Horrible British Histories: young people in museums interrogating national identity through principles and practices of critical pedagogy

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Abstract

This paper explores the importance of supporting young people in exploring identities and belongings in the cultural heritage sector. When working with young people in British museums, creating open and safe spaces for discussing the entanglements of contemporary multicultural identities with the legacies of British colonialism is necessary and long overdue. By employing the principles and practices of critical pedagogy, heritage organisations can interrogate the dominant narratives about identity and belonging in Britain, and work with young people to highlight shifting, fluid and multiple identities and belongings in contemporary Britain.

Drawing on my experiences as the Our Shared Cultural Heritage Project Coordinator at Manchester Museum, I argue the case for cultural and heritage institutions to create safe spaces for young people from diverse ethnic and class backgrounds to explore and celebrate the meanings and complexities of their lived experiences of Britishness. Museums can become crucial cultural sites where young people can lead a critical interrogation of the idea of nation, through an exploration of the discourses attached to British identities that play out at local, national and global levels. Critical pedagogy is an emancipatory and transformative approach to democratising education, and we urgently need more of it in museums to radically transform heritage spaces.

Keywords: Identity, belonging, museums, young people, critical pedagogy

1. Introduction: challenging exclusionary politics of nation and belonging

Over the last two decades, the promotion of national identity has increasingly come to dominate public and political debate about multiculturalism, diversity and belonging. Those of us who work with young people have observed how these discourses of Britishness have also governed policies and practices in educational settings such as schools, colleges,

universities and youth and community spaces (Habib, 2018). Whilst discourses of Britishness might initially have partly emerged due to the UK government's anxieties about Scotland and Wales seeking independence, ethnic minorities, and particularly Muslims, have subsequently become the relentless target of Fundamental British Values (FBV) policies (Maylor, 2016). This exceptional focus on ethnic minority communities has been perpetuated by the terror attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001 and in London in July 2005, which have amplified public, media and political debates about what it means to be British and what it means to belong to Britain (Kiwan, 2012).

The world has transformed in many strange and new ways since these aforementioned events, especially with regards to political demands for and confused attempts to define and preserve a form of national identity that promotes a rhetoric of exclusion and assimilation. Official accounts of Britishness in the political field have been critically reviewed as false, mythical and exclusionary (Habib, 2018). According to Croft (2012), the political elite construct and present their version of a story of Britain's history. Often it is a narrative that serves to reproduce the British nation as being exclusive and exceptional in character and values. Critics of how national identity has been historically framed note a rhetoric is created deliberately. Often these narratives are "rhetorical frames through which to define how the public sees policy issues" to influence the public in determining who is a friend or who is an enemy, as well as who are outsiders or insiders (Grube, 2011, p.628).

The promotion of Britishness—a very social phenomenon—has therefore been critiqued time and again as a means for the powerful elite to perpetuate "officially constructed patriotism" (Colley, 1992, p.145). As the mainstream official discourses on Britishness have been problematised by researchers, educators and students as being narrow and insular, there is a call to engage with a sense of multicultural Britishness that is diverse and complex. As a researcher and educator who is openly critical of the FBV agenda, I have sought to make the case for young people's voices, experiences and opinions to be recognised and valued in the ongoing debates around Britishness. My own work has revealed the rich insights that emerge when young people are encouraged and supported to challenge hegemonic myths about British identities (Habib, 2018, 2020). Yet across both formal and informal educational settings, opportunities for young people to engage in these debates are currently limited. My work with young people in schools, colleges, and community and heritage organisations highlights the importance of valuing and recognising complex and nuanced multiple identities and belongings, whether they be local, national or transnational (Habib, 2018, 2020).

In this paper, I argue the case for cultural and heritage institutions to create safe spaces for young people from diverse ethnic and class backgrounds to explore and celebrate the meanings and complexities of their lived experiences of Britishness. I argue that museums can become crucial cultural sites where young people can lead a critical interrogation of the idea of *nation* through an exploration of the discourses attached to British identities that play out at local, national and global levels. I advocate critical pedagogy as an emancipatory and transformative approach to democratising education, and emphasise that we urgently need more of it in museums to radically transform heritage spaces. Giroux (2004, p.64) applauds the power of critical pedagogy in transforming "how people think about themselves and their relationship to others and the world", and in inspiring young people to "engage in those struggles that further possibilities for living in a more just society". Critically engaged pedagogy empowers young people, especially those who might have previously felt unworthy of participating in school life (hooks, 2010) or alienated from a Eurocentric school curriculum.

2. Museums, national identity and belonging

It is helpful to acknowledge from the outset when exploring Britishness that defining national identity is neither simple nor straightforward. Nation, nationality and nationalism are concepts that are hard to define, and also difficult to analyse (Anderson, 2006), especially for young people grappling with rapid global changes and digital technologies impacting their local belongings. For Bhabha (1990,

p.1), the nation is "a powerful historical idea" emerging from "impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical" political and literary thought. The most popular definition for nation seems to be what Anderson (2006) calls an "imagined political community", where "even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 2006, p.6). Similarly, Colley (1992, p.5) highlights how nations have long been "culturally and ethnically diverse, problematic, protean and artificial constructs that take shape very quickly and can come apart just as fast". It is helpful therefore to acknowledge from the outset when exploring Britishness that defining national identity is not simple nor straightforward.

Museums are known to be the stalwarts of nation states. They are seen as pandering to the whims and desires of the political architects of the nation. Consider the notion of the national museum with "collections and displays that ultimately claim, articulate and represent dominant national values and myth" (Aronsson & Elgenius, 2015, p. 1). The sheer power of museums to contribute to debates about nation and identity is supported by "scientists, art connoisseurs, citizens and taxpayers, policy makers and visitors alike" (Aronsson & Elgenius, 2015, p. 2). Phillip's (2011, p.3) work on the indigenisation of Canadian Museums reveals the challenge for museums seeking to engage diverse communities whilst simultaneously attempting to align with the values and identity of the nation: navigating this tension has significance for "issues of identity, diversity, and public representation". Trofanenko and Segall (2014) explain that to begin "to understand the pedagogical mandate of public museums, one must understand the colonial practices that aided in their creation". And so it transpires that this power of museums as bolsterers of national identities cannot be underestimated.

As critical museum educators witness the ways in which "national values and notions of a 'Western civilization'" continue to be transmitted through some European museums (Aronsson & Elgenius, 2015, p. 2), in this paper, I ask how might we support young people from diverse communities who are keen to challenge dominant and popular myths about national identity and belonging. I highlight a need to create a movement in heritage spaces for young people to critically interrogate the contemporary machinations and meanings of museums, and importantly, I describe how these institutions can begin to take the smallest steps to work towards dismantling a colonial legacy that impacts society even today. My own experience has found that young people are very committed to and passionate about uncovering the colonial and transnational histories of buildings, monuments and architectures in their everyday spaces which can open up opportunities to explore connections between their sense of belonging to Britain and legacies of empire, colonialism and the slave trade (Habib, 2018).

If museums have been contributory factors in cementing the imagined notion of a nation, then museums must not delay in critically examining their own role in promoting exclusionary notions of British identities. Museums must strive to now actively use their spaces, collections and objects to challenge the resurgence of a defensive, exclusionary politics of national identity. This resurgent defensiveness – an almost symbolic denial of the violence of colonial heritage - has been seen very recently in the marked hostile reaction of right-wing cultural commentators and politicians in a bizarre public backlash against the National Trust's report (National Trust, 2020). It's as though by suppressing the dark and violent colonial histories of quintessential British country houses, those levelling criticism against the National Trust, position themselves as guardians and defenders of British Values.

That Britishness and national identity are so closely connected to heritage and politics became all too apparent last autumn when the National Trust published the aforementioned interim report (2020a) describing "the connections 93 historic places in our care have with colonialism and historic slavery" (National Trust, 2020b). *The Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery* (National Trust, 2020) was well received within the heritage sector and generated a great deal of productive discussion about how to move forward with honest conversations. While museum curators, heritage staff, academics,

students, educators and historians were particularly vocal in applauding the National Trust for its responsible decision to explicitly write about direct and indirect links to British colonial histories, others reacted more defensively.

The media reported on government, claiming the report was 'unfortunate' and caused offence, and supposed outrage at the inclusion of Winston Churchill's estate (Hope, 2020). In an open letter to *The Telegraph*, the 'Common Sense Group' of Tory MPs accused the Trust of rewriting history, having "implicitly tarnished one of Britain's greatest sons, Winston Churchill, by linking his family home, Chartwell, with slavery and colonialism" (Cowles, 2020, n.p.). Likewise, for Sandbrook (2020) of *The Daily Mail*, in daring to scrutinise key figures in British history such as Kipling, Churchill and Wordsworth, "the Trust published one of the most intellectually fraudulent documents I've ever read" (n.p.). These political and media figures were quick to impose an insular and defensive type of Britishness on those seeking to diversify and share honest accounts of histories in cultural heritage spaces. In fact, the Tory MPs who damned the National Trust Report highlight that part of their mission is to "ensure that institutional custodians of history and heritage, tasked with safeguarding and celebrating British values, are not coloured by cultural Marxist dogma colloquially known as the 'woke agenda'" (Cowles, 2020, n.p.). It is perhaps interesting to note that much of the criticism was not so much concerned with the National Trust making public the dark colonial histories of the nation's built heritage, but rather, that such links necessarily revealed connections to the 'great Britons' who built, lived in and owned the properties.

I was interested in following how the report *(*National Trust, 2020) also received support on social media from museum curators, heritage staff, academics, students, educators and historians who applauded the National Trust for its responsible decision to explicitly write about direct and indirect links to British colonial histories. *The Guardian* newspaper's Mitchell (2020) cited the academic Patrick Wright's arguments from as far back as the 1980s when he had argued that the National Trust, …had been constructed as a kind of "ethereal holding company for the spirit of the nation". Mitchell (2020) explains to his readers that,

> Country houses are easily mythologised as Britain's soul, places in which tradition and inheritance stand firm against the anonymising tides of modernity. They are places of fantasy, which help us imagine a rooted relationship to the land that feels safe and secure. As Wright pointed out, this makes the project of preserving them necessarily defensive, and one that doesn't sit well with the practice of actual historical research – which contextualises, explains and asks uncomfortable questions (n.p.)

Against this backdrop, the idea of Britishness and national identity is perhaps even more complex for young people today whose lived experiences of nation and sense of belonging are further complicated by the rapid pace of global change and emerging digital technologies.

A key question then for the heritage sector is: how do young people define nation? As a critical museum educator, I am interested in young people's interpretations of the critiques levelled against the political establishment for appointing themselves as vanguards of "shaping, defining and guarding 'Britishness'" (Grube 2011, p. 628). Does the idea that "patriotism and ideas of national identity have long been the playthings of politicians" (Ward 2004: 93) resonate with young Britons? Given the opportunity to explore different ways to belong to Britain and what Britishness means to them personally, young people are capable of rich and nuanced understandings and discussions around the distinctions and tensions between classed and racialised belongings to urban (multicultural) and rural (White) Britain.

My own research into Britishness and belonging has found that young people are often keen to interrogate the ways that the political and media elite impose racial prejudices and class stereotypes on young Britons (Habib, 2018). It is important to highlight the ongoing challenges in formal education for teachers and students who want to spend more time critically reflecting and exploring identities and belongings but - due to curriculum constraints and

teaching to pass examinations – there's not room for thoughtful individual and collective creative work about cultural heritage and multicultural identities (Habib, 2018). This means the roles and responsibilities of museum educators in collaborating with young people to explore contemporary British belongings become even more paramount. For young people growing up in the wake of recent anti-racist mobilisation, identities are a hot topic.

If the imagined community of a nation consists of "economic, political, linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, historical" relationships (Hroch, 2012, p.79), then heritage organisations can seek to uncover how young people interpret, represent and live these very relationships that constitute a nation. This paper argues museums are ideally suited for young people to lead on the critical interrogation of the idea of nation, and to explore diverse British identities and the various aforementioned relationships as described by Hroch. As such museums – their spaces, objects and collections - can become rich spaces for challenging the resurgence of a defensive, exclusionary politics of national identity. Museums can radically reconfigure ways of engaging young people from multicultural communities who inhabit transnational and glocal spaces.

3. Young People in Museums

When working with young people in British museums, creating open and safe spaces for discussing the entanglements of contemporary multicultural identities with the legacies of British colonialism is necessary and long overdue. Normative practices where young people simply drop in to their local museum on a school trip, have a tour, learn a little about the objects and collections, and never return to the museum need to be problematised. Such passive encounters with heritage simply reinforce the belief that the 'formal heritage' displayed in museums constitutes *the* heritage and tells *the* story. The treatment of collections as special with artefacts displayed behind glass so you can't touch them is a privileging of a certain type of classed and racialised heritage. The presentation of these historic objects as fixed and static things with a significant name and alongside authorless text is another way of alienating young people who feel museum displays do not resonate with their lived experiences. Such modes of knowledge in museum spaces perpetuate a myth that the formal heritage in museums is more important than the cultural heritage of young people from diverse communities that exists beyond the museums walls. These encounters in mystifying heritage and histories continue to push young people away.

How can we expect young people to challenge the processes and practices of heritage making and display when such formative experiences of the museum are so passive? A bolder and more radical approach to heritage education is required to interrogate the ways that museums have long become adept at discouraging any nuanced - and honest - discourses about British national identity being tied up with theft and looting of colonised places. Critical educators – working within heritage spaces – can seek to disrupt the status quo by opening up avenues and opportunities for young people to challenge popular elitist notions of British values. This then also raises the important question of whether museum spaces are employing critical educators who are welcome and encouraged to create transformations within their organisation.

A bold and radical vision is especially needed when we consider how schooling and education in the UK has for far too long failed young people by not making multiculturalism, diversity and anti-racism central to school policies and practices. This neglect has stemmed from the lack of time and attention given to these important topics in school professional development courses and teacher training courses (Lander, 2014). As a result, young people seek out alternative spaces – for example, community, cultural or online spaces – where they can reflect, have dialogue and debate about the past, present and future of multicultural Britishness.

Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh (2012, p.29) raise the issue of whether museums are doing enough to alter "curatorial practice and audience development" in the light of there being so much new important research about "the museum's historic role in maintaining colonial and imperial worldviews, as well as their function of producing audiences based upon social distinction". While I agree with their call for

new ways of knowing museums, such a radical departure requires drawing upon seminal works by Edward Said and Franz Fanon, and others who to this day inform our critical examination of the ways culture and arts are still used to push colonial discourses about national belonging and identity. These theories are not only necessary to explore contemporary contradictions and concerns between distinctions such as the "global/local, private/public, identity/difference, knowledge/feelings, etc", they are urgent given the call "to help us articulate teaching practices together with the social, political and cultural issues that constitute, design and could transform them" (Tourinho & Martins, 2008, p.63).

In *The Brutish Museums*, Hicks argues that British museums must own up to the "sheer brutishness of their continued displays of violently-taken loot" (Hicks, 2020, p. xiii). Critiquing the lexicon employed by anthropologists and museum curators who perpetuate the notion of "gift-giving", Hicks writes "and yet those institutions that anthropology has built for material culture research are filled with objects that have not been given, but taken" (Hicks, 2020, p.20). It's time for museums to acknowledge that "vocabularies of booty, desolation, wasting, ravaging, depredation, plunder, pillage, confiscations, desecration, trophy-taking, spoliation, enslavement, loot, elginisme, relics of war" (Hicks, 2020, p. 20) exclude and alienate museum-goers. The colonial heritage of museums is embedded within and across many practices that are undertaken within museums, and thus, museums need to challenge these archaic ways of maintaining museums. The beginning of this necessary journey of critique and resistance necessitates a deeper mode of reflexivity and critical consciousness where young people's voice is more central and critical pedagogical approaches are embraced consistently throughout the different parts of a museum.

Young people of colour in Britain have grown up in a world where their own cultural heritage has been treated as irrelevant or actively excluded, having seen the ways in which elders in their communities have been ignored, neglected or marginalised by formal cultural heritage spaces. Writing about cultural capital, class and habitus, Newman, Goulding, and Whitehead (2013) refer to culturally irrelevant exhibitions as a key barrier for people of colour. Thus, young people of colour in the UK have been socialised into experiencing cultural barriers and exclusions, where they have witnessed that neither their parents' generations nor their peers have felt they can unconditionally belong in heritage spaces and projects. Sometimes they might be called upon to *participate* in certain projects, but this might be on the terms of the institution or organisation who temporarily seeks their skills, expertise and ideas.

The problematics of *participation* in heritage institutions' projects has been written about at length in critical museology studies. Dewdney et al. (2012) draw on David Beech's work problematizing the ways that institutions do not critically examine the power dynamics at play when they encourage communities to *participate* in arts and culture; instead, it is better, Beech advises, to work in collaborative ways where communities are able to lead and make decisions about arts and culture. Of particular interest for this paper, Lynch and Alberti's (2010) critical review of well-intentioned efforts to develop authentic practices of community engagement at Manchester Museum is strangely familiar and reveals how certain challenges remain unresolved over a decade later.

As well as striving for culturally relevant galleries, museums still need to work out ways to engage young people through critical thinking which fosters a sense of ownership and belonging. Writing about adult education, Lewis and Clarke (2016, p. 92) argue for emancipatory and transformational practice to counter an inflexible – and I would argue racist and classist – model of 'heritage education' that "institutionalises a Eurocentric colonial authorial model". New democratic practices can be strived for by working with people of colour across all age groups "in all aspects of learning, design, co-production and delivery/facilitation"(Lewis & Clarke, 2016, p.92). This critical education practice is further developed through their discussion of heritage projects with adults that "progress multiple voices, challenge authoritarian positions and encourage active participation and empowerment" "(Lewis & Clarke, 2016, p.92). And important for the arguments presented in this paper, they raise concerns about structural and institutional barriers that mean "community-led grassroots (heritage) projects have

to, in effect, re-educate the institutionalised educators to value and recognise so-called non-traditional skills" (Lewis & Clarke, 2016, p. 92). If heritage staff want to make radical changes with communities or young people leading on heritage projects, then the sector needs to actively embrace new ways to co-design, co-produce and co-curate, thereby engaging with the complex relationships between cultural heritage, identities and belongings.

Within the heritage sector, I work with young people who state their desire for safe spaces where they can be critical and interrogate the status quo, where their critique of colonial practices and policies is welcomed and acted upon, and where they feel they can belong. How can museums, therefore, begin to help to shift the pernicious racialised and classed discourses about young people in Britain? I will now go on to describe the significance of the Our Shared Cultural Heritage (OSCH) project in creating change for young people and the heritage sector. Young people's ideas, experiences and stories of contemporary Britishness and cultural heritage can be a catalyst for change within cultural spaces. Key questions about the past, present and future of museums can be interrogated within these very same museum spaces through the lived experiences of diverse communities. Young people are interested in grappling with questions regarding ethics and ownership. For example, how do museums continue to maintain a picture of the benevolent British who travelled throughout the world and were given gifts in faraway lands to take back and treasure in antiquated buildings? In the following sections I will highlight that when young people show interest in the (controversial) relationships between museums, identities and belongings, these can become significant opportunities for museum educators to embrace and develop.

4. Project Overview: Our Shared Cultural Heritage (OSCH)

Our Shared Cultural Heritage (OSCH) is a partnership project, led by the British Council and working with Manchester Museum, Glasgow Life and UK Youth, that sets out to give "young people from around the UK the chance to come together to explore the shared cultural heritage of the UK and South Asia and develop new methods for museums to engage with people" (Lanchin, 2019). It is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund's (NLHF) Kick the Dust programme, a funding stream launched in 2016 specifically in order to "make heritage more relevant to the lives of young people aged 11-25" (Lanchin, 2019). While the NLHF had, for a number of years, invested in work to engage young people more closely with heritage, the establishment of Kick the Dust represents the fact that, in spite of their efforts, "young people were still under-represented as audiences, participants and volunteers at heritage sites and services" (Lanchin, 2019). There are key questions to be asked of how heritage is defined and to what extent such definitions are understood by or relevant to the young people with whom the NLHF is attempting to engage. The UNESCO (n.d.) definition of 'cultural heritage' gives examples of tangible cultural heritage as movable (e.g. paintings, sculptures, coins and manuscripts), immovable (e.g. monuments and archaeological sites), and underwater (e.g. shipwrecks, underwater ruins and cities). Intangible cultural heritage examples include oral traditions, performing arts, and rituals. For natural heritage, UNESCO refers to natural sites with cultural aspects (e.g. cultural landscapes, physical, biological or geological formations).

During the preliminary consultation to pave the way for the OSCH project, the British Council also found that whilst the themes of identity and belonging are important to young people from South Asian backgrounds, unfortunately, many young people do not see heritage organisations as sites to explore cultural heritage (Imran, Clark, Iconic Consulting, & Bolton, 2018). The consultation also revealed the strong associations between museums and the formal school curriculum, and as such, that many young people felt that home and family environments were their only spaces to explore their lived experiences of heritage, identity and diversity. In order to redress these problems and the fundamental lack of connection that young people feel towards the formal /official heritage presented in museums in particular, OSCH has sought to make heritage spaces more relevant and useful for young people keen to explore their experiences of identity and belonging. In order to do this, OSCH supports young people from

the South Asian diaspora and their peers to lead on developing, experimenting with and evaluating new ways of engaging with discourses of cultural heritage in their communities, with their peers, and within the heritage sector. This focus on young South Asians in Manchester is especially pertinent with the development of the first permanent South Asia Gallery in the UK at Manchester Museum.

Since OSCH commenced in May 2019, young people in Greater Manchester - and beyond since the project moved online in March 2020 due to Covid - have formed a Manchester Museum Young Collective. What happens then when young people are supported to critically engage with a museum and gain confidence, skills and therefore a sense of agency? They embrace opportunities to deliver programming and contribute to organisational decisions. Young people have led on and organised events, activities and campaigns that they have felt are important to their lived experiences, to their peers and to their communities, and in doing so have demonstrated their keenness and drive for exploring cultural heritage and changing cultural spaces.

Some of the OSCH project aims are for museums to become better places for young people to explore identity and connect with others; for museums to change how heritage spaces engage with and represent young South Asian communities,' and, for museums to open up new opportunities for young people. One of the very first events young people played a key collaborative role in was in August 2019 when, in partnership with the Whitworth Art Gallery and the Manchester Museum, OSCH young people commemorated the history of the 1947 Partition of India. The key themes explored at the commemoration day were - why do we need South Asian Heritage Month and why/how does the history of the Partition of India need to be taught in UK schools?

We held a call out for young creatives to plan and deliver workshops for young people and wider communities. At the family event, there were guided tours by curators, presentations by historians and authors, creative workshops, object handling, films and performances. There was a bazaar for young creatives to sell arts and crafts, refreshments and books, as well as a 'partition wall' for attendees to note thoughts and comments on the themes of the day. Young people were paid to lead on the workshops; they designed and delivered engaging workshops for their communities and peers. There was great attendance of young people with their families. A local news reporter covered the day's events also recorded a recitation of the Sujata Bhatt poem 'Partition' by a young person and uploaded it to social media.

Young people run the OSCH Twitter, Instagram and blog – and the diversity and complexity of what it means to be British, and the impact of classed and racialised identities, as well as attachments to local, national and transnational identities very much come through on what the young people post, produce and write. Moreover, young people have been teaching the heritage sector about these very same lived realities by delivering social justice and anti-racism training to museum staff. Young people have engaged in shortlisting exercises for new posts, sat on recruitment panels, and interviewed the designers for the new upcoming South Asia Gallery. Recently in autumn 2020, some of the young people co-submitted a brilliant proposal to the Fair Museums Careers Summit to share their learning about how museums can engage with young people to create transformative new policies and practices with the wider sector. Their joint proposal was accepted and they delivered an outstanding session online attended by heritage staff throughout the UK who learned about how these young people had embraced opportunities to collaborate and create in museum spaces.

5. Critical pedagogy in Museums: co-production, co-design and co-curation

My arts-based research with ethnically diverse young people from south-east London showed that even in the classroom context it is hard to shift the mindsets of students (and sometimes teachers) to employ radical and critical ways of exploring Britishness, identities and belongings (Habib, 2018). However when students and their teachers embrace an approach which disrupts conventional and traditional classroom hierarchies, and engage in deep and meaningful critical encounters with peers,

families and teachers, there is a remarkable honesty and openness in the reflective and collaborative conversations about identities and belonging.

Throughout this paper I am focusing on what occurs when we adopt a framework of critical pedagogy in museum spaces to explore identities and belongings with young people. I am interested in the activities, events and campaigns that they create, change, or lead on in ways that they deem relevant to themselves, their peers and communities. Critical pedagogy advocates for a non-hierarchical and non-elitist approach to learning and teaching. Thus, we can adopt critical pedagogy principles and practices to radically shift traditional arts and culture hierarchies and privileging of curators (often white, male and middle-class) as being the most knowledgeable. Co-production, co-design and co-curation are currently the preferred new methods in establishing the UK's first permanent gallery dedicated to South Asian histories and cultures at Manchester Museum. Over the last three or more years, a whole range of interested parties with different levels of experience, skills and knowledge – including members of the community, designers, young people, and Manchester Museum and British Museum staff, and many others – have come to learn from one another and teach one another. This mode of learning has resulted in a conscious effort to rethink and redirect outdated policies and practices, in order to strive to co-produce non-hierarchical and non-elitist ways of showcasing British Asian histories, identities and belongings.

When supported with the right opportunities in collaborative and caring spaces, young people are eager to explore social justice through arts and culture (Habib, 2020). The young people I've worked with on the OSCH project, as well as previously in my capacity as a school and college teacher, will share that they aren't granted these moments of identity exploration as much as they would like in schools. They recognise this is due to the time and curriculum demands on teachers to teach them to pass examinations. Museums, therefore, need to be spaces of reflection and critical collaboration where young people delve into understanding and sharing historic and contemporary modes of belonging, identity and citizenship. Museums are important places to critically engage in dialogue and discussion, and to interrogate dominant myths about migration, multiculturalism, nation, identity and belonging.

Museums have a responsibility to develop strategies with young people to further exploration of the self and the other through arts and culture. These practices of interrogating identities can transform young people's ways of thinking about multiple identities and belongings. Arts-based reflection and discussion enables young people to recognise complexities, to challenge oppressions and to seek social change (Habib, 2018). According to Chilton and Leavy (2014, p.403), the arts can consistently "promote autonomy, raise awareness, activate the senses, express the complex feeling-based aspects of social life, illuminate the complexity and sometimes paradox of lived experience, jar us into seeing and thinking differently, and transform consciousness through evoking empathy and resonance". When engaging with arts and culture through frameworks of critical pedagogy, we find that these aforementioned benefits are even more heightened and deeply felt by both young people and museum educators.

Critical pedagogy principles and practices are powerful when working with different social groups. Clover and Sanford (2016, p.73), researching the challenges specifically faced by women museum educators in a heritage sector that denies the lived and gendered experiences of museum educators, highlight that some of the educators they heard from were keen to emphasise the need for critical pedagogy in "gaining the confidence needed to tackle difficult issues and contribute to meaningful social change": "One participant in particular spoke about how the complexity of today's social issues and populations necessitated deep and critical pedagogical preparation". And thus, it isn't only the traditional 'official' museum educators who might understand the significance of critical pedagogy, but the young people – our teachers in the museum sector – also appreciate the value of critical pedagogy in museums.

Some of the main issues raised by the museum educators working with adults equally apply to those engaging with young people in heritage context. Young people are conscious of museums acting as

"manifestations of cultural and political desires, rather than straight-forward representations of historical or national 'facts'" (Aronsson & Elgenius, 2015, p. 2). Thus, young people are keen to use a critical pedagogy framework to uncover the representations of history that museums produce and maintain over time. There are a number of changes that museums can make to implement pedagogies that are relevant and useful to young people and their communities. Clover, Sanford, Johnson, and Bell (2016), for instance, highlight recurring themes in art and culture organisations: firstly, the need to move beyond focusing solely upon schooling and curriculum in museum education; secondly, create new and better ways to negotiate tensions between curation and pedagogy; thirdly, build upon critical and radical pedagogies; and finally, establish museums as pedagogical spaces for us to challenge the dire consequences of capitalism and neoliberalism on our society and on the environment.

All of these aforementioned issues are relevant to the lives and experiences of young people, and are key for museum educators interested in promoting young peoples' identities and belongings within the museum context. All of these identified challenges and tensions can begin to be understood at deeper and critical levels if we use a critical pedagogy framework when working with young people (and of course with adults too) in museum education.

6. Conclusion: young people radically transforming arts and culture

In this paper, I have drawn upon my relatively new role within Manchester Museum as the project coordinator of a cultural heritage initiative - Our Shared Cultural Heritage (OSCH) - to engage young people from the South Asian diaspora and their peers in leading on changing the ways that museums have worked with traditionally underrepresented groups. Some of the key learning from the OSCH experiences are that we need a longer time period to plan for an annual event on Partition1947 and for better scope to have a grander events with more young people gaining organising and leading on the day. It might be better to hold a weekday event for school students and teachers to lead on workshops/talks and co-produce events and activities for the community commemoration. The Partition1947 event, for example, was advertised through social media/community groups, but need more lead time to publicise the event for more young participants to produce, collaborate, and participate in activities relevant to the South Asian British diaspora. Since this event, we have created spaces for young people to continue to lead on and deliver (and as far as possible paid opportunities) so many other meaningful community events, ranging from the launch of a report on the impact of discourses of the war on terror on young people, both Muslim and non-Muslim to a multilingual poetry and language learning session to accompany the Beauty and the Beasts exhibition at Manchester Museum.

There is still so much work to be done when it comes to young people feeling secure and confident in belonging (or not) to Britain, and in young people being bold and proud to celebrate complex multiple identities. Heritage spaces need to move towards models that are ethical and responsible when doing community engagement with young people of colour. At the very least, this means diversifying museum spaces and museum workforces by providing meaningful and useful paid opportunities, paid internships, and paid work experience for young people who wish to get to know the sector, learn about the careers and opportunities available, and change the future of the heritage sector.

Museums can be welcome and necessary spaces to showcase young people's lived realities. Moreover, museums must adopt radical and transformative practices to platform young people's counter stories about British histories, identities and cultures. If it is commonly accepted that museums were introduced as elitist endeavours to reproduce and preserve discourses about cultural heritage in heavily classed and racialized ways, then how do we own those shameful moments of our colonial past and neoliberal present? When working reflectively and collaboratively about our shared colonial histories using critical pedagogy principles, tensions about the authenticity of 'democratic' practices might emerge as museum staff naturally have the power to shift the course of the project and activities. More work needs

to go into breaking down power imbalances, and subsequently, encouraging authentic, radical and productive modes of collaborative activities in museums.

How do we provide safe spaces for young people to be able to counter dominant myths about Britishness and belonging with their own creative and cultural campaigns, exhibitions and pedagogies? When exploring cultural heritage, we can explore what resonates for young people, showcase their contemporary perspectives on cultural heritage, and learn more about how technological developments have impacted young people's ideas about cultural heritage. Naturally, new ways of doing collaborative arts-based activities with young people will bring forth contemporary nuances to ethical decision-making about co-production and co-dissemination, particularly in an age of social media (Lomax, 2015). There is increasing discussion in museum education about adapting heritage spaces to go beyond what is traditionally deemed as cultural heritage.

Questions continue to arise—and will keep on emerging—about who defines "British Values", and whether religiously, ethnically and culturally diverse Britons are permitted and welcome to contribute to the conversation on British belongings and identities (Bragg, 2006; Habib, 2018; Miah, 2015). What truths, hopes and stories do young people want to share about the past, present and future of British histories, identities and cultures? What are the classed and racialized experiences of contemporary belongings to Britain? How are museums important cultural sites for young people to explore, develop, and rethink some of these aforementioned questions about national identity? Moreover, by adopting critical pedagogy principles and practices, museums can offer educational and curatorial support and resources to young people eager to teach us about Britishness past and present.

When exploring Britishness with young people my experiences have pointed towards the importance of young people's counter-stories (Habib, 2018) which correlates with the idea that perhaps then the nation is "important only in the moment where its cultural imperatives are being carnivalized, subverted and challenged" (Back, 1996, p.250). Therefore, in reflecting on the OSCH project, I am keen to keep on working to accommodate these challenges and counter-stories in cultural and heritage spaces. Do we do enough genuine challenging and enough subverting, or do we adhere to the status quo and to what has always been? A very important question that drives my work with young people is when it comes to exploring identities and belongings do we dedicate enough time and space with young people for them to reflect on and create conversations where they begin to grapple with the complexities of belonging to nation? The latest exciting space to reflect and converse about these issues, and then to co-curate, co-design and co-produce a gallery for Manchester is the upcoming South Asia Gallery. Young people are integral to this reflective and collaborative process: they are currently working on this co-curation, co-production and co-design, and their individual and collective stories about diasporic belongings to Britain will be showcased in the South Asia Gallery when it opens in 2022.

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9. Open Access Policy

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