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Roshi Naidoo and Jo Littler

White past, multicultural present: heritage and national stories

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In 2002 the BBC produced the results of its *100 Great Britons* poll. Voted for by ‘the people’, the event presented itself as taking the temperature of the nation regarding its heroes – historical and contemporary. That currently fashionable device of popular culture, the ‘Top 10’, gave the BBC its version of a favourites list – one which could boast some *gravitas* and educational content. The poll showed up many troubling trends, including a reluctance to think of women as Great Britons, a reductively individualised approach to history, and of course the almost complete lack of non-white people in the top 100 (Wazir and Curran, 2002). In the process one predominant cultural understanding of what our national heritage is became quite clearly highlighted. This was that whilst the British *present* is now frequently thought of as being multicultural, only too often is the British past, and British heritage, still imagined as being white.ⁱ

Whilst signs such as this point to an apparent lack of progress in understanding our multicultural, multiethnic heritage (Ramadin, 1999) there are at the same time clearly many initiatives seeking to emphasise inclusion and diversity that are being, and have been, developed within the institutional heritage sector (Hooper-Greenhill, 1997). Indeed, the re-examination of policies and practices affecting how Britain’s non-white presence is represented, and attempts to ‘include’ diverse audiences, has been a key feature of many debates within the heritage sector over the past few years in particular (Vaswani, 2000).

How, therefore, might we to find ways of understanding the complex and at times even contradictory ways contemporary heritage functions in respect of ideas about ‘race’ and ethnicity? In this chapter we address this question by interrogating some of the ways ‘heritage’ has been imagined in the recent past and in the present. Taking as a starting point how heritage has been discussed in and around British academia since the ‘heritage

debates' of the 1980s, we ask how these discussions over heritage were racialised, whether consciously or not. This is used as a way into asking the following questions. To what extent has 1980s liberal multiculturalism persisted as a mode of understanding heritage and the legacies of 'race'? How progressive are the discourses of 'inclusion' which have remoulded understandings of our national past? How can we discuss the relationship between dominant understandings of heritage and ideas about 'ethnicity' in the age of Blair?

The heritage debates of the 1980s

The meaning of 'heritage' has morphed over time, and as Peter Mandler's work on Victorian heritage informs us, popular interest in heritage is not in itself particularly new (Mandler, 1997). Therefore the cultural and political conjuncture has to be taken into account in order to understand the politics of popular heritage and its relationship to the ideological and discursive legacies of 'race'.

From the mid-1970s to the early 1990s in particular (a period which could perhaps be thought of as 'the long 1980s') a lively debate over an expanding heritage culture was generated inside and outside academia for a range of reasons. One reason was because the rise of the new right in the 1970s had injected the term 'heritage' with a new vigour. The 1980 National Heritage Act was in part a continuation of the aggressive campaign against the wealth tax that in 1974 the Wilson government attempted to introduce on *personal* fortunes above one hundred thousand pounds (exemptions were made for sites or artefacts accessible to the public). This had been defeated by a predominantly conservative alliance of the 'great and the good'. Wealthy individuals, and conservative social institutions who had vested interests in maintaining these individual's wealth, fought tooth and nail against it by annexing the fear of this private loss to nationalist sentiment (Hewison, 1995: 191-3; Mandler, 1997: 401-18). The notoriously polemical exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, *The Destruction of the Country House 1875-1975* – discussed in Director Roy Strong's diaries as a direct exhibitionary campaign against the wealth tax – and the lobby group *Heritage in Danger* were perhaps the two most prominent examples of this (Strong, 1998: 121).

The revitalisation of ‘heritage’ against the redistribution of wealth was to become a hallmark of Thatcherism, which also marked an intensification in the conservative approach to heritage. Like the rest of Thatcherism, it *popularised* the idea of elitism, making prestige something to be sought after and to be competed for, rather than inherited (Wright, 1985; Bird, 1996). Newly monied classes were now to be more eagerly welcomed into patronising the poor.

At the same time, the meanings of ‘heritage’ were also changing because of the arrival of new modes of heritage such as the experience attraction (whose ‘scratch and sniff’ approach to representing the past disturbingly bridged the gap between museum and funfair – see Bennett, 1995) and because the practices of left historians concerned with excavating ‘history from below’ both inside and outside of the academy were becoming more widely known. Both these perspectives – for academics, most famously demonstrated on the pages of *History Workshop Journal* and through the work of Raphael Samuel - consciously sought to expand *whose* past could count as heritage (see Samuel, 1994). It became more acceptable for ‘heritage’ to mean the past of the working as well as the upper classes; to mean wash-tubs as well as gilt-edged paintings, back-to-back houses as well as stately homes.

However, a noticeable aspect of many of the discussions of heritage from the 1980s is that they tended to focus on issues of class rather than gender or ‘race’. The absence of discussion about gender is particularly noticeable right at a time when many heritage practices were being gendered in very visible new ways. The dominant mode of heritage to be found in British public spaces had been to enshrine imperial masculine prowess and heroism; if women were depicted it was usually as abstract and mythically transcendent figures (Aitchison, 1996; Rutherford, 1997; Warner, 1996). New types of heritage experience attraction frequently depicted women’s roles and occupations as part of their focus on the ‘everyday’, highlighting for example shop assistants or servant girls in their dramatisations of history (for example, *Yesterday’s World in Battle* or the *Britain at War Experience* in London).

Neither did the debate around heritage have very much to say about the politics of ‘race’ or ‘ethnicity’. But, clearly, many people were problematising notions of what constituted the British past at this time – for example, Paul Gilroy or Peter Fryer (Gilroy, 1987; Fryer, 1985). Similarly, the growth of museology informed by postcolonialism meant that the colonial histories of museums were, and have continued to be, interrogated (for example, Coombes, 1994; Barringer and Flynn, 1998; Simpson, 2001). But in the heritage debates this was often mentioned only insofar as popular manifestations of heritage were registered as involving the loss of empire. Today, the heritage debates of the 1980s might be read as characterised by their absence of discussion around ‘race’ and diversity as much as anything else.

However, this is not to say that these debates are not useful in understanding the contemporary relationship between heritage and ‘race’. On the contrary, combining their insights over class and national identity, together with work from post-colonial studies and more recent work on black British heritage (Hall, 1999) can provide us with useful interpretative frameworks for the present. One of the most suggestive approaches to understanding the different positions taken over heritage at this time is outlined in Patrick Wright’s 1985 book, *On Living in an Old Country*. Here he looks at the implicit and explicit arguments around heritage at this time, and traces the different tendencies or public philosophies of history that are used to legitimise present events. The first tendency is what he calls a ‘complacent bourgeois alignment’, a Whiggish form of history which narcissistically assumes historical progress to be complete. The second is the ‘anxious aristocrat alignment’. Organised around a sense that history has been ‘cut down in its prime’, it insinuates that we are on the precipice of barbarism as opposed to the golden age of the aristocratic past and it works to urge us to protect its remains. In the third, an ‘anti-traditional technicist alignment’, the past exists as a kind of ‘other’ to the modern present with which we, the public, are depicted as ‘wanting nothing to do with because of our modern rationality’. The fourth, ‘marching proletariat alignment’ represents a reductive strand of marxism, the idea that the forward march of labour is an endless struggle, but one which will inevitably come right in the end (Wright, 1985: 146-

153). Wright's narrative of the long 1980s is therefore an account of the failure of the last position and the rise of the other three.

At the end of his book Wright argues that 'in this old imperial country, it would be altogether preferable to say farewell to the elegant but also grievous culture of decline', and calls for a heritage politics open to 'imagine ways of life different from those that currently exist' (Wright, 1985: 256). This is preceded by a discussion of an article by Charles Moore of the *Daily Telegraph* on the Brixton riots. Whilst this is not part of Wright's different heritage paradigms, it contains within it a more complex story of the interrelationship between class, race and gender than the previous 'alignments' on offer. Wright's analysis unpicks how Moore's article, in Powellite vein, yokes together two groups – white working class and white upper middle-class - through and at the expense of black youth. In describing old white working class people feeling 'threatened' by black youth, it reveals how an authoritarian upper middle class Tory readership is positioned as imagining an 'obedient white plebiscite', which in turn is figured as recognising 'its previous political mistakes and longing to be rescued by them' (Wright, 1985: 246-7).

This story shows how imperial heritage was used by an aspirational bourgeois and anxious aristocratic alignment to shore up its power; and it also shows how this power used whiteness, and works at the expense and exclusion of black youth. Wright therefore gives us a glimpse of how questions of heritage and class might be articulated with those around 'race', and we want to follow on from this by picking up on these asute and at times latent suggestions on the interrelations between ideas of heritage, 'race', class and gender, and by thinking about how they might translate into 'alignments' of the present.

New heritage formations

These heritage debates now in many ways seem to belong to another era, to already be, themselves, a part of heritage. There are three main reasons for this. Firstly, because the debate drawing on these references is not now as active; secondly, because the debate is being codified through textbooks, for undergraduates and postgraduates - such as in *Culture and the Public Sphere*, or *Representing the Nation* - as a moment in academic

debate (McGuigan, 1996; Boswell and Evans, 1999); and thirdly, because of the cultural and political context. For, as new Labour was once at continual pains to remind us, we live in 'Young Britain'. 'Heritage' was dropped from the governmental department responsible for cultural policy when renaming The Department of Culture, Media and Sport. But has Labour's partial rejection of heritage signified a progressive modernity, one which is less exclusively white, or does it, like much of the 1980s heritage debate, fall into the trap of situating multicultural society as a purely contemporary phenomenon?

To consider this we need not only to look at cultural policy, as the power relations shaping culture aren't simply reducible to it, but to look at other policies and at the politics of discourses being promoted. Here we might use Patrick Wright's notion of 'alignments' to suggest some additional categories: to discuss how the imagined category of 'race' figures in contemporary heritage. This is not to say that all examples of heritage fall into these fairly crude paradigms, but rather to try to suggest ways in which the current racialisation of heritage might be understood.

Firstly, we have the construction of what might be termed an 'uncritical imperialist' alignment. This would include the *Daily Mail's* outraged reaction to the inclusion of narratives about slavery at the Merseyside Maritime Museum. Uncritical imperialism often has clear points of identification with an anxious aristocratic alignment that posits a past age of civilisation now being corrupted. As diversity initiatives and training make their mark this is now less common in the heritage sector, particularly in its most gung-ho incarnation, but remains a key aspect of some popular representations of heritage. For example, if we take a broad, popular understanding of heritage, it would include the images of Earl Grey used on Twinings tea packets that implicitly celebrate the high point of empire.

Secondly, we continue to have tokenistic approaches to 'ethnic' heritage. This is where certain types of heritage are marked as 'other', are ghettoised as occurring on their own in a vacuum, and are not interwoven into 'mainstream' heritage. Clearly, such an alignment is related to the liberal meaning 'multiculturalism' came to have in the 1980s. As an

approach that espoused a reliance on culture as a means of eradicating racial prejudice - in schools, for example - liberal multiculturalism was translated as seeking empowerment for minorities, and tolerance and understanding from white people, by giving institutionalised recognition to certain cultural and religious practices. A commitment to multiculturalism often translated as lip-service to certain communities through an essentialised approach to their cultures and cynically became known as 'the three 'S's', or the 'sari's, samosas and steel-bands syndrome' (Donald and Rattansi, 1992: 1-8). Multiculturalism in this form was an approach that only recognised aspects of 'other' cultures that could be associated with countries outside Britain, such as the Caribbean or Asia, and in some ways reinforced the idea of a non-white presence as foreign in British schools. Culture as a signifier was problematic here because it translated as something which white people could taste or watch or enjoy without having to think critically about their own racist behaviour or about how institutions reinforced racist practices. This version of multiculturalism (for a discussion of other versions, see Hesse, 2000: 1-30) also did not seem to require a debunking of the myth of British culture as white and hermetically sealed before the advent of post-war migration.

It may seem a moot point to go on about the past problems of multiculturalism as a discourse. Not only was it a long time ago, but there have been many developments since then. These have included the 'anti-racist' political agenda challenging multiculturalism, alongside a whole host of exhibitions, writings and practices that have explored the longevity of a Caribbean, African and Asian presence on these islands, which have presented a cultural politics of difference resisting easy and identity categories and which have attested to the embeddedness of non-white Britons in every aspect of this nation's past, present and future. However, these critiques require unearthing because echoes of multiculturalism occur in the persistence of tokenistic 'ethnic' histories, often even within more progressive representations of Britain's non-white heritage. Often anxious attempts are made to find some sort of accommodation between the traditional liberal values of public institutions and postcolonial critiques of heritage, nation and identity. In the quest for accommodation and re-ordering, there is sometimes a reversion to old, familiar and essentialised 'ethnic' categories.

Pictures of Asian women in shalwaar-kameze working on a community outreach project, for example, are only a small part of addressing 'minorities'. It is more challenging to ask why the National Museum of Scotland has unproblematised images of missionaries in its 'heroes' section, or why we spent a week as a 'nation' mourning the death of that apologist for Empire in the shape of the Queen Mother. It is more pertinent to ask why even university courses can rarely place black people at the centre of Enlightenment ideas about subjectivity or the economics of the Industrial Revolution. It is the lack of embeddedness that is the problem. Those same women in shalwaar-kameze on language sensitive leaflets may be 'inclusive', but these sorts of images do not invite us to consider the role women like them played in undermining British rule in India, or in continuing the great radical traditions of British worker's rights activists. (see for example Wilson, 1984; *The Guardian*, 2/1/93). They can fail to question the frameworks of understanding through which we understand the past. Instead they 'add on' certain people into the heritage without inviting us to think critically about how they have always been there. Too often there is a reliance on images of 'other' Britons as a modern addition to this nations' history. Heritage projects need to instigate a more comprehensive overhaul of how British and heritage in general is presented and understood. Time and time again appeals for institutions to be sensitive to 'minorities' are met with knee-jerk reactions and quick fixes, rather than with more sustained attempts to radically include minorities in the nation. In the case of tokenistic approaches to 'ethnic' heritage, battles fought and won over policy and politics need to be fought and won again. Those critiques of multiculturalism need to be got out, dusted down and brought to bear on discourses of social exclusion and cultural diversity that are part of current heritage agendas.

Thirdly, we have what could be called the 'white heritage, multicultural present' alignment. This differs from uncritical imperialist heritage as it appears happy to be part of a multicultural society; and it differs from tokenistic multicultural heritage as it figures a more 'ethnically integrated' contemporary national heritage. However, it still predominantly figures this multicultural society as a new development, against which the imagined British past and heritage is still implicitly depicted as white. Whilst there are

very good reasons why multicultural modernity might be emphasised, as it is a shift away from notions of primitivism and the pre-modern, there are also clear risks of here of foreclosing the possibilities of more radical heritage projects. This paradigm can therefore allow plenty of scope for cultural forms of racism in its tokenistic approaches to a multicultural present. The Millennium Commission's failure to fund any projects about black British heritage (whilst turning down the application from the Caribbean Heritage Centre) might be cited here (Pallister, 1999).

This paradigm of 'white past, multicultural present' has many different aspects to it. Perhaps the most obvious is the discourse of social inclusion, which has become conspicuously problematic. The way it is increasingly been deployed has been in liberal assimilationist terms. It implies that certain 'ethnic' groups are wrongly aberrant in their identity and their place outside the fold of a singular 'mainstream' culture and need to be included into it. For example, the 2001 Cattle Report into the riots in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford, commissioned by the home secretary, notoriously recommended that immigrants take an oath of allegiance to Britain. Whereas the rhetoric of social inclusion does not *have* to necessarily be articulated in exactly this way, the idea that certain groups are deviant is what it has come very strongly to mean. The idea of citizenship classes for example means a two-way dialogue and an opportunity for mutual translation in the Parekh Report into *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, but means forced assimilation to what are framed as the norms of white British heritage under David Blunkett (Parekh, 2000: 55). This has led to a situation in which, as Gary Younge comments, 'Thirteen years ago racism was regarded as the problem. Now, once again, the very idea of Britain's ethnic minorities is becoming the problem' (Younge, 2002: 13).

Let us turn this 'problem' around and look at it from a different angle, from that of practices and representations around the heritage sector. Here, the key issue is not so much one of gaining inclusion and visibility – most major heritage organisations now are sensitive to the gaps in their material, and aware of the parts of the community which they are not reaching. There are willing and enlightened individuals wanting to address former omissions to look more critically at their collections and how they address their

audiences. The pressing problem is *how* ‘other’ Britons are included into national events and whether attempts to include them genuinely challenge the boundaries of how British heritage is understood.

This was made strikingly clear through the London String of Pearls Golden Jubilee Festival. This major cultural and heritage venture organised for the Queen’s Jubilee year foregrounded a series of Community Focus Events intended to bridge the gap between local communities and major organisations and institutions in the nation’s capital. Its remit, partly, was to renew peoples’ faith in institutions and renew civic pride by having a series of events in public buildings and institutions that involved ‘the people’. It was predictably presented as good for ‘the people’ rather than being good for the institutions under threat from diminishing faith in their legitimacy and the forces of the free market. For the Jubilee to have any sort of legitimacy it needed to present a figure of a benign monarch interested in *all* her subjects. The ‘tradition’ of the white past, symbolised by monarchy through the ages, was linked ideologically as in tune with a ‘young’ Britain which it more often than not signified as multicultural. (Black people and increasingly young Asians are perpetually figured as hip and happening, urban and of the ‘now’).

The London String of Pearls Event on the whole displayed an anxious liberal inclusion of non-white Britons. One particular story the String of Pearls organisers gained a lot of publicity for was the event which sent six young black men from the ‘Boyhood to Manhood’ Foundation in Peckham, South London, for a one-week placement with the army. The boys, all of whom had been excluded from school, spent time with the Household Cavalry and the Scots Guard. The supposed success of this event was predicated on the fact that the boys had grown in stature and confidence due to this experience. At an event for the London String of Pearls participants the story was recounted by one of the organisers and by a black woman who worked with these youths. It was very difficult to express the disquiet that many of those present felt about this. The narrative of excluded boys finding a voice and becoming empowered makes anyone objecting to it appear very churlish. But there were larger questions that hung over this event. Why are a disproportionate amount of young black boys excluded from school in

the first place? How close was this narrative to the notion that all wayward boys need is a bit of hard discipline? Is the army primarily interested in excluded children, or in recruitment? As we get swept away with how good this experience was for individual boys we were skillfully deflected away from the more pertinent issues of how ‘other’ people are being used to legitimise archaic and anti-democratic institutions. The truth is that the Household Cavalry were much more in need of these boys than they were of them. By extension, the Jubilee celebrations also needed stories such as these - ‘positive’ concessions to Britain’s multicultural present - in order to signal their continuing legitimacy. The String of Pearls and many of the Jubilee events, such as the pop concert at Buckingham Palace, attempted to make the monarchy appear benign, bountiful and yet in tune with a modern Britain which has non-white as well as white subjects. The ‘white past, multicultural present’ formation occurs simultaneously as a lament and a celebration - a celebration of our nation being modern, young, hip and in-tune with the globalised economy as well as harbouring a nostalgia and lament for a bygone contained, safe and mono-cultural world.

Like the spectacle of the funeral of the Queen Mother, London String of Pearls worked on a level that divorced monarchy from the inequities of racism and poverty. As Edgar Wilson argued in his book *The Myth of British Monarchy*, ‘[h]ow the recognised source and symbol of arbitrary social distinction comes to be detached in the public mind from the chronic problems that such distinctions give rise to is a matter that calls for further explanation.’ (Wilson, 1989: 33).

What emerges from this particular example is the importance of being cautious about how the cultural diversity and social exclusion remit of modern heritage culture is acted out. The wisdom behind such events is that those on the periphery, those marginalised in British society can have their social alienation relieved and eased through such cultural events. But these sort of approaches tend to reinforce ideas about the old and the new Britain: one represented by the Guards, the other by ‘black people’. It is this very fallacy of ‘white past, multicultural present’ which constantly requires that non-white Britons

constantly have to justify their presence on these islands and be alienated in the first place.

The 'white past, multicultural present' alignment, then, works in heritage discourses as a means to divorce stories about the distribution of power in the present from stories of the power relations of the past, and does not only take the form of legitimating archaic institutions. The entrepreneurial discourse of the creative industries, for example, often figures a vibrant multiculturalism claiming to celebrate difference. The creative industries have been touted by New Labour as an engine of economic growth, even though, as Angela McRobbie has pointed out, this paradigm of a flexible, meritocratic and talent-led knowledge economy, led by youthful and innovative creative industries, is a neo-liberal strategy resulting in a landscape of consistently unstable and unpredictable employment where only a few can claim prizes (McRobbie, 2002: 97-114). Chris Smith's *Creative Britain* for example was festooned with references to the same few young creative types (such as Roni Size and Rezz) who are invoked as good examples of entrepreneurial multicultural activity (Smith, 1998). The ubiquitous *Demos* report *Britain TM* attempted to sell us and new Labour ways of promoting the country like a company: the 'multicultural hub' was one of its recommendations (Leonard, 1997).

Here we have images of multicultural modernity, of Britain as a flourishing cosmopolitan space. But such predominantly corporate multicultural images are profoundly double-edged. Images of black and Asian people are being slowly pulled into the mainstream of representation, providing greater visibility and a wider range of role models, a process Stuart Hall has called 'multicultural drift' (Hall, 1999: 188). At the same time these images are not necessarily reflecting establishment structures or life opportunities available, and they are being used to promote a hyper-competitive and individualised culture in which it is structurally impossible for everyone to participate.

At the crux of this formation is the easy celebration of a multicultural present that shores up its celebration by ignoring the unequal power relations of the past. In this way a multicultural present can be celebrated whilst skating over the issues of contemporary

inequalities and their roots in the multifaceted - racialised, gendered, economic – exploitations within our heritage. Neo-liberal multiculturalism does not *necessarily* need to construct a white heritage or to avoid the thorny issues around narratives of imperialism completely in order to perpetuate itself. (The agendas of historians such as Niall Ferguson who push the argument for a new, liberal imperialism is proof enough that a highly limited revisionist reading of a multicultural past can be articulated to a highly limited celebration of a multicultural present). But it is the most common way in which the power relations between heritage and ‘race’ are problematically figured.

A more radical way of ‘marking’ the Jubilee would not deploy the white past multicultural present paradigm, but figure the monarchy’s international and foreign nature rather than using them as a signifier of Britishness. Clearly, the next step would be to make the connection between their recent claims to Englishness and those of British Asians, Caribbeans and Africans, for example. The String of Pearls could not take on board such a radical inclusion of non-white Britons as this would require an interrogation of where the wealth comes from - colonialism, slavery and the inequities of class. It would require a critique of the sources that instigated, legitimised and perpetuated such things. To thoroughly write the story of the presence of ‘others’ into the nation would mean to look at how integral diverse people are and have been to this country’s economic, political and social development.

Clearly, the persistence of the ‘white past, multicultural present’ paradigm is not merely a matter of simply having got the analysis wrong. The investment - economically, psychologically and politically - in a white past is, for many groups, both enormously important and sustaining. It is too terrifying for certain vested interests for this knowledge to enter and dominate public consciousness. This makes it all the more pressing for practitioners, for policy-makers and for heritage critics to encourage more thorough and progressive popular narratives about our multicultural heritage, and to invent more versions of heritage that can be used, as Wright said, to ‘imagine ways of life different from those that currently exist’. This is clearly an issue about processes, space and resources as well as ideologies (see Littler and Naidoo, 2003).

Conclusion: Interrogative hybrid heritages

We have suggested that in academic work on heritage there has often been an unreflexive whiteness at work that has been highly alert to the relationship between heritage and class, but less so to that between heritage and the legacies of ‘race’. What still dominantly exists today is the implicit myth of a white British past in opposition to the idea of a multicultural present, a present that is framed as both new and, once again, as ‘a problem’. This formulation is in itself clearly a problem. As Yasmin Alibhai-Brown argues

Knowing our common historical bonds – even if they were ultimately based on inequality – is a contractual responsibility. It also provides a core around which a new national identity can be layered. The various tribes of Britain have not yet reached the understanding which would enable them to see that such a history makes mutuality a real possibility and that to assume a ‘natural’ antagonism or genetic cultural purity is wishful nonsense. (Alibhai-Brown, 2000: 45)

More useful versions of heritage draw from such a commitment to mutuality and interrogative understandings of the past. They also delve into the global interrelations between and before the existence of nations and therefore complicating and at times undermines the boundaries of the nation state altogether. For cultural theorists and historians such as Paul Gilroy, Catherine Hall, Stuart Hall and James Walvin, such a wider geographical and historical framework leads to better, rather than diminished, versions of national heritage. As Walvin puts it, black British history offers ‘amongst other things a perfect opportunity for working towards a fuller, more closely integrated reconstruction of British historical experience’ (Walvin, 1992: 230). Moreover, usefully interrogative heritage practices emphasise the relationship between our multicultural past and our multicultural present without sanitising and skating over the inequalities that have and do exist, or the interrelationship between power, money, ‘race’, class and gender.

Whilst there are heritage practices which are uncritically imperialist, which are tokenistic, and which construct a mythical white past behind the multicultural present, there are also heritage practices which do this. We might figure attempts to unravel these narratives and social and cultural economies as a position called perhaps 'interrogative hybrid heritage'. Here we might put the work of Yinka Shonibare, which reworks traditional icons to stress the centrality of imperial 'subjects' to the construction of Britishness. Here we might also put Hans Haacke's interwoven exhibitions which interrogate the imperial histories of the Victoria and Albert Museum, or the displays at the Merseyside Maritime Museum that unpack the global histories of sugar. For such displays, such practices, such ideas argue for the redistribution of wealth whilst not being blind to the persistence of discourses of 'race', and whilst being aware of the implicit whiteness of much of this rhetoric, and practice, around what is framed as our common heritage.

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¹ In this paper we are of course using 'white' (like 'black') not as an essentialised category, but as a cultural codification. For a discussion of 'whiteness' and its varying historical levels of visibility, see Richard Dyer, *White* (Routledge, 1997)