# Welsh Cultural Legacies of Colonialism and the Politics of Exhibition

## Project description

The history of slavery and the social, economic, and cultural impact of colonialism are entrenched in museums, collections and heritage sites. In recent years, institutions in the UK and internationally have publicly committed to a process of decolonisation. However, understanding how to decolonise is complex, has come under scrutiny, and requires a multi-perspective approach.

In the case of Wales, whilst its successful iron, wool and copper industries often represent a source of pride, there has been an absence of academic analysis and public discussion and reflexion on how these resources were tied up in the transatlantic slave trade and how Welsh industry, commerce, society and daily life was, and continues to be, embedded in colonialism. This interdisciplinary project responds to this and will involve developing a deep understanding of scholarship on postcolonial (e.g., Chilisa, 2012) and decolonising methodologies (e.g., Tuhiwahi Smith, 2006; ), museology and museum practice (e.g., Jeffery, 2022), Welsh narratives of colonialism (Lewis, 2018; Taylor, 2017, 2018, 2019), slavery and Wales (Evans, 2015; Gwyn, 2012) and migration and diversity in Wales (Williams et al, 2015).

This interdisciplinary project is situated at the intersection between postcolonial politics, international history and museum studies. It gives the prospective student scope to explore themes such as slavery, postcolonial art practice, colonial material culture, deconolonising methodologies, myths of national identity, racism and migration to shape the project in line with their research background and interests.

### Research questions

This research project responds to opportunities, obstacles and limitations of efforts of museums across the globe to decolonise their collections and reflect on their colonial and racist legacies. It has two strands. The first focusses on Wales’ colonial legacy and the narratives surrounding its role in the British empire and the transatlantic slave trade. In this vein, it will explore the tensions between Wales of being both coloniser and colonised (Taylor, 2018). On developing this strand, the research project will focus on the below questions:

* What does the presence or absence of narratives on colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade in Wales’ museums produce?
* How do these narratives sustain or challenge wider narratives on Wales’ status as colonised?

The second strand focusses specifically on the role of Welsh cultural institutions, particularly Amgueddfa Cymru, and their efforts to promote decolonisation. The project will explore the below questions:

* What role has Amgueddfa Cymru played in (re) producing colonial narratives?
* How can Amgueddfa Cymru expand our understanding of cultural legacies of colonialism in Wales?
* What are the tensions between balancing experiences of being colonised with recognition of a colonising past?
* What role can marginalised communities play in decolonising major cultural institutions in Wales?
* Does decolonising exhibitions have the potential to address racial inequalities in Wales?

The project will explore colonialism and the histories of transatlantic slave trade in the places, stories and collections of Amgueddfa Cymru. It will analyse evidence of the slave trade and its impact in their collections, who made the decisions about exhibitions, whose voices are heard, what is shown in the exhibitions, and how stories are narrated in Amgueddfa Cymru.

### Methodology

Data collection and analysis will take place in two phases. During the first phase, the candidate will focus on analysing the archives and collections of Amgueddfa Cymru to explore narratives on colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade in Wales and how Wales’ status as ‘colonised’ is bound up in such narratives.

The second phase of data collection will adopt community-based participatory research methods based on the principle of co-creation as a means of ‘empowering, equitable, inclusive, and ethical science in partnership with communities’ (Kia-Keating & Juang, 2022). Data collection will take place through a series of participatory sessions with BAME communities in Wales with the aim of the empowering often marginalised voices.

## Collaboration

The project is designed as collaborative research with Amgueddfa Cymru and is an opportunity for real knowledge exchange. In addition to providing access and expert guidance on relevant collections, Amgueddfa Cymru will provide skills training to the PhD student, which will inform and influence their project throughout. This will include support on the following: object handling, collection management services training, facilitating museum talks, running creative methods workshops, and developing skills to organise and run pop-up exhibitions.

Amgueddfa Cymru also has the opportunity to learn from the student and the communities that they work with. The student will share project findings to Amgueddfa Cymru staff through an interactive workshop and will participate in Amgueddfa Cymru’s monthly cross-departmental decolonising group meeting. The student’s research will also benefit Amgueddfa Cymru visitors and this will be communicated to them in a 3-part blog post series and associated social media content for Amgueddfa Cymru’s online platforms.

## Collaborative partner

Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales is a charity, and a family of seven national museums and one collections centre located across Wale. For more information on Amgueddfa Cymru, see their [Strategy 2030 | Museum Wales](https://museum.wales/about/policy/strategy-2030/#:~:text=Amgueddfa%20Cymru%20-%20Museum%20Wales%202030%20This%20is,contribute%20through%20our%20museums%2C%20programmes%2C%20collections%20and%20work.).

## Supervisors

Dr Catrin Wyn Edwards, Lecturer and Dr Lucy Taylor, Senior Lecturer, Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University. Their areas of expertise include migration and diversity in Wales, decolonial and settler colonial theory and narratives of colonialism.