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*Colonialism, Empire, and Slavery in Scottish  
Museum Exhibitions: A Qualitative  
Evaluation of Policy Implementation for  
Critical Learning Outcomes*

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates how exhibitions about colonialism, empire and slavery in Scottish museums are designed, experienced and how education is emphasised. This is done through the evaluation of the implementation of recent recommendations from the Steering Group in 'Empire, Slavery & Scotland's Museums'. The study aims to address the gap in the Scottish education system and highlight that museums can be a place where different perspectives and alternative histories can be taught, and critical thinking can occur.

The research questions were explored through three case study exhibitions; *Glasgow - City of Empire*, *Curating Discomfort*, and *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian Plants in Hornel's Home and Garden*. A qualitative research methodology was employed, involving interviews with museum professionals and personal observations of exhibitions. The research also analyses visitor feedback, collected through focus groups, to evaluate the impact of these exhibitions on the public's understanding of Scotland's colonial past and the development of critical thinking.

The findings reveal a variance in the degree to which museums have successfully integrated the Steering group recommendations, how education is emphasised and the development of critical perspectives in visitors. There remains a need for more consistent and comprehensive approaches in application of the Steering Group recommendations across the sector.

This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on the change of narratives in museums and argues that museum exhibitions can be a productive learning space for complex subjects such as colonialism, empire and slavery. It also sheds light on the gap between policies and action as an area of improvement in museum practices.

**Keywords:** colonialism, slavery, empire, Scotland, museums, policy, education, critical thinking.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Aim of Study

This study aims to evaluate the gap between the Steering Group recommendations ‘Empire, Slavery & Scotland’s Museums’ and the action given to them. This dissertation will also explore how created spaces in museums, where Scotland’s role in colonialism, empire and slavery is regarded, are designed, implemented and experienced. Finally, the dissertation will explore how these exhibition spaces invite visitors to be active, critical learners.

The main research questions which will be expanded upon during this study are:

- Research Question 1: To what extent have the Steering Group’s recommendations been implemented when exhibitions targeting colonialism, empire and slavery have been designed?
- Research Question 2: How have museum exhibitions created space to address Scotland’s role in empire, colonialism and slavery and how is education emphasised?
- Research Question 3: In what ways do these exhibitions provide a space where the visitor is invited to be an active critical learner?

The questions will be addressed through a qualitative evaluation of three case studies (i) *Glasgow - City of Empire* at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, (ii) *Curating Discomfort* at the Hunterian museum, and (iii) *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian Plants in Hornel’s Home and Garden* located at Broughton House and Garden as part of the National Trust for Scotland. To answer the questions of the study, interviews with staff, personal observations and focus groups with visitors were conducted.

## Research Background and Significance

The transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery was a horrifying yet world changing part of history. The British Empire’s involvement in the trade had a profound impact on society in the United Kingdom as it is known today. Scotland, as a part of the UK, was an active agent of empire and as such has a long economic relationship with chattel slavery (Mullen, 2021). Scotland’s involvement in

colonialism, empire and slavery has previously been overlooked when discussing the slave trade, by academics, educators and government facilities such as museums and its impact has focused more on abolition and England (Hamilton, 2010; Mullen, 2022a).

In recent years, research has been seeking to expand and acknowledge Scotland's role in the empire, slavery and colonialism. While the Scots have had limited direct involvement in trafficking enslaved people, chattel slavery profoundly influenced the nation in many other ways particularly in economic development (Mullen, 2021). Because Scotland's wealth was built on the backs of enslaved people this information is important for all to learn. In the current Scottish high school history course, National 5, emphasis is placed on ports such as Liverpool and Bristol and on abolition, rather than participation (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2021). Because of this oversight it allows places like museums to add deeper meaning to school courses. By including ways Glasgow, and Scotland were involved, this study argues that the individuals visiting museum spaces are further educated about the past and can develop further critical thinking skills.

Museums and heritage spaces should be a witness of important historical and social events and assist in providing educational experiences for the public and reconciliation (Anderson, 2019). The museum space should be active in relaying facts but also creating inclusive environments for this learning to occur as noted by the International Council of Museums (2022a). Museums and heritage sites should provide a place to be "agents of social change and, in particular, articulating their capacity to promote cross-cultural understanding, to tackle prejudice and intolerance and to foster respect for difference" (Sandell, 2007). This idea is reflected in the rhetoric from international museum agencies such as ICOM and in the policies implemented by governing bodies.

Currently, museums in the UK are evaluating how they can address the narratives of colonialism and empire in their exhibition spaces. In Scotland, some museums dedicated spaces in their museum to address their colonial past. In recent years, The Scottish Government provided sponsorship for recommendations for how empire, colonialism and historic slavery can be addressed in museum collections and spaces. The project resulted in the publication of the independent Steering Group's guidelines 'Empire, Slavery & Scotland's Museums' (Museums Galleries Scotland,

2022). The recommendations are emphasised nationwide and includes advocating for a dedicated space to address Scotland's role to be created; anti-racist attitudes embedded in museum workspaces and continual research and education of Scotland's links to empire. As these recommendations are newly integrated research can be done to review how and if this policy has been implemented.

Scotland is starting to educate the public about its links to the transatlantic slave trade and slavery through museums spaces. Although there are some resources and attempts from museums to address this it is still a developing area. This dissertation hopes to further emphasise that museums are a place where the public can be educated about Scotland's role in empire, slavery and colonialism, through targeted exhibitions. This dissertation will combine both the intended outcomes that museum professionals intended for their exhibitions and the experiences of the visitors to discern both educational and critical thinking success.

### **Structure of the dissertation**

This dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter 1 introduces the research questions, problems and objectives, providing a foundation for the research. Chapter 2 presents the historical context and review of relevant literature, identifying the gaps which this dissertation aims to address. Chapter 3 introduces the case studies; participants and details the methods of data collection used. Chapter 4 analyses the collected data in regard to research question one, the implementation of the Steering Group recommendations. Chapter 5 examines the collected data in reference to research question two, how museums create space to address colonialism, empire, and slavery and how education is emphasised. Chapter 6 considers the collected data in regard to research question three, how the exhibitions created space for critical thinking. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation by summarising the main findings and discusses the limitations of study.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Insights into Colonial Histories as it pertains to Scotland, Museums, Polices and Critical Thinking

The British Empire's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery had a profound impact on society in the UK as it is known today. The British arrived late in comparison to other European countries but certainly reaped the benefits and perfected the craft of enslaving individuals. It is estimated that about three million human beings were forcefully removed from their African homeland on British ships, estimating twice the number of other nations (Beckles, 2013). When reflecting on Britain's role in the enslavement of others not much emphasis was placed on the individuals, cities and organisations that benefited from participating, rather the emphasis is placed on the abolition movement. In the academic literature following the abolition of slavery in Britain a defining choice was made in portraying the actions of the past. A specific narrative was emphasised where the British were painted as heroes for providing abolition after recognising the horrific actions displayed by individuals of the upper class that perpetrated the act of enslavement and after the goodness of the layman's hearts (Mathieson, 1929). This narrative also included the impact Britain had on the rest of the world to also come to the same conclusion (Mathieson, 1929). Eric Williams (1944) challenged this understanding in his influential book *Capitalism and Slavery*. Their writings brought to light the economic role of those who were forcefully enslaved by showing the slave trade was instrumental in providing financial benefits in the industrial revolution. He also emphasised that this system which provided profit was declining, thus the abolition of slavery occurred (Williams, 1944). The legacy of slavery was not the abolition and the good deeds of the British, but the work of the enslaved individual's contribution to a capitalistic society (Drescher, 1987). Despite the attention brought by Williams, academics throughout history still invested their time in displaying a narrative of abolition from the perspective of the British without regards to efforts made to individuals who were enslaved (Fladeland, 1984; Drescher, 1987; Oldfield, 2012). Gratus (1973) emphasised "that operators of slavery and the slave trade and their opponents, as well as those who wrote their history, were not able to stand far enough outside the system to describe it objectively, nor generally to analyse it accurately" (p. 13). He argued that there was a benefit to supporting the myth of

the heroic British abolitionists rather than address the truths of the past and recognise the systematic racism that developed throughout history.

The choice to focus on abolition rather than the extent of past injustices, in academic literature has had an extraordinary impact on the current understanding of the transatlantic slave trade that is portrayed in Britain. There are many efforts to refocus and educate the public about colonialism, slavery, and empire by heritage sectors. This discussion explores this refocus and education by detailing the context of Scotland, colonialism, and education, showing there is a gap in the education system that museums can fill. Museums are a place of learning and a place of power which has an impact on how exhibitions about colonialism, empire and slavery are designed. Designing exhibitions about colonialism, empire and slavery could be impacted by policy thus the policies regarding this topic will be discussed to evaluate the gap in policy and action. Finally, as narratives in museums change visitors can be invited to be active critical thinkers and exhibitions about colonialism, empire and slavery can be an effective place where this skill is developed.

### **Context: Scotland and Slavery**

To understand Scotland's role in slavery one must understand Scotland's role in Britain. In 1701 Scotland ultimately decided to join in union with England to create the United Kingdom. This union is unbalanced throughout history making the relationship contemptuous even to this day, as often Scots see the English as their oppressor and unequal partner. This social uneasiness is a factor when looking at Scotland's history after this time as it has influenced the way history is dictated and perceived. From 1707, Scotland was part of Britain and benefited from the economic expansion that took place after, including the participation in the transatlantic slave trade. On reflection the Scottish literature surrounding the Scottish involvement in slavery echoes that of the British, there is heavy focus on Scottish contribution to abolition (Rice, 1981). However, there is another undertone that the Scots were also forced in their circumstances, they were the underdogs and thrived despite the conditions they were placed in. This is reflected in Sheridan's article 'The Role of Scots in the Economy and Society of the West Indies' (1977). The article reflects Scottish feelings against slavery and implies that they had to be there to ensure their

own survival. The examples given of participants in slavery reflect the anti-slavery ideology. For example, a bookkeeper who did not want to abuse those enslaved, a plantation owner who established a botanic garden on their plantation and a doctor who would cure enslaved people, to resell them again (p. 97-98). Overall, there is a detached and unsympathetic tone for the people who were enslaved but a narrative that implies that the Scots were the underdogs that triumphantly made their fortune in the enslavement of individuals. Despite this overarching theme and tone, Sheridan does however dictate in great detail the roles the Scots had, what ways they were involved and how they embraced the enslavement of others for their own wealth and prestige much like their European counterparts (Sheridan, 1977).

Scots were present in many aspects of the transatlantic slave trade, both in Scotland and on the plantations. Individuals were hired by merchants to be agents or bookkeepers, many immigrated leaving Scotland to find new fortune in the Caribbean and send their profit back to family in Scotland (Sheridan, 1977). At home, benefits from work and goods coming in shaped Scotland economy. The port town of Glasgow generated a great amount of wealth from their participation which allowed them to flourish (Beckles, 2013). Glasgow dispatched twenty-four ships to the Caribbean islands in 1735, and others after (Sheridan, 1977). These ships produced jobs for individuals and brought back profit for banks and other institutions (Beckles, 2013). Sir Tom Devine, one of Scotland's leading historians, wrote about the merchants in Glasgow, *The Tobacco Lords of Glasgow* (1990), that benefited from the participation of the transatlantic slave trade and how their fortunes impacted the city. Devine mentions slaves only briefly for context but throughout their career attempted to shed more light on the connection that has been previously "lost to history" (Devine T. M., 2015). Devine along with other contemporary historians have strived to emphasise Scotland's involvement and shy away from the narrative that Scots were purely abolitionists. David Alston et al, (2021) explores the Scottish Highlanders association on the plantations in the eighteenth and nineteenth century following the Highland Clearances and Alex Renton (2021) reflects their family's wealth and their involvement with slavery that was hidden for many years and what he has learned from this recognition of the actions of the past.

The historian, Stephen Mullen has done extensive work in recent years re-contextualising the transatlantic slave trade and the impact it had in Scotland, focusing on the City of Glasgow (Mullen, 2022a). Mullen produced an audit for the city of Glasgow bringing to light the many links the city has to the slave trade such as noting the Gallery of Modern Art was originally built as a house for plantation owner and enslaver Cunningham (Mullen, 2022b). This was shortly after they, with Simon Newman, produced a similar report for the University of Glasgow (Mullen & Newman, 2018). Mullen's most recent work 'The Glasgow Sugar Aristocracy: Scotland and Caribbean Slavery, 1775-1838' (2022c), is an amalgamation of their previous academic accomplishments highlighting the details of Glasgow's and Scotland's benefits of participation in slavery, which Mullen has made accessible to the public. This is not the first time Mullen has made his research publicly accessible, their 2009 book 'It Wisnae Us - The Truth about Glasgow and Slavery' has been made into an interactive webpage (Mullen, 2024). Visitors to the website are given detailed information about Glasgow's historical link to slavery and a built heritage trail showing buildings and areas that benefited from colonialism and empire. Mullen's work has provided an excellent insight for both the academic world and the public for enlightenment and education. Because Glasgow's wealth was built on the backs of enslaved people this information is important for Glasgow to understand this as part of their heritage.

Overall, Scotland's involvement in colonialism, slavery and empire is "submerged in abolition, eclipsed by indenture, assigned to the English and denied outright" (Morris, 2016). Scotland's role has been overlooked when discussing the slave trade and its impact (Hamilton, 2010). More focus has been placed on England and other countries in Europe (Mullen, 2022a). This can be most seen in the school curriculum. In the current Scottish curriculum, History teachers have a reference list to choose what can be taught in their classrooms. The teacher chooses one topic from three sections: Scottish History, British History and, European and World History (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2021). The subject 'The trade in enslaved African people' in both the National 5 curriculum (students in Secondary year 4 typically aged 14- 16) and the Higher curriculum (students in Secondary year 5 or 6 typically aged 16-18) is under the 'British' section (Scottish Qualification Authority, 2023). This structure of teaching provides two concerns. Firstly, as teachers are only

asked to pick one subject from the 'British' section, so a number of schools do not get taught about this history as their focus is brought to another aspect. Secondly, because of this classification, Scotland's involvement is not specifically noted, attention is brought to ports in England, such as Liverpool and Bristol and an emphasis again is placed on abolition with in-depth discussion of William Wilberforce (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2021, p. 11). Although there is a lack of concentration of colonialism, slavery and empire in lower education there are small opportunities for students in higher academia to reflect upon these events due to the academic efforts of scholars bringing to light the histories that have been overshadowed. This shows there is a gap within formal educational systems where the history and legacies of colonialism, empire, and slavery are not addressed. This translates into an opportunity for museums to add to the knowledge of the public that has been neglected by the school curriculum.

### **Museums, Education and Authorised Heritage Discourse**

Museums have always emphasised themselves as a place of learning. From their origins they solidified themselves as educational institutions by nature which has been more sincerely recognised since the early nineteenth century (Hein, 2006). The purpose for the opening of museums in western society was to educate the public. Scholars like Prottas argue that the development of museum education and the birth of the museum itself was a simultaneous event (2019, p. 337). The origin of the museum is a challenged subject as scholars have debated to when the museum, as we know it today, was created. Some debate that Aristotle was the great mind behind the museum with his student Theophrastus (Abt, 2006). The two curious individuals collected and studied sampled botanical objects. Other scholars emphasize the opening of the Louvre as the first modern museum where the public were able to behold and learn from art installations (Prottas, 2019). There is not one simple origin of the museum as each exist within different complexities, having their own story and purpose (Prottas, 2019). Despite the debates of origin, the museum is currently seen as a resource that provides justification and promotes itself as a vital part of the learning community (Falk, Moussouri, & Coulson, 1998).

The museum provides a place where both informal and formal learning can take place and where active learning can occur.

In November of 2015 the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference for The Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO) in Pilsen, Czech Republic, focused on the educational value of museums and produced a publication documenting the conference (NEMO, 2015). In this publication Kalle Kallio describes museums “as unique media and places of learning” (2015, p. 12). They also consider that museums are not often focused on fixed learning objectives but promote an informal learning environment. This is due to the concentration of social interactions that exhibitions evoke (Allen, 2002). Mujtaba, Lawrence, Oliver, & Reiss (2018) concluded from their study that national history museums have a lasting impact on visiting students as they strengthen their knowledge and gain new perspectives through social interactions. Museums provide a space where visitors can participate in hands-on activities, promote accessible and inclusive programmes as museums offer a place where visitors are in the centre. Elizabeth Vallance (2004) notes that museums can be a place where visitors interact with the stories around them to recount and create lasting memories. Effective educational outreach and engagement strategies in museum settings can significantly enhance visitor experience, promote learning, and foster community involvement.

Although the origin and current purpose of the museum facilitates and encourages learning, it would be neglectful and untruthful not to address that another purpose in historical design was also to establish power (Prottas, 2019). Soares (2018) argues museums were created on colonial structures of power. As Europeans had the methods to transfer objects around the world each artifact comes with historical perceptions that are often not addressed, such as violence and racism. Because of this systematic power imbalance museums historically have followed an authorised heritage discourse (AHD).

Authorised heritage discourse emerged in nineteenth century western Europe, through debates about the necessity to protect material culture that were deemed inherently valuable by architects and archaeologists (Smith, 2015, p. 135). The result of this debate influenced the conception of what heritage is and the practices and policies that are put in place to protect it. Authorised heritage discourse

manifests itself through aesthetics, control of expert knowledge, future preservation, and nationalism. Traditional museum spaces can be defined where the aspects of aesthetics, expert knowledge, future preservation, and nationalism are heavily emphasised. In perpetuating the authorised heritage discourse museums do not have the opportunity to re-contextualise the past to give social meaning and bring contrasting thoughts and perspectives in the present (Smith, 2006, p. 29). This also reduces the experience of history and heritage to a reflection of fact and figures rather than meaningful human connections. By doing this the past is interpreted as a vague concept that only allows experts to interact with it. Not only does this create a power dynamic but does not allow individuals to talk about their experiences with their heritage. Visitors of heritage sites and museums are lectured by experts rather than contributing to a conversation. Because authorised heritage discourse emerged in the nineteenth century where nationalism was prominent, it carries these values with it inherently, and the basal concept of identity is associated with the nation often concentrating on the achievements of the elite social class (Smith, 2006, p. 30). This means that uncomfortable histories along with women, indigenous communities, ethnic and the working-class perspectives do not find themselves written into the narrative. This is not because these perspectives did not exist but because they are not deemed important by the authorised heritage discourse, thus not shown in the museum (Mason & Sayner, 2019, p. 6). As a result of this exclusion, critical engagement and engagement in general can be neglected and absent and individuals from these isolated groups do not feel welcome in heritage spaces. When heritage is reduced to these seemingly manageable sections there is no room for conflict and visitors are assumed to be passive and uncritical in this top-down relationship. The ultimate challenge that the authorised heritage discourse creates is the lack of empathy and inclusion of humane perspectives.

The United Kingdom and Scotland have been subjected to reflecting these narratives in their museums and heritage sites. However museums and heritage sites have begun to see how they can evolve to be more relevant and adjust how they contextualise their objects and history to include further stories and perspectives that have previously not been addressed (Haan, 2006). In historical museums there has been a change in how history is being represented. Haan (2006) notes the historiographic developments that are being reflected in these museums. There has

been a shift in focusing on the history of nations to mundane themes, such as experiences and memories. The range has opened to include voices outside the AHD and include the specific histories of woman, people of colour and the working class (Haan, 2006). When museums choose to focus not on academic prowess but on individuals and their interpretations, it promotes further accessibility as a broader range of individuals can see themselves in the museum narrative. Thus, museums can appear more inclusive and democratic, be more recent to those who do not normally visit museums, especially young people and be more responsive to the needs of society (Earle, 2013). Providing a wider range of perspectives also invites visitors to reflect on most museums that are not adhering to this change, expanding on the populations critical thinking skills (Haan, 2006). As more museums are connecting to contemporary social issues, community and audiences are effected, this should be the priority of museums (Vlachou, 2015).

### **Critical engagement with Colonialism in Exhibition Spaces**

Museums in the Global North, including Scotland, when recognising their roots in colonialism, empire and slavery there has been a focus in repatriation efforts (Curtis & Scholten, 2022, p. 429). Some museum professionals are advocating for the discussion and returning of objects that are intertwined with their origin (Hicks, 2020). Others see addressing this history as contradicting to the overall educational role of the museum (Jenkins, 2016). However, through re-contextualising the museum and its artefacts, the museum can prove to be educationally beneficial by providing a space where open conversations and proper representation can occur. The addressing of the important topic of colonialism, slavery and empire promotes further learning about other social issues, such as racism, which adds to the museums ability to be a source of learning as it develops and changes through time. Because museums have challenging histories and are linked to the colonial practices of the past, they can be a great place to address these legacies. Museums are an evolving educational beneficial space where the objects on exhibition can be used to address societal needs, such as the education of disregarded subjects and perspectives (Abt, 2006).

In 2007, the British government chose to commemorate the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in Britain. Although the government chose to perpetuate outdated ideas, such as to focus on 'abolition' rather than recognising past wrongs, the choice to commemorate the transatlantic slave trade brought mass public appeal. It was a memorable step in addressing slavery, empire and colonialism as no other commemoration of slavery in Europe had the kind of government support, financial resources, and strong participation from descendants, especially by government spaces (Oostindie, 2009, p. 614). Due to these commemorative events, museums across the UK began to open to the idea of addressing colonialism, slavery and empire, outside of repatriation, in their spaces in the following years (Oldfield, 2012).

In 2014, due to the commonwealth games being hosted in Glasgow, there were more projects pushing to address colonialism, slavery and empire in the city's museums. The Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum held a temporary exhibition called *Georgian Glasgow 1714-1837: How Glasgow Flourished* which talked about how Glasgow's industry relied heavily on the transatlantic slave trade (Morris, 2016, p. 196). More recently, National Museums Scotland in 2018-2019 explored aspects of Scottish involvement in slavery, empire and colonialism through creating interventions in two displays (Laurenson, 2023). The project was also short term called *The Matter of Slavery in Scotland* and also brought together professionals, university researchers and activists in a discussion on how to address the history and legacy of Scotland's involvement in colonialism (Laurenson, 2023). Sarah Laurenson, who was part of the curatorial staff, states that:

in order to represent a more nuanced and transnational history, the objects and display needed to be understood across temporal and geographical boundaries to show the true impact of slavery in Scotland and the triangular trade, from past to present. (Laurenson, 2023, p. 107)

The outcome of the project was the understanding of how to address complex legacies such as clericalism, empire and slavery. They emphasised the importance of collaboration, the potential of juxtaposition and emphasises that these interventions were a small step to future changes.

Successful exhibitions about colonialism, empire and slavery are both confrontational and affirmative (Oldfield, 2012, p. 251). When museums have opted for representations that will be palatable to their visitors it can lead to whitewashing and offence (Oostindie, 2009, pp. 615-616). Due to addressing such a heavy subject, care and understanding must be put into action. When pivoting from the way the authorised heritage discourse looks at slavery, empire and colonialism, from the triumph of abolition, exhibitions must highlight the perspectives of all who were part of this history, including narratives of resistance and rebellion (Oldfield, 2012, p. 250). Exhibitions should celebrate the achievements of people of colour without diminishing the obstacles that have been placed in their way, such as racism, prejudice, and discrimination. The lesson Laurensen took from their study was looking outwards “instead of focusing solely on the impact within” (Laurensen, 2023, p. 118).

### **Museum Policy addressing Colonialism, Empire and Slavery**

Due to previous temporary exhibitions and attempts to address colonialism, slavery, and empire, museums are beginning to address new perspectives and these complex histories through their policies. Diverse policies include advocating for diversity and inclusion, anti-racism, and ‘decolonisation’. Museum organisations often use the word ‘decolonisation’ in policies to describe the actions taken to address colonial history and the legacies of it as well as anti-racist practices (Brulon Soares & Witcomb, 2022). Such as ICOM’s Strategic plan for 2022-2028 which adopted ‘decolonisation’ as a principle and focus area (ICOM, 2022b, p. 14). As a result, a Working Group on Decolonisation has been established to “proactively address decolonisation cultural rights and democracy, and the role that museums have played in colonisation” (ICOM, n.d.). The Museums Association also issued a similar campaign called “Supporting Decolonisation in Museums” (Museums Association, 2024). The campaign seeks to support and lead museums in addressing the legacy of British colonialism (Museums Association, 2024). More specific to Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland has also issued a project on decolonising the museums in their organisation. In 2021, they brought to light a project, called ‘Facing our Past’, looking at their heritage sites’ links to slavery with the goal of expanding knowledge

and supporting staff in addressing Scotland's role in slavery and colonialism (National Trust for Scotland, 2021). Due to the early nature of this journey of embedding decolonising approaches and narratives into exhibition spaces the insights will prove constructive in understanding how policy is put into action. Smaller city organisations such as Glasgow Life, also offer policies on anti-racism and decolonisation following the pattern on the National Trust for Scotland (Glasgow Life, n.d.a). The word 'decolonisation' has been used to address colonialism or as a brand to give credibility and relevance to audiences (Brulon Soares & Witcomb, 2022). The word also is not a universal term as interpretations are infinite and continue to evolve (Brulon Soares & Witcomb, 2022). For the purpose of this discussion the word 'decolonisation' will be in reference to museums efforts to address colonialism, slavery and empire in their spaces (Brulon Soares & Witcomb, 2022).

Policies for decolonisation and anti-racism are becoming more common in recent years, however, they often do not produce recommended actions to how the historic legacies of empire, slavery and colonialism can be addressed. The Scottish Government sponsored a national project to issue recommendations to how slavery, empire and colonialism can be addressed in museums throughout Scotland. A group was created of museum professionals, social activist and teachers called the Steering Group and resulted in publication the 'Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums' (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022). In this publication the group issues six recommendations that museums across Scotland can do to address colonialism, empire, and slavery. They include creating a designated place and organisation to address Scotland's role in empire, colonialism and historic slavery as well as promoting co-production, repatriation and restitution, and anti-racism in workspaces (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022). These recommendations offer a cohesive set of action goals for individual museums in Scotland to evaluate their practices.

There is a complex issue of the relationship between policies and practices in the context of implementing these recommendations. Some authors have suggested that putting theory and policies into action can prove difficult, such as Vikki McCall in their article "Exploring the Gap between Museum Policy and Practice". They argue that there is often a gap between policy and action (McCall, 2016). Neman and

McLean (2006) evaluated policies for exhibitions and museum-based development projects in the community that were designed for a social role. They concluded that existing policies were “confused and ineffective because of a lack of understanding about what museums and galleries are capable of doing and, therefore, what their role in society is” (Newman & McLean, 2006). In contrast, Rhiannon Mason expressed that theory and practice are not in “separate spheres” but actually complement each other (Mason, 2006). This dissertation adds to these studies with curiosity to explore to what extent the Steering Group’s recommendations have been implemented when exhibitions addressing colonialism, slavery and empire have been designed in recent years.

### **Critical Thinking**

Paulo Freire (2005) professes that critical thinking is perceiving reality as a process and transformation rather than as a static entity. He emphasises that critical thinking must exist for the continuing development of reality and as a result the “humanisation of men” (Freire, 2005, p. 92). Critical thinking links the individual to the world around them, both to understand and to modify (Newman & McLean, 2006). It invites one to question order and evaluate things for themselves. It is useful to be critical to balance ideologies and come to one’s own conclusions. Margaret Lindauer (2005) is interested in inspiring critical thinking in museum visitors. They describe a critical museum visitor as one who “notes how objects are presented, in what ways and for what purposes and who explores what is left unspoken or kept off the display” (Lindauer, 2005). The critical visitor asks questions and searches for those answers that may or may not be found, and though this process come to their own conclusions. Lindauer notes that searching for this kind of visitor is difficult to find when using typical evaluation tools such as audience reactions (Lindauer, 2005). In order for museums to provide a place where visitors can reach their own understandings the typical curatorial voice needs to be modified (Hein, 2006). This can be done in a number of ways including alternative interpretations of an object or exhibit or encouraging visitors to participate in the display, leaving their own comments, thoughts and knowledge (Hein, 2006). Providing questions that ignite discussion or thoughtful reflection is also an essential way of putting critical visitors in the centre

of the museum experience (Sandell, 2007). Critical thinking can also be enhancing if museums are vulnerable about the process of how certain artifacts are exhibited and why only some narratives are presented (Wollentz, 2023). George E Hein further argues that museums “need to do more than challenge their visitors; they need to constantly challenge themselves [and] examine their practices” (Hein, 2006).

To evaluate to what extent exhibitions, provide a space where the visitor is invited to be an active critical learner, visitors and their experiences will be studied. How museum visitors are studied is evolving at a swift pace with controversial and dynamic elements (Hooper-Greenhill, 2006). As museums widen their perspectives to include a more varied audience, urgency has been placed on social issues, culture and identity (Hooper-Greenhill, 2006). Definitions of learning and education in the museum space is shifting away from content learning outcomes and to visitors having meaningful and impactful experiences (Hein, 2006). This produces a challenge as museums turn to the visitor for guidance and assistance giving up their inherit power (Hooper-Greenhill, 2006). Some scholars suggest that visitors’ agendas before coming to a museum effect how they behave and what they learn (Falk, Moussouri, & Coulson, 1998). However, Karen Knutson (2002) argues that curators and museum educators heavily impact what the visitor experiences. They noted in their study that each member of the curation team had different ideas of what visitors should experience when attending their exhibition, which had an impact on what the final exhibition looked like (Knutson, 2002, p. 42). As curation teams diversify there is more voices that can be heard and can help guide visitors to multiple intended outcomes. Through analysing the language of visitors critical thinking can be assessed. Sue Allen (2002), analysed visitors conversations as they moved around the exhibit space searching for evidence of learning in their speech. Allen showed that there was evidence of learning and reflection in conversations in museum visitors (Allen, 2002). Visitors can apply personal and culturally shared interpretive strategies to make narrative links though museums creating their own reflections (Vallance, 2004).

Museum spaces where colonial legacies are addressed can lead to the development of critical thinking in visitors. As visitors navigate the complex field of confrontation and affirmation, they can use what they have learned “understand

and modify the social world around them” (Newman & McLean, 2006, p. 65). Exhibitions about colonialism, empire and slavery offer a space where critical thinking can occur as they present new voices, provide questions and open up about how objects were gathered providing different interpretations.

## **Conclusion**

Scotland’s role in colonialism, empire and slavery has been overlooked by academics and the educational system and museums can provide a place where these themes can be explored due to their educational links and their historical controversies. To address the legacies of empire, slavery and colonialism museums must recontextualize themselves and their exhibitions to tackle historical ‘amnesia’ and the authorised heritage discourse that has been leading the narrative for years. This dissertation will explore how the recent the Steering Group’s policy recommendations in ‘Empire, Slavery and Scotland’s Museums’ (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022) has been implemented in the design of recent exhibitions about slavery, colonialism and empire. There is a notable gap between policy and action which this dissertation will explore. Due to social factors and many polices, museums in Scotland have addressed colonialism, empire and slavery in temporary exhibition spaces. Due to the newness of these exhibitions, this dissertation will explore what exhibitions about colonialism, empire and slavery look like in their design and educational emphasis. Finally, museums are evolving to include a diverse range of perspectives and shift the power to visitors. This dissertation will also address how this shift to include colonial narratives invites visitors to be critical thinkers.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### Case Studies

The study comprised a qualitative comparative case study of three exhibitions in three separate museums throughout Scotland. The first is *Glasgow - City of Empire* at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, the second, *Curating Discomfort* at the Hunterian Museum and the third, *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian Plants in Hornel's Home and Garden* at Broughton House and Garden, which is under the jurisdiction of the National Trust for Scotland. The following reasons underpinned sampling these exhibitions, firstly each exhibition debuted in the last four years and are some of the first dedicated spaces within in each museum to focus specifically on colonialism, empire and slavery. Being recently new additions to the space they can provide great insights on the beginnings of the process of addressing the subject in question. Secondly, the exhibitions were chosen because the subject focus and type of each museum differs which can provide an interesting comparison and argument that addressing colonialism, empire and slavery is possible in museums with different purposes. Finally, the three exhibitions were selected due to convenience, as the museums are accessible to all participants.

#### **Glasgow - City of Empire at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum**

The Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum was built in the Victorian era as part of Glasgow's International Exhibition in 1901. Over the years it has become very popular and beloved by both the city of Glasgow and international visitors (Glasgow Life, n.d.b). The museum has an anthropologic style and holds a vast collection of both art and artifacts in its stunning baroque architecture (O'Neill, 2007). On the second floor next to the museum's most well-known possession, Salvador Dali's *Christ of St John of the Cross*, the exhibition *Glasgow - City of Empire* is located (Glasgow Life, n.d.c). The exhibition, which is now a permanent display, focuses on how slavery and colonialism has shaped the city of Glasgow using objects with themes such as education and rebellion, teaching both the history and the present legacy of colonialism empire and slavery (Glasgow Life, n.d.c).

#### **Curating Discomfort at The Hunterian Museum**

The Hunterian Museum is located within the University of Glasgow's main building and is Scotland's oldest museum, opening in 1807 (The Hunterian, n.d.a). The museum houses the collection of Dr William Hunter, the physician to Queen

Charlotte, a teacher and collector (The Hunterian, n.d.b). As a museum located within a university space, the focus is on education with objects reflecting on biological, medicinal and historical importance. *Curating Discomfort* is located in a small corner with parts located over already existing collections which advocates that museums are political places.

### **Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian Plants in Hornel's Home and Garden at Broughton House and Garden**

The National Trust for Scotland is an organisation that oversees many properties across Scotland, one of which is the Broughton House and Garden which is the home of the famous Scottish painter Edward Hornel. Hornel spent time in Japan and is famous for his paintings of Japanese culture and his association with the Glasgow Boys (Törmä, 2024). The house is in Kirkcudbright, about 2hrs and 30min drive from Glasgow. *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian Plants in Hornel's Home and Garden* is a temporary exhibition that is running from 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2024, curated using the research of a professor at the University of Glasgow and with support from the National Trust for Scotland (Törmä, 2024). The exhibition is inspired by flower imagery from souvenirs that Edward Hornel brought back with him from Japan. The National Trust for Scotland informed in personal communication that this exhibition was one of two exhibitions at their properties that dealt with themes of colonialism and empire (personal communication, 27 Feb 2024). The other being significantly further away from the other two exhibitions, thus this one was chosen for the study.

*Glasgow - City of Empire* and *Curating Discomfort* are in close proximity to each other in the city of Glasgow and *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian Plants in Hornel's Home and Garden* is the closest National Trust for Scotland exhibition noted to cover the same theme to the other two exhibitions. The three exhibitions presented are accessible, share a general vision of commitment to the subject studied and differ in terms of focus which allows a valid investigative and comparative case study to explore.

### **Research Paradigm**

Since the research questions for this dissertation focus on the human experiences, such as designing and learning, aspects of the interpretivist paradigm

will be implemented as a theoretical basis. The interpretivist paradigm's purpose is to understand individuals' interpretations of the social world they interact with (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This study uses methods aligned with the interpretivist paradigm to collect understanding from museum professionals and visitor participants, such as interviews, personal observations and focus groups. The belief that observers and researchers naturally influence the reality they are studying is also considered and used. Through personal observations the researchers own world views, concepts and background enhance the data collection process.

This study will also conform to the interpretivist paradigm as a pattern of meaning will be explored throughout the research process (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). This study will take a deductive approach, differing from traditional interpretivist studies, as identifying patterns and themes occurs before the data collection process using the research questions. Data will be searched for words, statements and experiences relating to these pre-identified themes; however, these themes are broad thus data can be searched for new patterns to be discovered in an inductive way (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The data will be analysed to provide context and purpose of exhibitions to how they are received and educational value and ultimately provide insight to the understanding and awareness.

### **Participants and Method of Data Collection**

The research focuses on qualitative data collection methods including verbal data, personal observations and open-ended data analysis. The research design is a comprised thematic analysis of data generated during interviews with museum professionals, personal observations and visitor focus groups and interviews. The following section provides details about each group of participants and the method used to gain data.

#### **Museum Professionals**

Purposeful sampling was used to ensure the participation of museum professionals who contributed to the designing of exhibitions relating to decolonisation, empire and slavery. The professionals were picked due to the public information that could be found about their efforts to address colonialism, empire and slavery. Exhibitions about empire and slavery are early in development so options were limited. However, six museum professionals initially consented to take

part in this study. The museum professionals were initially contacted through their publicly accessible email addresses or connections on the business focused social media platform LinkedIn or through their organisation webpages. After interest was established all further correspondence, such as the sending and receiving of consent forms and establishing the interview date was done through email. One museum curator expressed in email communication that they were unavailable to take part in the study due to schedule conflicts but consented to information that is in the public domain relating to their work to be cited and used as part of this study. Of the five remaining, two participated in the curation of *Glasgow - City of Empire* as a curator or as a co-curator, one of the already mentioned also participated in the co-curation of *Curating Discomfort*. Of the final three participants, one curated the *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian Plants in Hornel's Home and Garden* and the final two were directly from the National Trust for Scotland. One leads learning and the other coordinates the 'Facing Our Past' project. As a group they will be referred to as museum professionals for the purpose of this study as each individual has a unique role within the museum sector.

After participant consent forms and information sheets were distributed (see Appendix A), a date and time for a semi-structured interview was set. The interviews were conducted online via the software programme Zoom at a time that was mutually convenient. This way of interviewing was easily accessible and comfortable as interviewees choose a space they are comfortable in for the interview to take place and the timing can be worked out to suit them. Interviewees were informed that the interview would take as little or as much time they were comfortable with, but most interviews lasted about an hour, which was the suggested time allotment. Participants also received a list of interview questions prior to the interview. Any interview has the potential to touch upon sensitive or upsetting topics, especially with the focus of this study being such a heavy topic. Precautions were taken as participants were informed, that they could choose to not answer any questions they did not want to and could stop the interview at any time. And if they decided to not want to participate in the overall study then there are no repercussions. All participants felt comfortable enough during the interviews to answer all questions and all participated in the study until its' completion.

The decision to use interviews as a method for data collection happened early in the design process for this dissertation. Interviews provide a rich description of an individual's experience that would not be able to be captured in surveys or through digital communication (Nelson & Cohn, 2015). The interview for museum professionals were semi-structured as they were based around a set of questions, but flexibility was accounted for. The main set of questions (see Appendix B) were designed around the three research questions discussing the Steering Group recommendations, the curation of exhibitions and what curators desired visitors to learn when attending their exhibition spaces. Some questions were adjusted to account for the specific role of the museum professional as some were not as hands on with the initial curation process whereas others were unfamiliar with the Steering Group recommendations. These variations were accounted for as much as possible and each interviewee received a list of questions that were tailored to them, and the dissertation's focus.

The data was recorded on Zoom and as a backup, on the Google Record app on a cellular device. As part of this app automatic transcription occurred which noted exactly what was said during the interview. These transcripts were copied into a Microsoft Word document that was then used to extract data for the findings and analysis chapters of this dissertation. Participants were informed that due to the nature of this study they cannot be completely anonymous due to their links with the museum they worked with and their position in organisations. However, to ensure some confidentiality when discussed in the data portion of the study, names and gender will not be used.

### **Personal observations**

For the purpose of this dissertation observation was used to analyse the design of the museum and record measure of learning as a student of education in museums and heritage. The personal observations originally followed the guidelines recommended by Margaret Lindauer in their article "The Critical Museum Visitor" (2005). Lindauer provides a series of questions that allow the visitor to critically analyse all aspects of a museum visit, from expectations prior to the visit to museum architecture, design of the museum space and beyond the display. A practice of this observation was done at another exhibition and upon review the questions failed to consider the educational implications the exhibition revealed. Further tweaking was

then done this time focusing on the intended themes of the dissertation but still using aspects of Lindauer's guidance. These final set of questions were used for each exhibition (see Appendix C).

Prior to visiting each exhibition, a review of what was already known, and expectations were recorded. During the visit questions were kept in mind but no specific structure was followed. Experience and thoughts were recorded in a notebook and for later remembrance pictures were taken on a personal phone. Upon returning from the exhibition thoughts were recorded on Microsoft word and questions about the experience were answered. These questions were a general review of the exhibition, what curators were attempting to convey and how, what stood out from the exhibition space and what was learned. Information collected from this reflection will be used to supplement data received from other participants, it also was used to inform visitor participants pre-question and guidance.

### **Visitors**

To gage the experience of visitors and the extent to what they learned, a focus group was created. Breen (2006) noted that the purpose of a focus group is to generate ideas for the purpose of change or improvement, to see how a new policy is received or generate ideas for curriculum development. However this study focused on what people learned and what they experienced not necessarily for improvement but for review and understanding on how exhibitions had an effect on their learning and critical thinking skills.

A combination of purposive and convenience sampling was used to recruit individuals to take part. Some individuals were contacted specifically as they came into mind when the study was designed because of known interest in visiting museums. Others, were conveniently sampled online. Recruitment was done a month in advance of the desired group discussion date to allow potential participants to prepare their schedules. Most participants were found through an online post on the social media site Facebook. This post was shared by personal connections and individuals that expressed interest were originally contacted though Messenger, the private messaging system on Facebook. The sample was slightly biased because of the use of convenience sampling however it was found that because participants were familiar with the interviewer they were more comfortable with sharing their

experiences. All participants were over the age of eighteen to ensure proper consent and ethical guidelines were followed. All participants were living in Scotland for convenient access to the museum spaces and all participants expressed an enjoyment in visiting museums in general. An interest in visiting museums was necessary as these individuals would be naturally more likely to encounter the exhibitions organically and the study required multiple museum visits so their enthusiasm would allow them to enjoy continuing in the study. No previous knowledge or interest in decolonisation was necessary as gaging of learning is not necessary pertaining to the knowledge previously had. Through this recruitment thirteen individuals reached out in personal contact. In response to this interest gratitude was expressed, a brief outline of the focus of the study and which exhibitions would be focused on were shared and request for their email address sent. Confidentiality and flexibility were also emphasised.

Once initial contact was made, consent forms and participant information sheets were dispersed through email (see Appendix D). The information sheet explained what the study would entail, firstly after consenting to take part participants were asked to visit the three exhibitions and take part in a focus group or interview to discuss their experiences over the course of three weeks. Participants had the opportunity to visit *Glasgow - City of Empire* and *Curating Discomfort* in their own time but for *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian Plants in Hornel's Home and Garden* a day trip was organised due to the exhibition being some distance away from the others. Although participants were still encouraged to visit the exhibition at another time if they were unable to make that day. Two potential dates were given for each exhibition for the focus group to take place and participants expressed which day worked for them. The day with the most participants available was chosen for the focus group but participants who could not make that day or time were personally interviewed through Zoom or in person at a time that was convenient for them. After sending this information a few individuals expressed they were unable to participate in the study leaving the final number of consenting participants being six.

The first focus group discussing *Glasgow - City of Empire* was attended by five participants with one opting to have a personal interview over Zoom due to scheduling conflicts. The second focus group discussing *Curating Discomfort* was

attended by two participants with four participants opting to have personal interviews over Zoom due to scheduling conflicts. The day trip to Broughton House and Garden was attended by two participants, no other participants were able to visit the exhibition independently due to the location and scheduling conflicts. This was previously noted as a challenge, so gratitude was shown to any individuals able to attend. The focus group discussion happened at Broughton House and Garden as the National Trust for Scotland was notified of our arrival and prepared a room for us to use. The National Trust for Scotland also offered a group discount but there were not enough participants for this to be applicable, so tickets were purchased by the researcher.

The focus groups all followed the same pattern. The participants were welcomed and given an overview of the topic. Ground rules were established, and confidentiality was repeated and ensured. The outline of consent was repeated again and then consent to start the recording was asked. Once the recording began, questions relating to the study were asked. Questions (see Appendix E) mainly focused on their experiences prior to the exhibition, their thoughts during/at the exhibition and finally after the exhibition. During the first focus group for *Glasgow-City of Empire*, participants were introduced themselves to get to know one another and to check the recording was working. When participants were unable to make the focus group, their personal interview followed the same pattern with the same questions. In total there were three focus groups and four individual interviews that were completed for this section. Each were recorded and transcribed using the same resources for museum professionals, Google recorder, Zoom when applicable and Microsoft Word.

The data was collected from the answers to questions but also from the social formed discussions that took place between participants in the focus group environment. In personal interviews more detailed data was gathered as the participants had more time and were more confident. However, the context in the group discussions was broader as participants were inspired by one another, this provided more data for the third research question investigating critical thinking skills. Although the process of this data collection was not expensive it was time consuming as each focus group or interview lasted about an hour, the shortest being 15mins. This was due to the flexibility that was offered. To conserve time a recorder

was used to automatically transcribe which was beneficial despite the struggle for the app to pick up certain accents. The spotty transcript was easy to edit while listening. Overall, participants were very reliable and the flexibility that was offered encouraged individuals to continue to participate. There was no dominant participant within the focus group, and all were able to express their thoughts and feelings. If one participant was particularly quiet, they were invited back into the discussion with a question directed at them.

All data was collected, managed and stored as regulated by the Data Protection Act and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU2016/679) and only the researcher had access to the raw data. Copies of all interviews, museum professionals and visitor participants are being kept on a password-protected computer until the degree is finalised (no later than December 2024), at which point the copies of these materials will be deleted. All participants were asked if they wanted copies of their recordings or transcripts, but none wished for a copy.

This research project involves a qualitative data analysis and will focus on both the themes presented by the research questions and themes that presented themselves throughout the data collection process. Each of the following chapters discusses a research question using the findings from the data collection process. The first, will focus on the Steering Group Recommendations inquired by question one. The chapter that follows will discuss what the exhibitions look like, how they are designed and how education is emphasised, relating to research question two. And finally question three, focusing on critical thinking skills will be discussed in chapter six.

## 4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STEERING GROUP'S RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of data analysis will refer to the first research question of the study which investigates to what extent the Steering Group's recommendations in the publication 'Empire, Slavery & Scotland's Museums' have been implemented in recent exhibitions targeting decolonisation in Scotland. This chapter will explore whether the case study exhibitions actively applied the Steering Group recommendations, if not, alternatives will be explored and finally reflections on the recommendations: their similarities, differences and challenges. As a reference, the recommendations are as follows:

“Recommendation one: Scotland should create a dedicated space to address our role in empire, colonialism, and historic slavery. A new organisation should be created to lead this work.

Recommendation two: Museums should ensure anti-racism is embedded in their workplaces and public spaces.

Recommendation three: Museums should involve the people of Scotland in shaping their work through co-production, to promote cultural democracy and participation for all.

Recommendation four: Museums should commit to research, interpret, and share the histories of Scotland's links to empire, colonialism, and historic slavery.

Recommendation five: Museums should support efforts to promote and embed race equality and anti-racism in the curricula in a meaningful, effective, and sustainable way.

Recommendation six: Scottish Government should demonstrate their support for restitution and repatriation of looted or unethically acquired items in Scottish collections." (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022)

### **Application/awareness of the Steering Group recommendations**

Of the five museum professionals who participated in the study only two had heard about the Steering Group recommendations prior to the interview. Of those museum professionals, one participated in the Steering Group in a subcommittee

relating to recommendation five which is “museums should support efforts to promote and embed race equality and anti-racism in the curricula in a meaningful, effective, and sustainable way” (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022). The museum professionals who had heard about the Steering Group recommendations stated that they used them generally in their professional life rather than specifically for this exhibition.

The recommendations were published in June 2022, although two of three exhibitions in this study opened after the recommendations were published there is still a disconnect in the planning and using of these recommendations. *Curating Discomfort* at the Hunterian Museum was the first to open in April 2022, only a few months before the Steering Group Recommendations which were published (Hunterian Glasgow, 2022). However, the curator for *Curating Discomfort* was a confirmed member of the Steering Group (Atkinson, 2020). Unfortunately, the curator was unable to participate in this study to discuss more about connecting the planning of *Curating Discomfort* with the Steering group recommendations. *Curating Discomfort* deals with the legacies of empire, slavery and colonialism particularly in the museum sphere and is curated in such a way that it stands out among other exhibitions in light of the Steering Group Recommendations. As the recommendations focus on how museums can and should change, *Curating Discomfort* also follows this theme. So, although the curator was unable to address the links between the recommendations and the exhibition, the fact that the curator participated in the process seems to have at least a general effect on the exhibition in relation to overall theme and topics.

The following two exhibitions opened after the publication of ‘Empire, Slavery & Scotland’s Museums’. *Glasgow- City of Empire* at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum opened after the recommendations were published in 2023, with the design process starting two years earlier. The museum professionals interviewed for this exhibition express that the recommendations were not specifically addressed for this exhibition. *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel’s home and garden* at Broughton House and Garden under the National Trust for Scotland opened March 2024. The curator for this exhibition expressed they had never heard of the Steering Group recommendations, however, the members of

the National Trust for Scotland who were interviewed discussed that they had heard of them but were not used for this exhibition.

### **Alternatives to the Steering Group Recommendations**

An alternative to Steering Group recommendations, 'The Museum Test', was used by three museum professionals for their exhibition (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2024). Museums Galleries Scotland co-produced this test with young South Asian people as part of the currently running 'Our Shared Cultural Heritage' programme. The test is shown as a visual flow chart which asks questions to note if an exhibition or display handles the topic of colonialism, empire and slavery effectively. This has been a successful tool in the development of the *Glasgow - City of Empire* exhibition and within the evaluation procedures for the National Trust for Scotland. One museum professional expressed that they assumed "there will be overlap between the guidelines [from the Steering Group] and the [Our Shared Cultural Heritage Museum] test". The evaluation given in 'The Museum Test' is more focused on specifically looking at the content of exhibitions whereas the guidelines noted in 'Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums' are more general goals for the museum to address. Other evaluation tools, such as the National Trust for Scotland collecting quantitative and qualitative surveys generally and specifically for teachers, can be extremely beneficial in providing evaluation and feedback but they do not focus on the broader aims and objectives noted by the Steering Group. Museum professionals that had heard of the recommendations expressed their hopefulness in using them in their future projects although they did not detail how or why. The overall consensus across all organisations is that the Steering Group recommendations were not regarded by museum professionals until formally recognised by the Scottish Government in January 2024. This formality can be the reason why there is a gap between the policy and action as well as the timing of the opening of the exhibitions in general.

### **Reflections on the Steering Group Recommendations**

Although the Steering Group recommendations were not fully recognised by museum professionals in the planning stages of the exhibitions in this study, when reading through the recommendations, museum professionals reflected and found parallels and similarities to their process and the actions recommended by the Steering Group. One museum professional expressed: “it is happening almost subconsciously...but it is not something specifically influencing what I do” (personal communication, 13 May 2024). They explained that they did not immediately assign what they were doing to a recommendation but in looking through them they do adhere to many. An example was given in relation to recommendation two which reads “museums should ensure anti-racism is embedded in their workplaces and public spaces” (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022). The same museum professional noted:

We have an anti-racism group where we go to trainings, we are proactive in these sorts of things. So, even though there may not be a line on our website that states we follow these guidelines, in a way we do - just by looking through them. (personal communication, 13 May 2024)

In reviewing the data from interviews with museum professionals and the recommendations given by the Steering Group, there were many similarities in what each were achieving. Each organisation was in line with recommendation one which states: “Scotland should create a dedicated space to address our role in empire, colonialism, and historic slavery. A new organisation should be created to lead this work” (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022). *Glasgow - City of Empire* and *Curating Discomfort* are both permanent spaces within their respective museums that discuss empire, colonialism and historic slavery. *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel’s home and garden* is not a permanent exhibition although most exhibitions by the National Trust for Scotland are temporary. Notwithstanding, the National Trust for Scotland do adhere to the second part of this recommendation where museums are encouraged to create a new organisation to lead this work (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022). The National Trust For Scotland has developed the ‘Facing Our Past’ project which looks into the properties in the National Trust for Scotland that have links to slavery with the goal of expanding knowledge and supporting staff in addressing Scotland’s role in slavery and colonialism (National Trust for Scotland,

2021). The facing our past project found that 50 properties at the National Trust for Scotland have links to enslavement, colonialism and empire (personal communication, 14 May 2024). They provide support to locations that want to address this history and help facilitate as a consultant and encourage collaboration. In relation to the creation of specific organisations to oversee the work that recommendation one suggests, the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum and the Hunterian Museum have not done so. However, the Hunterian Museum has appointed a permanent ‘Curator of Discomfort’ who is specifically hired to lead the work in the museum relating to empire, slavery and colonialism (Adams, 2021).

Another example can be seen regarding recommendation three, which advocates that: “museums should involve the people of Scotland in shaping their work through co-production, to promote cultural democracy and participation for all” (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022). *Glasgow - City of Empire* was co-curated by members of the ‘Our Shared Cultural Heritage’ programme, a group of south Asian individuals between the ages of 16 and 25 were selected to engage in this project. One of the museum professionals that was interviewed as part of this study belonged to this group. They emphasised that working with the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum was a very collaborative and beneficial process (personal communication, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024). They expressed that they wanted to promote participation for all by including a poem in Urdu which accompanied the artifact they curated. The choice to advocate for the first written text in Urdu in the museum was so families that only spoke Urdu, including members of their own, were able to engage positively with the exhibition and feel both included and seen (personal communication, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024). *Curating Discomfort* also had members of the community take part in the curation process. One member of the community curators was able to speak about the process for this study. They explained they worked with museum staff to both inform them about their own experiences but also choose an item to curate for the exhibition that stood out to them. The item they picked explores the complexities of empire and shows that some individuals that are usually perceived as victims also benefited from colonialism. Ultimately, they had a strong desire for stories and experiences that are not always represented in museums to be highlighted. Collaboration for *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel’s home and garden* looked slightly different. The National Trust for Scotland prides

itself in supporting individuals and communities in their ideas and efforts for their properties, and Broughton House and Garden incorporated individual support. Although not a member of the community, the curator of *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel's home and garden* had a specific personal research interest in the objects at Broughton House and was supported by the National Trust for Scotland to create the exhibition. The curator chose the objects and themes and museum professionals from the National Trust for Scotland provided support in the providing of labels and captions. The link between the third recommendation and the curation of this exhibition is weak in the sense community involvement did not occur, however there was a co-production between museum professionals at the National Trust for Scotland and outside professionals. Although the recommendation was not specifically noted we can see that each exhibition adhered to recommendation three according to the objectives of this exhibition in involving the people of Scotland and promoting cultural democracy and co-production.

Another Steering group recommendation that was focused on in two of the exhibitions was number five: “support for restitution and repatriation of looted or unethically acquired items in Scottish collections” (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022). *Glasgow - City of Empire* and *Curating Discomfort* both show their support for repatriation and addressing looting and unethically acquired items throughout their exhibition. *Glasgow - City of Empire* refers to looting throughout the exhibition. The glossary holds the definition of ‘Loot’ as a “political act shaped by systems of power and oppression” (personal observation, 17 April 2024). The exhibition further emphasises that the products of empire came from “injustices, pillaging and stealing, with no concern for the long-term impact on indigenous lands and peoples” (personal observation, 17 April 2024). This allows the visitor to come to their own conclusions about the objects on display and produce a discussion about whether they should be viewed in a museum. *Curating Discomfort* is more direct in their support for repatriation and addressing unethically acquired items. Above the collection of Fredrick Eck there is an added *Curating Discomfort* information panel which asks the reader “How and why, did he acquire these things? Where there acts of looting involved?” encouraging the onlooker to form their own opinion and thoughts (personal observation, 16 April 2024). Upon a personal visit to *Curating Discomfort* the collected item of a Jamaican Giant Galliwasp specimen was not there but

replaced with a notice that said, “Back Soon” (personal observation Hunterian, 16 April 2024). It also noted the specimen was removed for further study with the intention to be returned to Jamacia (personal observation Hunterian, 16 April 2024). The Jamaican Giant Galliwasp was returned to Jamacia on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024 (The Hunterian, 2024). The exhibition, *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel’s home and garden* did not mention repatriation or restitution because the objects within the exhibition were souvenirs bought by Hornel and had no link to questionable acquired means.

Despite not referring to the recommendations provided by the Steering Group in the planning process there are some parallels and similarities between the recommendations given in the result of the three exhibitions. All three exhibitions conformed to recommendation one in dedicating a space or organisation to addressing empire, slavery and colonialism in Scotland. Each exhibition also involved the people of Scotland in their development, acknowledging recommendation three, whether it was through the use of community groups, such as Our Shared Cultural Heritage, or the support of one individual’s interests and research. The exhibitions also recognised the questionable ways objects in their museum were acquired and spoke of themes of restitution and repatriation, where applicable, accepting recommendation five. In summary, upon reflection the three exhibitions adhered to some of the recommendations published by the Steering Group although this was unintentional. Museum professionals did not refer to the recommendations by the steering group out of lack of knowledge of the recommendations or the time lag between the opening of the exhibitions and the recommendations did not allow for a direct relationship. Because of this lack of knowledge and time lag there are some recommendations that were overlooked and not addressed.

### **Reflections on the Steering Group Recommendations: Challenges**

Museum professional expressed the challenges to implementing a new set of guidelines, such as the Steering Group recommendations, in their respective fields. One museum professional noted that the biggest challenge was the lack of funding from local and national authorities (personal communication, 17 May 2024). This is a general problem that influences all aspects of exhibition and museum life as well

as what the staff focuses on. This museum professional emphasised that due to the lack of funding staff are very stretched which influences the pace at which new guidelines such as the Steering Group recommendations are addressed (personal communication, 17 May 2024). This was a voiced concern of the museum professional however, not a specific challenge to implementing the Steering Group recommendations.

In specific reference to the challenges in implementing the Steering Group recommendations, other museum professionals noted that their biggest challenge was recommendation two which advocated for anti-racism in workspaces and having a diverse workforce (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022). Firstly because of concerns similar to funding and staff availability but also noting that even though their exhibitions reflect diversity and inclusion the staff itself does not reflect the same diversity. Another challenge is working with the volunteers and emphasising the importance of anti-racism to them. One museum professional noted that most people know that slavery is wrong, but some older volunteers don't have the same attitude towards the word empire (personal communication, 13 May 2024). Everyone comes with their own biases and knowledge and sometimes find it difficult to remember the training given. Because they are volunteers there is a balancing act where the organisations want "them to stay and for [the environment] to be a place that they feel comfortable in but still upholds the values" of the organisation and the Steering Group recommendations (personal communication, 13 May 2024). Finally, one museum professional emphasised that although the recommendations provided by the Steering Group are incredibly important there is a difficulty in their implementation as there is a lack of training and guidance to make sure that museums are "getting it right" (personal communication 15 May 2024). Different areas of the sector also will draw to different recommendations and occasionally there is a lack of continuity between departments.

Despite these challenges, museum professionals noted that the recommendations, now supported by the government, have been reviewed and there is an aim to use them in future plans. One museum professional noted that the Steering Group recommendations have been discussed sector wide and there has already been direct output from these discussions (personal communication, 15 May

2024). For example, the ‘Blether Together’ sessions hosted by Museums Galleries Scotland came as a response to recommendation five, “museums should support efforts to promote and embed race equality and anti-racism in the curricula in a meaningful, effective, and sustainable way” (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022). At these events individuals that work at museums, galleries or other heritage organisations can converse with teachers and community learning practitioners to discuss the latest changes in education settings and advocate for resources to further support teachers and learning practices (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2024). The most recent one in April 2024 focused on ‘decolonising the curriculum’ and introduced teachers to educational resources within museums that discuss slavery, colonialism and empire (personal attendance, 24 April 2024).

With the Steering Group recommendations being accepted by the government, one museum professional emphasised that it provided a solid argument when advocating for decolonisation in museum settings. They said in “making the case for something to be done - particularly internally has been made far easier by actually being able to point to this document and say no - this is what the government says we should be doing” (personal communication, 17 May 2024).

## **Conclusion**

Although the Steering Group recommendations have not been a focal point in the exhibitions studied, despite the recommendations being published prior to the opening of two exhibitions, and the third exhibition’s curator being a part of the Steering Group. This could be because of the timing of the planning and opening of the exhibitions and the recommendations being formally accepted by the government in 2024. Upon reflection, museum professionals noted that some recommendations were still being adhered to. Examples noted within this discussion are dedicated spaces and organisation, involving the people of Scotland in co-production and restitution and repatriation where applicable. Although not all recommendations were observed and some challenges were faced, each museum have their own methods of evaluation that aided them in their strive to address the sensitive subject of colonialism, slavery and empire with truthfulness and dignity. Finally, museum professionals from each exhibition expressed they hope to

incorporate the recommendations more prominently in future work and the acceptance of the government has made the process easier. There is a hope and plan that the Steering Group recommendations will be more prominent in the future as one museum professional noted, “for me it has definitely influenced my work and what we [as an organisation] are doing and it will probably continue to get more important in the coming years” (personal communication, 15 May 2024).

## 5. CREATED SPACES AND EDUCATIONAL EMPHASIS OF CASE STUDY EXHIBITIONS

The exhibitions that have been looked at for this study all show different ways colonialism, slavery and empire can be addressed in different types of museums. Each museum has a different purpose and design thus insight can be drawn to how Scotland's role in empire, colonialism and slavery is addressed and how education is emphasised. The data that was collected to answer this question are interviews with museum professionals to understand the intentions of the curated experiences and both visitor interviews and personal observations combined to evaluate if those intended educational outcomes were met. This section is divided by exhibition.

### **Glasgow City of Empire**

Due to the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum's size and prestige, the exhibition *Glasgow - City of Empire* was the biggest and most traditional in its presentation. The museum is beloved by the people of Glasgow and the museum also receives many visitors from across the UK and the rest of the world. However, despite international popularity the exhibition is very specific to Glasgow and Scotland and its link to slavery, empire and colonialism. It is specifically designed to educate and fill in the gap that schooling and culture have created. The exhibition informs the visitor through different themes such as education, nature and resistance. It raises questions and provides new contexts, writing different perspectives into the history of Scotland and more specifically, Glasgow.

There were several aims that both the curator and the 'Our Shared Cultural Heritage' co-curator intended the audience to learn while curating the exhibition. First, was the overall aim to educate visitors about Scotland's involvement in colonialism, empire and slavery. The exhibition emphasises that Scotland was not a victim but a perpetrator in both the enslavement and colonisation of others and in promoting racist ideologies. Often Scotland dismisses its role because of contentions between Scotland and England but this exhibition emphasises how Scotland benefited from participation in the past and the impact it has had in the

present. This was done through design choice, the use of technology and the contextual information panels that accompanied objects.

The exhibition had the traditional anthropologic design with smaller objects grouped together in display cases and larger objects on a pedestal. However, an interesting design feature was added - open metal frames - which a few visitors observed: “there was a barrier, but these metal frames made it almost like you were leaning in to look into it” (personal communication, 4 May 2024). This also stood out in personal observations, combined with discussions from visitors the consensus being that this design choice was an important feature. It conveyed that the added history and knowledge of Scotland’s perspective in perpetrating colonialism is now open for all to see and invites visitors to look closer as the visitor is physically let in through the barriers.

The messages of deeper knowledge about Glasgow’s involvement in colonialism, empire and slavery were most heavily conveyed through two videos, which were captivating and simple. One video focused on the education system and how the knowledge of Scotland’s involvement in colonialism, empire and slavery had been overlooked. The second video was a tour of Glasgow with a famous Glaswegian actor David Hayman emphasising the benefits these places received from the money and prestige of the slave trade. Both videos were short and direct with the content allowing the onlooker to both learn something new and be able to use that information to interpret the objects around you. Many visitors noted how much they appreciated the videos as not only did it give them a break from reading but also, they were able to recall the information given more easily (*Glasgow - City of Empire* focus group discussion, 1 May 2024). The messages of Scotland’s role in slavery are also reflected in the information panels of the objects throughout the exhibition. For example, many visitors appreciated the glossary that was provided at the exhibition as it answered questions, gave further context and situated itself as a powerful learning tool.

Another aim of the curators was to provide an exhibition that was accessible to people of colour and had a desire for them to feel seen while viewing the exhibition. This was achieved through highlighting the ways colonialism impacted a

range of people, focusing on resistance and incorporating language that is inclusive to all.

*Glasgow - City of Empire* included the perspective of the British Rule of India to show that colonialism impacted a range of people. To many participants this was new information, as when previously taught about colonialism and empire the participation in the transatlantic slave trade is often more heavily emphasised. Participants were encouraged to think about the impact colonialism had on many parts of the world and the individuals targeted by it. This was also done through the theme of resistance. Resistance was shown through poetry and the use of questions. For example, poetry from Asian poets were printed next to the contexts for both the sculpture of resistance fighter Rani of Jhansi (1828-1858) and a beautiful door made from crates from James Findley and Co (1750) who benefited from participation in colonisation (see Figure 1).

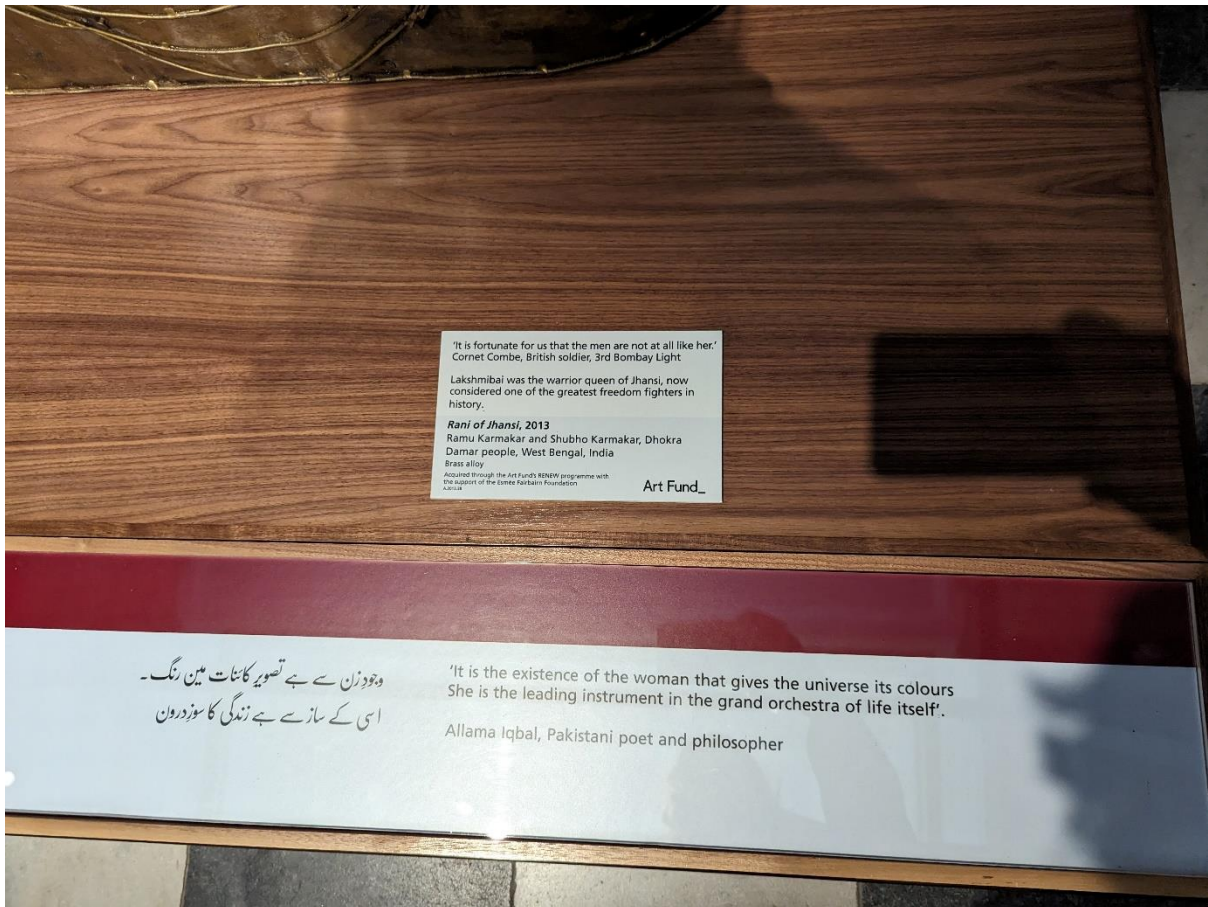


Figure 1: Urdu writing at Glasgow - City of Empire

Giving these artistic words to those who had previously been silenced was an active choice of rebellion and resistance to contrast the usual narrative and techniques used in museums. When discussing Rani of Jhansi, the heroine, the 'Our Shared Cultural Heritage' co-curator wanted to emphasise female empowerment that was prevalent during colonial times. They emphasised that this was not just the telling of history but a place where more space is created for voices of all people (personal communication, 15 May 2024). Lastly, this section used language to provide an exhibition that was accessible and inclusive for a diverse range of people. One museum professional noted that *Glasgow - City of Empire* was the first to use Urdu in its captioning. The poems added next to captions were both written in Urdu and English. This addition, discussed by curators, was driven by a desire for accessibility and for people who speak Urdu as their first language to be seen as well as being able to engage with the exhibition without the need for a translator.

Finally, curators wanted to address the prevalence of present-day racism within the *Glasgow - City of Empire* exhibition. One section of the exhibition addressed police brutality in the UK and invites visitors to reflect on the legacies of racism around them. When interviewing visitors, they brought up in their group discussions that they had a desire for the exhibition to address this topic in a clearer way. When discussing the section on police brutality, however, they automatically reflected on present-day racism. One visitor expressed when reflecting on a graphic painting depicting members of the police force harming a black individual, "the picture with a knife and the police officers was very graphic - Yeah, that was, I mean, that, that one that made me feel like, oh my goodness. That's, that's still going on!" (*Glasgow - City of Empire* focus group discussion, 1 May 2024). Another replied, "when you look at like police brutality and politicians and stuff, it feels like we can talk about it so much, but what's actually changing at the moment?" (*Glasgow - City of Empire* focus group discussion, 1 May 2024). Both responses made the link to present day racism through the reflection on objects in the museum. Despite this reflection participants didn't see racism in the UK as a big problem when compared to the United States of America. One participant articulated "that racism is still really bad in the UK. It's awful. Um, but I think obviously America is also a lot bigger" (*Glasgow - City of Empire* focus group discussion, 1 May 2024). This is a common misconception and deflection that comes with addressing legacies and histories of

colonialism, empire and slavery. So despite *Glasgow - City of Empire's* efforts in drawing attention to the legacies of racism and police brutality in the UK, the confrontation was rejected by visitors. This rejection may have come because of a lack of understanding the content presented or biases the onlooker holds prior to the visit.

Visitors noted some other some challenges that prevented them from engaging in education fully. For example, many visitors noted that the exhibition was difficult to find due to lack of directions and signage. This lack of direction also confused visitors to understand what was part of the exhibition and what was not. Although in discussions with the curator language was made to be easy to read some visitors still struggled when reading captions as some vocabulary was confusing (personal communication 17 May 2024 ; *Glasgow - City of Empire* focus group discussion, 1 May 2024). For example, a visitor expressed “there was bits I didn’t get, bits I didn’t understand even from reading it, I didn’t really take it in”, in regarding a caption that referenced the bourgeois and Karl Marx (*Glasgow - City of Empire* focus group discussion, 1 May 2024). They recognised a few of the words but found that the overall description was difficult for them to understand. They expressed “I would have liked that to be a bit more understandable... there was a lot of words that maybe aren’t friendly for maybe people that aren't higher class. There was good parts in it, but I wasn’t able to understand some of the good parts because of the jargon” (*Glasgow - City of Empire* focus group discussion, 1 May 2024).

Overall, the exhibition *Glasgow - City of Empire* emphasised education throughout its design process. The educational aims made by curators were conveyed in a way that visitors were able to understand. The exhibition does this through the choice of aesthetic design, technology and traditional information panels with a twist. Visitors learned about Glasgow and Scotland’s involvement in colonialism, empire and slavery and the impact the participation had on a diverse range of people through themes such as education and resistance.

### **Curating Discomfort**

*Curating Discomfort* is the result of an institutional change within the Hunterian Museum. Unlike the exhibition at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum it was not made with the intention of educating the public specifically but made to show the public the importance of addressing institutional racism and white supremacy that are embedded in the history of museums. This is why it is called an intervention not an exhibition. This context proves an interesting output to evaluate as an educational tool, because the purpose is not for educating in the same way other exhibitions about empire, slavery and colonialism do. The exhibition was about how objects can be recontextualised to address the colonial narratives of the British Empire. The visual product is about what the museum can do to change and identify colonial narratives with the collections and institutions already instigated. It was very focused on the museum's role and was not specific to Glasgow or Scotland but was very general to Britain. It did focus on the collections from Scottish people and give context to their histories, but the overall themes were relating to the British rather than the Scots. Rather than provide the historical narrative of slavery, colonialism and empire, *Curating Discomfort* is a call to the institution of the museum and how objects are presented or interpreted, it is a self-reflective and self-critical approach to the museum institution and its involvement in re-creating colonial narratives. Although the curator of *Curating Discomfort* was not able to participate in this study there are many public resources that they have produced that detail what they wish audiences to learn from visiting the intervention. The data from this section is taken from these public resources and the personal communications with a community curator who helped finalise the visual product.

Published on the Hunterian Glasgow's YouTube channel in November 2022 is a 'Friday Focus Talk' where the curator discusses three main intentions of *Curating Discomfort* (Hunterian Glasgow, 2022). Firstly, the curator desired visitors to understand that museum institutions have supported white supremacy which was the reason for this intervention. The purpose of the project is conveyed through the information panels at the beginning of the intervention and through multiple videos presented. These panels gave context and guide the visitor to realize that there is more under the surface to what they see, by inviting them to review the artistic depiction of notes from the meeting where white supremacy was discussed with museum professionals. The accompanying video showcased how museum

professionals contributed to the project (personal observation, 16 April 2024). Both the video and visual aid emphasised the importance of listening and how powerful it can be as a tool to understanding how institutions can address the legacies of racism and white supremacy that are prevalent in museum spaces. Despite the abundance of information about the project, there was a lack of clarity in the purpose of the project as only one visitor participant described *Curating Discomfort* as an intervention (personal communication, 17 May 2024). What emerged from interviews and the focus group was that although some learned snippets of the process, overall, the concept was lost on visitors. Visitors understood that the information related to museums and their involvement in empire, slavery and colonialism however they did not make the connection of the behind the scenes elements in tackling white supremacy. The topic of white supremacy was not mentioned in the visitor focus group discussion or interviews for *Curating Discomfort*. One participant did enjoy the artistic visual output of meeting notes however saw it as art rather than a way to depict information (*Curating Discomfort* focus group discussion, 9 May 2024). What can be noted is visual output of meeting notes, while being different and engaging, lacked the simplicity and engagement needed to properly educate visitors. The process and reasoning for the intervention needed to be clearer to help visitors further understand the purpose of the project.

Secondly, the curator of discomfort wanted the intervention to challenge the voices that have historically been reflected in the museum. This was done in the visual output by choosing to add to the information panels that were already there rather than choosing to re-write. The added information gives the reader more historical context to the boxed group of artifacts within the display (personal observation, 16 April 2024). It even asks questions to the viewer and the museum itself to encourage the visitor to reflect on their surroundings. The new information panels are placed outside of the viewing box suggesting that the intervention is encouraging visitors to literally ‘look outside the box’ of what they already know. Adding instead of re-writing provides an interesting technique for education as instead of removing problematic information panels the visitor can learn from them both. This technique was only noted by visitors who had been to the exhibition before. Most participants that visited *Curating Discomfort* did not know if the objects had always been there or if they were added for the exhibition and missed

the interpretation for this focal teaching point (*Curating Discomfort* focus group discussion, 9 May 2024). The exhibition tried to make this clear by colour contrast, using orange for new information panels to contrast to the original white ones, however visitors did not recognise this technique when viewing. However, further clarity in text could have been used to help visitors understand the purpose of the colours and added information panels.

Another way that the exhibition hinted at challenging the traditional narrative of the museum is by using colour. The University of Glasgow and the Hunterian museum's colour of choice for logos, design, pillars and walls is mostly blue (personal observation, 16 April 2024). But the *Curating Discomfort* intervention is orange which is a contrasting colour to blue. This makes *Curating Discomfort* stand out to catch visitor's eye but also has the connotation that what it contains contrasts with what is already there. All participant visitors commented on this colour saying the contrast allowed them to understand where the intervention was. The design emphasises that *Curating Discomfort* is something different, something out of place and something that almost shouldn't be there, challenging what is already in the museum. Despite this bright colour some participants missed parts of the exhibition because of lack of direction between information panels situated in the corner and the artifacts in the middle of the room (personal communication, 3 May 2024).

Finally, the intervention was designed to make visitors feel uncomfortable. The name *Curating Discomfort* on its own conveys that the participant should feel uncomfortable as they view the exhibition. The discomfort is directed at all visitors and was given through the added information panels that questioned the museum and those who collected. Usually, collectors are viewed in a positive light by museums that present the collected objects. The added panels explained their links to colonialism, slavery and in some cases environmental impact (personal observation, 16 April 2024). When asked about the feelings this intervention provoked in visitors, most participants explained that they didn't feel as uncomfortable as they thought they would be (*Curating Discomfort* focus group discussion, 9 May 2024). From the discussion it can be noted that participants struggled to connect to the objects highlighted. Participants struggled to make the connection to themselves arguing that as *Glasgow - City of Empire* focused on

Glasgow and the stories of people who were affected as the reasons they found more discomfort at that exhibition.

In conclusion, curating discomfort meet the aims set out by the curator but with some challenges in visitor engagement and understanding. Participants understood that museum institutions supported white supremacy but struggled to understand the concept of the *Curating Discomfort* project. Participants also understood that the ideas presented were a challenge to the traditional curating practices shown in museum even though finding the content proved difficult. Finally *Curating Discomfort* did put forth discomfoting provocations but participants struggled to find the human connection amongst the content and the artifacts.

### **Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel's home and garden**

The exhibition, *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel's home and garden*, at Broughton House and Garden provides a distinct contrast from the previous two exhibitions. *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel's home and garden* is situated at the house of Edward Hornel, a famous Scottish painter, in a small upstairs room. It focuses on one individual, Hornel, incorporating the souvenirs he brought back from Japan and the diversity of his garden outside (Törmä, 2024). On a first glance the house is not grand or isolated in a park but situated in a residential area near shops in the small town, Kirkcudbright. There were many signs outside advertising the exhibition to the locals inviting the public in. Hornel travelled to Japan in 1893-94 and again in 1920-21 and the exhibition focuses on the flower motifs in souvenir objects, photographs and paintings that Hornel brought back from said travels (Törmä, 2024). The exhibition itself is quite raw as general information panels are located on chairs or on the floor. All objects are in glass boxes following the traditional museum design however it seems out of place within the context of the museum where everything else is open for the public to see (see Figure 2). There were numbers next to each object but no information panels near to correspond to them. However, on the windowsill there were booklets with information corresponding to the numbers and the large panel information included as an introduction. If one was to visit without the intention to learn more,

it would have been a quick stop and onto the other rooms in the house as the space did not produce a welcoming impression (personal observation, 25 April 2024).



*Figure 2: Exhibition of Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel's home and garden*

The exhibition was chosen due to being under the jurisdiction of the National Trust for Scotland. In an email conversation with museum professionals at the National Trust for Scotland, this exhibition was highlighted as one that discussed colonialism and empire, and upon reviewing the associated website there was potential. The exhibition website states:

This idea of ‘plant journeys’ also creates opportunities to reflect on colonial histories. From the 18th century onwards, the British were fascinated with ‘exotic’ plants and desired them for their greenhouses and gardens. Botanical gardens, nurseries and wealthy private individuals employed plant collectors, and non-native plants were distributed and hybridised to create new, more resilient varieties. (Törmä, 2024)

However, in arriving to the exhibition there is no specific addressment of colonial histories except one paragraph found in the general information panel and in the information booklet which can also be found on the website, which is quoted above (personal observation, 24 April 2024). The information booklet details where each plant originated from, with their meanings in those places and scientific names of the plant species and variants. The journeys of the plants to the UK and Hornel’s garden are not given a narrative or context besides the naming of people and dates. For example under the ‘Lily’ section the introduction to the western world is described:

“The tiger lily, *Lilium trigrinum*, was sent to Kew Gardens from China in 1804 by William Kerr (1779-1814). Philipp Franz von Siebold (1779-1814) introduced *L. speciosum* in 1830 from Japan. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century E.H. Wilson (1876-1930) introduced the most easily cultivated of lilies, *L. regale* (white and golden inside, purple outside) and *L. henryi* (orange with brown spots). (information booklet, 2024)

The caption leaves more questions than answers, who were these people? What were their occupations? How did they get their money for travel? Why did they bring these flowers to the UK? How did these flowers make this journey? All of these questions could have been explored by simplifying the text into a narrative. By providing this context or simplification visitors could have the opportunity to reflect more directly on colonial histories.

When in discussion with the curator, they were specifically asked about colonisation, empire and slavery and the connection it had to plants. This offered an interesting discussion where many links were highlighted. They discussed the economic impact colonialism had in reference to plants, such as the expansion of the spice and tea trade (personal communication, 13 May 2024). The curator also

made the link to the travelling of ‘exotic’ plants to the UK came as a result of the practices of trading tea and spice. In the interview with the curator the impact colonial officers had to landscapes was discussed. Colonial officers working in China and India had a desire to create a space that felt like home in the country they were in and used their gardens and plants that were available. When returning plants were brought with them igniting a “Victorian craze for all kinds” for ‘exotic’ plants that was ultimately “quite destructive to the environment” (personal communication, 13 May 2024). This was to create ‘Japanese gardens’ which the curator emphasised the language and naming of such gardens is rooted in colonialism and should not be used (personal communication, 13 May 2024). The curator also discussed the importance of the meanings of plants in their original countries, which is discussed in the accompanying booklet, however there is no commentary to how those meanings were lost as the plants travelled overseas. This line of inquiry, the silencing of these voices, could potentially be linked to colonialism and empire. None of these contexts and links to colonialism were mentioned within the exhibition, due to time constraints inquiring to why these pointers were omitted from the exhibition was unable to happen.

One of the loose connections to colonialism that was emphasised by the curator is the reflection on the influences of other countries. Because travel and colonialism happened there is a diversity of plants within the UK, the curator wanted to emphasise the idea of relating the diversity and beauty of a garden to the diversity and beauty of human beings (personal communication, 13 May 2024). Visitors found this exhibition to be forward focused and concentrating on appreciation of cultures (*Plant Journeys* focus group discussion, 18 May 2024). One expressed the analogy of taking “cuttings for my neighbours and it's not taking away from what they have. It's just that we're both cultivating it together” (*Plant Journeys* focus group discussion, 18 May 2024).

The previous two exhibitions discussed have shed a light on the negative impacts of colonialism and giving detail of issues with explanation however this exhibition omits these negative contexts to focus on a hopeful appreciation. This contextualisation was not beneficial to learning about colonialism and empire. Visitors noted that the repeating of the information and the lack of historical context

gave connotations that the exhibition was a box to be ticked rather than an actual interest of the curator (*Plant Journeys* focus group discussion, 18 May 2024). In discussion with the curator, they did have a passion and understanding of colonialism, slavery and empire that provided great context to their research for their exhibition (personal communication, 13 May 2024). However, this context was not reflected within the exhibition despite the National Trust for Scotland highlighting it as an exhibition about these subjects. The curator's main focus was their work on flowers and plant material and their symbolism within their original cultures, which is heavily emphasised throughout the exhibition. This symbolism and the knowledge to where plants originated from stood out to the visitors and in the focus group discussion, they highlighted that this was something they enjoyed learning (18 May 2024).

Overall *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel's home and garden*, did not meet the standards of the participants in addressing colonialism, slavery and empire. Most focus was placed on the flowers themselves with limited context given. However, in contrast to the other museums the exhibition at Broughton House and Garden entices a positive feeling with visitors to encourage them to look at the diversity around them and appreciate the beauty and knowledge that comes from diversity.

## **Conclusion**

All three exhibitions are different in their design, theme and educational output. All three exhibitions were co-curated with non-museum professionals, *Glasgow - City of Empire* and *Curating Discomfort* benefited greatly from the knowledge and experience their co-curators brought. *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel's home and garden*, had a passionate and knowledgeable curator but a clear lack of museum professional guidance that had a negative impact on the exhibition, such as captions being unclear and poorly contextualised. The three exhibitions had variable success in conveying their intended messages with their visitors. *Glasgow - City of Empire* guided visitors in each step with design, videos and traditional information panels. Visitors were able to understand and learn about Glasgow and Scotland's relationship with colonialism, empire and slavery. *Curating Discomfort* used similar visual cues but added additional information panels to challenge the

traditional voices in museum spaces. Although visitors struggled to understand what the project was they still understood that museums are places that are to be questioned and benefited from empire, slavery and colonialism. *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel's home and garden* although noted as a place where colonial histories can be reflected upon, the exhibition did not have any explicit links to colonialism, empire or slavery. Visitors had to make loose connections such as appreciating the diversity that colonial legacies have left behind.

## 6. PROVIDING SPACE FOR CRITICAL THINKING

Although these exhibitions are different in how they were designed, their purpose and their overall look, each was able to invite visitors to be active critical learners. To answer the final research question, data will be used from the discussions of visitor participants both in group discussions and personal interviews. In these discussions and personal interviews participants were asked about what stood out to them, what challenges they faced and what they learned. It was found that as participants reviewed their thoughts and insights, they demonstrated critical thinking skills that were inspired by the content found in the exhibitions. This critical thinking is beneficial in changing and challenging perspectives about the legacies of colonialism, empire and slavery (Vallance, 2004).

### **Glasgow - City of Empire**

Most participants noted that most of what was presented was new to them. They noticed the gaps that had been in their previous education and general knowledge expressing

I've learned a little bit about British colonialism, like I know it happened, I know they did a lot of terrible things, um, but.. Most of the stuff I learnt from the exhibition was new knowledge to me... I especially didn't know as much about Scotland's or specifically Glasgow's role in it. (*Glasgow - City of Empire* focus group discussion, 1 May 2024).

Others did not comprehend the extent to what colonialism, slavery and empire had on other cultures. Participants noted new information such as colonialism in India, expressing: "I thought we were finding out about like Africa not India" (*Glasgow - City of Empire* focus group discussion, 1 May 2024). Some gained a complete understanding about what slavery was with a help of the glossary and objects. Previously thinking slavery was being a servant in someone's house and not being paid, unlike the reality of exploitation and generational harm that came from the exploiting of others for profit. Through this further knowledge critical thinking skills were enhanced as participants reflected on their own consumerism thinking about

their purchases from unethical places such as Temu and Shein. They also began a discussion about what modern day slavery is and how it manifests itself, evolving again into a discussion of fair trade and workers' rights.

Participants also discussed how they felt throughout the exhibition, the most prominent feeling being discomfort. This uncomfortable feeling stirred visitors to reflect on how one can separate the context from the content. For example, how an individual can enjoy art when the artist is proven problematic or how they now cannot separate the beauty of Glasgow without remembering where the money came from. One participant concluded that reconciling with this history is difficult and that they “got some great things but they came from bad place” (*Glasgow - City of Empire* focus group discussion, 1 May 2024).

Participants expressed critical thinking in response to specific objects. An object promoted critical discussion about language was a children's book, published in 1943, containing multiple uses of the N-word (see Figure 3). This shocked participants not just because of the content of the book but that the book was used to teach children in a day where the use of this racial slur was noted as unacceptable. After the shock, participants critically discussed language and how that is used in both the past and the present. They discussed change and how difficult the process is as there are many barriers preventing people, organisations and governments to choose different paths. One participant commented that there is “a lot of talk about all the things we need to do, but it's still like frustrates me sometimes as it feels like there's barely any action actually happening”. Another object triggered a discussion about what was missing from the exhibition. This was the handmade door made from crates belonging to James Findley and Co, a company that benefited from taking part in the transatlantic slave trade. One participant expressed they were “sad that there was no knowledge of who made the door, although this did make me think of all the nameless people who are forgotten because they weren't seen as important” (personal communication, 4 May 2024). The participant then reflected that in this moment the exhibition was “a lot about what wasn't there”, that the exhibition invited visitors to look

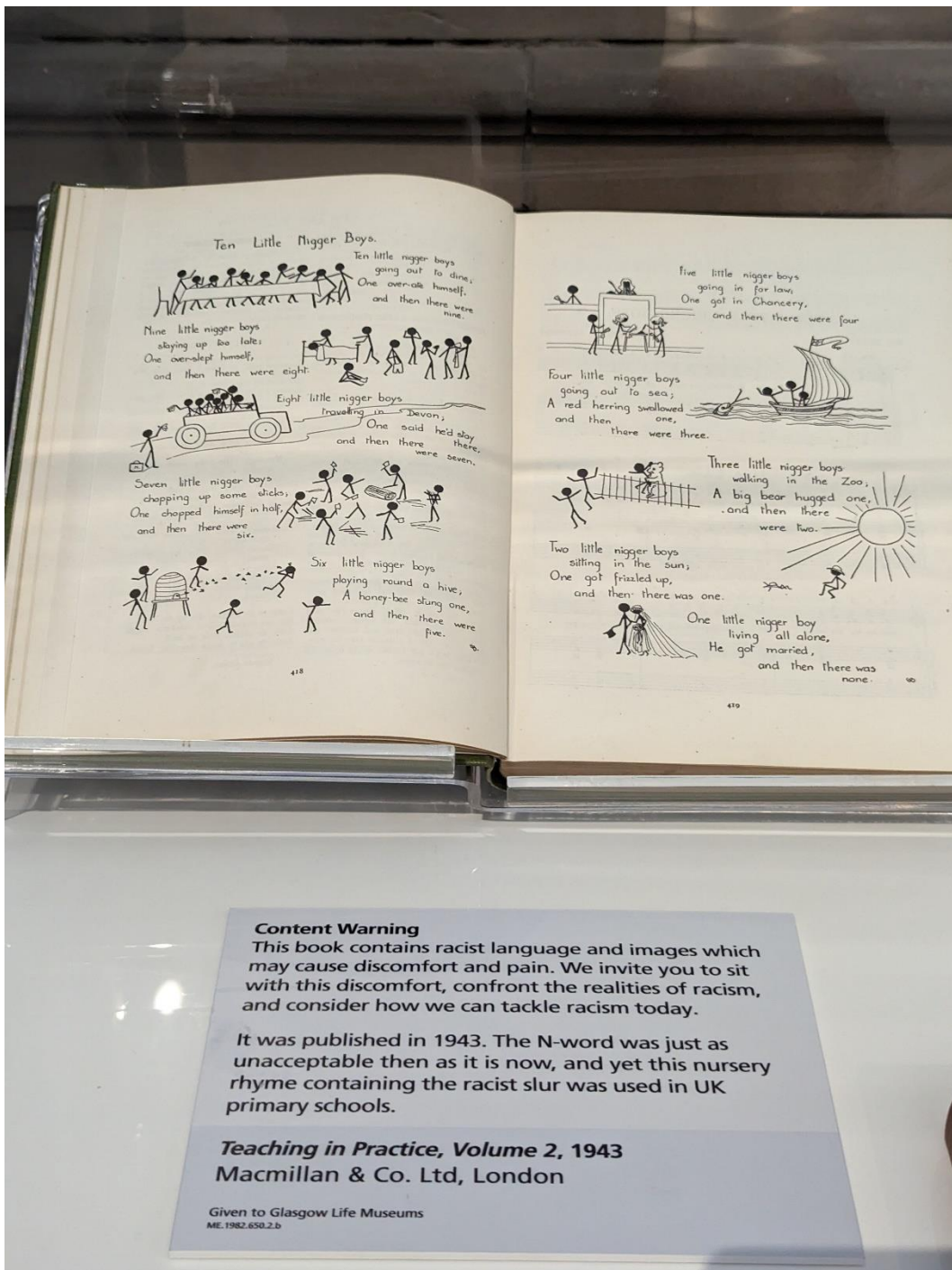


Figure 3: Book displayed at Glasgow - City of Empire

beyond what was in front of them and listen to the silenced stories. These critical observations were stirred by the discussion of the context of the exhibition

In summary, through new knowledge, uncomfortable feelings and specific objects *Glasgow - City of Empire* provided content that facilitated critical thinking both in what was physically there and what was not.

## Curating Discomfort

The visitors had already been introduced to the general topic of colonialism at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, so upon entering this museum some noted they critically analysed the building and questioned where the money for such a grand building had come from. This shows that the previous exhibition provided the participants with increased critical thinking skills as they were evaluating their surroundings before even getting to the content. When participants approached the intervention, comparable to the *Glasgow - city of Empire*, they were introduced to new knowledge. In the case of *Curating Discomfort* participants learned about the complexity of museums and what should they contain.

This intervention sparked discussions of restitution and human rights as participants observed the artifacts around them and evaluated museums generally. One participant observed: “What if they did this at the British Museum?... I think at any museum you [look at] ... every single piece or a lot of the pieces, [there] would be problems about how this was obtained” (*Curating Discomfort* focus group discussion, 9 May 2024). This sparked critical debate about what belongs to who and that there is ignorance and many assumptions made when viewing objects through the eyes of the oppressor. Participants discussed how they came to an understanding of the bias museums have when choosing how history is conveyed in their spaces, particularly who is remembered and who is forgotten. As participants viewed the content outside the exhibition some noticed the Egyptian mummy in another collection and noted:

There is a dead person just sitting here in a museum. And, yeah, obviously it's great to learn about the history but it feels disrespectful to just put a dead body on display even if we can't actually see the body, you know, it's there and it's like this, this feels wrong. They should be allowed to rest. (personal communication, 17 May 2024)

This sparked discussions about what is morally right, critically analysing objects and the museum in that light. Another object that had profound impact was a display of sacred belongings, that should not be shown. Some participants opened up about their own religious practices and how they felt that the museum should not have those sacred objects on display (personal communication, 9 May 2024). Through

personal reflection of their own practices sparked by the contents of the exhibition participants were able to critically analyse the museum's role and provide opinions about the rights of human beings in the present.

Participants also critically analysed the naming of the exhibition, although in the exhibition name most visitor participants would not describe their feelings in attending the exhibition as discomfort. Participants argued that understanding how an object came to be in a museum didn't ignite as much discomfort as stories and perspectives of what humans did which was found in the *Glasgow- City of Empire* exhibition. But similar to the exhibition at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum *Curating discomfort* also ignited conversations about language. The 'Tasmanian devil' was discussed as participants did not know the indigenous names for the creature. There was a further discussion about language, this time about how it is used to be inclusive of cultures and emphasising how using names like taraba and purinina instead of 'Tasmanian devil' is part of the restitution process.

Overall, participants used the critical thinking skills and knowledge developed from visiting the previous exhibition before entering *Curating Discomfort*. The intervention reinforced topics already discussed such as the feeling of discomfort and the use of language but this time in new context. Majority of discussion was focused on human rights and repatriation, discussing how museums can be a more inclusive and kinder place. As a final critical commentary, participants observed from their opinion that the project *Curating Discomfort* addressed issues like restitution but didn't show a lot of action in relation to it.

### **Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel's home and garden**

This exhibition was not focused on colonialism, empire and slavery as previously noted (see Chapter 2). Because of this lack of addressment visitors were able to critically analyse the exhibition for themselves and draw their own conclusions. When asked about their initial thoughts about the museum one participant said:

It's really nice! I've been a little bit wary because I'm like, what's wrong with this? It seems like everything is. Okay. So what am I missing? And you know,

with the other two, exhibitions I kind of needed them to say like this is why it's problematic and Yeah, like here... I'm not getting any of that. Yeah, I think this one is quite different from the other two. (*Plant Journeys* focus group discussion, 18 May 2024)

This shows that as individuals visited more exhibitions, they were using what they had learned previously, and the critical skills developed in each next exhibition. Participants then concluded that the exhibition was not as colonial focused as the others but still strived to find links and topics that were relevant. They discussed the topic of looting and concluded that all the artifacts on display were brought back by Hornel as souvenirs so there was no violence in the obtaining of the objects.

Similarly to the previous two exhibitions, participants were introduced to new knowledge. One participant was surprised to find that *Wysteria* was not native to Britain but to China (*Plant Journeys* focus group discussion, 18 May 2024). This led to a discussion about how plants made their journey to the UK. Participants questioned if the plants were brought to Broughton House and Garden from Japan by Hornel himself or whether plant nurseries were used in his lifetime. They did not find the answer to this question in the exhibition so noted they wished they had had more information about the journey of the plants. Overall, participants noted that the exhibition promoted diversity and addressed the positives of connecting with other countries. They concluded that the exhibition was “not necessarily appropriation but appreciation”. Upon personal reflection while driving home from the museum the cherry blossoms seemed to stand out more than usual. As I reflected back upon the exhibition I contemplated how these trees, native to Asia, were potentially planted where they are - on the side of the road. It is amazing to see how plants not only survive but thrive in a non-native environment and positively affect the area they are currently in.

Through critical analysis of the museum as a whole and in the light of the other two museums, the exhibition provided critical thinking and reflection regarding colonialism, empire and slavery. However, the exhibition itself did not include ignite critical reflection except the desire for more information.

## 7. CONCLUSION

### Summary of Main Findings

In this dissertation, the extent to which the Steering Group recommendations, found in the publication of 'Empire, Slavery & Scottish Museums', were implemented when exhibitions targeting colonialism, empire and slavery have been designed was explored (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022). As a result the study found that the Steering Group recommendations were not actively applied in the case studies shown. Despite its publication in 2002, the recommendations were not regarded by museum professionals until formally recognised by the Scottish Government in January 2024, providing a gap in policy and action (McCall, 2016). However, there were parallels and similarities in the design and output of each exhibition. *Glasgow - City of Empire* and *Curating Discomfort* have created spaces within their museum that address empire, slavery and colonialism which is in line with recommendation one (see page 28 for list of recommendations as reference). *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel's home and garden*, although not meeting the criteria of addressing colonial histories in their exhibition their museum is part of the National Trust for Scotland which has a dedicated organisation to address colonialism, empire and slavery which also aligns with recommendation one. *Glasgow - City of Empire* and *Curating Discomfort* also support recommendation five, mentioning and supporting repatriation and restitution. Finally all three exhibitions were community or co-curated supporting recommendation five. As these exhibitions were not designed with the Steering Group recommendations in mind, similarities were unintentional and other recommendations were not addressed. Overall, the exhibitions were extremely limited in their implementation of the Steering Group recommendations, but museum professionals expressed their desire to address them in future projects. This shows that there is a gap between action and policy regarding the acceptance of the Steering Group recommendations and the implementation of them.

This dissertation also explored how the case study exhibitions regarding Scotland's role in empire, colonialism and slavery are created and how education is emphasised in these spaces. The study found that each exhibition had a different purpose, layout and theme which impacted the created space and how education was emphasised. There was also varied success in conveying intended messages as

well as the outcomes of learning. *Glasgow - City of Empire* used aesthetic design, technology and traditional information panels to emphasise and allow learning to occur. The exhibition was designed to provide knowledge about Glasgow, and Scotland's role in empire, slavery and colonialism, and visitors expressed this was new knowledge to them. The exhibition also strived to show the diverse range of people colonialism, empire and slavery effected. This was successfully done through themes of resistance and education, and the inclusion of the Urdu language. *Curating Discomfort* was a visual output of institutional change rather than an exhibition specifically targeting education. The intervention desired visitors to understand the institutionalised racism that is prevalent in museums through the use of colour, technology and the artistic conveying of behind the scenes meeting notes. The intensity of information lacked clarity and was not visitor focused. This resulted in visitors not understanding the specific details of the project. Still, the overall concept was conveyed that museums are colonial through the use of objects, questions and new information panels. *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel's home and garden* did not provide education about colonialism, empire and slavery despite the National Trust for Scotland recommending the exhibition as one that does. The exhibition was the closest National Trust for Scotland site to Glasgow that mentioned colonial histories on their website which was why it was chosen for this study. Being a historic house museum, there are certain challenges to educate visitors about specific subjects as visitors are less inclined to read in the house environment and would rather explore and experience. However, the information for this exhibition did not facilitate a great learning experience as text was confusing and there was a lack of context. Visitors did not learn about colonial histories from this exhibition and were left with more questions than answers from the exhibition as a whole. This shows that exhibitions are a place where education can occur, however the type of museum and design of exhibition has an impact when learning about colonialism, empire and slavery.

Finally, this dissertation investigated in what ways the exhibitions focused on provide a space where the visitor is invited to be an active critical learner. To summarise; the three exhibitions were very different in terms of the extent to which they engaged the visitor critically and what that required from the visitor. *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel's home and garden* required nothing

from the visitor as all information was given and there was no specific measures taken to invite the visitor to critically assess the information given. The only link to the world around them was perhaps viewing flowers in a different way due to the origin of the plant. *Curating Discomfort*, on the other hand, was quite demanding regarding the intellectual accessibility of the visitor, which impacted how the visitor interpreted the details of the project. Still, there were very clear occasions where curating discomfort facilitated critical thinking for example through engaging the visitor in questions about whether objects should be in a museum. Visitors were then able to analyse museum objects displayed in other areas of the museum and lead to discussions about restitution and repatriation. *Glasgow - City of Empire* not only provided a space where new knowledge was learned but critical thinking also followed as visitors were able to reflect on their own consumerism and how that has an impact today. The exhibition also inspired visitors to think critically about how they view objects, art and buildings in Glasgow as they think about the exploitation that is, or may be, in the context. Finally, through objects within the exhibition, visitors were able to critically think about what wasn't there and what they wanted to see more of. Overall, the exhibitions about colonialism, empire and slavery provided a place where the visitor was able to engage in active critical thinking. As participants visited each exhibition, starting with *Glasgow - City of Empire* and finishing with *Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian plants in Hornel's home and garden* visitors thinking skills evolved as visitors were more inclined to critically assess and express these observations as the study continued. This study shows that critical thinking can occur in exhibitions targeting colonialism, empire and slavery and as these skills are recognised, they can evolve to critically thinking outside the targeted exhibitions.

### **Limitations of Study**

Notwithstanding these insights the study has limitations. Firstly, the sample size of exhibitions and participants was restrictive. As the Steering Group recommendations are only beginning to be implemented there were only a small number of case studies that could be analysed. As discussed, the timing of the recognition of the recommendations and the design of the exhibition was a limitation.

The results of this study cannot be generalised to the whole of Scotland due to the small sample size and the sample being non-representable to the population. All research projects have some experimental bias, this study being no different. Although restraints were put in place to avoid such biases from having affect the researchers' expectations and design may have affected the outcomes.

### **Directions for Future Research**

This study can be a stepping point in further research. The study could be replicated with larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalisability of findings. The study can also be replicated in different areas of Scotland if case studies are found. As museum professionals emphasised that the Steering Group recommendations would be used in future planning, this can be evaluated. The results of this study can lead to the examining of how action to polices change over time. This study also offers future investigating of how to meet challenges facing polices. For example, the Steering Group recommendations and their implementation in future exhibitions. Because the exhibition at Broughton House and Garden did not link to colonialism, empire and slavery this raises a question for future studies regarding to what extent historical house museums can be effective in teaching about colonialism, empire and slavery.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study provided understanding into how the Steering Group recommendations are regarded and implemented in current exhibitions about colonialism, empire and slavery. It shows that there is a gap between policy and action and describes some challenges for implementation that should be addressed. This study also shows that museums can be a place where education can occur. Through the exhibitions it was noted that visitors learned information that the curricula neglects. Exhibitions where colonialism, empire and slavery are addressed are also places where visitors can expand on their critical thinking skills, through concentrating on different narratives outside the authorised heritage discourse,

participants were able to have wider conversations and see links to the world around them.

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## APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM AND INFORMATION SHEET FOR MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS

### Informed Consent Statement

#### IntM Education in Museums and Heritage Dissertation

I understand that Rhona McLaughlin is collecting data in the form of a recorded interview for use in her dissertation for the International Master's degree Education in Museums and Heritage at the University of Glasgow.

I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for this project and that the researcher has answered any questions I had to my satisfaction;

I confirm that I am 18 or older, and can give consent to participate in this research;

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, without having to give a reason and without any consequences;

I understand that I can withdraw my data from the study at any time;

I understand that due to the nature of the study I cannot be completely anonymous and my role and link to the museum will be identifiable;

I understand that my interview will be recorded, and this recording will be kept on a password-protect computer until the degree has been finalised (no later than December 2024), at which point Rhona McLaughlin will delete it; and

I understand that the recording of my interview will be transcribed, and that Rhona McLaughlin will refer to this transcript in their dissertation for data analysis.

Tick as appropriate:

I consent to take part in an interview.

I agree to the terms for processing of my interview as outlined above.

I would like the following special conditions to be associated with my interview and transcript (optional):

I,

(PRINT NAME OR PSEUDONYM)

hereby agree to take part in the above project.

Signature of Participant:

Date:

## **Participant Information Sheet**

### **IntM Education in Museums and Heritage Dissertation**

You are being invited to participate in an interview. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information about the project and do not hesitate to ask questions if anything is not clear. My contact details, and that of my supervisors, can be found at the end of this letter.

#### **About the project**

My name is Rhona McLaughlin and I am a student in the International Masters degree Education in Museums and Heritage cohort of 2022-2024. I am currently collecting data for my dissertation in which you have been invited to participate.

My dissertation's focus is on investigating how exhibitions about slavery, empire and decolonisation in Scotland are designed, implemented, experienced and educationally beneficial. The purpose of your participation would be to compare the desired outcomes of educational themes presented by curators with the experiences of the audience. Your interview will be analysed alongside data collected from discussions with visitors who have attended your curated exhibition and an analysis of the exhibition done by myself.

#### **What does taking part in the study involve?**

If you agree to take part in the study, an interview with me would involve spending as little or as much time as you are comfortable with talking about your experiences - ideally about one hour. The interview will be conducted online using Zoom at a mutually convenient time. You will also be offered a list of interview questions prior to the interview.

Any interview has the potential to touch upon sensitive or upsetting topics, though it is not my intention to do so. Please note that you can choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Likewise, you may stop the interview at any time. If you wish, you can also change your mind and decide not to take part in this project at any time.

## **What will happen to your interview?**

The interview would be recorded and then transcribed to create a written version that documents exactly what you have said on paper. The interview transcript will be used in the data analysis portion of the dissertation.

You have the right to put your own name to your interview recording and transcript, but a pseudonym will be used linking your comments to your role and museum. Due to the specificity of contexts, you may be identifiable, you will not be able to be completely anonymous as your role and link to the museum will be discussed throughout the dissertation. Pseudonymisation will take place at source and in the presentation of findings. *If there are any concerns about this, please let me know and we can come to an agreement that will make you comfortable and able to participate.*

Data will be collected, managed and stored as regulated by Data Protection Act and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU2016/679) and only the researcher will have access to the raw data. Copies of your interview and transcript will be kept on a password-protected computer until the degree is finalised (no later than December 2024), at which point the copies of these materials will be deleted. If you would like a copy of the interview recording or transcript, please let me know and I would be happy to provide this to you.

I ask that you consider these issues and if you agree to participate, be interviewed and for your interview to be so used, to complete the Informed Consent Statement (attached separately). *If you have any questions or would like to place any special conditions on your participation in the project, please feel free to contact me to discuss this.*

Please note: there will be no negative impact to you if you choose either not to participate in the project or not to allow me use to use the resulting materials. Should you decide not to take part, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your attention and for considering my project.

If you have any specific questions about the research, please contact either me or my supervisors using the following contact details.

### **My Contact Details:**

Rhona McLaughlin

Email

Personal: [rhonamclaughlin8@gmail.com](mailto:rhonamclaughlin8@gmail.com)

University: [2257722M@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:2257722M@student.gla.ac.uk)

**Supervisors:**

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Dr Margaret McColl

College of Social Sciences

School of Education

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## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS**

### *Questions that relate to Research Q2:*

#### **For Curators/ Community Curators:**

1. What was the process of curating your exhibition about colonialism?
  - a. Where did the initial idea come from? What was the biggest influence/inspiration when curating this exhibition/s?
2. What messages were you hoping to convey through this exhibition?
  - a. What educational and curatorial methods did you use to create/convey these messages?
3. How would you describe the 'ideal visitor' to your curated exhibitions? (Lindauer, 2005)
  - a. Which group of visitors did you think about when you planned this exhibition? Do you do anything specific to appeal to these groups of visitors?
4. To what extent did you collaborate with education professionals, such as teachers, when producing your exhibition?

#### **Slavery, Colonialism and Empire:**

5. Why do you believe conversations about colonialism are important?
6. How did you build your knowledge about colonialism, slavery, and empire? - any outside sources?
7. How did you convey your passion and the importance of the topic of colonialism and slavery within your exhibition/s?

#### **For Museum Professionals at the National Trust for Scotland:**

1. What is your role at the National Trust for Scotland?
2. In what ways do you work with different museums in their efforts to teach about slavery, empire and colonialism or In what ways do you work with different museums to initiate the Facing our Past project?
  - a. Do you oversee exhibitions? Provide training? Etc

3. Why do you believe conversations about colonialism are important?
4. How did and do you build your knowledge about colonialism, slavery, and empire?
  - a. Training or any outside sources?
5. How do you convey your passion and the importance of the topic of colonialism and slavery within your work?
6. You sent me an extensive list of exhibitions that the National Trust for Scotland have done about colonialism and Slavery. - do you have a favourite project or one that had the most impact to you or the community?

***Questions that relate to Research Q1:***

The Scottish Government provided sponsorship for recommendations for how empire, colonialism and historic slavery can be addressed in museum collections and spaces. The project resulted in the publication of the independent Steering Group's guidelines 'Empire, Slavery & Scotland's Museums' (Museums Galleries Scotland, 2022). The recommendations are emphasised nationwide and include advocating for a dedicated space to address Scotland's role to be created, anti-racist attitudes embedded in museum workspaces and continual research and education of Scotland's links to empire.

The Six Recommendations:

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** Scotland should create a dedicated space to address our role in empire, colonialism, and historic slavery. A new organisation should be created to lead this work.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** Museums should ensure anti-racism is embedded in their workplaces and public spaces.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** Museums should involve the people of Scotland in shaping their work through co-production, to promote cultural democracy and participation for all.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Museums should commit to research, interpret, and share the histories of Scotland's links to empire, colonialism, and historic slavery.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Museums should support efforts to promote and embed race equality and anti-racism in the curricula in a meaningful, effective, and sustainable way.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Scottish Government should demonstrate their support for restitution and repatriation of looted or unethically acquired items in Scottish collections

1. Have you heard of the Steering Group's 2022 recommendations "Empire, Slavery & Scotland's Museums"? YES/NO

IF SO:

1. What is your opinion/ initial thoughts on the Steering Group's recommendations for museums about slavery and colonialism?
2. Have they been implemented when planning your exhibition and how? Or Why not?
  - a. What has the implementation consisted of so far (e.g. other exhibitions, educational programs, collection work, community relations, cooperation with activists and other public history organizations, etc.).
3. Is there anything about these recommendations that makes their implementation a challenge for you or the museum? Can you give examples of this?
4. Which of the Steering Group's recommendations seem most important to you?
5. Are these recommendations collectively discussed at the museum?
  - a. What were these discussions about and how were the conclusions reached?

IF NO:

1. Have you observed the slavery commemoration in the museum and in person and discussion about it?
  - a. For example: in the media?

2. Which topics have come to the fore for you the most and how have you reflected this in your curatorial activities?

***Questions that relate to Research Q3:***

1. What are your expectations for visitors to your exhibition/s? How can they engage with the exhibition/s?
2. What do you believe is the most important thing for visitors to take away after visiting your exhibition/s?
3. Are there any evaluation tools to help gauge your goals for this exhibition?
4. What has the reception of the exhibition has been like?
  - a. What are your thoughts about this reception?

## APPENDIX C: OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

### Prior to Museum Visit:

1. Have you been to this exhibition before?
2. How did you know about the exhibition?
3. What do you remember about your previous visit/s?
4. Do you remember what stood out to you?
5. What are you hoping to learn from the exhibition today?

### During the Visit/ Post Visit Questions:

1. What is the exhibition about?
2. What do you think the curators trying to convey?
3. How did they convey this message?
4. How do you relate to the subject?
5. What do you like? / What stands out to you?
6. What don't you like?
7. What have you have learned?

## APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM AND INFORMATION SHEET FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

### Informed Consent Statement

#### IntM Education in Museums and Heritage Dissertation

I understand that Rhona McLaughlin is collecting data in the form of a recorded interview discussion for use in her dissertation for the International Masters degree Education in Museums and Heritage at the University of Glasgow.

I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for this project and that the researcher has answered any questions I had to my satisfaction;

I confirm that I am 18 or older, and can give consent to participate in this research;

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, without having to give a reason and without any consequences;

I understand that I can withdraw my data from the study at any time;

I understand that if I wish to be anonymous, I can use a pseudonym and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available;

I understand that my interview will be recorded and this recording will be kept on a password-protect computer until the degree has been finalised (no later than December 2024), at which point Rhona McLaughlin will delete it; and

I understand that the recording of my interview will be transcribed, and that Rhona McLaughlin will refer to this transcript in their dissertation for data analysis.

#### Tick as appropriate:

I consent to take part in an interview.

I agree to the terms for processing of my interview as outlined above.

I would like the following special conditions to be associated with my interview and transcript (optional):

I,

(PRINT NAME OR PSEUDONYM)

hereby agree to take part in the above project.

Signature of Participant:

Date:

## Participant Information Sheet

### IntM Education in Museums and Heritage Dissertation

You are being invited to participate in an interview. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information about the project and do not hesitate to ask questions if anything is not clear. My contact details, and that of my supervisors, can be found at the end of this letter.

#### About the project

My name is Rhona McLaughlin and I am a student in the International Masters degree, Education in Museums and Heritage cohort of 2022-2024. I am currently collecting data for my dissertation in which you have been invited to participate.

My dissertation's focus is on investigating how educational exhibitions about slavery, empire and decolonisation are designed, implemented and experienced in Scotland. The purpose of your participation would be to compare the desired outcomes of educational themes presented by curators with the experiences of the audience.

#### What does taking part in the study involve?

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to visit the following exhibitions and take part in an interview to discuss your experience.

The exhibitions:

1. *Glasgow: City of Empire* at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow
  - a. Focus group discussion to be held on an agreed upon date during the first week of May
2. *Curating Discomfort* at The Hunterian, University of Glasgow
  - a. Focus group discussion to be held on an agreed upon date during the second week of May
3. Plant Journeys: Stories of East Asian Plants in Hornel's Home and Garden at Broughton House, Kirkcudbright

- a. Focus group discussion to be held after the visit on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 2024

You have the freedom to explore the exhibitions at a time convenient to you and at your own pace but would be best to do so as close to the date of group discussion as possible. The first two exhibitions are situated in the west end of Glasgow and are free to visit. The third exhibition is £8.50 for an adult to enter and is further afield in Kirkcudbright, so a day trip will be organised to visit there as a group on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2024 for all who can attend. *If you are unable to attend the third exhibition for any reason, participation in the first two exhibitions discussions would still be greatly appreciated and beneficial to my study.*

After visiting these exhibitions, a group discussion with other participants will be held to discuss what you have learned and experienced. A focus group discussion would involve spending as little or as much time as you are comfortable with talking about your experiences - ideally at least one hour. The group discussion will be held in an accessible location and comfortable environment at a convenient time for most group participants. *If you are unable to attend the group discussion or would prefer an individual interview this can be arranged. This individual interview would be conducted online using zoom at a mutually agreed upon time.*

Any interview has the potential to touch upon sensitive or upsetting topics, though it is not my intention to do so. Please note that you can choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Likewise, you may stop the interview at any time. If you wish, you can also change your mind and decide not to take part in this project at any time.

### **What will happen to your interview?**

The group discussion or personal interview would be recorded and then transcribed to create a written version that documents exactly what you have said on paper. The interview transcript will be used in the data analysis portion of my dissertation.

You have the right to put your own name to your interview recording and transcript or, if you prefer, to be anonymous (in which case your name will never

be used publicly). I can also remove any personally identifying information from the transcript, if you so wish. This protects your legal rights. I will keep copies of your interview and transcript on a password-protected computer until my degree is finalised (no later than December 2024), at which point I will delete my copies of these materials. If you would like a copy of the interview recording or transcript, please let me know and I would be happy to provide this to you.

I ask that you consider these issues and if you agree to participate, be interviewed and for your interview to be so used, to complete the Informed Consent Statement (sent separately). *If you have any questions or would like to place any special conditions on your participation in the project, please feel free to contact me to discuss this.*

Please note: there will be no negative impact to you if you choose either not to participate in the project or not to allow me use to use the resulting materials. Should you decide not to take part, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your attention and for considering my project.

If you have any specific questions about the research, please contact either me or my supervisors using the following contact details.

#### **My Contact Details:**

Rhona McLaughlin

Personal: [rhonamclaughlin8@gmail.com](mailto:rhonamclaughlin8@gmail.com)

University: [2257722M@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:2257722M@student.gla.ac.uk)

#### **Supervisors:**

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Department of Ethnology

Professor of Oral History and Memory Studies

University of Tartu

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Dr Maria Brown

Department of Arts, Open Communities & Adult Education

Faculty of Education

University of Malta

Email: [maria.brown@um.edu.mt](mailto:maria.brown@um.edu.mt)

Dr Margaret McColl

College of Social Sciences

School of Education

University of Glasgow

Email: [Margaret.McColl@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Margaret.McColl@glasgow.ac.uk)

## APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

### Prior to Museum Visit:

1. What did you previously know about Scottish (or British) colonial history before visiting this exhibition or participation in this project? (To identify what preconceptions and knowledge they go to the exhibition with.)
  - a. Have they been following what is written in the media about the transatlantic slave trade? What criticisms have caught their eye (if any). [come back to this at the end if nothing is brought up]
  - b. Did this in any way guide/influence their visit and the way they viewed the exhibition?
2. What did they expect/expect this exhibition to be like? (What were your initial thoughts about the exhibition before you went in?)
  - a. and what did they find/not find?

### Reflections on the Visit:

1. What do you like? What stands out to you?
2. Was there anything you didn't like about the exhibition? Or what challenges did you face?
3. What is something you have learned?
4. How did you feel as you were walking through the exhibition?
5. If you could describe your experience at the exhibition in one word, what word would you choose? And why?

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I, Rhona McLaughlin

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Colonialism, Empire, and Slavery in Scottish Museum Exhibitions: A Qualitative Evaluation of Policy Implementation for Critical Learning Outcomes,

supervised by Dr Ene Kõresaar, Dr Maria Brown & Margaret McColl

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*Rhona McLaughlin*  
*08/11/2024*