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Digital Representations of Slavery in Australia

Navigating Heritage, Identity and Power

The digital transformation of museums and heritage has created diverse new opportunities for expressions of slavery heritage and slavery memory. Beyond traditional physical exhibition spaces, the history and legacies of slavery are being explored through apps, audio tours, immersive digital installations, interactive documentaries, video narratives, and more. COVID-19 has created further demand and appetite for the digitisation of exhibition spaces. Liverpool's International Slavery Museum is one of many museums to offer virtual tours of its galleries, allowing audiences to explore the museum space from their own homes (NATIONAL MUSEUMS LIVERPOOL 2021a).

As part of a team developing an online exhibition about the legacies of slavery in Australia, we are exploring the possibilities of these digital interpretations within the context of Australia's difficult and traumatic – though often unacknowledged – slavery pasts. Digital modes offer opportunities for new voices, narratives, and interpretive styles. However, they also intersect with colonial and racial frameworks that still underpin histories, heritage, and museology. This paper considers some of the questions and choices for curators developing a contemporary exhibition on slavery. Following a discussion of the proliferation of “slavery memory” since the latter 20th century, and the context of Australia's own slavery heritage, memory and identity that have grown out of British colonisation, the article examines a selection of exhibitions and especially digital representations of slavery. Paying particular attention to representations of historical and modern slavery in Australia, as well as global representations of transatlantic slavery, the paper explores tensions and considerations around narrative, framing, authorial voice and ownership, and the ways these interact with digital modes of storytelling.

The “Slavery Memory” Boom

Slavery pasts have often been ignored and silenced by dominant discourses of nations and communities. In her extensive work examining representations of transatlantic slavery across a vast array of spaces such as monuments and memorials, festivals, dance, oral history traditions, religious practices, and photographs, Ana Lucia Araújo argues that “in most European, African, and American societies, the traces of more than three centuries of the slave trade and slavery remained concealed in the public space” (ARAÚJO 2012, 2). She attributes much of this to the threat

that “slavery memories” would pose to the descendants of “perpetrators” and established relations of power in these societies (ARAÚJO 2012, 3). However, Araújo identifies a shift in the second half of the 20th century toward broader public discussion and recognition of slavery memory. She cites global political and social events including the decolonising of African countries, the civil rights movement and popularisation of “slave narratives” in the US, and intensifying reflections on the past in Europe following the Second World War and the atrocities of the Holocaust (ARAÚJO 2012, 2–4). In his work on the impacts of the First World War, prominent historian Jay Winter asserted that much of the world was going through a “memory boom” (WINTER 2001). At the same time, nations were cultivating public sites of slavery memory. West African countries began initiatives to preserve slave-trade castles and fortresses in the 1960s, and from the 1970s monuments to those who resisted and fought slavery appeared in Africa and the Caribbean (ARAÚJO 2012, 9). In 1994 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched “The Slave Route Project: Resistance, Liberty, Heritage”, aimed at better understanding the ongoing global consequences of slavery and outlining guides for sites of slavery memory such as memorials (UNESCO 2020). In the 1990s and 2000s, exhibitions on slavery proliferated across Europe, the Americas, and the Caribbean, including the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool (ARAÚJO 2012).

Today, many communities are looking back on slavery pasts with increasingly critical lenses. With the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, dominant discourses and monuments favouring slave owners and colonists have been interrogated and literally dismantled (STIEM 2018). A growing number of nations are examining their own involvement and responsibility in transatlantic slavery, no longer framed within the plantation context of the United States but extended across the many axes of global trade routes and beneficiaries.

In academia there is particular interest in questions around legacies and reparation. In a recent article for *The Conversation*, Michael McEachrane asked when European nations would recognise and address the structural legacies of slavery, focusing on the case study of Sweden and its economic benefits and racial frameworks inherited from colonialism (MCEACHRANE 2021). For just over ten years, the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery at University College London (UCL) has been exploring the foundations and legacies of slavery in contemporary British culture through the lives of British slavers and, more recently, enslaved people in the Caribbean. The centre’s chair, Catherine Hall, is particularly interested in the potential for “reparatory history”, not only through addressing the trauma and loss for the enslaved and their descendants, but by exposing historical narratives on empire and race, and frameworks of racial thinking and racial logics that construct “otherness”, that are still defining British cultures and racisms today (HALL 2018).

Australia's Slavery Heritage

In Australia, various forms of slavery have been operating since British colonisation in 1788. Many of its British colonies were built and established through convict labour, and within a generation British Australians established slavery practices across several major industries. From the late 1800s, Aboriginal men, women, and children worked on sheep and cattle stations as pastoral and domestic workers, where they were given rations or little to no pay. Many were mistreated, physically and sexually abused, and forced to work under the threat of violence (ANTHONY/GRAY 2020). Aboriginal people were also kidnapped to work as “trackers” or “guides” on colonial expeditions. Shino Konishi gives the example of the expeditions of David Wynford Carnegie in the 1890s, in which Carnegie captured 14 men and women and used punitive measures to have them lead him to water (KONISHI 2019). As Konishi and others have outlined, after being established as a “free” colony without convict labour, colonists soon discovered that Western Australia’s Swan River Colony required cheap or free labour, and Aboriginal workers became integral (KONISHI 2019, 30). Nyikina Mangala Aboriginal Elder John Darraga Watson, imagining the experiences of his great-grandfather’s generation in the Kimberley region of Western Australia (WA), reflects,

When I come to this place, I think about how these wild kartiya [white people] treated our people, tried to make slaves out of them, steal our women from our husbands, sometimes kill the man to get her. They were really rough old kartiya, make life really bad for our people in those early days. Took the land off those old people and made slaves out of them (WATSON 2012, 67).

The 1946–1949 Pilbara strike in WA and 1966 Wave Hill walk-off in the Northern Territory were key moments led and organised by Aboriginal workers in which the conditions on stations were challenged. Victoria Haskins’s and Anne Scrimgeour’s examination of the Pilbara strike highlights the role and impact of female Aboriginal domestic workers, whose actions have often been overlooked in favour of male pastoral workers (HASKINS/SCRIMGEOUR 2015).

Slavery was also commonplace in Australia’s pearling and sugar industries. In his extensive archival research into the history of the Kimberley, Chris Owen draws on police and colonial administrative records to detail the violence of WA’s policing and criminal justice system, and slavery practices in the pastoral and pearling industries (Owen 2016). Labouring on the pearling luggers in Australia’s northwest, many Indigenous people as well as people from Southeast Asia were captured and forced into the brutal and often lethal work of pearl diving. Divers were at the risk of the bends and shark attacks, and Indigenous workers could be stranded on islands between seasons, preventing them from returning to their homelands (KONISHI 2019, 31). Australian South Sea Islander Emelda Davis details the practice

of “blackbirding” in Queensland – also commonplace in the pearling industry – in which people from the South Sea Islands were kidnapped from their homelands to work under terrible conditions in the sugar cane fields (DAVIS 2017). Davis’s grandfather Moses Topay Enares was coerced onto a ship and taken from the beach off the island of Tanna, Vanuatu, to Queensland when he was 12 years old. Davis explains, “We identify as Sugar Slaves” and rejects the term “indentured labour”, which she contends is “a weak word that does not express the real truth of the physical and cultural theft of human beings”. Our paper accordingly refers simply to “slavery”.

Slave labour was not limited to adults. Shirleene Rose Robinson has documented the thousands of Aboriginal children forced to work in Queensland from 1842 to 1945, in particular girls in domestic work and boys in pastoral work on stations, as well as in other dangerous industries, including pearling. Robinson argues that “the youthfulness of these workers made them particularly susceptible to exploitation” (ROBINSON 2003). Penelope Hetherington has outlined the exploitation of both Aboriginal and European child labour in Western Australia during the first two decades after colonisation (HETHERINGTON 2002).

While many Aboriginal people, migrants, people of colour, and other minorities have experienced the realities of slavery for generations, Australia’s slavery heritage has been receiving wider attention only recently. Davis’s article is one example of a growing recognition in online research and journalism. *The Conversation* has run several feature series into the Black Lives Matter movement, the process of decolonising, and recently the legacies of slavery in Australia (to which our research team has contributed) (WATEGO 2017; AUERBACH/TRISOS/KATTI 2021; LYDON/LAIDLAW 2021). The issue of Aboriginal workers’ stolen wages has gained increasing public exposure since the early 2000s in Queensland and New South Wales. In Western Australia, a class action was launched against the state government to recoup and compensate wages (positively, this moved into mediation in mid-2021) (PRENDERGAST/HUDSON/VARISCHETTI 2020).

However, slavery is still largely excluded from many Australian narratives and identities. Amid the Black Lives Matter protests, Prime Minister Scott Morrison stated in a radio interview, “It was a pretty brutal place, but there was no slavery in Australia” (MORRISON 2020). Morrison’s comments, though hurtful and inaccurate, prompted widespread discussion about the country’s slavery heritage (GAY 2020). However, they also speak to the erasure of slavery in many white expressions of Australian history and identity. Slavery is often framed as something that happens in another place, another country. This distancing can operate through geographical, racial, and visual framing such as the common associations of slavery with images of people of colour in the majority world.¹ Ironically, this is prevalent in campaigns against modern slavery. Groups such as Walk Free, though more

1 Shahidul ALAM (2008, 89) argues for the use of “the majority world” rather than terms such as “Third World” or “Developing World”, as this “challenges the West’s rhetoric of

recently emphasising that modern slavery occurs in Australia, overwhelmingly display images of people of colour in other nations. They also rarely draw connections between modern slavery in Australia and the slave labour that laid the country's colonial foundations (WALK FREE (s.d.)). Distancing also operates through temporal framing by historical accounts that locate slavery as something deep in history, without demonstrating its ongoing legacies (“the past is a foreign country: they do things differently there”) (HARTLEY 1953, 1). As explored here, social history exhibitions about slavery can inadvertently practise this temporal distancing.

Slavery memory in Australia is further complicated by disparate and unconsolidated strands of study and thought. For many researchers, social policy-makers, and cultural commentators, the definition of “slavery” is not agreed upon, sitting among a host of other terms including indentured, coerced, forced, and bonded labour. Enslaved people and their descendants may also be reluctant to use the term, possibly due to the institutionalisation and normalisation of slave labour practices, social pressures, fear, or as Araújo points to, stigma (Araújo 2012, 3). Despite a growing number of excellent investigations into slavery practices, no field appears to be dedicated to Aboriginal slavery studies or Australian slavery history. In museums few major exhibitions have addressed the country's slavery heritage, though there have been a handful of investigations, particularly into the Queensland sugar industry. There have also been some exhibits on modern slavery, but these representations do not tend to make explicit connections to Australia's slavery past.

Background to the Exhibition

This paper refers to an Australian Research Council-funded project² and planned exhibition that follow on from extensive work conducted by UCL's Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery, which has its roots in the Legacies of British Slave-ownership (LBS) project that began in 2009 (LEGACIES OF BRITISH SLAVERY – UCL DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY 2021). Tracing the nearly £20 million in compensation money that was paid out by the British Government to British slavers following the abolition of slavery in 1833, the LBS project locates individuals who benefited financially from the slave trade, and through biographical research reveals connections and relations of power between individuals and families to dig into Britain's complex legacies of slavery across commercial, cultural, historical, imperial, physical, and political dimensions. The current project builds on this work by focusing on the movement from the 1830s onwards of capital, people, and culture from

democracy” and emphasises that those “whose decisions affect majority of the world's peoples – represent a tiny fraction of humankind”.

² Western Australian Legacies of British Slavery, Australian Research Council Discovery Project DP200100094. See <https://australian-legacies-slavery.org/> (accessed 11/06/2024).

slave-owning Britain to Australia, and in particular newly colonised Western Australia, illustrating what lead Chief Investigator Jane Lydon terms a “larger imperial shift from slavery to settler colonisation” (LYDON 2022). Much of the research to date is biographical, investigating the lives of individual slavers and colonists and drawing connections between them and their businesses, politics, families, and the British Empire, while also beginning to explore the complex ways these relationships and their legacies play out in Australia today. In conjunction with this work, we are developing an online exhibition that will interpret and build upon research findings to create a public-facing output of the project. Though the exhibition is tied to the research, it has scope to incorporate and present additional research and perspectives on the legacies of slavery.

Framing the Narrative

Perhaps the first and most central question for curators and exhibition developers is: What is the story? That is, what is the exhibition about; what is the overarching narrative and the patchwork of supporting narratives? How can we tell the story of slavery in Australia? What are the key narratives, themes, and messages? Should we organise stories according to time, place, or certain themes such as types of legacies (for instance, the LBS project’s commercial, cultural, historical, imperial, physical, and political legacies) (LEGACIES OF BRITISH SLAVERY – UCL DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY 2021)? Similarly, how might we frame these stories? Within what geographical and temporal contexts could we situate them? Should we locate slavery within the local context of Western Australia and its colonial foundations, broader Australia, the British Empire, or the global slave trade? Do we locate it within a historical moment in time, or bring it all the way up to the present day?³

In most digital (and physical) exhibitions in Australia, the story of slavery has been framed through discrete historical chapters, or under the theme of modern slavery. In 2021, Anti-Slavery Australia launched their interactive art installation *Human Mart*. This comprises a physical exhibition space ostensibly and ironically presented as a supermarket, as well as a website displaying a selection of the supermarket’s “products”. After clicking on “Shop now”, online visitors can explore products including “Unsavory Treatment”, priced at three dollars – the story of “Solanda”, who married an Australian man who became physically and verbally abusive, and trafficked Solanda and her son to Thailand (ANTI-SLAVERY AUSTRALIA 2021). While this exhibition explores some of the complex and diverse experiences, practices, and economies of modern slavery in Australia, it does not explicitly

3 For another critical assessment of procedures of exhibition, see Kimberley COULTER: *Mediating Ecologies*, pp. 91–101 in this volume.

investigate the colonial slavery roots or structures of racism underlying contemporary Australian cultures.

Other digital displays have concentrated on historical narratives of slavery. These have been particularly focused on local case studies such as the sugar industry in Queensland, and to a lesser extent the pearling industry in Western Australia (GAPPS 2019; NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA 2018; WESTERN AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM 2015). When it comes to the legacies issue in these historical exhibits, this is generally not treated as a primary theme for exploration but rather as a concluding moment in a chronology of slave labour. The Australian National Maritime Museum's 2019 blog post by curator Stephen Gapps, "Blackbirding: Australia's Slave Trade?", ends by noting the ongoing contributions and impacts of Australia's South Sea Island community to Australian life and culture (GAPPS 2019). Gapps refers to the community's roles in the construction of significant buildings, and the eventual recognition by Queensland of Australian South Sea Islanders as a distinct community that have contributed to the economy and broader culture. Similarly, the National Museum of Australia's 2018 online content for *Island Labourers*, part of its *Defining Moments* timeline, ends with two sentences describing the recognition of South Sea Islanders "as a distinct ethnic and cultural Australian group" and acknowledgement of "discrimination and injustice experienced by the community throughout their history in Australia" (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA 2018). Looking at the pearling industry in Australia and particularly in the northwest, the Western Australian Museum's 2015 exhibition *Lustre: Pearling and Australia* (the text panels of which are now displayed online), features a section titled "Indenture" that details the terrible conditions for Southeast Asian and Indigenous people forced into pearl diving. Largely covering the historical period around the late 19th and 20th centuries, the text concludes by stating, "The pearl-culture industry continued to employ indentured workers until the 1980s" (WESTERN AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM 2015). While these representations nod to the ongoing social, political, and economic impacts of Australia's slavery history, it is not their primary concern to explore these impacts further or to make explicit connections with ongoing labour practices or racial frameworks in Australia. Rather, their focus is to explore a slave trade operating in Australia during a specific historical period.

This is relevant in a global context, where museums have increasingly been exploring connections between slavery pasts and the present day. In his analysis of abolition bicentenary commemorations in the United Kingdom in 2007, Geoffrey Cubitt noted that exhibitions were dedicating considerable attention to the impacts of the slave trade's legacies upon British social and economic development, and the question of "unfinished business" (CUBITT 2012, 168). Liverpool's International Slavery Museum (ISM) has been particularly explicit in exploring not only Britain's deep-seated and ongoing social and economic benefits that the slave trade provided, but the continuing frameworks of race underpinning contemporary culture. In 2007 the ISM named one of its spaces after Anthony Walker, the British college

student of Jamaican descent who was murdered in a racially motivated attack in 2005, drawing direct connections between Britain's slavery past and contemporary racism (BENJAMIN 2012, 190). Similarly, one of the central displays in its *Legacies* gallery is a Ku Klux Klan outfit. This not only frames slavery within a broader context in a temporal sense, but also in terms of its global geographical and sociopolitical contexts.

One digital representation in Australia that grounds the historical narrative in contemporary contexts is *Malga Gurlbarl (Hard Secret)*, by Badimaya First Nation woman and painter Julie Dowling. Exhibited as a digital show on her website (and previously as a physical show in Germany in 2017), *Malga Gurlbarl (Hard Secret)* presents a series of portraits depicting First Nations people who, following colonisation, were enslaved and forced into work as domestic servants, pastoral workers, pearl divers and trackers. In accompanying text, Dowling explains that she created these paintings "to emphasize the global case for compensation for slavery, stolen wages, and cultural dispossession in an international arena for First Nation people here" (DOWLING 2017), expressly connecting Australia's slavery past to its ongoing structural racisms and violence. Dowling's words prompt us to reflect on how the story of Australia's slavery heritage might be framed not only to local but global communities.

Voice and Ownership

Underlying questions around narrative and framing are deeper and more urgent questions around voice and ownership. *Whose* stories are to be included and prioritised in representing the histories and legacies of slavery in Australia? Furthermore, who is narrating and curating these stories? While *Human Mart* tells the personal stories of individuals who have been enslaved, their voices mediated through curators, Dowling's work tells the story of slavery through the personal narratives of the enslaved, through her own position as a descendant. Her work reinhabits those whose lives and experiences have been omitted or silenced by institutions, archives, and white historical discourses. She explains,

I wanted to paint these First Nation people because they are "unknown" individuals whose spirit lives on only in the drawers of museums and antique collectors. I am claiming these images and re-interpreting or translating them for my family and myself as Indigenous people today (DOWLING 2017).

Digital formats offer new opportunities for these reimaginings, giving first-person voice and agency to enslaved individuals. The 2019 interactive documentary, *People Not Property: Stories of Slavery in the Colonial North*, features high-quality short films depicting experiences of enslaved people, as well as contemporary artworks

and poetry (HISTORIC HUDSON VALLEY 2019). These digital interpretations offer new ways of imagining lived experiences of slavery through intimate, first-person narratives and multilayered storytelling.⁴

Our project, however, stems largely from research into those who owned and profited from slavery – the slavers rather than the enslaved. In her essay on reparatory history, Hall suggests that critical analysis of the slavers’ lives is certainly valuable in helping us deconstruct the racial thinking and racial logics that underpinned the slave trade and British colonialism and that, crucially, continue to inform contemporary attitudes. Hall refers to Toni Morrison’s work, *Playing in the Dark*, in which Morrison critiques influential white American authors such as Willa Cather and Ernest Hemingway. Morrison explains that she is seeking to “avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject”, and exploring

the impact of notions of racial hierarchy, racial exclusion, and racial vulnerability and availability on nonblacks who held, resisted, explored, or altered those notions. The scholarship that looks into the mind, imagination, and behavior of slaves is valuable. But equally valuable is a serious intellectual effort to see what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of masters.⁵

Digital technologies and methods offer new opportunities for interrogation of the workings of these “masters” and relations of power. In parallel with our research into the legacies of slavery in Australia, we have been involved in trialling mapping software by submitting biographical data on slavers and colonists for a national digital humanities infrastructure project.⁶ This opens new avenues for analysing the movements of these people and mapping out slavery networks in Australia – for example, revealing frequent colonist routes between Mauritius and Western Australia. It also raises familiar problems relating to the colonial frameworks underlying maps and data. Data are not simply unearthed but created, and they represent relations of power at the times they were collected, while they’ve been maintained, and as they are drawn upon today; colonial maps and data often write out the “other”, and contain deep prejudices and euphemisms regarding the experiences of the enslaved. We are trying to read between the lines of these data,

4 For the employment of graphical models for the narrating and visualisation of interactions between historical persons, events, and institutions, see Aaron PATTEE: *Graph Databases for the Organisation and Analysis of Digital Heritage*, pp. 123–138 and Victoria HERCHE: *Mediating Traumatic Memory*, pp. 139–153 in this volume; and for another immersive experience of heritage, see Romany REAGAN: *Unlocking Heritage Stories*, pp. 73–89 in this volume.

5 TONI MORRISON 1993 [1992], *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Cambridge, MA 1993, 11–12, as cited in HALL 2018, 11.

6 Time-Layered Culture Map of Australia. See <https://www.tlcmmap.org/> (accessed 11/06/2024).

identifying the silences and interrogating the prejudices to explore the racial logics and colonial paradigms that are still defining Australian politics, cultures, and identities today.

Even so, we are faced with the question of whether these interrogations alone suffice to inform and guide our exhibition. In 2021, the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery announced that it was moving in the direction of more focused research on the lives of enslaved people in the Caribbean”, and no longer operating under its previous name, the Centre for Legacies of British *Slave-ownership*⁷ (LEGACIES OF BRITISH SLAVERY – UCL DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY 2021). The logo of the centre also changed, from a historical cartoon showing a Whig politician sneaking £20 million out of John Bull’s pocket, to a design created by Stephanie Channer, a Jamaican graphic designer.

As white curators and researchers on this project, and hence direct or indirect beneficiaries of slavery in Australia, looking to the lives of the enslaved raises serious questions around ownership and agency. In her analysis of the development of content for the *London, Sugar and Slavery* gallery at the Museum of London, Leanne Munroe explains that

one male curator felt as though his lived experience as a white, middle-class curator would make it inappropriate for him to discuss some issues, especially concerning the racist legacies of slavery (MUNROE 2016, 126).

As Stuart Hall asks, “Who should control the power to represent?”, and “Who has the authority to represent the culture of others?” (HALL 2005, 28). Who are the custodians of the stories of slavery in Australia, and who is authorised to present them? In his analysis of the UK’s 1807 commemorations, Cubitt refers to interviews conducted by researcher Ross Wilson with museum staff, and explains that many curators struggled to engage “with a painful history in which others had not just a fierce emotional investment, but a claim of ownership” (CUBITT 2012, 166). This speaks not only to issues around custodianship but working with trauma.

Within the context of public and digital exhibitions, there are also uncomfortable questions around the consumption of traumatic pasts. In *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography*, Marcus Wood analyses British slavery heritage and discourse to argue that representations of the enslaved may aestheticise and exploit the suffering of others (WOOD 2002). Scrutinising a vast array of primary materials ranging from Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte to street publications, Wood suggests that writers and audiences may derive affective and even sexual pleasure from enslaved black bodies. These problems are particularly important to bear in mind regarding audience contributions, an increasingly popular approach in digital displays. Especially through online platforms, many museums encourage audience

7 Our emphasis.

reflections and responses to stories and images relating to slavery. The ISM, for example, produces a wide range of digital content open for discussion via its social media channels, such as exhibition previews, interviews with staff and profiles on activists, as well as historical re-creations. In one digital interactive display, *Ellen Craft's Freedom Journey*, a video shows an actor depicting Ellen Craft, an enslaved woman who escaped slavery in the US South. The ISM asks audiences to engage in creative activities such as drawing “a picture of one item that you would take with you on a long journey” and sharing these on social media using museum hashtags (NATIONAL MUSEUMS LIVERPOOL 2021b). Such interactive displays promote valuable discussion and engagement with slavery pasts and contemporary cultures and politics. However, how are they to be moderated? Are these everyone's stories to share in? Are some stories too personal or too painful to be opened up to all? Who decides which stories may invite shared reflections, and which stories may not?

New Forms of Heritage and “Community Engagement”

Some spaces are being run and moderated entirely by those who have direct stakes and claims in slavery pasts. The Descendants of Enslaved Communities at the University of Virginia was established in 2020 by the descendants of enslaved and free black people who built the university. Independent from the university, the organisation declares its “mission is researching the free and enslaved community, reclaiming the narrative, and honoring the legacies of the enslaved and free black communities and their descendants at UVA. We are committed to achieving restorative justice” (DESCENDANTS OF ENSLAVED COMMUNITIES AT UVA (s.d.)). The descendants have a particularly strong digital heritage presence, sharing a great deal of their research insights and personal experiences through video narratives on YouTube and other social media, and in online journalism (DESCENDANTS OF ENSLAVED COMMUNITIES AT UVA 2021).

The Slavery, Memory and Orality in Northern Ghana Archive, a digital repository created by Dr. Emmanuel Saboro from the University of Cape Coast in Ghana in collaboration with Brown University, offers another example of digital slavery heritage projects built with communities. Saboro has created and compiled materials including contemporary photographs of slave forts and significant sites such as burial grounds of enslaved people, as well as documentary films, oral history interviews, and recordings of songs and performances with present-day Balsa and Kasena men and women of Ghana (BROWN DIGITAL REPOSITORY, BROWN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY 2021). Saboro explains that these contemporary materials help in understanding the history of enslavement, and the traumas of capture and captivity (SABORO 2017).

In Australia, “Keeping Places” have been established as alternative sites to institutional museums. These community-based spaces are created by Aboriginal

people in local areas to present, celebrate, and continue Indigenous culture and arts. Keeping Places feature artworks, repatriated artefacts, and temporary exhibitions; conduct education and research programs; and provide employment and meeting places for communities (KELLY 2001; AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM ABORIGINAL HERITAGE UNIT 2001). Similarly, arts spaces such as Mowanjum Arts Centre create community-run hubs for the promotion of artists, cultural and historical exhibitions, and the continuation of Aboriginal culture, narratives, and heritage. (MOWANJUM ARTS CENTRE (s.d.)).

Communities are also working with museums. In the Rijksmuseum's 2021 *Slavery*, a physical and online exhibition telling the story of the Netherlands' involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, all narratives about enslaved individuals are voiced by staff and community members with personal connections to these stories – for instance ancestors who worked on the same plantation, or shared bloodlines (RIJKSMUSEUM 2021). More museums are adopting this approach, in which objects and stories are interpreted through the first-person voices of black curators, artists, or communities – rather than the third-person, often objectively and authoritatively framed white curatorial voice. The roles of white curators are shifting from creators and custodians of content to facilitators and mediators of others' stories.

This process of collaboration can be complex. In *Museums, Heritage, and Indigenous Voice: Decolonising Engagement*, Bryony Onciul emphasises the need to recognise community participants' perspectives on engagement, warning of its significant risks, costs and potential disempowerment for communities if done poorly (ONCIUL 2015, 2). In Munroe's study of the *London, Sugar and Slavery* exhibition, she refers to a meeting between curators and community members to sign off on exhibition text:

One curator described such a meeting when signing off the panel text: We didn't quite understand why the discussion wasn't flowing – you know, the discussion was just [gestures with hands and face as if to say 'tense']. And finally one of the consultative group turned round to say 'Look! We don't like the language! When we read this, what we're reading is the voice of the curator. It's not the voice of the African Caribbean community' (MUNROE 2016, 127).

The text was subsequently completely rewritten two weeks before the deadline. Recently our project team has begun communicating with representatives and contacts of Indigenous communities. Even with good intentions, engagement practices can continue to omit and silence community perspectives, through ongoing racial and colonial frameworks that are invisible to white and privileged practitioners.

Whose Heritage?

Two hundred kilometres north of Broome, Western Australia, pearler Terry Hunter grew up and lives at Cygnet Bay pearl farm. Hunter is a Bardi and Jawi man from the Dampier Peninsula. He is also the great-great-grandson of Harry Hunter, one of the most brutal slavers and master pearlmen of the region (COLLINS 2018). When asked in a radio interview about this latter part of his heritage, Hunter reflected that it was “a brutal part of our history, but it is Australia’s history. [...] It made me who I am today” (HUNTER/COLLINS 2020). Hunter’s words and lived experience speak to the complexity of Australia’s slavery histories, legacies and identities.

Hunter might also be understood as a living symbol of what Catherine Hall calls deeply “entangled histories”. Hall suggests that working through the past and the legacies of slavery has “to do with trying to understand the ways in which *we are all implicated* in this history, which is a shared history” (HALL 2013). Reparatory history is by its nature complex and filled with pain, but vitally important. She also contends, “Reparatory history must be about more than identifying wrongdoers and seeking redress: it begins with the descendants, with trauma and loss, but the hope is that the work of mourning can be linked to hopes for reconciliation, the repair of relations damaged by historical injustice” (HALL 2018, 12).

Australia’s slavery heritage is a complex and charged space, filled with past and ongoing traumas, racisms, and injustices. Working out how to represent our slavery pasts and legacies is complicated by questions over who the custodians of this heritage are, and the deep damages to individuals, communities, and relationships caused by colonisation.

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