Empire and identity

Dieser Vorschlag bezieht sich auf Hanif Kureishi: My Son the Fanatic.

Aufgaben

Der vorliegende Vorschlag enthält in Aufgabe 3 alternative Arbeitsanweisungen.

1 Outline the older and more recent factors that have shaped the author's identity. (Material 1)

(30 BE)

2 Relate the author's sense of her identity to that of different characters in the short story "My Son the Fanatic", taking attitudes towards being British and experiences as immigrants into account.

(40 BE)

3 Choose one of the following tasks:

3.1 "An apology is not about holding British people today literally responsible for the acts of some in the past. When Britain is having to redefine itself, an apology would signal that the British government takes its history, and its moral responsibility to prevent similar future atrocities, seriously." (Material 1)

Taking the quotation as a starting point, assess the importance of an official government apology regarding colonial acts (like the Jallianwala Bagh massacre) for a contemporary definition of British identity.

or

3.2 As a student spending a semester abroad at a British university, you take part in an online discussion about the British Empire sponsored by the University of Exeter's Centre for Imperial Global History.

Taking the statistics (Material 2) into account, write a blog entry discussing whether the British Empire should be a source of pride or shame.

(30 BE)

Material 1

Avani Lal: Violent legacy of Empire forces British Asians into an identity dilemma (2019)

Last month, the 100-year anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Punjab, north India, reignited[1] the bitter debate about Britain's colonial legacy and its responsibility to apologise for past atrocities. Now that the centenary has been and gone, we must remember the struggle for adequate recognition for colonial atrocities is an ongoing and pressing concern.

On April 13 1919, Indian soldiers under the command of the British General Reginald Dyer shot and killed at least 379 colonial subjects[2] who had gathered on the Sikh[3] and Hindu religious festival of Vaisakhi. Britain has not apologised for this atrocity.

This issue dominated conversations around the centenary this year and was a prominent topic in a television documentary marking the anniversary of the massacre. In the documentary, one of Gen[eral] Dyer's descendants showed admiration for their ancestor, angering many viewers. Since then, a letter has circulated on social media from another of the Dyer family to the journalist Sathnam Sanghera, who presented the programme, offering a private apology.

As a young British woman with Punjabi heritage, remembering the massacre and confronting the lack of an apology raised a conflict for me. It was Indian troops – my ancestors – shooting their own, but at the command of a nation that I now identify with. The centenary made me realise that this 100-year-old violence forces me, and other ethnic minority citizens of former colonial powers, into an identity conflict today.

While Mr Sanghera's documentary managed to educate many British viewers on this significant historical event, some noted that the film was more of a journey of self-discovery than a historical piece, and some criticised the film for granting disproportionate airtime to Gen[eral] Dyer's family. Critics also highlighted Mr. Sanghera's westernised pronunciation – even of his own name.

All this, they argued, was evidence of a colonised mind – an outlook where any feelings of cultural inferiority, a legacy of the Empire era, have been internalised[4].

Some Punjabi friends accuse me of the same thing: I pronounce my name "A-var-née", they argue it should be "Uhv-uh-nee". In identifying with this "colonised" pronunciation, I sometimes feel like a traitor to my heritage, to my own British Asian community and to the ongoing process of decolonising our intellectual, social and political worlds. While a reasonable discussion about language should be welcomed, (perhaps Mr Sanghera should have said "Gurdwara[5]" not "Sikh Temple", for example), making individuals feel like outsiders to their own community should not. My heritage is Punjabi and I am proud of this. Yet, because of how I say my name, some claim that I am not Punjabi enough.

For others, I am not British enough either – whatever that means. While at school, I vividly remember being instructed by teachers to explain the Hindu festival of Diwali to my majority-white classmates. This well-intentioned but clumsy move forced me to confront my "otherness" before I was even aware of it. Recently, on a bus, I was told to "go back to where I came from".

Remembering the massacre has forced me to recognise this struggle between the different aspects of my identity.

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[1] to reignite – to make something start burning again; *here:* to reopen the discussion
[2] subject – a person who belongs to a country with a monarch as head of state
[3] Sikh – a northern Indian religion or religious group that is separate from Hinduism and Islam
[4] internalised – made part of what someone thinks
[5] Gurdwara – Sikh word for a place of worship

Something must change. Britain must own[6] its past, good and bad, and understand how that shapes its present and future. Perhaps an apology would be a step towards this. An apology is not about holding British people today literally responsible for the acts of some in the past. When Britain is having to redefine itself, an apology would signal that the British government takes its history, and its moral responsibility to prevent similar future atrocities, seriously.

Rather than glorifying Empire, British schools need to talk about it openly, truthfully and with genuine remorse for events like the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. According to YouGov's[7] 2016 poll, about 44 per cent of UK citizens are proud of Britain's colonial history. But we all need to understand this period of global history better – such an education might help millions of ethnic minority Brits more peacefully reconcile different aspects of their identities.

Finally, the many and varied British Asian communities in the UK, like many other ethnic minority communities, need to accept that individuals will interact with our shared heritage differently and to view this without judgment. Embracing diverse points of view will continue to strengthen our already strong and warm communities.

These changes will not miraculously put an end to the internal conflict I find myself in. However, they may help me peacefully attempt to reconcile the different parts of my identity […].

In the meantime, please call me "A-var-née" because that feels right for this British Asian.

(757 Wörter)

Avani Lal: Violent legacy of Empire forces British Asians into an identity dilemma, in: Financial Times, 23.05.2019, URL: https://www.ft.com/content/5a20fede-7baf-11e9-8b5c-33d0560f039c (abgerufen am 30.04.2022).

Hinweis
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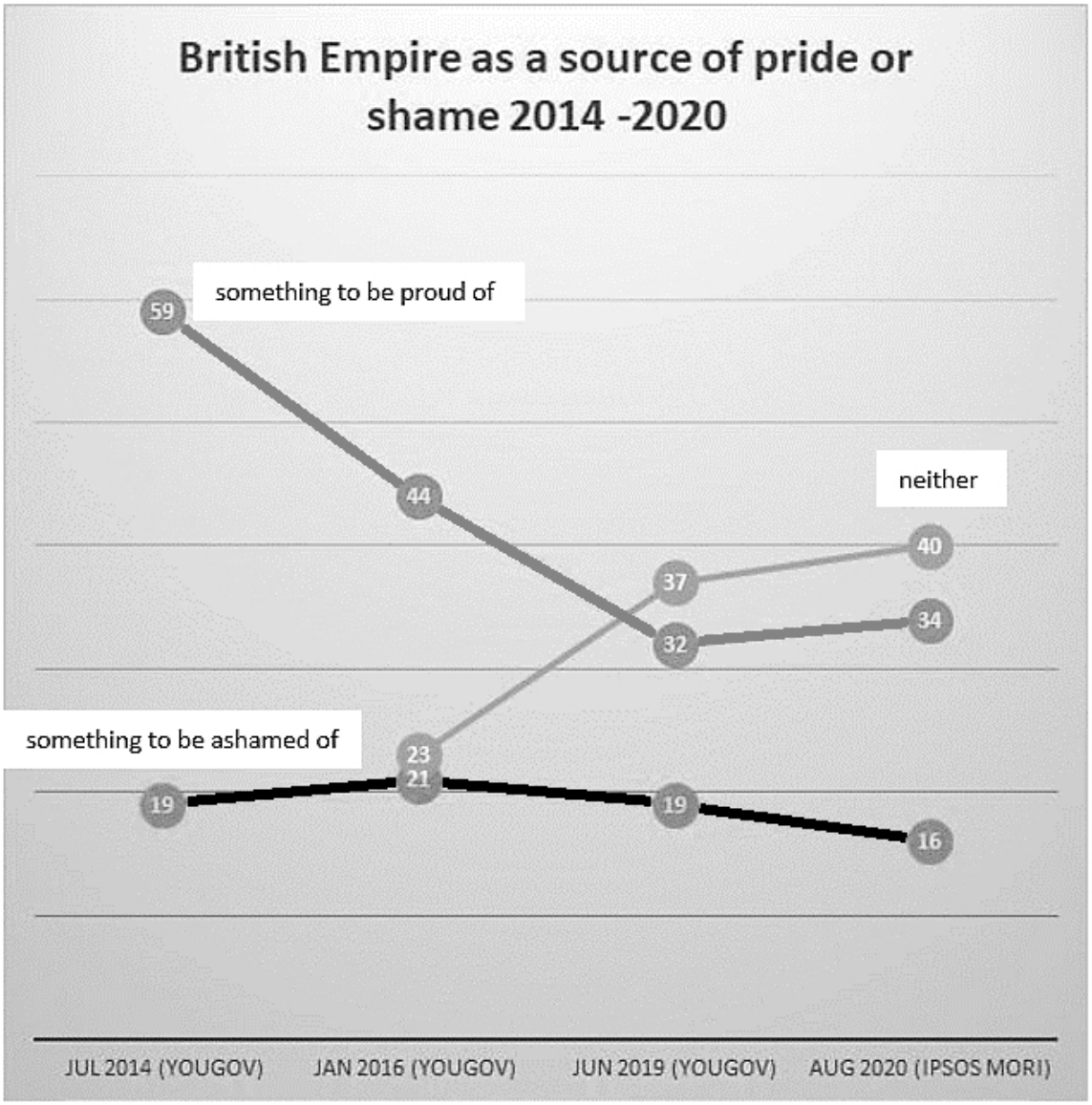
[6] to own – *here:* to accept and be responsible for something
[7] YouGov – data company that carries out surveys of public opinion

Material 2



Andrew Defty: Are attitudes towards the Empire changing?, in: Who Runs Britain?, 08.03.2021, URL: https://whoruns britain.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/2021/03/08/are-attitudes-towards-the-empire-changing/ (abgerufen am 30.04.2022).

Hinweise
Similar to YouGov, Ipsos MORI is a market research company that carries out surveys of public opinion.

Numbers in percent.