, and examine some of the significant factors and issues raised by the curators which contributed to their varying levels of participation in audience-related work. As a result of this exploration, I present a spectrum of practice in order to illustrate museological, conceptual, and practical trends identified in their individual approaches. Building on Chapter 4, this chapter further demonstrates how formative stakeholder, organisational, and external influences are to the small museum curatorial approaches identified.

5.2. Engagement in practice: curatorial examples

In Olivia's case the mini-museum itself was an exercise in engaging with audiences and involved her local community in several ways. Firstly, the venue was an existing structure within the neighbourhood. The purpose, in Olivia's words, was to "celebrate" the community by providing a physical symbol of appreciation. Furthermore, for Olivia calling the arts venue a 'museum' was also intended to celebrate, as she confirmed:

> "calling something is a bit […] 'up there', isn't it? It's a bit [like] saying: 'This is a big, grand thing'. […] just giving it that title is saying, 'Yeah look, we're a little [neighbourhood] but we can have a museum about us'. It makes us feel important enough to be recorded in a museum".

This demonstrates the impact a small museum might have on its local community, and reiterates the perceptions of grandeur and prestige that can be afforded by a museum. The social benefit of Olivia's museum was empowerment through an act of being included, celebrated and, most significantly, valued. Olivia's community museum project aimed to support this sense of value. Jasper shared the view that a local museum should do the same through sharing stories "about the people who came

from their area", based on the objects. Here Jasper has confirmed the significance of representation in museum spaces: being able to relate to a story, image, or object in a personal way, empowers the visitor experience of the museum and, potentially, impacts on their values, assumptions, and sense of identity. This also speaks to the problematic nature of the museum experience when one, for example, is not represented in its displays and narratives. The likely outcome for audiences who are not represented would be obverse to the feelings of empowerment, value and acceptance in those who are. An unrepresented visitor would therefore feel disempowered, undervalued and denied.

Evelyn expressed concerns about how audiences might interpret the indigenous work that was on display at her museum, showing awareness of "common misconceptions" about the people featured, which were part of a global diaspora. However, she had not yet made significant progress in the way of updating the displays to address the issue. She described a situation where an international indigenous community group had visited to consult on the displays: "they were brilliant because they spent several hours with us. It was excruciating because, I was quite embarrassed by quite a lot of stuff that was down there, standing with them." Evelyn's embarrassment shows that she felt accountable towards these visitors, which subsequently informed her curatorial approach. She claimed that the experience had opened her eyes to the problem of diasporic representation. Informed by this awareness, Evelyn drew on the experience and exercised her curatorial control to enact a positive change, as exemplified in the following account:

> "We're getting a new kid's play area out here, and […] a brief went out to the designers, and the designers came back and I nearly flipped my lid. Because, it was like, every stereotypical image you can think of, of [the indigenous group] was in there. Yeah. […] And I was like, 'No. No we can't, we can't'."

Evelyn demonstrated empathy for the stakeholders involved in this display and considered the impact it might have on her audiences, taking curatorial responsibility and using her level of control to positively influence others. Approaches to control were exercised in different ways amongst the interviewed curators, and informed their

136

practical responses to audiences in their work, as will be discussed in the following section. Control, it seems, also played a part in the ways in which the curators talked about their respective practices.

Linking museum content to wider social issues, such as wildlife and environmental conservation for example, was a method Mia used to reach out to audiences. Mia's example below shows the practical benefits of inviting other organisations to participate at her small museum.

> "We try to link animal conservation in with the museum and have days like that, which will attract different audience[s] that wouldn't be interested in an oil painting of [one thing], but they might have an interest in [another] and then have a look at the museum at the same time and spread the word. And it might be a different reason for them to come, and then they might discover the other things [in the museum]."

Experimenting with different ways of creating exhibitions, such as co-creation for example, was, in Mia's eyes, of tangible benefit to her museum by way of diversifying her audience and facilitating engagement with environmental issues for new and existing audiences and stakeholders.

5.3. Communication processes regarding audiences

In this section I share some key observations and interpretations around how the curators referred to their practice during our interviews, and therefore is concerned with the processes of communication and reflection regarding the curators' engagement with audiences.

5.3.1. Possession and deflection

When describing how audience engagement was carried out in practical terms in the work of the interviewed curators, a common occurrence in the responses was a tendency to refer in hypothetical terms, rather than providing explicit examples of

engaged practice, such as planning to update interpretation or being in the stages of forming a collaborative partnership. For example, Ava confirmed that engagement was something she and her museum had been thinking about, and as we already know they had engaged with external consultants to identify their core audience. In terms of her own practice, Ava expressed: "I don't have a very clear idea of that at the moment because we're still exploring." She also described plans to "set up focus groups, to do surveys to find out what are the barriers and what they actually enjoy at the museum so we could make improvements." Later, when I asked if there were opportunities for her to talk to other stakeholders, such as staff, about her work, she again responded hypothetically: "For the team, volunteers and friends, no, not yet. Although we're planning to do sharing sessions so each team member should talk a bit about their work [...] to volunteers, so that they understand what we do." Ava was not able to articulate her own examples of engagement and kept her responses in the collective and the hypothetical.

Sophia also responded in a collective way. She spoke about her organisation as a whole, which drew the focus away from herself and her curatorial work:

> "So, in terms of collections development [...] we're actually thinking about, what's missing, and how can we address what's missing in order to be able to do what we want to do. [...] So, working with the [local club], the ['Thomas'] Society, the, departments at universities in [this City] and Cardiff, to say, 'Ok, how'? – The work – we have the relationship with them, which is helping us inform the museum, but also how *with* them, we can then do."

As with Ava, she too may view audience engagement as a shared responsibility rather than one of her own. Finn also shared this view, and had elected to absolve himself from audience-related work altogether, discussed further in section **5.3.3.** Viewing engagement responsibilities as shared and referring in hypotheticals can be seen as a way of relieving a curator's own accountability towards audiences.

Another way in which some of the interviewed curators referred to their practices, was via a method I have termed 'tick-boxing', whereby the interviewee appeared use

ubiquitous language from the museum sector in response to a question, such as 'engagement', 'community', 'co-creation', 'constituents' and 'partnerships' in lieu of providing practical examples of audience-engaged curating. Terminology such as this was used throughout the Museums Association Conference live stream in 2017, for example. Through the mask of buzzwords, remained an underlying view of 'them and us'. During the conference collaborations with universities and scholars seemed to be a way for the museum professionals speaking to attempt to determine the desires of their visiting publics. However, Western universities and are not necessarily representative of a 'diverse' visiting public in the way that the conference speakers appeared to be trying to demonstrate. Therefore, the language around museum goals and intentions does not always translate to its true meaning, in practice. For example, Sophia confirmed that funders encourage the use of certain words, which are taken as evidence of engagement. She explained that she knew what terms to use in her funding applications and evaluations to enhance the likelihood of being awarded grants: "once you've been in the game for a while, you also develop the kind of language that [...] the funders want to hear." Though she professed to hate the term, "existing users", at certain points in the interview, it seemed that Sophia may have been strategically and intentionally mentioning some key terms from contemporary museum guidance (such as 'community', 'engagement', 'collaboration') in an effort to signal her own awareness and virtue in doing what she understands museums are expected to do. Her language was not particularly candid on those occasions, which led me to believe it may not have accurately reflected her views on engagement.

In some cases the curator directly referenced the idea of 'ticking boxes'. Ava had described the Arts Council England Accreditation process as extremely useful, but suggested that some in the field can take advantage of the system, "treating it as a box-ticking exercise".[34] Similarly, speaking about applying for funding from large grant providers, such as the Arts Council and the National Heritage Lottery Fund for example, Sophia noted: "[it's] the challenge for us to always make sure that, we're not just doing

---

[34] The UK Museum Accreditation Scheme provides "nationally agreed standards" for museums in the UK to adhere to (Arts Council England, 2021).

it for the sake of funding. And we're not doing it for the sake, of 'that will tick that box'.", and she made an earlier statement that described tourists as "box-ticking visitors", as mentioned in the previous chapter. This suggests both a dichotomy between some curators wanting to carry out a particular piece of work, which might require funding, and simultaneously wanting to avoid coming across as performative. It also appears to imply that some curators may take advantage of museum guidance frameworks in order to secure finances without deeper investment in the underlying requirement. Sophia's use of the term "paying lip service", for example, suggests that she views other museums with a critical eye in terms of their engagement with audiences: "it's very easy to go to other places or see other projects that people do and just think, 'that's just paying lip service to something'" (this is discussed more in Section 6.4.). The critique applied towards others by some of the interviewed curators however, was sometimes missing when discussing their own practices. In some cases critical comments of others over self-critique could be seen as a means of deflection or dispossession of individual responsibility, and in my coding I did note that some appeared to be demonstrating their own form of 'tick-boxing' in their attempts to tell me, the researcher, what they thought I should want to hear – as a potential mechanism to portray the work of themselves and their institutions in a positive, rather than critical, light.

The 'tick-boxing' responses that occurred in the curators in those instances evidenced signs of self-consciousness and uncertainty when prompted to reflect on their own practice, a consequence of which was the realisation that perhaps they could be working in a more thoughtful, conscientious, engaging, or ethical way. The use of the 'tick-boxing' mechanism also suggested that the interviewed curators may not have been encouraged to engage in *reflexive* processes relating to their work prior to participating in this study.

5.3.2. Curator reflexivity

My observation that reflexivity may not have been enacted by some of the curators in my survey, prior to our interviews, is supported by Charlotte's contemplative response to a question about providing an example of collaborative working, where she

admitted she could be doing more. She explained they were still in the "experimental stages" of forming partnerships, and that consideration of the "outcomes for people" was a requirement for a recent round of National Heritage Lottery Funding that her museum had been granted. She reflected on some advice she had been given on collaborative partnerships at a South West Federation of Museums and Art Galleries conference:

> "they said, 'stick at it, just start somewhere, and don't assume what people want'. I'm sure I've done that in the past, so, set a brief, thought, 'This is what I want, and then what I think you want from it', but actually that's not what they are about. […] So perhaps, I should be doing more groundwork in terms of going out to people and, listening, rather than telling or assuming what I think they're interested in."

This indicates that Charlotte wanted to be more audience-engaged, through her emphasis on what she could be doing rather than being able to evidence what she actually does in support of that aim.

In the next example, I was questioning Sophia about a community engagement initiative based at the smallest of her four venues, which she had previously mentioned when explaining her understanding of the organisation's visitors. The following extract includes an observatory memo I wrote when transcribing the interview:

JS: Actually, going back to the community engagement part, you said that, that's one of the most successful things-

Sophia: -I think so.

JS: -to come out of your recent changes, can you talk a bit more about that?

[Memo: I think here I was trying to encourage the participant to explain why they thought it was successful, but I didn't ask the question simply. On reflection I think I was restrained in my questioning here, because the participant was talking very passionately, and I didn't want to ask something confrontational or challenging, or critical, even though it is relevant to my research to know the answer.]

Sophia: "[it] was a big Arts Council-funded grant, I want to say ten years ago […]. There was audience, visitor, kind of analysis, that was all the kind of surveys and focus groups. […] There was an interpretation strand, which [used] the results of that visitor analysis to introduce and test a couple of pieces of new interpretation, and then evaluate them. That wasn't as successful, not because of the idea, but because of the time limit […]. It was such a ridiculous turnaround for museums where generally you've only got one member of staff doing two of those strands, that [is why] it wasn't that successful."

She had described this as "the most successful strand" of the project, and "the one that's still really successfully continuing". I wanted to return to this in an effort to ascertain why she thought it was particularly successful. This was despite the site being part of a larger trust. Instead of explaining the "community engagement" practices, Sophia described an interpretation exercise that failed during the project. Sophia revealed to me that this initiative was actually ten years ago and proposed that it was a problematic project, because a museum of such a small size couldn't handle this task, stating that it had a "ridiculous turnaround" of two months to introduce a new piece of interpretation in addition to having to carry out and complete evaluation exercises. The funders had imposed this timescale and completing the work in time was a challenge for this organisation.

The limitations placed on access for smaller museums by funding bodies was highlighted by some of the other interviewed curators, and will be further discussed in section **5.5** of this chapter. Sophia's response did not answer the question posed however, supporting my assumption that she might have been exaggerating and embellishing details in our conversation by way of signalling virtue. When asked to further comment on the claims to success that she had made herself, she was unable to explain. This exemplifies what I have referred to as tick-boxing' behaviour. This is consistent with a general reaction I observed amongst the interviewed curators, of indicating insecurities when being questioned on their own curatorial practice or being put in a position which required critical thinking about their organisations and their individual actions. The memo included in the above extract demonstrates my

perceptions of the interviewee's sense of discomfort at the time: due to her reaction, I was hesitant to push her for a response.

The original question I had posed – which was how she engages with audiences in her work – proved to be a challenging one for the curator to answer. The responses from the curators to this question ranged from uncertainty to contemplation, which shows the significance of the interviews conducted in this study – they had not been encouraged to think about their own practices in this way before. Emma confirmed that reconsidering her practice in light of "academic discussions around museums and neutrality" had impacted her approach. Here, she demonstrates critical reflection about her positionality:

> "I think there's a sense where it's a real wake-up call, to suddenly maybe understand that what you [think] of as being neutral is like, not neutral to a lot of people. […] And, it's really hard […] as a woman, but also as, a white person, and also as a kind of person who's had this like elite education […] – it feels like an identity crisis. […] I think it has been a bit confronting but I think maybe it's just because, I don't think people really – I don't think that I realised really before."

It is unclear what Emma meant by "before", but nevertheless, her statement resonates with broader ethical issues, such as how curators are being cared for in their organisations in terms of professional development, whether they are given opportunities to converse and reflect on their practices, and furthermore, how they are being held accountable for their responsibilities towards audiences in the production of exhibits, interpretation and access to their collections. It also calls for consideration as to why thinking about audience engagement in curatorial work might feel "confrontational" or result in a perceived "identity crisis", to use Emma's terms. The emotional response from Emma, with regards to critiquing her own practice, has, in fact, been acknowledged as part of a beneficial process when undertaking reflexivity in one's work (Probst, 2005). Furthermore, Emma's acknowledgement of her positionality ("woman"; "white"; "elite education") demonstrates that she recognises herself in a racialised context. Her engagement with these issues therefore suggests

she is has started to consider how to act upon that realisation in her curatorial work and is interested in resolving that sense of crisis. The potential for reflexivity practices to assist curators like Emma in dealing with decolonial practice will be further explored in Chapter 7.

To summarise, 'tick-boxing', speaking collectively and thinking hypothetically, were some of the mechanisms that the curators employed during our interviews, demonstrating possessive and deflective behaviours that could be explained as reactions to the confrontational nature of being asked to think with reflexivity about their roles and assumptions as curators in regional, small museums. However, such reactions can also be understood as reflective of a perceived sense of threat to the levels of control, flexibility and power some of the curators' experienced. These issues are integral to explore within this thesis and will therefore form part of the discussion in Chapter 6 along with the notion of losing one's "curatorial voice". However, in the following section I will highlight the contrasting ways in which the interviewed curators navigated their autonomy in practice.

5.3.3. Control: relinquishing and reluctance

Isabel was passionate about democratisation of the museum space and collaborative work. Describing an oral history project, she explained: "we gathered all their voices, it was all done with their voices. [...] I tried to keep the people's voice in there so it wasn't me speaking." She also delegated to her volunteers, showing a significant level of trust compared to some of the other curators, but she also provided training where needed: "when I first started here, we have a collection and we had archives, but they were completely undocumented. So one of the first things I started was, I got training for a team of volunteers to, who were interested, in cataloguing our collection." She also listened to her volunteers and respected their backgrounds and the fact they all had interests and careers outside of the museum – the cataloguing task, for example, was not mandatory for all volunteers to do, just those amongst whom Isabel recognised interest. Isabel also showed acknowledgement and respect for the previous curator's work, stating that they had "chosen very wisely" in their arrangement of the museum prior to her arrival in post. She built upon the previous curator's work rather

than rewriting it. She explained that she was being "mindful" of his work, indicating an empathetic approach to curating, rather than possessive.

Isabel's attitude, this relinquishing of control, shows a level of trust from curator to volunteer that was rarely exhibited in the others interviewed. She was not possessive about her responsibilities, nor was she proud about who would take the credit – she openly said: "they've done a huge amount of work, […] they know what they're doing, so that's great.". Isabel accepted that she was not needed to do the cataloguing work, and that perhaps others were better suited to it.

Evelyn had taken this a step further, in that she had designated curatorial volunteers whose duties included research, inventory checking, assisting with exhibition changeovers and condition checks. She admitted: "I've accepted that I can't do everything, as much as I would love to do everything", and was able to reflect on the impact of allowing her volunteers to take on more, claiming that things were "much more streamlined". Furthermore, Evelyn noted the impact on the volunteers themselves, stating that: "they *really* enjoyed it, because it was an opportunity for them to get really close to things and really spend that time examining stuff.". As a curator, she also felt that delegating was beneficial to her own practice, realising that she had "changed from an 'absolutely, not getting volunteers involved in any curatorial work'". She confirmed her change in approach came through selecting the right people, showing that she had paid attention to which volunteers would be most suited and interested in participating in the work.

Taking a similarly open approach to relinquishing control, Jasper revealed that he saw it as part of his responsibility as the curator to seek out volunteers who wanted to be more deeply involved in aspects of the museum, including curatorial work, and to help facilitate and cultivate that interest. He saw it as: "giving them something back, because I'm involving them in something that I know that they've actually got […] an interest in, and I'm giving them the chance to be more than just, you know, sitting in the chair and answering questions if they're asked." The attitudes of some of the curators, in terms of relinquishing their control, and placing trust in others in tasks that would otherwise be solely considered the remit of curators, provide refreshing

examples of curatorial practice and demonstrate a mark of innovation in the small museums under study.

By comparison, Finn showed a sense of distrust towards his colleagues, who were also volunteers, and exhibited a more traditional attitude to curating. He felt that they could not understand his role, but equally valued his own knowledge and abilities over the others around him. He expressed concern for the succession of his work, and the future of his museum and was worried that no one would or could step in when he would eventually leave his role as curator. However, he failed to share his perceived knowledge, and further, appeared to believe that his knowledge was innate. For example, when explaining his audience-related practices, he claimed it naturally happened due to his own instinct rather than, say, research:

> "I don't sit down and formally think about an audience. I have as part of my thinking the assumption that I have got to make what I've got as interesting as I possibly can to as wide a range of people as possible. So I am conscious that the language on the text panels has to be appropriate, I'm conscious that it has to be the right mix of visual and textual. I'm always conscious, not because I think about it, because I now know that we've got to have an element which will appeal to the younger generation coming in - call it interaction if we like, but that typically is what it is. […] But that balancing act is built into my psyche. I don't sit down and plan it that way. I just know instinctively that we've got to do these things."

Having confessed to having no prior training in curating, he also posited that nothing could prepare someone for taking up his, unique, position, stating: "I have never read a single book about how to curate in a museum because I don't believe one to be written that would tell me how to run this place!". Nonetheless Finn claimed to use his volunteers as a resource, acknowledging and utilising their expertise to strike a suitable balance:

> "But it, it's those volunteers that probably teach me how to do most of these things best because over the years some of them have been trained specifically

on care and conservation. [...] I tend naturally enough probably, when I'm mounting a display, to follow my own personal disposition which is that I like information – text. But I have enough volunteers in here who will stop me in my tracks if I put up what they call a 'book on the wall'. So, because they have *visual* priorities and don't like words at all, and I'm the other way round, we can get the balance between us. So I use the volunteer base almost as my teaching mechanism."

He contradicts his claim of having "innate" expertise. Despite Finn's consistent vocalising of his elevation above the rest of his voluntary colleagues during the interview, the above statement also shows that, in practice, he may in reality take a more collaborative approach to curating at his museum through his working with the volunteers, than he had implied.

Finn kept the control of narratives and conveyance of outward messaging at this venue, mobilising the volunteers as necessary, but using his own "subliminal approach to doing these things". By pandering to an 'old'-museological curatorial style, of being the only person with expertise, and staying separated from his peers, Finn's approach enables his sense of tradition to hinder growth at his museum. If one person keeps all the knowledge and stays at the top of the hierarchy, new ideas and approaches cannot be generated, which puts the succession of his small museum at risk.

As demonstrated, the curators described their practices in various ways, from attempting to hold on to curatorial control in a traditional sense, through means of self-separation (Finn) and opting to use 'tick-boxing' terms in lieu of candid, and perhaps critical, reflection (Sophia). Those who participated in self-reflection about how they considered audiences in their curatorial work, would potentially be left feeling disengaged or disempowered themselves (Emma and Charlotte). Some of the interviewed curators were primarily concerned with presenting an engaged impression of their practice (Ava and Sophia). Deciphering their accounts for evidence of examples of practical manifestations proved to be a challenge due to the ways in which they chose to communicate them to me, signifying a particular difficulty in articulating, and perhaps understanding on my part, audience-focused curatorial practice. Some

described practical engagement with stakeholders however: through delegating curatorial responsibilities (Isabel and Evelyn), asking for advice (Charlotte), inviting others to participate (Mia), and focusing on empowering their local communities (Oliva and Jasper).

5.4. Curator approaches to audience engagement

As I have established thus far, each curator operated differently in relation to the other interviewees and no two backgrounds were the same. Yet, I found that their respective approaches appeared to represent several curatorial styles, or types of curators. I have mapped these onto a spectrum of curatorial practice, exemplified in *Figure 1. 'Engaging Curators' Spectrum of Practice.*

5.4.1. A spectrum of curatorial practice

The identified types of practice in the presented spectrum correlate with distinct sets of interests, influences, approaches and discourses that have developed over the course of museology, and the spectrum shows how the final grouping indicates a new stage of museological understanding. Over the past decade, museum scholarship has noted an emerging state of museum practice in England. For example, strides have been made by Sandell (Sandell et al., 2010; Janes and Sandell, 2019), advocating for the intervention of museums into pertinent social and environmental issues of disparity and inequity.

Featured topics in the works cited include gender, disability, sexuality, and decolonising. However, more work could be done to improve capacity, preparedness and practice on the ground. Interrogating and understanding the racialised elements of English society and its manifestation in museums, for example, must be prioritised, rather than conflated or abridged, in order to address the influence of 'race', its manifestations in cultural practice, and its consequent impact upon said issues of inequality. As illustrated in the spectrum, I propose that the new paradigm is aligned with postcolonial museum practice. This emerging paradigm points towards pluralism, empathy, social benefit and ethics – all of which are congruent with taking a

postcolonial approach – and some of the interviewed curators exhibited signs of adopting such approaches into their practice.

'ENGAGING CURATORS' SPECTRUM OF PRACTICE

PRACTICE CHARACTERISTICS

STATUS-DRIVEN

Maintaining top hierarchical position is a priority, shows disdain for support and views the expertise of others as inferior.

- MINIMAL INTEREST IN PEOPLE
- INDIFFERENT TO ENGAGEMENT CONCERNS, PRIORITISES OBJECTS
- UNCOLLABORATIVE/UNRESPONSIVE TO OTHERS
- POSSESSIVE, PROTECTIVE OF CURATORSHIP
- RISKS SEEN AS DETRIMENTAL
- IMPACT OF SUPPORT FROM OTHERS IS MINIMAL

OBJECT-FOCUSED

Values objects first and people second, would benefit from support, but not proactive

- AWARENESS OF PEOPLE CONCERNS
- LACK OF UPTAKE OF ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE
- RISK-AVERSE
- SUPPORT IS REQUIRED FOR CHANGE

OTHERS, AND OBJECTS

Values people and their interactions/experiences around objects

- MORE BALANCED APPROACH
- LENIENCE TOWARDS BREAKING TRADITIONS
- RISK-DESIRABLE
- ENGAGEMENT IS ONE OF MULTIPLE PRIORITIES/AIMS
- COLLABORATIVE NATURE
- SUPPORT GRATEFULLY RECEIVED, BUT LESS REQUIRED THAN OTHERS

PEOPLE-DRIVEN

Driven by supporting peoples' experiences, supports others in practice

- ENGAGEMENT IS A FOCUS, AT ALL STAGES
- EXPERIMENTAL
- CREATIVE, RISK-DESIRABLE
- INSTIGATOR
- COLLABORATIVE
- INDEPENDENT/CONFIDENT APPROACH
- OFFERS SUPPORT TO OTHERS

INFLUENCES

ART HISTORICAL TRADITIONS

Categorical methods, anthropological canon, 'West and the rest'

HEGEMONIC OUTLOOK

VISITOR RESEARCH

In line with social and cultural 'turns' throughout the 1990s, and developing ethical practice in museums

HETEROGENOUS OUTLOOK

SOCIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Postcolonial, decolonial, equitable, democratic, and anti-racist interests

PLURALISTIC OUTLOOK

DISCOURSE

OLD MUSEOLOGICAL

IMPERIALIST TRADITIONS
EURO-CENTRIC
COLONIALIST
PATRIARCHAL

NEW MUSEOLOGICAL

SOCIAL TURN
CULTURAL TURN
ETHICS

EMERGING PARADIGM

POSTCOLONIAL
DECOLONIAL
EQUITABLE
ANTI-RACIST

Figure 1. 'Engaging Curators' Spectrum of Practice (Sutherland, J., 2021)

150

5.4.2. 'Status-driven' curator: Finn and Sophia

The 'status-driven' curator, to whom I attributed Finn and Sophia, was influenced by traditional art-historical methods, whereby a curator sits at the top of a hierarchy such as prioritising categorisation in line with the order of an established canon. Finn and Sophia had very different backgrounds, with the former moving into museum work after retirement and no previous training, and the latter adjacently-qualified in museum curating with a long-running career in the field. However, from their interview data, both shared characteristic approaches to curating that are congruent with 'old'-museological methods. Finn's understanding of a traditional curator was: "the person with a quill pen who sat on a high stool somewhere and wrote dodgy bits of captions for all sorts of esoteric things that they were gonna stick in a display case." In the way that he exerted his control over others as the curator/manager at his museum, combined with his perceptions of his own abilities and strengths, it is this very preconception of his that I think Finn was fulfilling, whether inadvertently or not. Similarly, Sophia also verbalised a caricature of how she thinks curators are perceived, which she claimed was not true:

> "I think we're still not far enough away from the people who have been in museums for forty years, I think it's a generation thing. […] It's still the hangover from, you know, the top of the tree, the people that sit in, their massive office […]. I'm in my bloody office on my own surrounded by things, that are separate from the shop floor of the museum. For anyone that's been in museums in the, last sort of fifteen years, it's absolutely not the case."

Yet, through Sophia's influential control over access, knowledge and decision-making, and her long term in post, she seemed to embody the curatorial approach associated with her caricature and Finn's stereotype. The interview also took place in her private office, on the top floor of the building.

'Old' museology and traditional art historical methods have been acknowledged – and criticised – as promoting a hegemonic state across museums and society. Hegemony can be understood as a societal condition whereby the interests of one group

dominates over others. Gramsci (1929-1935, 1988) and Spivak (1988) are associated with the concept of hegemony through their engagement with the 'subaltern', which can be understood in simple terms as a form of 'other', such as a colonial subject, a class designation, or separate in various social and economic ways from the dominant culture and its practices (Forgacs, 1988; Green, 2011). The mechanism of hegemony may involve both overt and covert practices that simultaneously appear to cater for 'subaltern' groups, but may not necessarily. Kolb and Richter (2017) provide a recent discussion of the problems associated with hegemony in relation to contemporary art history, practices, education, institutions, and audience reception, supporting a "re-coding of the hegemonic public space" (Jain, cited in Kolb and Richter, 2017, p. 124). In the case of the museums sector in England, for example, a claim to support "great art and culture for everyone", such as that made by the Arts Council England in their 2010-2020 Strategic Framework, suggests that art and culture *can be* for everyone. Taken at face value, this means that art and culture in England, according to the Arts Council, would and could be accessed, understood, and enjoyed, by 'everyone'. This claim could be seen as appealing to the 'subaltern' groups in England, such as ethnic minorities or other socio-economically disadvantaged groups, through the promise of inclusion. Yet, without reflexivity and engagement with the social, economic and historical barriers that some people, 'subaltern' groups – and 'non-users' to use a sector term for those who do not currently visit museums – face when it comes to experiencing and accessing the arts, museums and their curators will continue pandering to a hegemonic state. In the 2010 strategy document, the word 'barrier' appeared twice, and only with emphasis on the lack of a diverse workforce (2019, p. 34).

In the Arts Council England's (2021) strategy for 2020-2030, entitled, "Let's Create", the organisation states that their latest goals to engage the public in the arts: "will only be possible if there is a shared commitment to removing the geographic, economic and social barriers that currently prevent many people from taking part in publicly funded cultural activity." (2020, p. 2), showing a change in priorities – and acknowledgement

– since the last decade.[35] It may be that the curators who exhibit the 'status-driven' approach in their work change alongside these sector developments over the next decade, but at the time of interview, their perspectives appeared to come from hierarchically privileged positions, and they reflected the dominant English social demographic – to use Sophia's words: "straight, white, middle-class".

5.4.3. 'Object-focused' curator: Ava and Emma

Those that came under the next style, 'object-focused', demonstrated awareness of audience engagement concerns, but a reluctance to take up a mantle of responsibility for audiences in their work. Ava and Emma fell into this approach. They maintained that objects were their curatorial priority, and while they acknowledged their responsibilities as museum practitioners towards the experiences of their visitors, tended to lean away from – either due to lack of knowledge of how to, or from lack of capacity to – directly engaging with audiences, or making them a priority. Objects, object care, and curatorial expertise, came first with these curators. They did both, however, express knowledge and use of visitor data in our conversation, which they relied upon to evidence their visitor types to me. Ava described herself as having a more reserved personality compared to her colleagues at the museum. I think if Ava and Emma had more socially-focused leadership, this support would allow for the 'people' side of their curatorial practices to blossom; potentially alleviating Ava's self-doubt and Emma's "identity crisis" in the process.

The curators that exhibited this style were, essentially, influenced by new-museological methods and a period of development in English museum practice that challenged the elite nature of museums prior to that decade (Vergo, 1989, 2000; Watson, 2007).

---

[35] The latest strategy however, has received criticism in an alternative rebuttal entitled, *'Ace in a hole?'* (Wright et al., 2020), which laid out a short series of principles for consideration by organisations such as the Arts Council, if they intend to put promise into action. This shows that large institutional bodies that provide guidance for the sector are not without reproach.

5.4.4. 'Others and objects' curator: Mia, Jasper, and Evelyn

Presented on the spectrum in third position, those who took an 'others and objects' approach, came across as more balanced in their methods in terms of working with, and for, people with and around objects – characteristics that Mia, Jasper, and Evelyn exhibited. These curators not only acknowledged engagement with audiences but stated that it formed one of the key priorities of their individual curatorial practices, respectively. Also utilising visitor data, as with those in the second approach, the 'others and objects' curators indicated interests in supporting a more heterogenous attitude towards audiences, that is, less constrained by traditions, but nevertheless they still operated in a traditionally hierarchical way. Some, however, did express desire and/or openness to risk-taking, or challenging current methods, where the previously introduced styles on the spectrum did not.

5.4.5. 'People-driven' curator: Olivia, Isabel and Charlotte

The final grouping in the spectrum is 'people-driven' and is primarily there to represent the curators who demonstrated the most interest and commitment towards their audiences. In the cases of Olivia, Isabel, and Charlotte, all operating in markedly different environments and with differing backgrounds, engaging with audiences was described as a priority in their work at all stages. They also appeared to evidence the more experimental, creative, and collaborative approaches to their own curatorial practices out of the ten curators interviewed, and perceived the impact of their work on others as a priority, over themselves. Isabel, for example, claimed: "I cut my salary down so I could have an intern." and Olivia stated:

> "…I'm not very good at blowing my own trumpet to other people. I noticed it in myself, when all the celebrations were actually happening, the council had come […]. I was there, but I wasn't like at the forefront of it. I did, kind of look at myself and think, 'Why am I not pushing myself to the front of this because actually, this is here because I organised it. But I'm actually very happy for other people to, go and enjoy being at the front of that, you know […] actually I prefer it when the volunteers are doing that".

Therefore the 'people-driven' curators exhibited more prevalent signs of empathy, awareness, and accountability for others. This style of curating supports a more pluralistic approach to museum curating, and seems to be the most likely to support postcolonial, decolonial and anti-racist methods, given the right circumstances and professional support. The issue of support for curators will be explored further in Chapter 6.

I do not intend to claim that the curators solely took the designated approach. Isabel, for example, heavily drew on her visitor data statistics when asked to describe her typical visitor, which might suggest a lack of knowledge of her audiences, or a reluctance to refer to them in descriptive terms. Yet her background and curatorial methods were clearly empathetic of, and focused on, her visitors. She might have, at first glance, been deemed as one of the other curatorial types for the former reason, however, the latter meant that she was placed in the final category, 'people-driven'. There are certainly crossovers in curatorial style for each curator between the categories presented in the spectrum; thus I assigned them to the style that most accurately described their methods in general, as per their interview accounts.

5.5. Contributing factors to small museum curatorial approaches

While the above 'mapping' of styles presented in Section **5.4.** draws from the influences of practical traditions in museum curating, the curators were part of organisations with other staff, some as part of a curatorial team, which might also contribute to their curatorial styles and approaches. It is unclear at this point to conclude what comes first: the curatorial style or the working dynamics. Therefore further exploration and discussion of the contributing factors behind the approaches explored within the spectrum of practice, which range from internal dynamics and external influence of governing bodies within the sector, in addition to historical, social, and geographical factors, will now be discussed.

5.5.1. Sector bodies

In Chapter 4, I introduced some of the issues with consultancy firms and visitor data, and the ways in which this influenced some of the interviewed curators' perceptions of their audiences. However, there are other ways in which sectoral practices appeared to impact the curators' practice, specifically expectations from funding bodies and professional museum standards organisations such as the Museums Association and Arts Council England.

For some of the interviewed curators, the Arts Council England Accreditation Scheme provided support to their curatorial roles. Ava confirmed that participating in the Accreditation Scheme was beneficial to her museum in that it gave the team focus. External guidance allowed them to carry out work she believed would also benefit visitors: "it has helped our museum progress tremendously. […] personally I think it's a great, great scheme. […] visitor experience is a huge part of the assessment, so if it's done properly then […] visitors should feel the change". Evelyn, too, thought of the scheme as an ally, describing herself as Accreditation's "biggest fan" as it provides a means to push through collections focused work: "I love Accreditation because I feel like that it was keeps us all, in a job here and keeps the collection justified […] and no-one else really understands it on the senior management team".

Finn saw the Accreditation Scheme differently, suggesting that the experience differs between a voluntary-led small museum and those with teams of staff:

> "my view of the system, is that it didn't differentiate enough previously between the V&As of the world and the [this museum]s of the world so we were still effectively expected to meet the same sort of criteria as large museums with salaried personnel and 40 hours a week for all of them to do their work. And there could have been more leeway given to the fact that we were doing things in the spirit of what was required but not necessarily exactly the same way."

The challenges – and barriers – experienced by Finn demonstrate that sector bodies may be neglecting certain smaller institutions in terms of guidance and support. He dismissively joked: "Until we can be bothered to read the instructions the next time we deal we may not know what the actual practice is.", but I agree with his call for more flexibility for museums in positions such as his. He did, however, accept help, going against his 'DIY' approach he valued: "we had to swallow our pride to a certain extent and use a mentor." This raises the important questions of whether external help should be required for a small museum to apply for professional accreditation or grants, and whether sector bodies could be doing more to alleviate that need.

Business terms and money come up a lot in the interviews, along with the concept of museums needing to be commercially viable and able to compete for funds. Money was talked about as a major disadvantage to the small museums and was often cited as the reason for a lack of uptake or focus with audience-related work. To view the museum and its work as a business is also linked to sector expectations. "We're not trained in a business sense.", Ava said as she described that the consultancy encouraged them to think of museums as businesses, a new idea that they hadn't strategically considered before. She was also encouraged to consider visitors as "customers", and their "value", the transactions, and "product" involved, which appears to clash with the "experience", sense of community and "wellbeing" prevalent in museum missions and sector guidance. Ava's perception of her museum became influenced by this business-driven way of thinking, and impacted her curatorial approach. She added: "it has affected my work quite a lot, because I have to consider what would fit in with the business model and what would damage our business model." Arguably this neoliberal approach sullies the social focus/potential transformative element of the small museum. It also prompts consideration of whether profits can happen naturally as a result of socially-focused work.

Sector body funding had been a prominent influence in Isabel's heritage career as a freelance curator. In the community focused organisation she had worked at prior to the small museum, she explained that they had been successful in achieving several National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) awards:

"we won lots of awards and Heritage Lottery said, 'Do you apply again?', so we did and we did [another community exhibition]. And then I had a few good ideas that HLF didn't like [...]. I rang them up [to ask why] and at the end of her telling me why they didn't like my good idea, she said, 'Oh I know a museum that needs some help, they're really keen to do some work around oral history go and visit them'."

Isabel experienced support from the funder in that they provided a second round of funding for a similar project, allowing the longevity of Isabel's work. She also experienced rejection as, in her view, the National Heritage Lottery Fund's perception of a "good idea" was different to hers. Simultaneously, they offered up an alternative opportunity, which resulted in her long-term position at the small museum. This demonstrates the fluidity and precarity in achieving successful funding.

I asked her: "So, with these project ideas that you have, do you have to keep applying for grants every time?", to which she replied: "Yes, yes, yes.", showing that the programming at her small museum is reliant on being awarded repeat funding.

Dependence on funding from external bodies impacted the content and programming in the majority of the small museums in the study. Olivia, for example, expressed that she knew her audience wanted to see other stories in the community venue, but as external funding brought the project to fruition the content had to meet their requirements. She confirmed:

"[Be]cause our funding comes from [a specific NHLF Fund] everything that's in there at the moment reflects on that time period. [...] we're concentrating on the area where we got our funding [...] But I know people would like to see [something else] so, this is a reason why I would like to keep [the venue] for longer, or as long as possible, because I want to tell that other story."

Olivia's community museum project was started as a temporary venture, subject to the funding she had received, therefore it is unclear how long she will be able to maintain the mini-museum once the grant has ended. She had also found the funding

application process particularly challenging, which she described as being "like a job", due to the long process, multiple stages, and "narrow criteria", and had to draw on her museum contacts for assistance. With funding being a necessary resource in order for small museums to maintain their programmes, keep the doors open as it were, there are opportunities here for funders to rethink their "difficult" processes, giving smaller venues the chance to develop their stories and the content that their communities want to see.

5.5.2. Organisational and internal dynamics

Trustees represented a major obstacle for Ava and Evelyn, who they viewed as imposing an inhibitory influence on their work. Both claimed their trustees did not understand processes like Accreditation, nor the value of such processes, due to their lack of museum experience, as Evelyn confirmed: "I think, there's no museum person on our board of Trustees. I really think we would benefit from a museum professional on a Board of Trustees, I think that would really help." Ava viewed them as unqualified to be in their roles, stating that "they don't listen", are only "interested in status" and don't care about the impact on people. She also viewed the ways in which the trustees at her museum were recruited as inappropriate and suggested this was a common problem in small museums:

> "a lot of small museums do not recruit their Board members through proper channels. So, instead of checking the skills required of the board, they will just say, 'Oh my friend could do this!', 'Oh I know this person who could be suitable', so they just recruit Board members quite randomly rather than thinking through the skills that's required to provide the leadership for the charity, or for museums."

The trustees also impacted on Ava's workload considerably, expecting her to manage the museum alongside the collection, and to conduct research in her own time. She admitted to spending "nearly all of my evenings and weekends on work" and to taking a salary cut in order to limit her responsibilities to solely curatorial. Ava felt misunderstood, neglected and unheard. The internal dynamics of the museum

affected her curatorial practice in that she found it easier not to involve or collaborate with others, hence the apathy she had shown towards audience engagement. I suspect her lack of engagement was not through a lack of desire, but rather due to the personal toll of receiving very little attention and support in her organisation.

Emma indicated that internal staff changes disrupted her capacity within her role in general. Having undergone several restructures and three changes in director in as many years, she felt the impact on the ground, confirming:

> "I think there's a lot of confusion from people who aren't in our team, like who does what and who's responsible for what. […] it's hard not to like, reflect on that structure in the sort of sense of the wider museum because I've been at the museum for five years, and […] there's been three directors in that time […] each with a […] different view of how all of that works. So I think, you know, that my role's changed quite a bit."

Major changes in staff led to descriptions of dissipation amongst teams, inhibiting the staff's collective knowledge and understanding on one another's roles and, it seemed, delineating the capacity of staff in working together. Such disruption appeared to contribute to a sense of uncertainty around her role as a curator at that museum, which would undoubtedly feel isolating. Ava felt distanced despite a staff restructure in her favour. She had stepped down from managing her museum so she could "focus on collections care, exhibitions and research", however this change did not help to fulfil her curatorial ambitions. Subsequently Ava, who was a qualified expert and enthusiast in the specialist subject of that small museum, chose to leave shortly after the interviews were completed in early 2020, marking a substantial loss of curatorial knowledge and experience for that particular organisation. One cannot help but wonder whether, had Ava received the attention, empathy, and support she clearly required from colleagues and trustees, she may have remained in post.

Internal dynamics and staffing structures within a small museum, then, appear to be formative to a curator's individual practice and subsequently impacted some of the

interviewed curator's approaches to audience engagement due to insubstantial interactions with internal and external stakeholders as a result.

5.5.3. Communication and engagement

In light of the above, effective communication, therefore, was a challenge due to the small museums' internal dynamics for some of the interviewees. Charlotte was situated separately from her colleagues within the museum building, so staff meetings were one of the few opportunities she had to engage with her colleagues. She said that they provided her with a sense of purpose and drive:

> "If they're constructive I find them really useful [be]cause I, particularly being down here, by myself, if I go away and spend a couple of hours in a meeting, run through actions and then leave, I've had that communication with staff but now I've got [a] plan. And I'm like, 'Great, I'm gonna work towards that' and then I like to set the next meeting so I can come back and share what I've done. [I] like that accountability, that type of meeting."

The first part of her statement suggests that these meetings are not always productive, nor provide the impetus, or validation from others, that she desired. It appeared that communication was an issue for some of the other curators. Some did not have an outlet, and others felt their support networks were inconsistent or inadequate. To illustrate this simply, the following quotes are from the interviewed curators in direct response when asked who knew about their work.[36]

> Finn: "Me […] my wife"
>
> Isabel: "one or two colleagues"; "nobody's really listening"
>
> Mia: "[the other staff think] I'm the bringer of extra work"

---

[36] As presented in my paper Sutherland, J. (2020) "'Who knows what you do?": Radicalism and Restrictions in Small Museum Curating', for the British Art Network Conference entitled 'Research and Museum Ecosystem', 3 December 2020.

Sophia: "if I sat and went through absolutely everything I'd been doing that week we'd be there for hours"

Emma: "people don't really know what I do"

Evelyn: "We have newsletters, but I know they are not read. So, I put stuff in there and I know it's not read."

Clearly these curators felt support for their practices in their respective small museum environments was missing, which appeared to affect their approaches towards committing to audience-focused work. External communication extends to engaging in, and with curatorial research, which was identified as a shortcoming amongst the interviewed curators (Sutherland, 2020). Again, limited capacity was provided as the primary reason for this shortfall in practice. One could infer that, in some cases, this is used as an excuse to alleviate accountability towards the consequences and impact of their roles on their stakeholders. There appears to be an issue with the small museum curators taking the initiative. As established in the 'Engaging Curators' pilot survey results, curators were held in the highest regard within their institutions compared to their non-curatorial peers, suggesting that they are imbued with a significantly influential level of control. This indicates a problematic cycle of disengagement, influenced by the lack of support for curators and internal dynamics, as illustrated in **Fig. 2.**

Ava's perceptions towards co-curation and collaboration with others demonstrates the above cycle in action, as I'll now explain. Ava was unsupported by her Board of Trustees, and also isolated from external academics due to the geographical area and subject (representing point (a)); she was under so much pressure that she was working in her spare time, therefore her capacity to participate in audience-related was reduced (b); influenced by the pressure and lack of support, it was easier for her to isolate (c), which resulted in a reluctance to take curatorial risks, and a lack of enthusiasm, (d). Ava needs support (a), however this is the deficit of the cycle.

What is missing from this cycle however, is a sense of curatorial autonomy, indicating that a potential factor in improving curatorial practices, for themselves, their stakeholders, and audiences, alludes to the matter of choice. I will explore this further in Chapter 7.
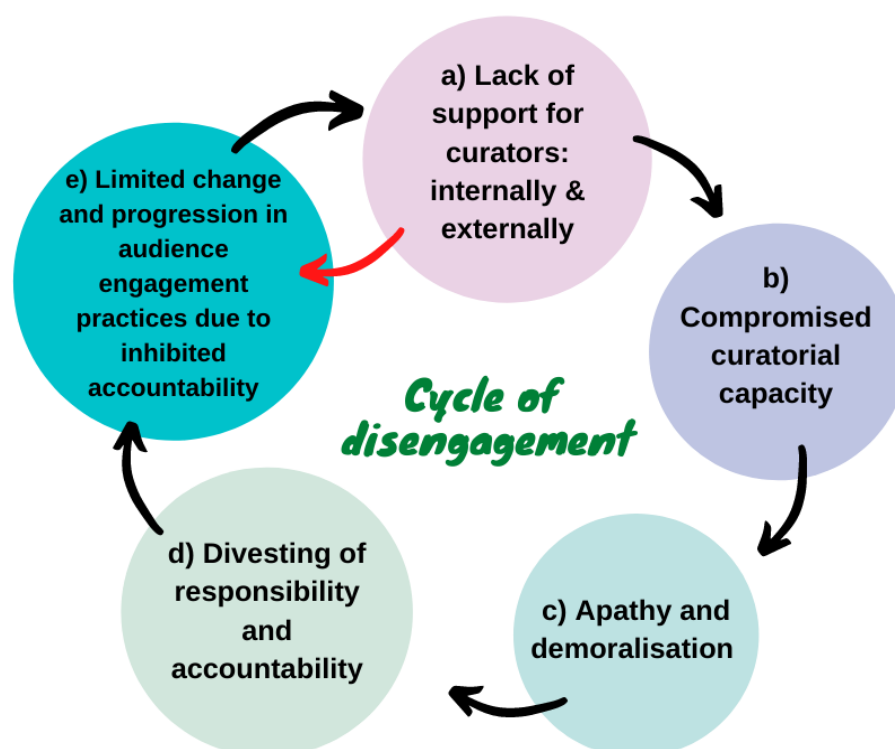
5.5.4. Location and community

Figure 2. Cycle of Disengagement (Sutherland, J., 2021)

Despite Olivia being a resident in her small community where the museum was being set up, she felt it took time for her to earn the trust of her fellow community members, in particular those in positions of authority for the area. Her mini museum was located in a small parish, and was managed by a group of church trustees. Unfamiliar to them, they initially treated her with "suspicion", and in order to engage them in her work, Olivia felt she was "infiltrating" them. She explained:

> "I think there was suspicion because they didn't know me and felt like I'd come from nowhere and it wasn't until other people [...] said, 'Oh come on, yeah we know [Olivia] she's around, she's always at the caff, she did this, she did that', you know, 'yeah sure you can trust her'. [It] wasn't until other people bridged that gap. And, [it] is great that this is the sort of community where people did do that, that made it possible."

Perceived as an outsider to a closed community circle and perceived newcomer, trust was an issue, particularly when it came to the issue of how to manage the money that had been granted from the successful funding application that Olivia had made, and how she intended to use it. Olivia gained acceptance from the trustees after others in the neighbourhood had vouched for her, and her trust was earned as a result. Claiming that "other people bridged that gap" Olivia needed the support of some key individuals in the community to earn the trust and co-operation of the wider network. In this sense, an exchange occurred: support from the community, for the community. On the other hand, being part of such a small neighbourhood presented challenges to the progress of Olivia's museum project. For example, the church was a dominant presence, restricting access to spaces she had planned to use. She "had to accept" their authority. Olivia's curatorial intentions were tempered "so as not to alienate or create obstacles for the project and people involved."

5.5.5. Curatorial isolation

Regionally, in 2018, the South Western Federation of Museums and Art Galleries held a conference entitled: 'Confronting the Challenges: Visits & Collections'. This was split over two days, with visitor-focused staff attending on one, and collections-focused

staff on the other. They did not attend each other's sessions, so they did not hear about each other's work. Further to this, there appeared to be no impetus or motivation for either group to do so. This divisive framing of the work of small museums by sector organisations such as in this case, only serves to further isolate and divide people-focused staff and object-focused work. It exacerbates the idea that collections, curatorial work and the expertise that goes along with that should not be shared with others, which in turn perpetuates the traditional view of curators as experts who work alone, separate from their colleagues. The most significant barrier to audience engagement that I identified amongst the interviewed curators was isolation.

5.6. Summary: curatorial engagement in practice

As I have highlighted, there are influences and expectations that informed the curators approaches to engaging with audiences in their own practices, and a lack of reflexivity prior to the conducted interviews was identified. The expectations for curators is also informed by notions of English society and the museums sector bodies, which operate within the same legacy-influenced environment. Such expectations, modes of behaviour and systems of representation, are formulated and upheld within the museum profession and therefore have direct influences upon the practice of the interviewed curators who, in turn, reinforce and mirror commonly held assumptions within each institution. However, this does should not absolve the curators from scrutiny of their own accountability. It is clear that some had the desire to be more audience-focused, as demonstrated by their testimonies and the presented spectrum of practice herein, yet inadequate assurance from within their organisations and a lack of tailored support from governing sector bodies and standards processes, had detrimental effects on the curators' capacities. The ethical implications of the interviewed curators' perspectives will be discussed in the next chapter, alongside a discussion of the potential for small museums in the South West of England to help to develop a more ethical mode of curating in accordance with an emerging paradigm of postcolonial museum practice.

Chapter 6. | Division and Hierarchy: Objects and Facts, People and Ethics

6.1. Introduction

Chapter 5 highlighted the different modes of practice adopted by the interviewed curators and highlighted examples of engagement, disengagement, and some of the factors that informed their work. Thus far we have seen how lack of communication and internal support, in addition to expectations based on inherited curating traditions, has impacted their practices. In Chapter 6 I introduce some of the societal circumstances in which the interviewed curators were working and explore their responses to navigating social history in curatorial displays.

Expanding on the ethical consequences and implications of the curatorial engagement practices presented in the previous chapter, I will situate my findings using a postcolonial perspective and identify some potential explanations as to why difficulties in engaging with diasporic audiences may persist. A richer discussion of the ways in which division and hierarchy play into modern curatorial engagement would require more space than is provided in this study, therefore, there is scope to develop this line of enquiry in further research, perhaps relating to what small museum curators can do to respond to postcolonial museum practice and enact change, rather than identify and acknowledge the need for it. While there were many ways in which the concept of traditional hierarchy was displayed in the interviews, I have chosen to focus on key areas of testimony and relevant issues that relate to audience engagement in a postcolonial context and that were socially pertinent in the period of 2019-21, during the time of the curator interviews.

6.2. Social context, government intervention

The murder of African-American man, George Floyd, at the hands of white police in May 2020, sparked global protests about systemic white supremacism and racial inequality and catalysed an increased shift in pace towards the issue of 'decolonising' museums. The outcry was heard in Britain, where the Black Lives Matter UK organisation arranged anti-racism demonstrations around the country. The most

notable was in Bristol on June 7ᵗʰ, thirteen days after George Floyd's death, where protesters took the opportunity to pull down the bronze cast statue of Edward Colston, a slave trader who had taken pride of place in Bristol's town centre. The monument had been a point of controversy for almost 100 years in the city, its presence criticised by some for glorifying white supremacist domination and promoting the valorisation of Britain's participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The position of the statue within the centre of Bristol inevitably had framed it as an icon to be admired and revered. Its racially biased representation of Bristol's communal heritage in a twenty-first century context was a significant point of contention (counteringcolston.wordpress.com, 2020). Demands from local community members had fallen on deaf ears, however responses from the media and the Conservative government omitted this integral information about the decades-long struggle on the part of Bristol's citizens who had consistently requested the Colston statue be removed, or further exposed, from their reports and statements around its toppling. Mainstream coverage of the BLM UK demonstrations was consequently dominated by describing the 'thuggery' and 'criminal damage' associated with the statue's apparently abrupt removal, and those responsible were sullied with the blame for perverting the movement's underlying aims.[37] As a result, widespread media reports showed government spokespeople disengaging with the underlying messages of the 2020 BLM protests, which were an outcry against racism, police brutality and racially-incited violence and a demand for recognition of systemic racial inequality.

In 2020 and 2021, the British Conservative government, through some of its key representatives at the time, such as Oliver Dowden, (Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2020-21) and Elizabeth Truss (Secretary of State for International Trade and Minister for Women and Equalities 2019-21) marked the country to be in the throes of a 'culture war', whereby national heritage, civility and decency were deemed under threat by politically left-leaning 'mobs' determined to

---

[37] For example, BBC News online article headline, 8 June 2020: "Boris Johnson: Anti-racism protests 'subverted by thuggery'"; and The Guardian online article headline, 12 June 2020: "Priti Patel condemns minority at Black Lives Matter protests as 'thugs and criminals' – as it happened".

erase Britain's history. In a speech in December, 2020, during the fallout of global anti-racism protests, Truss claimed that the equality debate had focussed too much on 'oppressed groups', suggesting that these ideas 'don't work' and that the government's approach would not be based on "campaigning and listening to those with the loudest voices". This choice of language, in a social context where people of colour and those in support of anti-racism were being criticised for speaking out, negated to acknowledge racist oppression and emphatically branded the 'loud voices' of protesters as selfish and unrepresentative: "Too often, the equality debate has been dominated by a small number of unrepresentative voices […]. This school of thought says that if you are not from an 'oppressed group' then you are not entitled to an opinion, and that this debate is not for you." The whole speech is somewhat discomforting as it is difficult to decipher what Truss means. She may be suggesting that rights for people of colour should fall in line as one of many societal problems that need equal attention, or perhaps that white people matter too. Truss did mention 'race' in the speech, although specifically supported "white working-class children" whom she implied were losing out due to wider conversations about 'race'. What Truss, and media coverage in support of the government during this period, apparently failed to recognise is that racist oppression has consistently impacted people of colour in ways that white people in the West have not experienced – a prominent argument behind the BLM protests.

Channelling the focus away from social issues of racialised inequality in the nation's historical narratives and the message behind the Colston toppling, Dowden turned attention to the damage caused as seen in his letter to museums and galleries across Britain in September 2020, which urged heritage organisations to protect the objects first (Dowden, DCMS, 2020).[38] Presenting and engaging with the violent aspects of the demonstrations dismissed the anger felt across the BLM supporters. Through prioritising the conservation of objects over social repair, the government and its instructions to heritage organisations during this period served to distract from the

---

[38] See Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 28 September 2020: *Letter from Culture Secretary to DCMS Arm's Length Bodies on contested heritage*

wider issues raised and appeared to evade responsibility for addressing the societal, structural, and cultural issues in question, altogether.

The imbalances in public displays and information about monocultural heritage highlighted in the wake of the 2020 protests also brought the implications on Britain's historical narrative and public sense of belonging, including what is and isn't acceptable, to the fore. The 2020 protests fuelled a subsequent excavation of colonial history and its presentation in cultural institutions. In the UK museums and heritage organisations began to 'go public' with commissioned research, funded projects, exhibits and initiatives that were attempting to reckon with British institutions' invisible colonial origins. Museum scholars have visited the intersectional implications of 'universal' (white-centred) representation, knowledge control, and cultural hegemony in – and constructed by – museums since the 1980s. Although early studies gained slow traction due to their limited number, the decolonial conversation has continued. The International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM) launched a 'Decolonising Museology' publication series in 2020, which promotes postcolonial theory, draws on global developments in community-focused museum practices, and acknowledges decolonising museums as appropriate and necessary tools for the twenty-first century museum (Soares, 2020, p. 51). In May 2021, there were increasing call-outs in the museums sector in Britain for research fellows, archival assistants, evaluators and tenders to engage in 'decolonising' work. The National Trust completed an interim report on colonial links to properties in their care, which was published in September 2020 and Historic Royal Palaces followed suit, commissioning their own review and recruiting for a 'Curator for Inclusive History' (The Telegraph, 2020). Criticism of these actions from the Conservative government escalated to accusations of undermining and rewriting British history and in May, 2021, Dowden announced that removing monuments or racist public displays may result in a withdrawal of funding (McGivern, 2021). Viewed more broadly, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's financial warning to institutions to get on the right side of the 'culture war', sends a message that examining and re-presenting accurate colonial history is against museum rules somehow, particularly if it is with a critical eye. Despite this apparent threat, there appeared to be no legislative ramifications to museums and

galleries' charitable statuses if they did decide to alter their displays (Huxtable, 2020 & McGivern, 2021).

This demonstrates that museums are susceptible to becoming the tool and target of political propaganda (Duncan, 1991) and in this case, can be appropriated by the government through a call of duty. To honour Britain's heritage in curatorial practice post-2020, is to maintain an ordered, traditional, a-political and innocuous rhetoric, it seems. This is a highly ironic and hypocritical web of politics, power and control. Museums wanting to address and explore colonial legacies may therefore face government-sanctioned backlash – not for breaking the rules, but for breaking from the traditions and expectations that have been placed on them since the inception of the first public museums in Britain in the nineteenth century. The departure is, in fact, from a traditionally imperialist British rhetoric which is Victorian and Christian, victorious and 'civilised', and therefore, racially, white and dominantly male. That is the Western worldview UK museums were constructed and expected to maintain, and this usually 'correct' version of events is under threat: it is these expectations that are at stake if UK museums are permitted to explore their institutions' decolonial position, to make that public and to demonstrate a sense of reflexivity. The danger is of democratising, giving up dominant power, losing exclusive privileges, and dismantling a capital-driven, structurally racist society. It is within this environment that the interviewed curators were operating, which sets the scene for another set of challenges posted to the small museum curator wishing to employ postcolonial thought, who may want to try to present multiple rather than monocultural contexts around object displays, or who wants to explore ethical approaches that meet contemporary social concerns. To 'decolonise', or not to, is the latest 'debate'.

6.3. Ava and Olivia: neutrality and risk

When the curators were asked about their views on 'neutrality', Ava recognised that museum practices are becoming more socially engaged and the need for museums to present narratives in a more ethical way:

"I think [museums have] always been political, it's just that we are more aware of those issues and we should be more sensitive about the information we present. For me, personally, I think [the museum] is a platform where people can come and have civilised debates. I think museums wherever possible should be neutral […] and provide the opportunities for both sides to voice their opinions."

Through her acknowledgement of sensitivity in presentation, Ava showed an awareness of museum ethical concerns. However, her view that museums should frame politicised issues as two-sided debates, maintaining a sense of neutrality, and her use of the word "civilised", is reminiscent of the didactic, civilising mission of the traditional museum (Duncan, 1995), demonstrating the persistence of 'old'-museological influences on contemporary curatorial practice. Later in the interview, when Ava answered a question about the emotions involved in curating, she responded much more personally, stating that: "museums [can] open up new worlds to people, [can] challenge people's current assumptions and ideas, and to me that's extremely rewarding". Ava's enthusiasm for "opening up new worlds to people" and challenging "people's assumptions", when interpreted through a postcolonial perspective, appears to be encourage a more pluralistic outlook, and one that is not particularly neutral, despite her claims that museums should try to stay balanced. However, her framing of the museum space as a place for "civilised debates" suggests a reluctance towards her museum engaging with perhaps more challenging social issues. When her two responses are considered, her later, personal view, seems at odds with what she initially presented, indicating a tension between what she believes museums should be doing and a personal desire to see traditional methods challenged. Initially Olivia, too, thought of museums in a didactic way, stating that they should: "be teaching something and showing an opinion". However, after reflecting on this during the interview, she changed her mind:

"No, I'm gonna […] go back a bit on what I said. Rather than having an opinion I think they certainly need to create a discussion. So, I don't think you have to be completely neutral to do that. But you have to acknowledge that there's

another side. You can't just put one side – there's so many different, difficult topics in heritage".

Olivia's view that a one-sided opinion is inappropriate for museum displays shows a support for multiplicity in narratives. For her, it was part of the museum's responsibility to show different sides and perspectives ("you have to acknowledge"). This pluralistic concept is consistent with the 'people-driven curator', as illustrated in the spectrum of practice in the previous chapter **(5.4.5.)** and is consistent with taking a postcolonial approach. She also indicated an openness, and sense of duty, to explore different perspectives in her work. Testament to this, she acknowledged:

> "there's always […] this kind of feeling like whose history are you telling? And what, who are you listening to? And who gets to be in there? […] but this is so local, it's so hyper-local. […] what we're hoping is that local people will come up with the idea of what they'd like to see in there [and] we can address that problem that way."

However, there are risks involved with living and working in, engaging with, and trying to represent a local community, such as with Olivia's situation. If she was to change the content to include something that could be deemed controversial, for example, her community is likely to be vocal about something they don't agree with:

> "with our particular museum […] it's kind of changed by the fact that I live in this community and I would have to live with whatever was there. I would have to justify it. Everyone knows who I am. If there was something in there that was violently disagreed with by a part of the population, I would have to justify that."

Curatorial decisions in this venue are informed and impacted by the fact the curator lives in the community she is trying to represent. Having to explain her decisions to the community if the content wasn't "right", suggests that they also have authority over the content at this museum, which she respects. On another occasion she described a test display in which she had placed a small art installation, which within a matter of

was intentionally damaged by a local resident, which speaks to the complicated relationship between content and community response in some cases (see p. 181). Proposing to display something potentially controversial, therefore might risk her social standing in the community therefore Olivia's approach is to work with her community collaboratively. This community and its views however is also subject to social commentary presented in the media and by the government, and may itself be debateable, for example, as with a museum audience, a community is not a uniform group and may feature its own structural and racialised problems.

6.4. Sophia: Objects, facts and people

As shown, some of the interviewed curators acknowledged the benefits they perceived from engaging with human stories in their practices. Others saw including social history in their narratives and displays as less significant than the objects themselves, or, at least, required the objects present to be directly related to any potential social element to be included. For example, Sophia recognised the significance of providing visitors with a human element:

> "what people like hearing about is other people. […] In the research we've done for this museum, one of the things that always comes back is, 'we wanna know about the people that built the houses, where did they live?', 'how old were they?', 'what did people get paid?', 'how did they learn their skills?', so that kind of personalising thing gives people something to connect to I think."

Yet, Sophia maintained that providing content with social elements could not work without the research and objects to "tie that story to us". For example, when her director proposed an exhibit related to India, Sophia claimed to have struggled in a 'back-and-forth' for a year trying to explain that such an exhibit was not viable because it was not relevant to the museums within the organisation. She explained:

> "We just didn't have the material. And it was just much too tenuous a stretch […] for the museums and the collections we have, because if it doesn't come from our collections, or our buildings, and that's where we're lucky […] because

we also [...] have an entire city of buildings that can be our collection, but if it doesn't come from those, then it looks like we're the people that are just paying lip service to something"

Sophia felt the collections simply could not show a clear connection to India. At first consideration, this seems logical. It is unclear what the exhibition idea was, or why the director suggested it, so the context is missing here, however, it is still useful to consider. If the exhibit was related to historical narratives about the town's past and its connections to India, it seems unlikely that not a single object in Sophia's collection would speak to this on some level (e.g. product imports, plants, plantations, landowners, the migration of Indian and diasporic communities).[39] It may be, then, that the subject matter did not align with Sophia's area of expertise and therefore she was reluctant to pursue the project without existing research in place for her to draw from. She explained the significance of research to her work:

"it has to come from, the confidence of saying those facts and the ideas that those facts can stem, or the suppositions, or the assumptions you can make from those facts, but those solid facts have to be there. Like, the object has to be there."

Her emphasis on "fact" in the above statement may indicate that for Sophia acquiring information through conducting research is a means of self-support – building on her own expertise gives her confidence in her work. Sophia found that, once conducted, research could then be used to enrich content:

"that's the value, that's the value of collections research, and the kind of, depth of knowledge about objects in a collection, so you've got that on tap for when

---

[39] "Is it not evident that all of those journeys and actions are connected? The routes where spices and sugar and cotton and animals and people were transported back and forth, they were all part of a system of imperialism and exploitation, extracting from, altering and decimating colonised landscapes, ecosystems and the people who lived within them" (Ratinon & Ayre, 2021).

you then start thinking about new stories or different stories or different interests."

Research, in this respect, is a supportive tool for the curator, reifying the need for small museum research to be conducted. Furthermore, the evidence that an object can provide is inevitably limited, so it follows that research and additional context should support and expand the information presented around it. Research is, however, time-consuming, so another reason for why the India project was shelved could have been a lack of capacity.

In Sophia's earlier statement, she mentioned not wanting to look like "the people that are just paying lip service to something". A further consideration of this in the context of an ambiguous 'India' display is that the idea of presenting a topic not wholly concerned, or centred around, white, Western history, was something Sophia was aware of as an existing conversation in museum work elsewhere. Some curators, it appeared to her, were trying to do so perhaps in an attempt to placate or pander to the contemporary demand of providing more inclusive narratives. What remains uncertain however, is Sophia's take on this, and her testimony does not definitively confirm a 'for' or 'against' stance. Taken at face value it appears that, to her mind, a lack of related tangible objects in the collection and research to draw on meant she did not have the means to present an India display and therefore she did not want to mount an incomplete project simply to look inclusive. This signifies a problem that may potentially be shared amongst other small museum curators with limited resources and collections, capacity and support.

Sophia's training and the time she had spent building her expertise was formative to her knowledge and enthusiasm for objects, and her passion for collections research came through during the interview, most notably her emphasis on using and presenting facts. She related facts to objects, which could be interpreted as suggesting that the object itself is evidential to historical fact. Her connections between the object and fact, almost equating the two, suggests that the physical object combined with research will result in the concrete information necessary for a museum display. This raises a different question of who conducts the research, as facts are ultimately

constructed ideas and are subjectively interpreted. Other curators, like Jasper, showed awareness of such bias, stating that: "history's written, and normally written from somebody's viewpoint.", and like Sophia, his stories were "told around the artefacts".

As with my own study, conducting research is subject to the biases and positionality of the researcher, amongst other issues such as accessibility to resources, capacity and circumstances. If a curator's intention is to present 'facts', then consideration could be given to what biases and positionality have informed the aims of the research and consequently the facts that are presented. From a postcolonial view, if we are considering how history in Britain, in Europe, and the West in general has been written, we know that what constitutes facts and knowledge is widely up for debate.

Morton, (1988, p. 131) argued that "The most obvious and in many ways also the most complex problems arise because museum exhibits use 'objects'.", and that "Several consequences result from this object-centred approach to history. One is simply that if there are no objects available, it becomes very difficult to mount a museum display." (ibid.) Morton proposed that this may occur when an object hasn't survived for us to be able to tell its tale, which results in a versioned sense of the past being represented through the objects that have survived. This does not mean that if there is no material proof that something happened or existed, it did not exist, but one can see the difficulty museums might face in attempting to represent something intangible, conceptual, or indeed historical, if there is no object upon which to support the desired account. Consequentially, Morton explains the "net result is for these museums to concentrate on the recent past and to present a foreshortened view of history." (ibid.). This raises questions about the validity of a mode of curatorial practice that relies upon the physical and tangible object to build their narratives and base stories upon. One the one hand, objects form the basis for traditional museum collections therefore to exhibit without them would be moot. On

The danger Morton points to is the museum exhibit's power in affirming Western notions of modernity and progress – essentially promoting the misunderstanding of the enshrined object as a relic in a sequential timeline that situates it as belonging to the past. When life histories are not included in a display's narrative, or if an object's

relevance to real-world – human – events is not established, the curator's responsibility to provide as complete an explanation as possible in the interests of public knowledge is called into question. Otherwise, the presentation of an object is surely incomplete, verging on false.

6.5. Localised narratives, representation of 'race', and "dodgy histories"

This section explores the interviewed curators' responses and practices relating to local history, national heritage, 'race' and diasporic representation, and engaging with colonialism.

6.5.1. Jasper and Finn: Localised narratives and the 'past'

With regards to the impact of British colonialism specifically on its white citizens, Irish and English men and women from poor, workhouse communities were sent by families such as the Draxs of Dorset, South West England, to labour on Barbadian tobacco plantations in the seventeenth century (Hayes, 2020; Fowler, 2021). The profits from those white, British, workers of empire, alongside the labour of subsequent enslaved Africans trafficked via the transatlantic slave trade route, directly lined the pockets of landowning families and fed into many physical structures that remain in place today. In rural England:

> "The period of enclosure and agricultural improvement was also the period of empire and slavery. Commodifying land and commodifying people went hand in hand. […] many of England's lengthier walls, hedges and keep-out signs are unrecognised legacies of colonial profiteering." (Fowler, 2021, pp. 44-45)

Context such as this, is rarely understood in common memory in England, nor acknowledged in museums. The curators interviewed from more rural locations in the South West upheld a notion that England's countryside communities are not as relevant to the conversations about Britain's colonial past, and did not feature as significantly in slave-trading practices as bigger cities.

Jasper, who had introduced himself as a local history enthusiast, was located in a town just over ten miles from a large city in the South West which had traded in gold with Africa from 1588, facilitated slave-trading voyages, had connections to tobacco merchants, and featured sugar processing factories on one of its main streets (Wills and Dresser, 2020). His view on incorporating more diverse histories into his curatorial content was that he would, if the history was there:

> "even if I wasn't the curator, I would encourage, that we tell the story of the town, as it developed and then therefore the people in the town who made that development. Now if that involves er, the sugar industry, er the cotton, er tobacco or anything like that and then that again goes out into involves slavery, then that should be told. […] "if there was a community came to me […] I'd consider if we thought that there was a story related to [this Town]."

The question I had posed did not ask about 'race' or colonialism, it was, in fact: "but in terms of your museum, how do you deal with perhaps difficult histories or conflicting views?". Therefore, this is an example of the status quo of whiteness: diasporic and black stories are conflated with discomfort, irrelevance, and are associated with slavery, and are located elsewhere.

> "when you're talking about history generally, you want - obviously, you're talking about the world, the history, it's a big world, everybody nowadays - youngsters they - it's not just a history of their village, because it's you know, they, they're listening to things about America, about Africa, about Australia and all that. Like it's not that far away in a way because it's a, it's a, approachable. So I said, 'Why don't you start with your local history?'. And I'm quite passionate about the Tithe map, I think it's a wonderful map to start as a base for almost anything. It's a nice period […] And I used to say, 'Why don't you start with this Tithe map?' and then you [say to the school children] 'Jimmy, Sarah' whatever it is, 'where do you live?'. And then you point to that map and you can say to them, 'did you know that used to be a, an orchard there?', or 'there used to be a mill just down from where you used to live' because, very

often you look out their front door and then none of what you're talking about is there."[40]

For Jasper, his museum was for local residents, "youngsters", and holidaymakers, so that they could "know a bit about the town", and "go and look at what things were like from the past". The above extract demonstrates his stance on historical narratives, despite having acknowledged awareness of history in a global sense, remains limited to the localised in terms of what 'past' the museum presents. The 'past' for a local museum such as his generally means Britain's industrial heritage (Redington, 2002, p. 1). Jasper's tithe map was from 1834, which he referred to as a "nice period" because the town was developing. For context, 1834 was the year that enslaved people in the Caribbean islands were officially emancipated. His references to the "orchard" and the "mill", together with an omission of global context in narratives about Britain's past can be seen as a continuance of building on the single-story myth associated with the English countryside. As Fowler (2020, p. 49) points out that rural towns: "were integral to the empire's expansion, operation and to its creative imaginary." What makes Jasper's view particularly challenging, is that he had personal connections to the slave trade in his family history:

> "in my family I've, [be]cause I've, my great grandfather was from Jamaica and he was 'mulatto', so I'm, so looked into it from that direction. But, I found that interesting, when I found you could look all that up, they've got it all digitised and that, and I started going in. Now I know that is something I would like to look into, in [this Town] and find out if there are any people like that."

He expressed that he was open to researching this further in his local area yet posited that it might not take precedence over other stories as: "There's always the other side." By means of showing balance, he then made comparisons to the local fishermen in his location who were historically enslaved by pirates from the Barbary Coast, "a lot

---

[40] A tithe map is similar to an ordinance survey map, and "may show where people were living and who their neighbours were in early Victorian times." (The National Archives, 2021).

of which wouldn't have been documented". For him, the history of transatlantic slavery was made somehow less pertinent to engage with than the history of enslaved local fishermen by Muslim privateers, due to a matter of documentation: "Now, the West Indies documentation as *really* crude and horrible as it is, but at least *that* somehow, allows people to *make* some connection."

Jasper's account therefore demonstrates the nuanced and challenging matter of engaging with diasporic histories in a rural setting, as he must navigate historical biases, his own diasporic family connections and biases, his enthusiasm for involving young audiences in their local history and passion for highlighting stories about people, whilst attempting faithfully to remain neutral to all sides.

On the one hand, he was aware of historical and narrative bias, including global, and personal, diasporic connections and expressed a desire and openness to explore and display narratives relating to those and his town. Yet he maintained that his perception of what constitutes 'local' should be prioritised within his museum. He is aware of bias, but the decisions about what stories are relevant to his town, are his to make.

6.5.2. Isabel: Representation of war narratives

> "one of the reasons we went for the First World War, because it's not actually my area of interest… but it is a big story for us… it was part of my strategy to get more people through the door because, funnily enough, people like to talk about the First World War. And the Second World War, and any war for that matter […]. [I] wasn't particularly wanting to visit that area of our history but I thought, 'Oh it'll bring more people in' and it was around 2014, everybody was celebrating it."

Isabel's statement suggested the visiting public to her museum enjoy talking about war and sharing war narratives – furthermore, war stories are generally popular ("any war for that matter"). My interpretation of the popularity of this narrative is that the war stories that are told in English museums celebrate Britain's fortitude and achievements. The glorious image of the Briton is satisfied through the themes of the

heroism of British soldiers against foreign invaders and a sense of victorious protection of the mother country: defeating the enemy for the benefit of British citizens. The effort of – and loss to – the individual in serving one's country holds a certain powerful and symbolic reverence. As Anderson, (1983, p. 144) confirmed: "Dying for one's country, which usually one does not choose, assumes a moral grandeur". 2014 marked 100 years since the start of World War One, so there was pressure on this curator to conform to the expected, nationwide heroism-affirming, and celebratory content. By confirming that the topic is 'not her area of interest', it is clear that portrayal of the usual war stories was not Isabels' curatorial choice, and she was concerned that people would rather talk about war than their own wellbeing. This pressure to conform with nationally-accepted narratives and themes, together with her own views, were at odds with her curatorial conscience, and she sacrificed her control in order to secure footfall – and ultimately income – for her museum. Not only are war narratives not her preference, she personally disagrees with war: "I can't imagine anything worse than war"; she "wasn't particularly wanting to visit that area of our history". Isabel went against her own views in favour of taking the popular, traditional – and expected – museum display route in this case. Isabel appears to prefer not engaging with the topic at all, which raises questions about whether and how curators *can* engage with topics that are personally difficult for them or not to their own tastes, as well as how commonly expected topics can be presented in more critical and interrogative ways.

Evidence of a local community enjoying and supporting more traditional war narratives was found in Olivia's account of her curatorial project that repurposed a small community venue into a museum, the opening exhibit of which marked the Armistice Centenary, 2018 (English Heritage, 2018). She remarked that, in the 'testing' stage of the project, she left an art display in the venue overnight. The venue is a wood-based structure that contains glass windows on all sides, and remains unlocked.

Olivia had described a test display in which she had placed a small art installation, which within a matter of days had been vandalised. She explained:

> "I put something a bit arty in there. That didn't go down quite so well. It looked, I thought it looked amazing. But, but that did get vandalised, and I wonder [...]

if that felt less accessible to... Whoever did that, felt, obviously felt it wasn't for them, and that actually the only thing it was to them was something that they could wreck. ...[A]nd it was a Saturday night - it's always on a Saturday night, something like that happens. [...] So, the problems are kind of like, testing those things out and not going too far."

No vandalism was reported after the World War One exhibit was installed. This could be for many reasons, one of them being that the local community preferred a museum format that told stories about them, as opposed to a more conceptual, and perhaps anonymous, art gallery setting. Olivia acknowledged that the artistic content might have isolated the individual that vandalised the display. Another possibility is that the damage was a response to the newness of the venue; an opportunistic attempt to assert a dislike for change, and when Olivia's main content was installed the venue was no longer new, which could explain it's lack of damage. It is clear, however, that the content must have had a different impact and effect on the audience and community than 'something arty' did. The war display was respected, rather than rejected, by the community, demonstrating the common public reverence indicated by Isabel in the previous example. The community here must have on some level felt that these war-based narratives and displays were accessible, for them. Either that, or they are not encouraged to embrace more artistic forms or expressive or overtly subjective narratives (even though war narratives themselves are subjective).

Museum narratives too often fail to communicate that Britain's war efforts during the First and Second World Wars were part of a *global* effort. In his recording for the Jaipur Literary Festival, Olusoga (2020b) pointed to the lack of research and coverage of Britain's colonial diasporic involvements in the Wars, thereby positing that the resulting narrative obfuscates the reality that the arrival of the Empire Windrush ship to Britain in 1946 was not, as commonly perceived, the first encounter the nation had with diasporic people on British soil (Olusoga 2020b, 36:04). Furthermore, Britain mobilised its colonial subjects of empire to contribute to 'its' war effort in combatant and non-combatant ways (Olusoga, 2020b). It is reasonable to assume that many of those responsible for displays about war simply are not producing any new research in

order to do so, rather, they recycle the version of history expected of them, thereby upholding Britain's mythic self-image. For Olusoga, museums *are* the appropriate places for critical engagement with the nuances of history.

Collectively the curators interviewed did not openly engage with diasporic audiences or histories in the museums they were working in at the time of interview. Consequently they fail to realise they are operating within, and perpetuating, a kind of curatorial solipsism through disengaged practices. A disengaged curator creates and contributes to a solipsistic museum environment, rather than one that is ethical and critical. In this sense, the narrative stasis of museum displays makes museums themselves a form of statue. Statements are made, memorialising myths in the process, and therefore cementing a single-story, and potentially nationalistic, version of history. According to Younge (2021) statues do not represent history, but mythology. Unchanging narratives in museums, too, signifies a shutting down of the 'debates and discussions' the interviewed curators claimed museums should encourage.

6.5.3. Representation of 'race' and colonialism

6.5.3.1. Sophia

Sophia no longer thought that the biographical history of the founding collector of one of the museums she curated was problematic, due to the research she had done. The collector's biographical history, which included links to colonialism and the slave trade, was something that Sophia claimed other people continued to struggle with. Noting that "a lot of people seem to think they are more difficult than I think they are, but I think that's because […] we've always just sort of talked very openly about 'Sir Allen's' history." The following extract shows a part of my interview with Sophia where she describes how visitors have responded to the potentially controversial involvement between the museum collector and the slave trade. It contains an observatory memo I wrote at the time:

Sophia: "more often than not, what you get, is more engagement. So particularly when we talk about the slave trade and 'Sir Allen's' involvement, and particularly when we have, you know, visitors who are, you know, Jamaican, and we even get people coming that have 'Sir Allen's' surname, actually they respond so much better when you're all, when you're really talking about it.

[MEMO: The participant motioned to me with their hand when they said 'Jamaican', as if to point out that I was included in that somehow due to my visible ethnic difference (a woman of colour who happens to have dreadlocks).]

JS: Hmm.

Sophia*: and sometimes that's, that's, the benefit is that we…often get people who are coming quite aggressively, and they're coming as a visitor aggressively, to say…you know, '*all* of this comes from slavery'. And you can say, 'Yes, actually it does'. And they'll be like, 'Oh. Ok'.

JS: So they're expecting-

*Sophia: -*Yeah.

JS: -they're already on the defence?

Sophia: Yeah,

JS: OK

Sophia: They're, they're, expecting you to be hiding it, or, softening it. And, and we don't."

This scenario is particularly problematic, for reasons as the researcher, and for reasons relevant to the research. On the one hand, from my position as the researcher, the curator and I were having a lively and friendly dialogue, discussing her work. On the other, I felt I had just experienced a racialised micro-aggression. Further difficulties with this statement in terms of how this relates to curatorial practice, are in the

language used to describe the visitors who take issue with the provenance of the collection and building ("aggressive"); and the dismissal of the objection in the first place. I would argue that the response Sophia gave indicates a limited view of the social context and audience-related ethics around such an issue, and a neglect to see the potentially harmful contributions to visitors' perceptions. With a deeper interpretation of this scenario from a postcolonial perspective, it appears to be a dismissal of social trauma and a dismissal of black lives mattering: she appeared to enjoy disarming the audiences perturbed by this subject matter at her museum by stating the facts. In this situation, facts and research presided over ethics.

Sophia claimed that this particular museum has "talked very openly" about the history of the collector. This has a potential for unacknowledged bias however, depending on whether the interpretation is in favour of him or condemns him, or is seemingly 'neutral'. In any case, it is a visitor's right to question displays (Sandell, 2007) therefore audiences will have their own views on how "openly" the museum is talking to them. To reiterate Morton's (1988, p. 131) words: "it is not just the intentional message supplied by one or several curators or sponsors which is important in a museum display." I think the extract under discussion exemplifies Sophia's museum, curatorial and white privileges. Sophia does not see an issue with the 'facts of 'Sir Allen's' history. 'Sir Allen' was a beneficiary of slave trade profits from a young age, and the building of the property she is referring to, was enabled by his colonial privilege at the time. Facts these may be indeed, but we can question whether Sophia's engagement with the display interpretation and her response may have been different if she was not racialised as white. The above example and discussion demonstrates the complex interplay between notions of curatorial and object hierarchies, expertise, racialised privilege in relation to navigating diasporic histories and the social elements of physical displays. It also speaks to the experience of the minority researcher in conducting qualitative interviews with white participants.

6.5.3.2. Finn

Where Jasper had given diasporic histories some thought, and had begun his own research in the area, it seemed that for Finn who curated at a similar museum, there

was no impetus to expand notions of the English countryside or to explore local history in a more critical or global way. In one of Finn's responses he asked me to give him an example of a socio-political issues affecting museums. I asked him if he was aware of debates around decolonisation.

> "I mean [...] it's not quite the same thing but are [...] we, we're verging on the sort of, diversity, political correctness sort of argument as well in this one. Erm. I think that what we do subliminally as well, as what was said before, isn't an issue really for those sorts of things, it [...] doesn't apply in quite the same way. I am. I am a natural enemy of political correctness per se, of, health and safety per se, of risk assessments per se, right? [...] But I know I have to follow the rules on these sorts of things. So my...natural bent is almost to do the opposite of a lot of the advice, just to be awkward. But I have to manage that within myself [be]cause I can't. So without it stopping me doing anything, what I'm doing...I am conscious of the awareness that I need to avoid giving offence to people, put it that way. Have to be very careful about how we do things."

Finn did not seem to have an awareness of the concept of decolonising museums in any great depth, and his response could be explained by his lack of understanding and therefore relatability to the question, and instead he equated the question with that of being 'politically correct'. In the next moment of the conversation, Finn directly addressed me, but quietly, saying: "I'm not racist, you're alright.", which was one of the more overtly racialised statements voiced by the curators interviewed. Finn's words raise questions about whether he was responding in defence of something – perhaps the question posed a threat. If so, the threat may have been perceived in discussions around narratives counter to the status quo. It could also have been an attempt to reassure me of his ethical stance with regards to racism. However, it is perhaps more likely that it was a defensive response due to being unaware, by his own admission, of the meaning of decolonising, given that similar reactions were observed in some of the other curators. Finn was not familiar with the term decolonising, and took it to mean "diversity", which he then associated with "political correctness". He did however confirm that he tries to maintain a mindfulness in his approaches to

curating exhibits so as not to "give offence". Nevertheless, Finn thought the matter of diversity simply did not apply to his museum.

6.5.3.3. Olivia

In a similar way to Jasper, Olivia also brought up slavery when asked about 'difficult' topics and she, too, believed that representing colonial histories required a balance of information from either side of the divide (in this case, between coloniser and colonised). Describing a project that was being carried out at another venue she was employed with, she explained:

> "we're doing something at the moment [...] that's all about [how] the house is basically built on money from South American indentured workers who were basically, it's basically slavery, and like, lots of country houses are gonna have the same kind of issues that the money that they were built on was some way linked to either the slave trade or something equally as sordid, or dodgy, or morally, morally wrong. And it's difficult not to have an opinion on that! But you can present some context around the time, as to why these people thought it was OK to make money in that way. [...] but that's not to say, that you're saying it was OK for them to do that. But you can, you can present some context. So, I think, while I wouldn't wanna be part of a museum that had an opinion that it was fine for those people to exploit workers in order to become rich, [...] I would want to see something about the people who did that as well. I would wanna be able to see something about why they, why they thought that was OK, or the context of the time."[41]

The difficulty for the curator here is the tension between providing historical information and recognising that colonial exploitation was immoral. Her use of the word "dodgy" speaks to this but to her, context is key. It may have been easier for Olivia to be candid in her thoughts on this, because it was not her curatorial

---

[41] Olivia had multiple jobs as her community venue was an independently funded project. Her employment at the venue undertaking the project described in her statement was in a non-curatorial capacity.

responsibility. An interpretation of her reference to enslaved people as "workers", is that it indicates an uncertainty in the appropriate language to use when explicitly engaging with an aspect of Britain's past that still risks offence to the white majority. Olivia's preference in this case, whether conscious or otherwise, was to use a term that is respectful to the oppressor rather than the oppressed (Freire, 1970), thereby upholding the status quo of whiteness as the 'norm'.

6.6. Potential: desire to transform

Alongside the themes discussed above, the majority of the interviewed curators demonstrated that they wanted to inspire people and showed a desire to be more inclusive (some of which was hypothetical, as discussed in Chapter 5). The most common way this was expressed was through their frequent references to the power of museums to tell stories. Alongside demonstrating a recognition of the social value of museums, this seemed to reflect each curator's passion and enthusiasm for the work they do, for example:

Ava: "we come into the sector because we have, maybe romantic ideas! [laughing]…about how we can make [a] contribution to the world. Yeah, so it is emotional, I think. […] I guess it's different for everyone, but that's when I talked about how museums could open up new worlds to people, how they could challenge people's current, assumptions and ideas, and to me that's extremely rewarding, because you can see in people eyes when they – when their brain somehow changed!"

Isabel: "I like that interface of providing people with something that they'll really enjoy, on any level. I love research. I love delving into something and telling stories. I did an MA for writing for children for pleasure, so I love that telling story aspect of curating."

In addition, the interviewed curators saw museums as inspirational, and potentially transformative spaces using words like "inspire" and "ignite" to describe the impact they want to have on visitors. Sophia acknowledged that museum experiences can impact people's lives, stating that: "we have, absolutely the power to impact people's lives through the experience they have, even just, you know, some of the people we

work with coming into a space where for two hours, they're safe." Therefore, the interviewed curators have varying levels of motivation towards audience engagement work, but an underlying enthusiasm for the possibilities of change a museum can bring. An underlying issue however, is the division between whose stories are being told and whose are not; whose lives are being transformed and whose are not. Lastly, as key decision makers in their organisations, the transformative potential may come down to what changes the individual curator chooses to make.

6.7. Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the ways in which the interviewed curators engaged with narrative, diasporic histories, presenting 'facts' and the desire to transformative experiences. The enthusiasm and need for research as a supporting tool to curatorial practice was also highlighted, and it formed an integral part of the curatorial process for some. As established, a tension persists between maintaining factual and curatorial integrity with regards to how small museums exhibit history, and what versions of history are currently told. Curating is a subjective practice, that is, based on the individual curator's preferences, biases and positionality. Therefore objects, the 'factual' information presented around them in a museum setting, and the historical narrative constructed, cannot be used to make claims to neutrality nor does the final act of presentation signify that critical engagement with museum displays should, or can, cease.

The Museum's Association *Code of Ethics* (2021, pp. 6, 9, 11) stated that museums should: "actively engage and work in partnership with existing audiences and reach out to new and diverse audiences", as well as providing "accurate information for and with the public". Their use of the word 'accurate' rather than, say, 'true', in the above statement is significant. Truth is acknowledged as being subjective and it is widely understood that there is no absolute truth. 'Accurate' originates from the Latin phrase, to be 'done with care', and is defined as: "1. correct in all details; exact", "1.1[...] capable of giving accurate information", and "1.2 Providing a faithful representation of someone or something" (Lexico, 2021). This word, like many of the phrases, indeed tenets, of the Museums Association's Code of Ethics for Museums, is also open to

interpretation, meaning that there is, by the ethical guidance provided by the Museums Association, inevitable room for error in the fullness of narrative a curator chooses to display. However, as with 'accurate', the term 'curator', defined primarily as "keeper or custodian of a museum or other collection", also stems from 'curare', which carries the paternal, religious, protectoral, and restorative connotations that accompany: 'care, concern, and responsibility' (Lexico, 2021). Therefore, accuracy of information, and ethics of practice, are of fundamental concern to the museum curator by name. Curatorial practice, as perceived by the interviewed curators continues hold an expectation to care for collections. Perhaps it is time for those "protectoral" and "restorative" responsibilities to extend further, that is, to people.

In the following concluding chapter, I will propose some of the ways in which curatorial staff in small museums in the South West of England may begin to address the identified deficits in support and racialised awareness.

Chapter 7: Developing Postcolonial Ethics in the Small Museum

7.1 Introduction

As I have explored, the small museum environment enabled the interviewees to exercise their control, be selective regarding their responsibilities, and they represented a spectrum of approaches to audience engagement. I have also discussed how influences were formative to their practices, and the ways in which they communicated and acted in response to the concept of audience engagement. In this concluding chapter, I will reflect on issues of postcolonial and decolonial practice and their implications on small museum curatorial practices with regards to audience engagement in the South West of England. Informed by the empirical data gathered from the testimonies provided by the interviewed curators, I will then discuss the possibilities for developing postcolonial and ethical practices in the small museum.

7.2. Challenges to curatorial expectations

The interviewed curators were operating in a museum terrain filled with expectations. This section presents some of the key observations I made through analysis of the interviews and how they relate to wider museological and postcolonial debates.

7.2.1. Museum privilege

I use 'museum privilege' here to refer to the special position that curators have in overseeing and communicating the information museums present. As we have seen, many of the interviewed curators experienced challenges within their roles, for example, having to adhere to the requirements of funders in terms of outcomes and exhibition content. Yet the positions they held within their respective museums gave them clear levels of autonomy, flexibility and choice in how to communicate narratives and what objects and themes should be presented to the public, such as whether they focused on art *or* social history. In postcolonial thinking the two are intertwined. This was also recognised in the wake of the social turn in museum studies. For example, as Shaman and Prakash (1989) argued:

"If we seriously consider the role of art in relationship to the history of civilization, the question of whether social issues have their place in museums becomes moot. The present challenge for museums is to find ways of exhibiting art in order to awaken our social consciousness. […] it is not enough for museums to limit themselves to broadening our sensual awareness or our understanding of the history of art. They must also consciously concern themselves with the duty of art to help reorder the prevailing economic, esthetic, [sic] and moral chaos." (1989, p. 8).

Curatorial privilege, for some, extended as far as them being able to choose what kinds of visitors were deemed appropriate and subsequently they could impart limitations to the access of those whom they viewed as less desirable or more challenging. The size of their museums did impose certain restrictions on their capacities. However, regardless of size, the curators in this study maintained 'old'-museological, hierarchical, and privileged statuses. Indeed, one of the interviewed curators had commented on the grandeur she associated with museums, and how she desired that status for hers. This reveals that the exclusivity of the English museum space is something that is still recognised and revered.

The notion of the grand museum reifies its historical image: a palatial period building housing wonders to be discovered, wealthy, elite, special and safe. Pointon (1994, p. 3) argued that studying museums allows us to peel back this glamourous façade, whereby our understanding is changed. We become critical, and we begin to see collections and exhibits as "components in a perpetually shifting language that works to create understandings of concepts such as 'the past', 'the present', 'art', 'nation', 'individual'." The special experience associated with the grand museum is altered, and we see displays of wealth as displays of power; we realise that tales of heroes and explorers become single-story accounts of people who may have been engaged in immoral, dehumanising processes. From looking beneath the veneer of 'the museum',

we see it as a constructed space, and we recognise the privilege it has garnered, and continues to hold, since the first English museum opened in the seventeenth century.[42]

Furthermore, if we consider museums in a postcolonial context, we might understand them as potentially unsafe spaces for some, and recognise the power of museum privilege to *harm*. Studying small museums allows us to turn a critical eye towards the peripheries of English museum practice, areas that tend to go unnoticed within museum scholarship, research and academic debates, as confirmed by the curators themselves. They, too, play a part in constructing meanings and values, and disseminating knowledge about English history and society. Therefore, small museums hold the same ethical responsibilities towards the public and society as their larger counterparts: as postcolonial theory tells us, being in the margins does not mean you are not present. To recognise museum privilege then, is also to recognise curatorial privilege and ethical responsibility. Likewise, I maintain that it is not only significant to continue to study small museums and their practices, but also that it is ethical. Larger museums and nationals are rightfully asked to be held accountable, particularly in our current postcolonial climate, and I would argue that small museums should also be included in wider sector discussions and be held ethically accountable for their practices. In addition, if English small museums and their curators could find a way to reflect on themselves in light of the above, perhaps this might inspire changes to their own values and perspectives. Therefore, attention needs to be paid to small museum practices, in order to develop small museum curatorial practice. Indeed, there is a pressing need for them to study themselves.

7.2.2. Losing control means losing privilege

Consistent with the notions of museum and curatorial privilege discussed above, some of the interviewed curators were concerned at the thought of losing their autonomy should they engage in more collaborative, co-created, and democratic museum work. As described in **5.3.3**, their relationships to the matter of control were complex: some wielded it unknowingly, enjoying the privilege of making decisions; others were

---

[42] The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford opened in 1683. (Lewis, 1984, p. 11)

overwhelmed with too much control, whereby the pressure affected their capacity to communicate and work well with colleagues, which resulted in apathy and isolation. Others still, enjoyed the separation that their hierarchical position gave them, choosing to self-separate in order to maintain that distance. The curators who appeared to fear losing control the most, coincidentally seemed the least likely to engage with audiences, and were identified as 'status-driven' on the Spectrum of Practice presented in **5.4.**

Sharing control was equated with a loss of quality and integrity based on 'fact', maintaining a paternalistic and didactic approach towards audiences. These curators would require the most support in developing postcolonial practices, that is, if they agreed to accept it. They were gatekeepers who enjoyed their places at the top of a hierarchy and felt entitled to their privilege, because they had earned their places through self-motivation, drive, and taking opportunities – which, concurrently, required being in a privileged position to do so. Engaging in reflexivity for status-driven curators might pose the most difficult challenge, due to the perceived threat to expertise they may encounter when encouraged to reflect critically. Status-driven curators value expertise over empathy, therefore, 'status-driven' and 'object-focused' curators have the most to lose, but potentially a lot to gain.

This study demonstrates that power and control imbalances persist in small museum curatorial practice. However, a significant finding in this research was that the curators who worked in the most democratic way out of the ten, did not express any concerns around losing control or power. Their 'people-driven' approaches to curating in their small museum, (as identified on the Spectrum of Practice, **5.4**) seemed to provide the most role satisfaction for them, and the most connection to their communities and colleagues. One curator, for example, who was initially seen as an outsider, was accepted into the community after she engaged with them, consequently earning their trust. This worked, because they didn't see themselves as having a privilege to lose, rather they wanted to share their access and privilege with others. Two curators had also cultivated environments of acceptance for their audiences and both demonstrated some awareness of decolonial issues. They were already practicing in

ethical and supportive ways, therefore these curators have the existing skills and commitment to develop a postcolonial approach, should they choose to. Olusoga (2020, 37:00:00-39:00:00), described engaging with the diasporic histories of Britain as an opportunity for curators, historians and educators, and in the interests of social understanding and collective memory. To not engage, is to continue to miss that opportunity.

7.3. 'Blackness' and Diaspora in the Museum Space

7.3.1. Curated amnesia and epistemic violence

The lack of recent historical memory and the absence of acknowledgement of a collective history that includes marginalised groups is a major sociological concern in Britain today and is becoming increasingly acknowledged in the museum field and beyond. Debates around decentring white-focused curriculums in the British education system, for example, have also undergone a recent reprisal (Goodfellow, 2019).[43] The result of such continued silence and absence, could be seen as a curated and selective version of history. For Olusoga, our national memory is trapped in a state of inaccuracy, as he explains:

> "The people who are defensive about the British Empire very often in this country have no memory of it, they're too young. And they talk as if they want to return to a 'golden age', and yet, that's not a memory. They remember, you know, films. And maybe they have childhood memories of watching flag lowering ceremonies. But they have no memory of the Empire. So there's this strange obsession with histories that never existed by generations too young to have been through them." (2020, 41:23:00).

This demonstrates that not only has research, heritage, and collective memory in England around its colonial past been largely neglected. There is, therefore, a renewed

---

[43] Also, see Goodfellow (2019).

– indeed, new – interest in topics such as decolonisation and the history of the British diaspora. The return to colonial history and postcolonial issues however is not new. Enthusiasm in Britain for 'Black' culture and the desire to focus on dissolving racialised inequality in Britain appears to manifest in a pattern of cyclic waves or collective bursts of energy at certain moments in British society (Andrews, 2019). Concurrently, the renewed interest in supporting black lives, as spurred on by Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, is a revisiting of issues that have been problematic for decades in the UK, further galvanising the significance of decolonising in wider discussions. For example, Kolb and Richter (2017, p. 4) heralded decolonising art institutions as "one of the most urgent topics of our times." However many in the UK are facing retaliation for engaging in conversations, such as in the case of the London-based musical outfit 'Bob Vylan', who were facing censorship due to their anti-racist lyrics, in September, 2021 (NME, 2021).[44] The problems seem to arise largely due to the racialised nature and anti-nationalistic tone that is associated with acts of challenging traditional histories, interrogating long-running cultural processes, and placing accepted mechanisms of social governance under scrutiny – acts that decolonising demands.

One of the challenges to postcolonial museum practices, then, is the impact of critical, anti-racist concepts, ideas and the language used. For example, a counter-insurgent slogan used in response to 'Black Lives Matter', is 'All Lives Matter', whereby the anti-racist message is interpreted to mean 'anti-*white*'. This is an example of how decolonial action can be stifled, due to the dominant group misunderstanding the message, whether it has been inadvertently misconstrued, or intentionally. Though there were several factors that the 2020 BLM protests were aiming to highlight and enact change, of which there is not sufficient room to discuss and explain here. However, the underlying principle I wish to emphasise is this: one decolonial term (Black Lives Matter) and one form of decolonial action (protests) were mobilised in an attempt to decentre 'whiteness' from taking precedence over the diaspora – in terms of human rights, in this case. This shows the upheaval and distress caused through, essentially,

---

[44] The title of the interview was: 'Bob Vylan: "We've been screaming about these topics at the top of our lungs for years. Why has it taken this long?"' (NME, 2021).

one attempt to *decentre* whiteness and draw the attention to structural, racist, inequality – not attack or deny whiteness. Decentring, or attempting to draw the attention away from whiteness as the most important 'race' in society, is a deconstruction of the idea that white is superior. This is the real cause of retaliatory counter-insurgency, not decolonisation. Engaging with decolonising terms and concepts therefore means engaging with dismantling exclusivity and superiority, and the deconstruction of privilege, through the decentring of epistemic 'whiteness'.

'Epistemic' is best understood as 'ways of knowing' something and is concerned with how knowledge is constructed. 'Epistemic violence', coined by Spivak (1988), is a feature of postcolonial scholarship, and the term specifically refers to the continued violation of colonized peoples through inherited knowledges passed down from Western literature and theories produced during the discourses of colonialism and the silencing of marginalised voices in the process (Frankenberg, 1993; Dotson, 2011). From a postcolonial perspective, such knowledges are understood as being fundamentally Eurocentric and white-supremacist and perpetrate 'violence' through the inferior positioning of those who are not racialised as 'white'. For example, Miller (1985, p. 284) referred to Western knowledge with regards to literary and anthropological theories about Africa as "a corrosive project of appropriation, wherein the Western reader projects desires onto the Other". One manifestation of epistemic violence in the present is in the formation of selfhood in relation to one's 'race'. For example, as Frankenberg (1993, p. 17) explained: "while discursively generating and marking a range of cultural and racial Others as different from an apparently stable Western or white self, the Western self is itself produced as *an effect of* the Western discursive production of its Others.". A specific result of this can be seen in the propensity of racist stereotype deployments in Western society. Formative to the creation of Western academic disciplines, it is also experienced socially in academic spaces (Davidson, 1970; Crenshaw et al., 2019; Meghji, 2021). Another example of many regarding this deep-rooted concept, is the depiction of the Other in Western art as well as literature, where colonised people, and those racialised as other than 'white' European, were subjected to imperialist tropes of wildness, savagery, animalistic and primitive, uncivilised, sexually voracious and less than human. Depictions and

descriptions of the non-Western 'primitive' in its many forms transferred these problematic and harmful tropes through the canons of Western knowledge, art history, and practice, and examples are still present in Western galleries and museums (for example, see Gates Jr., 1985; Barrell, 1992; Harrison et al., 1993; Coombes, 1994; King, 1999; Childs & Libby, 2017; Murrell, 2018; and VanDiver, 2020).[45]

As such, if Western museums continue to transmit traditional modes of knowledge to audiences through their displays – for example through Eurocentric narratives, the rendering of non-Western objects and culture as inferior, and/or use of colonially-informed historical information and tropes (Procopio, 2019) – then they can be understood as re-committing epistemic violence. In response some museum scholars are advocating for 'decolonial curatorial practices', which "would advocate for an epistemic disobedience, replacing or complementing Eurocentric discourses and categories with alternative perspectives." (Muñiz-Reed, 2017, p. 102). This signals an encouraging development in decolonial museological perspectives in scholarship.

Relative to the South West region of England and to the small museums and curators in this study, if only white populations are seen as inhabiting the local community, and in turn the space of the museum, to continue addressing and welcoming only-white audiences is to be complicit in reinforcing the dominant status quo of white racial superiority. The countryside and potentially smaller towns such as Bath, Glastonbury and locations like the Cornish coast offer an escape from bigger, urban cities with denser populations, a faster pace and politically vocal lifestyles. Stereotypical behaviours associated with cities like noise, disruption, aggression and violence coincide with white perceptions of Blackness, serving to equate the city with non-white behaviour and a non-white environment which disturbs the peaceful idyll image and

---

[45] There is not scope to discuss the motivations and complexities of the primitive in art in more depth here due to the vastness of the subject, nor is there room to unpack the implications and nuances of the ways in which 'primitivist' art has been and is displayed. Therefore the references suggested are offered as entry points for the reader into this topic. Examining the concept of the 'primitive' and its relationship to decoloniality is an area of continuing interest in my own research.

negates countryside and small town identities. Anything that threatens the identity of a place or people – or, the status quo – is automatically perceived as challenging and negative. 'Diversifying', that is, breaking down the barriers of a perceived all-white space, therefore holds negative connotations, and could explain some of the rurally-located curators' reluctance to tell different stories.

The disengagement with associated traits of the city and of Blackness, not only means the denial of the existence of wider social problems and issues, but also contributes to a tourism-sanctioned white-denial of Britain's multiracial environment, citizens and history. The offering supplied by England's small towns, rural countryside, and museums, such as those within which the interviewed curators operated, is one that promises less exposure to and, therefore the chance to disengage with – and ignore – multicultural ways of life.

Engaging with diasporic histories and narratives in such locations therefore, is dismissed, as diasporic populations are not featured in the imagery associated with peripheral English regions. Contributing to the idyllic, peaceful, and seemingly innocuous trope is a significant denial of the role the countryside and regional outskirts of cities played in the construction of English identity. Such locations and communities, and by proxy, the messages portrayed in their museums, are directly connected to Britain's colonial past and the building of the nation (Neal, 2002, p. 443; Olusoga, 2016, p. 21; Fowler, 2020, p. 49). Neal (2002, p. 444) argued that regional locations of England, such as the South West, continue to be formative influences on the nation's sense of identity through nostalgia: "In a postcolonial era the importance of English rurality has developed around the politics of (invisible) whiteness and constructions of ethnicity, identity and belonging." The tendency to the ignore the existence of a British, or local, heritage that is anything other than white, was manifested in some of the interviewed curators' perceptions of their locations, collections, and audiences; demonstrating the pervasiveness and continuation of imperialist thought. In small museum curatorial practice, using the location of the museum, or the provenance of objects as 'local', as reasons to discount engagement with diasporic histories and audiences, can be understood as a means of historic – and racialised – denial. In postcolonial terms, this signifies epistemic violence.

7.3.2. Difficulties with inclusion: 'de-segregating' white spaces

Potential difficulties arise when considering diasporic inclusivity in museum practices. One example, is the concept of 'colourblindness', whereby the 'race' of a person is ignored by way of attempting to show acceptance and demonstrate anti-racism. This is problematic in that ignoring 'race' also signifies ignoring the racialised disparities in society (such as in education, employment, health care, for example). Advocating an all-access, open door, policy towards museums being accessible to 'everyone', such as the Arts Council of England (2013) made claims to in their 2010-2020 strategy, can diminish significant issues at stake surrounding national identity, inclusion, acceptance, and the treatment of diasporic populations in the country.

One of the potential problems is how Britain's diaspora may respond or react to what sense of national heritage is portrayed in current museum displays, in addition to what is omitted from that narrative. If white, middle-class, visitors are accepted as the normal demographic to frequent museum spaces, corroborated by the interviewed curators' accounts in this study, then museums continue, as they have been since their inception, to be locations of specific racialised segregation.

Commenting about the social climate at the eve of desegregation in America in the 1960s, hooks (2003, p. 13) explained:

> "Black folks living in segregated worlds who had only spent a measure of their lives thinking about white folks were more and more becoming obsessed with race. Naturally, the more contact we had with white folks the more intensely we experienced racist assaults. Even the well-meaning and kind white teachers often believed racist stereotypes. We were never away from the surveillance of white supremacy in the world of racial integration. And it was this constant reality that began to undermine the foundation of self-esteem in the lives of black folks."

Although the hooks statement quoted above refers to the legislative act to desegregate American schools that was set in motion from the 1960s (Andrews, 2019),

it demonstrates that when a predominantly segregated space becomes a desegregated one, undoubtedly both sides of the previously sanctioned divide must negotiate inhabiting a new plain. The discriminatory experiences of settlers coming into Britain from Commonwealth colonies after the Second World War speaks to the difficulties of integrating people of diasporic heritage into a white-majority society with existing racialised prejudices. People had been conditioned at this historical conjuncture, on individual and communal levels, in a colonial logic that depended upon the separation and demarcation of social correctness by 'race' (Fryer, [1984] 2018, pp. 353 – 387), and the postcolonial argument is that such logic has not diminished within our cultural and social spaces in the present. The continuing challenges of inclusion and separation in contemporary Britain, in terms of individual choices and systemic problems, is explored by Andrews (2019, pp. 249-260). He referred to the argument for inclusion as inherently one-sided and claimed that white people are presented within the common rhetoric of cultural difference in Britain as "the solution to the problem, not the cause of it." (ibid., p. 258). From Andrews' perspective, conversations about inclusion in UK society are often not about sharing the space but rather integrating and assimilating others into that space.

To adopt inclusive initiatives and narratives in the small museums of the interviewed curators could therefore be seen as acts of ideological and social desegregation, as would be the case for any English museum, whether large or small and regardless of geographic location. Consequently, curators and their colleagues would be wise to consider how the desegregation of museum spaces might affect visitors, existing and new. The so-called 'colourblind' lens would be lifted; the raw nerves of British identity, social assumptions, and cultural differences, would be exposed.

Another point to consider is who tells the story. If new displays as such are curated by the ubiquitous white, middle-class, curator, consideration needs to made as to whether their version of history can sufficiently represent the history of the diverse population they might be aiming to represent. 'Race', in fact, would become central in readdressing the history of the nation in the museum setting; the fallout from which both white and diasporic Britons would have to face.

7.4. 'Racialised' reflexivity and preparedness for diversity

Being challenged about one's working style can inevitably feel personal, perhaps more like criticism rather than a constructive method of critique. Where the interviewed curators showed self-doubt and uncertainty with regards to the efficacy of their audience engagement practices, this could indicate an underlying sense of duty and responsibility, demonstrating that they care. Encouragement and support for museum staff to be able to critically reflect on their own practices could help with this. Thus, I propose that adopting racialised reflexive practices in curatorial work, is not only applicable, but beneficial for engagement with Britain's diasporic heritage and with the concept of decolonising museums, through engaging with the following problems.

7.4.1. Challenging museum privilege

Through analysing interviews with visitors regarding their perceptions of the museum experience, Sandell (2007, p. 132) identified "a hierarchy of trust [...] in which museums appear to hold a relatively privileged position.", indicating that museums are often seen by those who visit as reliable spaces of neutrality and truth. This is part of the constructed reality of museums and their publics, where one acts as an authority figure for benefit of society and the latter is subject to their didacticism. Sandell noted that while audiences will, and do, sometimes challenge what they see in museums, their assumed level of authority: "places certain responsibilities on museums – responsibilities for the ways in which they represent and engage with difference which many museums remain reluctant to acknowledge and act upon." (2007, p. 133) During an online seminar, Richard Sandell, Professor of Museum Studies and Director of the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) at the University of Leicester, claimed it would be "profoundly unethical" to pose LGBTQ equality as a debate. During the Q&A, I asked him how we might navigate the framing of colonial history in our museums. He agreed that this topic in museums is being "purposefully mis-portrayed" as a debate, and advised that museums should attempt to adopt the view of telling "a richer, fuller story", but that this "always attracts the attack" and prompts rejection. His view of museum work in the contemporary moment is that museums should re-examine their social responsibilities, to enact their "social purpose, with purpose". He

suggested that, at present, activism is deliberately accused of being "extremist", rather than reflecting a wider set of ideas among people that has galvanised into a call for action. Museum activism to Sandell, is "acting with purpose". (Sandell, 2021).

A possible explanation for the rejection Sandell describes, is that decolonisation conversations are challenging stereotypes about the colonised 'other'. Bhabha (1983) posited that the stereotype is required for the rejection to first be felt by the rejecter, then submitted, and subsequently acknowledged, and the rejection of change exists within a binary, colonial paradigm of the normative and the 'other'. According to Bhabha, the stereotype must be wielded first, in order for the rejection to hold meaning and validity. The stereotype, a discriminatory apparatus of the knowledge of difference, is thereby utilised to negate challenges to the way museums present history, what history is told. It is invoked to silence calls for change or acceptance of the wider, fuller story of Britain's colonial history, as those calls threaten and negate the norm. The way forward, according to Sandell (2007, p. 139), is to recognise that: "meaning is never fixed but rather in flux and always open to change, however pervasive and persistent dominant representational strategies might be. Counter-strategies can be deployed". This exemplifies Sandell's advocacy for museum activism and signals that curatorial strategies could be formed to promote a protean sense of meaning, heterogeneity in perspectives, along with centralising the marginalised and negating division, all of which are akin to taking a postcolonial approach. However, for such to be realised, curators must go through a process of racialised reflexivity in order to recognise the implications of privilege in oneself, one's practice, and one's museum practices and to begin to understand the ethical implications for audiences and curatorial practice, when museums are complicit in reproducing constructed narrative mechanisms such as the stereotype or the myth.

7.4.2. Shame: assuaging curatorial uncertainty

As the topics of 'race' and decolonisation were raised by the interviewees, I would like to discuss the process of shame in an attempt to explain how thinking with a 'racialised' sense of reflexive practice could be useful for museum professionals who find navigating decolonial issues particularly challenging. In a study relating to the

effectiveness of reflexivity, Probst (2015, p. 44) identified that engaging in the process may result in feelings of "discomfort, frustration, vulnerability, and unwanted emotions". The thought of engaging in anti-racist practices, or discussing an issue such as 'white supremacy', for example, could be confrontational for curators who have not previously considered this. Part of the difficulty experienced could be due to feeling shame. Exploring the theory of 'Shame', Scheff (2003, p. 241), explained that feelings of embarrassment and inadequacy provide boundaries to our social interaction and behaviours, but that self-monitoring, or personal surveillance, can result in assuring feelings of pride.[46] These recommendations are consistent with the practice of reflexivity. If engaging in difficult critical reflection on curatorial practice is enabled, it could be possible for the curators who felt uncertainty and self-doubt, to instead feel the desired obverse: pride. We could infer that a threat to pride (assuming that 'pride' represents a successful demonstration and achievement of audience engagement, or improved understanding of how to navigate a decolonial issue, for example) would likely induce feelings of shame (the undesirable opposite of the perceived success).

Drawing on Scheff's (2003) analysis of shame, then, a threat to self-pride is therefore likely to result in a personal reaction and sense of inadequacy. He also suggested that our understanding of shame is rooted in a sense of denial which stems from the West's imperial attempts to civilise societies during the colonial project: "the denial of shame and of the threatened social bonds that both cause and reflect that denial." (ibid., p. 249). The 'threat' is that which induces or evokes shame and negates our impressions of ourselves. The threat comes to represent that which is 'taboo'. In the context of the interviewed curators, one of the 'taboos' could be having to confront their own approaches to decolonial curatorial practice and representation. As Hall (1997, 2013) pointed out, the cultural meanings of representations are not fixed and change constantly, over time: there is no absolute, universal meaning. 'Culture' is subjective and socially formed, therefore representations, assumptions and values can be re-formed and new meanings found/interpreted. Perhaps if considering decolonial

---

[46] Scheff (2003) used the term 'Shame' to describe the group of emotions experienced.

practice is considered more, then it may no longer feel 'taboo' (to use Scheff's term) and it may become easier, if not empowering, to do so.

Some of the curators interviewed expressed a sense of loss: of control, of their curatorial voice, of existing visitors. To lose control within the 'circuit' of shame explained herein, would place one's sense of self at risk of shame, and would defy the fixedness of that particular circuit of cultural practice. In other words, the greatest potential consequence of engaging in critical reflexivity around decolonial practices is the risk to oneself. Reflexivity could be used as a means to change assumptions and associations around discussing issues pertaining to decolonising and 'race'. In an article proposing ways to address 'race' in the classroom amongst white pupils, Lucal (1996, p. 245), posited that "current conceptualizations are limited by their tendency to focus only on racial "minorities" and the oppressive aspects of race. This approach overlooks how whites are affected by race and indeed receive privileges through race." Moving the focus from 'race' as the problem of 'others' would, Lucal proposed, promote acceptance and a relational understanding of 'race', 'white supremacy' and privilege. Though this still depends upon a relationship of seeing difference, that is, of looking at others in relation to oneself, Rose (1997, p. 314), identified that it is the "relational understanding of *position*" (my emphasis) that is most helpful. In other words, forging an awareness of and acceptance that our identities are a result of "mutually constitutive social relations" – we are who we are *because* of and *through* our relations to others and each other, and our collective identities are mutually formed relationally to systems, institutions and narratives. I propose that racialised reflexive practices be engaged within the small museum, to foster awareness and acceptance of how the small museum environment: the curators themselves; their visiting and 'non'-visiting audiences; their local communities; and perceptions of their geographic history are part of a *relationally* racialised environment.

Making the invisible, visible, is part of postcolonial critique. Therefore, *talking* and *thinking* about potentially difficult topics in museum curating, makes the issues visible, acknowledged, and 'embodied'. Furthermore, a curator might feel pride and validation in seeing decolonisation, and themselves, differently. This may help in providing the

curators with another form of support and motivation that the interviewed curators expressed was clearly missing. Yet without sufficient scholarly and critical attention, and encouragement and support from the museums sector, progression of small museum curatorial practice may remain in stasis, and their curators may slip into the cycle of disengagement: "Un-centred, un-certain, not entirely present, not fully representable: this is not a self that can be revealed by a process of self-reflection." (Rose, 1997, p. 314). In museums, readdressing problems of cultural visibility and exposure in narratives, histories and the display of objects – in representation, more broadly speaking – are forms of decolonisation. Therefore, to engage in racialised reflexivity, is a means of decolonising curating.

7.4.3. Preparedness: we might not like what we see

Ethical, reflexive practices promote "self-discovery" over "self-construction" (Rose, 1997, p. 313). Therefore, one must prepare for some deconstructing to happen: of privilege; of control; of sense of self; of our values; of the stereotype. If English museums strive for access for diverse audiences, museum staff and volunteers must accept that those new audiences might not *like* what is currently on offer in their institutions. What's more, if debate and discussion is encouraged from both sides (white: normative and diasporic: diverse), the facilitators of those conversations, that is, the curators, educators and volunteers, must be prepared to listen to the responses. Museum staff must anticipate that what they will hear and witness from diverse audiences, may not be what they want to hear or, indeed, expect. It is the diasporic visitor's right to agree or disagree, to like or dislike, the content and/or presentation of a museum's displays and to voice that, just as the existing, 'white', majority of visitors have had the privilege of doing to date. As Bourdieu and Darbel, (1991, p. 102), argued: "As a listener's interest in, and, more importantly, understanding of, any particular message is a direct function of his or her 'culture', the effectiveness of all techniques of direct cultural action must be questioned." The agency that diasporic and diverse visitors will bring, as museum visitor studies in the 1990s confirmed, will be loaded with their own experiences, cultural heritage and values, therefore, to draw on Bourdieu and Darbel, those in charge of the narratives and messages, such as

curators, will need to undergo critique of the efficacy of their processes. However, if opening their doors to more diverse audiences is truly a goal, adopting a reflexive approach as part of the process should be invited, much like the 'people-driven' curators identified in this study, who navigated forms of critique and rejection, in the interests of their audiences.

Forgacs (1988, p. 424), suggested that, for a hegemonic state to persist, "active and practical involvement of the hegemonized groups" is also assumed, suggesting that 'subaltern' groups have, in fact, a level of agency in the perceived lack of inclusion to the arts. The non-visiting audiences of colour to museums in Britain, for example, indeed to museums in the South West of England, may be staying away from visiting these white-led 'cultural' institutions, by choice. Alongside, perhaps even in lieu of, seeing our legitimate histories displayed as part of the national heritage in English museums, diasporic communities have formed our own, separate, identities; forged through subcultures, communities, and our own cultural pastimes. If museum narratives do not speak for, to, or about us, why should we visit?

If curators can find certain visitors undesirable in comparison to others, the museum mantra of striving for inclusivity and access for all, becomes redundant, having been reduced to a utopic sham. Diasporic people in Britain, I would argue, need museums: we need to be seen represented on their walls, in their stories, and we need to be seen strolling through their galleries.

I would also contend that museums need people of colour and diverse heritages to be on staff – that is multiple staff, not just one – particularly for small museums, as the interviewed curators expressed that internal dynamics largely influenced their capacity and engagement practices. We can take from their testimonies that small museum internal dynamics which, in some cases appeared to be somewhat toxic and inhibiting, need to change. Similarly, if they open their doors to diasporic staff, museums must be prepared to navigate and accommodate the impacts of those individuals entering a typically segregated white space. In an article describing her difficult and highly racialised experiences as the first and only black curator at the Cleveland Museum of

Contemporary Art, Ohio, doctoral candidate Autry (2021), expressed relief when her post ended, seeing it as a freeing opportunity. She wrote:

"I, moCa Cleveland's first on-staff Black curator creating exhibitions, know the farce of the institution's "inclusion" rhetoric. I refused to subject myself to more institutional violence. I *imagined my otherwise*. March 31, 2021 was my last day. It was also my last day working at all-white museums. After years of being the only Black person, only person of color in numerous white museum spaces, I got free!" (Autry, 2021)

Vacating the space for Autry was a way to avoid a negatively racialised environment: one of "institutional violence". Autry experienced racism at this museum as an industry professional, and made the choice never to return, which raises questions about how institutional racism might manifest amongst audiences of colour and diasporic staff. Sharing her experiences as an African-American schoolgirl, hooks (2003) knew that she would leave the racialised classroom at the end of each day, providing her with a similar sense of freedom by vacating the negative space. This was to be a 'decolonising of the mind' mechanism that hooks maintained was an integral part of her survival arsenal in navigating white supremacism at school (hooks, 2003, p. 15). One possible explanation for the lack of visitors of colour to small English museums may be that it is a choice that has been freely made: to vacate – or evade – the segregated white space.

However, to disrupt the canon, one must engage with the system – and ideology – within which it was forged. Spivak (1982), the postcolonial theorist, referred to this process as deconstruction. To continue to vacate the white space, as Autry vowed to herself above, is to disregard the canon entirely, however. Such a choice could be interpreted as radical and empowering; demonstrating agency and utilising one's choices to maintain independence (Andrews, 2019). However, I maintain that vacation perpetuates absence, which paradoxically supports the ideological base of a museum as a space for white superiority and supremacy. Furthermore, choosing to avoid uncomfortable or confrontational situations is less radical than it is expected, therefore Autry's intentional continued absence from white museum spaces could also be considered a passive acceptance of the problem by an outright refusal to engage with it. Nevertheless, support within the Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland's internal

staffing structure was evidently amiss – they were not prepared to navigate the impact of including diverse stakeholders.

In my own experience, group dynamics amongst white-majority museum teams can feel oppressive; one is often pushed into being angry in order to be heard, reinforcing the racialised stereotype that women of colour are angry, and visitors are often surprised to see you and may treat you with contempt, confusion or suspicion. Therefore I agree that museum work as a person of colour can indeed be diminishing of one's self-esteem and mental resilience, as Autry experienced. However, I also realise that my presence *altered* and *disrupted* those spaces. As the only women (often, people) of colour on staff and through our work as minority researchers, the presence of diasporic staff members such as Autry, and our presences as audiences of colour inadvertently work to decolonise the traditional, white, museum space; visually, conceptually and dialogically. Thus, if small museum internal dynamics need to change, it is not only ethical, but logical that they engage with diasporic stakeholders, bearing in mind that such ventures require reflexive practices, empathetic support, and preparedness, in order to be beneficial. A wider issue here to be researched beyond this study, is why museums want *us*, when we, the diaspora, have become accustomed to being ignored. There is not scope to discuss this here, but others have been questioning why interest in decolonising in cultural institutions is happening here and now (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2020). Expectations need to change in the small museum environment. Equally, as discussed throughout this thesis, expectations for small museum curators also need to be revisited. Arguably, the changes they require start with them.

7.4.4. Extending 'care'

Curatorial support, from a network of peers, in the area of diasporic history and heritage in England might assist in encouraging postcolonial practice in the small, regional museum. Working with limited external interaction it seems, is common in small museum practices, , as Candlin confirmed in her own study: "small- and medium-sized organizations almost invariably work in isolated conditions." (2016, p. 30), and it was common amongst my participants. Therefore, curators cannot be expected to

single-handedly diversify their approaches. As Marzio put it, thirty years ago: "those of us who care about making the minority arts a vital part of mainstream museum programs must work together." (1991, [page unknown]). Edson, concerned with museum ethics, took the stance that a responsibility of a museum is to help make a 'better world' (1997), and Gramsci, in his writing about perceived 'working classes' and their own 'subaltern' cultures, reiterated the importance of collective action in mobilising real-world change ([1919], 1988, p. 79). As it stands, in 2021, collaborative working partnerships amongst curators and small museums, specifically on the topic of navigating diasporic art and history exhibits, undertaking decolonial work, and negating classist division, particularly in the region of the South West of England, still remains to materialise. This is to the detriment of museums, as Edson confirmed:

> "Never has it been so necessary for museums as institutions and their perceived missions to undergo an ethical renewal that will distinguish them from the negative aspects of contemporary society and those industries that use the museum disguise to gain relevance. The profession needs the capacity for rapid adaption to changing circumstances […] and renewed credibility for defending a common cause." (1997, p. 173).

7.4.5. Engaging with diasporic literature, scholarship and research

A further means of developing a postcolonial approach to curatorial practice, is through engagement with the literature and scholarship of diasporic writers. As explained in Chapter 3, my own experience of this research process was assisted, and supported, through doing this. In order to understand the diasporic experience in the West, and our history, it could also be productive for small museum curators to engage with literature, historical scholarship, and contemporary research from the diaspora, particularly if they are conducting curatorial research themselves. A few examples of diasporic writers working in Britain today are the historians David Olusoga, Caroline Bressey; sociologists Gary Younge, Joy White, and Gurminder Bhambra; polemical writers and journalists like Akala and Reni Eddo-Lodge. Attention should be paid to the work of diasporic curators, postcolonial writers, and to seek out minority produced research, such as this thesis.

As identified in scholarship and confirmed in the interviews, research from and about small museums is limited in the UK. A determining factor for a lack of research among the interviewees in general, was the time and capacity research would take to conduct. Marzio (1991) claimed that museums in the USA were in a similar state, particularly in relation to minority and diasporic art history. In planning an exhibition of Hispanic art, the curators under his direction at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas, needed to undergo a long and unwieldy process of research first. He warned that: "Because contemporary minority art, by way of its recency and subject, has not been researched, one must prepare to undertake a massive effort if one wants to do the job well." (1991, [page unknown]). If contemporary minority art research is lacking still, contemporary minority history research follows suit.

Research was one of the key areas that appeared to suffer from the perspectives of the interviewed curators in terms of their career goals and expectations. Marzio (ibid.) also acknowledged that research is costly and questioned whether museums could afford to diversify their programming in the face of monetary necessities. The interviewees confirmed that underfinancing for programming, and reliance on external grants for new projects, were continuing problems alongside the stretched capacities they experienced in their small museums. Thus, significant logistical barriers are presented in small museum curatorial practice that prevent the undertaking of crucial collections and historical research – work that could be conducive to providing adjacent and diasporic historical contexts and interpretations. Marzio (ibid.) did, however, claim that strategic placement of minority (art) exhibits within a general museum setting could help to boost the quality of the programme and also allow for existing audiences to engage with community-related issues gradually, over time. This provides a constructive alternative to the ubiquitous temporary exhibit, helping to embed engagement with decolonial concepts with some longevity.

7.4.6. Summary: Postcolonial potential for small museum curatorial practice

I think we are a nation in trauma, and the wounds run deep. Chambers (2007, p. 243) alluded to this, stating: "To propose a postcolonial museum is therefore to cultivate a historical, cultural and ontological wound. […] Here 'difficult heritages' […] insist with

the demand for a response, not a resolution." We have not dealt with the collective trauma in England, of Britain's colonial past and representation. Reparations and reckoning need to be made, but to, and for, us all. I agree with Andrews' (2019, p. 5) declaration that: "There is no 'British' problem that is not an American, Caribbean or African one." Furthermore, some are advocating for more overtly anti-racist modes of curatorial practice as an – ethical and practical – means of offering responses to decolonial concerns, in the form of interventions and activism such as Bayer et al. (2018). Looking to postcolonial critiques may help us to *begin* to repair our latent traumas because, through postcolonial thought and research, we cannot but recognise that colonialism has not only caused immense damage to us, individually and collectively, but underpins much of the environment we consume and experience in our daily lives.

The postcolonial approach engages with the controlling cultural practices of shame, encourages an understanding of an existence that is not binary, and asks us to bear witness to our collective experiences *alongside* our nuances, not despite them, nor by denying them. It exposes that we (the British) live in a world, not an island, and that the paths of 'difference' and 'others' have been crossing historically, and continuously, throughout centuries of encounters and intersections, right up to the present day; from the streets we traverse and residences we occupy, to the cultural, economic, and professional spaces we inhabit. A postcolonial sense of ethics in a museum setting thus could help to facilitate a shift in collective thinking towards the above, and prompt reconsideration of what it means for our identities to be living in 'Britain' today. Though it may be difficult, perhaps recognition of our nuances allows space for those difficulties to be engaged with, interpreted, and received. It is difficult to see how engaging with the above cannot and should not be mobilised by museums, of any size and capacity, for positive, and common, ends. If the curators have the power and control, they have the mechanism of choice at their disposals, as this study as shown. Small museums can opt to attempt to change the usual outcomes – if they want to. The most pressing ethical issue is whether – and how – they are willing to break the silence.

7.5. Key Findings

In the interests of investigating small museum curatorial practice and responses to audience engagement, this study aimed to answer five main questions, which were:

Research Question 1: What do small museum curators in the South West of England think of their audiences?

Research Question 2: What are the small museum curators doing to respond to audience engagement demands and expectations in practice?

Research Question 3: How are the small museum curators navigating and experiencing issues of audience engagement?

Research Question 4: What are the external and internal factors that contribute to, influence, inhibit, or change, small museum curatorial engagement with audiences?

Research Question 5: How might considering small museum curatorial engagement with audiences in a postcolonial context change our understanding of the challenges, perceptions and practices of small museum curating, based on these examples from the South West of England?

The following summarises the key findings.

The small museum curators in the study perceived audiences in different ways, with certain types of visitors being considered more desirable than others. The testimonies from the majority of the interviewed curators appeared to take up an assumed stance of whiteness as normative. The tone of conversations about 'race' varied amongst the curators, and their responses ranged from showing signs of sensitivity, awareness, and curiosity, to complacency, uncertainty and denial – sometimes exhibited within the same curator. A range of mechanisms were used to indicate, or imply, audience-related practices, and often the curators referred to their engagement successes as collective, historic, or hypothetical, and a spectrum of practice was identified. This, together with observed patterns of disengagement, demonstrated the nuanced approaches of the individual curator, but also the pervasive impact of external and

historic influences on their practices. Internal and external support were identified as deficits for the curators, leading to increased pressures, reluctance and uncertainty to make changes. The curators appeared to experience different sets of challenges when discussing diasporic, international, diverse visitors in comparison to describing their core audiences, who were usually racialised as white. Overall, there was also a collective difficulty in evidencing the ways in which they engaged with their existing audiences. However, for the majority, a level of desire to challenge traditional narratives in general persisted.

Engagement with postcolonial theory was generated by the data, in the form of direct references, verbally and in actions, to racialised factors, where 'race' had not been a focus of the questions or conversation: the scenarios where 'race' was discussed were instigated by the curators themselves. The factors included associating difficult, and different, histories with slavery, making assumptions about my heritage due to my physical appearance and verbally mentioning racism. The reasons behind their decisions to turn to the topic cannot be established here, however, an interesting point to consider is that fact they felt the need to. The curators engaged *themselves* in discussing 'race' in relation to their practices, thereby indicating a general awareness of racialised difference, social imbalance, and the omission of diasporic presence in museum narratives, whether they intended to or not.

As established in Chapter 2, scholarship regarding small museum curatorial practices in the UK is limited. Despite a wealth of literature and guidance available, the small museum curators interviewed in the study appeared to engage with it rarely, if at all, indicating that museum theory is distanced from practice. The need for increased support to engage with research and colleagues also posed a barrier to engagement, due to reduced curatorial capacity.

Though slow progress is being made, many of the questions relating to audiences, decolonisation, and representation are still not receiving enough attention within the museums sector, and in the case of the small museums in this study, often these questions are simply not being asked. The consequence of this is a lack of understanding and capacity to navigate the issues by curators on the ground.

Furthermore, lack of exposure of small museum practices perpetuates their peripheral consideration by sector bodies, in scholarly research, and in wider social discussions. Another consequence is that white curators continue to produce white shows for white audiences, thus making further contributions to the absence of recognition of Britain's diaspora. Some of the curators showed sparks of creativity, enthusiasm and interest. This needs to be nurtured. A common occurrence in the curators studied was a tendency to show a sense of loyalty for the local, limiting their exhibits and narratives to that which is tangible and accessible. However, communities can be extended.

Utilising a mixed-method research design, the pilot survey results formed the basis for the study, confirming my starting assumption that curators were generally perceived to have the most level of esteem within their institutions. This suggested a potential for curators to influence audience engagement work within their institutions. It is my conviction that this study shows they can.

7.6. Conclusion

This study and its engagement with postcolonial theory changes our understanding of the English small museum context and its practices, and responds to a lack of scholarship for and about small museums. Furthermore, it engages with the members of staff traditionally presumed most unlikely to prioritise social elements over object-centred practices. Through direct dialogue, this research therefore offers unique insights into how curators in small institutions operate, particularly in relation to internal dynamics, external influences and historic traditions.

This study has implications for an emerging paradigm of museum practice and small museum curatorial practice, specifically. Scholarly research into small museums in England is scant, particularly regarding contemporary sociological issues. Furthermore it contributes to minority and diasporic research and researcher reflexivity practices.

This study helps us to understand perceptions of small museums, curatorship, and the relationships between curatorial practice, audience engagement, small museum operations, and how they are situated within the wider sector.

In essence, small museum curators are alive to, and becoming increasingly aware of the ethical responsibilities associated with decolonial issues. As a result, a postcolonial ethics is in development, and the museum field is moving forward with the energy of those taking risks, working collectively, and engaging in critical stages of urgently needed reflexivity in their practices. In order to maintain momentum however and to promote change, curators in small museums require new and different kinds of support to move out of traditional modes of static practices.

The strategies that curators might adopt in navigating decolonial issues in their museums, as I have presented in this chapter, resonate, engage with, and support the following concepts identified in postcolonial theory: "'Intimately inhabiting' and 'negotiating' discourse"; "Acknowledging complicity'"; "'Unlearning one's privilege as loss'"; "'Learning to learn from below'"; and "'Working 'without guarantees'" (Kapoor, 2014, pp. 640-644). In the interests of self-reflexivity, Foucault (1984) asserted that only with a change in attitudes can we to move beyond our perceived limitations:

> "it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time a historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them." (Foucault, 1984, cited in Rabinow, [1984] 1991, p. 50)

By this rationale, reflexivity should not be limited to the researcher or the academic but has the potential to be extended to professional practice and social attitudes. The small museums and their curators were free in many ways compared to larger organisations. He also argued that one can operate both within and under the 'state' (ibid., p. 64). In other words, *change* can happen, with or without external support, but it starts with a change in attitudes, a process that increased reflexive practices in museum working may assist in beginning. Reflexivity amongst curators would benefit museum practice, particularly in terms of navigating 'decolonisation', as it would provide a space to problematise, understand and identify how to transcend boundaries and limitations. A reflexive curator might understand audiences with more empathy and affinity, as they would have a deeper connection to their own historical formation, positioning, and their true feelings, post-critical engagement. Increased reflexivity in

general terms could even inform daily life in Western societies, if it was utilised and encouraged.

The roots of museum tradition have been identified and exposed through scholarship and practice over the past fifty years, and they have been in need of revisiting themselves and how they respond to twenty-first century concerns. Postcolonialism interrogates the typical consensus of the value of human life in Western culture, which is taken-for-granted by those in a privileged position and demands that privilege is recognised and reflected upon. I argue that it is through the use of postcolonial criticality, reflexivity and ethics that amends may begin to be made.

This study did not set out to provide answers specifically on how curators can adopt anti-racist practices in their work, but rather aimed to answer the presented research questions and provide some explanations produced in line with grounded theory methods. It did however identify a need for museological and curatorial change, corroborated by developments in museology and in the words of the interviewed curators. As a result I have posited integrated hypotheses, rooted in the data, on how developing postcolonial strategies for practice and curatorial ethics – such as engaging with a racialised form of reflexivity – may be applicable within an emerging paradigm of museology and may potentially contribute to addressing issues of 'race' within the museums sector in general. The study has not provided conclusive recommendations or instructional, practical guidance for curators of small museums as this was not an intended outcome of the research. As discussed in Chapter 3, Methodology, the models and theories presented herein are transferable but have not yet been tested. Therefore, concepts such as 'racialised reflexivity' are still in development, and I continue to apply this knowledge to my own work in professional contexts. There is therefore scope to further explore the elements as suggested, particularly with regards to how and whether racially reflexive curatorial, or new museological discourse that engages with this concept, has indeed emerged. There are inherent risks in undertaking and developing new modes of practice in any profession, and what constitutes as 'anti-racist' may differ to the individual. Nevertheless, choosing to adopt and develop a postcolonial ethics for the small, regional museum in England, or opting

against it, are political acts. I would encourage the curators of small museums who acknowledge a need for change to consider which decision is the most ethical.

Bibliography

Adams, G. K. (2021) *Black Lives Matter: one year on.* Available at: https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/analysis/2021/05/black-lives-matter-protests-one-year-on/# (Accessed: 04.11.2021).

_____. (2021) *Changes made after Colston exhibition hit by blockbooking protests.* Available at: https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/06/changes-made-after-colston-exhibition-hit-by-blockbooking-protests/ (Accessed: 08.06.2021).

Achebe, C. ([1958] 2010) *Things Fall Apart.* London: Penguin.

Agee, J. (2009) Developing qualitative research questions: a reflective process, International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 22:4, pp. 431-447.

Akala ([2018] 2019) *Natives: Race & Class in the Ruins of Empire.* London: Two Roads.

Alasuutari, P. (1998) *An invitation to social research.* London: Sage.

Aldridge, J., Larsen, M. and Jarvis, P. ([2019]2022) *Open Up*: *A practical guide to support museums to increase the diversity of their visitors.* Association of Independent Museums. Available here: https://aim-museums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Open-Up-%E2%80%94-Guidebook.pdf (Accessed: 09.08.2022).

Almeida, S. (2015) 'Race-based epistemologies: the role of race and dominance in knowledge production', *Wagadu*, (13), pp. 79-105.

Ames, P. (1993) 'Views on the value of various evaluations', in Bicknell, S. and Farmelo, G. (ed.) *Museum visitor studies in the 90s.* London: Science Museum.

Amundsen, H.B., Morland, G.E., Phillips, A., Greenberg, R., Demos, T.J., Sjoholm, C. and Degot, E. (2015) *Curating and politics beyond the curator: initial reflections.* Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2015].

Anderson, B. ([1983] 2016) *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* Revised edn. London: Verso.

Andrews, K. ([2018] 2019) *Back to Black. Retelling Black Radicalism for the 21st Century.* London: Zed.

Appleton, J. (2007) 'Museums for The People?', in Watson, S. (ed.) *Museums and their Communities.* London: Routledge pp. 114-126.

Arendt, H. ([1951] 2017) *The Origins of Totalitarianism.* London: Penguin.

Arnold, K. (2006) *Cabinets for the curious: Looking Back at Early English Museums*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Arts Council England (2013) *Arts Council England 2010-2020 Strategic Framework.* Available at: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Great_art_and_culture_for_everyone.pdf (Accessed: 17.10.2019)

_____. (2014) *Accreditation guidance: An introduction.* Available at: *https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/FINAL_201406_GuidanceIntroduction_PrintFriendly.pdf* (Accessed: 29.08.2018)

_____. (2021) *Let's Create 2020-2030 strategy Arts Council England.* Available at: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Strategy%202020_2030%20Arts%20Council%20England.pdf (Accessed: 30.09.2021)

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H. (Ed.) ([1995] 2006) *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader.* 2nd edition. Oxford: Routledge.

Ashley, S.L.T. (2014) ''Engage the World': examining conflicts of engagement in public museums', *International Journal of Cultural Policy,* 20(3), pp. 261-280.

Association for Art History (2020) 'The Future of the Blockbuster: A Need for Change?' [Zoom event], 22 October.

Autry, L. (2021) 'A Black Curator Imagines Otherwise', *Hyperallergic,* 22 April. Available at: https://hyperallergic.com/639570/a-black-curator-imagines-otherwise-latanya-autry/?fbclid=IwAR0Rd-zGAgvrCgnY1hx5xPgWNjPzziX9j6f2JtbJNnfNe21a24zm374QXxY (Accessed: 25.08.21)

Azoulay, A. A. (2019) *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism.* London: Verso.

Bal, M. (1992) 'Telling, Showing, Showing Off', *Critical Inquiry,* Spring 1992, pp. 590-594.

Baldwin, J. [1965] (2018) *Dark Days.* Milton Keynes: Penguin Random House.

Barrell, J. (ed.) (1992) *Painting and the Politics of Culture: New essays on British Art 1700-1850.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bayer, N., Kazim-Kaminski, B. and Sternfeld, N. (2018) *Curating as Anti-Racist Practice.* Aalto University.

Bennett, T. (1994) 'The Exhibitionary Complex' in Dirks, N. B., Eley, G., & Ortner, S. B., (eds*.*) *Culture/Power/History, A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory.* Chichester: Princeton University Press., pp. 123-154.

Bennington, R., Backos, A., Harrison, J., Etherington Reader, A. and Carolan, R. (2016) 'Art therapy in art museums: Promoting social connectedness and psychological well-being of older adults', *The Arts in Psychotherapy,* Vol. 49, July 2016, pp. 34-43.

Berg, B. L. and Lune, H. (2014) *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences.* 8th edn. Essex: Pearson Education [Ebook].

Bhabha, H. K. (1983) 'The Other Question: the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse', *Screen*, Vol. 24(6), 1 November 1983, pp. 18–36.

Bhambra, G. K. (2007) Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

_____. (2011) 'Historical Sociology, Modernity, and Postcolonial Critique', *American Historical Review,* pp. 653-662.

_____. (2014) 'A sociological dilemma: Race, segregation and US Sociology', *Current Sociology Monograph 2014*, Vol. 62(4) pp. 472–492.

Bhopal, K. (2018) *White Privilege: The Myth of a Post-Racial Society.* Bristol: Policy.

Bicknell, S. and Farmelo, G. (Ed.) (1993) *Museum visitor studies in the 90s.* London: Science Museum.

Bitgood & Loomis (2012) 'Chan Screven's Contributions to Visitor Studies', *Curator*, 55(2), pp. 107-11.

Blake, F. (2019) 'Why Black Lives Matter in the Humanities' in Crenshaw, K. W., Harris, L. C., HoSang, D. M. and Lipsitz, G. (ed.) *Seeing Race Again. Countering Colourblindness across the Disciplines.* Oakland: University of California, pp. 307-326.

Blatti, J. (1987) *Past Meets Present: Essays about Historic Interpretation and Public Audiences.* London: Smithsonian.

Blauner (1969) 'Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt', *Social Problems,* 16(4), pp. 393-408.

Bonilla-Silva, E. and Zuberi, T. (Eds.) (2008) *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology* [ebook], Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield.

BOP Consulting and The Museum Consultancy (2016) *Character Matters: Attitudes, behaviours and skills in the UK Museum Workforce. Commissioned by: Arts Council England, Museums Galleries Scotland, Museums Association, Association of Independent Museums.* [unknown]: BOP Consulting. Available at: https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Character_Matters_UK_Museum_Workforce_full_report.pdf (Accessed: 28 November 2017).

Bourdieau, P. and Darbel, A. ([1969] 1991) *The Love of Art. European Art Museums and their Public*. Cambridge: Polity.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 3(2), pp. 77-101.

Brent, J. (1997) 'Community without unity' in Hoggett, P. (ed.) (1997) *Contested communities: experiences, struggles, policies*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 68-83.

Bryman, A. ([2001] 2012) *Social Research Methods.* 4th edn. Oxford: Oxford University.

BSU Handbook on Research Integrity and Ethics (2016), *Bath Spa University.*

Buurman, N. (2017) 'Engendering Exhibitions: The Politics of Gender in Negotiating Curatorial Authorship', *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 6(1), pp. 115-138.

Candlin, F. (2016) *Micromuseology : An Analysis of Small Independent Museums.* London: Bloomsbury.

Chakrabortty, A. (2021) *The UK government's race report is so shoddy, it falls to pieces under scrutiny.* Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/apr/16/government-race-report-evidence (Accessed: 12.10.2021).

Chambers, I., Angelis, A. D., Ianniciello, C., Orabona, M. and Quadraro, M. (Ed.) (2014) *The Postcolonial Museum. The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History.* London: Routledge.

Chandler, L. (2009) ' 'Journey without maps': unsettling curatorship in cross-cultural Contexts', *Museum and Society*, Jul. 2009. 7(2), pp. 74-91.

Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis.* London: Sage.

Childs, A. L. and Libby, S. H. (2017) *The Black Figure in the European Imaginary,* The Cornell Fine Arts Museum, London: D Giles.

Chow, R. (2014) *Not Like a Native Speaker. On Languaging as a Postcolonial Experience.* Chichester: Columbia University.

Clegg, S. R. and Rhodes, C. (2006) *Management Ethics: Contemporary contexts*. Oxon: Routledge.

Clifford, J. (1987) 'The Others: Beyond the 'Salvage' Paradigm', *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, No. 1, Ed. Hal Foster, Dia Art Foundation, Bay Press, pp. 73-77.

Coffee, K. (2013) 'Visitor Comments as Dialogue', *Curator: The Museum Journal,* 56(2), pp. 163-167.

Conn (2010), cited in Mancino, S. (2016) 'The Museum Profession: Protecting and Promoting Professional Commitments', *Curator,* 59(2), pp. 141-152.

Connell, R. (2018) 'Decolonizing Society', *Contemporary Sociology,* 47(4), pp. 399-407.

Coombes, A. E. (1994) *Reinventing Africa. Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination.* Bath: Bath Press.

Cossons, N. (1984) 'Independent museums', in Thompson, J. M. A., Bassett, D. A., Davies, D. G., Duggan, A. J., Lewis, G. D. and Prince, D. R. (ed.) *Manual of Curatorship: A Guide to Museum Practice.* London: Museums Association.

Crenshaw, K. W. (2019) 'Unmasking Colorblindness in the Law: Lessons from the Formation of Critical Race Theory', in Crenshaw, K. W., Harris, L. C., HoSang, D. M. and Lipsitz, G. (ed.) *Seeing Race Again. Countering Colourblindness across the Disciplines.* Oakland: University of California.

Crenshaw, K. W., Harris, L. C., HoSang, D. M. and Lipsitz, G. (Ed.) (2019) *Seeing Race Again. Countering Colourblindness across the Disciplines.* Oakland: University of California.

Creswell, J. W. (2014) *Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches.* 4th edn. London: Sage.

Curtis, A. (2019) *Museums should honour the everyday, not just the extraordinary.* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=UDvw9vWSgt4 (Accessed: 12.05.2020]).

Davidson, D. (1970) 'The Furious Passage of the Black Graduate Student', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology,* 15 pp. 192-211.

Davies, A.F. (1952) 'Prestige of Occupations', *British Journal of Sociology,* 3(2), pp. 134-147.

Davies, M. and Heath, C. (2014) '"Good" organisational reasons for "ineffectual" research: Evaluating summative evaluation of museums and galleries', *Cultural Trends,* 23(1), pp. 57-69.

Davis, P. (2007) 'Place Exploration: Museums, Identity, Community' in Watson, S. (ed.) *Museums and their Communities.* London: Routledge pp. 53-75.

Dawson, A. ([2007] 2010) *Mongrel Nation. Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain.* USA: University of Michigan.

Denford, G. T., Lewis, E. R. and Viner, D. J. (1984) 'Small museums', in Thompson, J. M. A., Bassett, D. A., Davies, D. G., Duggan, A. J., Lewis, G. D. and Prince, D. R. (ed.) *Manual of Curatorship: A Guide to Museum Practice.* London: Museums Association.

Dewdney, A., Dibosa, D. and Walsh, V. (Eds) (2012) *Post Critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum.* London: Routledge.

Diamantopoulou, S., Insulander, E. and Lindstrand, F. (2012) 'Making meaning in museum exhibitions: design, agency and (re-)representation', *Designs for Learning,* 5(1), pp. 11-28.

Dobbs, S. M. and Eisner, E. W. (1987) 'The Uncertain Profession: Educators in American Art Museums', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education,* 21(4), pp. 77-86.

Dotson, K. (2011) 'Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing', *Hypatia*, 26(2), pp. 236-257.

Dowden, O. (2020) *Letter from Culture Secretary to DCMS Arm's Length Bodies on contested heritage* [Letter]. 28 September. Available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-culture-secretary-on-hm-government-position-on-contested-heritage (Accessed: 28/07/2022).

Du Gay, P. & Pryke, M., Eds. (2002) Cultural Economy: cultural analysis and commercial life, London: Sage

Duggan, A. J. (1984) 'Ethics and the curator', in Thompson, J. M. A., Bassett, D. A., Davies, D. G., Duggan, A. J., Lewis, G. D. and Prince, D. R. (ed.) *Manual of Curatorship: A Guide to Museum Practice.* London: Museums Association.

Duncan (1991) 'Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship', in Karp, I. and Lavine, S. D. (Eds) (1991) *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. London: Smithsonian Institute.

Duncan (1995) Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums. London: Routledge.

Eddo-Lodge, R. ([2017] 2018) *Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race.* London: Bloomsbury.

Edson, G. (Ed.) (1997) *Museum Ethics.* London: Routledge.

Edwards, E. and Mead, M. (2013) 'Absent Histories and Absent Images: Photographs, Museums and the Colonial Past', *Museum & Society,* 11(1), pp. 19-38.

Elliot, J. (2005) *Using Narrative in Social Research. Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches.* London: Sage.

Elliot, V. (2018) 'Thinking about the Coding Process in Qualitative Data Analysis', *The Qualitative Report,* 23(11), pp. 2850-2861.

Evans et al. (2009) 'Developing Valid and Reliable Online Survey Instruments Using Commercial Software Programs', *Journal of Consumer Health on the Internet*, 13(1), pp. 42-52.

Falk, J. H. (1993) 'Assessing the impact of exhibit arrangement on visitor behavior and learning.', *Curator*, 36(2), 1 – 15.

Falk, J.H. and Dierking, L.D. (eds) (1992) *The Museum Experience.* Washington: Whalesback.

_____. (1995) *Public Institutions for Personal Learning: Establishing A Research Agenda.* Washington: American Association of Museums.

Falk, J. H., Dierking, L. D. and Holland, D. G. (1995) 'What Do We Think People Learn In Museums?', in Falk, J. H. and Dierking, L. D. (ed.) (1995) *Public Institutions for Personal Learning: Establishing A Research Agenda.* Washington: American Association of Museums.

Fanon, F. ([1952] 2021) *Black Skin, White Masks.* London: Penguin.

_____. ([1963] 2001) *The Wretched of the Earth.* London: Penguin.

Fenge, L. A., Oakley, L., Taylor, B. and Beer, S. (2019) 'The Impact of Sensitive Research on the Researcher: Preparedness and Positionality', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 18, pp. 1-8.

Forgacs, D. (1988) *The Antonio Gramsci Reader.* London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Foucault, M. (1984, 1991) cited in Rabinow, P. (1984, 1991) *The Foucault Reader.* London: Penguin. (pp. 32-75).

Fowler, C (2020) *Green Unpleasant Land: Creative Responses to Rural England's Colonial Connections.* Leeds: Peepal Tree.

Frankenberg, R. (1993) *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness.* London: Routledge.

Freire, P. ([1970] 2017) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* London: Penguin.

Fyfe, G.J. (2016) 'Established-Outsider Relations and the Socio-Genesis of the Museum', *Historical Social Research,* 41(3), pp. 54-80.

Gable, E. (1996) 'Maintaining boundaries, or 'mainstreaming' black history in a white museum' in Macdonald, S. and Fyfe, G. (Eds.) (1996) *Theorizing Museums. Representing identity and diversity in a changing world.* Oxford: Blackwell., pp. 177-202.

Gates Jr, H. L. (ed.) ([1985] 1986) *"Race," Writing and Difference.* London: University of Chicago.

Gayle, D. (2021) "'A potent historical artefact': the statue of Edward Colston's new role", *The Guardian,* 4 June. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/04/edward-colston-statue-potent-historical-artefact-david-olusoga (Accessed: 22.05.22).

Gazi, A., (2014) 'Exhibition Ethics - An Overview of Major Issues.', *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies,* 12(1): 4, pp. 1-10.

Gilroy, P. (1987) *'There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack'*. Chicago University Press.

_____. (2005) *Postcolonial Melancholia.* Columbia University Press.

Glaser, B. G. and Strauss, A. L. (1965) 'Discovery of Substantive Theory: A Basic Strategy Underlying Qualitative Research', *The American Behavioral Scientist (pre-1986)*, Feb 1965; 8(6), p. 5.

Gombrich, E. H. (1955) *The Story of Art.* London: Phaidon.

Goodfellow, M. (2019) 'Put our colonial history on the curriculum – then we'll understand who we really are*.', The Guardian,* 5 December. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/05/britain-colonial-history-curriculum-racism-migration (Accessed: 12.11.2019).

Gopal, P. ([2019] 2020) *Insurgent Empire. Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent.* London: Verso.

Gramsci, A. (1929-1935, 1988) cited in Forgacs, D. (1988) *The Antonio Gramsci Reader.* London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Green, M. E. (2011) 'Rethinking The Subaltern and the Question of Censorship in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks', *Postcolonial Studies,* 14(4), pp. 387-404.

Grey, C. (2014) *A Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about Studying Organisations.* 3rd Edn. London: Sage.

Griffin, S.M., Rowsell, J., Winters, K., Vietgen, P., McLauchlan, D. and McQueen-Fuentes, G. (2017) 'A Reason to Respond: Finding Agency Through the Arts', *International Journal of Education & the Arts,* 18(23-25), pp. 1.

Grosvenor, B. (2020) 'Is Art History Becoming Too Woke?', *The Art Newspaper,* 3 March. Available at: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/03/06/is-art-history-becoming-too-woke (Accessed: 06.03.2020).

Guthe, C.E. and American Association, o.M. (1973 reprint of 1957) *So You Want a Good Museum. A Guide to the Management of Small Museums [Pamphlet].* Washington D.C.: American Association of Museums.

Hall, C. (2018) 'Doing reparatory history: bringing 'race' and slavery home', *Race & Class,* 60(1), pp. 3–21.

Hall, S. (1978) 'Racism and Reaction' in Davison, S., et al. (eds.) (2017) *Hall, Stuart. Selected Political Writings: The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays*, Duke University Press [Ebook].

_____. (1999) 'Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'The Heritage', Re-imagining the Post-Nation', *Third Text,* 13(49), pp. 3-13.

_____. (2011) 'The Neo-Liberal Revolution' *Cultural Studies,* 25(6), pp. 705-728.

_____. (2017) *Selected Political Writings: The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays*, Duke University Press [Ebook].

Hall, S., Evans, J. and Nixon, S. (2013) Representation. 2nd edn. Milton Keynes: The Open University.

Hanquinet, L. (2013) 'Visitors to modern and contemporary art museums: towards a new sociology of 'cultural profiles', *The Sociological Review* 61, pp. 790-813.

Harrison, C., Franscina, F. and Perry, G. (1993) *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century.* London: The Open University.

Hatchett, S., & Schuman, H. (1975-1976) 'White respondents and race-of-interviewer effects', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 39(4), pp. 523–528.

Hayes, N. (2020) *The Book of Trespass: Crossing the Lines that Divide Us.* London: Bloomsbury

Hearn, R.R. (2012) *"From Practice to Theory: An Exploratory Research Study of the Relevance of Museum Studies Curriculum to Museum Professionals" Dissertations - Open Access. Paper 1.* PhD. Syracuse University.

Hein, G.E. (1998) *Learning in the museum.* London: Routledge, 1998.

Henry, C. (2000) 'How Visitors Relate to Museum Experiences: An Analysis of Positive and Negative Reactions', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education,* 34(2), pp. 99.

Hill Collins, P. ([2000] 2009) *Black Feminist Thought. Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment.* Oxon: Routledge.

Hoggett, P. (ed.) (1997) *Contested communities: experiences, struggles, policies*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Hood, M. (1992). 'Significant Issues in Museum Audience Research', *International Laboratory for Visitor Studies Review,* 2(2), pp. 281–286.

hooks, b. (2003) *Rock my soul. Black people and self-esteem.* New York: Washington Square

Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1995) *Museum, Media, Message.* London: Routledge.

Huxtable, S. (et al) (Eds.) (2020) 'Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery', *Wiltshire: National Trust.*
Jackson, A. Y. and Mazzei, L. (2012) *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research: Viewing Data Across Multiple Perspectives*, London: Routledge.

Jafari, A., Taheri, B. and vom Lehn, D. (2013) 'Cultural consumption, interactive sociality, and the museum', *Journal of Marketing Management.* 29(15-16), pp. 1729-1752.

Jain, R. (2017) 'How to Be Affected in Postcolonial Public Spaces? Ethnographic Remarks on a Multifocal World in the Making … ' in Kolb, R., and Richter, D. (Eds.) (2017) 'Notes on Curating: Decolonizing Art Institutions', Issue 35., pp. 119-128.

Janes, R. R. and Sandell, R. (2019) *Museum Activism.* London: Routledge.

Kaitavuori, K., Kokkonen, L. and Sternfeld, N. (Eds.) (2013) *It's All Mediating: Outlining and Incorporating the Roles of Curating and Education in the Exhibition Context.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.

Kapoor, I. (2004) Hyper-Self-Reflexive Development? Spivak on Representing the Third World 'Other', *Third World Quarterly,* 25(4), p. 627-647.

Karp, I. and Lavine, S. D. (Eds) (1991) *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. London: Smithsonian Institute.

Karp, I. (1992) 'On Civil Society and Social Identity', in Karp, I., Kreamer, C. M. and Lavine, S. D. (Eds.) (1992) *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture.* London: Smithsonian Institution.

King, C. (Ed.) (1999) *Views of Difference: Different Views of Art,* London: The Open University.

Kirchberg, V, (2016) 'Museum Sociology' in *Hanquinet, L. and Savage, M. (eds)(2016) Routledge International Handbook of the Sociololgy of Art and Culture.* London: Routledge, pp. 231-246.

Knudsen, B. T., Oldfield, J., Buettner, E. and Zabunyan, E. (2021) *Decolonizing Heritage: New agendas, actors and practices in and beyond Europe.* London: Routledge.

Kolb, R., and Richter, D. (Eds.) (2017) 'Notes on Curating: Decolonizing Art Institutions', Issue 35.

Lavine, S. D. (1992) 'Audience, Ownership, and Authority: Designing Relations between Museums and Communities', in Karp, I., Kreamer, C. M. and Lavine. S. D. (Eds.) *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture.* London: Smithsonian Institution.

Lawrence, G. (1993) 'Remembering rats, considering culture: perspectives on museum evaluation', in Bicknell, S. and Farmelo, G. (Eds.) *Museum visitor studies in the 90s.* London: Science Museum.

Ledesma, M. J., & Calderón D. (2015) 'Critical Race Theory in Education: A Review of Past Literature and a Look to the Future', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(3), pp. 206-222

Levitt, R. (2008) 'The political and intellectual landscape of instrumental museum policy', *Cultural Trends,* 17(4), pp. 223-231.
Levy, J. ([1977] 2003) *Memoir of an Art Gallery.* Boston: MFA.

Lewis, G. D. (1984) 'Collections, collectors and museums: a brief world survey', in Thompson, J. M. A., Bassett, D. A., Davies, D. G., Duggan, A. J., Lewis, G. D. and Prince, D. R. (Eds.) *Manual of Curatorship: A Guide to Museum Practice.* London: Museums Association.

Lorde, A. ([1984] 2019) *Sister Outsider.* Milton Keynes: Penguin Random House.

Lubar, S. and Kingery, D. (1995) *History from things: essays on material culture.* Smithsonian Institution.

Lucal, B. (1996) 'Oppression *and* Privelege: Toward a Relational Conceptualization of Race', *Teaching Sociology,* 24(July), pp. 245-255.

Lumley, R. (Ed.) (1988) *The Museum Time-Machine.* London: Routledge.

Macdonald, S. and Fyfe, G. (Eds.) (1996) *Theorizing Museums. Representing identity and diversity in a changing world.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Macdonald, S. (2005) 'Accessing audiences: visiting visitor books', *Museum and Society,* 3(3), pp. 119-136.

Madowitz, J. and Boutelle, K. N. (2014) 'Ethical Implications of Using the Term "Non-white" in Psychological Research', *Ethics and Behaviour,* 24(4), pp. 306-310.

Maldonado-Torres, N. (2011) 'Epistemology, Ethics, and the Time/Space of Decolonization: Perspectives from the Caribbean and the Latina/o Americas' in Isasi-Díaz, A. M., and Mendieta, E. (Eds.) *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*. New York: Fordham University Press, pp. 193-206.

Mancino, S. (2016) 'The Museum Profession: Protecting and Promoting Professional Commitments', *Curator,* 59(2), pp. 141-152.

Marstine, J. (2013) 'Situated revelations: radical transparency in the museum', in Marstine, J., Bauer, A. A. and Haines, C. (Eds.) (2013, 2014) *New Directions in Museum Ethics.* London: Routledge, pp.1-23.

Marstine, J., Bauer, A. A. and Haines, C. (Eds.) (2013, 2014) *New Directions in Museum Ethics.* London: Routledge.

Marzio, P. C. (1991) 'Minorities and Fine-Arts Museums in the United States' in Karp, I., Kreamer, C. M. and Lavine, S. D. (Eds.) *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture.* London: Smithsonian Institution, pp. 121-127.

Mason, J. ([1996] 1997) *Qualitative Researching.* London: Sage.

Mastai, J. (2007) '"There Is No Such Thing as a Visitor"', in Pollock, Griselda et al. (eds) Museums after modernism, (2007) Maiden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Matthews, B. and Ross, L. (2010) *Research Methods: A Practical Guide for the Social Sciences.* Essex: Pearson Education.

McGivern, H. (2021) *National Trust's report on colonial and slavery history did not breach charity law, regulator says.* Available at: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/03/12/national-trusts-report-on-colonial-and-slavery-history-did-not-breach-charity-law-regulator-says (Accessed: [unknown]).

McGrath, A. (2002) McGrath, Ann. Review of Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era. *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol. 3 no. 1, 2002. *Project MUSE*.

McLeod, J. (2000) *Beginning Postcolonialism.* Manchester: Manchester University.

McManus, P. (1996) Frames of Reference: Changes in Evaluative Attitudes to Visitors.

Meghji, A. (2021) *Decolonizing Sociology, An Introduction.* Cambridge: Polity.

Merton, Robert K., Ed. (1973) The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations, London: University of Chicago Press.

Mignolo, W. D. (2009) 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom', *Theory, Culture & Society,* 26(7-8), pp. 1–23.

_____. (2017) 'Coloniality is Far from Over, and So Must Be Decoloniality', *Afterall Journal*, (43), 17 March, pp. 38-45.

Miller, C. L. (1985) 'Theories of Africans', in Gates Jr, H. L. (ed.) ([1985] 1986) *"Race," Writing and Difference.* London: University of Chicago, pp. 281-300.

Mills, C. W. (2000) 'Race and the Social Contract Tradition', *Social Identities,* 6(4), pp. 441-462.

Minister of State for Equalities (2022) *Inclusive Britain: government response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities* (CP 625) 17 March. Crown Copyright. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-britain-action-plan-government-response-to-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities/inclusive-britain-government-response-to-the-commission-on-race-and-ethnic-disparities (Accessed: 02.08.2022).

Morton, A. (1988) 'Tomorrow's yesterdays: science museums and the future', in Lumley, R. (ed.) *The Museum Time-Machine.* London: Routledge.

Muñiz-Reed, I. (2017) 'Thoughts on Curatorial Practices in the Decolonial Turn', *OnCurating: Decolonizing Art Institutions,* 35, pp. 99-105.

Murrell, D. (2018) *Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today,* London: Yale University Press.

Museums Association (2004) *Museum and Galleries Yearbook*

The Museum of East Asian Art (1993) *Inaugural Exhibition Volume 1: Chinese Ceramics.* Bath: The Museum of East Asian Art.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2018) 'Metaphysical Empire, Linguicides and Cultural Imperialism', *English Academy Review,* 35(2), pp. 96-115.

Neal, S. (2002) 'Rural landscapes, representations and racism: examining multicultural citizenship and policy-making in the English countryside', *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 25(3), pp. 442-461

Niemojewski, R. (2016) 'The Aspirational Narrative of the New Curator' in Hoare, N., Milliard, C., Niemojewski, R., Borthwick, B., & Watkins, J. Eds. (2016) *The New Curator,* London: Laurence King Publishing, pp. 9-11.

NME (2021) '"Bob Vylan: "We've been screaming about these topics at the top of our lungs for years. Why has it taken this long?"', *NME* [date unknown]. Available at: https://www.nme.com/blogs/nme-radar/bob-vylan-we-live-here-interview-2684568 (Accessed: 23.09.2021).

O'Neill, P. ([2007], 2011) C*urating* Subjects London: Open Editions.

Obrist, H. U. (ed) (2011) *A Brief History of Curating* (Kunsterlav: JRP Ringier, 2011)

Olusoga, D. ([2016] 2017) *Black and British. A Forgotten History.* London: Pan.

_____. (2020a) "The 'statue wars' must not distract us from a reckoning with racism", *The Guardian,* 14 June. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/global/2020/jun/14/statue-wars-must-not-distract-reckoning-with-racism-david-olusoga (Accessed: 22.05.22).

_____. (2020b) 'The World's War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire, David Olusoga in conversation with Yasmin Khan'. *Jaipur Literature Festival*. 22 July. Available at: https://youtu.be/bXXqORD0nZA (Accessed: 20.09.2021).

Orosz (1990) *Curators and Culture The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870*. University of Alabama Press.

Parry, B. (1987) 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', *Oxford Literary Review*, 9(1-2), cited in Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H. (Ed.) ([1995] 2006) *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader.* 2nd edition. Oxford: Routledge, pp. 43-50.

Patel, T. G. and Connelly, L. (2019) ''Post-Race' racisms in the narratives of 'Brexit' voters. *The Sociological Review*, 67(5), pp. 968–984.

Pekarik, A.J. (1997) 'Understanding visitor comments: the case of Flight time Barbie', *Curator,* 40, pp. 56-68.

Phillips, A. (2015) in Amundsen, H.B., et al. (2015) *Curating and politics beyond the curator : initial reflections.* Ostfildern : Hatje Cantz, 2015].

Pointon, M. (Ed.) (1994) *Art apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America .* Manchester: Manchester University.

Pollock, G. and Zemans, J. (2007) *Museums after modernism: strategies of engagement.* Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Probst, B. (2015) 'The Eye Regards Itself: Benefits and Challenges of Reflexivity in Qualitative Social Work Research', *Social Work Research,* 39(1), pp. 38-48.

Procopio, L. (2019) 'Curating Racism: Understanding Field Museum Physical Anthropology from 1893 to 1969', *Theory and Practice,* 2., (no page specified).

Proctor, A. (2020) *The Whole Picture: The colonial story of the art in our museums & why we need to talk about it.* London: Octopus.

Prösler, M. (1996) 'Museums and Globalization', in Macdonald, S. and Fyfe, G. (Eds.) (1996) *Theorizing Museums. Representing identity and diversity in a changing world.* Oxford: Blackwell., pp. 21-44.

Quiros, L., Varghese, R. and Vanidestine, T. (2020) 'Disrupting the Single Story: Challenging Dominant Trauma Narratives Through a Critical Race Lens', *Traumatology,* 26(2), pp. 160-168.

Rabinow, P. (ed.) (1991) *The Foucault Reader.* 2nd edn. London: Penguin.

Ratinon, C. and Ayre, S. (2021) *Horticultural Appropriation – Why horticulture needs decolonising: A conversation in the gardens of West Dean.* England: Rough Trade Books, 2nd edn, Spring 2021.

Redington, C. (2002) *A Guide to the Small Museums of Britain.* London: I.B. Tauris & Co.

Rhodes, P. J. (1994) 'Race-of-interviewer Effects: A brief comment', *Sociology,* 28(2), pp. 547-558.

Richardson, J. and Lambert, J. (1985) 'The Sociology of Race' in Haralambos, M. (Ed.) *Sociology: New Directions.* Reprint. Lancashire: Causeway Press, 1990, pp. 3-88.

Ritchie, A. (2020) *Locals enjoy rare calm at London Museums.* Available at: https://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2020/08/22/locals-enjoy-rare-calm-at-london-museums.html (Last accessed: 19.11.2020).

Rose, G. (1997) 'Situating Knowledges: Positionality, Reflexivities and Other Tactics.', *Progress in Human Geography*, 21(3), pp. 305-320.

Sadaratnam, M. (2020) Decolonisation, The Making of the Modern World - Lecture 4. SOAS University of London, Nov. 30, 2020. https://connectedsociologies.org/curriculum/mmw/decolonisation/?fbclid=IwAR0aRrEI0dFkHsL8q7a343r1oxcgNBEVcRMru4l_nXdc7VKaE_N9ZM_8Vog [Last accessed: 3.01.21]

Said (1978) *Orientalism.* New York: Pantheon.

Said, E. ([1993] 1994) *Culture and Imperialism,* New York: Vintage Books.

Sandell, R. ([2002] 2005) *Museums, Society, Inequality.* Abindgdon: Routledge.

_____. (2007) *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference.* Oxon: Routledge.

_____. (2021) 'Activism Ethics in Museums'. [Zoom lecture]. *Museum Lab.* Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage. 16 June.

Sandell, R., Dodd, J., Garland-Thomson, R. (Eds.) (2010) *Re-Presenting Disability Activism and Agency in the Museum*. London: Routledge

Scheff, T. J. (2003) 'Shame in Self and Society', *Symbolic Interaction*, 26(2), pp. 239–262.

Shaman, S. S., and Prakash, M. S. (1989) 'The Duty of Art: Museums and Social Consciousness, *The Journal of Museum Education,* 14(1), pp. 5-8.

Shettel, H. H. (1993) 'Professionalism in museum studies: too soon or too late?', in Bicknell, S. and Farmelo, G. (ed.) *Museum visitors studies in the 90s.*

Shettel, H. H. and Reilly, P. C. (1966) 'Evaluation of Existing Criteria for Judging the Quality of Science Exhibits', *AV Communication Review,* 14(4) pp. 479-488.

Silverman, D. (1998) 'Qualitative research: meanings or practices?', *Information Systems Journal,* 8, pp. 3-20.

Simon, N. (2010) *The Participatory Museum*. Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0

Sin, C. H. (2007) 'Ethnic-matching in qualitative research: reversing the gaze on 'white others' and 'white' as 'other'', *Qualitative Research,* 7(4), pp. 477-499.

Smith, L. (2017) 'The cultural 'work of tourism' in *Smith, L., Waterton, E. and Watson, S. (Eds.) (2017) The Cultural Moment in Tourism.* London: Routledge., pp. 210-234.

Soares, B. B. (Ed.) (2020) *Decolonising Museology: 1 Museums, Community Action and Decolonisation.* International Committee for Museology – ICOFOM.

South West Museum Development (2017) *Annual Museum Survey 2016 - 2017* Available at: https://southwestmuseums.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/South_West_Museum_Development_16-17_Data_Report.pdf (Accessed: 01.08.2021).

_____. (2019) *Annual Museum Survey 2018 – 2019.* Available at: https://southwestmuseums.org.uk/what-we-do/sector-research/ (Accessed: 01.08.2021).

_____. (2020) *Annual Museum Survey 2020 South West.* Available at: https://southwestmuseums.org.uk/what-we-do/consultancy/annual-museum-survey-2020/ (Accessed: 01.08.2021).

Spalding, F. (1986) *British Art Since 1900.* London: Thames and Hudson.

Spalding, J. (2002) *The Poetic Museum. Reviving Historic Collections.* London: Prestel Verlag.

Sparrow, A. (2020) *Priti Patel condemns minority at Black Lives Matter protests as 'thugs and criminals' – as it happened.* Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2020/jun/08/uk-coronavirus-johnson-says-anti-racist-protests-were-subverted-by-thuggery-live-news-covid19-updates (Accessed: 07/05/2021).

Spivak, G. C. (1982) 'The Politics of Interpretations', *Critical Inquiry,* 9(1), pp. 259-278.

_____. (1988) 'Can the Subaltern speak?' in Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L. (Eds.) (1988) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Basingstoke: Macmillan., pp. 271-313.

St. John, M. & Perry, D. (1993) in Bicknell, S. and Farmelo, G. (Eds.) *Museum visitor studies in the 90s.* London: Science Museum, pp. 59-66.

Stephens, S. (2021) *International Slavery Museum secures grant.* Available at: https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/07/international-slavery-museum-secures-grant/# (Accessed: 05.11.2021).

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1998) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory.* London: Sage.

Sutherland, J. (2014) *A Curved Wall: Julien Levy's Surrealist Art Gallery and the Importance of the Curator to Art*. University of Bristol. [Unpublished]

Sutherland, J. (2020) 'Who knows what you do? Radicalism and restrictions in small museum curating', British Art Network 3 December 2020. Available at: https://youtu.be/lAKWPUEkYsc

Svoboda, M. (2015) 'Realism, Instrumentalism and the Time Aspect of Theory Building', *Prague Economic Papers,* 24(4), pp. 473-481.

Thea, C. (ed.) (2009) *On Curating: Interviews with Ten International Curators.* New York: Distributed Art.

Thiong'o, N. ([1986] 2005) *Decolonising the Mind. The Politics of Language in African Literature.* Nairobi: East African Educational.

_____. ([2013] 2014) *Resisting Metaphysical Empires: Language as a War Zone* [Lecture], 2 October 2013, The George Padmore Institute, London: New Beacon Books.

_____. (2014) *Metaphysical Empires: Language as a Warzone*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuynDZOsfiY (Accessed: 19.10.21).

_____. (2019) "Europe and the West must also be decolonized". Available at: https://youtu.be/FOXqc-8zCPE (Accessed: 31.12.2020).
31.12.20]

Thompson, J. M. A., Bassett, D. A., Davies, D. G., Duggan, A. J., Lewis, G. D. and Prince, D. R. (Ed.) (1984) *Manual of Curatorship: A Guide to Museum Practice.* London: Museums Association.

Törngren, S. O. (2012) 'Methodological Reflections on Being an East Asian Researcher Researching the White Majority', *Graduate Journal of Social Science,* 9(1), pp. 46-64.

Truss, E. (2020) *Fight for Fairness* [Speech]. 17 December. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/fight-for-fairness (Accessed: 28/07/2022).

Tuhiwai-Smith, L. (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples.* 2nd edn. London: Zed.

Tuhiwai Smith, L., Benson, M. and Salem, S. (2020) *An interview with Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith; Decolonising Methodologies, 20 years on.* Available at: https://thesociologicalreview.org/collections/decolonising-methodologies/an-interview-with-professor-linda-tuhiwai-smith/ (Accessed: 04.06.2021).

Urquhart, C. (2013) *Grounded Theory for Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide.* London: Sage.

VanDiver, R. (2021) *Designing a New Tradition: Lois Mailou Jones and the Aesthetics of Blackness,* Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University State Press.

Vandrame, V. (2018) *Decoding Data.* 26.03.2018, Bath Spa University. [Training]

Vergo, P. ([1989] 2000) *The New Museology.* London: Reaktion Books.

Viau-Courville, M. (2017) 'Museums without (Scholar-)Curators: Exhibition-Making in Times of Managerial Curatorship', *Museum International,* 68, pp. 271-272.

Warhust, A. (1984) 'University museums', in Thompson, J. M. A., Bassett, D. A., Davies, D. G., Duggan, A. J., Lewis, G. D. and Prince, D. R. (ed.) (1984) *Manual of Curatorship: A Guide to Museum Practice.* London: Museums Association.

Watson, S. (Ed.) (2007) *Museums and Their Communities.* Oxon: Routledge.

Watts, S. (2014) 'User Skills for Qualitative Analysis: Perspective, Interpretation and the Delivery of Impact', *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 11(1), pp. 1-14.

_____. (2019) *Analysing Qualitative Data.* 12.03.2019, University of East Anglia. [Webinar]

Weil, S. E. (1995) *A Cabinet of Curiosities. Inquries into Museums and their Prospects.* London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

White, J. (2020) *Terraformed: Young Black Lives in the Inner City.* London: Repeater Books.

Wills, M., and Dresser, M. (2020) 'The Transatlantic Slave Economy and England's Built Environment: a research audit', *Research Report,* 247 Portsmouth: Historic England.

Wilson, R. (2010) 'Rethinking 1807: museums, knowledge and expertise', *Museum and Society* 8(3) pp. 165-176.

Wintle, C. (2017) 'Decolonising UK World Art Institutions, 1945–1980', in Kolb, R., and Richter, D. (Eds.) (2017) 'Notes on Curating: Decolonizing Art Institutions', Issue 35., pp. 106-111.

Wright, S., Newbigin, J., Kieffer, J., Holden, J. and Hewison, R. (2020) *ACE in a hole? An alternative cultural strategy for England.* Arts Professional.

Young, L. and Smith, N. P. (2007) 'Culture, Resistance, Freedom', *Index on Censorship* (1), pp. 133-137.

Younge, G. (2021) *Why every single statue should come down.* Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/jun/01/gary-younge-why-every-single-statue-should-come-down-rhodes-colston (Accessed: 01.06.2021).

Zavala, L. (1993) 'Towards a theory of museum, reception', in Bicknell, S. and Farmelo, G. (ed.) *Museum visitor studies in the 90s.* London: Science Museum.

Zephaniah, B. (2020) *Windrush Child.* London: Scholastic.

Zukin, S. (1995) *The Cultures of Cities.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Web-based Media

Araujo, A. L. (2021) *University of Edinburgh: Cultural Memory Seminar – Slavery in the age of memory: Engaging the past.* at: https://www.ed.ac.uk/history-classics-archaeology/news-events/events/2021-lecture-in-the-history-of-slavery-araujo   [No longer available]

Bath Abbey (2020) *Exhibition: Monument, Empire & Slavery.* Available at: https://www.bathabbey.org/whats-on/memorials-empire-and-slavery-exhibition/ (Accessed: 05.11.2021).

BBC News (2020) *Boris Johnson: Anti-racism protests 'subverted by thuggery'* Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52960756 (Accessed: 08.06.2020).

Birkett, D. (2020) *Museums should stay shut*. Available at: https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/museums-should-stay-shut (Last accessed: 19.11.2020)

Bridport Museum (2020) *Bridport and slavery*. Available at: https://www.bridportmuseum.co.uk/news/view/?v=bridport-and-slavery (Accessed: 21.09.2021)

Connected Sociologies Curriculum Project (2021) *What is the colonial global economy?* No longer available at: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/what-is-the-colonial-global-economytickets-131835283883# (Accessed:

Countering Colston Blog (2020) *Countering Colston Statement on The Merchant Venturers – 29th June 2020.* Available at: counteringcolston.wordpress.com, 9 June 2020 (Accessed: 07.05.2021)

Courtauld Institute (2020) *Looking back, Looking Forward: Decolonising the Museum.* (online event). No longer available: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/looking-back-looking-forward-decolonisingthe-museum-tickets-145423907823?keep_tld=1# (Accessed: [unknown).

Devon Museums (2020) devonmuseums.net (Accessed 10.05.2020)

Elam, J. D. (2019) *Postcolonial Theory, Oxford Bibliographies.* Available at: https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0069.xml (Accessed: 19.10.2021).

English Heritage (2018) *Armistice Centenary 2018*. Available at: https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/inspire-me/armistice-centenary-2018/ (Accessed: 21.09.2021).

Ethnicity Facts (2020) *Regional Ethnic Diversity.* Available at: https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest (Accessed 08.11.20).

Harvard Art Museums (2021) *De-centering, re-centering: forging new museological and historical narratives.* [No longer available]: https://harvardartmuseums.org/calendar/decentering-re-centering-forging-new-museological-and-historical-narratives-art-museums-and-the-legacies-of-the-dutch-slave-trade-curating-historiesenvisioning-futures-part-2?utm_source=EConnect&utm_medium=listing&utm_campaign=4-16 (Accessed

Hicks, D. (2020) *The future of the blockbuster: a need for change?* Available at:

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/x/the-future-of-the-blockbuster-a-need-for-change-tickets-125042217639?utm_source=eventbrite&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=reminder_attendees_event_starting_email&utm_term=eventname&ref=eemaileventremind (Accessed: 22.10.2020).

Historic Royal Palaces (2020) *Curator for Inclusive History' Job Advert*. Available at: https://hrp.tal.net/vx/mobile-0/appcentre-1/brand-3/candidate/so/pm/1/pl/4/opp/609-Curator-for-Inclusive-History/en-GB (Accessed: 07.05.2021).

Holburne Museum (2021) *Untold histories of Bath: From Barbados plantation to the Holburne Museum.* Available at: https://youtu.be/HV5wATKKWOA (Accessed: 05.11.2021).

_____. (2021) *The Holburne Family and Caribbean Plantations.* Available at: https://www.holburne.org/the-holburne-family-and-caribbean-plantations/ (Accessed: 05.11.2021).

_____. (2021) *A decolonising creative writing workshop series.* Available at: https://www.holburne.org/events/a-decolonising-creative-writing-workshop-series-2/2021-11-11/ (Accessed: 05.11.2021).

Horvath, C. (2021) *Engaging with Bath's uncomfortable past through walking and creativity.* Available at: https://www.co-creation-network.org/engaging-with-baths-uncomfortable-past-through-walking-and-creativity/ (Accessed: [unknown]).

Howard University (2018) *Desegregation – a brief history of civil rights in the United States*. Available at: https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/blackrights/desegregation. (Accessed: 01.08.22).

Lexico (2021) *Online Dictionary* Available at: https://www.lexico.com/definition/accurate (Accessed: 18.08.21).

_____. (2021) *Online Dictionary* Available at: https://www.lexico.com/definition/curator; and https://www.lexico.com/definition/cure (Accessed: 18.08.21).

Localstats.co.uk (2011) *Census Demographics, England, South West.* Available at: http://localstats.co.uk/census-demographics/england/south-west (Accessed 08.11.20).

Lyme Regis Museum *Ethnic Minorities Today.* Available at:
https://www.lymeregismuseum.co.uk/related-article/ethnic-minorities-today/ (Last accessed: 17.12.20).

MHMInsighnt.com *Affirmation Pen Portrait* Available at:
https://mhminsight.com/files/affirmation-pen-portrait-dGbG-258-10208.pdf

The National Archives (2021) *How to look for records of Tithes.* Available at:
https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/tithes/ (Accessed: [unknown]).

Save our Statues (2021) *Save Our Statues.* Available at: saveourstatues.org.uk (Accessed: 08.06.2021).

South West Federation *Your County*. No longer available:
https://www.swfed.org.uk/your-county/ (Last accessed: 16.01.2019).

The Telegraph (2020) *Historic Royal Palaces launches review into residences' links to slave trade.* Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/10/28/chief-curator-historic-royal-palaces-launches-review-residences/ (Accessed: 28.10.2020).

Thompson, L. J. and Chatterjee, H. J. (2020) *UCL Museum Wellbeing Measures Toolkit. A*vailable at:
https://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/sites/culture/files/ucl_museum_wellbeing_measures_toolkit_sept2013.pdf

VisitBath.co.uk (no year) *About the regional visitor economy*. Available at:
https://visitbath.co.uk/members/facts-and-figures/ (Accessed: 25.09.2020).

APPENDICES

What makes an engaging curator? - an anonymous survey

SOUTH WEST ENGAGING CURATORS RESEARCH SURVEY (10 min approx.)

This survey provides a chance to share your thoughts on your venue's curatorship, anonymously. Any comments you make will be anonymised for research purposes and the survey does not allow for your organisation to be identified, which means you can freely have your say.

If you work or volunteer in a museum/gallery in the South West of England and you are not a member of curatorial staff, this survey is for you!

OK - Continue

1. How many visitors does your venue receive on-site per year, on average?

○ Under 30,000

○ Between 30,000 – 100,000

○ Between 100,000 – 250,000

○ Over 250,000

2. Please identify your venue type, then TICK ALL BOXES THAT APPLY

	NO paid staff	Less than 5 paid staff	More than 5 paid staff	No curator	ONE curator	More than one curator	Shared curatorial duties
Independent	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Local Authority	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
National Trust	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Local Trust	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
University	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Military	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

If you selected 'Shared curatorial duties', PLEASE SPECIFY how/what duties are divided:

3. How well do you understand what the curatorial staff in your organisation do?

○ Extremely well - I know what they do, and they involve me in their work

○ Very well - I understand the majority of the work they do

○ Fairly well - I understand some of their work

○ Not very well - I have a vague idea about the work they do

○ Not at all - I have no idea what they do at work

Contact: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Comments
_____

4. Within your organisation, which area of work out of the following do you feel is held in the highest esteem?

Please rank all fields from 1-9, with 1 being the highest-regarded role, and 9 being the lowest. (Please select/write the number rating from 1-9 in the corresponding box).

[▼]
Curatorial & Collections

[▼]
Education & Learning

[▼]
Facilities & Operations

[▼]
Finance, Fundraising & Administration

[▼]
Front of House & Retail

[▼]
Marketing

[▼]
Staff Management (HR.)

[▼]
Trustees

[▼]
Volunteers & Guides

5. How do you rate the quality of your venue's in-house exhibitions and displays?

○ Very high quality - engaging to ALL visitors

○ High quality - somewhat engaging to ALL visitors

○ Inconsistent - only engaging to SOME visitors

○ Low quality - not particularly engaging for visitors

○ Very low quality - not engaging for any visitor at all

Comments
_____

Contact: ████████████████████

6. **Do you feel that the curatorial staff in your organisation understand what you do in your role?**

○ Yes

○ No

To help the analysis, PLEASE STATE YOUR ROLE TITLE:

7. **What kind of measures does your organisation use to record and evaluate audience engagement data?**

○ Standard - comment cards, visitor book, word-of-mouth, noting internet comments, recording visitor numbers, visitor surveys

○ Intermediate - as above, but with advice or involvement from an external consultancy or museum organisation

○ Advanced - staff may have knowledge of visitor/museum studies literature, 'formative' & 'summative' methods, thematic analysis, or participant observation, for example

○ None - we don't record or evaluate any audience engagement-related data

○ Not sure/I don't know

Comments:

8. **Do you consider your curatorial staff to be 'engaging'? - with you, your colleagues, with audiences/other stakeholders?**

- If YES, please use the comment box to explain what you think makes your curator/s engaging. How do they engage? What does this mean to you?

- If NO, please explain why you feel they are not engaging in their curatorial role/s. What changes would you like to see? What would this mean to you?

○ Yes

○ No

*Please share WHY:

Contact: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

9. *In general, do you think curatorial staff in museums should be more involved with audience engagement or visitor experience initiatives?*

○ Yes

○ No

Comments:

_____

10. *Finally, which county is your venue in?*

If you'd like to stay involved and be contacted with any follow-up questions that might arise from this survey, please provide your name and email address. (Any personal details provided will remain confidential.)

Thank you!

YOUR COUNTY:

_____

Your name (optional):

_____

Your email address (optional):

_____

Comments/feedback for researcher:

_____

DONE - Thank you for your time!

You can submit this survey in the following ways:

By email to ██████████████████████

By post to Engaging Curators Project, ███████████████████████████████

Alternatively, you can complete the survey online at:

███████████████████████████

Contact: ██████████████████████

Appendix ii) 'Engaging Curators' Interview Schedule

	Theme	Question/s
1	Curatorial background and current responsibilities	-How did you come to be curator at this museum? -Can you tell me about what **your role** involves?
2	Community engagement – Describe your typical visitors.	-What sort of visitors do you typically get at your museum. - How do you tackle the issue of **inclusivity**? -Are there particular groups or communities you are trying to attract and how? -Whose community are you engaging with?
3	Available resources and sector guidance e.g. Accreditation	- What **resources or guidance** do you use? - What do you think of the Arts Council **Accreditation** process?-What **other resources** do you use and has there been anything particularly influential, like an author, a blog or journal?
4	Traditional hierarchy and separation between collections work and 'visitor' work. E.g. survey and conference	-What do you think about the **traditional divide** between collections and visitor-based work in museums? -SWFed separated their conference last year into two days, one for each. - Curatorial staff were ranked most esteemed in my survey. Why do you think this is?
5	Considering audiences in curatorial practice: methods.	-At what stages do you consider the audience in your curatorial work? -How do you measure and use audience engagement data in your curatorial work? E.g. surveys, evaluation, visitor comments
6	Size and location: limitations and advantages	What are the difficulties or advantages you face in terms of size & location of your museum?
7	Understanding of the museum curator's work	- How do you communicate about your work – who knows what you do? -How well do you understand each other's work in your museum?
8	Museums and politics e.g. Decolonisation, patriotic narratives, focus on wellbeing,	-Museums are becoming more socially political – why? -Should they be neutral or active and how does this play into your work?
9	Collaborative practice	- Do you have examples of collaborative practice at your museum? -What limits the possibilities for you? -Have you considered co-curation?
10	Museum function and role in society	- Jay Rounds, a museum scholar, recently talked about museums experiencing a crisis of identity. Do you think all museums have a unifying purpose in society today? – Is there a crisis of identity in the sector?
11	Art gallery vs. museum curating	-A group of masters students told me that they think an art gallery is a place for inspiration and expression, and the museum is for learning. Why do you think they have this perception? -How do you take risks in your role?
12	Small museum curator recommendations	-What advice do you have for other small museum curators?
13	Future museum: engagement, maximum capacity	-What does engagement look like to you? -If you had all the time and resources you needed, what would you choose to focus your work on?
14A	Emotional?	-Helena Rickett, a feminist curator, said that curating is emotional. How do you respond?
15A	Segmentation	-Are you aware of visitor segmentation and how useful do you think it is?

Field Notes:

Engaging Curators in the South West Research Project 2019 – Participant Information Sheet

ARE YOU / DO YOU KNOW AN ENGAGING MUSEUM CURATOR IN THE SOUTH WEST?
WHAT MAKES AN ENGAGING CURATOR?
TAKE PART. HAVE YOUR SAY.

'ENGAGING CURATORS' is a museum engagement PhD research project by Jillian Sutherland, in association with Bath Spa University

Project question: How does curatorship and audience engagement come together in the small museum?

Project aims: Drawing from the perspectives of both non-curatorial and curatorial museum staff, the 'Engaging Curators' research project aims to investigate how museum curatorship is responding to audience engagement and the expectations and pressures that accompany the concept.

It seeks to explore how the relationship between curatorship and audiences factors in the planning of in-house displays, exhibition programming and other areas of curatorial work, taking the historical and contemporary significance of the role of the museum curator into account.

Context: In the modern museum, the curator's traditional role is changing dramatically from its traditional roots of carer, keeper and researcher of collections to something far more dynamic that encompasses many additional tasks such as managerial responsibilities, exhibition design, providing educational resources, or training other team-members.

With public engagement now a hotter topic than ever, a nationwide call-to-arms is in effect for social, educational and cultural institutions to include and appeal to as many different types of people as possible. Consequently, museums are coming under pressure from prescriptive policies designed to guide what engagement should look like and measure how well engagement has been achieved.

Scope: I hope this research will highlight valuable sector developments in the South West of England; a region densely populated with a variety of diverse small and independent museums, and an area that is under-represented in wider museum studies.

Opportunities: If you choose to participate, your contributions will enrich research for your sector in the South West, and lend insights into broader questions of museum culture and curatorial practice.

Participants are invited to take part during the following research stages:

Stage 1 - Anonymous survey for non-curatorial museum staff (Feb 2019)
Stage 2 - Focus group 1 with curatorial staff for survey response and discussion of audience engagement in relation to museum curatorship (2019, date TBC)
Stage 3 - Interview and case study with up to 3 museums to present examples of curatorial intervention and visitor response, including observation and evaluation of a selected current exhibition to be conducted by researcher (2019, date TBC)
Stage 4 - Focus group 2 a follow-up with curatorial staff for reflective responses to case studies (date TBC)

For further information please contact Jillian Sutherland, PhD Researcher, Bath Spa University: ███████████████

Engaging Curators in the South West Research Project 2019 – Participant Information Sheet

About the researcher

Jillian has volunteered and worked in art galleries and museums throughout the South West region over the past decade, including collaborating on independent art projects. Jillian completed her Masters in History of Art in 2012. Inspired through both her previous research in contemporary curating and by her experiences interacting with visitors in art and museum settings, Jillian's research interests are now concerned with curatorial practice, museum traditions and reception, and the entrenched social behaviours and indicators associated with visiting museums. 'Engaging Curators' forms the basis of her current PhD project at Bath Spa University.

'Engaging Curators' research interviews
How is audience engagement changing your role? What challenges do you face?
What are your thoughts on growing sector expectations for you and your teams?
PARTICIPATE in valuable discussion.
CONTRIBUTE to research for your sector in the South West.
HAVE YOUR SAY.

Hi! Thank you for your interest in participating in the curator interviews stage for the 'Engaging Curators' PhD research project, led by Jillian Sutherland, in association with Bath Spa University. To continue, please read the following sections:

1) Information for Participants – July 2019

ENGAGING CURATORS is a museum engagement PhD research project that focuses on smaller museums and museum curatorial practice in the South West of England.

Project question: How does curatorship and audience engagement come together in the small, South West museum?

Project aims: Drawing from the perspectives of both non-curatorial and curatorial museum staff, the 'Engaging Curators' research project aims to investigate how museum curatorship is responding to audience engagement and the expectations and pressures that accompany the concept.

It seeks to explore how the relationship between curatorship and audiences factors in the planning of in-house displays, exhibition programming and other areas of curatorial work, taking both the historical and contemporary significance of the role of the museum curator into account.

Context: In the modern museum, the curator's traditional role is changing dramatically from its traditional roots of carer, keeper and researcher of collections to something far more dynamic that encompasses many additional tasks such as managerial responsibilities, exhibition design, providing educational resources, or training other team-members.

With public engagement and inclusivity now hotter topics than ever, a nationwide call-to-arms is in effect for social, educational and cultural institutions to include and appeal to as many different types of people as possible. Consequently, museums are coming under pressure from prescriptive policies designed to guide what engagement should look like and measure how well engagement has been achieved, such as provided by the Arts Council England.

Scope: I hope this research will highlight valuable and significant sector developments in the South West of England; a region densely populated with a variety of diverse small and independent museums, and an area that is under-represented in wider museum studies.

Opportunities: If you choose to participate, your contributions will enrich research for your sector in the South West, and lend insights into broader questions of museum culture and curatorial practice.

Research stages:

1.	Anonymous survey for non-curatorial museum staff, *April 2019*
2.	Interviews with curatorial staff for survey response and discussion of audience engagement in relation to museum curatorship, *July 2019*
3.	potential Case studies with up to 3 museums to present examples of curatorial intervention in visitor engagement (2019, *date TBC*)
4.	Reflective focus group session with curators (2020, *date TBC*)

1

Engaging Curators Research Project 2019 – Interview Disclaimer & Consent Form,

2) Interview Disclaimer – July 2019

The purpose of the interviews is to share insights on how you as a curator engage with the topic of audience engagement in museums.

The information you provide will be:

- anonymous and will not be used in a manner which will allow identification of your individual responses. Information about your institution/organisation will not be published, nor circulated with other participants without your express permission
- used as feedback to be shared with participating curators for discussion during a potential follow-up focus group
- analysed and used for the purposes of the 'Engaging Curators' research project
- recorded then transcribed verbatim, stored and archived for reference by the researcher

Proposed schedule

- *Interview dates:* July 2019
- *Estimated duration:* 1.5- 2hrs
- *Topics for discussion:* Audience engagement issues and the sector, the changing role of the museum curator, perspectives on small museum-working, impact of collaborative working, the concept of 'community' and current developments in the museum curatorial role.

Benefits to you

- The opportunity to voice your experiences of audience engagement and museum curatorship
- Contribution to sector research for smaller museums in the South West region
- Bringing museum research and practice together

Please now read, complete and return the 2-page consent form attached to proceed. Thank you very much for your participation and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours,
Jillian Sutherland
PhD Researcher, Bath Spa University

About the researcher
Jillian has worked and volunteered in art galleries and museums, and on independent art projects throughout the South West region over the past decade. She completed her Masters in History of Art in 2012, which focused on contemporary art curating methods. Inspired to combine scholarship and practice, Jillian's research is now concerned with museum curatorial practice, museum traditions and reception, and the social behaviours and indicators associated with visiting museums. The 'Engaging Curators' project forms the basis of her current PhD. linkedin.com/in/jill-sutherland

2

Appendix iv) Participant Consent Form

Page 1 of 2

RESEARCH INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM 2019

Title of research project: Engaging Curators

Name of researcher: Jillian Sutherland

Name of research institution: Bath Spa University

Your details (Personal information will remain confidential)

Your name:

Your job title:

Your organisation:

Interview details

VENUE:

INTERVIEW DATE:

Please read and tick each of the following. To tick electronically, double-click into the box and change Default Value to 'Checked'.

1. I have read, and I understand the **Information for Participants**, dated July 2019 ☐

2. I have read, and I understand the **Interview Disclaimer**, dated July 2019 ☐

3. I give my consent for my interview to be recorded (audio only) and transcribed for the purpose of this study ☐

4. I understand the nature of the topics that I will be required to discuss, and give my consent that I will participate honestly in open discussion ☐

5. I understand that the data and ideas raised in the discussion will be used for the purposes of this research only and will not be published outside of the Bath Spa University thesis with the potential exception of conference papers and academic journals ☐

6. Should external publishing of data in the forms of conference papers of academic journals, I understand that any reproductions of comments from discussions will be published without my name attached and the researcher will make every attempt to ensure my anonymity. I understand, however, that complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. ☐

1

253

Engaging Curators Research Project 2019 – Interview Disclaimer & Consent Form, ███████████████████

7. If the researcher is meeting me at my organisation's venue, I therefore take responsibility to abide by the health and safety guidelines of my hosting venue, and will inform the researcher of any relevant health and safety notices when they arrive.　☐

8. I understand that the interview will be carried out by the project researcher, Jillian Sutherland, and will involve only myself and the researcher. ☐

9. I understand that confirmation and arrangements of interview dates and times will be communicated via emails between myself and Jillian Sutherland.　☐

10. I understand that I have the right to withdraw my consent, or withdraw from the project, prior to, during and after the interview and I understand that any withdrawals of information shared with the researcher will be limited to the terms stated here. The deadline for withdrawal will be one month from the date of the final data collection stage. This is to allow for the information gathered to be written into the PhD thesis. The final data collection stage is anticipated to be completed in February 2020. In the event of withdrawal, please email ████████████████████ within the specified time limit.　☐

11. I confirm that I have not been coerced to participate in this study in any way and that I am freely choosing to participate.　☐

12. I have been given, or emailed, copies of the Information for Participants, Interview Disclaimer and Research Interview Consent Form to keep. ☐

Declaration: By signing and returning this form I confirm that I have read, understood and agree to the terms and requirements of my involvement in the Engaging Curators research interviews:

Research participant

Your Name: _____

Your Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher

Name:　　　　**Jillian Sutherland**

Signature:　　███████████　　　　Date:　　02.07.2019

Please email your completed form back to: ████████████████████ and do not hesitate to contact me with any further questions, or if you'd like to return this form by post.

Thank you!

2