Master's thesis

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Language and Literature

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A Threatened British Identity?

Rethinking the Roles of Commemorations in 21st Century Britain

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education
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Kunnskap for en bedre verden

ABSTRACT

In the last decade, commemorations in the public spaces of Britain have gained attention as a result of increased focus on inclusivity. This focus has emerged from discussions and debates about Britain coming to terms with the negative aspects and consequences of its empire. In the discussions, the focus has been on the problematic pasts of some people commemorated in statues and memorials in connection to their views on 'race' and empire. A division has developed between people wanting to remove these commemorations on the one side, and people wanting to protect them, because of their history's significance to the persons' heritage and identity, on the other. This thesis investigates the connection commemorations have to identity, heritage, and the past, and commemorations' significance in Britain's public spaces. Moreover, this thesis aims to investigate the necessity of having debates about these commemorations and the narratives of the past which they represent.

Keywords: commemoration, statues debate, heritage, identity, myth, cultural memory, renegotiate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my supervisor, Professor Gary Love, without whom this thesis would not have been what it is, for his invaluable advice and patience. I also want to give thanks to my lovely parents for inspiring me with their work ethic, and for their support and encouragement previous to and during these five years at NTNU. For this, I am forever grateful. Thanks are also due to the magnificent teachers who inspired me and led me on this path. They know who they are. Lastly, I would like to thank my peers with whom I have shared this journey these past five years. It has been the best.

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INTRODUCTION

Historical Context

In 1911, in what is now known as Sudan, the stone head of the first Roman emperor, Augustus, was found underneath the steps of a temple in what had been the city of Meroë. It is believed that its placement there was not accidental. The story behind it is that the people of Meroë have, in their ongoing conflicts with the Roman Empire, gone and taken the statue, or more accurately its head, from its place in the province of Roman Egypt. The statue was erected as an indicator of Roman power in Egypt but ended up becoming a target for Rome's enemies. The statue's head was taken as a sign of the people of Meroë's control and buried under the steps of an important temple for the inhabitants to walk over. This action and the placement of the head says something about the power of the statue, and its significance: it is not simply a statue of Augustus. It was a signal of Rome's power when raised in Egypt, and when it was decapitated and stolen, it became a signal of Meroë's power. By letting the inhabitants of Meroë walk over the place where it is buried, it transmits another message: a message, to the inhabitants at least, that even though Rome is a powerful neighbour, Meroë's people can walk over Rome's emperor.[1]

This story of the Meroë head of Augustus is relevant because it says something about the importance statues can have for people and how they present themselves. Professor Mary Beard, University of Cambridge, says that how we present power, the divine, and ourselves, whether it be through statues or paintings, and what their function is, is an important area of debate in every culture. Current debates all over the world concerning statues tackle the questions about their meanings and importance; are statues non-living, powerless, lumps of stone or metal, or is there an inherent meaning and power to statues that encapsulate the person or the politics it represents, or the people who commissioned it? If a statue of a person is put up long after his or her demise—like the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol, and this person, like Colston, had earned his wealth from slave trade and was also a benefactor of his city—what statement does it make and what does it say about those who put it up? These are important questions to discuss because statues, and other ways of commemoration, are present in the public spaces of our society.[2] Moreover, they are often connected to the importance of history, which can, according to Alix Green "sadden, offend, enliven and

[1] The British Museum, 2020, 01.27-04.50.
[2] The British Museum, 2020, 04.55-06.42.

engage. It can define and it can dismantle ideas, identities, and boundaries. It promises the ultimate appeal to justify one course of action or to render another indefensible."[3] In other words, the history behind these figures is of central importance as a mechanism for building civic identity.[4]

As a result of the 'heritage industry', a term that emerged in 1987 coined by Robert Hewison, much more attention has been paid to public heritage institutions, such as historic sites and museums, and their role in producing national identities, partly because they have turned into profitable tourist attractions.[5] Until relatively recently statues, street names, names of buildings, and other public places such as city squares, were not paid much attention; they existed in public spaces as relics of the past, functioning as decorations for their surroundings. However, over the past 5-10 years, the symbolic and political meanings behind these figures, as well as the commemorations themselves, have become objects of public scrutiny. Consequently, issues regarding the meanings of statues, and other ways of commemoration, are raised. Issues such as; who is this person?; who put up this statue and what statement were/are they making?; and, lastly, can our society stand behind this statement or does it represent something which does not align with the society we live in? Different people have different ideas about what statues mean, and it changes over time. Although statues are raised to celebrate and commemorate, they are also part of the way societies present themselves. Thus, they say something about us, who we think we are and imagine ourselves to be, and who we want to admire.[6]

The changes over the past 5-10 years are, amongst other things, connected to the quick exchange of information from one corner of the world to another. The world we live in now is a world where one's 'outrage'[7] can gain momentum through its exposure on different social media platforms, which enables the outrage to quickly reach out to people all over the world. Thus, we see not a slow and steady modification of thoughts and opinions, but rather a rapid turnaround and exchange of information and ideas. In other words, a political movement in the USA does not need days or weeks to spread to other places; it can happen overnight. One example is the Black Lives Matter protests after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020, which spread everywhere on the internet in a matter of hours and forced many places to examine, again, the presence of racism in their own cultures and

[3] Green, 2018, 181.
[4] Green, 2018, 181.
[5] Hewison, 1987, 9-12, 102-105.
[6] The British Museum, 2020, 06.55-08.40.
[7] Charles, 2020.

societies. In some extreme cases this outrage has developed into what is now known as 'cancel culture', a culture characterised by its 'wokeness' and political correctness.[8] These rapid exchanges of information are powerful—especially in the world of social media—and it has forced societies, institutions, and people to look inwards and to investigate what they as a society find acceptable. This is part of the reason people have started to raise questions about people who are commemorated in our public spaces, whether it be through a physical presence (a statue) or a mental presence (how they are worshipped in everyday discourse).[9] Naturally, this has developed into debates and discussions about who should pride public spaces and who should not, and what commemorations say about the society in which they are present. The above-mentioned debates are part of a relatively recent branch in the field of cultural memory studies which incidentally is essential for being able to discuss these subjects.

In Britain, debates regarding commemoration in public spaces have concerned themselves with figures of the past with both a physical and mental presence in the public space, with connection to Britain's colonial past. The statue of Cecil Rhodes at Oriel College at the University of Oxford, and the consequences of Winston Churchill's policies abroad and his legacy, are some of the topics in this ongoing national debate which are researched in this thesis. The primary concerns of the polarising debates are how these men gained their wealth, how their politics affected the colonised and their descendants, and their views on 'race' and empire.[10] These concerns have ultimately led to debates about whether they should be commemorated in public spaces or not, and to demands that their past should be re-examined. Moreover, the debates deal with issues of heritage, culture, and identity in connection to these figures, whether we are erasing history by examining them, and whether the British Identity is under threat. The men who are discussed are protected by the Right and criticised by the Left, for different reasons. For many on the Left, these men were racist colonisers, and they think it right that these men should be removed from or become less prevalent in the public spaces. On the other side of the political spectrum, the Right protects the legacies of these men saying they did what they did for the future of Britain and that they were great men who, although not perfect, cannot be judged by moral standards of today. In addition to claiming that the Left is too politically correct and that they are demolishing British identity and heritage, there are signs of the Right shutting down discussions surrounding these figures,

[8] Satia, 2022, 311-312; Linstrum et al., 2022, 5-6.
[9] Errl & Rigney, 2009, 1-3, 131-132.
[10] A multifaceted term referring, in contemporary use, roughly to 'ethnicity'. I continue to use 'race' as a term in what follows as that is what the historical figures are criticised for today.

saying that it is "wokeness" propaganda and "cancel culture". Regarding this, professor of modern history, Elizabeth Buettner, writes that "for much of the time, critical awareness – indeed, *any* awareness at all – of colonial and decolonization history still competes against pride, nostalgia, and amnesia, while much historiography and public historical consciousness still remains centred on Europe."[11] As with everything connected to identity and culture, the debate is complex as it deals with existential questions and issues about acceptance, what British heritage and identity are, and what people imagine it to be.

According to Buettner, there remains much work to do in the process of integrating empire and imperialism into the past and present of Europe, although much of overseas history now is regarded as part of European history. There has been an increase in academic work on empires in the last 30 years, but this work has not transmitted out of the realm of academia to public acceptance.[12] For many in Britain, memory of Empire is something that displays the power and glory which Britain once had and worked as a bandage over the wound caused by a weakened role in world affairs after WWII and onwards. Moreover, dominating stories and voices in history writing and memory-making are white European stories. Buettner observes that notwithstanding the efforts of examining Europe's overseas histories, there are signs of a willingness to forget the imperial past after the process of decolonization[13] in the latter parts of the 20th century in the form of statues, street names and names of public buildings in European cities that date back to the age of empire.[14]

One advocate for a positive reputation of the British Empire is historian Niall Ferguson. He believes that the case *against* the British Empire is well established among the public. In his book *Empire,* he applauds the British Empire for its promotion of free movement of goods, capital, labour, and for imposing western law, order, and governance.[15] He asks the rhetorical question: "In the end, the British sacrificed her Empire to stop the Germans, Japanese, and Italians from keeping theirs. Did not that sacrifice alone expunge all the Empire's other sins?"[16] If the reality is, as Buettner suggests and Ferguson's nostalgia implies, that the integration of the imperial past of Britain and Europe into European history is still unfinished, it provokes the question of whether these nations are completely

[11] Buettner, 2016, 490.
[12] Buettner, 2016, 474; Grindel, 2013, 43.
[13] "Decolonization" here means the actual process wherein colonies became independent from the British Empire.
[14] Buettner, 2016, 474; Drayton, 2011, 681; Assmann, 2015, 171.
[15] Ferguson, 2004, xxii.
[16] Ferguson, 2004, 363.

decolonized or not.[17] Moreover, it lays the foundation for the statues debate to take place in Britain.

Thesis Question

The aim of this thesis is to provide a study of recent academic and public history debates about statues, commemoration, and identity in relation to the history of empire. Moreover, I aim to research academic and public debates that were triggered by questions about Britain's public spaces and colonial past to understand how the spaces are used and whether they should be adopted to accommodate a plurality of identities and histories. The new narratives about Britain's colonial past have not moved out of academia and the stories that are written are still predominantly white European ones. In other words, its integration into European history and the public is still lacking. There are people from independent post-colonial nations who try to make their stories heard and who try to change the narrative about empire, and the statues debate is part of this. The presence of imperial figures in public spaces seems hostile to many people whose ancestors suffered under the age of empire. At the same time, however, these figures are testimonies of the past, both as primary and secondary sources; they say something about the society in which they were raised, and something about the society in which they exist now. So, a dilemma occurs: are we removing history, great and bad, by taking statues down? Is there a risk of ruining British heritage and identity by taking a closer look at the ramifications of their actions and judging them by morals and standards of today? The supporters of the figures are many, as are their opposers, and both sides of the debate have good arguments as to what the future of statues and commemoration in public spaces should look like.

As we will see later, statues and commemorations are not just "non-living, powerless, lumps of stone or metal"[18], and that makes them legitimate places of scholarly inquiry. Re-examining what is accepted as national truths, can welcome new understandings of what it means to be British in the early 21st century.[19] As a result, I have formulated two thesis questions that need to be addressed to gain deeper insight into the complex discussions regarding commemoration and British identity and heritage. The question is as follows:

[17] Buettner, 2016, 490.
[18] The British Museum, 2020, 04.55-06.42.
[19] Buettner, 2016, 490.

> *In what ways are commemorations in public spaces connected to identity and heritage? If commemorations are important markers of identity and heritage, should this influence how public spaces are used in today's society?*

I will answer the questions by reviewing recent scholarship on heritage, identity, and memory, and by looking at public history debates in which academics have contributed.

Historiography of the 21st Century and Historical Writing About Empire

As new generations of historians and history writing emerge, questions concerning how to study, research, and write about history need to be re-examined because of the change in the intellectual climate.[20] The aim of cohesion in late 19th century and early 20th-century history writing is left behind in favour of a history writing that is less unifying and more ideologically diverse. The political form of nation-states, which created uniformity in history writing when the discipline was new in the late 19th century, is replaced with a history writing which has moved in many different directions. In the study of history and history writing in the early 21st century, stories about everyday lives, new mentalities, sexualities, and stories from outside Europe or non-Western regions, in a broader sense of time and space have emerged. The field has developed from one concerned with nation states and their wars and conflicts, into, amongst other things, a more recent branch of history—cultural history—and to other fields such as memory studies and postcolonial studies.[21]

The historian's job is not only to change the narratives made by other historians but also to change the narratives of the past.[22] Professor Allan Megill, writes that the historian of today ought to offer a critical perspective on the past, what we perceive as our past, and our use of this past in the present:

> [This] means the revealing of fissures and contradictions—in the past, in historians' representations of the past, in historians' assumptions as they seek to represent the past, and in dominant and perhaps also non-dominant assumptions in the present concerning the future, the present, and the past.[23]

The history that surrounds us is not just a reflection of the past, it is too the act of telling stories of the past aloud to generations coming after us, and it is not an innocent business. This is apparent in the historiography of the West and its relationship to the rest of the world. When it comes to the writing about colonial and imperial history, the narratives were shaped

[20] Evans, 2018, 1.
[21] Megill, 2004, 208.
[22] Evans, 2018, 148.
[23] Megill, 2004, 227.

by the political elites and what is palatable for the public.[24] In the words of historian Donald Kelley about Ranke's *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*[25]: "the way things really were was the way men of power and influence judged them to be."[26] During much of the 1900s, history-making and history writing about empire and the Commonwealth was based around a belief that the British Empire was an emancipator and teacher of western laws and norms. In fact, until 1914 being an 'imperialist' was a positive description.[27] Later, during the years of decolonization, the history produced did not pose a challenge to this narrative on either side of the political spectrum.[28] In the 1980s and 1990s, however, the narrative was challenged by scholars outside of London, Oxford, and Cambridge, which led to the inclusion of previously excluded voices into the discipline in the UK and other places.[29]

One of the contributions to this challenge of the established narratives of the past is the study of cultural memory. In the beginning, cultural memory was focused on "sites of memory" which worked as reference points for groups to remember a shared past. There has been a shift as the field has progressed, however, towards understanding cultural memory as processes of remembrance and forgetting in which the past is continually re-remembered and renegotiated to be adapted to both known and new memory sites. The main concerns for cultural memory studies are the rise, fall, and marginalisation of stories. The task of the field is to investigate the factors that allow some stories to be remembered whilst others are forgotten, and to allow previously silenced stories and memories to establish themselves.[30] Since the 1990s, memory studies have introduced the history of themes such as identity, issues of identity, emotions, and gender to politics, and this broadening of perspectives has during the years gained opponents who want these processes to be stopped. Thus, we get what is called 'memory wars'.[31] We will have a closer look at memory in the next chapter.

Inclusion in history writing and other disciplines is important because without it the consequences are significant. For one, the portrayal of the past is dependent on several perspectives to understand how past and present societies have experienced power and pleasure, and/or humiliation and pain, and to understand how those experiences have shaped societies differently and inherently through generations. With only a singular perspective, we get a distorted understanding of the past. Secondly, according to Professor Richard Drayton,

[24] Drayton, 2011, 672.
[25] Famous quote by Leopold von Ranke about history writing, meaning writing "how things actually were".
[26] Kelley in Drayton, 2011, 673.
[27] Wurth, 2019, 336-337.
[28] Drayton, 2011, 677- 679; Evans, 2018, 181.
[29] Drayton, 2011, 677- 679.
[30] Errl & Rigney, 2009, 1-2.
[31] Assmann, 2015, 179; Satia, 2021, 319.

the "narcissism which orders the past to please the present" is often unsympathetic to the pain, destruction, violence, and death of other people, especially outside of the West.[32] The fact that voices from Africa, Asia, and the Americas have been excluded, affects the way historians today write about the British Empire because they base their studies on works by generations of Imperial historians who did not listen to these voices.[33] Indifference to the suffering endured by the colonised is visible in the fact that the benefit to the world economy, international mobility, and movement of labour and goods which Empire contributed to, is seen by many on the Right and centre-left to outweigh Empire's disastrous consequences on many human lives and generations of people.[34]

By inviting more and new voices to history and other fields' round table, new perspectives emerge to challenge previously assumed truths. Thus, new points of discussion and debate emerge. One such discussion is about whether actions and people of the past can be judged by today's morals and standards, or if they should be exempted from blame because they were just products of their time. Today, historians, and scholars of other academic disciplines, generally do not assume that individuals have unrestricted freedom of choice but recognise that institutions and mentalities affect people's choices. Thus, they also recognise that what is considered 'common sense', and right and wrong, varies between cultures, time, and space. In other words, 'common sense' is not the same in 2022 as it was in 1822 or 1922. So, to determine whether people can be judged by standards of today, it is necessary to look at the societies these persons lived in and to welcome rigorous historiographical debates about the past. New perspectives challenge conventional narratives about the past, but they must also be critiqued using the available evidence.[35]

In his book *In Defence of History* (2018), Richard Evans discusses the issue of who should be allowed to write whose history. It is an important issue in modern history writing and it has many nuances. Some believe that only oppressed groups can write the stories of the oppressed and that these groups cannot write the history of white protestant males and vice versa. The reason is that only oppressed groups have the knowledge and experience it takes to write these stories.[36] "The ultimate implication indeed," writes Evans "is that no one can know anything beyond their own bodily identity. Experience is the sole arbiter of truth. There

[32] Drayton, 2011, 680; Evans, 2018, 211-214.
[33] Drayton, 2011, 680.
[34] Drayton, 2011, 683; Ferguson, 2004, 367.
[35] Evans, 2018, 138.
[36] There is an important distinction here, however, between historical writing that is based on historical facts and sources, and just "writing" from non-professionals that do not rely on a historical method or scholarly rigour to base their writing on.

is no universal truth, only truths particular to specific groups of people."[37] This is somewhat problematic because if we are to follow this thought then "the history of religion would have to be left to clergymen, of war to the generals, of fascism to fascists."[38] This would take the science out of the history discipline. History is, and should be, as much about what is unknown as what is familiar. It is also about making gaps between what we know and do not know about the past smaller. This can be done by including one's own experiences, but too narrow a perspective can also abstruse important distinctions between past and present. Naturally, if the oppressors can write the story of the oppressed, it means that the oppressed can and should write the story of the oppressor. In practice, this has led to important work that has brought new perspectives into narratives of the past, such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).[39]

The challenge in history writing today is to write and create a history that everyone feels belongs to them.[40] The journey towards a history which integrates different stories starts, according to Drayton, when historians start to examine parts of the past that are painful and uncomfortable. In doing this, the historian "acquires a capacity to help his or her community renegotiate its sensitivities, and in particular to lower the frontier between the self and the foreign."[41] Thus, historians might also to a larger extent be able to appreciate these foreign pleasures and pains and take them as one's own and write about this history conscientiously. History, and history writing, is about the foreign as much as it is about the familiar, and an imperial history that does not represent the history of the "losers" of imperialism cannot accurately present the reality of empire.[42] It is necessary for history as a discipline, for present and future generations, that history is written for everyone and not for people who benefit from only certain types of history being written.[43] Ultimately, no matter how history is actually written, it will participate in passing on these stories to future generations because, in the words of Drayton, "[w]hether they like it or not, historians are forced to choose what sort of future they wish for the world", and it is crucial that the historian remembers this important mandate.[44]

Simultaneously as there has been an increasing focus on inclusivity and subsequently on decolonisation in history writing, there is an increase of it in other fields. Advocates for

[37] Evans, 2018, 211.
[38] Evans, 2018, 213.
[39] Evans, 2018, 214-215.
[40] Drayton, 2012, 158.
[41] Drayton, 2011, 684.
[42] Drayton, 2011, 684; Evans, 2018, 214.
[43] Drayton, 2012, 169.
[44] Drayton, 2011, 685.

decolonisation demand an investigation of the way we use and understand canonical texts, and the way we critically examine the connection between empire and those who produce its narratives. So, where is the place of decolonisation today? There has been a shift from decolonisation being reserved for fields of postcolonialism towards a wider semantic range going beyond postcolonialism and into other fields. The field of decolonization is interdisciplinary—not only a historical phenomenon but a process which has bled into the fields of decolonisation in history, memory studies and postcolonial studies, creating a collective where the fields can help and lean on each other.[45] Professor Stuart Ward thinks that this change is the result of a wish to make the complexity of postcolonialism into something more accessible and comprehensible for popular protests.[46] And whereas decolonisation is still useful for talking about the process leading former colonies to independence, it also needs to be understood as something broader than that. Professor Vanessa Ogle notes that decolonisation is also a marker of a wider confrontation whose goal is to "reckon with empire and colonialism, and indeed history, memory, and memorialization more broadly".[47] With this understanding of decolonisation, it becomes necessary to look at the parts of empire and colonialism which still cast their shadows. In other words, we need to look at decolonisation as a category that connects the colonial past to the postcolonial present and future.[48] Critically examining what Linstrum coins as 'the false consciousness' of British decolonisation is a natural aspect of the "new" decolonisation movement. Moreover, it is useful for historical analysis because of this boost in global histories in connection to empire and colonialism. However, it is necessary to have an interdisciplinary approach to it and see decolonisation as a global event and process, and not to keep it separate in the different disciplines of postcolonial studies, memory studies, history, and more.[49]

Research Methodology, Sources, and Thesis Structure

I recognise that this thesis builds large parts of its chapters on secondary literature. This is, of course, not due to a lack of primary sources on these subjects. For the purpose of this thesis, however, the primary sources—the debates—used in chapter 3 are representative, in my opinion, of many statue debates that have taken place during the last decade in Britain. I have researched the Edward Colston statue that until June 2020 was erected in Bristol, and

[45] Linstrum et al., 2022, 1-3, 18.
[46] Linstrum et al., 2022, 5.
[47] Linstrum et al., 2022, 5.
[48] Linstrum et al., 2022, 6.
[49] Linstrum et al., 2022, 19-24.

the Nelson column in Trafalgar Square, and the controversies surrounding them. To avoid repeating the same arguments and opinions, I decided to focus on the Cecil Rhodes statue in Oxford and the examination of Winston Churchill at University of Cambridge. Moreover, with a divisive and important subject such as this, I find it important to safeguard the thesis against eventualities of repudiation on the grounds of bias, or lack of academic backing, by taking certain precautions such as including thorough examination of secondary material. The secondary material in chapter 1 and 2 addresses the subject from historical and critical perspectives, provides the groundwork for the analysis and discussion of the case studies in chapter 3, as well as the thesis as a whole. I choose to focus the three chapters on academic debate and academics in public because it allows me to gain a comprehensive understanding of why the removal or continual existence of the commemorations discussed stirr people's emotions and make some people feel excluded from the public spaces whilst it makes others feel that their identity is threatened, and lastly why this debate takes place in Britain. All chapters provide answers to questions that must be addressed to arrive at an answer for the thesis questions.

To answer the thesis questions and ascertain how public spaces in Britain should be used today, it is first necessary to look at recent scholarship on identity and heritage, memory, and commemoration to understand how commemorations in public spaces are connected to identity, heritage and remembering, and to the nation's understanding of itself. In chapter 1 I will be reviewing John R. Gillis (d. 2021), David Lowenthal (d. 2018), and Kirk Savage's studies on commemoration, identity, and heritage. All of whom are authorities in their fields; social and cultural history, heritage studies, and collective memory and identity, respectively. I also lean on Ann Rigney's, authority in the field of Memory studies, research and theories on cultural memory, narrative, and remembrance. I apply this secondary material to ascertain why commemorations have received criticism, and what the impact of this criticism on public debate in Britain is.

Chapter 2 consists of an examination of public debates on commemorations in Britain's public spaces, and the broader issues of 'culture wars' in Britain. The secondary material in this chapter consists of social and cultural historian Katie Donington's work on divisions in Britain exposed by the decision to leave the European Union, as well as her research on representation, narrative, and legacies. In addition, I utilise Richard J. Evans' writing on the disagreement between the Left and the Right, academia and government, on the threatened British identity and who poses this threat. To support the argument proposed by Evans in chapter 2, I employ examples from UKIP's "Restoring Britishness" and

Priyamvada Gopal's article in The Guardian "Why can't Britain handle the truth about Winston Churchill?". Chapter 2 investigates why the commemorations in question have become a matter of debate in Britain and examines why some Britons feel their identity and heritage is threatened by these public debates.

Lastly, in chapter 3 I will do a case study on the two debates mentioned above. In these debates scholars have met and contributed with their opinions and arguments as to what should be done to the commemorations and their legacies, and lastly how they should be examined in the public and academic sphere. The primary sources of chapter 3 are mostly two filmed debates[50] published on YouTube. The Churchill discussion was uploaded to YouTube by Churchill College at the University of Cambridge on 12 February 2021 under the title "The Racial Consequences of Mr Churchill". The Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) debate was uploaded by Oxford Union on 21 January 2016, under the title "Must Rhodes Fall?". The debates are highly political, and often largely divided between the Left and the Right. In the RMF debate there are panellists from both sides of the argument present. However, in "The Racial Consequences of Mr Churchill" there is arguably an imbalance as the panellists are all critical of Winston Churchill. Other sources used are online newspaper articles, and scholarly books and articles. The newspaper articles contribute to an understanding of public and personal opinions from both outside and inside of the academic realm. The scholarly books and articles are used to give insight into the connection between commemoration in public spaces to identity and heritage.

The participants in the discussion about the racial consequences of Winston Churchill, are Professor Kehinde Andrews, Dr. Madhusree Mukerjee, Dr. Onyeka Nubia, and Professor Priyamvada Gopal. The strengths of the debate are firstly Andrews and Gopal's expertise in the fields of Black and Postcolonial Studies respectively, Nubia's authority in British history, Black Studies, and intersectionality, as well as Mukerjee who as a journalist writes on issues such as colonialism. Secondly, as is conveyed in the debate, the participants have unique perspectives to bring to the table. Not only are they authorities in their fields, but as persons of colour they also have the embodied knowledge that many white persons do not. Because of this they can speak on behalf of, and represent, other persons of colour that do not have a seat at the table. Its weakness, however, is that there is an absence of debate due to a lack of representatives from the other side of the discussion. As we shall see, the reasoning behind this decision is made clear already at the beginning of the debate, but it nevertheless makes a

[50] I call them 'debates' here out of practicality. However, the chair of "The Racial Consequences of Mr Churchill", Priyamvada Gopal, stresses that it is not a debate, but rather a discussion.

discussion between different sides of the argument difficult as there are not any other scholars there to challenge their views. In such a debate it would have been more fruitful, in my opinion, to include several perspectives on the issues discussed. In chapter 3, I go into more detail concerning the discussion's overall content.

As mentioned above, the contributors to the RMF debate at the University of Oxford, are more evenly spread along the political spectrum. On the side that demands that Rhodes must fall are Ntokozo Qwabe, Yasmin Kumi, Athinangamso Esther Nkopo, and historian Richard Drayton. On the other side of the debate are Professor William Beinart, Professor Nigel Biggar, and Sophia Cannon. This makes for a more interesting debate because they can challenge each other's opinions right then and there, and not in a debate review later.[51] The panellists get an equal amount of time to make their opening and closing statements, and in the Q&A sections, the participants are all asked questions from the audience and the debate facilitator, which is a strength of this debate. The panellists are also engaged in the topics discussed and have their expertise in, among other disciplines, African studies, Imperial studies, and Race Relations.

On a general basis, there are weaknesses when it comes to debates. Naturally, they are thought-provoking and often enlightening. But they can also be confusing, which makes it difficult to decide one's own opinions on the matter. In addition, as we will see in chapter 3, in the heat of the moment the panellists' desire to "win" the debate or persuade the audience, can make them say whatever will strengthen their case, without it being true. If there are no people present to challenge this, it may be understood as truth. History can, on both sides of the political or ideological spectrum, be twisted and turned to underscore one's arguments. Moreover, things move quickly in a debate and to get a word in the participants have to think fast. Unless you are a well-versed panellist it might be difficult to convey what you want to say. Consequently, miscommunication and misunderstandings can occur, and when the debate is filmed and analysed it can seem as though participants express opinions they do not actually have, which is important to keep in mind. Lastly, the debates are both an hour and a half long. Consequently, I cannot comment on everything they discuss due to the scope of this thesis. The focus is, therefore, on the most relevant parts of this thesis.

The "Must Rhodes fall?"- debate is included because it discusses issues and a movement that have gained much attention since it started in South Africa in 2015. The RMF movement started as a protest against the Cecil Rhodes statue at the University of Cape

[51] The centre-right/ right-wing think tank Policy Exchange wrote a review of the Churchill discussion, where the imbalance, amongst other things, was criticised.

Town. Protestors asked questions relating to Rhodes' character, how he gained his wealth and whether it was right to have him greet students attending the university. This debate spread to concern other statues and figures of the past around the world, and it also resulted in the debate at Oriel College at the University of Oxford where there is another statue of Rhodes. The debate at Oriel College took place in January 2016, and the themes of the debate have been highly discussed ever since. As we will see in chapter 3, the debate critically questions history, identity, heritage, and the presence of racism and white supremacy in British society and institutions.

"The Racial Consequences of Mr Churchill" is included because it not only discusses a statue, but a person's legacy and its presence in public spaces of British society. Moreover, Churchill College, where the discussion is held, was founded as the national and commonwealth memorial to Sir Winston Churchill.[52] As such, it is relevant for this thesis because it is a memorial, a commemoration, in honour of Churchill. He is seen as a British and European hero, who saved and emancipated Europe from German rule and Nazism. His legacy as a saviour and hero is still very existent in Britain's stories about its victory, greatness, and heritage. In the discussion, the panellists are stressing, however, the need to investigate the consequences of Churchill's foreign policies, and to move the gaze outward and look at how it impacted people in the colonies and their descendants, especially in connection to the reverberations of racism. The discussion received much criticism, and it signalises that it is a discussion that many are not ready to have. This, coincidentally, makes it appropriate to include in this study; some find it important to discuss, whereas others want to shut the discussion down before it has begun.

[52] Churchill College, 2021, 00.33.

I. IDENTITY, HERITAGE, MEMORY & COMMEMORATION

> History tells all who will listen what has happened and how things came to be as they are. Heritage passes on exclusive myths of origin and endurance, endowing us alone with prestige and purpose.
>
> — David Lowenthal, *Fabricating Heritage* (1998)

Lowenthal's quote on the difference between heritage and history speaks of an important distinction. The history discipline is dependent on scientific methods and data to be recognised as scientific. Heritage's data are not scientific, however, but based on the acceptance of the group's insiders, and features "fantasy, invention, mystery, error".[53] It is these fantasies and inventions that are materialised in commemorations of many public spaces in Europe and Britain. Why do conversations of examining and/or removing statues affect people to such a degree that they feel that their identity is threatened? Moreover, why do the same statues in question make some people feel excluded from public spaces they exist in? To understand why many commemorations have received criticism in recent years, and to understand the impact of this criticism on public debate in Britain, it is necessary to investigate the connection between commemoration and memory, heritage, and identity.

In *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, John R. Gillis begins by reminding the reader that "memories and identities are not fixed things, but social and political representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena."[54] On the journey of trying to understand the complex concepts of identity and memory, and as we shall see, heritage, this is important to keep in mind. The study of memory is not a new field; for a long time, historians have been interested in how ideas and understandings of history change over time. However, there has been a rapid growth of memory research since the 1980s.[55] To make sense of the world, we revise our memories, collective and individual, for them to fit into our present identities. Groups define who they are and who they are not, by their stories about who they were and how they got to where they are now.[56] These memories are connected to, and dependent on, our class, gender, power,

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[53] Lowenthal, 1994, 49.
[54] Gillis, 1994, 3.
[55] Glassberg, 1996, 8; Radstone, 2008, 31.
[56] Rigney, 2019, 365.

and ethnicity, and they also contribute to deciding "what is remembered (or forgotten), by whom, and for what end."[57]

It is understandable, then, considering that memories are constructs of reality, that it is often the majority's and the powerful's memories that are, to a larger extent, remembered, and that the minority's memories are the ones that are forgotten or overlooked. Throughout history we know that this is the case; victories of the large and powerful are recorded, whereas stories of the "Other" are not, and have been included to various degrees of success, only in the last 50-60 years.[58] By examining these historical constructions of reality, we gain a broader understanding of the members of society who establish these identities and who they benefit.[59] "Identities and memories are not things we think *about*," writes Gillis, "but things we think *with*."[60] Therefore, these constructs are not significant if they are isolated from politics, history or our communities. It is necessary, therefore, that we are aware of, and take responsibility for, the way 'identity', 'heritage' and 'memory' are used in our societies and acknowledge that the constructed identities affect everyone around us, including ourselves.[61]

Historian David Lowenthal writes that identity and heritage alike, are connected to individual family history as well as buildings, landmarks, language, and folklore. However, 'heritage' expresses best the dependency we have on the past to create our identities today.[62] Throughout history, heritage (and memory and identity related to it) has been restricted to the nobility; those who had something to pass on and something to inherit such as titles, properties, and land.[63] Today, however, people of all strata of society claim their own identity and heritage. This is done both on the individual level and on macro levels, such as the geographical and national. These developments have contributed to singling identity and heritage out as an "ultimate concern", writes Gillis, "worth fighting and even dying for."[64] The thought of identity and heritage as something subjectively and culturally constructed is obvious in Europe and other parts of the West. These are places in which previously well-established and traditional foundations of national identities have played a big role, and that have become more blurred and less prominent today due to the increasing degree of

[57] Gillis, 1994, 3.
[58] Rigney, 2019, 366; Kvande & Naatad, 2013, 79.
[59] Gillis, 1994, 4.
[60] Gillig, 1994, 5.
[61] Gillis, 1994, 5.
[62] Lowenthal, 1994, 43.
[63] Gillis, 1994, 6; Lowenthal 1994, 43.
[64] Lowenthal 1994, 42; Gillis, 1994, 4.

globalisation throughout the last two centuries.[65] What might happen when such changes occur is explained below.

Diverse societies contain many "layers". Sociologists Michael Dunning and Jason Hughes write that exactly how many layers are connected to a person or society depends on the 'complexity' of the given person or society. The layer, which is relevant here, however, is the layer of affiliation to a social group, whether it be neighbourhood, city, or nation. These layers create interdependency and subsequently "we-mentalities" and "we-images" of that particular group.[66] A change in this interdependence because of changes in the group, caused by integration, for example, can lead to some members losing their function or position, whilst others gain power and rise through the ranks. In other words, a shifting balance of power. This loss may cause the given members to feel threatened, and consequently, conflicts arise. Typical conflicts are usually between those who used to have power and those who are in position to gain it, and it is often connected to the emancipation of groups formerly kept outside of the "we-image". One example of these types of conflicts is between people of former European colonies and the colonisers.[67] The members who see their position changing for the worse tend to hold on to the way things used to be, and the identity associated with the time before this integration took place. Regardless of whether the threat is real or not, the fear of losing power and status is important and can play a decisive role, and contribute to creating socially and politically constructed heritage, memories, and identities. This has essentially made heritage in particular a defining characteristic of nation-states, as well as various ethnic groups.[68]

On the "pursuit of heritage", as Lowenthal calls it, we see that all over the world heritage becomes gradually more generic in its traits; the ideals and aims are similar in many nations, cultures, and social strata. While holding on to distinctive stories specific to the given nation or culture, they are similar in that they all generally concern themselves with heroism, superiority, sacrifice, continuity, and coherence.[69] The heritage that is important to so many of us can be said to be reflecting a personal or communal self-interest. Lowenthal explains this by stating that: "Things are valued as *my* heritage or *our* heritage; we may be modest about what we *are*, but rarely about what we *were*."[70] There is a tendency in many societies to be highly devoted and self-congratulatory towards their heroes and achievements,

[65] Gillis, 1994, 4.
[66] Dunning & Hughes, 2020, 273-274.
[67] Dunning & Hughes, 2020, 275.
[68] Dunning & Hughes, 2020, 276; Lowenthal, 1994, 43.
[69] Lowenthal, 1994, 44-45.
[70] Lowenthal, 1994, 46.

and their past.[71] As mentioned above, claims to heritage are no longer exclusive. Neither are they exclusive to nation-states, or cultural and geographically connected societies. Construction of heritage and identity is as apparent in 'underdog' sovereignties as in more dominant states and cultures: "bereft of place and power, land and language, they may doubly cherish a glorified past as all they have left."[72] As a result, the notion that 'our' heritage and identity is unique from everyone else's goes unchallenged as 'timeless truths', and by extension we are as unknowledgeable of other people's, cultures', and nation state's heritage as they are of 'ours'.[73]

In *The Life of Texts* Professor Ann Rigney writes that a society's ability to remember is culturally determined because for memory to be shared between multiple individuals who constitute the collective, it must be *communicated*. This communication can take different forms: a memoir or holiday selfie for instance.[74] The term for the various narratives about the collective past and the narrative's production and dissemination is coined 'cultural memory'. Rigney defines cultural memory as "the gradual synthesis of individual memories into a limited number of narratives that are shared between people and collectively recognised as representing a common past."[75] Cultural memory is recognised as both a creator of a "we-group" and a "they-group"; in other words, cultural memory is understood as both a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. Since Hayden White wrote about history-making and history-writing, and the decisive roles of narratives in *Metahistory*, it is widely recognised that the historian makes sense out of her data by creating a narrative which subsequently makes the data and its results meaning-forming and meaning-bearing. This theory has been developed further and transmitted into cultural memory studies where the focus is on how the past is recollected in public spaces and public commemoration. Memories are dependent on their dissemination, lest they will be forgotten and replaced with other stories. Keeping cultural memories "on the move" through different platforms means that they often get remediated. One such platform is memory sites. Memory sites can consist of locations or persons, and often a combination of the two. They can often represent either an entire period or set of incidents.[76] Examples of such memory sites are Winston Churchill as saviour of Europe after WWII, Rosa Parks, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott for the Civil Rights

[71] Lowenthal, 1994, 46.
[72] Lowenthal, 1994, 48-49.
[73] Rigney, 2018, 241.
[74] Rigney, 2019, 365.
[75] Rigney, 2019, 366
[76] Rigney, 2019, 366-367, 372.

Movement in the 1950s and onwards, or Ground Zero where the Twin Towers of World Trade Center stood before the 9/11 terror attacks in New York in 2001.

To create a monument in honour of everyone who left their mark on the world would be an enormous task. Moreover, it would remove the monuments' significance. So, who and what gets commemorated? As we have seen, Rigney believes that remembrance and commemoration is culturally based and culturally selected. Selective remembrance is essential for making the stories we tell ourselves meaningful. "This means," writes Rigney "that cultural memory and *cultural amnesia* are two sides of the same coin."[77] Forgetting is as complex as remembering is, and cultural amnesia ranges from trivialities to extreme suppression of the past. As what and who is commemorated depends on what is important enough to be shared and thus remembered, the commemorations naturally reflect values of our culture and society. Some groups find it difficult to acknowledge the past's relevance to the present because it is seen as a threat to their identity, thus partaking in suppressing the past; for example the unsettling impact of postcolonial stories on the belief in "Europe as inventor and guardian of human rights."[78] For people believing Europe is the 'inventor and guardian of human rights', the opposition to this thought might shake the basis of what they see as their heritage and identity. When something is remembered, something else is forgotten. Since cultural memory is culturally constructed, the dominating culture decides what is remembered, and what is forgotten; dominating stories become hegemonic, whilst subordinate stories are ignored. A result of this is the difficulty of some groups to find and identify *their* history amongst the hegemonic narratives, leading them to advocate for their stories.[79]

Public monuments are relevant to study because they are remnants of the changing politics of history, and thus give us testimony of 'memory work' in process.[80] Rigney writes that monuments of national writers were important for cultural nationalism in Europe. We can translate this into general nationalism and say that monuments are devices which are used to shape, transfer, and spread narratives about the past, and that they have been used to strengthen a nation's feelings and the bond between its people through so-called 'symbolic spaces'.[81] But that is not the only justification for erecting monuments. The rhetoric used to justify the need for monuments has varied from trying to protect the people's memory from

[77] Rigney, 2019, 375-376.
[78] Rigney, 2019, 375.
[79] Rigney, 2019, 375-376.
[80] Brüggemann & Kasekamp, 2008, 430; Burch & Smith, 2008, 917.
[81] Rigney, 2019, 381; Rigney, 2018, 243; Osborne, 2001, 41; Errl & Rigney, 2009, 131-132.

themselves; because people are forgetful and need to be reminded of their heritage. Another justification is that the heritage needs to be transmitted to future generations. Whether the motivation for raising the monuments comes from anxiety about heritage being lost or to commemorate achievements or heroes, the thought that a shared cultural memory (and thus a shared heritage) strengthens the people permeates them both.[82] Historian David Glassberg writes that historical consciousness also gives meaning to public commemorations in that we attach feelings and histories to places, and that the value it is given comes from the associations, historical and emotional, we have to the given place or monument. In addition, when historians make places 'historical' they participate in making them different from other places. Thus, the historian plays an important part in creating the narratives that unify or destabilise communities, but also in deciding which and whose history is communicated.[83]

Commemorations represent, some more than others, the myths we tell about ourselves and our societies. Myths are tailored, renegotiated, and reactivated, to resonate with us, our values, and what we imagine ourselves to be and become. The myths can be connected to heroic narratives about ourselves, people of the past, places, or even to the national image of what 'our' country is.[84] These narratives and commemorations are meant to work as an apparatus to reconcile social fragmentation in a society, and bring its people closer together through a shared cultural memory and narrative.[85] The myths, memories and heritage that allow us our individual and collective identity also warn us that if we do not contain these narratives, we will not be able, or willing, to act together to resolve problems that might occur in the future.[86] Since these myths are so deep within our identity, they will often go unchallenged and thus live on through generations as timeless truths. Leaving them unchallenged gives them the power to create affect and loyalty to the timeless truths.[87] The act of renegotiating or remaking memory is not only the outcome of opposing parties in disagreement; it can also come from indifference which can, in fact, be as hard to overcome as antagonism. One example of this is the passive forgetting of imperialism, colonialism, and its repercussions in Europe. Passive forgetting leads to a failure to look past the timeless truths and the well-established myths. The passivity also makes it difficult for some people to understand why others are outraged and vice versa when discussing polarising subjects.[88]

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[82] Savage, 1994, 129-130.
[83] Glassberg, 1996, 17, 19.
[84] National image can for example be Norwegians telling themselves that Norway is the best country in the world, or the notion of the American dream—the land of opportunity— in the USA.
[85] Osborne, 2001, 44-46; Rigney, 2018, 241.
[86] Francis in Osborne, 2001, 45.
[87] Rigney, 2018, 241.
[88] Rigney, 2018, 247.

Naturally, the public's stance towards the monuments plays a big role in deciding their meaning, and whether they passively adorn our surroundings, create fragmentation, or contribute to social cohesion. Moreover, a person's stance towards the monument is decided by the person's social class, ethnicity, education, gender, age, and a combination of these.[89] Osborne writes that elite groups of society tend to organise public spaces to represent the national myths and the common heritage they find desirable and abandon the rest. What is remembered and what is not is also affected by their 'collective significance'. In other words, only what is seen as relevant to the "collectives within which people position themselves" is remembered.[90] It is natural, then, that what is remembered also changes according to the majority's understanding or agreement of who matters and who does not.[91] It follows therefore, as discussed with the head of Augustus, that removing or destroying a statue is an exercise of power. Understanding this is important to be able to see the commemorations not just as decoration or powerless lumps of stone, but as devices which communicate values and attitudes.[92]

As we have seen in this chapter, debates about the past and the remaking and renegotiation of it are destructive to cohesion. These acts are, however, essential to be able to welcome possibilities of other truths about the past, and to create new social relations in the societies we live in now.[93] Old habits die hard, and we can say the same about memory; collective memory takes time to create, and it also takes time to change, adapt or destroy. The dissemination of memory is a communicative practice, which means that it is also a resource for "redefining the borders between 'them' and 'us'," writes Rigney, because "[m]emories are used not only for making the nation but also for remaking it."[94] Now that the connection identity, heritage, and memory have to the stories and myths that fabricate the image of ourselves is explained, we can more easily understand the role of commemorations in our societies and the debates that have emerged surrounding them.

[89] Glassberg, 1996, 10.
[90] Ringey, 2018, 245.
[91] Ringey, 2018, 245.
[92] Osborne, 2001, 53-55; Glassberg, 1996, 10.
[93] Rigney, 2018, 251.
[94] Rigney, 2018, 253-254.

II. CULTURE WARS

The United Kingdom has a vast history. One that is not just English, but which extends beyond the British borders to Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas. People from these places have also migrated to Britain during and after the age of empire, and had children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren who carry the history of these places with them. Therefore, it is difficult to claim that Britain has one uniform identity and the same heritage. People of Britain might all say that they are British, but what that entails varies from person to person. Acknowledging this, and the different preconditions of those from former colonies and their descendants to people who have gained from empire and colonialism, is essential for understanding why a so-called 'culture war' has emerged in the UK and why, as a result, statues and commemorations in public spaces have gained much negative attention.

In *Embers of Empire in Brexit Britain*, Katie Donington writes that: "The divisions within society which the Brexit result exposed have been attributed to differences in class, age, education, geography, ethnicity and nationalism."[95] These factors also play a part in sorting people into the Left or the Right on the political spectrum. In discussions in the last 20 or so years, about what British identity is and in what ways, if any, it is under threat, we see a dichotomy between the political Left and the political Right—and generally between the historian[96] on the one side, and the government on the other—between two different mandates of the past.[97] Although Brexit is not the focus here, the large divisions in British society are important.[98] The Brexit result underlines the many layers and differences that exist in Britain. If we follow Dunning and Hughes' thoughts about interdependence and status, introduced previously, we might conclude that there are many people in Britain today that feel that their identity is under threat, as the integration of colonial and imperial history is increasingly incorporated into British history during the last 30 years and as Britain has been forced to re-examine their colonial and imperial past.[99] In fact, we do see this: one teacher said to Daily Express that "they want to do away with our heritage," when referring to the debate about removing the statue of Admiral Horatio Nelson from Trafalgar Square in London.[100] Similar statements are easily found when observing the debates, and they reveal

[95] Donington, 2019, 121.
[96] Broadly speaking this includes teachers of history as well.
[97] Green, 2018, 178.
[98] Brexit is definitively worth investigating further in connection to identity, heritage, cultural memory, and re-imagining. There are already good publications on it such as the book referenced here; *Embers of Empire in Brexit Britain* edited by Stuart Ward and Astrid Rasch.
[99] Donington, 2019, 121.
[100] Chapman & Millar, 2017.

something about the, perhaps narrow and somewhat exclusionary, views on their own society. Because who determines what 'our heritage' is? Moreover, who are 'they', the Britons who want to remove the statues, and what is *their* heritage?[101]

Britain is often described as a melting pot, a term used to describe societies in which many different people, cultures and ethnicities melt into one. And in Britain, as in so many other places, the majority rules and is dominant. Richard Race states that there are negative cultural consequences connected to the thoughts of a 'melting pot' because some cultures are lost in it, due to majority domination. He emphasises the issues with identity and self-understanding being lost if one's history is overlooked in the process of creating new identities to fit in.[102] In times of great change it is natural that anxieties about national identity rises, and that the wishes to strengthen and preserve it increases.[103] Problems arise when one narrative about heritage is promoted, one which overlooks the identity of a large number of Britons, in this case because of the narrative's connections to colonialism and empire. On the one hand, we see people holding on to the history and heritage that have created one trajectory of the British identity connected to Britain's imperial past, with Britain as an imposer of western law and order. On the other hand, we see a growing group of people who challenge the way history has been interpreted. As a result, figures that represent the age of imperialism and colonialism in public spaces of Britain are increasingly scrutinised by those who want to change the narrative. Some demand that the physical legacies in the form of statues should either be removed or contextualised. This has resulted in polarisation regarding the heritage and identity of the British people, and a disagreement on how to deal with the past which ultimately has led to what we can call a 'culture war'.[104]

The iconic figures whose commemorations we will examine closer in the following chapter—Cecil Rhodes and Winston Churchill—both represent the imperial nationalism which many Britons feel nostalgic about. And as we have seen, increasing discontent has emerged with the way their legacies, and other legacies from the age of imperialism and colonialism, have been portrayed in Britain's history. Those who challenge this narrative have voiced their opinions on these men, their politics, and the histories they represent, demanding that their physical legacies be removed through campaign groups such as RMF at UCT in Cape Town and Oxford. These groups demand that the consequences and brutality of colonialism be included in the stories that are told about Britain's imperial past and ask

[101] Donington, 2019, 122.
[102] Race, 2012, 174.
[103] Létourneau & Chapman, 2015.
[104] Donington, 2019, 128

critical questions about the stories Britain has created about herself. Furthermore, they are critical to how the country and local communities have generated their wealth in the past and present, suggesting that both those who were indirectly, as well as directly, involved in the imperial project enjoy the benefits from it to this day. These critiques are uncomfortable for people because they illuminate the persistent privileges and inequalities that empire helped produce.[105]

Critiques of empire and its narrative is seen by some as an attack on the British identity.[106] There is also a tendency to shut the discussion down, disregarding the critique as "Leftist propaganda" and political correctness. We can see several groups blaming the 'woke worthies' and 'cancel culture' on the Left.[107] In UKIP's "Restoring Britishness: A Cultural Policy for an Independent Britain" from 2010, the party writes that "Britain and Britishness are in trouble," because they are being attacked, amongst other things, by "misguided politically correct ideology."[108] They relate that the politically correct class targets its "wrath" on the UK and the British Empire, their traditions, and the British people.[109] There are many statements like these ones, and the one from the teacher above, that suggest that these beliefs have many followers.

Any real threat to erasing British history is of course rightly condemned, but as Richard J. Evans is pointing out in his article "Rewritten History", the threat often comes from the Right and the Conservative government themselves, and not necessarily "the flash mob of the Left".[110] He defends this by looking at the politics of the Conservative governments which wish to restrict funding to projects that do not suit the narrative they want to project onto the public.[111] We also see a wish of similar policies in UKIP's "Restoring Britishness": "UKIP would prevent public money being used to support quangos, artistic or media projects which gratuitously insult or undermine Britain, its people or British values."[112] Moreover UKIP also wanted greater control of how the history teaching should be like: "UK schools would be required to teach about Britain's contribution to the world, such as British inventions, promoting democracy and the rule of law and the role of Britain in fighting slavery and Nazism."[113] In other words, they encourage an uncritical national narrative where

[105] Donington, 2019, 122.
[106] Donington, 2019, 122.
[107] Evans, 2021.
[108] UKIP, 2010, 3.
[109] UKIP, 2010, 9.
[110] Evans, 2021; Satia, 2022, 312.
[111] Dominic Dean in Evans, 2021.
[112] UKIP, 2010, 5.
[113] UKIP, 2010, 26.

Britain and imperialism is seen as being mainly a civilising mission.[114] Political interference such as Evans writes about in his article, and which is mentioned above, is a reaction to the growing body of research on Britain's imperial and colonial past.

The Conservative politicians Evans mentions in the article say that public funds should not be used for political purposes. This is interesting because holding back funds also serves a political purpose. Moreover, deciding what researchers can use their funding on is in itself a threat to Britain's history for both the present and the future, because it can keep researchers from pursuing sensitive subjects. Moreover, the, often immediate, labelling of critical debate as leftist propaganda by the Right, helps them hide their participation in "a process of historical destruction" by not allowing the debate to be taken seriously according to historian Katie Donington.[115] In connection to the discussion on Churchill which will be examined in chapter 3, the college hosting the discussion received "outraged letters" saying that "this was academic freedom gone too far", and that the event should be cancelled.[116] Moreover, tabloids and people on social media denounced the discussion as "'idiotic', a 'character assassination' aimed at 'trashing' the great man", before the event had taken place.[117] Thus, we come back to Evans' statement that the threat does not necessarily come from the "woke" and "political correct elite" on the Left.[118] And, as we have seen, rewriting a nation's history is nothing new, nor is it something that is found exclusively on the left side of politics; "there's nothing intrinsically wrong with 'rewriting history'," Evans writes, because it is done all the time by conservative and left-wing historians alike—it is the historian's job.[119] I want to stress, however, that neither side of the political spectrum is innocent when it comes to the use and misuse of history throughout the years since history became a discipline. As stated in the introduction: the act of telling the stories of the past is not, and has not been, an innocent business.

Circling back to the statues debate, Donington considers the significance of the removal of certain statues versus the public dialogue which has developed because of it. She writes that the dialogue around empire's place and position in British history might be more important than the actual removal of the statues because it is a long-awaited conversation for many Britons. The lack of empire's implementation in history in national curriculum and public institutions has led to an imperial amnesia in which empire is seen as something that is

[114] Donington, 2019, 124.
[115] Donington, 2019, 125.
[116] Gopal, 2021.
[117] Gopal, 2021.
[118] Evans, 2021.
[119] Evans, 2021.

nostalgic and longed for, and has contributed in creating a sense of national identity and belonging for many people in Britain.[120] This should not be dismissed because, as we have seen, what we believe to be our heritage is based on the stories and myths we tell ourselves, no matter what the "truth" is. Moreover, whether the threat to one's identity and heritage is real, it can play a decisive role for the levels of polarisation in a society. UKIP write in "Restoring Britishness" that they think Britons should learn about one "unified" British heritage.[121] But the British Empire is not part of every Briton's identity. And so, the problem arises again; who gets to decide what is part of this common heritage? Donington writes:

> In a Britain in which the descendants of the formerly colonized live and learn alongside the descendants of the former colonizers, indeed when some peoples' heritage draws from both sides of the historic divide – what stories are we to tell about empire, and who should have the right to tell them?[122]

Imperial history is polarising and difficult because it partakes in exclusion and silencing of some people, as well as having contributed to other people's sense of belonging.[123] Is it possible, then, to arrive at a compromise in which both groups feel that their heritage and identity is welcome and safe? It is possible that the connection between Britain's imperial past and Britain's present will divide its people for many decades to come exactly because there is no singular unifying cultural agreement on what it entails to be British or what the British heritage is.[124]

The disagreement on how to deal with and narrate the past has resulted in a 'culture war' between the political right with people wanting to spare the narrative of empire from scrutiny and critical examination on one side, and the political left with people wanting to bring the negative aspects of Britain's imperial past to the surface through, amongst other things, the removal of commemorations with imperial ties on the other. Attempts to bring the debate about the commemorations forward in a balanced manner have, as we have seen, failed multiple times, and the debates are in many cases dismissed. Thus, the role of the public spaces remains standing still, and continues to represent figures of the past which seem insensitive to the generational consequences of colonialism which many Britons experience to this day. In the next chapter, I investigate two debates in which academics discuss what the

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[120] Donington, 2019, 123, 125; Grindel, 2013, 44.
[121] UKIP, 2010, 26.
[122] Donington, 2019, 124-125.
[123] Donington, 2019, 125.
[124] Donington, 2019, 129.

culture war and statues debate are really about, and what we should do with said commemorations.

III. DEBATES

Must Rhodes Fall?

The RMF Movement started in Cape Town in 2015 and spread to Oxford early 2016. The statue of Cecil John Rhodes in question is positioned at the entrance to Oriel College at the University of Oxford, and it gained attention there, just as the statue at UCT in Cape Town did, because of Rhodes' views on race and empire, as well as the exploitative form of labour he led and his discriminatory legislation.[125] The panellists have 2 minutes and 30 seconds to give their opening statements and their opinion on the question "must Rhodes fall?". On the "must fall" side of the debate are Ntokozo Qwabe, Yasmin Kumi, Athinangamso Esther Nkopo, and historian Richard Drayton. On the "must not fall" side of the debate are Professor William Beinart, Professor Nigel Biggar, and Sophia Cannon. Being on the "must not fall" side of the debate does not mean, as we shall see (with one exception), that the persons do not see Rhodes as a problematic figure, only that they do not think the right way to handle the situation is to take the statue down.

Qwabe, Kumi, Nkopo, and Drayton's position on the matter can be summarised as an agreement on the debate and dialogue surrounding the statues, and the structural and institutional changes these can lead to, being the most important, and the statue itself being the emblem through which the debate is held.[126] However, they do insist on the removal of the statue on the grounds of several reasons which we will take a look at as well. "We have a broad program that we are advocating for at Oxford," Qwabe says, "and that interrogates how patterns of exclusion functions at Oxford."[127] Kumi follows up on this in her opening statement, saying that the debate should be about the broader issue of institutional racism and the decolonisation of education within Oxford. These issues, Nkopo says in her statement, are more problematic and damaging for the Black and minority students that attend Oxford and live in that environment.[128]

The interrogation of the statue and what it represents is important because of how statues function in our societies. Nkopo says that:

> We think that statues function to reflect the ways in which institutions, societies imagine themselves. And being that Oxford University has all of these structural

[125] Oriel College, 2020a.
[126] Oxford Union, 2016, 03.00-04.58; 05.38; 08.23.
[127] Oxford Union, 2016, 03.16.
[128] Oxford Union, 2016, 05.38; 08.23.

> problems we put before you, we think that them having a statue of Cecil John Rhodes overlook us [...] on a pedestal, is very problematic.[129]

Since statues are used in our societies for commemoration and glorification of the people whose ideas and actions have been remembered in the narrative of the past that we are familiar with today, which also represent how societies imagine themselves, putting a plaque next to the statue for contextualisation is not enough, according to Nkopo.[130] On whether or not the University of Oxford should remove the statue, she says that the university should consider how it wants to imagine itself now and in the future, and how this presentation of the university affects the people affected by empire. Lastly Nkopo urges the university as well as the people attending the debate to consider what the university loses by removing the statue, and replaces it with something everyone can feel proud of.[131] In his opening statement, Drayton says that this discussion is not about the past but rather centred around the present, because the traces of the colonial and imperial age still affect people today, as Nkopo, Qwabe, and Kumi presented in their statements.[132]

On the other side of the panel, Beinart also relates that he considers the statue to be a secondary issue. He highlights, too, the possibility of "positive and concrete academic developments" that emerge from the statues debate, and says that the priority should not be on what should fall, but on what might *rise*.[133] Biggar, on his side, does not think it is "the end of the world" if the statue comes down, but thinks that Rhodes was not the demonic figure he is painted out to be.[134] Moreover, he says that statues of other people with similar views on race and empire still stand, and repeats during the debate that "if we insist on our heroes being pure, we aren't gonna have any."[135] Lastly, Cannon believes that the statue should stand because it was not raised in a 'culted personality' as they are on the continent, and moreover that the statues in Britain are welded to its history, and as such should not be removed.[136]

Cannon and Beinart are both worried about how we consider and decide who is allowed to be in the public spaces, and where to stop if we start removing some statues.[137] Cannon plays on the sentiments of the audience, saying that she wants her grandchildren to see the statue to shout shame at it. She says: "If you erase your history, you erase both the

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[129] Oxford Union, 2016, 08.52.
[130] Oxford Union, 2016, 09.28
[131] Oxford Union, 2016, 10.20; 10.40.
[132] Oxford Union, 2016, 12.54.
[133] Oxford Union, 2016, 14.23; 16.28.
[134] Oxford Union, 2016, 1.33.42.
[135] Oxford Union, 2016, 17.15; 18.41; 1.21.38.
[136] Oxford Union, 2016, 21.02.
[137] Oxford Union, 2016, 30.12; 41.29.

bright lights and the dark spots."[138] In other words, removing the statue would be equivalent to erasing history. Qwabe challenges the idea that statues are places we seek out to learn about history and relates that he does not see students go to the statues on campus and discuss them. Moreover, he argues that the statue itself constitutes an *erasure* of history in that it does not say anything about who Rhodes was or what he did, nor does it say anything about how he gained his wealth—some of which he donated to the university.[139] Beinart on his part, thinks that the statues' historical significance and power are too great to be removed. He uses the RMF movement as an example to emphasise the power of interpreting history from images and symbols. As such, he urges the movement, and those who agree with it, to be careful of what they take away, because "you take away a weapon for yourselves as well." He would rather the statues be used as a medium to think with and to further academic developments.[140]

Professor Beinart argues that the statues can lead to positive and concrete academic developments. So, what can the statues teach us? The statues have been essential in creating a space wherein these debates about Britain's imperial and colonial past, and its multiple consequences on the present, have manifested themselves. Because of the statues debate we have reached a point where we can ask questions not just about bygone men, but about ourselves and our community, society, and nation. Statues, put in their context, can also help us remember where some of our wealth has come from, and remind us that many of us are beneficiaries of the oppressive systems during the age of empire, and after its demise. The controversies of the statues debate have taught us about the difficulties of coming to terms with the past in societies which are diverse, multi-layered, and which have controversial and conflicting pasts.[141] Moreover, I think that statues can teach us something about the fragility of our morals and standards, and remind us that when we are gone and society progresses without us, our norms, thoughts, and mentalities might seem just as strange to the people of the future, as slave trade seems in 2022. We do not know what *our* heroes will look like in 150 years and need to understand that our moral values today are not supreme.[142]

The meanings of the commemorations are not set in stone. Celebration, for instance, is only one form of function in a statue's or commemoration's history. Like many other things, statues change their function over time; they play different roles, their significance

[138] Oxford Union, 2016, 30.44.
[139] Oxford Union, 2016, 31.15.
[140] Oxford Union, 2016, 41.00; 16.28.
[141] Brüggemann & Kasekamp, 2008, 440.
[142] The British Museum, 2021, 09.11; 09.36; 12.30; 13.07; 13.47.

changes, and they end up looking different. This is because the audience and the society in which it exists changes, and so do their associations.[143] When the head of Augustus was removed from its body, the significance of the statue changed, and the power which it symbolised changed sides. It is a legitimate historical task, therefore, to examine who these commemorated men were, and inquire further into their involvement in slave trade or slave labour, for example. Because seeing as monuments are for remembering, looking into them can also reveal what is forgotten.[144]

To Biggar's refutation of Rhodes being a racist, Nkopo responds saying that such attitudes are indicative of the denialism that Biggar, and other people who share his beliefs, have towards the consequences of imperialism and colonialism on the people the Empire touched in the past and present. She says that Biggar's insistence on Rhodes not being racist is a distraction removing the debate from revolving around the bigger picture which she says is white supremacy, racism, and its continuous impact on people's lives.[145] Drayton says that the statue at Oriel College represents and celebrates this, and that it acts as a constant reminder and symbol of white domination.[146] Drayton moves the attention to public spaces and says that in cities all over the world public spaces are constantly being reinvented, renegotiated and repurposed: "things are taken away, they're moved, they're relocated, things are given new facades, things are made ready for the future. And this is essentially what the claim of Rhodes Must Fall is about. It's about Oxford, in fact, confronting."[147] In Drayton's opinion, the statue belongs contextualised in a museum.[148]

To statements such as those of Cannon about removing statues being an erasure of history, Kumi asks in her closing statement whether Rhodes really is history. It is interesting because she questions whether something is history just because the person is deceased, or when we have fully processed the legacy of said person. She asks this because in her opinion, the legacy of Rhodes is not processed well enough and thus the statue of him might have been erected too early.[149] Cannon insists, however, that if we "white-wash" history and remove all traces of inequity and superiority, we cannot learn from our mistakes and move forward because "We must know our history, to know our place."[150]

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[143] Dresser, 2007, 164-165; The British Museum, 2020, 12.00.
[144] Dresser, 2007, 165.
[145] Oxford Union, 2016, 28.58.
[146] Oxford Union, 2016, 34.44.
[147] Oxford Union, 2016, 43.07.
[148] Oxford Union, 2016, 1.30.13.
[149] Oxford Union, 2016, 1.26.09.
[150] Oxford Union, 2016, 1.36.16.

But why does it matter that a person who stands at the High Street in Oxford, who died 120 years ago, legislated discriminatory laws and was racist? The commemorations represent something from the past whose legacy is valued by the community in which they are present.[151] Savage writes about William Dean Howells' opinions on commemoration through monuments, and Howells makes an interesting distinction; it is as necessary to examine the *ideas* that are conveyed through the monuments, as finding out *who* or *what* should be commemorated.[152] As pointed out in the introduction, monuments are not just powerless lumps of stone or metal. Hence, it is definitively important to also look at whose heritage and whose stories are represented through the monuments and examine how they align with the society they exist in now. Especially if one is to understand why some members of society are critical of these monuments.

One of the most used arguments in the statues debate is that we erase history by removing statues or other forms of commemoration.[153] However, history is not necessarily so easily erased. Let us again turn to the Meroë head of Augustus; the act of removing the head of Augustus arguably gave the statue *more* history. The story of the Meroë head changed drastically because of the iconoclasm, the stealing of it, and its new placement. As such, its history was, and is, not erased even though it was removed. If anything, it expanded.[154] This can also work the other way around. A statue erected to celebrate a person whose imperial ambitions benefited the British Empire can likewise change its significance and become a symbol of a nation that does not acknowledge its dark past. Moreover, one can argue, like Qwabe, that a perpetual silence and cultural amnesia is another form of erasing history. By not investigating the connections between a person's philanthropy and participation in slave trade, for example, the person's success is often not linked to slavery. This disassociation renders the person 'clean' and contributes to the myth in which societies and nations see themselves as 'pure'. By not critically assessing commemorations that express a "sanitized self-image" on how nations see themselves, the commemorations, and the narratives in which they exist will contribute to perpetuating silence, forgetting, and to an obscured understanding of the past.[155]

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[151] Rigney, 2019, 381.
[152] Savage, 1994, 127.
[153] The removal of statues was, however, not always synonymous with 'destruction of the past' or vandalism. For example, see pp. 654-655 in Richard Drayton "Where Does the World Historian Write From? Objectivity, Moral Conscience and the Past and Present of Imperialism" (2011).
[154] The British Museum, 2020, 11.10.
[155] Dresser, 2007, 169.

In a The Guardian column Owen Jones writes that the toppling of statues is proof that history is being remembered, not erased, and that every time a new statue falls, new history is being remembered.[156] The statues debate is a testimony to the fact that the past is being remembered, and that people are taught about the past of those who are commemorated in the public spaces. These new understandings of the past do not threaten historical facts but rather the established memorialisation of the past. This is not to be dismissed because memorialisation can create a sense of belonging and identity, and naturally this is meaningful and important for people. These debates occur, then, when "various protagonists of the same community attach different meanings to the same events." The toppling of statues is used as a means to create a space in which one can change the narratives of the colonial and imperial past by removing, rewording, and challenging the established forms of memorialisation.[157][158]

The Racial Consequences of Mr. Churchill

Former Prime Minister Winston Churchill has turned into a complex persona. His legacy as a war hero is still admired, his speeches and sayings are still quoted, and only a couple of weeks ago did I read that someone compared Ukraine's president Volodomyr Zelenskyj to Churchill in a positive manner.[159] Churchill's less agreeable sides, and his less popular politics, have also been emphasised, however, and we will look at one such example here. The Churchill College discussion is part of a campaign of increasing inclusivity in the college community at Cambridge and is chaired by Professor Priyamvada Gopal. The panellists are Professor Kehinde Andrews, Dr. Madhusree Mukerjee, Dr. Onyeka Nubia.

The legitimacy behind the statements made about Churchill in the discussion, are something that I will not comment on because I am not a Churchill scholar. Furthermore, the focus is not to determine whether Churchill was good or bad, but to look at the discussion itself about how to deal with the legacy of Churchill in the 21st century. There are layers to discover in how the lives of the formerly colonised and their descendants have materialised due to Churchill's politics, and the racial consequences those policies have still to this day. As mentioned, it is not a study on Churchill's person or politics per se the reader will find here.

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[156] Jones, 2020.
[157] Otele, 2019, 138-139.
[158] After the debate finished, the audience and the panellists got a chance to give an informal vote on whether Rhodes must fall or not, and the verdict was 245 ayes to 212 noes. In spring of 2021 the decision was made not to remove the statue due to "legal and regulatory advice", but to include a plaque that contextualises Rhodes and the consequences of his colonialism (Oriel College, 2020b). In this case at Oxford, Rhodes did not fall, and to the dismay of Drayton, Kumi, Nkopo and Qwabe, the statue got its own plaque instead.
[159] VG, Eirik Løkke, 4 May 2022, "Ukrainas sak er vår sak".

But rather an analysis of the discussion on the consequences of his politics on British and previously colonised areas' society, identity, and idea of themselves.

Both before and after the discussion was held, the college received backlash for hosting it. Sir Nicholas Soames, Churchill's grandson, writes in his foreword in "'The Racial Consequences of Mr. Churchill': A Review" that the discussion "constitutes [...] a new low in the current vogue for the denigration in general of British history and of Sir Winston Churchill's memory in particular."[160] The negative reactions to the event before and after it was held are testimonies to the unwillingness to broaden the narrative of the past because it is uncomfortable, and because it might lead to groups and organisations having to re-evaluate their relationship to, and views on, Churchill. One thing commented on in particular is the 'imbalance' of representations on the panel. Gopal, the Chair of the discussion, highlights the fact that the scholars who participate in the discussion have different perspectives and expertise to bring to the table in that they come from four different regions of the world and have their own areas of expertise. However, because they are "marked by not being racialized as white", their credentials and their right to speak on the topic have been questioned.[161] Gopal points out the hypocrisy in letting all-white and all-men panels pass without criticism, whereas this discussion with four scholars of colour has met accusations of being unbalanced.[162] Gopal's justification here is warranted if we remember what Evans writes about history writing, and who should be allowed to write whose history. The way I see it, however, is that the 'imbalance' is not necessarily unfortunate for the college's discussion because of bias, ideology, or the 'imbalance' itself, but because it is doomed from the beginning to be criticised for not having more people to challenge the views presented. The discussion is about highly divisive subjects and as such I think it would have better served the aims of the discussion had they included people on the panel that are more pro-Churchill as well. When there is something as easy as 'imbalance' to criticise by those who are critical of the discussion, the focus is instantly moved away from the issues they are discussing and moved to revolve around imbalance; it works like red herrings for the media and Churchill supporters to avoid acknowledging the historical gaps that are trying to be filled in the discussion by the panellists.

Moreover, in Policy Exchange's review of the discussion its authors point out several times that the debate seems to be affected by a lack of research on the panel's side. There is

[160] Soames in Roberts & Gebreyohanes, 2021, 5.
[161] Churchill College, 2021, 08.20.
[162] Churchill College, 2021, 08.20-09.20.

no fault to find on what they present about their own area of expertise (such as the actual racial consequences of Churchill), but when it comes to Churchill's character (which they primarily said they were not going to talk about) it seems as though their knowledge is lacking, which in turn weakens their arguments and their credibility towards the people on the other side of the argument whom they are trying to convince. As rhetorical devices used in attempts to convince, several of the participants make generalisations and historical oversimplifications that are unfortunate for the discussion. Again, when these generalisations and oversimplifications are refuted, by Andrew Roberts in the review for example, the legitimacy of the panellists decreases and the seriousness of the themes that are discussed disappear because the discussion is branded as leftist propaganda. Regarding topics that are as controversial as this one, detail and accuracy are imperative.

In the introduction, Athene Donald, master of Churchill College, says that Churchill is by many, both past and present, seen as a supreme leader during WWII, whose personal qualities helped defeat Hitler. However, following up from that she relates that Churchill's views on race and empire have their own legacies around the world, legacies which are less known and less pretty. Professor Donald stresses that it is important for the college to be open to discussing the 'multifaceted character' of Churchill as well as recognising complex truths and acknowledging difficult realities when it comes to their founder and foundation. Moreover, she relates that the aim of this discussion was to engage accurately on all aspects of the founder, because by better understanding the past, she says, we can "seek to better shape the future".[163] The goal was to confront the narrative that is ingrained in the majority which might make them blind to the racial consequences of the former Prime Minister's politics. It is emphasised more than once, that it is more about examining a national narrative that has emerged around Churchill and the subsequent consequences of the narrative, than his reputation.[164] As part of an ongoing discussion about identity, 'race', heritage, and history in the UK, the college and the panellists find it fitting to discuss Churchill because he is a "symbol of Britain's official view of itself" and because he works as a reference point to those who do not know much about history; he can operate as an entrance to the discussion about British imperialism and colonialism.[165] The overarching question, as Gopal asks in her introduction: "Should commemoration mean unconditional celebration?", and the panellists all bring their own sets of expertise to weigh in on this question.[166]

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[163] Churchill College, 2021, 00.38- 01.38.
[164] Churchill College, 2021, 04.30; 10.00.
[165] Churchill College, 2021, 04.50; 14.35; 26.30.
[166] Churchill College, 2021, 07.01.

One argument used by Churchill's defenders, and of others with critiqued pasts, is that they cannot be judged by the standard of today, because they were a product of their time. This is a challenging argument because it has many layers to it. Gopal says in her introduction that it is not true that Churchill was 'simply of his time', because he was criticised for his views on race in his time as well.[167] But, as mentioned in the introduction, historians today do not generally assume that individuals have unrestricted freedom of choice, but recognise that institutions and mentalities affect people's choices.[168] And so it is difficult to ascertain how isolated these views were to Churchill, or how much he was affected by the institutions and mentalities surrounding him. Moreover, historians Jens Pietras and Jens Aage Poulsen write in their book on history didactics that it is important to acknowledge that people's priorities, values, and ideas are in perpetual change, to make sure that we do not judge too easily the behaviour and mindsets of the past.[169] This is, of course, not to be used as an excuse for every problematic person in history, but rather as a reminder that all people, past and present, are complex and multifaceted, bound to the mentalities of their time. In an interview with The New Yorker, Roberts relates that "the idea of the hierarchy of the races was considered a scientific fact when [Churchill] was a young man. Unfortunately and sadly, it wasn't unusual for someone of his age and class and background to believe these thoughts."[170] As such, Gopal's statement about Churchill not being of his time is not necessarily as uncomplicated as she makes it seem in her introduction.

Professor Kehinde Andrews argues in his contribution that the reason why Churchill is still so popular today, and a 'saintly figure beyond reproach', is because he is the "perfect embodiment of white supremacy".[171] Since these white supremacy politics are still here today, Andrews says, he remains popular. Since Churchill, for many people, is an important part of the narrative they like to tell about themselves and Britain, it means that to undo the myth of Churchill would be to undo the myth of the West, British identity, and narrative, and this is what evokes reactions from people.[172] I both agree and disagree with Professor Andrews. What we disagree on is the idea of Churchill still being popular because of white supremacy politics keeping him relevant and his memory alive. Yes, I too believe that white supremacy thoughts and ideas still exist, and that people of power might have these ideas. But to say that Churchill is popular still because of white supremacy politics today sounds, dare I say,

[167] Churchill College, 2021, 07.45.
[168] Evans, 2018, 138.
[169] Pietras & Poulsen, 2016, 118-119
[170] Roberts in Chotiner, 2021.
[171] Churchill College, 2021, 38.32.
[172] Churchill College, 2021, 38.32; 39.10; 47.20; 49.00.

conspiratorial. However, as discussed in chapter 1 & 2, we can see that people get emotional and react to discussions such as this because Churchill is tightly connected to their heritage and identity, and that an attack on Churchill's legacy seems like an attack on their personal identity. But I do not believe that most people who see Churchill and his legacy as part of their heritage, do so because of a belief in white supremacy. It seems rather like an unfortunate attempt at a generalisation on Professor Andrews' part.

Towards the end of the discussion, they turn their focus over to commemoration and the statues debate. Professor Andrews is the first to speak on this topic and he begins by saying that memorials and statues are not historical artefacts or historical records, because they are raised to celebrate particular things, and to make a statement about the present and what we find acceptable in public spaces.[173] Again, I both agree and disagree with Andrews here. Firstly, statues do absolutely say something about what we accept in our public spaces today, and in doing that it also reveals something about the society in which we live in. However, saying that memorials and statues are not historical records breaks with some of the most fundamental things in historical research. When starting to work with sources in history lessons at school or when studying history at university, one of the first things you learn is that a historical source can act as both a relic and an account of the past. This means that the source can explicitly say something about the past through writing for example, but also that it can say something about society at the time when it was erected. As such, statues can say something about the society we live in now, *and* the society that existed when said statue was erected; one does not exclude the other.

When questioned about the removal of statues, Andrews is in two minds. He says to leave statues of slave traders and 'colonial murderers' be in public spaces makes a statement about the present and what is accepted in there. He observes that taking them down would not be to remove history but to make a statement about what kind of public spaces are wanted in our society. He says, however, that removing statues does not really change anything other than the public spaces themselves, because figures like Churchill represent the logic of today, which is white supremacy. Andrews is saying that ultimately, it seems, the statues are not the problem per se, but rather the institutionalised attitudes connected to white supremacy and racism.[174] Dr. Madhusree Mukerjee says that the statues must come down, but that it can only be done by grappling with what empire actually means, because the statues represent

[173] Churchill College, 2021, 1.01.10.
[174] Churchill College, 2021, 1.01.47.

something that is at the core of British identity.[175] How this is done is, naturally, difficult to determine.

I think it is worth mentioning that even though statues of slave traders or colonisers are allowed to remain in these public spaces, does not directly mean that every person who does not constitute an opposition to the statues worships or idealises said statues. Many people are ignorant to the pasts and consequences of these men, and that is part of a cultural amnesia allowed to fester over decades. Subsequently, the statues do not necessarily represent a society in which these people want to continue living in either. With the growing focus on inclusivity in narratives about empire and colonialism, it is obvious that many people do not want to live in such societies, and consequently these debates and discussions have emerged; "Many people want to know more about the historical figures they are required to admire uncritically."[176] In other words, Donington's writing about the social dialogue that has emerged, surrounding these subjects and structural change, being more important than the actual removal of the statues themselves seems to be ringing true in this discussion as well. In the words of Dr. Onyeka Nubia: "Just the removal of statues doesn't change hearts and minds, doesn't change perspective, doesn't change the institutional nature of racism."[177]

The importance of representation in different disciplines and aspects of our society has increased in the last 50-60 years, and that is the case for commemoration as well. Representation implies dominance and power, and the lack of it implies the opposite. A lack of representation and diverse voices deprives people of the power to speak for themselves, as well as it hides those who lived and died "on the underside of 'empire'."[178] Moreover, it impacts how narratives will look in the future.[179] Listening to those who were previously silenced will add to and change stories of the past, which in turn will change what we perceive as our identity and heritage. This also aids us on the journey of understanding why some feel excluded from public spaces and public debate, because we can learn to better understand that consequences of slave trade and colonialism, for example, are complex, many, and sometimes difficult to see. It can intrude on people's lives differently, ranging from everyday racism and discrimination to intergenerational trauma and racially aggravated violence.[180]

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[175] Churchill College, 2021, 1.03.25.
[176] Gopal, 2021.
[177] Churchill College, 2021, 1.13.17.
[178] Drayton, 2011, 652.
[179] Wurth, 2019, 342; Donington, 2019, 127-128.
[180] Green, 2018, 178; Donington, 2019, 128.

It is necessary to question if it is right that the present and the future are obliged to preserve one set image of the past; "or might the face of the city not be remade to reflect both the silenced voices of the past and the ideas of the public and the citizenship of the present?" asks Drayton.[181] Should those who had power and money to create the narrative about the past be allowed to keep this exclusive access to its construction, and still to this day keep their symbols (statues, street names, building names) of national heritage in the public spaces without examining them? The point is not to erase history or to destroy the past by removing commemorations or examining them, but to renegotiate it into one that is appropriate for a contemporary society. Because, as previously argued, the past is not uncontested, history is not cohesive, and our understanding of heritage changes.[182]

Finally, it is also necessary to discuss to what degree we can judge commemorated people today, based on a society which has changed dramatically in the last centuries and decades. If we believe that the individual throughout history did not necessarily have unlimited free will, we must apply that to those we are investigating as well. Even though both Churchill and Rhodes existed at the same time as people who criticised them for their policies, and their views on race and empire, they also lived in an age where these thoughts were not unique to them. Major changes happened in the world regarding imperialism and colonialism only in the years after WWII, and, as we have seen, memory works slowly.[183] I would argue, however, that in the grand scheme of things it does not matter if the person commemorated did not "understand" what he or she was doing was bad. Their actions, many would agree, are despicable today and since many people feel excluded by the commemorative conventions of their country, and of the public spaces, then that should be acknowledged.[184] We have the power today to do what we want with the commemorations—we can leave them be, or remove them—that is completely up to us.[185] I am not saying, either, that the solution is to remove the statues. But since identity and heritage is renegotiated all the time and nations reimagine themselves, maybe it is time for such negotiations to start. It appears that the times are calling for it.

It is no easy task, and there is no recipe on how to solve it. But it is essential, I think, that these debates about statues, and the overarching debate about identity, heritage, and history are held on both sides of the political spectrum and that they are kept civil. The

[181] Drayton, 2011, 665.
[182] Drayton, 2011, 665; Osborne, 2001, 40.
[183] Rigney, 2018, 253; Satia, 2022, 308.
[184] Dresser, 2007, 165.
[185] The British Museum, 2020, 13.47.

debates and discussions help create new ways of understanding and looking at the past, and so new understandings of who we are emerge. Moreover, the debates are important pieces in the progress of coming to terms with the uncomfortable truths of the past as well as negotiating new social relations.[186] Richard Handler writes in *Commemorations* that "a renewed politics of cultural diversity cannot be built on the old epistemology of identity, no matter whose homogeneous cultural identity is successfully asserted in the end."[187] Memory works slowly, and re-remembering may be even more so. But as remembering is a communicative practice, it also means that it is a good place to start redefining what we mean by 'them' and 'us', and thus maybe obscure the borders between the two.[188]

[186] Handler, 1994, 38; Rigney, 2018, 251.
[187] Handler, 1994, 38.
[188] Rigney, 2018, 253.

CONCLUSION

Lastly, let us turn again to the thesis questions: In what ways are commemorations in public spaces connected to identity and heritage? And if commemorations are important markers of identity and heritage, should this influence how public spaces are used in today's society? As we have seen in the previous chapter, there is an agreement that the commemorations are of secondary concern in the overall public debate about recognising and acknowledging the dark spots of Britain's colonial and imperial past and its consequences today. People from both sides of the debate are unsure whether taking the statues down is the resolution to the problem, while some are determined that they should be removed. Cultural studies deal with contemporary political debate, and that involves looking at the consequences of past actions, and their presence in and influence on the present. This includes investigating past hurts, difficult truths, and acts of forgetting. The results of such an investigation can be fundamental for social change, and they can put a stopper to the narrative of pride and progress.[189]

Commemorations in public spaces are connected to identity and heritage in that they are built on, and emerge from, the myths we tell about ourselves, and the commemorations are a celebration of these myths. They determine how we imagine ourselves and our communities, and they are created out of our understanding and remembrance of the past. They are not based on objective historical facts but rather on the dominating narratives about the past. These narratives have, until the last 30-40 years, exclusively been created by and for the powerful and dominating nations and people, which has led to an exclusion and forgetting of the stories of those who were dominated. In Britain many of the commemorations in public spaces have connections to Britain's colonial and imperial past, and for many who suffered directly or indirectly from the British Empire, these commemorations are a reminder of the injustice that was inflicted upon them, their ancestors, and possibly future generations. Moreover, the commemorations present, for the previously dominated and colonised, a past that is unfamiliar to them. And as the commemorations' presence go unquestioned and non-contextualised, they are testimonies of a society that does not acknowledge this injustice and an unwillingness to come to terms with problematic pasts.

It is necessary to examine these commemorations because by understanding the history that lies behind them, we can better understand why they are subjects of national and international debate, and what the debates are about. The debates are about Britain

[189] Radstone, 2008, 32.

confronting the negative aspects of its empire, and welcoming and acknowledging additions to and critiques of the narratives and myths that have built its cultural and national identity. The examination is also important because it has opened a conversation about what is lost or gained if the statues are removed. As we have seen, a consensus on what to do with the statues is not reached, and people from both sides of the debates are uncertain whether the solution to the problem is resolved by taking the statues down. Moreover, several of the people who participated in the debates included in this thesis have related that the statues themselves are a secondary issue. So why, then, are the statues under scrutiny? For the RMF movement, and other organisations like it, the statues are the emblem through which these debates are held.

The controversies surrounding the statue protests have created a public dialogue wherein empire and racism's presence in Britain have been debated and discussed. The dialogues contribute to the re-remembering and renegotiation of the past so the stories of the silenced can establish themselves and allow people to identify their history amongst the hegemonic narratives. As such, these public spaces have changed function: going from adorning the background to being the centre of public debate. The goal, as the participants of the "must fall" side of the debate stressed, is that by starting the debate about the statues we can ease into confronting the past before going on to have conversations about the bigger structural and institutional problems regarding empire and racism in Britain. Because, like Dr. Nubia said in the discussion: "Just the removal of statues doesn't change hearts and minds, doesn't change perspective, doesn't change the institutional nature of racism."[190]

We do not know what the future is going to look like. What we do know is that a world in which many societies are forced to come to terms with their dark past, and where societies gain more layers as they are becoming increasingly more complex and diverse, we must negotiate and construct new memories and identities which are suitable for those types of societies. The controversies which the debates have created are testimonies to how much work and how difficult this is. Therefore, it is imperative that the debates are not shut down and dismissed—doing so only saves the problem for later. We need to become familiar with other people's memories, identities, and versions of the past so that we can gain understanding and respect towards them. Only then will it be possible to create spaces for discussing, debating, and negotiating the past, and consequently define the future. With the understanding of decolonisation as a means to confront empire, colonialism, history, memory,

[190] Churchill College, 2021, 1.13.17.

and memorialisation, it is also necessary to look at decolonisation as something which connects the colonial past to the postcolonial present and future.[191] The commemorations are evidence of this connection, and the public space can actively function as facilitators for debates about it. Critically examining commemorations in public spaces and the established truths of British decolonisation is a natural aspect of the decolonisation of the 21st century. These debates about commemoration in public spaces are one piece of this puzzle, and this thesis a small contribution to the debates.

[191] Linstrum et. al, 2022, 6.

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IV. APPENDIX

Relevance for the Teaching Profession

There is one main aspect of this thesis that in particular is relevant for the teaching profession and my future as a practising teacher, and that is the relevance of the themes in the thesis for English and history teaching. The overarching core curricula [overordnet del] of the Norwegian school system are categorised into three sections which consist of the core values and principles of Norwegian education, and they are applicable to all instances of education which the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training is responsible for. I would like to talk about points 1.3 and 2.5.2 of the overarching curricula. Point 1.3 is "Critical Thinking and Ethical Consciousness", and it states that for "new insights to emerge, established ideas must be scrutinised and criticised with theories, methods, arguments, experiences and evidence."[192] This thesis presents a challenge to the traditional way of thinking about and understanding the roles of commemorations in our societies. Adapting this knowledge into something suitable for the given target groups will be an example of critically examining established ideas, introducing what may be an alternative way to look at what we understand as truths, and can be used in secondary education. Point 2.5.2 is "Democracy and Citizenship", which is one out of three interdisciplinary themes, and it says that students will be familiar with, and knowledgeable of, "the preconditions, values and rules of democracy, and enable them to participate in democratic processes" after completing their primary and secondary education.[193] Learning about what democracy is and how to participate in it is an important principle in the Norwegian school, and the way I see it, this thesis is about just that. Opening to new interpretations of the past, letting new voices speak up, creating more seats around the table, and recognising and acknowledging other peoples' heritage, identity, and history *is* what democracy is.

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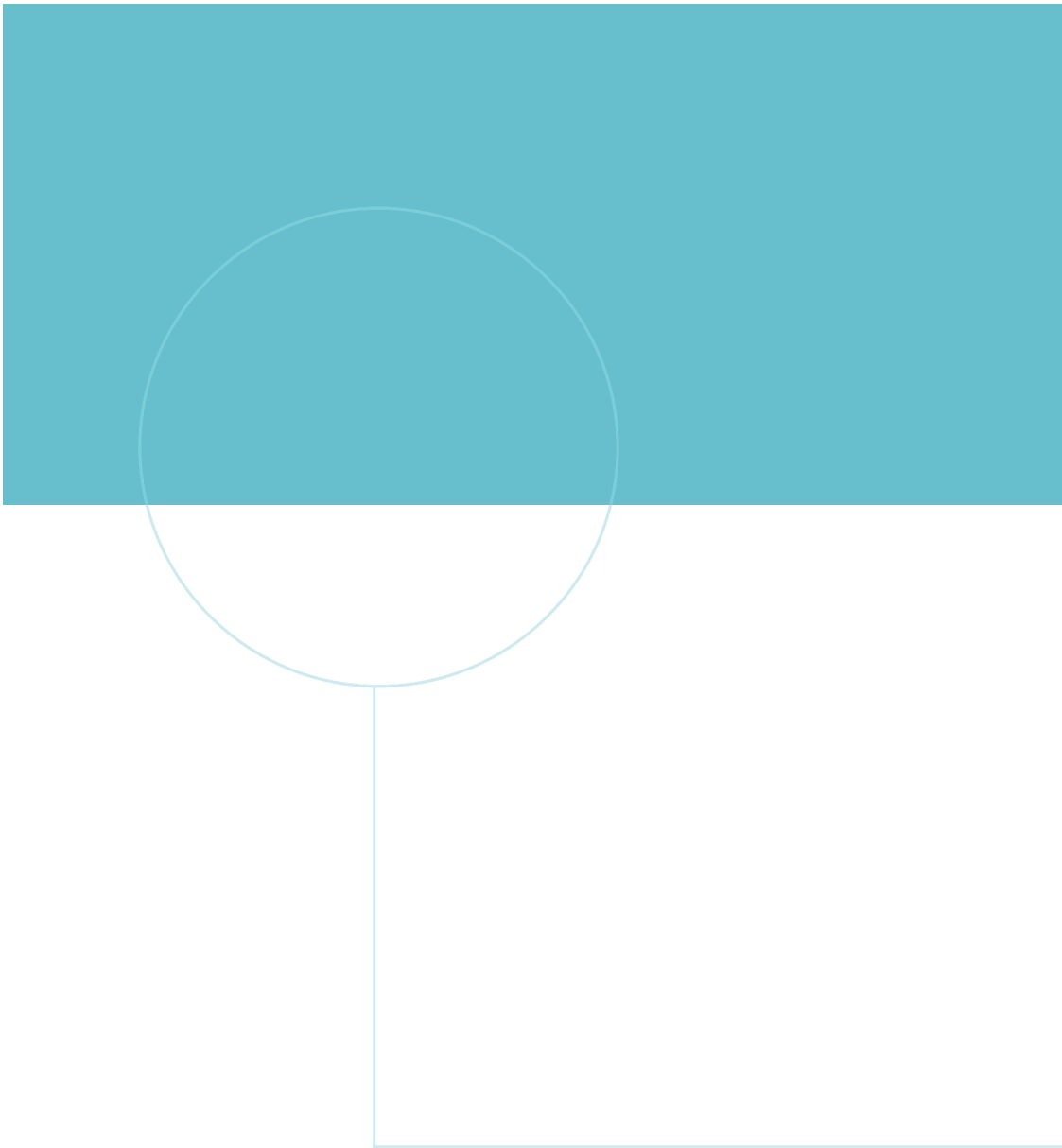

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