

Migrations, disputed heritages and multicultural identities: archives in a post-colonial society

Andrew Flinn

Dr Andrew Flinn is a senior lecturer and the Director of the Archives and Records Management MA program at the School of Library, Archives and Information Studies at University College, London. He is the lead researcher on the 'Community archives and identities' project which examines community archive and heritage initiatives of black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in the United Kingdom. Among other professional positions, Andrew was previously archivist at the National Museum of Labour History in Manchester. As a social historian and archival educator, his interests include documenting grassroots community organisation and activism, collective and social memory, and the relationship between archives, heritage and identities.

The legacies of empire and colonialism exert a powerful influence on contemporary societies yet they are frequently ignored or unacknowledged in much Eurocentric history and heritage. The movement of populations, both from and into the imperial centre, and the growth of multicultural societies with shared and disputed heritages, have significant implications for archival practice and the attempts to support a 'democratised' archival heritage. Taking as its focus the British Empire and Britain, and in particular London, this article will interweave individual 'hidden' stories of international resistance to colonialism and imperialism in order to contextualise some of these impacts including: the disputed heritage of the imperial archive; the need to document anti-colonial resistance as well as rule; archival acknowledgement of the place of enslavement and colonial exploitation at the heart of modern British society;

the challenges of recording the experiences of migration (in and out, legal and illegal); and the necessity to document the lives and histories of post-colonial peoples now living in the heart of the former imperial metropole. The article will also argue that in seeking to address these challenges, the archival profession must embrace diversity in all its aspects in support of the production of a more representative national heritage which in turn might engender a greater sense of shared, multicultural identities.

Introduction

This article was originally designed to engage with the themes of discovery and exploration at the 2008 Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) conference. As a national of the United Kingdom visiting Australia, via Malaysia, it seemed only fitting that I should examine the relationships of imperial and post-colonial societies to archives, and of migration and the development of modern metropolitan cities like London, to questions of representation and shared or disputed heritages. In particular, I wished to explore the irony that while former imperial capitals often hold vast archives that are relevant and hugely significant to the rest of the world (though often somewhat inaccessible), at the same time they have rather less representative collections of the peoples living in their cities. It is in this context that this present article will examine what the archive and other heritage professions in former colonial powers might do to acknowledge and address some of the archival legacies of imperial exploration and exploitation.

Professional consideration of such questions is sometimes dismissed as being trite and prosaic, and potential solutions remain unadopted because of their alleged complexity. However, this article begins from the premise that such questions are of real contemporary significance and that solutions however complicated can and should be attempted. The debates in the United Kingdom on the 2007 commemorations of the passing of the 1807 Abolition of Slavery Act and the prolonged 'history wars' in Australia and the Americas on the impact that conquest and colonisation had on indigenous peoples, demonstrate that understandings around the legacies of empire and enslavement are far from being settled. These controversies have also emphasised the important role that archives and other heritage institutions play in

promoting public debate and understanding of these histories. Former colonised and colonising societies have a shared history and heritage which is often difficult and painful but that still needs to be properly acknowledged and understood if we are to move on to something better. While we can readily understand the need for the colonised and the marginalised to reclaim their histories and gain acknowledgement and reparations for wrongs done unto them, Paul Gilroy in *After Empire* has also provided us with a compelling portrayal of the melancholia overwhelming those former imperial and settler societies which have failed to come to terms with the loss of their imperial power and imagined 'greatness', as well as with the revelations of racism, inhumanity and murder that the imperial project entailed. For Gilroy this melancholia and refusal to acknowledge the realities of the past fosters backward-looking, divided, and xenophobic societies, and acts as a barrier to the more convivial multicultural society which might also be our future.¹

While empire, religion and commerce have always been recognised as obviously transnational in their scope, it is rarely acknowledged that resistance to imperialism and colonialism was also often international, operating within internationalist frameworks as part of what Gilroy has described as 'translocal solidarity'.² Benedict Anderson's *Under Three Flags* recovers the hidden histories of internationalist anti-imperial and anarchist revolutionaries in the 'early globalisation' of late nineteenth-century Europe and the Americas. The book studies the local and global at the same time, describing how local, national struggles were connected to and operated within much broader international intellectual frameworks as well as physical networks of which little is known. At the end of the book, Anderson recounts being given a leaflet (an archival trace) of contemporary anti-globalisation anarchist-inclined movements at a lecture on his book at a university in the Philippines, thereby making the connection with the previous struggles and movements his work describes.³

I have written elsewhere of the challenge and importance of documenting contemporary radical political movements,⁴ so this article will explore related but different questions about the records of the hidden histories of movement and global communication in earlier eras. Inspired by Anderson's approach, and by way of an exploration of the challenges of recording international resistance movements,

this article will introduce the lives of three individuals who in their different ways acted on an international stage and were touched (or influenced) by global events, but whose place in the archives and history is rather fleeting and insecure. For today's activists the preferred method of global communication and organisation is of course the web and the mobile phone, but in the past it was the journal and the ship. Like Anderson, I am interested in personal histories and (auto-) biographies as tools for placing the individual agency of 'ordinary' or forgotten activists into otherwise impersonal or elite historical accounts, particularly of international movements where the individual story is perhaps even harder than normal to discern. These three stories tell of activists operating on an international stage in an era before we take such global networks and struggles for granted. Such stories are not easy to tell, because the sources for them are not so easily located. The details of one life have had to be partially recreated from the traces in many different archives in different countries, another from sources and communities typically ignored by mainstream archives, and finally the international richness of one life was revealed through an oral history interview and would have otherwise gone unremarked. Historians can only take so much of the blame for the partial histories they write, and archivists must also take responsibility for collections that reflect the lives of some and not the lives of others. Clearly the anti-imperialist narratives exemplified in these lives are only one aspect of the under-documented experience of empire and its legacies. However, such stories point to the necessity of archivists taking seriously the challenge to integrate diversity and international perspectives more fully into their work. So in between and alongside these individual recovered histories of movement and struggle, I will examine ways in which British archives are (or should be) seeking to meet the challenges of documenting the legacies of exploration and discovery, including hidden and diverse histories of resistance and migration.

George Hardy was born in 1884 in Yorkshire, England, the son of an agricultural labourer. In 1906 he emigrated to Canada in search of work, where he eventually joined the radical syndicalist union, the Industrial Workers of the World (also known as the Wobblies), eventually becoming a leading member. In the service of the union, he spent the

next few years working his passage around the world as a merchant seaman, visiting and organising in the United States, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. Perhaps the place that made the biggest impact on him however was the Belgian Congo, where he wrote about the brutal racism he witnessed. In his account the experience deepened 'my feelings of revolt and school[ed] me in the ways of twentieth century imperialist barbarism'. After this he dedicated the rest of his life to international revolutionary movements, first with the Wobblies (as one of their leaders he was imprisoned in America in 1918 on charges of treason) and latterly with the Communist International, in whose service he worked and lived in Moscow, Berlin, China and South Africa as well as for periods in the United Kingdom. So from comparatively lowly origins, Hardy rose to play a significant role in a number of international revolutionary movements and this resulted in the British Communist Party publishing a somewhat unreliable autobiography a few years before he died in 1966. Nevertheless despite his status and the autobiography, there are only a few disparate and fragmentary traces of Hardy within the archives to reconstruct the full complexity and impact of this remarkable revolutionary life.⁵

Empire, archives and centralising knowledge, sharing heritage

Many writers have commented on the connection between the processes of imperialism and construction of the modern archive. The reliance of the British Empire on information and control of knowledge as a source of its power, and the consequences of that for the development of the symbolic and the real archive, have been seen as particularly significant. Thomas Richards's *Imperial Archive* describes the 'archive' as a largely figurative and symbolic repository of 'comprehensive knowledge' by which imperial rule was imposed and maintained. The symbolic centre of this knowledge was best represented by the acquisitive centralisation (and retention ever since) of the world's knowledge and memory in the British Museum. Nevertheless the

symbolic qualities of the imperial archive were also manifest in the developments in colonial administration and recordkeeping which were essential to the effectiveness of the imperial project. Control of information, the imposition of order and above all equating knowledge with power all underpinned and secured colonial administrations. The 'comprehensive knowledge' archive was the technology which enabled the imperial state's domination.⁶ In light of this, a number of archivists and historians, including Antoinette Burton, Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz, have drawn attention to the contemporaneous (and not unconnected) nineteenth-century developments and extensions of imperial rule, colonial administration and bureaucratic forms, the modern archive and scientific historical methods.⁷

Given the central role afforded to the archive in imperial administration, it is hard to overestimate the significance of the records contained within the archives to colonial and post-colonial peoples. While it is largely true that administrative and governmental archives rarely contain many direct traces of the non-dominant elements of society, historians and others have long recognised that reading the archives 'against the grain' can 'bring out voices which speak in opposition to power, or that insert irony or sarcasm or doubt'. Such readings may then reveal the presence of women, of the colonised, of others marginalised in society and in the records.⁸ Crucially, more recent understandings of the archive as central to the imperial process, and often involving the colonised directly if limitedly in its creation, has led certain writers such as Jeannette Bastian and Ann Stoler to argue that archives are fundamental to understanding colonial rule, from the perspective of the colonised as well as the colonisers. The meanings (that is the context) of the archive can only be understood if the whole of society is considered as part of the context or provenance of the record. Consequently they argue that if colonial records are read 'through archival lens', with the grain, as well as against the grain, they reveal important historical traces of the colonised as well as the colonisers.⁹ Taking into account what Bastian has termed the 'community of records', or what Tom Nesmith refers to as 'societal provenance', is important not just for what it adds to our understanding of the records themselves. It also means that debates over the relevance and legitimate ownership of colonial archives are not just confined to narrow definitions of their traditional administrative or

institutional keepers, but extend to the whole of the society in which they were created. Accepting the logic of this argument does not imply that these records alone can reveal the histories of indigenous, colonised or otherwise marginalised peoples. Their own records and testimonies, if preserved, remain crucial and powerful sources in this regard. However it does mean that these peoples have a powerful claim to share the ownership and heritage of the records created and held by the imperial archive.¹⁰ Such arguments are also persuasive when considering records relating to indigenous and aboriginal peoples in Australia and elsewhere. It has been suggested that ownership of, and responsibility for, records created by the state or its agents, and which have aboriginal peoples as their subject, be jointly held.¹¹

What are the implications of this in practical terms? Bastian's examination of provenance in the case of those colonial records of the Virgin Islands held in Denmark and the United States concluded that the islanders had a historical interest and moral stake in being able to access these records, and in addition were also partial owners of the records, and hence should have easier and appropriate access to them by right.¹² How such shared access might be achieved in reality is complicated but the recognition and acknowledgement of shared and joint heritage is a very important principle to accept. Once the principle is accepted then technological and perhaps digital solutions will follow. As Bastian and others have demonstrated, UNESCO and the International Council on Archives (ICA) have for a long time sought to resolve claims about disputed heritage and archives by reference to concepts of shared heritage and memory. In the continuing absence of enforceable legislation in the case of disputed archives, commentators have suggested that the pursuit of bi-lateral agreements on the basis of recognition of shared heritage is often the most pragmatic approach for resolving these disputes.¹³ However if we follow the logic of Bastian and others' arguments that the provenance and ownership of these records needs to be more broadly defined to include all those involved in their societal creation, then consideration of shared heritage, and responding to it, moves from the pragmatic and moral, and into something more forceful and essential.

What types of records might be considered to have a joint and shared heritage? In the context of a globalised world incorporating histories of

empire, enslavement, commerce and migration, a significant part of a former imperial nation's archival heritage might fall into the category of shared heritage. To take a few examples from the United Kingdom, the National Archives (TNA) hold substantial series of records relating to colonial administrations in Asia, the Americas, Australasia and Africa. Although these are not always the records of the colonial administration as such, significant parts of which sometimes remained with the post-colonial governments, they do include the communications between the colonial government and the centre, including reports, petitions, correspondence, and so forth, and in many cases the private papers of colonial officers and administrators. Such material is at least as pertinent to the history of the former colony as it is to Britain's history, and more needs to be done to make such records available in both locations.¹⁴

The British Library also holds substantial collections of the personal papers of former colonial officials but more significantly also holds the records of the one substantial imperial office not held by TNA, the India Office. This large collection covers the period from 1600 until Indian independence in 1947, embracing the British administration of the sub-continent and connections further afield in Asia and beyond. The collection is particularly noteworthy in documenting the history of how British rule in India evolved from the mercantile imperialism of the East India Company, with direct imperial rule only developing with the establishment of the Board of Control in 1784, and then the India Office in 1858.¹⁵ With this in mind it is worth noting that with traditional territorial colonialism being largely if not entirely replaced by neo-colonial industrial and commercial control, the records of these contemporary colonisations do not even exist in the public arena. In our times, the imperial archive has largely been privatised and is thus even further removed from public scrutiny by those directly affected. A further set of records which should also be considered as relevant in terms of shared heritage are church and missionary collections such as those held by the School of Oriental and African Studies.¹⁶

All these institutions have participated in past schemes which saw archival material shared with the countries to which it refers, usually via microfilm. The British Library has exchanged microfilmed materials with the National Archives of India and Pakistan, TNA have made their

records available for copying or filming to archival or governmental representatives of several former colonies, and the holders of missionary archives have supported various initiatives to make their collections available in the countries to which they refer.¹⁷ However it is generally the case that historically the archival institutions in the imperial centres have rarely been proactive in this regard. They have usually responded to requests rather than taking the initiative and although they were often willing to contribute staff time and resources to supporting any copying or microfilming projects, finance for these often very costly projects had to be found by the government or national archives of the former colony.

In terms of a purely national view of priorities and the relatively scarce allocation of resources within even large national archive and heritage institutions, such a policy might be understandable. However, given the global legacies of empire, conquest, economic exploitation and the slave trade, and the consequent disparities between nations in terms of financial and technical resources, it seems incumbent upon former imperial nations to behave more actively in examining their archival heritage with a view to taking steps to make it more readily available to all those who share in its heritage. A commentator on a recent TNA re-cataloguing project of an important series of colonial records ('Your Caribbean Heritage'), acknowledged that while the primary intended audience for the project was based in the United Kingdom, there was bound to be extensive interest in the Caribbean and the project hoped to satisfy this as well.¹⁸

Perhaps we need to go further. In Bastian's account of Virgin Islanders' attitudes to the records of their colonial history being held overseas, she reports the sentiment felt by many was that 'there are moral obligations on the part of Denmark and the United States to at a minimum share this common history.'¹⁹ National archives and other institutions holding shared heritage located in former imperial countries should acknowledge the colonial legacies and joint histories embodied in the records they hold, including those of resistance and liberation struggles, as well as more traditional records of administration and rule. With the explicit support of government, these institutions should then seek to make those records more easily available to the peoples of the

countries described, at no or limited cost, via copying, microfilming and digitisation. This is beginning to happen much more frequently than before. At the British Library for instance, custodians of the India Office records have recently been actively engaging with archivists and historians from India and other countries about what types of papers they would most like the library to digitise and make available to them. In one case, papers relating to Surinam were digitised with the support of a small grant from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.²⁰ This is an area in which commercial exploitation and privatisation should be minimised – certainly it would be wise to avoid the ill-feeling aroused by allowing a private company to charge for access to the digitised records of the slave trade.²¹

The second individual whose life I wish to briefly introduce, shares some differences and some similarities with George Hardy. Although Mike W... came from a very different social background and from a different period (he grew up around the time of World War II), his story is also one of travel and migrations leading to radicalisation by his contact with the realities of imperial rule, and finally acting, albeit at a much lower level than Hardy, in international networks of agitation and resistance. Coming from a middle-class family, he attended private school and finished his education in Egypt. This experience disturbed some of his liberal illusions about the realities of British rule, but the real change came in 1953 when as a member of the Royal Navy he accompanied the British troops sent to overthrow the democratically-elected government of Cheddi Jagan in British Guiana. Thoroughly disillusioned with Britain and the empire, he considered himself henceforth a communist and was soon discharged from the Navy for his political activities. He subsequently joined the merchant navy and acted as a conduit on behalf of the Communist Party and other radical groups, by conveying messages and papers to important and often banned individuals, such as Richard Hart in Jamaica, and Albie Sachs, Fred Carneson and Walter Sisulu in South Africa. Though not as senior or as well-known as George

Hardy, Mike W... nonetheless played a significant if small role in international revolutionary politics, and was similarly radicalised by his engagement with imperialism. However, there are few if any traces of his activities in the archives, the details of which could only be captured in an oral history interview. Without an explicit commitment by archivists and historians to try to document these sorts of lives, the impact and agency of the less notable will go unrecorded and ultimately unremarked.²²

Recording migrations

Any focus on the movement of peoples, whether for reasons of work, political intrigue or migration, makes archives and recordkeeping a global concern. The experience of migration, whether in the service of empire, religion or commerce, and whether as a migrant, a traveller or a refugee, rarely begins and ends neatly within the same national boundaries. If we are to properly understand and reflect the stories of the movement of people in our records, then some measures of international cooperation are surely essential. Unfortunately, most archival strategies and networks remain bounded by the nation state and national partnerships, however, as the examples of the legacies of empire, trade, enslavement and migration demonstrate, such national horizons are not sufficient when considering a global archival heritage.

TNA's guide to the UK Government's records of immigration and citizenship legislation is a very useful introduction to the available sources but it acknowledges that the records it details provide a very incomplete story of the history of migration to the United Kingdom.²³ The guide only briefly deals with records of migration from the UK. While acknowledging that the archives held at TNA are only a part of the records of migration in the UK, the guide only recommends that researchers consult other British records, rather than seeking out possibilities further afield. Similarly, the excellent collaborative project *Moving Here*, brought together national and local English archives and museums as well as a number of minority ethnic community groups and archives, but did not include any overseas partners.²⁴ This is not

to criticise the project. By bringing together material (text and digitised records) from a wide range of sources and allowing people to contribute their own migration stories, *Moving Here* is an important resource of material on migration to England over the last 200 years, with a particular focus on Jewish migrants as well as those from Ireland, South Asia and the Caribbean. Nevertheless, a similar collaboration including partner archives, museums and community groups from abroad would have contributed more depth and scope to the project, and to the stories it has made available.

Any attempts to fully understand colonialism and its legacies must acknowledge the impact of movement: of slavery, of those who left imperial centres for the colonies, and of those who made the journey in reverse. The archives of these movements, if collected and preserved, described and made accessible, will help to comprehend the impacts of the contacts resulting from them. The need to document migration remains a contemporary concern. The large numbers of migrants and refugees moving around the world today, often without records and often undocumented, represent a huge contemporary challenge to this endeavour. Official government records of migration are likely to give a very fragmentary and one-dimensional picture, especially in the case of refugees and those seeking asylum. Archivists and others should try to work with these groups, and as far as they are willing, to document their experiences.²⁵

The question might be raised as to why should we do this, why should we expend effort and possibly scarce resources on what will often be difficult and complicated problems? A better understanding of how our societies are constructed and how they are connected to others by the movements of people and cultures may contribute towards building more cohesive societies with a more widespread awareness of the legacies of the past, and the essential inter-connectivity of global human society. It might also help societies to see migrants as no longer always the 'other'. Finally, as discussed in the next section, an awareness and recognition of the global and diverse roots of peoples might also help to facilitate an individual and local sense of place, identification and belonging.²⁶

***Delivering Shared Heritage* – metropolitan centres and their diverse populations**

As has been already suggested earlier in this paper, one of the ironies about collections held in former imperial centres like London is that these often provide a better reflection of the outside world than of their own diverse populations. While many significant, if also partial and fragmentary archive collections relating to the rest of world are held in such metropolitan centres, comparatively little is held about the many peoples who now live in these cities, at least as far as speaking in their own voices is concerned. A similar paradox is to be found in the museum sector, where imperial-era collections such as those held by the British Museum have been 'acquired' from all over the world. However, prior to the application of revisiting collections methodology, comparatively little had been done to systematically connect those historical objects with the descendants of the source communities now living in London.²⁷

The absences and under-representation within archive collections both reflects and contributes to the same invisibilities and absences in local and national histories which are often drawn from these 'memory stores'. The implications of such absences are hard to quantify but at the very least they reflect broader societal marginalisations, and reinforce messages of belonging (or in this case not belonging), and can thus be seen as one of the building blocks of continuing ignorance, racism and discrimination:

When an individual's or a community's heritage is denied adequate recognition within a particular milieu, or is overshadowed by dominant narratives or is simply ignored, the outcome can be debilitating, leading to disaffection and disillusionment, a sense of disenfranchisement and contributing to socio-economic decline.²⁸

The response to this, by community activists and historians, but also increasingly by archivists and other heritage professionals, has been to re-state and recover what should be clear and obvious to all, particularly since the publication of Peter Fryer's *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* in 1984: that Britain's ethnic and cultural diversity is not a new post-World War II phenomenon. Rather, the United Kingdom is a country built upon successive waves of migration, and that as a consequence of empire and trade, there has been a discernable black and Asian presence

(as students, as slaves or servants, as seamen, as workers) from the 1600s onwards, long before the post-1945 migrations commenced. In the words of one leading activist and historian, 'colonialism and immigration are part of the same continuum – we are here because you were there'.²⁹ For Gilroy the response by historians and others to popular and Eurocentric denial of this diverse history is crucial to 'contemporary multiculturalism and future pluralism':

... the historians of Europe's repressed, denied and disavowed blackness must become willing to say the same things over and over again in the hope that a climate will eventually develop in which we will be able to find a hearing ... The little-known historical facts of Europe's openness to the colonial worlds it helped to make must be employed to challenge fantasies of the newly embattled European region as a culturally bleached or politically fortified space, closed off to further immigration, barred to asylum seeking and wilfully deaf to any demand for hospitality made by refugees and other displaced people.³⁰

Indeed the evidence for such works of recovery is to be found hidden in many archives in the United Kingdom. Academics like Caroline Bressey and other members of the Black and Asian Studies Association (BASA), have sought to recover and disseminate traces of the black presence to be found in archives and elsewhere. BASA was, along with the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and the National Archives, one of the leading partners in the Caribbean Studies and Black and Asian History (CASBAH) pilot project, which established an online database identifying archival and other resources useful for the study of black and Asian history in Britain. Regionally, groups such as the Northamptonshire Black History Association, and projects such as Birmingham's 'Connecting Histories', have sought to raise awareness of black history (broadly defined) in their respective regions. They have done this by bringing together community groups with archivists and other heritage professionals to recover traces of the black presence in existing collections, and to encourage the preservation (and perhaps the deposit) of relevant new collections. In other cases independent community heritage and archive organisations have sought to collect and present the 'community' histories within their own spaces and

outside the mainstream heritage arena. Similar projects and initiatives are also well-established in the fields of working-class, women's, and lesbian and gay histories.³¹ Nevertheless despite all these important initiatives and projects, it must be acknowledged that such efforts also suffer from being often piecemeal and rather ad-hoc, reliant on committed volunteers and short-term project funding rather than being a core part of long-term regional or national strategies.

One significant response to this lack of a strategic and sustained approach to issues of diversity within not just archives but heritage more generally was the Mayor of London's Commission on African and Asian Heritage (MCAAH). Established in 2003, the commission took evidence from a range of representatives of London's black and minority ethnic communities, academics, policy makers and a broad spectrum of cultural and heritage professionals. MCAAH's deliberations started from the recognition that:

African and Asian heritage, its upkeep, promotion and preservation continue to suffer as a direct consequence [of racism]. In the heritage sector specifically, and in other walks of life generally, institutional racism continues to disable, negate or neutralise initiatives towards positive advancement.

The commission's role, with the backing of the office of the Mayor of London, was to provide an intellectual and practical framework with which to seek to overcome these institutional barriers.³²

The Commission's final report *Delivering Shared Heritage*, was published in 2005 and though focused on London's African and Asian heritage, it can and should be read in the context of engaging with more broadly defined absences from archives and heritage, not just for London but more widely in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. The report analysed the current situation and its impact and then set out an agenda for systematic change and transformation. This agenda included recommendations regarding leadership in the heritage and cultural sectors, measures to ensure the diversification of governing bodies, workforces and audiences, the establishment of sustained and equitable partnerships, the development of collections, greater support for African and Asian community heritage and archive organisations, and support for greater incorporation of black and Asian histories into national heritage and education programs.³³

Responsibility for taking the commission's recommendations forward was assigned to a heritage diversity task force, again comprising community representatives, heritage professionals, academics and policy makers. The task force in turn established various subcommittees, including an archives diversification subcommittee.³⁴ Its brief was to suggest ways to implement the MCAAH recommendations within an archival context. Taking as its framing vision, 'Democratising the Archive', the subcommittee and its report made a number of recommendations for supporting the diversification agenda, including:

- advocacy for the diversity agenda from leading professional bodies;
- establishing better and mutually beneficial partnerships with community groups;
- addressing issues of cultural ownership and custody within an equitable framework;
- supporting investigation into description and terminology, including exploring ways of better involving community representatives and other experts in the cataloguing process; and
- establishing national and international networks of archivists, academics and African and Asian history experts, to better understand the role of archives and education in diverse and globalised histories supporting individual and community identifications and understandings.³⁵

This is designed to be a practical agenda aimed at transforming aspects of professional archival practice. Some recommendations are already being taken forward, by building on work done by the CASBAH project in examining issues around terminology and description, for instance. However, transformative change in individual archives and heritage institutions will require further detailed development in guidance and professional education. Diversity strategies and useful models of change are available beyond the archive world. Consideration of these challenges is generally more advanced in the museums' world. For instance, guidance on implementing a thoroughgoing cultural diversity strategy in a museum setting is provided on the Museum of London's website.³⁶

There are, of course, important local and national contexts in which these changes must be framed and understood if they are to be appropriate and relevant. However, such has been the experience of contact and interaction through migration, trade and, crucially, imperialism, between many peoples and countries, that all records and histories are in essence part of a global and shared human heritage. The archive profession should therefore acknowledge and incorporate all international developments in theory and practice which attempt to come to terms with shared histories, absences and questions of visibility, disputed ownership and custody, diversity and pluralism, and the legacies for heritage and archives of empire and colonialism. In particular, in this regard Jeannette Bastian's agenda for meeting the 'critical challenge' of constructing 'peoples' archives' for those 'post-colonial peoples whose histories have at best been marginalised and at worst, eradicated', as well the provoking and essential South African writings on re-figuring or building a post-colonial archive, point to possible ways forward.³⁷ Recent articles by Anne Gilliland and Kelvin White, and by Elizabeth Adkins, have further made the case for incorporating more diverse perspectives at the heart of professional education and practice respectively.³⁸ In Australia, New Zealand and the Americas the example of partnership between Archives New Zealand and Maori communities, the Australian Society of Archivists' Indigenous Issues Special Interest Group, and the Native American Archives Roundtable, all contribute significant perspectives to the development of any new and transformed archival practice. In particular, attempts to formulate new archival paradigms which 'respect and empower the local and indigenous' heritage of those less visible groups clearly have wide relevance whether it be addressing indigenous or aboriginal peoples in Australasia and the Americas, or minority ethnic and other sometimes marginalised communities elsewhere.³⁹

A word of caution is needed here, especially when contemplating this kind of work from a professional standpoint. Verne Harris in his 1997 agenda-setting 'Claiming Less, Delivering More' article, and more recently Matthew Kurtz, both warned against a too 'triumphalist' and positivist approach to seeking to re-capture those silent, invisible or marginalised within the archive.⁴⁰ As Rodney Carter argues, some of these individuals and groups do not consider themselves marginalised, or may wish to remain silent and invisible, or at least to become visible only on their own terms.⁴¹ In seeking to recover or give voice to the under-voiced we may

be seeking to recover and document those who have not chosen to speak or be recovered, and thus are in danger of reinforcing and replicating the power relations within society, rather than acting to re-fashion or re-balance them. For these reasons, Kurtz expresses reservations about the possibility of post-colonial archives (or even moves towards post-colonial archives) where the motivation, and ultimately custodianship, comes from and rests with those in authority, or associated with authority. Harris warns against temptations in re-inventing the archive to adopt new meta-narratives which continue to obscure and exclude other, contrary narratives. However, as Harris also suggests, this does not mean that we need to give up the project of re-thinking and re-inventing our archives as a hopeless or too complex one. Rather, we need to 'embrace *process* rather than *product*'. While the archive will always remain a fragment of the whole and never be representative of the entirety of society, it can at the very least be more representative of the diversity of society, and if we work to achieve this with those previously absent, allowing them the initiative and control over the process, then many of the concerns raised by Kurtz and others can perhaps be minimised.⁴² Even though questions of authority, closure and invisibilities will remain, allowing control over the processes through which countries, communities and individuals are given a voice, and through which they can become more visible, to reside with those affected will mean that the colonial, imperial and orthodox patterns of dominance and authority will be less inscribed in these processes.

I will thus finish with my third and final story which concerns Claudia Jones, who was born in Trinidad in 1915 before moving to New York with her family in 1923. Although she suffered from ill-health throughout her life, she soon became actively involved in black and revolutionary politics, becoming a senior member of the American Communist Party and a well-known civil rights writer and speaker. In the McCarthy era, this resulted in a series of arrests, and eventually in 1955 she was deported to Britain (Trinidad would not accept her). In London she joined the British Communist Party and remained relatively active on the world stage, though her relations with the British party were never easy. Her most significant role was now working with a number of politically active West Indians in organising

against racism and discrimination. She helped found the first black newspaper in Britain (the *West Indian Gazette*) and in response to the race riots of 1958, she was a driving force behind the establishment of an annual carnival. Drawing on her Trinidadian roots, she saw the carnival as way of demonstrating West Indian culture and unity. Over the years this event evolved into what is now the internationally recognised Notting Hill Carnival, with Claudia Jones now recognised as the 'mother of the carnival'. Sadly, her ill-health continued and caused her early death in 1964, and she was buried in Highgate cemetery alongside Karl Marx. Her role in the birth of the carnival has led to a number of biographies, and she has quite a high profile in Britain's black and African-Caribbean communities, if not perhaps in wider society. However, much of the information for these books, at least as far as her time in England is concerned, has come from oral testimony from those who knew and worked with her, and archival sources for her life are extremely (and some say suspiciously) rudimentary. Like the life histories that came before, Claudia's story is one in which the imprint of empire and movement, resistance and struggle is strong, but for which the archival traces are faint.⁴³

Endnotes

¹ Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2004, in particular chapter 3, 'Has It Come to This?'

² Gilroy, *ibid.*, pp. 84-92.

³ Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination*, Verso, London, 2007, p. 234.

⁴ Andrew Flinn, 'Other Ways of Thinking, Other Ways of Being. Documenting the Margins and the Transitory: What to Preserve, How to Collect?', in Louise Craven (ed.), *What Are Archives? Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives*, Ashgate, Abingdon, 2008.

⁵ Andrew Flinn and Kevin Morgan, 'Hardy, George. Syndicalist and Communist', in Keith Gildart, David Howell and Neville Kirk (eds), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Volume XI, Palgrave, Basingtoke, 2003, pp. 98-109.

⁶ Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*, Verso, London, 1993, pp. 6, 11; Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science*, vol. 2, nos 1-2, 2002, pp. 92-7.

- ⁷ Antoinette Burton, 'Thinking Beyond the Boundaries: Empire, Feminism and the Domains of History', *Social History*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2001, pp. 68–9; Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook, 'Archives, Records and Power: The Making of Modern Memory', *Archival Science*, vol. 2, nos 1–2, 2002, pp. 16–17.
- ⁸ Schwartz and Cook, pp. 13–18.
- ⁹ Stoler, pp. 98–101, 109; Jeannette Bastian, 'Reading Colonial Records Through an Archival Lens', *Archival Science*, vol. 6, nos 3–4, 2006, pp. 267–84.
- ¹⁰ Jeannette Bastian, *Owning Memory: How a Caribbean Community Lost its Archives and Found its History*, Libraries Unlimited, Westport, Connecticut, 2003, pp. 75–89; Tom Nesmith, 'The Concept of Societal Provenance and Records of Nineteenth-Century Aboriginal-European Relations in Western Canada: Implications for Archival Theory and Practice', *Archival Science*, vol. 6, nos 3–4, 2006, pp. 351–60.
- ¹¹ See for instance the Monash University Archives for Koorie Communities Update on Trust and Technology research project, ASA Indigenous Issues Special Interest Group *Newsletter*, December 2007 p. 8, available at <<http://www.archivists.org.au/files/Pubs/SIG/II/IISIGNewsletter200712.pdf>>, accessed 20 November 2009.
- ¹² Jeannette Bastian, 'Whispers in the Archives: Finding the Voices of the Colonized in the Records of the Colonizer', in Margaret Procter et al, *Political Pressure and the Archival Record*, Society of American Archivists, Chicago, 2006, pp. 39–40.
- ¹³ Bastian, *Owning Memory*, pp. 83–4; Leopold Auer, *Disputed Archival Claims: Analysis Of An International Survey: A RAMP Study*, UNESCO, Paris, 1998; Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, 'Displaced Archives on the Eastern Front: Reflections on Unresolved Legal, Political, and Humanitarian Issues', ICA Congress 2004, available at <http://www.wien2004.ica.org/imagesUpload/pres_114_GRIMSTED_CUSAHO01-EN.pdf>, accessed 20 November 2009, although focused on disputed archival collections in Russia and Eastern Europe gives a broad overview of the legal and cultural questions pertaining to disputed archives and shared heritage.
- ¹⁴ The UK National Archives, *Research Guide: Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Overseas Records Information 20, 2004 (updated 2008), available at <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/RdLeaflet.asp?sLeafletID=377>>, accessed 20 November 2009.
- ¹⁵ The British Library, 'India Office Records: History and Scope', available at <<http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelppregion/asia/india/indiaofficerecords/indiaofficescope/indiaofficehistoryscope.html>>, accessed 20 November 2009.
- ¹⁶ School of Oriental and African Studies, 'Our Collections', available at <<http://www.soas.ac.uk/library/subjects/archives/collections/>>, accessed 20 November 2009; Rosemary Seton, 'Co-operative Efforts to Promote and Secure the Archives of Christian Missionary Societies with Special Reference to those in the Third World', *Comma*, 2005.3.
- ¹⁷ A sense of some of contemporary and historic initiatives in this regard can be obtained from Centre for Research Libraries, South Asian Microform Project, available at <<http://www.crl.edu/area-studies/samp>>, accessed 20 November 2009; Steve Mwiyeriwa, 'The National Archives of Malawi and the problem of migrated archives', *African Research and Documentation*, vol. 30, 1982; IJ Johnstone, 'The Zimbabwe documentation project', *African Research and Documentation*, vol. 33, 1983; Jill Rush and Molly Barton, 'Improving Access to modern African sources at the National Archives of the United Kingdom', *African Research and Documentation*, vol. 93, 2003; Susannah Rayner, "'Go ye into all the world": Missionary Archives in the School of Oriental and African Studies', *African Research and Documentation*, vol. 98, 2005; Seton, 'Co-operative Efforts'.

¹⁸ Mandy Banton, "'Your Caribbean Heritage": A New Cataloguing Project at the National Archives', *Recordkeeping*, Winter 2005, pp. 19–21.

¹⁹ Bastian, *Owning Memory*, p. 86.

²⁰ British Library, India Office Records staff, December 2009.

²¹ Although the Slave Registers 1812–1834 remain free to view at the National Archives of the UK, the decision to allow Ancestry.co.uk to digitise and then charge for access to them was controversial, they are available there at <<http://content.ancestry.co.uk/fiexec/?htx=List&bid=1129&offerid=0%3a7858%3a0>>, accessed 20 November 2009. An e-petition calling for free access to these records 'for African descendants' on the Prime Minister's website garnered over 9,000 signatures, available at <<http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/freecaccess/#detail>>, accessed 20 November 2009. The records were eventually made available free to all.

²² Interview with Mike W..., 2000, CPGB Biographical Project, interviews available at the National Sound Archive at the British Library.

²³ Roger Kersham and Mark Pearshall, *Immigrants and Aliens: A Guide to sources on UK immigration and citizenship*, The National Archives, Kew, 2004.

²⁴ The National Archives, 'Moving Here', available at <<http://www.movinghere.org.uk/default.htm>>, accessed 20 November 2009.

²⁵ Examples of contemporary projects include Generiques project (France), available at <<http://www.generiques.org/images/pdf/DP-Generiques-2-Anglais.pdf>>, accessed 20 November 2009; Cultural Heritage of Minority Groups Project (Netherlands) see Charles Jeurgens, 'The Other Past: the memory of migrants and their representation in archives', *Comma*, 2005.3, pp. 3–4; University of East London, 'The Refugee Council Archive', available at <<http://www.uel.ac.uk/rca/index.htm>>, accessed 20 November 2009.

²⁶ Jeurgens, pp. 5–6.

²⁷ Mayor's Commission on African and Asian Heritage, *Delivering Shared Heritage*, Greater London Authority, London, 2005, pp. 10, 74–5. Further information about Revisiting Collections and Revisiting Archive Collections can be found at Collections Link, 'Revisiting Collections', available at <http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/Increase_access/revisiting_collections>, accessed 20 November 2009.

²⁸ Mayor's Commission on African and Asian Heritage, pp. 10, 75–6; Stuart Hall, 'Whose Heritage? Un-settling "The Heritage", Re-imagining the Post-Nation', in Jo Littler and Roshi Naidoo (eds), *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of 'Race'*, Routledge, London, 2005, p. 24; Gilroy, pp. 107–16.

²⁹ A Sivanandan, 'Catching History on the Wing', 6 November 2008, available at <<http://www.irr.org.uk/2008/november/ha000016.html>>, accessed 20 November 2009.

³⁰ Gilroy, pp. 156–7.

³¹ Caroline Bressley, 'Invisible Presence: The Whitening of the Black Community in the Historical Imagination of British Archives', *Archivaria* 61, 2006, pp. 47–61; Black and Asian Studies Association, available at <<http://www.blackandasianstudies.org/index.html>>, accessed 20 November 2009; CASBAH, available at <<http://www.casbah.ac.uk/index.html>>, accessed 20 November 2009; Northamptonshire Black History Association, available at <<http://www.northants-black-history.org.uk>>, accessed 20 November 2009; Connecting histories, available at <<http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/>>, accessed 20 November 2009. More details on the range of these initiatives can be found in Andrew Flinn, 'Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 28, no. 2, October 2007, pp. 151–76.

³² Mayor's Commission on African and Asian Heritage, p. 9. It should be recognised however that at the time of writing (July 2008) under Boris Johnson's new mayoral administration and the appointment of a new cultural adviser, Munira Mirza, the continued future for this work is not clear.

³³ *ibid.*, pp. 77–84.

³⁴ The sub-committee included representatives from the Greater London Authority, the Heritage Diversity Task Force, experts in African, Asian and other minority ethnic heritage and a number of professional and academic institutions including the National Archives of the UK, London Metropolitan Archives, Lambeth Borough Archives and UCL (the author).

³⁵ Heritage Diversity Task Force (HDTF) Archives Diversification Subcommittee, 'Report', 2007. The report was approved by the HDTF in 2007 and should be available online in due course. In the meantime e-copies can be obtained from the author on request.

³⁶ Lola Young, 'Our Lives, Our Histories, Our Collections', 2005, available at <<http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/English/Collections/OnlineResources/RWWC/Essays/Essay2/>>, accessed 20 November 2009, and Raminder Kaur, 'Unearthing Our Past: Engaging with Diversity at the Museum of London', 2005, available at <<http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/English/Collections/OnlineResources/RWWC/Essays/Essay1/>>, accessed 20 November 2009.

³⁷ Jeannette Bastian, 'Making the Journey from the Imperial Archives to the Peoples Archives: A Social and Professional Agenda', *Comma*, 2006.3–4, p. 1; Carolyn Hamilton et al (eds), *Refiguring the Archive*, New Africa Books, Cape Town, 2002; Cheryl McEwan, 'Building a Postcolonial Archive? Gender, Collective Memory and Citizenship in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2003, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 739–57.

³⁸ Anne Gilliland and Kelvin White, 'Perpetuating and Extending the Archival Paradigm: The Historical and Contemporary Roles of Professional Education and Pedagogy', *Interactions*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2009, available at <<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/7wp1q908>>, accessed 20 November 2009; Elizabeth Adkins, 'Our Journey Towards Diversity – and a Call to More Action', *American Archivist*, vol. 71, 2008, pp. 21–49.

³⁹ Sue McKemmish, Anne Gilliland-Swetland and Eric Ketelaar "'Communities of Memory": Pluralising Archival Research and Education Agendas', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2005, pp. 146–74; papers given by Sue McKemmish, Anne Gilliland, Kirsten Thorpe, Anne Wright and Kelvin White as part of 'Developing Inclusive, Culturally Sensitive Archival Education to Meet the Needs of Diverse Communities' session at ICA Congress, 2008.

⁴⁰ Verne Harris, 'Claiming Less, Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations on Archives in South Africa', *Archivaria* 44, 1997, pp. 133–4; Matthew Kurtz, 'A Postcolonial Archive? On the Paradox of Practice in a Northwest Alaska Project', *Archivaria* 61, 2006, pp. 63–90.

⁴¹ Rodney Carter, 'Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence', *Archivaria* 61, 2006, pp. 215–33.

⁴² Kurtz, pp. 86–9; Harris, pp. 138–40; Schwartz and Cook, pp. 17, 18; McEwan, pp. 746–7, 753–6.

⁴³ A sense of the brief but significant influence of Claudia Jones within Britain's Black communities can be gauged from Donald Hind, 'Claudia Jones and the "West Indian Gazette"', *Race & Class*, vol. 50, no. 1, July 2008, available at <<http://www.irr.org.uk/2008/july/ha000007.html>>, accessed 20 November 2009. See also Marika Sherwood with Donald Hinds and Colin Prescod, *Claudia Jones: A Life in Exile*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1999.