Clara Arokiasamy OBE

The Management of Race Equality, Decolonisation and Rights-Based Approach in the UK's Cultural Heritage Services

Interview by Regine Hess

For the past three decades, Clara Arokiasamy OBE has been an advocate for integrating race equality and anti-racist policies and practices into the protection and management of tangible and intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the United Kingdom (UK). This is to ensure that the histories and heritages of people of colour are brought from the margins to the centre to form an integral part of the UK's national story. She has also shared her experience and expertise internationally through her membership of global networks, including the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). She writes and speaks regularly on race equality and heritage, diaspora heritage and intangible cultural heritage.

We are delighted to have secured an interview with Clara for *kritische berichte*. Our project, A Future for *whose* Past? The Heritage of Minorities, Fringe Groups and People without a Lobby (referred to as AFFWP here on) provides the framework for this interview. This project has been organised by the ICOMOS-Suisse's Heritage Year 2025 working group to celebrate the forthcoming 50th Jubilee of the European Architectural Heritage Year 1975. The AFFWP aims to include objects of minorities in Switzerland in the national inventories of monuments, to shed light on overlooked or hidden aspects and narratives of Switzerland's cultural heritage, and to increase the proportion of members from minorities in decision-making and management around preservation. We have defined nine areas of discrimination which the project will address: gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, class, language, disability age and language. In cooperation with representatives of discriminated groups and with museums and other centres of expertise, the AFFWP will collect voices, stories, places and objects and use them as a basis for exhibitions, events and teaching, advised by a scientific and a civil society advisory board.

The focus of this interview is on rights-based approaches (RBA) in the context of heritage and preservation, and to explore some lessons that could be learned from the UK and the rest of continental Europe. We are particularly interested in how anti-racist policies and practices or equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) or decolonisation approaches contribute to the promotion of RBA in the management of heritage in UK museums and galleries and monuments and sites. The AFFWP is aware that decolonising heritage is an indispensable contribution to creating greater equity in society. So we invited Clara to share her experience in addressing racial inequalities in heritage management.

Although Clara is the President of ICOMOS-UK, this interview represents her personal point of view as someone who has been working with culture and race equality for a long time.

kritische berichte 52, 2024, Nr. 1. https://doi.org/10.11588/kb.2024.1.101454

Regine Hess (RH): Dear Clara, could you please briefly introduce yourself to our readers who come from the fields of art and architectural history, historic preservation, and museums in the German-speaking world?
Clara Arokiasamy OBE (CA): Firstly, thank you for asking me to give this interview. It is a privilege to share my experience and knowledge with you. I am Black British of South East Asian heritage. I refer to myself as Black because it is a political identity which I have grown up with since the 1970s. So in this interview I will use the terms Black and people of colour (PoC) interchangeably to refer to people of African and Asian descent.

I am pleased to note that the aim of the AFFWP is to empower marginalised communities to tell their own stories in collaboration with heritage and educational organisations. It sounds like a major exercise designed to put people at the heart of the stewardship of culture and heritage.

I am a strategic planner by background. For most of my career, I have planned and managed public services for local governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with culturally diverse urban and rural populations. Planning and delivering arts and heritage services have formed a critical component of my career to date. I have also spent a lot of time on diaspora heritage and the promotion of intangible cultural heritage. I founded and chair ICOMOS-UK's Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2022. I felt it was important for communities and heritage practitioners to be aware of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and why and how they needed to be safeguarded for future generations. I am delighted to say that after 20 years of resisting ratification, the UK Government announced its intention to ratify the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s 2003 *Convention for The Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* [link 1] on the 23rd of December 2023. The ICH Committee played a pivotal role in bringing about this change through its promotion of the importance of ICH and representing ICH practicing communities' interests at national and government levels [link 2]. The UK is also witnessing the emergence of new genres of ICH resulting from the fusion of traditions practiced by its super diverse communities, over many decades. These need to be safeguarded to prevent their loss to the nation.

As an independent consultant I advise on developing evidence-based anti-racist/inclusive policies and capacity-building for grassroots communities, undergraduates and postgraduates, and cultural practitioners. I write and speak about the need for framing research, cultural policies and processes within an inclusive race equality framework for changing demographics in the UK and Europe, especially those with established diaspora communities and newer migrants fleeing conflict, discrimination or climate change or who migrate for economic reasons.

I am neither a resident nor a national of Switzerland. However, I have had some exchanges in the past with Swiss people and heritage professionals engaged in the conservation of built heritage and ICH through my work with civil society organisations and international networks, including ICOMOS and UNESCO.

RH: Could you tell us what a rights-based approaches are in the management of heritage?
CA: Rights-based approaches (RBA) are based on human rights principles and standards found in a variety of documents including, treaties, charters and conventions

adopted at international, regional and national levels. This pluralistic nature of RBA does not lend itself to a single, internationally agreed definition. However, the lack of definition has not prevented its widespread acceptance globally and its use in international development programmes (including cultural programmes). The fundamentals of RBAs are about ensuring respect and support for rights in practice. There are three key principles that underpin the RBA. They are the rights to: participation and inclusion, equality and non-discrimination and accountability and transparency. It is contrasted with needs based approach (NBA) thus shifting the focus from individuals and groups' needs to universal and inalienable rights; therefore, applicable to everyone rather than just to individuals and groups as is in the case of NBA. RBA is designed to address root causes of problems such as structural injustices. It empowers citizens or rights holders to ask of the duty-bearers (government, formal bodies responsible for services, owners) for their right to be fulfilled. RBAs are legally binding and states have responsibility to implement them.

RBAs integrate human rights-based approach (HRBA) into the identification and conservation of heritage, including the integration of standards and principles into cultural heritage policy planning.

The concept of HRBA is rooted in the principles of the United Nation's (UN)'s 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* [link 3] and the 1966 *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* [link 4]. The UN programme for reform launched in 1997 called for the mainstreaming of HRBA into the activities and programmes of all UN entities (including UNESCO) and came into effect in 2003 [link 5]. The HRBA is a single approach and is concerned with the identification of rights and duties and the recognition of ‹rights-holders› and ‹duty-bearers›.

In 2009 the UN's Human Rights Council «established the special procedure for an ‹independent expert in the field of cultural rights›». The mandate for the rapporteur for «Mapping cultural rights: nature, issues at stake and challenges» [link 6] defines cultural rights as the rights of individuals, communities and groups «to develop and express their humanity, their world view and the meanings they give to their existence and their development». Among other things, the rights are related to «values, beliefs, convictions, languages, knowledge and the arts, institutions and ways of life» and access to heritage. The protection of rights is extended to the resources needed for «identification and development» methods.

An important point that comes through from the mandate for the rapporteur is that the rights are not just about the protection of the products (culture or heritage), but they also include the promotion of conditions that allow all people to «access, participate and contribute to all aspects of cultural life» within a framework of equality, human dignity and non-discrimination.

UNESCO's statement on mainstreaming HRBA to programming distinguishes two key constituents in capacity building within its development (programmes) cooperation: ‹duty-bearers› and ‹rights-holders›. ICOMOS launched its Our Common Dignity: Rights-Based Approaches Working Group (OCD-RBAWG) in 2011 [link 7]. As an advisor to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, ICOMOS, through its OCD-RBAWG is supportive of HRBA. The OCD-RBAWG has worked on integrating RBA into World Heritage processes and heritage management generally. It defines rights-holders as individuals or groups of people with statutory and customary rights relating to a particular site(s). The groups may not share the same interests in the site(s). It describes duty-bearers as those who represent the State Party's responsibilities and

duties when dealing with a World Heritage Site. As the State is commonly responsible for designation, it will therefore hold overall duty and responsibility for the management of sites. Indigenous Peoples may also be duty-bearers.

RH: How has the UK managed the implementation of rights-based approaches?
CA: The UK is an UN member state and a signatory to the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the 1966 *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, and supports the principles enshrined in them. It has also ratified the 1965 UN *Convention on Racial Discrimination*. The UK is a State Party of UNESCO and has ratified several of its conventions: for example, the 1972 *World Heritage Convention*, the 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* and the 1951 *European Convention on Human Rights*. Additionally, the UK has its own laws designed to prevent racial discrimination and enable access to public services (including cultural services) for people of colour, starting with the 1965 *Race Relations Act* (RRA). This was aimed at the prohibition of racial discrimination in public spaces in the UK and was in part a response to the race riots in Notting Hill, London, (and Nottingham) in 1958 caused by tensions between Black migrants and working-class white residents, and the killing of a Black man Kelso Cochrane in Notting Hill, in 1959. A Caribbean Carnival was organised in the same year by the Black activist Claudia Jones to smooth tensions and as a response and protest to the riots and the state of race relations at the time. That carnival born out of resistance was a precursor to the now internationally famous Notting Hill Carnival, an annual cultural event which attracts more than 1.5 million people. The 1965 RRA was improved on by successive race legislations in 1968, 1976 and 2000 [link 8].

The UK's current *Equality Act* (2010 EA) brought together 116 pieces of legislations, including gender and disability discrimination laws, and came into force in 2010 [link 9]. It provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals who fall into one or more of the nine protected groups of characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (in employment only), pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. A critical feature of the 2010 EA is the duty of all public bodies, including those providing cultural services, to carry out regular Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA). It is voluntary and aimed at ensuring the needs of all individuals are considered in the planning and delivery of services, and protected groups are consulted and involved in shaping employment structures and services.

So, it could be argued that the UK has had a long trajectory of implementing elements of HRBA and RBA. In principle, the UK's national discrimination law combined with international conventions have provided opportunities to deliver HRBA in the public services. The translation of it into practice, however, has varied. Health, social care, housing and education services made visible efforts to deliver anti-racist and culturally diverse models, which took account of Black peoples' needs and their representation in their workforces. The cultural sector was, however, slow in utilising the legal provisions at its disposal to make significant changes in the way it engaged with Black communities or involved them in the interpretation of its vast African and Asian collections until the enactment of the 2010 EA and the advent of the London Mayor's Commission's inquiry, which I will discuss later in this interview. Inevitably, Black practitioners, activists and communities were critical of the sector's lack of cultural offer. The main promoters of Black culture in London

were local governments who, under the 1976 and 2000 legislations, provided grant aid and made space for Black cultural activities in their annual arts programming.

The need for a serious consideration for HRBA in the cultural sector was brought to the forefront by a high-profile, seminal conference, *Whose Heritage*, in 1999. In his keynote address, Stuart Hall, a well-known cultural theorist, called for African and Asian histories and heritages to be brought in from the margins and to be told as part of the national narrative to reflect centuries of Black people's presence in the UK and the inextricable connections between Britain and its Black communities resulting from the British Empire, colonialism and Transatlantic Slave Trade (TST). The event, supported by the government and key national arts, heritage and funding agencies, was a critical development in drawing attention to, among other inequalities, the marginalisation of art and culture produced by young Black artists which were ignored and/or relegated to second-class status. It revealed the poor interpretation of artefacts extracted from Africa and Asia and the lack of Black presence in the cultural sector's workforce to challenge inaccurate narratives, and diversify interpretation and programming. For the first time, Black communities and activists were in the same room as the policymakers and leaders from cultural agencies. I attended the conference in my then role as a new Deputy Director of the Heritage Lottery Fund which was a distributor of lottery monies to heritage projects in the UK; the Fund was a key sponsor of the event. The Black communities had not had a fair share of lottery and other funding either. The excitement over the change the conference promised in diversifying heritage was palpable among the audience. The conference did stimulate a period of positive work among the various cultural agencies and included transformational projects such as the London Mayor's Commission and Task Force. In my opinion the *Whose Heritage* conference laid a strong and pioneering foundation for change which is ongoing, albeit slow with stops and starts.

Another critical event added to the pressure the cultural sector was already under. The commemoration in 2007 of the bicentenary of the abolition of the *Slave Trade Act* brought additional attention to the cultural rights of the Black communities in the UK. It was the first opportunity for many people of African and Caribbean heritage and the wider public to openly research and discuss the history of the TST and the legacies of the violence towards, and dehumanisation of, Black people it had caused. Inevitably, many cultural agencies came under pressure from the Black communities and other campaigners to use their collections to interpret the TST story. Black communities also pushed for the co-curation of exhibitions by cultural agencies with Black academics, activists and communities as equal partners, the creation of permanent exhibitions and galleries, and the exploration of the TST in schools. Two permanent galleries in London – the London, Sugar & Slavery gallery at the Museum of London Docklands and a gallery at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich – are key examples launched in 2007. Curated closely with Black people, for the first time, each told the story of the TST using different themes. The early 2000s leading up to the 2007 commemoration also witnessed many debates about restitution of objects and reparation, and placed decolonisation of UK's heritage firmly on the heritage agenda. The term decolonisation became synonymous with cultural diversity, which until then formed the commonly understood principles of HRBA.

It is also important to highlight that language used to describe HRBA policies, practices and projects relating to the management of Black peoples' heritages has

evolved with the changes in UK's discrimination legislation. It has also been influenced by civil rights and racial justice trends in the USA and other nations internationally, and international conventions which promote HRBA. The terms ‹race equality› and ‹anti-racist approach› were widely used in the 1980s to describe HRBA. This was replaced by ‹social justice› in the 1990s. Cultural ‹diversity and inclusion› became the buzzwords in the 2000s and remained popular until around the second decade of this century, when ‹decolonisation› became the preferred term. In the last few years, the term ‹equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)› has appeared to be gaining momentum.

RH: Could you cite examples of HRBA work in the UK in which you have been involved?
CA: It's not easy to select examples of work from a career spanning three decades. All projects I have undertaken are worthy of mention. Given the time constraint, I will restrict it to the twin political processes led by the then Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone: the London Mayor's Commission for African and Asian Heritage (MCAAH), implemented between 2003 and 2005, and the subsequent Heritage Diversity Task Force (HDTF), which had a remit to implement the MCAAH recommendations. They were ground-breaking political processes set up in response to years of complaints from African and Asian communities about the neglect and marginalisation of their histories and heritages in the UK's cultural sector.

Contrary to the belief among many people in the UK that Black people arrived as immigrants during the 1950s, their presence across the UK dates back 500 years or more well before post World War II. Records show that in London there were people of African and Asian origin as early as 1772. The city was a trading and financial hub and the capital of the British Empire and colonial expansion. For example, places that traded in slave-harvested products, such as West India and East India Docks and Jamaica Wharf, indicate the connections with the Empire and slavery. Buildings such as the British Museum, which holds collections purchased partly with money from slavery by its founding father, Sir Hans Sloane, and the Benin Bronzes, which were obtained as part of an aggressive and violent expansion of the Empire, are also reminders of the shared history between Black and white people of Britain.

Additionally, African and Asian Londoners fought in the first and second world wars for Britain. As residents and citizens, they had made significant contributions to London's economy through jobs, income and wealth creation. Their dynamic contributions to arts, heritage, poetry, literature and music played a critical role in making the capital's cultural heritage one of the most vibrant and multi-cultural in the world. Regrettably, the major cultural institutions stewarding the vast collections of Black heritage objects, buildings and sites often failed to make these shared histories and stories visible and accessible to Black people and the city's wider community as part of the national narrative. Where attempts had been made, the interpretations were unimaginative, lacked depth and/or were inaccurate. The arts and heritage programming ghettoised Black culture into seasonal events like the annual Black History Month which took place during October. Programmes tended to focus on festivals, dance, culinary traditions, hair grooming and fashion, language and postwar migration and were repetitive. The short-term funding afforded to Black heritage made such programmes unsustainable.

Whilst complaints of racism and racial discrimination in society resulting in institutional and structural racism in services and employment were widely debated

in other public services, the cultural sector very rarely engaged with it or examined its own institutions for such racial inequalities. Instead, it attributed the poor representation of Black people in its workforce and governance largely to the lack of suitably qualified Black people with relevant skills, knowledge and experience. The few Black staff that were employed were concentrated at the lower levels, usually in administrative and front-of-house roles with little or no promotional prospects. Cultural agencies also resisted the integration of Black heritage into their core business strategy. Instead, Black heritage was delivered as one-off initiatives which were short term and largely reliant on external funding which affected the sustainability of the projects. The cultural heritage sector had not responded adequately to calls for change over many years from Black academics, educationalists, practitioners and community activists. This inevitably led to anger and frustration among the African and Asian communities.

The census figures released in 2001, a couple of years before the Mayor's Commission was convened, showed that London's Black population comprised 30% of the total of around 9 million people. For the first time, PoC formed the majority group in two of London's boroughs: Newham and Brent. Many of them were second and third generations who resented the systematic erosion of their cultural rights and identities as Black British. Consequently, MCAAH was seen as the first response of substance from politicians which showed that Black Londoners mattered and were being listened to.

RH: So what did the MCAAH and HDTF process involve?
CA: In my view, MCAAH and HDTF were two of the most transformational political processes in the cultural history of London and the UK. Doubtless, the 1999 *Whose Heritage* conference which I mentioned earlier had a role in catalysing this response.

The mayor tasked the Commission to produce an overall London-wide strategy for the preservation of African and Asian history and heritage and increase its accessibility to all sections of society. Twenty professionals from the African and Asian communities with expertise in the arts, heritage and education sectors were appointed as Commissioners. A parallel advisory group of more than 20 representatives from major heritage agencies in the capital was assembled to assist the Commission with the development of an inquiry process. Commissioners were tasked with producing a programme of actions including policy and practical interventions which responded to the marginalisation and under-representation of African and Asian histories and heritages. These were considered to have been caused by the legacy of inequality resulting from elitism and institutional racism, especially among some high-profile cultural agencies. The Commission gathered evidence through a highly intensive inquiry process. It comprised 15 sessions held across London to assess heritage services to the Black communities and the needs of the African and Asian community network engaged in championing and delivering heritage-related activities. The focus was on key issues impacting on inclusion, race equality and cultural diversification of services and the workforce. Around 200 attendees representing various aspects of community, cultural and education sectors and civil society were invited to explore a range of key themes. The process allowed for an open dialogue which replaced previous defensive and hostile interactions and was facilitated by MCAAH Commissioners and other specialists. The approach also shifted the Black community's role from one of passive consultees, which they had been relegated to for decades, to leading on consultation.

Analysis of the data collected highlighted six key areas for action:

— the creation of strategic leadership and accountability in the sector responsible for the mainstreaming of African and Asian history and heritage
— the development of dedicated leadership roles to champion and co-ordinate race equality/cultural diversity at senior management and governance levels
— the redress of the low levels of Black staff at all levels of the workforce and governance, with special attention given to recruiting to middle and senior management posts and board appointments
— the empowerment of community-based heritage networks
— the development of equitable partnerships between the established large national and regional agencies and the small community-based organisations to shape policy and practice, in particular the management of collections and their interpretations and set standards for equality and cultural diversity
— the inclusion of African and Asian history into the National Curriculum.

The findings and recommendations were published in 2005. The HDTF was established soon after to implement the recommendations. More specifically it was tasked to identify and develop principles, policies and good practice that could be embedded in the cultural heritage and education sectors.

I was appointed to lead the HDTF in 2006 on a three-year term. It was a multidisciplinary group comprising high-profile strategic leaders of cultural agencies with authority to make decisions on behalf of the sector and representatives from academia, funding agencies, trade unions, Black communities and civil society organisations. The group's aims were to embed race equality in the form of cultural diversity practices into the sector's core values and infrastructure. The HDTF's structural arrangements offered an unprecedented opportunity for cross-sector working, which involved direct involvement of key personnel from the various agencies in creating solutions. Specialist sub-committees were established to produce ideas, principles and actions with guidance for implementation based on cross-sector deliberations on good practice, identification and examination of exemplar projects, and the exploration of funding models. Five key areas were targeted for diversification – museum collections, archive collections, workforce, governance and audiences – while a sixth focused on developing equitable partnerships. As the UK was preparing for the 2012 Cultural Olympiad, a seventh group worked on actions to ensure that the London's Black communities were involved and benefited from the international event. The London political administration changed during the HDTF's final year. Although the newly elected Mayor set different priorities, the HDTF was allowed to complete its work. A report documenting its outputs and recommendations with examples of good practice was published in 2009.

MCAAH and the HDTF processes remain pioneering works in the promotion of African and Asian communities' cultural rights in the UK. Both processes provided a strong platform for RBA and decolonisation agendas and have acted as reference points for the rest of the UK. The EUROCITIES Award under the theme ‹Creating Cohesive Cities› awarded to MCAAH in 2007 demonstrates its impact on Europe.

RH: Compared to Great Britain, Switzerland is a country without colonies. But since the research of, for example, Andreas Zangger, who also sits on the AFFWP advisory board, we know how strongly Switzerland was intertwined with the

global slave and plantation system and how much this shaped Swiss politics, finances and science. We are keen to reveal these connections. Can you give an example of a place or an object that represents this kind of exploitation and profit in the UK?

CA: Various factors have compelled UK institutions, including businesses and the Royal Family, to confront and reveal information which they held but never made public previously. These include the impact of Brexit [link 10], the Windrush Scandal [link 11], George Floyd's death in America and the global Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests and toppling of statues [link 12] that ensued, decolonisation movements' calls for restitutions and reparations, the disproportionate deaths among African and Asian people during the COVID pandemic, and the so-called ‹culture wars›.

Research undertaken by various academic institutions, heritage organisations and individuals has revealed that enslavers and owners of enslaved people were not the only ones benefiting from the proceeds of the slave trade. The list is long and included shipbuilding and sugar-refining industries, metalworking industries that produced guns and other equipment needed in the plantations where enslaved people were working, merchants who provided credits for traders and plantation owners, insurance companies, dockworkers and many more. Although the Atlantic slave trade was abolished in the UK in 1807, slave ownership was abolished only in 1833. Slave owners (and not the freed people) were compensated for the emancipation of enslaved workers under the Slave Compensation Act of 1837. The British Government raised a £20 million loan to pay a total of around 46.000 people, including small sums to many ordinary people who had one or a handful of slaves. Substantial sums were, however, received by around 3.000 families who had hundreds or thousands of enslaved workers on their plantations.

The Brattle Report, which analysed the true cost of the TST for the UK in 2023, translates the £20 million to £17 billion in today's money and revealed that the loan was being repaid by the British taxpayers, including the descendants of enslaved people, until 2015. This money enabled the wealthy to buy influence, fund or consolidate political ambitions, pay for their children's and grandchildren's education, purchase artefacts and collections and fund the buildings that housed them, and invest in railways and other aspects of the emerging industrial revolution. Some built grand country houses and landscapes with the proceeds.

University College London (UCL)'s Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery (‹Legacies›) database includes records of compensations made to individuals and families at the time by the Slavery Compensation Commission set up in 1833. This is to ensure, in part, that celebration of emancipation does not eclipse or contribute to selective memory of the human cost – degrading and violent treatment of enslaved people – and the inequalities that have continued to affect their descendants. Among those listed are ancestors of some well-known figures. They include Henry Lascelles, 2nd Earl of Harewood, ancestor of Queen Elizabeth II's cousin, who owned enslaved plantation workers in Barbados and Jamaica; the families of the former UK Prime Minister David Cameron and authors Graham Greene and George Orwell; Barings, one of the oldest banking families; and many more. The debates on reparation and restitution and calls for the decolonisation of heritage are increasingly contributing to several families and businesses with direct or associated links to slave traders and/or owner ancestors publicly confronting and/or acknowledging their connections.

Another repository of untold stories is held by the National Trust (NT), a membership organisation that is Europe's largest conservation charity and is involved in caring for nature and the historic environment. In 2020 the NT released an interim report revealing connections, some familiar and others new, between 93 of its historic properties (a third of the total) and colonialism and historic slavery. This was part of the NT's commitment to ensure that narratives and interpretations of its properties told and shared the full story. Some of these buildings, for example, Speke Hall in Liverpool and Penrhyn Castle in Wales, are well known for their links to slavery. Information on other properties though was less comprehensive, for example on wealth transferred through marriages with daughters of slave owners, and others who had received compensation when slavery was abolished in 1833. The report also highlighted the presence of African, Indian and Chinese people working in and around landscapes of English and Welsh country houses owned by these wealthy families during the 17th and 18th centuries.

A group of politicians wrote complaining that the NT was subscribing to a ‹woke› agenda [link 13] and there was also resistance from some of the organisation's members. The NT was able to ride these criticisms and held on to its commitment to the decolonisation of the assets and nature in its care. The UCL ‹Legacies› database was a source of information for the report and the NT's report is being expanded as ongoing work in this area unveils other important untold stories.

Many Black and Asian researchers, historians and members of the public passionate about uncovering their ancestors' histories have researched untold stories too – a trend that started during the period leading up to the 2007 commemoration which has produced some very interesting accounts. This trend continues and many more Black authors, historians, researchers, academics, social commentators, individuals and community groups are producing publications which recount black people's histories and stories from the Black communities' point of view for the first time. This is despite the difficulties they often face in securing funding and/or publishing their findings.

RH: Who champions the cultural rights of migrants of colour in the UK?
CA: In my view, there are three groups that champion Black cultural heritage: the Black communities, cultural and academic institutions, and regional and local governments. There are some overlaps and interface between the work that these three groups undertake.

African and Asian led institutions, individuals and community groups have and continue to be at the forefront of awareness-raising campaigns and activism about their histories and cultural heritages and the need for their protection among their own communities as well as at the wider community, political and institutional levels. Their role as champions was borne out of the need to protect and cultivate their identity and pride to counter racism and discrimination in a hostile environment. It was also a tool to resist assimilation policies which threatened the dilution of or removal of their cultures and heritages whilst refusing them a British identity reserved for the white population. Much of Africans and Asians' effort to assert their cultural identity was delivered through community celebrations of their customs and traditions and social activities within the confines of their homes and places of worship, streets and community spaces such as social housing estates. While the fervour to maintain their cultural identities has been strengthened by the determination to

ensure African and Asian histories and heritages are integrated into the national narratives, the methods of championing, however, have evolved with changes in discrimination laws and social attitudes generally since the 1950s and 1960s.

Many expressions of African and Asian cultural traditions continue to be celebrated and several are presented on a national scale showcasing Britain's multi-culturalism internationally. Examples include Black and South Asian History Months, Carnivals, Melas, Chinese New Year, Hindu New Year, the celebration of Eid, community conferences and archives, research projects, lectures and debates. Some of these activities are funded largely by formal funding agencies such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Arts Council for England which distribute lottery money for arts and heritage projects. Cultural NGOs and local governments also provide grants. However, these funding schemes are generally short-term and therefore do not sustain activities over time.

The Black communities' change movement is led by Black voluntary groups, activists, politicians and celebrities who usually engage with the formal heritage sector and political processes as advocates and consultees and in co-creation processes as part of the decolonisation of museums, galleries and archives, examples of which I have already identified. As there are only small numbers of Black people employed within cultural and academic institutions, the Black communities and their voluntary network and cultural activists have been the main champions to exert pressure on the government and formal institutions to incorporate Black heritage and history into their work.

The UK's cultural heritage sector is vast compared to that of many other European countries. It is a diverse and complex network of government departments, sponsored government agencies, cultural institutions, funding agencies, the academic and research sector, and civil society organisations. However, there is no effective sector-wide coordination on race equality issues. Each organisation is therefore left to its own devices to promote Black heritage. Research through audience engagement and audience development actions to seek Black communities' views on single issues, projects or programmes, academic research and the staging of events and dissemination of research findings have been the most popular method of promoting Black cultural heritage. These processes are largely focused on gathering information by the providers about what the communities need, or seek their input into content without the guarantee of action or implementation. The decolonisation programmes pursued by several institutions have also contributed to raising the profile of African and Asian history and heritage, albeit with mixed reception from the government and Black communities for different reasons. While Black people feel excluded from these decolonisation programmes, some politicians see them as ‹wokeism› and part of culture wars.

DETOX is an exclusive national support network formed by Black employees for Black staff to provide a safe space to discuss their workplace experiences, in particular racism and discrimination. They also see themselves as collection activists. The group provides advice to any cultural organisation on decolonisation of cultural services and the workforce in a voluntary capacity. The European Society of Black & Allied Archaeologists plays a similar role and has UK members. However, some Black employees have complained that DETOX can undermine their agency in challenging their white managers who often feel that they cannot be racist on the grounds that they have attended a DETOX training.

While regional and local governments, especially those with a sizeable or majority local Black population, promote the benefits of multi-culturalism, central government devolves this responsibility to the cultural and educational institutions that it funds. However, in recent years central government has become more audibly critical of decolonisation processes as ‹wokery› which culture critics, the media and Black communities see as being a part of the government's wider ‹culture war› agenda.

RH: Currently, the city of Zurich and the Swiss Heritage Society are fighting in court. The city plans to cover racist house inscriptions like ‹House to the Moor› to protect Black people from discrimination, but the society argues for the protection of cultural heritage. Can you contribute anything to this dispute from your experience?

CA: The UK government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) published its long-awaited guidance on the management of historic statues on 5 October 2023. The document on the ‹retain and explain› (RE) policy [link 14] seeks to help decision makers responding to calls for the removal of all public memorials, including statues, monuments and commemorative heritage assets. Decision makers may include trustees or board members or building owners. The guidance is for the implementation of the law announced at the beginning of 2021 [link 15], which prevented the removal or relocation of statues without listed building consent or planning permission. It was triggered by the toppling of the statue of the slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol in June 2020 during Black Lives Matter protests and the defacing nationally of other public monuments which represented Britain's colonial legacy. The guidance was compiled by a government-appointed Heritage Advisory Board of seven members, who included academics and heritage professionals.

The guidance sets out a five-step plan for custodians to follow; the policy is exclusively for England (rather than the UK) and does not apply to museum and gallery collections. The recommended starting point is to retain the assets *in situ* with a comprehensive explanation which provides a full story of the person or event. The intention is that the public gets a thorough understanding of the historic context, which in turn should provide opportunity for debate. Custodians can conclude and close a case for removal at any of the five steps if they are satisfied with the evidence assembled. The rigour for evidence-gathering and the quality and range of evidence needed for assessment of cases increases at every level, and includes stakeholder involvement in the decision making. A toolkit on how to implement the five steps, with case studies, has been produced.

The retain and explain policy has been controversial ever since it was announced, and the guidance has reignited those differences of opinion once again. The heritage sector and funders have given the guidance a cautious welcome as they feel that it would help with the implementation of the law and decision making on case-by-case basis, but they will need to wait and see how it pans out. In his interview with BBC Radio 4 (and broadsheet newspapers), the Black historian and broadcaster David Olusoga argued that while the retain and explain policy is appropriate for some cases, he does not agree that «a statue of a mass murderer and slave trader [such as Colston should be] on public display» and says that the statue is not about history but instead about «validation and memorialization». He also stated that the government's guidance reinforces two «falsehoods»: first, that modern attitudes are the problem, and that the people at the time when statues of these men were

erected were supportive of it, which is often demonstrated not to be true. The second «falsehood», argues Olusoga, is the notion that statues communicate history and removal of them will limit the public's understanding of Britain's difficult and dark past. Olusoga disagrees with this view because he feels that many of these statues do not speak about the victim and were erected by very small, exclusive groups of «elite men» to celebrate the lives of group members. I am sure many Black and white people in Bristol where Colston's statue stood and elsewhere in Britain, where there are similar statues, share Olusoga's views. We must also remember that those who took part in the BLM protests were largely young Black and white people disillusioned and frustrated with historic legacies of inequality which have resulted in contemporary inequalities for them. Our priority must be to help them find some solutions so that they and the future generations can live in a more equitable society.

RH: Is there any general advice you would give to the Cultural Heritage Year 2025 Working Group of ICOMOS Suisse and other organizations working against racial discrimination in the field of cultural heritage and monument preservation?
CA: The work that has been undertaken in the UK by the Black communities and institutions is unique in Europe. So, you will find many lessons for your project in my responses to your previous questions. There are a few more I could share. First, it is important to undertake a mapping exercise which provides information on the demography of diaspora and migrant communities in Zurich, an assessment of their needs (including the level of engagement with them by the local cultural heritage services), their participation in the education sector and what gaps remain as part of their rights to cultural services and education. The development of a framework for this must have a significant input from the communities and opportunities will need to be built into the process for candid exchanges.

Secondly, you would need to create an environment for genuine collaboration and equitable relationships through co-creation or other more suitable methods in the development, delivery and evaluation of the project. These are key to producing the right outputs and outcomes which meet your organisation's goals at the same time as communities' needs. This means moving away from the traditional consultation model and instead creating an active role for people of colour and involve them at all levels of the project's structures and processes, starting with the board. Make sure that the black people recruited or elected to drive the project must have the willingness and capacity to challenge existing institutional and structural racism and practices and not rubber stamp the status quo and thereby become part of the problem. You would also need to ensure that they come to it with the assurance that they have the same power as the other trustees or executives, and that they are listened to. Ensure the role helps them to develop new skills and expertise and they are remunerated appropriately so that they are not just giving away their precious knowledge, time and effort and get little or nothing in return. These may sound small matters but the lack of them perpetuates systemic unequal treatment.

It is also important to bear in mind that Black people are represented in all of the nine protected categories that you have outlined and that they are likely to face racism and discrimination even within their protected groups.

Decolonisation is not the panacea for eliminating casual, institutional and structural racism. The term is under scrutiny for relevance in museums and cultural services generally. There are discussions about whether the term ‹anti-racism and

anti-racist practice›, which were ditched (certainly in the UK) in the 1990s for the softer phrase ‹social justice›, would be more appropriate. Also, much of the decolonisation work in Europe tends to be led by white academics, professionals, researchers and practitioners with limited and in some cases no input at all from Black people. Structural racism which has excluded Black Europeans from the cultural institutions has played a huge role in this. You only have to look at the teaching staff and student population undertaking degrees and postgraduate work relating to culture, history and heritage in universities in Europe and you would notice this. So, who is decolonising whom? Are colonisers the right people to decolonise? These were questions raised by a mixed group of white and Black employees, who I recently interviewed on perceptions of progress in advancing racial equality in cultural institutions. Above all there needs to be a decolonised or an anti-racist mindset and sustained commitment among cultural institutions to achieve equalities and cultural rights for Black people and for the delivery of our centuries-old, shared heritage!

RH: Thank you very much, dear Clara!

List of Links

1 Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage – intangible heritage – Culture Sector – UNESCO: https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention

2 Exploring Intangible Cultural Heritage Report – ICOMOS-UK: https://icomos-uk.org/exploring-intangible-cultural-heritage-report

3 Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

4 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – Manual for Human Rights Education with Young people (coe.int): https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/international-covenant-on-economic-social-and-cultural-rights

5 Strategy on human rights – UNESCO Digital Library: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000145734

6 About the mandate | OHCHR: https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-cultural-rights/about-mandate

7 Our Common Dignity – Rights-Based Approaches Working Group: history and milestones – ICOMOS Open Archive: EPrints on Cultural Heritage: https://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/2896/

8 History Of Notting Hill Carnival: how riots inspired London's biggest party (timeout.com): https://www.timeout.com/london/things-to-do/notting-hill-carnival-history

9 Equality Act 2010 (legislation.gov.uk): https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

10 European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020 (legislation.gov.uk): https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2020/1/contents/enacted

11 What is Windrush and who are the Windrush generation? – BBC News: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43782241

12 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/08/edward-colston-statue-history-slave-trader-bristol-protest

13 The National Trust is under attack because it cares about history, not fantasy | Peter Mitchell | The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/nov/12/national-trust-history-slavery

14 Guidance for custodians on how to deal with commemorative heritage assets that have become contested – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk): https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-custodians-on-how-to-deal-with-commemorative-heritage-assets-that-have-become-contested/guidance-for-custodians-on-how-to-deal-with-commemorative-heritage-assets-that-have-become-contested

15 New legal protection for England's heritage – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk): https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-legal-protection-for-england-s-heritage