"Westernised" inclusion? - Decolonising visual arts and knowledge.

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Briefing Note:

This report aims to discuss the role the Western World has in undermining minority groups through the enforcement of colonial and imperial views. Decolonising art, education, and politics can achieve greater inclusivity and challenge westernised conceptions.

Overview:

- Art and visual representation have played a crucial role in 'othering' minorities and advancing imperialism. Nowadays this is persistent through harmful practices of cultural appropriation for profitability.
- Museums are physical legacies of colonialism and imperialism through the appropriation and exhibition of cultural material and the 'exotification' and 'othering' of the colonised. These narratives are largely unchallenged in the current institutional framework of museums and culture.
- The Western World fails to take accountability and lacks transparency in national curriculums on the effects the British empire had on its colonies. This often invalidates the knowledge and intellects of those colonies through the use of unjustified labels such as 'backward' and 'underdeveloped'.

Visual arts and imperialism:

Cultural appropriation, defined as the 'taking from a culture that is not one's own in terms of intellectual property, cultural expression and artefacts, history and even ways of knowledge' highlights how persisting colonial legacies are shaping the histories of 'European colonial peripheries'.[1]

- The settler colonialist project has played and still plays a crucial role in eradicating Indigenous culture through legislation aimed at outlawing language, cultural and religious practices including art, and 'othering' the colonised.[2]
- Landscape photography in settler colonies, such as Australia and New Zealand, was used to erase Indigenous presence and claim settler territoriality over so-called 'no-mans' land.[3]
- During the 18th century, India and Indians were represented in art as incapable, lazy and exploitative in comparison to the images of British officials in formal attire, alienating India from itself and presenting it as part of the British Empire, with little effort to address these representations in contemporary exhibitions.[4]

Harm done by cultural appropriation through art can take forms such as the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes or distortion of indigenous imagery, which can lead to nonrecognition.[5]

- Indigenous peoples in the US are commonly portrayed as 18th-century figures; a content analysis of 345 most viewed US primetime television shows from 1987-2008 found that only 3 regular characters of 2336 were Indigenous.[6]

[1] Matthes, E. H. (2016). Cultural appropriation without cultural essentialism? *Social Theory and Practice*, 4, 2, pp. 343-366.

[2] Cunneen, C. (2017) *'Visual Power and Sovereignty: Indigenous Art and Colonialism'* In Brown, M. and Carrabine, E. (Eds) *The Routledge International Handbook of Visual Criminology*, Milton Park: Routledge.

[3] Neath, J. (2023) Visions of Nature: How Landscape Photography Shaped Settler Colonialism AND Colonization, Wilderness and Spaces Between: Nineteenth Century Landscape Painting in Australia and the United States, *Australian Historical Studies*, 54:1, pp. 179-181.

[4] Chatterjee, A. (2019). *Visual arts and British Imperialism in India in the Eighteenth century: a colonial society in the making*.

[5] Lalonde, D. (2021). Does cultural appropriation cause harm? *Politics, Groups and Identity*, 9:2, pp. 329-246.

[6] Matthes, E. H. (2016). Cultural appropriation without cultural essentialism? *Social Theory and Practice*, 4, 2, pp. 343-366.

- As the majority culture tends to 'exoticise' ethnic cultures, exploitation and commodification of cultures and art for aesthetic and economic reasons damages marginalised groups which do not enjoy the same privileges or rights to self-expression as the dominant culture.[7]
- In the UK, the 1990s fashion trend known as 'Asian chic' used traditional religious icons in catwalk shows inverting the meaning or value of Hindu culture.[7]
- USA-based retailer Urban Outfitters commercialised products underneath the 'Navajo' label, from dreamcatchers to headdresses; seizing a large source of potential direct revenue from the Indigenous Navajo Nation, unable to compete with the large company.[7]
- Throughout history, motifs and inspirations from Africa, which have religious and ceremonial values attached, have been used as 'inspiration' by Western artists while presenting disdain for their origins.[8]
- In Australia, auction sales of Indigenous artworks were over $23 million AUD 2020-2021 period, however, less than 10% of people operating Indigenous art businesses are Indigenous.[9]

Dispossession of Indigenous practices and art is also present through the cultural and religious appropriation of non-Anglo imagery.[9]

- The 'self-help' industry represents billions of dollars, and abundant usage of Native American symbology for the commodification of 'self-help' products removes the 'sacred' and 'cultural' aspect of their symbols and art.[10]
- The usage of stock images, with deities, saints and sacred sites of Hindu origins; has increasingly been utilised in merchandise intended for Western audiences in fashion and visual arts for consumerist purposes.[11]
- The increasing usage of cultural elements such as white sage among new age spiritualists is seen as a trend, being sold and marketed in stores such as Walmart and Anthropologie for mass consumption while ignoring the complicated histories of repression against Native American spiritual practices; while[12]

[7] Arya, R. (2021). Cultural appropriation: What it is and why it matters? *Sociology Compass*.
[8] P54 (2020). *Cultural appropriation and its relation to African art*.
[9] Chow, A. M., Michal Carrington, M & Ozanne, J. L. (2022) Reimagining the Indigenous art market: site of decolonisation and assertion of Indigenous cultures, *Journal of Marketing Management*.
[10] Awad, A. (2021). *The new age looks enlightened and exotic because it borrows freely from non-Anglo cultures*.
[11] Arya, R. (2017). *Cultural appropriation: analysing the use of Hindu symbols within consumerism*.
[12] Berger, H. A. (2023). *-.Sage, sacred to Native American, is being used in purification rituals, raising issues of cultural appropriation*.

Institutionalised colonial narratives:

The expansion of empires and the creation of museums has occurred hand-in-hand throughout history, as museums in the Imperial centres were expressly founded for the purpose of promoting colonialism and showcasing the colonies.[13]

- In London, the Imperial Institute was founded in the late 19th century with the intention to represent the centre of the British Empire following the 'Indian exhibition'.[13]
- The Royal Museum of Central Africa in Brussels was created to display Belgium's Empire after the conquer of the Congo, displaying ivory artefacts from the colony among many others.[13]
- In the Netherlands, the Dutch Colonial Institute was constructed using materials 'collected' from travels to the Dutch colonies by the United East India Company, to better reflect the country's colonial achievements.[13]

Museums are a product of colonisation and of Western 'othering', as they have originated from private collections of 'oddities' from 'foreign and exotic' lands.[14]

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[13] Aldrich, R. (2009). Colonial museums in a postcolonial Europe. *African and Black Diaspora: an international journal*, 2, 2, pp. 137-156.

[14] Maranda, L. (2021). The Decolonisation of Museology: museums, mixing, and myths of origin. *ICOFOM study series*, 29, 2, pp. 180-195.

- Imperial exploration and colonisation have led to the sample collection of animal and plant species, but also of material culture objects from Indigenous peoples the colonists came into contact with.[12,15]
- Anthropology as a field of study developed as a consequence of Imperial expansion, resulting in a great influx of culture objects from colonised Indigenous tribes to museums located in the Imperial core.[12]
- The Natural History Museum in London has refused to return 7 preserved Māori tattooed heads used in divination and burial rituals, as part of the museum's scientific specimens.[16]

In the case of the British Empire, the British Museum is a good representation of cultural imperialism through the material appropriation of 'artefacts'. the colonial legacy of this institution persists through its refusal to acknowledge the Imperial past and repatriate cultural objects.[17]

- According to AlJazeera (2021), the British Museum is currently holding 73,000 African objects looted from wars and colonisation.[18]
- It is estimated that out of the 1,000 pieces of *Benin Bronzes* looted by the British Empire in the late 19th century, the British Museum is withholding 700; refusing to repatriate them to Nigeria.[19]
- The *Parthenon marble* or *Elgin marble* have been acquired by the British Empire from Ottoman-occupied Greece; repatriation talks only considered the option of loaning the sculptures to Athens.[20]

Colonial narratives persist in museum exhibitions, particularly through the way curators portray and exhibit artefacts to present a story, distorting perceptions of the material culture.[21]

- Museum professionals risk perpetuating harmful practices and irrelevant structures, alienating the visitors and communities they aim to attract.[22]
- The galleries of the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol, through photographic 'invisibility' of the colonial past, have failed to address the imperial narratives of these institutions.[23]

[15] Pyenson, L. (1996). *Science and Imperialism*. In: Olby, R. C.; Cantor, G. N.; Christie, J. R. R. & Hodge, M. J. S. *Companion to the history of modern science*, Routledge.

[16] The Guardian (2019). *'They're not property': the people who want their ancestors back from British museums*.

[17] Rooney, P. (2019). A 21st century empire: the British museum and its Imperial legacies. *The forum: Journal of History*, 11, 1, pp. 92-105.

[18] AlJazeera (2021). *Stealing Africa: how Britain looted the continent's art*.

[19] AlJazeera (2022). *Benin Bronzes go on last exhibition in Berlin before repatriation*.

[20] The Guardian (2023). *British museum in talks with Greece over return of Parthenon marbles*.

[21] Edwards, E. (2018). *Addressing colonial narratives in museums*.

[22] British Art Network (2020). *Research and the museum ecosystem*.

[23] Edwards, E. & Mead, M. (2013). Absent histories and absent images: photographs, museums and the colonial past. *Museum & society*, 11, 1.

- A US exhibition in 2017 about cotton in the American South has created controversy by decontextualising the art pieces from their entrenched histories of slavery and colonialism, to focus on the artistic elements of the pieces.[24]

Education and Other Institutions' perceptions of non-western worlds:

The education system has a lack of representation and inclusivity which has a direct link to the underperformance of BAME students. Looking particularly at the art subject curriculum in secondary education and higher education there is a lack of exposure to BAME authors and history.

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[24] Li, S. (2020). *American museums are going through an identity crisis.*

- There is not much systematic teaching about the empire, hence young people believe people who came from colonies and former colonies did not so as citizens but instead as immigrants leading to exclusivity.[25]
- According to the Guardian, only 25 out of 128 universities that were asked about reforms to address colonial legacy are committed to the idea, demonstrating a lack of interest in addressing the attainment gap between white students and those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.[26]
- Penguin Book Ltd. Suggests fewer than 1% of GCSE students in England study a book by a writer of colour despite 34.4.% of school-age children identifying as BAME.[27]
- Bird and Pitman suggest through analysis of reading lists there is a correlation between being inclusive, implementing more diverse and representative reading and people being more engaged and achieving better academically.[28]

To this day, politicians in the western world have not taken accountability for the actions of the former empires leading to the growing spread of imperialistic ideas. Without accountability, the view of the empire doing more good for colonies continues and suggests that the oppression of ideas and resources is acceptable.

- Politicians such as Boris Johnson believe the UK grew rich not because of exploitation and resource extraction but due to an innate ability to progress. Spreading colonial thinking of the non-western world being 'backwards' and 'undeveloped' whilst the lives and knowledge of some are still considered more important than others.[29]
- American Imperialism is, arguably, accountable for wars including Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen yet there is little accountability by politicians or recognition for the need to offer aid.[30]
- Most of the western world policymakers avoid accountability, particularly in Britain. For example, they have been told any sort of accountability of the empire would put pressure to decolonize more rapidly.[31]

The western world is largely portrayed as a superior civilization; it takes credit for modernising and building countries despite having stripped resources and

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[25]The Guardian (2019) <u>Put our colonial history on the curriculum- then we'll understand who we really are</u>

[26]The Guardian (2020) <u>Only a fifth of the UK universities say they are 'decolonising' curriculum</u>

[27]Penguin Books Ltd. (2021) <u>Fewer than 1% of GCSE students in England study a book by a writer of colour</u>

[28] K. Schucan Bird, Lesley Pitman (2020) <u>How diverse is your reading list? Exploring issues of representing and decolonisation in the UK</u>

[29]The Guardian (2019) <u>Put our colonial history on the curriculum – then we'll understand who we really are</u>

[30] The Daily Campus (2023) <u>Imperialism and accountability: American Politics</u>

[31] Robert.D.Venosa (2022) <u>Liberal Internationalism, Decolonization, and International Accountability at the United Nations: The British Dilemma</u>

knowledge of these colonies to further themselves. The view of European superiority must be decolonized and given credit to the countries that grew even when taken advantage of.

- Science was and still is to an extent used to argue imperialism was morally justified because it reflected British goodwill. To an extent, Europeans take credit for introducing modernity and civilised governance in the colonies as it was seen as a 'white man's burden'. The legacy of colonialism still pervades science today.[32]
- During the covid 19 pandemic the number of BAME groups in the UK dying was much larger than the white people which some say is the effect of the intergenerational trauma from former colony workers as they have high-risk health issues such as diabetes but also the fact that there has not been enough research regarding racism in the NHS.[33]
- According to Fanon, the inferiority complex of the colonised leads them to have the desire to be the "Other." Fanon uses this concept in reference to adopting the cultural norms and values of the coloniser, which is a natural outcome of the inculcated inferiority complex.[34]

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[32] Rohan Deb Roy (2018) Decolonise science- time to end another imperial era
[33] Nafees Mahmud (2021) The legacy of colonial trauma can still be felt in the UK's health divide
[34] Seunghyun Song (2017) Bridging Epidermalization of Black Inferiority and the racial Epidermal Schema: Internalizing Oppression to the Level of Possibility

Insight:

Overview:

The world of the arts is facing persisting issues around inclusivity, particularly of non-Western communities; as a consequence of persisting colonial and imperial legacies perpetuated in the Western World. Addressing these issues from a policy-making perspective requires a deeper understanding of the role of arts in 'othering' and 'exoticising' minority cultures, museums as colonial institutions and Eurocentric perspectives on knowledge and education in the arts and beyond.

The visual arts have played an important role throughout history in 'othering' minority cultures through a combination of both 'awe' and 'depreciation' of these, nowadays best exhibited via practices such as *cultural appropriation* for economic benefits. Museums originated as sites of Imperial exaltation by showcasing *cultural objects* acquired through colonisation, contemporary refusal to acknowledge these histories and in some cases repatriate objects raising questions around the narratives perpetuated by these institutions. Finally, education plays a key role in this process by perpetuating Eurocentric knowledge hegemony which permeates different aspects of public life, from arts to healthcare.

Visual arts have played a crucial role throughout history in 'othering' and 'exoticising' non-Western culture to advance imperialism. Nowadays, this is commonly exhibited through practices such as *cultural appropriation* for profitability.

Cultural appropriation is a contentious concept broadly defined as the process of some members of a culture taking for their own use items and practices produced by a member(s) of another culture.[35] Within the art world, different types of appropriation can occur ranging from the appropriation of artistic ideas from other cultures to content and motifs from indigenous cultures.[35] Although not intentional, this process can be harmful to cultures whose elements are being borrowed from; it can be engaging in cultural theft, perpetuating harmful stereotypes of a disadvantaged group, silencing voices or perpetuating oppressive power dynamics.[36]

In the world of visual arts, art has been used as a means of establishing Western superior narratives via the degradation of non-Western cultures, best represented through the labelling and representation of non-Western cultures as 'exotic' or different, also known as the process of 'othering'. According to von Beyme (2015), the Western fascination with the exotic has a long historical tradition, including within the arts; which has developed as a hierarchical understanding of cultures and places in foreign continents.[37] Indeed, although these concepts of exoticism and 'the other' have had positive connotations, such as understanding and sympathy towards different cultures, within the (post)colonial context the 'exotic' is predominantly marked by prejudice, Eurocentrism, imperialism and racism against different cultures from the Western one. Within the British Empire, art has been utilised to promote imperial unity and homogenise the *Imperial lived experience*, where it has constructed racial hierarchies around efficient military campaigns and 'empty' natural landscapes among many.[38] Yet what explains this simultaneous fascination and devaluation towards foreign cultures? In the visual arts, this process can be explained by considering art pieces of 'ideological work', where the appropriation of land, resources, labour and culture through empires is transformed and 'beautified' to conceal the hardships which actually characterised life in the Empire, particularly among local people; and even to perpetuate colonial narratives of 'empty lands' or the 'noble savage' to justify imperialism.

As a cultural phenomenon within the arts, 'Exoticism' has reflected Western perceptions of 'the East' as places of mystery and intricate cultural items such as costumes but also places of cruelty and irrationality, creating an artificial divide and 'othering'.[39] Similar to the British Empire, the French Imperial expansion justified Exoticism (or Orientalism) as a civilisational mission, the visual arts derived from this

[35] Young, J. (2008). *Cultural appropriation and the arts*.

[36] Pearson, P. (2021). Cultural appropriation and aesthetic normativity. *Philos Stud¸*178, pp. 1285-1299.

[37] von Beyme, K. (2015). *Chapter 13: from exoticism to postcolonial art: theorizing and politicizing art in the age of Globalisation*. In: et. al. *Politics in South Asia: Culture, rationality and conceptual flow.*

[38] Auerbach, J. (2014). The picturesque and the homogenisation of Empire. *The British art journal¸*1, pp. 47-54.

[39] Kurkina, A. (2021). *Orientalism as the 'Other' in Artwork*.

perpetuation of stereotypes while also *appropriating* cultural elements within the West. In this way, visual arts have been instrumental in 'othering' the colonised and justifying the Western Imperial project while paradoxically upholding a fascination and curiosity towards different cultures.

Here the concept of *cultural appropriation* comes into place, as the members from the dominant culture utilise elements from minority cultures towards their own benefit; discrediting the origins of art and highlighting power imbalances. In a way, the practice of *cultural appropriation* can be seen as a continuation of imperialism and colonisation, and as a way of destroying indigenous ways of living and forcing assimilation into the dominant culture.[40] Unethical profiting at the expense of non-Western voices is a main concern of this practice, which explains to a great extent why *cultural appropriation* within the arts is problematic. Western cultures have utilised the history of oppression against non-Western cultures in their favour to gain profit; disregarding the origins of art and ignoring the prosecution of traditional ways of living and creating ties with it.[41] From a socio-economic perspective, non-Western artists cannot compete with the low/mass-produced inauthentic items, redirecting revenue for these marginalised communities away and causing harmful impacts on cultural maintenance and self-determination.[39] Closely related to non-Western art forms is the representation of religion, increasingly commodified by Western cultures to expand profit and represents an opportunity for exploitation and even capitalistic imperialism over so the called 'inferior status non-hegemonic cultures'.[42]

Throughout history, visual arts have been utilised by Western imperial cultures to shape perceptions of foreign cultures from a place of fascination and power dominance towards 'inferior' cultures, effectively creating imperial narratives of 'exoticisation' and 'othering'. Nowadays the practice of cultural appropriation can be seen as a form of neo-colonialism by profiting from marginalised cultures at the expense of the exclusion of non-Western cultures in these discourses.

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[40] Canadian Crafts Federation (2021). *What is cultural appropriation? A brief introduction to cultural appropriation of craft in Canada*.

[41] Nara, E. (2017). *How cultural appropriation profits from the history of the oppressed*.

[42] York, M. (2001). New Age commodification and appropriation of spirituality. Journal of Contemporary religion, 16:3, pp. 361-372.

Western Imperialism through the extraction of resources and labour from non-Western cultures has led the Imperial Core to acquire vast quantities of resources and *cultural objects*. Museums have played (and still play) a central role in this process by perpetuating unequal power dynamics.

The expansion of colonialism and imperialism throughout Western Europe is reflected through the rise and creation of museums as cultural institutions. The entrenched imperial nature of these is still present in current practices. Historically, museums arose between the 18-19th centuries as a consequence of industrialism and colonialism as sites for housing artefacts and objects extracted from European exploration and the colonies.[43] In the broader context of the colonial project, museums functioned as places that showcased Imperialism; these institutions predominantly ignored or oversimplified the brutal histories of slavery and empire whilst simultaneously glorifying the empires themselves.[44] With a few exceptions, throughout history, these institutions have ignored critical histories of empires in favour of celebratory narratives of Western hegemony over the colonies. The art-historical significance of extracted objects has been neglected, and descriptions of artefacts taken out of their historical contexts are usually omitted. This has led to a showcasing of objects from colonised cultures that's created a binary division between the 'civilised' West and the rest of the world.[45] Consequently, museums have been a key element in the creation of an artificial 'otherness', an intrinsic aspect of the colonial project. Western culture seems to be showcased as a somewhat superior point of reference for visual arts, something which is still pervasive in contemporary practices within these institutions.

In the contemporary world, despite the formal end of the Imperial era; colonial narratives persist and are still strongly present in cultural institutions such as museums. This is perhaps best reflected through existing curational work within these organisations and the way artefacts and objects of colonial origins are exhibited and

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[43] Vawda, S. (2019). Museums and the Epistemology of Injustice: from colonialism to decoloniality, *Museum International*, 71:1-2, pp. 72-79.
[44] Small, S. (2011). Slavery, colonialism and museums representations in Great Britain: Old and New circuits of migration. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-knowledge*¸9, 4, pp. 117-126.
[45] Giblin, J., Ramos, I. & Grout, N. (2019). Dismantling the Master's House, *Third Text*¸ 33:4-5, pp. 471-486.

presented to the public. The practice of curatorship within museums is a central element of these institutions, where narrow social groups define how other cultures and people are categorised, studied and displayed. This enables the construction of the 'otherness' identity that does not represent the lived experiences of non-Western people themselves.[46]

Certain artefacts or art objects do not fit into clear classification categories as the very origins of these 'classification categories' are legacies from colonial methodologies of classifying, with implicit interpretations and assumptions associated towards the colonised.[47] These practices in curation and exhibition have implicit assumptions regarding non-Western cultures and present a clear example of *cultural imperialism,* which is manifested through dominant discourses of Western/non-Western dichotomies within cultural spaces such as museums.[48] Art museums, therefore, were designated to separate so-called 'civilised art and culture' from 'primitive' artefacts to display the superiority of Western civilisation.[49] In contemporary curatorial work in some institutions, exhibition spaces still depict non-Western culture within a 'primitive' framework and decontextualise cultural objects from their original uses and life histories, in order to prioritise their 'aesthetic' function[50] (i.e. their *beauty*) and cater to Western audiences.

The issue of repatriation of non-Western cultural objects within museums is another example of *cultural imperialism* displayed by these institutions, this being defined as the process by which *cultural objects* are returned to a nation or state upon government request.[51] Increasingly, the debate about repatriation is being discussed within mainstream discourses around museums, forcing these institutions to reevaluate their own positionalities in the Imperial project and address issues around the provenance of some of these items.[52] Apart from European 'awe' towards the 'other', justifications for the removal of these cultural objects from their contexts follow 'saviourism' arguments; pertaining that the removal of these objects from non-Western cultures has been done to 'preserve' those cultures from degradation,[49] Ironically, the removal of these objects has historically been carried out through illegal means such as stealing, looting or trading on unequal terms.[42] The relevant institutions are reluctant to repatriate items, highlighting how, although these museums hold profound importance in the contemporary world as a 'universal resource' for everyone to access[53], implicitly, through the refusal to return these cultural objects to their

[46] Morton, S. (2020). *Inside the human remains store: the impact of repatriation on museum practice in the United Kingdom.* In: Fforde, C., Keeler, H. and McKeown, T., eds. *The Routledge companion to indigenous repatriation: return, reconcile, renew.* Pp. 902-917.

[47] Loren, D. D. (2015). Seeing hybridity in the anthropology museum: practices of longing and fetishization. 15, 3, pp. 299-318.

[48] Minott, R. (2019). The past is now: confronting museums' complicity in Imperial Celebration. *Third Text*, 33:4-5, pp. 559-574.

[49] Okediji, M. (1999). "Oruku Tindi Tindi": Museums and the Pseudo-Aesthetics of Primitivism. *Research in African Literatures,*30, 1, pp. 216-232.

[50] Price, S. (2013). *The Enduring power of primitivism: showcasing "the Other" in twenty-first-century France.* In: Salami, G. & Visoná, M. B. *A companion to Modern African Art.*

[51] Collections Trust (2023). *Cultural property advice: restitution and repatriation.*

[52] Wilding, M. (2019). *Museums grapple with rise in pleas for return of foreign treasures.*

[53] Curtis, N. G. W. (2006). Universal museums, museum objects and repatriation: the tangled stories of things. *Museum Management and curatorship*, 21:2, pp. 117-127.

respective 'home communities', museums perpetuate notions that the 'civilised races' are the ones capable of defining and preserving universal human culture(s) for future generations.[42]

Institutions such as the education system, the political system and the medical system are in dire need to decolonise to achieve inclusivity. Education is secondary socialisation; POC learning about the glorified British Empire is disturbing. Politicians also lack accountability, leading to ignorance towards third-world countries and wars occurring in the middle east. Finally, there is a superior complex between the west and the rest.

Education, as one of the largest and most necessary institutions, is implementing the most colonial national curriculum that discourages students from ethnic backgrounds. Art subjects such as History and English Literature focus on British History and White writers to grow patriotism. This often leads to the glorification of the British Empire including the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade which, in reality, created social inequality and mass exploitation, not to mention death. According to Springfield Community Primary School, the history curriculum includes the British themes of 'Invasion and settlement, legacy, empire, civilisation, monarchy and society'.[54] Whilst the Department for Education suggests 'History helps pupils to understand the complexity of people's lives, the process of change, the diversity of societies and relationship between different groups as well as their own identity and the challenges of their time', Black British children are exposed to sources that depict their ancestors as slaves and treated as products to trade.[55] The history curriculum is taught from a Eurocentric view, making it unrelatable and having little to do with their identity. Being described as 'slaves' instead of 'enslaved people' is just a small change that would make a large impact in terms of inclusivity.

Previously, political leaders in the West viewed their culture as superior, and the necessity to impose this on others simply 'came with the territory'.[56] Specifically, this Europe was historically acclaimed as superior after achieving world hegemony in the 1500s. This is measured through technological, scientific, research and political advancements.[57] However, these advances largely occurred through the exploitation of third-world countries which political leaders never compensated for halting the development of their own countries. This leads to the lack of credit and respect being given to those that fuelled the development of the countries. Furthermore, some politicians still enforce a level of cultural superiority in the western world. This is evident through the disrespect shown towards indigenous cultures. Such groups suffer disproportionately from climate change, environmental degradation, high levels of poverty, and poor access to health and migration.[58] The world is often viewed through a Eurocentric lens, and this almost necessarily reinforces a very specific way of living.

[54] Department for Education (2013) . History programmes of study key stages 1 and 2- National curriculum in England

[55] Department for Education (2013) . History programmes of study key stages 1 and 2- National curriculum in England

[56] J. Wittwer. (2020). The Colonial Superiority Complex: Why Adapting to Another Culture is a Struggle for The West

[57] Rahul Amin. (2019) . Domination Of European Culture in All Over The WorldDomination of

[58] United Nations. (2019). About indigenous peoples and human rights – OHJCHR and indigenous peoples

Themes such as modernity, feminism, and the welfare system are often overly credited to the western world through a legacy of colonialism. This can be seen through the way feminism rose in waves. The first wave occurred in the 'society of civilised states' in the 1900 and 1920s. These so-called civilised states are referring specifically to western countries such as Britain and the USA. The second and third waves are seen to move into the Asian continent with the influence of the empire.[59] However, the fourth wave actually demonstrates that feminism has *limited* links to the colonial path regarding the non-western world like African countries. This is significant as it is the wave of feminism that is growing in the present day and is growing through recognising women for who they are and not as a consequence of just following the western world in how they are becoming modern. This shows that feminism should not entirely be credited to the western world. Furthermore, institutions such as the NHS research very little on BAME diseases such as diabetes and sickle cell disease. They are seen as lesser and inferior, so it is not important when studying white medicine.

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[59] Ann Towns . (2018) . Global patterns and debates in the Granting of women's suffrage

Conclusion:

- Through their role in 'othering' and 'exoticising' minority cultures, the world of the visual arts has catered to Western audiences' fascination regarding 'foreign lands'/Orientalism under Imperial rule, while also reinforcing ideas of Western superiority colonial narratives such as 'empty lands' and the 'noble savage' to justify colonialism. In the contemporary world, the cultures that have been historically depreciated and undermined for their cultural production are now suffering from the harms of cultural appropriation perpetuated predominantly by Western actors, excluding the voices and histories of marginalised communities while engaging in unethical profiting.

- Imperialism from the Western World has relied on the extraction and accumulation of resources and labour from non-Western cultures back to the Imperial Centres, including *cultural objects*. Through the accumulation of objects from 'foreign' cultures, museums arose with the mission of highlighting and showcasing the colonies of the Empire and catering to Western audiences, while reinforcing Western superiority narratives; still present through the refusal to repatriate objects to home communities. Nowadays, although the rule of the Empire is formally gone; the legacies of museums as colonial institutions persist through modern curatorial practices which decontextualise artefacts and do not address their complicated histories, perpetuating colonial narratives.

- Institutions are not doing nearly enough to ensure decolonisation occurs. This can be seen in education, politics and society as a whole. Due to the lack of emergence for these changes, these institutions maintain their systems in the way that they want to. Whilst Universities are encouraged to decolonise the curriculum, very few take the step to do so. Furthermore, western politicians appear too power-hungry to create a good rapport with the eastern sphere of the world, hence halting the others from developing.

Policy Recommendations:

Overview:

The next policy recommendations aim to address persisting issues regarding a lack of inclusivity of non-Western (visual) arts and knowledge, in addition to improving inclusivity within Western institutions which may be perpetuating imperial power dynamics and colonial narratives.

- **Action 1** - promote the creation of *community cultural documentation programmes* in combination with appropriate *group rights* on cultural production to reinforce intellectual property rights in the face of cultural appropriation.

  - The historical 'othering' and 'exoticisation' of non-Western cultures and their art has taken place both from a place of 'awe' and depreciation towards these. Cultural appropriation relies on the incorporation of elements from a minority culture into the majority culture, nowadays (often for economic purposes) ignoring the complicated histories of oppression against the original culture producers. Community cultural production combined with group property rights could reinforce intellectual property rights for non-Western communities over art.

- **Action 2 -** Encourage *collaborative community co-curatorship* approaches for exhibitions and projects within museums, by incorporating in the contextual information surrounding cultural artefacts the decolonial perspectives and expertise provided by home communities.

  - Exclusion of more critical histories of artefacts and cultural objects within museums has its origins within the Imperial project of the Western World. Museums were formed as sites of Imperial exaltation, in order to showcase the 'loot and riches' from the colonies and promote Western supremacy. These colonial narratives are still perpetuated within museums through contemporary curatorial practices, which tend to decontextualise artefacts and cultural objects from their histories. In this way, collaborative community co-curatorship approaches would help contextualise the complicated histories of non-Western *cultural objects* through the incorporation of home communities' voices in the exhibition processes.

- **Action 3 -** Hold institutions accountable for their western views including education and the curriculum of art subjects, politicians and museums that look down on the global south.

  - Generally the global south is seen as inferior in a eurocentric view and very little decolonisation occurs. Institutions need to be held accountable for the lack of diverse content being taught in school or the lack of policies made to protect people of colour in the country when it comes to immigration and looking at visual art and discrediting them.

Action 1: promote the creation of community cultural documentation programmes and the establishment of group rights on cultural production for non-Western communities, to reinforce and uphold intellectual property rights in the face of cultural appropriation.

The involvement of the communities which have been impacted by the harms of cultural appropriation is a good first step towards addressing this issue, particularly since these minority groups express the importance of *consent* as a key prior requirement to the art acquisition process. Therefore, as a first action point, the issues of *intellectual property* and *communities* should be reframed to achieve greater inclusivity.

The creation of *community cultural documentation programmes* could assist Indigenous communities and cultures in establishing and creating intellectual property rights in their cultural heritage. These training programmes would therefore consist in creating and archiving cultural heritage and traditional cultural expressions (ranging from music to the visual arts) via digital photographs, audio-visual material, sound recordings and databases.[60] The communities would then hold the intellectual rights over the usage and dissemination of these recordings through appropriate guidance on information management, enabling them the freedom to establish usage rules in line with customary laws and practices. With the establishment of these rights, these cultures will have the potential to commercialise their own cultural heritage if it aligns with their values and community desires, without external market pressures derived from foreign cultural appropriation practices. The documentation of these cultural forms of expression would therefore enable greater control of communities over access and use of visual arts, tackling issues of cultural appropriation and associated harms of misrepresentation and lack of accreditation.

To exemplify how this action point could look into practice, the literature provides a few success stories around *cultural* documentation. A *cultural documentation* programme was established within the Maasai community in Kenya to enable and empower them to document and digitise their cultural heritage. The programme consisted in the provision of necessary training and equipment to the community and has been successful in empowering the Maasai to manage and make informed decisions about their cultural intellectual property assets (including the visual arts).[61] Similarly, the Subanen community located in the Philippines was established through the assistance of specialised organisations' skills necessary to document indigenous

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[60] WIPO (2023). *Training program*.
[61] WIPO (2009). *Indigenous community goes digital with high-tech support from WIPO*.

knowledge and artistic cultural practices through the usage of multimedia formats.[62] This has been successful in the preservation of their (in)tangible culture and to register the materials with the government copyrights office to guarantee the community's intellectual property rights.

Hand-in-hand with the establishment of these community programmes, a reframing of 'property rights' for Indigenous communities and cultures should be explored. This could be achieved through the acknowledgement of *group rights to cultural property* (tangible and intangible) as an extension to Western-based intellectual property rights which would accommodate the particularities of non-Western communities.[63] The establishment and provision of *group rights* would enable the inclusion of non-Western artists into the mainstream scene of visual arts providing them and their communities effective control over their culture and cultural objects. This idea of a 'collective indigenous work' with the extension of intellectual rights into existing Western 'frameworks could be another effective tool against foreign cultural appropriation within the visual arts.

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[62] UNESCO (2003). *Community-based documentation contributes to the viability of intangible cultural heritage in the Philippines*.

[63] Gonzalez, O. (2019). Cultural appropriation: the native American struggle for intellectual property protection in Canada, Mexico and the United States. *Thomas Jefferson Law Review*, 42(1), pp. 1-27.

***Action 2: promote collaborative community co-curatorship approaches for exhibitions and projects within museums, by incorporating into cultural objects the voice and expertise of the communities of origin themselves, and by reframing existing educational programs within these institutions towards decoloniality*.**

The exclusion of the histories of artefacts within museums stems from the entrenched histories of colonialism and imperialism upon which these institutions have been built, in order to 'exoticise' and 'other' non-Western cultural objects, practices and communities. Although the formal empires have disintegrated, colonial power dynamics persist within these institutions through exclusionary contemporary curatorship practices. Therefore, addressing these issues to achieve greater inclusivity of marginalised voices within the world of visual arts requires the implementation of *decolonial museum practices* such as *community co-curatorship*.

Decolonisation as a process can be interpreted as a reframing of the effects of colonisation on impacted communities, including understandings of non-Western art.[64] These practices within museums can be implemented as an action point through the collaboration with relevant stakeholders, in the context of museums by working alongside relevant communities in projects and exhibitions which ensure appropriate context is given to the objects and artefacts on display. This could be implemented by acknowledging the agency of source communities (i.e. the communities where the

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[64] Walsh. S. (2022). *The role of community museums in museum decolonization discourse.*

cultural objects originated) in the curatorship process, encouraging institutions to start seeing these communities as experts and research partners with the potential to highlight different ways of knowing and caring for the past.[65] Collaboration efforts in the curation of museum exhibits would therefore provide more control of narratives back to the communities they are representing, making collections more accessible and representative of the communities of origin themselves.[64] One example of a successful *community co-curatorship* project has been the *Owning the Past* exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, in which the long-lasting impacts of British rule and border creation in the Middle East region were discussed. The exhibition introduced voices and stories of people previously not included in these displays, which highlighted the histories and heritage of their home communities[66] and therefore demonstrates the value that collaborative curatorship can have in achieving more inclusive narratives when exhibiting *cultural objects*.

Challenging colonial histories of museums and their exhibitions can go beyond *just* curatorial transformation; an appropriate complementary approach being by reframing museums' educational programs. This could be done by training members of relevant members of staff on the histories of the objects beyond the museum's formal interpretation and could be a more useful and effective tool to engage with the public. Another good example of such approaches is the *Untold Histories Guided Tours* offered to the public at the *Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology* in Oxford, where there is a focus on going beyond the narratives displayed on the labels and acknowledging the colonial and military origin of the displayed objects.[67]

The work must also be done by the institutions themselves; museums should engage in the wider implementation of decolonisation practices and engage more actively with home communities in both permanent and temporary exhibitions of *cultural objects* and museum staff in reframing educational programs.

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[65] Chipangura, N. (2020). Co-curation and new museology in reorganising the Beit Gallery at the Mutare Museum, Eastern Zimbabwe. *Wiley Periodicals LLC*, 63, 3, pp. 431-446.
[66] University of Oxford (2023). *Decolonisation and provenance research – Owning the past.*
[67] Ariese, C. & Wróblewska, M. (2021). *Practicing decoloniality in museums: a guide with global examples*.

Action 3: Hold institutions accountable for their western views, including education and the curriculum of art subjects, and politicians and museums that appear to 'look down' on the global south.

Art as a whole should have an objective approach and view, whether this be through visual art or the knowledge of the history of a country. The history of European countries is rich in colonising and modernising or developing and whilst institutions' curriculum focuses heavily on the latter two, colonisation and the empires are glorified as a whole.

Decolonising the curriculum is a critical first step; it acts as a role of secondary socialisation. As the national curriculum claims the aim of these art curricula is to create an understanding of the complex history and form a sense of identity amongst pupils, as mentioned above. However, the only representation of BAME students is being exploited or brutally treated in the national curriculum. Changing the curriculum to cover broad and balanced views of events such as the empire and challenging racism instead of learning about its existence is essential.[68] Furthermore, higher education such as universities must be held accountable for the lack of diversity in their curricula. Focus groups should be conducted to help improve the curriculum within their departments. Whilst there is media amplification of the protests and resistance universities face, there is little pressure put on the universities to make changes *after* the media is off of them. This leads to a lack of actual changes put in place. For example, the 'Rhodes Must Fall' campaign in Oxford was shown in the news numerous times after the murder of George Floyd, but very little changed in terms of Oxford's curriculum and treatment of pupils, suggesting that more pressure and media amplification should hold these institutions accountable for their action to deliver genuine change better. Statistics show that only 20% of UK universities have actually attempted to 'decolonise' their curriculum, and it's likely that the statistics are even lower for those that were successful in doing so.[69]

Politicians need to be held accountable for their policy-making and prioritisation of privileged backgrounds. Recent events such as the death of Queen Elizabeth II show that the ending of the empire was not decolonisation, or any form of compensation, but was continued through global financial imperialism.[70] This can be seen as trade and exploitation is still occurring in post-colonial countries that still held under the commonwealth. Therefore, nations such as Britain and France must compensate these countries by supporting the countries they have colonised and not continue to exploit workers in third-world countries. For example, IMF loans can actually problematise the route out of poverty cycles for low economically developed countries since they are required to pay back the loans with a larger interest rate. These economic policies must be recognized by politicians as a problem and should be reviewed to create more equal opportunities and treatments. In addition, harsh immigration laws are put in place against immigrants that are attempting to escape countries in conflict and where war is not even acknowledged in the western media. All these issues suggest that politicians must be held accountable since third-world countries are still suffering from the damage of the empire today.

Modern and progressive art or culture is usually given a subjective and western definition as Europe is somewhat promoted as superior. This can often miscredit the development of the global south; instead, we need to give appropriate credit and recognition towards all countries. For example, India had the first openly gay prince, and countries in Africa grew towards gender equality without the influence of the empire. In addition, before the second world war, Russia and eastern Europe were seen as inferior as opposed to the west due to their 'different' ideology of communism and their political system, even though these countries were better equipped and

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[68] National education union, (2022), What is decolonising education
[69] Robert Mason, (2022), Decolonising the UK curriculum should be the start of a much wider process
[70] Robert Mason, (2022), Decolonising the UK curriculum should be the start of a much wider process

industrialised than the west. These concepts need to be widely defined without the fear of the west looking inferior; credit must be given to these countries that have modernised even if this isn't through the traditional methods of the western world.[71]

All these points have a prevalent theme of holding institutions accountable so that credit and value are given to those that deserve it. This will allow us to finally decolonise the idea that the western world has progressed by its own merits and is somehow still superior to the rest of the world. The underlying promotion of superiority has led to many injustices and internalised racism, an attitude which could be better resolved if all institutions would make an active effort to decolonise their sectors.

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[71] J. Sundberg. (2009). Eurocentralism

Conclusion:

Decolonisation is essential for creating an equal and inclusive community. In order to achieve this we must value visual art and decolonise information to progress our knowledge of colonial countries. By working together as a globe we can collaboratively share and credit the art of society and visual art itself and accept non-western cultures by providing these groups with the correct documentation and conditions to live. We can also hold institutions such as museums, schools and politicians more accountable in the west and share the realities of the history of the global south. These   policies are certainly attainable if the western world is willing to achieve decolonisation and accept country-by-country differences in development and historical achievements.