The Summer 2020 Debate on How Britain Commemorates Its Past			Cambridge Heritage Research Centre
Interview Date:	27-07-2020	Interviewer:	Tom Crowley
Interviewee:	Aleema Gray	Organisation:	Museum of London
Position:	Community History Curator		

Interview Between Tom Crowley (University of Cambridge) and Aleema Gray, Community History Curator at the Museum of London. 27-07-2020

Tom Crowley 0:01

Okay, so we're recording now. I'm Tom Crowley from Cambridge University speaking to Aleema Gray from Museum of London. What's your job title again Aleema? I've just forgotten.

Aleema Gray 0:15

Um, Community History Curator.

Tom Crowley 0:18

Great, thank you. And we're on the 27th of July 2020. And Aleema, as we've just discussed, you're speaking in your professional capacity, of course, but that will, no doubt be also inflected to some extent with your personal perspective on these questions. So, the first question is: has your museum done anything which engages with the legacy of slavery or colonialism in recent years? And that's prior to this summer's Black Lives Matter movement.

Aleema Gray 1:03

Yes, we have. The main sort of example would be, of course, our London, Sugar and Slavery gallery, which is at the Museum of London Docklands. And it's a gallery that speaks or that tries to critically engage with London's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. That was a gallery that opened in 2007, so of course it came about during a moment when a lot of museums were thinking and reflecting about how Britain can sort of document and acknowledge these histories. And what was different about this gallery was that it was put together by a community advisory panel. And the community advisory panel particularly spoke to the lived realm which is, which is quite often overlooked within curatorial practices.

So, it was made up of a lot of people that could speak to the lived experiences of what it means to be African-Caribbean in London today. And so, because of that, it was trying to, kind of, move beyond a Euro-centred narrative of London's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. And so that came about in 2007. And so, as a part of that gallery, there was

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this idea that it should be used as the sort of vehicle for community engagement. And so, with the gallery came a series of programming, a series of events, a series of workshops, and so forth, [unintelligible] from families to schools to various different audiences to engage with these histories. Unfortunately, the high moment of that gallery has— at some point dissipated as a result of cuts and so forth. And so, the Museum has introduced Curating London which is a project that I'm working on with a particular responsibility for the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery to think about how we can re energise these conversations. And so, these are all things that was happening prior to the upswell of the Black Lives Matter protests that we've recently seen. But yeah, I'm hoping I answered that.

Tom Crowley 3:28

You did an excellent job, sorry, yeah, I'm speaking as little as possible. Just—

Aleema Gray 3:33

That's okay.

Tom Crowley 3:35

You know, like, people want to hear the people I'm interviewing not me. So, in this video I normally make encouraging faces, so sorry, it's a bit of a one-sided conversation. Um, so the next question is: has the recent Black Lives Matter protests, the recent Black Lives Matter movement over this summer influenced Museum of London policy going forwards? And if so, can you expand on why these decisions were made?

Aleema Gray 4:12

Absolutely, I would definitely say there's been multiple different changes that has happened. Mainly just the sort of conversations that's been happening around the Robert Milligan statue, which is a statue that sort of sat outside the Museum of London Docklands. A statue similar to Colston: the statue of a slave owner and commemorating his life and works. And so obviously, having a statue such as Robert Milligan, outside of a museum that deals with such sensitive histories was always presented challenges within my work and within, obviously the audiences that came to the museum to remember and pay homage to those that lost their lives and the ongoing legacies around slavery. So the conversations that's happening around the Milligan statue and the support that the museum has been giving to the activists, to the local communities that have sort of, I guess brought further support to removing this statue, has been one way in which the

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museum has sort of backed local community voices. Which has been really good to see, and it's been good to be a part of those conversations.

So that's been one aspect of it— thinking about how our role as a museum— thinking about responsibilities and thinking about how we can acknowledge, you know, acknowledge statues in their rightful position has been quite a— Yeah, it's been an important change that has come about from the Black Lives Matter movement.

But also, internally, so thinking about what it means to be Black within the museum, arts and heritage sector today. And I think the Black Lives Matter movement has meant that a lot of the senior management team has been— has seen the need to actually take a lot of the conversations that was happening underground, or silent conversations, and put it to the centre of thinking about anti-blackness, anti-racism and so forth. And so, a lot of the conversations was thinking about how the museum can learn and unlearn. And also, quite importantly, drawing on staff networks, such as the BAME network as a part of the Museum of London as well. So, for an example, the museum released a statement in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement. And the statement for the network was ill-equipped and was quite offensive for a lot of the members of the network. And so, as a result the network put together another statement.

So, through those conversations, it was very uncomfortable. There was a lot of emotions. But through those conversations, it sort of showed how, you know, through conversations through communication and through actually just listening to the voices that has been underrepresented and silenced within the sector there has been some changes in terms of drawing on networks, drawing on the experiences of BAME members of staff and thinking about how we can make the museum more of a— I guess, a safer place for Black and BAME members of staff as well, which has been a an important outcome of the Black Lives Matter movement.

I'm trying to think what else has changed? Yeah, basically just yeah, it's definitely just turned these conversations— It's just basically shown the need to take these conversations very seriously, within the sector, and I think the um— Yeah, and to think about— and it's also, I guess, given people like me, I am Black— giving people like me just more of a sort of wider global village of support to voice some concerns that, I guess for a lot of people like me would be more of a, you know, side conversation that you might have. And now I've been feeling a lot more empowered to be like, actually, these things that I've been feeling I know they're wrong, and I'm going to put it forward. And yeah, I think it's, um, a lot of processes of just learning and unlearning which has been very difficult, very uncomfortable, very taxing, but also obviously very much needed in the current climate that we're living in.

Tom Crowley 9:00

Thank you very much. Thanks. I've got one little question about, um, yeah, what you've just told me. So the statement that you and your colleagues in the network prepared after the initial Museum of London statement wasn't satisfactory, did the Museum then take the statement that you prepared and issue it on behalf of the Museum?

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Aleema Gray 9:26

Kind of but not really. So, they— we worked together to write another statement, but I think the statement— they edited it a little bit, so they mixed the original statement with the BAME network statement. And in the end as a network, the network wasn't satisfied with the final statement, even though the statement had changed from the initial statement, because it was still sort of blurry. I think the main problem was just the not being committed, not being I guess strongly committed to anti-racism. And yeah, the statement was more about diversity and inclusion. Whereas as a network, we felt that there needed to be more of a kind of strong commitment to anti-racism and looking specifically at Blackness and what that means in terms of the museum sector. Whereas the statement that the Museum produced was— not only the statement, but also the processes in which it was produced, which I guess happens within a lot of you know— within a lot of institutional settings is that the communication the internal communications and consultation between particularly members of staff that could speak to this lived realm was completely overlooked. So it wasn't just the statement, but it was also the processes that went into forming that statement had left out networks such as the BAME network, which would have been a crucial source of information for that statement to be produced, if that makes sense? But in any case, they did make a final statement. But the final statement was still— as a network we didn't feel it was as equipped as it should be to put out there. And so we asked to remove our name from the statement in the end, which is a bit of a shame. It was a bit of a shame, but as a network we decided that would be the best— yeah, the best decision to take.

Tom Crowley 11:35

Thank you for elaborating on that, it's very interesting. So, the next question, which you may feel that you've already answered, but I'm just going through these questions very formulaically in every interview, so it's consistent across all the interviews we do with different museums. So, the next question is: has the pulling down of the Colston statue and the ensuing debate influenced your plans going forward? And again, if so, can you explain why you made these decisions?

Aleema Gray 12:12

Absolutely. I think it really represented a real turning point within the conversations, particularly in thinking about Black Lives Matter. There was one aspect of it— I guess it started out as feeling like it was showing solidarity to our brothers and sisters in America. And then the conversation turned into thinking about sites of memory and what that means for those who have been, I guess, silenced with these regimes of whitewashing history. And once the conversation turned into thinking about how we can acknowledge these histories, and how Black Lives Matter expands into so many, multiple different aspects of being— like it's you know, under surveillance with postcolonialism, colonialism, the colonial afterlives, and so forth. Once that statue in Bristol was removed by the community, there was already internal conversations within

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the museum thinking about, okay, what position can we take on the Robert Milligan statue because we saw that there would be an upsurge of people thinking and looking at sites that uphold these sorts of— yeah, these really violent histories that have dehumanised so many of the communities in London and Britain today.

There was already this sort of sense of panic about how we can position ourselves in relation to the statue that sat outside of the Museum of London Docklands, so as soon as that statue was removed, there was you know, a kind of need to take a stance on okay, if someone was to bring up the Robert Milligan statue, what as a museum are we going to say about it? Obviously, we supported the removal of the Robert Milligan statue. And, you know, we had already tried to really think about removing it before that point. And so, as a museum we took the position that it would be best to sort of support any campaigns to remove the Robert Milligan statue. And so— and I think it's also influenced it in thinking of— in also thinking about how we can connect these conversations across Britain. And I think it goes into the difference of, you know, national museums. Because obviously, Museum of London is not a national museum. But thinking about a lot of the work that I'm doing around the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery. It's very similar to the work in Bristol, the work in Glasgow, and so forth. So how can we connect these conversations as a sector to learn and as I was saying to unlearn and to draw on support in terms of processes, and so forth. So, I think, yeah, multiple different layers of like the domino effect, both internally and externally.

But definitely the statue being removed by members of the community in Bristol forced the museum to take a strong position on that statue and some people didn't like the position that the museum took. It's a very obviously contested topic. But yeah, but essentially it forced the museum to make a decision on such statues. And it's a thing that we understand that we have to sort of tread very carefully in terms of, all right that statue has been removed, what does that mean going forward? Which is a similar conversation that happened in Bristol, you know, what happens to that statue now? What happens with what's outside of the museum? And whose voice is going to be at the table in that process? Who should be at the table? And so these are conversations that are happening across Britain across, you know, across national museums. And yeah, I think it is the need to connect these conversations which the removal of the statue definitely sort of put forward.

It's so weird, it's so strange talking [with no response] because, yeah— I'm sorry.

Tom Crowley 16:31

I'm sorry, it's not really a proper conversation. We can have a little chat afterwards and then it will be more like a real conversation if you if you have time. That's normally what happens. Yeah, so it's not really fair. I've got one little question, just on what you said. Would it be possible just to tell us a tiny bit about the history of the Milligan statue: when was it made, when was installed outside of Museum of London Docklands?

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Aleema Gray 16:58

Absolutely. It's got quite a complex history. So I guess the statue came about when the warehouse was erected in the early 1800s, but it also has moved as a result of— I think in the 1940s it was moved temporarily, but basically I can't remember if it's 1996, but in the mid-90s it was erected in what you see as the statue today or what you had seen as a statue today. And that was a decision that was taken by the Council members but also the Canal and River Trust, which is the landowner for that statue at the moment. So it was it was a very strange situation because the even though it had such a big, even though— I guess you can see it as part of— it wasn't part of the Museum of London Docklands' collections or the Museum of London's collections. But of course, it heavily spoke to a lot of the themes that is articulated in the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery. And also it's sat outside the front door of the Museum of London Docklands, so there was always conversations about why do we have a statue like that outside of a museum that is, you know, trying to create this sort of ethical or I guess, a social justice framework within these narratives of sensitive histories and so forth. But because the Canal and River Trust are the landowners, we didn't really have any say in terms of what happens with that statute.

But basically, it was erected in 19— in the in the mid-90s. And then it's been there. It's been in that position until the very recent events that led to obviously removing the statue, and whilst it's been there, it's shared a very uncomfortable presence within the sort of landscape of the Docklands area, and particularly within the curatorial work behind the Museum of London Docklands as well. And there's other I mean, I keep talking about statue but it's not only the statue. You have Hibbert's Gate as well, which is at the back end of the museum and so the area the Docklands area in itself is now—

Tom Crowley 19:37

What's Hibbert's Gate? I've never heard of it.

Aleema Gray 19:37

Oh, so it's the gate that he sort of entered the Docklands— so basically the history, being very brief— not like sort of talking over myself: the Museum of London Docklands was basically a sugar warehouse. As you might know, maybe—

Tom Crowley 20:03

I don't actually know. I don't know I'm ashamed to say.

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Aleema Gray 20:06

Okay, that's fine. Okay, so maybe that makes sense. So that whole area that the Museum of London Docklands is nestled in was basically a magnificent structure of warehouses that stored sugar and other items that came from Caribbean, but mainly sugar. And so the Museum of London Docklands is a sugar warehouse essentially, and it's only two of the remaining 11 warehouses that was put forward and represented and, you know, offers a glimpse of the scale of London's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. And it was put together by the West Indian merchants, one of which was Robert Milligan, who statue is outside of the museum but also Hibbert, George Hibbert, who, you know, was also a slave owner as well. So, these rich wealthy, white British men sort of established the Docklands area. And so a lot of the material, a lot of the sort of remnants— there's a strong remnant of this sort of West Indian merchant culture in the Docklands area, one of which is the Museum of London Docklands, which is a warehouse, also the Robert Milligan statue, but also the Hibbert's Gate, which is where you sort of entered this Imperial structure. And so, these things are very much things that I guess are the physical sites of London's involvement in the slave trade. I mean, London was like fourth in terms of the scale of transported enslaved people and profits gained from the slave trade as well and so the Docklands area really speaks to this, not only in terms of how it was established, but also in terms of, you know, when you look at places such as Canary Wharf and so forth, you know, there's these real remnants of, I guess, financial gain that came as a result of enslaved labour. And so that still exists today. And there's a lot of research and work around it.

I personally, I can't really speak to it too much, because I'm more of a modern historian. And my research more sort of focuses on post Windrush, but there's a lot of research that has been going out in terms of looking at— I know, UCL and their slave— they have a website— a lot of projects, basically, that's going out tracking, tracing the money of the Hibbert family, of the Milligan family and so forth and looking at the names of streets and so forth, because there's this idea that, you know, slavery is in the past and I think that what these statues such as the Hibbert Gate, such as Robert Milligan, Colston, it reminds you that actually this idea is part of this regime of whitewashing history and removing this narrative of the legacies and its impact and how it's felt today in Britain. And so, these statues represent this physical manifestation of that, if that makes sense? That's sort of interrupting this, this narrative that: Oh, it's in the past, it doesn't really matter anymore. We apologise and in fact, we abolished slavery. So, yeah, I mean, it's very complicated. It's very complex. And I could get into it, but essentially the whole area is just marked with remnants of slavery. And so that is in fact the reason why the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery came about in the first place. Because we saw that there was not only a need to document the experiences of those who worked in the Docklands area in the East End, but also actually, you know, the way in which the impact has been felt— how this area actually represented the third cornerstone of a dehumanising trade. And so the gallery acknowledges that and tries to centre the experiences of those who— Yeah, of figures such as Robert Wedderburn who was of mixed heritage who also pioneered the abolition movement and so forth and these voices in history that has been removed as the results of these sort of—

Tom Crowley 24:39

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When was the gallery opened again?

Aleema Gray 24:41

So, the gallery was opened in 2007. Yeah, as a part of that move to mark, the 200 bicentenary, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. I think that it came at the same time that the National Maritime Museum's gallery opened as well. And so yeah, sorry. I feel like I'm just waffling.

Tom Crowley 25:07

No, the more information the better. So, it's much appreciated. Thank you. The more information this archive has, the context— yeah, when people answer at length, that's good news. The last thing we want is very short answers, so thank you. So next question: has the website Topple the Racists influenced your response?

Aleema Gray 25:39

No. To be honest I've never come across that website.

Tom Crowley 25:48

It prompted some institutions, some museums. I think you acted actually before it appeared.

Aleema Gray 25:55

Okay, maybe, maybe. But yeah, no, I didn't come across that website before you mentioned it actually.

Tom Crowley 26:03

That's fine. It's just— I'm going through the questions formulaically. So, the next one: has the organisation Museum Detox influenced your response as a museum?

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Aleema Gray 26:17

I mean, we have the powerhouse Sara Wajid, who is the Head of Engagement. I think she's one of the cofounders of Museum Detox. I know she's very heavily involved in the Museum Detox network, and so her just being here, or, you know, having her presence within the Museum, it means that there's this kind of energy, this Museum Detox energy anyway. And I think it's particularly important that she's, you know, she's a senior member of staff. So it does mean that in terms of policy and in terms of understanding, activism, and museum activism, and what that means for people of colour within these organisations, it means that there's this sort of, I guess, this strong representative. So, for me, I wasn't thinking okay, let me let me talk to, let me consult museum detox. No, I think everything was happening so quickly. I think the fact that Sara Wajid is a part of the Museum and is the Head of Engagement. It means that she was very much a part of these conversations as well. And she came in from a Museum Detox point of view and thinking about drawing on the right resources, the right people, the right training, suggesting points, whether it's, you know, anti-racist training, which was put forward, as you know, a sensible follow up as a result of the Black Lives Matter protests and so forth. So, it means that Museum Detox essentially is felt throughout the Museum as a result of having such a core member, cofounder of Museum of Detox in such a senior position, it's, it's been amazing.

Tom Crowley 28:12

Great, thank you. Okay. Um, so the next question: do you plan to address the legacies of slavery / colonialism in displays or other public areas in your museum going forward? And when you do that, what resources do you draw on? Who do you consult?

Aleema Gray 28:38

Absolutely, of course, we will. I think the main aim for the museum as it stands is thinking about how we can re energise the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery, and to update it within our contemporary climate. Because, of course, it's been over 10 years since that gallery was curated and like many things, you know, expectations, experiences have changed, the younger generation has risen up and so forth. So how can we keep that gallery relevant? I guess particularly to the audiences and the history that's been negatively impacted by the themes in that gallery as well. So that's the key sort of point in thinking about— even as a strategy for the museum there's already been conversations around what does the Museum of London Docklands strategy look like over the next five years?

There was this idea in the last five years for instance, that Museum of London Docklands is a family museum. And for me, the word 'family' is an unstable term anyway, within the context of museum audiences, but what does it mean to have family audiences as your main audience for a museum that deals with such histories? And so those are the questions that we have to think about moving forward and thinking about I guess, one of the things I'm doing as a part of Curating

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London, which is a contemporary collecting project that seeks to put lived experiences at the forefront of curatorial practices, and my particular responsibility for London, Sugar and Slavery gallery, is thinking about how we can expand our remit, expand our audiences, and I guess develop more critical dialogue that can drive the discourse of that gallery forward into the contemporary world that we're living in. So, we're already thinking about how do we collect? I don't like the word collect, because I find it's a bit triggering, but like how can we acknowledge the unequivocal experiences of BAME communities during COVID-19? For example, what does that mean?

And so thinking about how we can expand our collections, and how we can expand our audiences and how we can energise the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery, in terms of the contemporary climate that we're living in today is for me personally speaking, and professionally speaking, this is the direction that I'm moving towards. And the only way you can do that is thinking, I think you mentioned it in the question, but it's definitely thinking about decision makers. You know, when it comes to how do we collectively reflect, and then invoke actions according to our reflections, if that makes sense, and who are the decision makers in this process and who needs to be invited to the table.

So when the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery was formed it was curated by community advisory panel. We need a community advisory panel around the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery now to take that forward. It cannot be me alone. And so these are the things that as a museum, we need to think about strategically. Not only thinking about inviting people to sit down at the table, but actually how is this table a safe space for people who need to be at the table? You know? So multiple different layers, essentially, it's very complex. But definitely, I think moving forward in terms of, you know, strategically thinking over the next five years. I think with the Black Lives Matter movement with all of the conversations that's been happening even outside of Black Lives Matter movement, and just the lived realities of what it means to be BAME within the sector today, it does mean that galleries that are speaking to these histories need to do it properly. And it needs to obviously take— museums are moving towards this whole idea of decolonizing -whatever that means-, within institutional practices, but moving to a kind of democratic approach, democratising history, decolonizing the way in which we work is definitely at the forefront of what we're doing. Even outside of the London, Sugar and Slavery gallery we've been thinking about the new museum project as well: how do we represent histories of migration, forced migration and so forth? It is at the heart of what we are doing and what we're looking to do over the next five years.

Tom Crowley 33:17

Okay, thanks. Yeah, so this next question is kind of the same thing: future plans relating to colonialism, legacy of slavery, but in this case -we have covered this some extent already- but not related to display so much, but things like, you know, the education team, recruitment, commissioning artworks and so on, working with artists.

Aleema Gray 33:50

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I think there's a real— I think one of the things that I've witnessed in a lot the conversations I've been drawn into because of the role that I'm doing, not only because of the role, my responsibilities, but also because I guess I'm actually I am the only Black curator in the museum at the moment, which isn't shocking, to be honest. But in any case, a lot of these conversations, it's not really talking about permanent representation in terms of the boards of trustees in terms of Directorate positions, when it comes to thinking more critically about power. It seems to be like there is a step back, if that makes sense? So, there's no conversation that's kind of like: Okay, how can we recruit? How can we diversify our recruitment process in a way that actually commits to there needs to be some form of representation within the sector. There hasn't really been any confirmed commitment, you know, to that, which I think needs to happen.

Because what tends to happen is that people, particularly people from, I guess, underrepresented backgrounds are invited in, but within a temporary sort of framework. And so of course, there's conversations about, for instance, the Robert Milligan statue that has been removed, what to replace that statue? Perhaps it shouldn't be a continuing artistic response from African and Caribbean communities. But obviously things like that is very temporary. So, it's okay to bring in a freelancer, for instance, for our schools programme to perform I don't know, Mary Seacole, but what does that actually mean in terms of permanent changes? I think there needs to be definitely a mix between these you know, temporal and permanent changes across the board in terms of representation and diversity and so forth.

I hate the word diversity, but I have to use it in this instance, but I think yeah, definitely, in terms of thinking about schools programme, there's already been conversations around— I guess these conversations was happening anyway and this is probably one of the reasons why the Black Lives Matter movement, even though it existed outside of this COVID 2020, but perhaps why it had such a high moment, because these are conversations that was very much bubbling. And then it just so happened that, you know, a couple of months ago, the world discovered that actually, wow this is happening, and this is bad. Whereas 10 years ago, people who was negatively impacted like me was aware that this is happening, but nobody was listening.

So it's good that the world is— the media, the sector and so forth— people are starting to stop talking and actually listen and even though it's very tiring, I think, you know, this process needs to happen. But at the same time, I think for me, the changes seem to be very much performative and seem to be very much temporary. And it doesn't seem to critically draw on how we can think about power. And actually, sometimes it's about giving up your seats, you know, but when it comes to that conversation, people don't really want to commit themselves to that as much, but they want to commit themselves: Okay, let's just get someone in for a three month contract to design a painting of, you know, African women in Jamaica, or something, reimagining the female slave and enslaved person, you know, but it's very much like temporal. It's very temporary, it's very— it's not transformative in the sense that it should be. Because it's fleeting. It's part of the Zeitgeist. And so for me, it's like: how can any change that we move forward doing, whether it's schools programme, whether it's, you know, workshops and so forth, how can it be embedded internally in the centre in the core and not be existing in the margins? And that is a conversation that I don't think people are having here. And they need to have it basically. I'm not sure, did that answer the question?

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Transcribed by: Tom Crowley
Participant permissions to record given ☑
Date of transcription: 30-09-2020
Participant permission to archive given ☑

The Summer 2020 Debate on How Britain Commemorates Its Past			Cambridge Heritage Research Centre
Interview Date:	27-07-2020	Interviewer:	Tom Crowley
Interviewee:	Aleema Gray	Organisation:	Museum of London
Position:	Community History Curator		

Tom Crowley 38:29

Yes, I'm keeping quiet but yeah, it was a very good answer. Thank you. For what that's worth. So the final question. And yeah, so this is like a University of Cambridge project, we are interested in research. Obviously, you have your own academic research and the Museum of London commissions and does its own research, but our question is, anyway: what would you like to understand better in terms of making decisions concerning the legacy of slavery and colonialism?

Aleema Gray 39:16

That's a good one. That's a very good question. I'm just trying to think, where do I start? I mean, quite a few things. Number one, I guess the gallery, the London Sugar and Slavery gallery, tried to do this. And they did it very well in fact, at the time. Obviously, it needs to be updated, but thinking about Black experiences in Britain outside of a narrative of slavery. And I know that Caroline Bressey, Catherine Hall, there's a number of professors and academics that are, you know, Hikkim Adi, that are doing research to document that. And to think about, yeah, how I mean, I know it's a question about like slavery and colonialism, but how can we also position Black experiences and Blackness in general outside of thinking about slavery? And so, there's a few— you have Equiano, who wrote the book, who was local in Deptford and bought his freedom and so forth. And then you also have Billy Walters, who was a performer and travelled the world and so forth. So how can we highlight the figures in history, Black figures in history, that start to tell this story, this narrative, this experience outside of slavery and furthermore adding to that how can we also draw on the conversations that's happening between— about Blackness in general?

So, I think Pan-Africanism speaks to that. So, I feel like curatorially we need to— I guess I'm interested in looking at the experiences of colonialism, slavery and so forth but outside of this binary notion of Black and White. So there's always these histories of Black people fighting against White people and white people oppressing Black people, which obviously is a reality, but what becomes powerful is actually curating these histories from below from a perspective of Black organising, in terms of what are the networks for instance between um you know, Marcus Garvey's UNIA for instance, organising from New York to London to Jamaica. What does it mean to organise within if that makes sense? You know within and below. When you look at figures such as C.L.R. James, when you look at figures such as George Padmore, you know, Du Bois. What does Black organising look like outside of a binary notion of Black and White? How do we connect these conversations between the African diaspora and the African continent? You know, so for me in terms of understanding the legacies of slavery, I would really be interested in moving beyond this victim narrative and this narrative of once again Europe needs to empower the African diaspora of Black people to have a voice and actually move beyond this narrative and actually centre it more in terms of Black radicalism, Black organising, outside of these binary notions of Black and White. Does that make sense?

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Tom Crowley 42:58

It makes sense. It makes perfect sense.

Aleema Gray 43:02

Yeah, so I guess I would find that more powerful— looking at the themes of history in terms of understanding how empires work. So, when you look at the Japanese Empire, or when you look at monarchy, for instance, thinking about the Ethiopian monarchy, how did the Ethiopian monarchy organise and how does that compare with the British monarchy? I feel like that is a part of the decolonial work, understanding that Ethiopia had a monarchy that traced back to, you know— I'm probably getting off myself in terms, but what does that mean in terms of Henry VIII and what's taught in school? So how does that compare? So, for me centring a narrative of Ethiopian monarchy also means decolonizing in a way, as opposed to constantly speaking about victims and sufferation and so forth. I feel like now we're in a new phase of trying to actually create a narrative of history, that sense of humanism— But yeah, sorry, I'm going off. Hopefully I answered the question.

Tom Crowley 44:34

No, it does. It's best in interviews when people, yeah— Well, you did stick to the question. But yeah, I can say that the more detail, the more thoughts, the more valuable the archive. So, thanks. I'm going to stop the recording unless you have anything else you want to kind of, you know, say for the record, or add?

Aleema Gray 44:55

I don't think I have anything I want to say, no. Thank you.

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