Can We Reduce the Harms of the White Museum Space?

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Abstract

This paper challenges the interpretation of decolonisation as 'diversification' by many museums in the UK, arguing 'diversity' as a concept unconsciously assumes diversity from whiteness, and in the white colonial space can result in perpetuating racial and colonial dynamics. Exploring critical whiteness literature by writers such as bell hooks, Rebecca Aanerud, Richard Dyer, Kehinde Andrews, and Nirmal Puwar, I examine the unshifting parameters of whiteness and how this translates into the museum space, offering examples of exhibitions that address racism and colonialism in ways that confronts whiteness but does not re-objectify or 'Other' people, providing a framework for the museum sector to move forward in more informed and conscious ways that reduce the violence and racism of their white colonial spaces.

Keywords: decolonisation, diversity, critical whiteness, exhibitions.

Under the Cover of 'Diversity': Experiencing Harm in the Museum

'Any document to civilisation is also a document of barbarism', Kaveh Akbar, *'The Palace' 2018*

Years ago, when my children were little, we visited Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. We live in inner-city Bristol. I am a working-class single parent; we live in a council house. I am white, my eldest son is white and my youngest son is brown (the term he uses to describe himself). Visiting the museum that day proved to be a pivotal moment in my thinking about decolonisation. We walked into the foyer, large and open, tiled flooring, grand staircases and statues. A new Black Lives Matter mural *A Movement Not A Moment* was in the foyer by artist Jasmine Thompson, of white British and Black Jamaican heritage, commissioned by the museum. The mural was large, black and white line drawings of people protesting in the streets. A cardboard cut-out of Black children in the mural stood separately. My heart sank; anger rose in my throat. This mural was surely intended as a gesture of anti-racism and allyship, decolonisation perhaps. Thompson said of her work:

> [j]ust having the space to be able to put my work on a platform, tell these stories, share the work and legacy of the people that have shaped the BLM movement, and highlight the societal work that still needs to be done – is a huge blessing.[1]

It was meant to be positive, and Thompson felt that way, but it didn't to me, and I questioned why. I was struck by the dissonance of the installation, the overall scene before my eyes. I sat with my children on a bench in the foyer. I looked. In that space, the museum built with the money from people who worked in slavery, a white colonial space; a large painting on the wall - the *Delhi Dubar* (1903) a colonial procession in India, 'which marked the declaration of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra as Emperor and Empress of India'; huge Egyptian sculptures stood to the right of the mural; and behind the wall where the mural was positioned lay dead African people, in glass cabinets.[2] Within this environment, the mural felt less like allyship and an anti-racist project, and more like the re-exhibition and re-objectification of Black people in a white space that refused to confront its own violence. The cardboard cut-outs of the children made me feel so upset. The only brown person in the museum was my son,

and I watched white people come and go, pass the mural, or stop to take a photo, and move on to look at dinosaur bones, taxidermy animals, and dead African bodies. While this shows the capacity for the artwork to draw attention and intervene in the space, the representation of Black figures in this way highlighted the profound harm that can be done by 'diversity' or decolonial projects that do not interrogate whiteness, that sit within white institutional spaces under the white gaze. My own experience in Bristol Museum aligns with scholarly work that questions the efficacy of 'well-intentioned' decoloniality. For example, Bernadette Lynch and Samuel Alberti's (2010:13) analysis of the Manchester Museum highlights how institutional racism and 'legacies of prejudice' can persist within co-curated projects. Similarly, Rachael Minott's (2019: 565) reflections on *The Past is Now* exhibition at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery demonstrate how 'false neutrality' can function as forms of 'imperial celebration' (Minott 2019: 569). This resonates with my own personal experience, where the Black Lives Matter mural, despite its anti-racist intentions replicated racial and colonial dynamics and avoided facing whiteness and colonialism. My experience as a white mother, and our experience of being a family with different skin colours, negotiating racial lines and ever-present awareness of safe and unsafe (white dominant) spaces are what fuels my passion for my work, and interrogating whiteness in particular in racist projects such as colonial museums.

The 'diversity' as decolonial approach - that 'works' with artists and 'communities' in the colonial space - can arguably be traced to influential anthropologists in the 1990s such as James Clifford and Laura Peers who paved the way for what we still see widely today in the museum sector's decolonial initiatives - the collaborative approach to exhibiting. Clifford advocated for a move away from the traditional top-down method of exhibiting towards a collaborative approach, arguing in his book *Routes*, for 'inclusion, integrity, dialogue, translation, quality and control […] that recognises diverse audiences and multiply centred histories of encounter' (Clifford 1997: 214). In addition, Peers praises a curatorial praxis where people are included in displaying heritage that is connected to them. In *Museums and Source Communities* Peers and Alison Brown (2003: 2) claim this approach is 'very different from the traditional curatorial approach in which museum staff […] control exhibition content'.

While I agree with Clifford and Peers that there is a need for a move away from the top-down approach, the 'diversity' or collaborative approach further perpetuates racial power dynamics of 'us' and 'them'. Stuart Hall, in 'Whose Heritage?: Unsettling "The Heritage," Reimagining the Post-Nation' (1999: 8) - an article often cited as advocation for bringing people in from the 'margins' - warned of art and museum spaces where 'the tentative efforts to involve the 'subjects' themselves in the exhibiting process […] objectifies them'. People are invited into white spaces as racialised 'Others', under the guise of the celebration of 'diversity' and inclusion. It could be argued that when museums aim to hand over full curatorial power to people, the racial power dynamics shift, however the owner is still the white colonial space, the visitor gaze is predominantly white, and white institutional power remains intact. As Robert Boast states in 'A New Museum Age or Neocolonialism' (2011: 63), 'no matter how much we try to make the spaces accommodating, they remain sites where Others come to perform for us, not with us'. What we see are more of the same: collaborations, 'diversification' efforts, the problematizing or the commodification of Blackness; with desperate attempts to 'get' people in white museum spaces, employ 'diverse' people, 'engage' 'them' with 'us' in the white colonial space; how to 'get' 'their' voice, expertise, ideas to make 'us' look better, like we are 'good' colonialists now that we are 'giving' 'them' some representation, on 'our' terms in the white space.

Clifford and Peers, and the museum sector's 'diversity' and collaboration approach, have questioned the colonial power dynamics of the collector and collected, aiming to rectify the violence of the museum space through 'diversification' of programming, 'cultural' events, collaborations, and specified temporal power handovers. This approach offers 'diversity' and collaboration initiatives at the margins, without changing the central power dynamics of the institution, and avoiding critically interrogating whiteness too far. It is also important to acknowledge the increasing use of the term anti-racism as a key term in museum discourse. While both terms - decolonisation and anti-racism - are essential at dismantling white supremacy, they are not interchangeable. Decolonisation is a fundamental critique of whiteness and colonial structures, whereas anti-racism can be interpreted as focusing on symptoms of

racism - for example lack of 'diversity' - yet do not confront the deeper institutional problem of whiteness. The Black Lives Matter mural at Bristol Museum and Art Gallery can be seen as a well-intended anti-racist display, however because the museum did not engage with its colonial foundations, and it did not connect the mural and the very reason for the existence of the Black Lives Matter movement to white supremacy and colonialism, it became a display of racial harm in the white space. What is not being interrogated is the root of racism and colonialism - whiteness. As Nirmal Puwar (2004: 9) states in *Space Invaders*:

> The obsession remains with changing organisations (diversifying them) by getting more racialised bodies into organisations. How institutional racism operates in extremely subtle ways, most especially through the designation of the somatic norm remains unexplored.

White, middle-class, heterosexual and able-bodied is the default, the 'norm' by which we are all measured. Outside of the somatic norm are 'Others', 'diverse', 'communities', 'ethnic', racialised bodies. As Emma Waterton and Laurajane Smith write in the 'The Recognition and Misrecognition of Community Heritage' (2010: 5), this 'artificial idea of community works to reinforce presumed differences between the white middle classes and "the rest", as well as the full range of heritage experts and "everybody else"'. In the museum context, a 'community' or 'diverse' people are objects, 'Community Curators' are 'alternative', 'Others' to be 'engaged' with, collaborated with, given voice, and to be looked upon from the position of power. In *Negotiating Race and Rights in the Museum* Katy Bunning (2021: 46) observes that cultural 'diversity' is 'racism reframed', arguing further that 'diversity' discourses:

> [a]s a strategy […] [were] normalised as the antidote to inequalities […] understood to inherently challenge the singularity of White cultural experiences; yet at the same time, they typically downplayed the dominance and normativity of White-centric worldviews within institutional structures (Bunning 2021: 46).

'Diversity' and collaborations as decolonisation offers 'a salve' (Bunning 2021: 46) to colonial origins, and protects white comfort, while also giving the illusion of representation and inclusion. As Sara Ahmed asserts in *What's the Use?* (2019: 148), 'Diversity might be a useful word because of what it does not address. […] Diversity creates the impression of addressing something without addressing anything'. Ahmed further argues, 'diversity' 'does not bring up what brings you to use it in the first place'. Under the cover of 'diversity' and inclusion, and by using 'diversity' as an image change on the surface; whiteness can remain largely unchallenged.

In this paper, I have chosen to focus on exhibitions which did not 'Other' people in racialised narratives, arguing that exhibitions can work to challenge the norms of white spaces (places which uphold whiteness as invisible) and reduce harm; questioning how we can exhibit in ways that disrupt the white fantasy of 'Other', and how we can exhibit in ways that de-centre whiteness. A practice of reducing harm disrupts long-standing racial hierarchy, a direct intervention that aims to mitigate the systemic harm of the white museum space which continues to over racialise Black and brown people, while upholding whiteness as norm. This disruption challenges the status quo and may be perceived as harmful to people who benefit from whiteness, causing discomfort in having privilege and a normalised identity challenged. However, while this discomfort may be felt by people used to the centrality and normativity of whiteness, decentring whiteness is fundamental in decoloniality and anti-racism. My belief is that true decolonisation is to close the doors of white colonial museums, yet I know this will not happen anytime soon. In the meantime, I argue that museums have an obligation to work ethically and reduce harm and to address discrimination and racism as part of their work and commitments. This paper provides a starting framework to unpack ways whiteness can be addressed and challenged, through artistic and curatorial methods of naming whiteness, unmarking people, and reflecting on the white gaze/'Other' object colonial dynamics. Though whiteness affects all white museum exhibitions, I have selected exhibitions which aim to draw attention to racialised histories because these are the sites where whiteness and colonial dynamics are reproduced, and where 'diversity' and inclusion are managed and contained most acutely. I draw on literature on whiteness from critical

whiteness studies, museum and heritage studies, sociology, and feminism, applying it to the white museum space through analysis of two exhibitions: *Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS*, Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester, UK, and *Genetic Automata*, Wellcome Collection, London, UK. I visited these exhibitions with my two children. Within my writing I use autoethnography, to express personal experiences: a method I have found helpful throughout my academic journey, one that supports me in university institutions where, due to class, I have felt I don't quite belong. With autoethnography I can write as my authentic self; my family, our socioeconomic status, my positionality as a mother, all shape how I see exhibitions and museums; it is intertwined and impossible to detach. Throughout this paper, I interweave autoethnography to show honest and open personal experiences of visiting exhibitions, conveying feeling and thoughts, alongside critical analysis and interview transcripts from curators and artists of the exhibitions.

White Tactics - the Mask of 'Diversity'

In the 'The Burns Halperin Report', Zoé Samudzi asserts, 'while museums have claimed an investment in "diversity and inclusion" as of late, this claim has really only translated into a fetishization of particular kinds of Black expression'.[3] Further, Puwar (2004: 69) highlights people are straight-jacketed, accepted as long as they remain racially confined, marked by 'race', artists and curators 'may even critique dominant culture (so long as they don't threaten the system). But whatever they do, they must not escape from their specific ethnic or racial identity'. 'Other' artists and curators must be marked in the white space to maintain the illusion of white normativity. There is a benevolent imperialism at play, a façade: invitations to speak or perform on specific controlled subjects, to be 'speaking subjects' (Puwar 2004: 73). This 'gives' 'voice' and creative participation in designated 'diverse' slots, while making the white institution appear inclusive. As Puwar (2004: 74) further asserts, 'the slot which is made easily available […] is one where she offers herself as an anthropological spectacle'. In addition, '[t]he room for self-commentary is especially forthcoming when the testimonies are able to induce pity, fears or, more recently, a celebration of diversity' (Puwar 2004: 74). White people on the other hand are un-named, unmarked, so as to be normal, and to be normal it has to mark 'Others'. From when 'race' was invented by white elites, the time of empire, white elites (though self-identified then as English, Anglo-Saxon, or Christian) positioned themselves above others by inventing whiteness, creating a colour-coded marking. Whiteness upholds its normalcy in the present day in the same ways, through silence and racial marking. As Rebecca Aanerud states in 'Fictions of Whiteness: Speaking the Names of Whiteness in US Literature' (1997: 35), '[i]n our society dominant discourse tries to never speak to its own name'.

However, though whiteness goes unseen through its status of normalcy in white spaces, it *is* seen by many people, just as bell hooks wrote in 'Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination' (1997: 175): 'I learned as a child that to be "safe" it was important to recognise the power of whiteness, even to fear it, and to avoid encountering it'. In museums whiteness is tangible, the history is visible, the collectors are visible, the 'Othering' is visible, the violence visible, though it is also unseen through its unchallenged normalcy. Whiteness has the power in the white space to collect, display, 'engage', represent, objectify, 'diversify', decolonise all from a position of unmarked whiteness, perpetuated by a continuation of marking 'Otherness'. As hooks (1997: 176) asserts:

> The eagerness with which contemporary society does away with racism, replacing this recognition with evocations of pluralism and diversity that further mask reality, is a response to the terror [of whiteness], but it also becomes a way to perpetuate the terror by providing a cover, a hiding place.

Whiteness hides in plain sight, by marking 'Others'. Richard Dyer (2017: 44-45) asserts, 'the ultimate power in a society that controls people in part through their visibility is that of invisibility, the watcher […] Looking and being looked at reproduce racial power relations'. Museums are colonial white sanctuaries, offering authoritative spaces to gaze at 'Others' from a superior positionality of the unmarked watcher. 'Diversity' projects and exhibitions within museums replicate this dynamic, allowing whiteness to be the looker, to gaze upon

the 'diverse'. In addition, labelling people 'Community Curators' or racially marking, presents people's input and projects as 'alternative' and differing from the white central authority of the museum - difference temporarily permitted in the white space.

The white space is a fundamental pillar in white supremacy. In 'White Space(s) and the Reproduction of White Supremacy' David Embrick and Wendy Moore (2020: 1941) argue that the white space controls environment and behaviour, seeking 'to hide social problems rather than fix them'. 'Diversity' and collaborations as decolonisation aim to mask racism rather than attack it head-on. As Ahmed argues in 'Feminist Killjoys (and Other Wilful Subjects)' (2010), there are 'two sides of the occultation of structural racism - the spectacle of black suffering and the 'smile of diversity'. Furthermore, as Silvia Dominguez, Simon Weffer, and Embrick state in 'White Sanctuaries: White Supremacy, Racism, Space, and Fine Arts in Two Metropolitan Museums' (2020: 2031), '[c]olonial rule is not accomplished by sheer force alone'. Colonial domination needs justification for oppression: for example museums continue the racist project of colonialism through maintaining the need to hold onto stolen artefacts or 'loan' them to countries they were stolen from - as has been the fate of many Benin Bronzes. Everyone has to be convinced of white superiority in arts, culture, education, ideas, intellect, museum care. We all have to buy into whiteness both physically and mentally. Museums, white spaces of the coloniser, have transformed themselves, from white spaces of domination - the 'traditional' top-down model of collecting and exhibiting Clifford cited - to a hegemonic white space of domination, one whereby oppression occurs through coercion and consent. Dominguez et al (2020: 2041) further assert:

> Decolonizing museums involves more than moving them away from being elitist temples of esoteric learning and towards sites of participatory inclusion in the selection of objects for exhibits and curating […]. Decolonising museums must be in the service of speaking truthfully about the legacies of colonisation.

The onus to address the legacy of colonisation and 'race' continue to be focused on people whose ancestors were colonised or those who experience racism today - with museums seeking to work with people, on 'race', slavery and empire in particular. Yet while this gives the positive impression of representation and inclusion – something many people want - it also places people as 'diverse' objects of suffering within the white colonial space, and as Audre Lorde (2017: 16) asserts, '[t]he master's tools will never dismantle the master's house'. 'Inviting' 'diverse' people into white sanctuaries is an institutional 'self-serving intention' (Ahmed 2019: 146), one that confines people's inclusion to the barometers of white comfortability - Black suffering and the smile of 'diversity', while masking whiteness.

Lord Woolley, at the request of The House Magazine, wrote a short review article on the Fitzwilliam Museum's exhibition 'The Black Atlantic', a co-curated exhibition between the museum and Dr Jake Subryan Richards.[4] The exhibition featured maps of the transatlantic slave trade routes, two portraits - one of the white museum founder Richard Fitzwilliam, and another of a man believed to be Olaudah Equiano. Woolley writes of artist Barbara Walker's portraits in the exhibition, where she 'reimagines' portraits that focus on white elite figures in the foreground, with Black figures smaller and in subservient positions in the background. Walker removes the focus on the white person by making them a silhouette, the aim to highlight the Black person to 'see' the person who was often left nameless and unknown in the image. Woolley praises the work, stating 'leaving the Black subject to own the space. The image becomes simply, but truly, powerful'.[5] But does it really? In the white space, within an exhibition on the brutality of slavery can artwork that focuses the gaze onto Black suffering and obscures whiteness deconstruct the 'subject' white gaze colonial dynamic, or does it perpetuate it? In a Black space, Walker's work will be instantly empowering because the colonial racist dynamic is not there. I think of an artist of influence to me, perhaps because I am white, Ken Gonzales Day, an American artist who edits black and white photographs of lynchings. He removes the lynched person; we know they are there, but we cannot see them. Instead, we have nowhere to gaze than at the white people who were there. The person who was lynched does not face more violence through the re-exhibition of his death: if the lynched man was in the image the white gaze would be drawn to him and whiteness would go unseen. Gozales Day ensures he is not a 'subject' to be watched again and again by white people:

instead, he makes white people see white people, the perpetrators. Furthermore, in protest to white artist Dana Schutz's painting *Open Casket* (2016) of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till at the Whitney Museum's Biennial, artist Parker Bright stood before the painting wearing a t-shirt with the words 'Black Death Spectacle' on the back. In addition, Hew Locke (2025), in a curator's talk of his recent exhibition 'What have we here?' at The British Museum, stated:

> I wanted to talk about the brutality of the slave trade system, I didn't want to have clichéd images of brutalised Black bodies, black and brown bodies. I wanted to come at things in a different way. This is not to spare people's feelings but because I have had conversations with other artists, artists of colour who say, I'm tired of seeing certain tropes.

In museums we continue to see the objectification of 'Others', the Black Spectacle of victimisation and suffering under the uncriticised white gaze. The white gaze/Black 'object' dynamic matters. Furthermore, space matters. Artwork for example can be empowered representation in one space and turned into 'subjects' in the white space. Though Woolley speaks positively in some ways of the 'Black Atlantic' exhibition, on the whole he admits, 'pain, anger, even hatred were few of the emotions I had to process'.[6] In her open letter artist Hannah Black argues 'to highlight the shameful nature of white violence [we] should first of all stop treating Black pain as raw material'.[7] In addition, Sumaya Kassim states in 'There is No Mutual Fascination: Why the British Museum's 'Inspired by the East' is Not Inspired (At Least, Not to Me, A Heartbroken Muslim Middle Easterner)' that 'I am not fascinated by my dehumanisation. […] I am sickened by it'.[8]

The museum obsession with 'diversification' as decolonisation ensures the museum is relatively unchanged. As Kehinde Andrews states in *Decolonising the University* (2018: 139), the museum 'simply puts black faces in white spaces'. What is avoided is the root of colonialism and racism - whiteness. As Claudia Rankine asserts in 'Anyone Who is Subject to a Culture Can Use It':

> Until we are willing to look at the ways in which white […] [people] are culpable in the suffering of people of color and understand that culpability needs to be present in the representation of that, suffering will continue.[9]

When museums offer up The Black Spectacle in 'diversity' slots which racially mark people, whilst at the same time avoid naming whiteness, this perpetuates 'Othering' and colonial dynamics in the white space, side-stepping white culpability. This is what whiteness requires to maintain itself. To disrupt whiteness, people are to be unmarked, and whiteness needs to be marked out. This could be seen as a juxtaposition of two strategies working in opposition to each other - that of naming and including whiteness, while unmarking people often racialised. Yet, this is not to say we cannot say Black or brown, or we cannot include people in exhibitions: it means to unmark people, whiteness needs to be named, to be racialised too, rather than left unsaid, maintaining its normalcy.

Unmarking: *Heart of the Nation; Migration and the Making of the NHS*, Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester, UK, 2023

Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS is a travelling exhibition curated by Aditi Anand, Artistic Director of The Migration Museum, London. The Migration Museum was founded by Barbara Roche, former British Immigration Minister, inspired by visiting migration museums around the world. Roche brought together people who shared her passion that migration should be at the heart of our British national story. From 2013-2017 pop-up exhibitions and educational programmes were run throughout the UK, and from 2017-2019 The Migration Museum was based in an old fire station in Lambeth. Since 2020 The Migration Museum has been based in Lewisham shopping centre, with plans for a permanent space in central London from 2027. *Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS* was toured at Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, Leeds Shopping Centre, and The Migration Museum, Lewisham, from June 2023 to July 2024. *Heart of the Nation: Migration and the NHS* was funded by the Arts Council. Anand said in an interview with me, that:

> we knew we wanted it to be a touring exhibition because it is a national story, and we're talking about the National Health Service. So that was conceived from the start. But I think the locations we chose, I mean, you know, they were, some of it was just a bit opportunistic in that sense of what, like, what was available to us.[10]

The Migration Museum was able to use its own venue for part of the exhibition tour, and Leeds Shopping Centre was free. In addition, The Migration Museum and Leicester Museum and Art Gallery had a pre-existing relationship, having been conversing about 'looking for a permanent site for the museum'.[11] In relation to *Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS* Anand said, Leicester Museum and Art Gallery was 'actually incredibly open to us kind of taking over that space, the temporary exhibitions gallery that they have […] it just became a very easy partnership'.[12] On explaining how the exhibition process worked, Anand stated, that 'largely it is that you come in, you have a formed exhibition, you have the space'. [13] It was Anand and The Migration Museum team who led and curated the exhibition. In this exhibition analysis I focus on *Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS* at Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, considering it in a majority white colonial museum space.

Leicester Museum and Art Gallery was opened in 1849 and was one of the first public museums in the UK. Collections were donated by Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society, founded in 1835 by Dr G Shaw and Mr A Paget. Leicester Museum and Art Gallery state on their website '[t]he collection of curiosities, artwork, antiquities, fossils, animal, bird and insect specimens offered local people a window into the wider world'.[14] Leicester Museum and Art Gallery is located near the city centre, four tall white pillars stand at the entrance of the large white building, with a spacious path outside and a tree lined park. Inside there are fifteen galleries, including taxidermy animals, Ancient Egyptian displays, dinosaur bones, Victorian artwork, and fossils.

When the kids and I visited the museum, I was pleasantly surprised at how light and open the museum felt. People - both staff and visitors - were fairly racially mixed, and it didn't feel too upper-class like museums often do. I felt a sense of safety with my children, the usual anxiety of white spaces lessened. I questioned if I had got it wrong about 'diversity'? But it was not just people, it was the exhibition too, for there were other exhibitions and displays that felt upsetting in the museum space, and my heart sunk at the way they 'Othered', but *Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS* felt different, even within the white museum.

Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS was in a gallery upstairs in the museum. The gallery walls were white and the room spacious, with a central area with a screen showing a film titled *Speak* with people talking of caring for people and singing, and hospital chairs were laid out for visitors to sit on. The Migration Museum website states the exhibition 'shines a light on the stories and experiences of people who have come to Britain to work in the NHS through photography, film, oral histories and an immersive experience that brings together singing and storytelling'.[15] The NHS was created over 75 years ago, facing many pressures over the decades, and '[f]rom the very beginning, people have come to Britain from all over the world to make this grand vision for a better society a reality. But their vital role has largely been ignored'.[16] The nature of the exhibition felt its objective was to educate and inform the public of part of our British history. The exhibition orientated towards memories rather than being 'traditionally' object focused. All around the gallery walls photographs were displayed - they had space between them, a clear simple display, small pieces of text beside them. The text was easy to read and didn't take up too much time (with kids in tow it's not always easy to read vast amounts of text). The text and images started sequentially at first, then dipped into present day and back and forth, always keeping the past and present connected. The exhibition information at the entrance informed me of the legacies of empire, with text reading:

> [t]he development of the British healthcare system is closely linked to the impact and legacy of empire. Many who came to work in the NHS in its early decades had grown up educated in British systems and had longstanding links with the UK.[17]

Furthermore, text introduced 'The Birth of the NHS', telling the visitor that when the NHS was founded in 1948, there were not enough doctors and nurses, and:

> [a]s a result Britain began to actively recruit nurses, doctors and healthcare workers from its former colonies in the Caribbean and South Asian subcontinents in particular. This built on the healthcare system prior to the NHS, which was already reliant on medical professionals from places such as Ireland and Central and Eastern Europe.[18]

The text highlighted the creation of the NHS and people who came to work here, as well as bringing attention to present day struggles for recruitment, noting thousands of professionals leave the NHS every year, and 'changes to immigration laws [have] made it harder to recruit workers from some areas […] Recent decades have seen the NHS recruit from a much wider range of countries than in the early years of the service'.[19] In addition, there were a series of clipboards with paper attached, some with old black and white photographs and others with modern day colour photographs, surrounded by text. The text had a title in larger bolder font at the top with people's names, and underneath the country they had arrived from and the year they arrived. The text had first person writing from each person about their experiences. I loved seeing these photographs. There were more around the gallery, presented in different ways. There was a selection of images that when you looked at them one way the people were young, when they arrived to work in the NHS, and then if you moved and looked at them from a different angle, they became older, as they are now. There was something so warming and beautiful about these photographs. In addition, there was a video showing of *Racism in the NHS 2022*, by Hashvi Shah and Alysha Harun, which showed healthcare professionals talking about their experiences of racism working in the NHS, drawing us back to the present - demonstrating ongoing legacies of colonialism and racism throughout the displays.

However, here in this exhibition we had photographs of people in a white museum space, people with brown skin, people racialised as Black who had participated in the exhibition, and it did not feel 'Othering', it did not feel harmful. It did not feel like 'Others coming to perform *for* us in the white space as Boast had asserted, which many exhibitions do. Yet, it also did not feel like a Clifford or Peers example of a collaborative approach, inviting 'dialog […] [with] diverse audiences and multiply centred histories of encounter (Clifford 1997: 214), or 'getting' people to reinterpret colonial artefacts. It felt different, it felt safe with my children in this space, in fact I felt proud: this was an honest British narrative I wanted them to see. One of the pivotal differences was language. The word 'people' was used - a word that cannot be understated when, unless you are white, racial descriptors always seem to come before your name, gender, or anything else about you. The words doctors, nurses, healthcare workers, professionals, medical migrants were used. People's countries were used, stating where they had arrived from, and sometimes where they moved to in the UK. In the video *Racism in the NHS 2022* some people used racial descriptors such as Black or Asian, and once BAME, but this was not white people saying these terms, and white was named repeatedly. I saw doctors and nurses from many countries: Ireland, Germany, Iraq, Pakistan, Trinidad, Lebanon and the Philippines. People arrived from as far back as the 1939 up to 2022. Furthermore, white people were included, nurses from Ireland and Germany. All too often migration is presented as 'Other', the racialised person, however, the inclusion of humanising language, respectful language to people's professions which did not racialise them, *unmarked* people often racially marked in white spaces. In addition, the inclusion of white migrants from Northern Europe and their stories named whiteness as migrants, thus unmarking people usually marked, disrupting the 'Othering' myth of migrants. British government and media swing from the perils of migrants to the 'narrative of "danger"' (Połońska-Kimunguyi 2022: 7). In 'Echoes of Empire: Racism and Historical Amnesia in the British Media Coverage of Migration', Ewa Połońska-Kimunguyi (2022: 7) asserts a racialised contrast in British portrayal of migrants, with white migrants from Eastern Europe stigmatised as an economic threat to working-class manual labour jobs, and a burden on the benefit system, stating Polish and Romanian people have become 'dirty whiteness, a new category of racial stratification'. By contrast, the overwhelming portrayal of migrants is linked to a threat of danger, which specifically maps onto Black and brown bodies, and primarily Muslim people 'especially those from the Middle East and Africa, as a threat to law and order' (Połońska-Kimunguyi 2022: 6), a toxic continuation of racial stereotypes and profiling. Further, British migration is represented as a one way route, neglecting the

'5.5 million British nationals' who have migrated to live overseas (Połońska-Kimunguyi 2022: 8), who are named 'expats', or perhaps 'adventurers' or 'explorers'. The inclusion of white Northern European migrants in *Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS* unmarked people usually marked and reminded us that migration is all of us. Anand stated the use of language, and the inclusion of white migrants was a deliberate curatorial approach:

> we definitely never want to create a sense of like an us versus them. So, the language we try to use is often you know it is about us as all of us and how we're shaped by migration and that we all have a story, and so yeah, we often try to even, even in kind of any exhibition, you know, introductory text or something, we try to avoid using the word *they* just because you know that is a very conscious choice to write from the perspective of this is all our stories.[20]

I visited this exhibition in Lewisham too, and it felt different, more like everyone's space, and in Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, though the exhibition itself felt positive, we then had to walk out past displayed African bodies and 'high' European art, the colonial collections of the white space. Creating safer white spaces is more than one exhibition. However, in the white colonial museum, *Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS*, de-centred the fantasy of 'pure' British whiteness as superior. The fantasy of 'Other' was disrupted by unmarking people, using self-identified nationalities rather than racialised labels, and including white migrants. The presence of whiteness in the narrative of British migration and the NHS allowed people to be people, and not 'Other', enabling the truth of 'great' British empire and racism to be heard in a way that was not 'them' but us. As Anand argued:

> one story doesn't have to threaten another story and if we actually see it as my story is a part of your story, and sometimes it can feel like you're doing this way of telling stories where it's kind of either or rather than trying to show the interconnectedness between all our stories. So, I think that for me feels like a model of decolonisation is to just tell more stories and situate them into that larger narrative.[21]

I think back to Bristol: the Black Lives Matter mural stood in the foyer, against a backdrop of imperialism, of trophies and within a monument to white supremacy. However, at Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, Anand and The Migration Museum consciously spoke truth about empire and racism and strived to exhibit in a way that actively disrupts 'us' and 'them'. I did not feel sad; I did not fear objectification or feel an anxiety to remove my children from the space; in fact, I wanted them to see *Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS*.

Whiteness Exposed: *Genetic Automata*, Wellcome Collection, London, UK, 2024

Genetic Automata is a major collaborative video work by artists Larry Achiampong and David Blandy, 'exploring race and identity in an age of avatars, videogames and DNA ancestry'.[22] The project originally started out with an invitation to Achiampong and Blandy to create an art piece for the Welcome Genome Campus. The project later became a full exhibition at the Wellcome Collection showcasing a series of four films exploring scientific racism: *A Terrible Fiction* (2019); *A Lament for Power* (2020); *Dust to Data* (2021), and the latest film *GOD MODE*, co-commissioned by the Wellcome Collection, Black Cultural Archives, and Wellcome Connecting Science, exploring the legacy of Francis Galton, 'who established eugenics as a scientific discipline at UCL (University College London) in 1904'.[23] *Genetic Automata* was curated by Shamita Sharmacharja of the Wellcome Collection, with an additional series of talks by historian and writer Subhadra Das. Genetic Automata was on at the Wellcome Collection, from June 2023 to February 2024. The exhibition was funded by the Wellcome.

The Wellcome Collection derives from Henry Wellcome, a wealthy white man who collected objects from around the world in relation to his interests in science and art. When Wellcome died in 1936, his wealth and collections founded the Wellcome Foundation, owned by the Wellcome Trust, and then the Wellcome Collection Museum and Library, focusing on health, art and funding research, which opened in 2007.

The museum is grand and large, facing the busy Euston Road in London. Inside the

space is vast and open, full of light, a café and shop to the right as we walk in. Black security guards, a man and woman, stood at the entrance steps, crowds of middle and upper-class white people swarm the foyer and café areas. I instantly feel out of place, insecure as to if we fit in. There are a few floors at the museum, and all the galleries are huge. *Genetic Automata* was upstairs, and I have to admit, I am not a fan of video installations or video games. Therefore, I didn't have much expectation of being inspired by *Genetic Automat*a, but it felt important to see it because it was an exhibition in the UK about 'race' science. Yet, *Genetic Automata* challenged my preconceptions completely.

The gallery was dimly lit, with glass cabinets displaying books such as Audre Lorde's *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House*, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, Charles Darwin's *On the Origins of Species*, and Francis Galton's *Finger Prints*; laid out together. A small film played within a glass cabinet of Micheal Jackson's 1991 music video *Black or White*, faces morphing into one another. A larger screen showed artists Achiampong and Blandy talking about the work. As we moved into another room, we were greeted by a wall of blue eyes. In the centre of the room were sculptures of white men's heads, one of which was Frances Galton, 'father' of Eugenics. They were death masks, common in Victorian times for painting people after they had passed. In glass cabinets there were also some objects that belonged to Galton and Karl Pearson - a follower of Galton and the first professor of Eugenics at the University College London; some photographs of Jewish school boys; some glass eyes in order of dark brown to lighter brown to green and then blue; and measuring tools. These objects were all used to classify people and put people into racial 'types'. The *GOD MODE* film was on in an even darker room within this space. The film started with talking over the visual of different angles of Galton's death mask:

> spinning tales to imprison lives in gossamer cages
>
> This was spun into enduring myths of our differences
>
> That some bodies are defective
>
> and some deemed normal
>
> Default selections on the home screen
>
> I wish these ideas had died
>
> with these old men years ago
>
> But they're embedded
>
> in the choices of who lives and who dies, of which lives have value.[24]

I snapped photos on my phone, desperate to capture the frames. I could not believe what I was seeing - truth was in a museum and boldly.

As we moved through the vast gallery space, there was a dark corridor with a repeated image from floor to ceiling of an Ancient Egyptian sculpture head. We watched the film *Dust to Data* next and it started as powerfully as *GOD MODE*: 'To cast is to mark and control'.[25] The film explored the web of archaeology, colonialism, and eugenics, and a correspondence between US Sociologist W.E.B Du Bois, and Flinders Petrie, a British Egyptologist and Archaeologist associated with the eugenics movement at The University College London. The film further is an analogy between archaeology and data mining in the present day, which searches for data in DNA or algorithms used in social media, relying on tiny fragments of data to provide origin stories of our past and present. The film shows an image of an Egyptian coffin, and a 3D pyramid suspended, rotating above, moving slowly onto a scene of a river and then a skull. The narration is a direct message, and a conversation again, asserting:

The academy is wary of change

of changing understandings of the past

And with that, they mould these new ways of thinking

in order to manipulate them

Careers need to be protected

And investments must thrive

The hierarchies baked into the code

Stay in your place, it is written

In the word.

You're terrified that if understandings change,

everything will fall apart

Within the archaeology of human origins,

the European record

has always been held up as the pinnacle,

the default, by which we judge

African finds.

The European history

of caves, paintings and bones

was the basis,

the origin of the studies,

so it's seen as the benchmark

the default.

Through this process, a set of norms was established

where the origins of Homo sapiens

was seen through a Eurocentric lens

This is how people in the past should have looked like if they were Homo sapiens "like us"

> In Home sapiens, this so-called white skin colouring
>
> It's not something that goes deep into the past
>
> It's not suddenly that Homo sapiens as hunter gatherers arrived in Europe
>
> forty thousand years ago, they turned white […]
>
> that until very recently hunter gatherers in Britain, ten thousand, even six thousand years ago, were dark skinned.
>
> Archaeology was born of the colony, used by colonial administrations to gather information about who they were administering.
>
> A way of finding out, who is here, who were they, what they were doing, and how they can tax them.
>
> And then control them.
>
> Our stories
>
> The past is a collective story, a story that we make.
>
> So we must remake it now.[26]

Time was fluid; the narrative was then and now, and it is the future if we let it. Historical objects, film, and words demonstrated the root and legacy of racism. The artwork exposed the coloniser. I was so surprised to see this in a museum. I had been searching for it, in my many exhibition visits, and here it was - whiteness revealed, and in a white museum space.

Whiteness was marked, in the blue eyes on the wall, the death masks, the films and words narrated over them. The word white was said. I was relieved at the absence of re-traumatising imagery - the usual Black Spectacle. In *Genetic Automata* there *was* Blackness, but it was different, the power was different. There was a film at the entrance of the artists Achiampong and Blandy; Achiampong is British-Ghanian and Blandy is white British, and this was cited. Blandy's whiteness was named, he was named a white artist, when usually only Black artists are marked racially. Class was named too, with Achiampong said to be working-class and Blandy middle-class. This is an example of Unmarking; Blandy was racially marked as well as Achiampong. To unmark does not necessarily mean Achiampong is not said to be Black or British Ghanaian, it means Blandy, as a white artist is named too. When I interviewed Blandy I asked about this - he said:

> I think effectively this comes from the relatively unusual situation of a collaborative project of two artists of different histories, and the way that we've dealt with language has been developed for, yeah, almost a decade. Like, you know, […] often it's just about mirroring, like so you're treating two artists the same and I think Shamita and everyone at Wellcome sort of, you know, picked up on the language that we had, you know and everything was done in consultation with us.[27]

I think of how I have also mirrored language in my own life. It is not new to name whiteness; Black and brown people say it all the time - it is white people who don't. As a white person you can go through most of your life and not be named white. Being called white jolts you out of socialised normalcy. I have learnt from family and community to mirror like Blandy; by my whiteness being named, I have named whiteness, and named Blackness and brown, often with geographical attachments. Sharmacharja talked of the Wellcome's anti-racist policies and staff learning, including anti-racist modules all staff undertake; and when I asked about marking Blandy and use of language within *Genetic Automata*, she stated, 'it was a

curatorial decision. It's also an institutional standpoint'.[28] I questioned this however, due to my experience of visiting the Wellcome exhibition, *The Cult of Beauty* (2024), which while it covered vast aspects of beauty, it specifically sectioned off a display on 'Racialised Beauty'. Though this display did allude to whiteness, it also visually and textually marked racialised beauty as Black and brown. Cabinets and displays showed Ebony magazines; a few framed portraits of Vogue magazine covers of Lupita Nyong'o; make-up; skin lightening creams; and a selection of Angelica Das's 'Humanae' portraits. In addition, there was a screen with Black women showing various hairstyles, and a large, framed photograph of 'Miss Black and Beautiful' 1972. Furthermore, what I found most disappointing and sad in 'Racialised Beauty' was the inclusion of an image of Saartjie Baartman. I did not want to even write her name here, and I almost didn't, not because she doesn't matter, she *does*, but because her name, her body and her life continues to be exploited and exhibited over and over again. As Achiampong said to me in an interview, 'the Black body, even in death, […] continues to serve white supremacy essentially'.[29] To see her in this exhibition presented in a book in a glass cabinet, no matter how much the text may write truths of the fetishization and racism that she experienced at the hands and gaze of white people, it is my feeling she should not be exhibited anymore. It is enough. Masses of white women gazed at 'Racialised Beauty'; there is racialised and colonial power in who is looking and who is being looked at in an exhibition.

While both *The Cult of Beauty* and *Genetic Automata* were held at and curated by the Wellcome Collection, with an institutional anti-racist standpoint, it takes more than policies to achieve this. Sharmacharja said *The Cult of Beauty* curator; 'she's a person of colour as well. She worked very closely with Emma Dabiri who, I don't know if you know who, but who wrote *Don't Touch My Hair*'.[30] Yet, we are all socialised in a white supremacist racist culture, and we all can - no matter how we are racialised - unintentionally reinscribe these dynamics. The language of *Genetic Automata* was led by Achiampong and Blandy - they brought their own standpoint, and the Wellcome mirrored them. As Sharmacharja stated, 'I think that's absolutely to do with David and Larry's practice'.[31] It was a collaboration, as Blandy told me, 'everything was done in consultation with us. So, you know, often like a text would come through and then like, you know words would be changed' and 'they did not try to push their agenda'.[32] Furthermore, Achiampong stated, '[i]n terms of our experience of working with the Wellcome Collection, I will say it was one of the better, if not one of the best experiences that we've had in terms of our career as a collaborative duo'.[33] Sharmacharja as curator and the Wellcome, were open to Achiampong and Blandy's approach, and worked in a truly collaborative way, allowing an artist led exhibition.

In addition, the artwork was a conversation of differing racial experiences, a colonial conversation, the recognition of differences that do not focus solely on the suffering of people who experience racial oppression but cast a lens on to the coloniser identity too. Achiampong and Blandy wrote different perspectives for the films, taking on the voices of people represented in the films. Blandy takes on the voice of the white person, and he talked about this with me:

> I'm for a lot of the writing that I do for those parts, you know, I know the role that I'm playing, I'm often taking on the role of the white voice within that space, so you know, and, but to take on the role of Galton just, well, like it's a lot, and then there's that feeling that, you know, that is both justified and kind of unjustified that Galton's voice is my voice. I felt like I really had to make it clear that this is me taking positions, and then because Larry was very much in his text kind of deconstructing the whole thing, which I think was completely the right thing to do. But yeah, it was.[34]

While a difficult conversation as artists and friends, as Achiampong said the films and these conversations cannot be:

> too pedestrian. Just like piecemeal, slow. Not honest about our positions […] [it has to] talk […] about the elephant in the room and the elephant in the room is me and David. It is our actual relationship […] If you decide not to talk about them, no one will talk about them.[35]

Not only did *Genetic Automata* mark Blandy as a white artist and address differing racialised

experiences, more often than not in the display text and film the word *people* was used. There was the word white, and whiteness was named, de-centring it from its somatic norm. There was the word Black on a few texts. The use of the word people is to unmark people usually marked out in white space. Moreover, *Genetic Automata* called out colonial truths, named whiteness, interrogated it and exposed it, narrated racism in all its guises past and present, without overtly marking or re-objectifying people visually or textually. As Achiampong described to me, the films in *Genetic Automata* aim to be:

> a trap. The first film, […] for me, the design is a trap. […] With my approach to writing, it is to trap whiteness. […] People talk about subversion, but no, for me I am interested in creating traps […] [and] what is a trap for some people in terms of their experience, will be freeing for others.[36]

While the work is a trap as such for white people, it is for everyone - it makes white people think and question, and 'it also frees Black folk, or folk from global majority because they are being seen'.[37] Working in collaboration Achiampong and Blandy have to consider their differing racial experiences: 'with a collaboration one or both must think of the other'.[38] Two words can describe the experience of *Genetic Automata* - *relief*, that an exhibition on colonialism and racism did not cause harm in the white space, and *hope*, that maybe change is possible.

Conclusion

This paper has been about challenging the status quo of decolonisation as diversification in the museum sector. More often than not, attempts to bring in racialised bodies through collaborative projects and the programming of artists, curators, 'community' members, and organizations, replicates the power dynamics of colonialism and racism. The racial dynamic is recreated most acutely when people are permitted into the white space within the confines of expressing racialised suffering or to pose as 'diversity' subjects for the new inclusive brand of the museum. Decolonisation and anti-racism of the museum space is far more than 'inviting' people to give their voice in their own re-objectification. It is an upfront challenge to white supremacy.

Decolonisation as 'diversification' and collaboration obscures addressing the source of colonialism and racism. 'Diversity' and the collaborative approach that Clifford and Peers advocated decades ago and of which the museum sector still commits too, gives a false illusion of change, while, as Ahmed (2019: 148) describes, 'diversity is like a big shiny red apple, it all looks wonderful but if you actually cut into that apple there's a rotten core in there'. The obsession with diversifying the white space only serves to offer a mirage, to appear to hand over some power while whiteness and its violence remain firmly embedded beneath the smile of 'diversity'. As Blandy asserts:

> the awful thing is that it 'Others' everyone involved […] It's like we're not normally involved, and then here, here's a group of people you wouldn't normally see in a museum. And then they're gone again. You know, it's like if it meant, like from this point, like, this is going to be, you know, much more kind of conversational space, a space where ideas are really challenged.[39]

Yet, when whiteness *is* brought to the surface, cracks start to appear and steps towards a decolonisation that does not recolonise starts to take shape.

The exploration of *Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS* and *Genetic Automata* illustrate not only rare personal experiences of visiting exhibitions on 'race', racism, and colonial history, that did not feel harmful, but the illustration of artistic and curatorial praxis that can reduce harm in the white space, and challenge whiteness. By including white people in the story of migration, *Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS* de-centred whiteness from its superior 'pure' British fantasy. The inclusion of white people in the display as medical migrants destabilised the fantasy of 'Other' in the white imagination and disrupted the white colonial gaze in the museum space. The usual white gaze onto 'Other' could not take place with white people included. The colonial racist canon was severed. In addition, people who have migrated from many countries were included with photographs and personal stories

of journeys, family, work, and racism experienced, yet people were not racially marked out in the white space. People's names were there, the countries they had migrated from, their geographical identity rather than a racialised one. The absence of racialised marking created an exhibition which avoided the 'us' and 'them' – the racialised 'Others' and made us all part of British history and contemporary life. Empire and colonialism, racism in the NHS past and present were clearly narrated through text panels, audio, and personal accounts. While some racialised language was used in the film screenings, whiteness was named, the silent word spoken many times to be revealed. While Leicester Museum and Art Gallery as an institution were open and supportive of hosting The Migration Museum exhibition, it was Anand and The Migration Museum and their ethos of working in ways that do not focus on 'diversification' as decolonial and anti-racist work but actively aim to curate in ways that disrupt 'us' and 'them'.

Genetic Automata displayed films and objects on racism - a topic where in the white museum space we usually see violent images and objects of Black suffering and victimisation. Yet, while the *Genetic Automata* exhibition laid out the truth of racism, colonialism and eugenics, it did this without re-exhibiting the trauma of people who experience racism. *Genetic Automata* shifted the gaze onto the coloniser, the white person, whiteness, its power, its racism. The oppressor was the 'subject' of the gaze. The coloniser as the subject did not mean Black experience was not heard within the exhibition, it *was* there fully, but the 'object' was not Black. As a white person in the white colonial space, we are used to being the unseen looker, gazing at the suffering, exoticized or 'diverse' 'Other' - museums teach us that - but *Genetic Automata* de-centred whiteness, made white look at white, and hear Blackness. As in *Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS*, *Genetic Automata* named whiteness, spoke to the name never said, and while Black was written in some text, the word people was used on the whole throughout, and people were not racially marked out. In addition, *Genetic Automata* felt like a conversation between the artists and the viewer, a teaching in a way, and *GOD MODE* was a back and forth between Achiampong and Blandy. While this is not to say people cannot exhibit alone, something about the conversation mattered. It was the conversation of acknowledgement of differing racial experience. The status quo in museums is to address colonialism and racism by putting the onus on those who are most oppressed by whiteness, with white people stepping back claiming to hand over power. Yet, what this does is not only place the focus on victimhood, but it side-steps the accountability of whiteness and interrogating our coloniser identity. As Sharmacharja questioned, '[w]hy is it that it's always people of colour who have to have these conversations? It would be really nice if it wasn't always on the onus of people of colour to be raising this because it's tiring. It's tiring'.[40] To decolonise there needs to be both. *Genetic Automata* did this, powerfully.

We must note however, that in addition to exhibitions, space is pivotal. Dan Hicks, in *Brutish Museums* (2021: xiv), asserts that violence is committed every day stolen objects are on display: 'the damage is renewed every day that the museum doors are unlocked and these trophies are displayed to the public'. Programming exhibitions that employ methods of naming whiteness and unmarking people, or including white people, and ensuring trauma is not re-exhibited cannot take away the violence of many museums, because of the objects they still display, and the institutional histories and current ties to colonialism and neocolonialism. For example, while *Heart of the Nation: Migration and the Making of the NHS* was an exhibition that was not harmful in the white space, the surrounding space of Leicester Museum and Art Gallery had elements that were. For example, the display of Ancient Egyptian artefacts and African bodies, and the buildings history itself, and this is where decolonial and anti-racist work also needs to be done. The Wellcome Collection, on the other hand, programmed and commissioned works for *Genetic Automata*, and as an institution have also made anti-racist moves, for example by removing the *Medicine Man* exhibit, a display that the Wellcome Collection:

> after research and reflection…had concluded that it "still perpetuates a version of medical history that is based on racist, sexist and ableist theories and language". There seemed no alternative - the gallery's doors had to shut permanently.[41]

However, the colonial gaze may always be there, for example the Wellcome's anti-racist policies do not transcend into all exhibitions - as seen in *The Cult of Beauty* which arguably replicated

racial objectification. It was Achiampong and Blandy's influence and lived experiences, in conjunction with Sharmacharja's commitment to an artist led exhibition, which made *Genetic Automata* so influential. Furthermore, in 'Passing down', an interview for *Genetic Automata,* Achiampong stated in the white museum space 'we're seen differently'.[42] However, it is perhaps with a level of consciousness of whiteness, and commitment to actively change and dismantle colonial spaces that exhibitions that employ artistic and curatorial praxis such as explored in this paper: naming and exposing whiteness; ensuring the colonial gaze and Black Spectacle are considered in the white space; and importantly racially un-marking people which as I have argued does not necessarily mean not saying Black - can, I argue, start to counter the harms of the white space. By destabilising the white fantasy of self and 'Others', exhibitions can confront whiteness - the 'trap' Achiampong speaks too - and in turn become 'freeing for others'.[43]

The underpinning research in this paper was approved by the University of Leicester's ethics committee in May, 2025.

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