# Quotes relevant for ‘Centring Race and Empire’

# Experiences (or not) of Direct discrimination

**Chandra Wickramsinghe**

It might have been a resurgence after the war perhaps, after the end of the war. But again, in those times I remember, I mean quite distinct signs saying ‘No blacks, no dogs’ on the windows of houses to let. So, this was a, an endemic situation in London I think that lasted from the 1930s all the way to the 1940s, and unashamedly, there was no excuses necessary. People were allowed to do that in those days, and... So that kind of external situation that surrounded me added to my sense of loneliness and my sense of isolation from the, from the world.

**Black man**

And so, I was then at a prep school, and then public school from 11 to about 15. But when I was 15, I was adamant that I wouldn't stay on in this school. I mean Britain, you're probably a bit young to have experienced this yourself, but I mean, Britain in the 1970s was a tough place not to be white.

I mean, you know, the overt, overt racism directed at Asians and people of Afro Caribbean origin, was just terrible. And in this school was just, you know, just absolutely ghastly. It's relentless, relentless racism directed at small number of non-white students, and also a lot of antisemitism, which I wasn't …

I mean, in retrospect seems a bit surprising that there was so much antisemitism, but I basically said to my parents when I was about 15, that I just didn't want to stay there anymore, and so I left.

…

**INTERVIEWER:** Absolutely. And, I suppose I'm also struck at that the influence of being in white majority or white minority spaces, and how that (1 word, 17:46), how you were welcomed in an institution or how you felt about it?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, that was a massive, massive, massive thing. I mean, people have never been in a minority, I think don't really understand, you know, what that means, and especially if the majority is quite hostile.

I mean, interestingly, in South Thames, although whites were in a really quite small minority, I just never ever encountered any animosity towards them at all; I never saw the black or Asian kids abusing the white kids.

You know, it was just, I mean, it was harmonious, I mean in the sense that all the racial groups sort of stuck together, basically; the Asians hung out with the Asians and that the blacks with the blacks, and the whites with the whites, but there was no, there was no friction that I could detect. It all seemed perfectly cordial.

That was an eye opener, because I sort of arrived thinking that the majority always tries to beat up the minority; actually, turns out that they don't, it depends on which majority it is.

…

So, it wasn't so much, I mean, race wasn't such an issue that but it was the suspicions of homosexuality were enough to, you know, for you to get, to have a very, very rough time. I mean, I was and am straight, so that didn't really affect me.

….

I think it's also, I mean, I think there's still bias against people from working class backgrounds, it's still, I think there's still bias against women. And I think there's still bias against people from ethnic minorities. I mean, I don't think all of that is sort of magically disappeared.

I think there's sort of greater consciousness of it, and certainly greater lip service to it, and perhaps, in some cases serious attempts to address it. But I wouldn't say that it's all perfect now.

…

And that, again, was a very, very kind of interesting experience because if that was a time when there were very few black players, the Arsenal team was all white and there were a couple of teams in the country with black players and they had, the abuse of black players was just incredible.

**South Asian man**

And although as comprehensive school it was streamed, and I that I remember being in the upper stream, but not particularly excelling, except at some subjects. But race was more of an issue at secondary school, there was quite a lot of bullying around race and so on.

…

INTERVIEWER: (2 words, 38:11) and perhaps I'll come back to that and ask you about your future plans. But I just wanted to touch on something you mentioned that because you talked about being one of very few ethnic minorities earlier in your career, and I wondered if you could reflect on what it's been like negotiating a majority white environment and holding a position of authority in that space?

PARTICIPANT: So, I haven't found it a huge problem, and I'm conscious that, you know, having a first from Oxford and having had a fairly conventional educational background, from at least university onwards. So, Oxbridge is kind of regarded as a natural route to the bar, and so on.

So, I'm conscious that I don't come from a background which makes entry to the bar difficult apart from money. So, one of the issues when I entered the profession was financing because there was very little support, so I had to be quite resourceful about financing entry to the profession, but the profession has become much better at giving scholarships and so on, so that people from less advantaged backgrounds have a chance of making it to the bar.

So, I’m conscious that background of having a first from Oxford, being in a really good set of chambers, which then appears at the bottom of court documents and so on, it's a slight leg up. So, when you appear in court, judges will know to be in my chambers, you'd have to be pretty bright.

So, I have a feeling that I've been slightly insulated from the kind of things that other ethnic minority barristers, operating in different fields have experienced. So, in the criminal bar, one has heard horror stories of like female black barristers, being told by judges or court, ushers and so on that they're sitting in the wrong place, assuming that they're a defendant rather than the barrister.

I've never had any experiences like that. I operate in quite a rarefied sphere, where a lot of my work would have been as a junior appearing in, behind a more senior QC in those days, KC now, or it would have been appearing in the commercial court, which is a very specialist forum; there are only 12 judges in the commercial court.

They would all come from, by large from a small number of specialist commercial sets, they would all know my chambers, they'd know more senior members of my chambers; any of us appearing in that court without a QC in front of me, they would know my chambers, even if they didn't know me personally.

And then after a while, they'd know me personally, because I was appearing in their courts, day to day. So, I've had quite a rarefied experience. I've haven't experienced racial discrimination and prejudice from judges, or clients, because our clients tend to have very professional solicitors who don't have a particular, you know, haven't experienced the sorts of things you hear in the criminal bar where clients don't want a black barrister or a brown barrister.

Our clients will be top law firms, which will look for talent; if you're in my chambers, it comes with a kind of badge of quality, and if a QC as recommending you, there's never really been an issue around colour. So, I'm very conscious that I've had a privileged background, professionally, of having, once you're into a top set of chambers, there's a real leg up.

So, I’m not probably a very good person to speak to in terms of the wider experience of the more general bar and criminal bar, which I think people, barristers have had a rough time sometimes.

**South Asian man**

Black and white boys were – they valued each other for being good at the same things: football, fighting and chatting up girls. And the Asian boys were regarded as useless at all those three things and therefore were at the bottom of the racial hierarchy.

…

I mean I did experience some racism, but that wasn’t a major feature of how I related to people or how I thought people related to me.

**South Asian Woman**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Interesting. Do you have any memories of that move?

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Yes, I hated it. I absolutely hated it, so when we were in India, I went to one of the top private schools, I suppose it's the equivalent of Eton or Harrow here, at the time. I had a very different way of life, lived in a very, very big house, with servants, we each had our own maids, we had a chauffeur, we had cooks, we had cleaners, we had our own nannies, my brothers and I, and came over here, and found life very harsh, very cold, and wanted to go back after two weeks.

**PARTICIPANT 1:**I thought we'd come on a holiday, and I wanted to go back home. Then when we came here, which was 1964, my brother, who's a year younger than me, and I, we were the only non-white children in the whole of the primary school. And that was very difficult, and long before Asians were coming into the country. So, we were really considered exotic, and a minority. And at the time, I didn't realise, but a lot of racism.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Okay, and that wasn't something you were aware of at the time?

**PARTICIPANT 1:** I don't think I was aware of it. I think I was made to feel different. So, I had long hair, and people would always be pulling my plaits, so I made my mother cut my hair. And when we used to go swimming, which was part of the curriculum, and my teachers would say, Rena, make sure you have a good shower, because we don't want the water to get dirty.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Oh, my gosh.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** So, all the children would laugh. So that's what I had.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah, those memories of racism from teachers and students.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Actually, probably more from teachers, the teachers were worse, I think.

…

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah, very human, the teachers and the students that have benefitted and learned from that process. And I suppose I might come back to asking, excuse me, about you becoming a dame. One of the things I wanted to ask, because I think you talked about this in terms of recruitment and your education, certainly, but how did you negotiate holding a position of authority in a majority white environment? I'm curious about that. Was that ever an issue?

**PARTICIPANT 1:** How did I feel holding a position of authority in a white environment?

**INTERVIEWER 1:** In a majority white environment. In terms of the schools you worked in, and later in your senior positions, working with government.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** I've never thought about it. I suppose because I was so confident in myself, in what I believed in, I didn't see it as an issue. I wasn't scared by it, I wasn't frightened by it. I relished it, and I didn't see myself as the person with the authority. So, for example, when I was chairing the Primary Heads Reference Group, I just saw myself as being one of the group, but I had a role to play. So, I don't think I'm any better or any worse. And even when I was made, which, by the way, my husband didn't believe that I was going to be made a dame, and my husband's a republican, so he didn't actually come with me for the ceremony.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Oh dear.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Our son flew in from Geneva, but my husband refused to come. So, he's got his own values and principles, which is absolutely fine. Even then, if I was being really honest with you, I'd say that there were people far more deserving than I, that should have been made a dame. But I think it's about who knows you. And if I'm also honest with you and know a little bit about how the honour system works, then our daughter is in the civil service, I won't tell you which department, but she did say, but mum, unless a minister approves... damehoods and knighthoods are never given without ministers’ approval. So, the committee can make recommendations, but ultimately, the ministers need to. Now David Cameron knew me, Michael Gove knew me, Nick Gibb knew me.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** And I was brown, and I know you have to have a certain number of females, non-whites and so on. So not being cynical, being realist, that year, another year, I might have been given an OBE. I don't know, and sometimes people say, you're short selling yourself, which I might be too, but I do think it's about people who know you, which comes back to networks as well. People far senior to me in government knew of my work, had been to visit my school, knew what I was doing, knew of my reputation, knew of my track record and suppose that's how I got it. But in terms of authority, I don't see myself as an authority figure. I do see myself as someone trying to influence change. That matters more to me than being an authority.

**South Asian Man**

**INTERVIEWER:** Yes, that's a big adjustment. Yeah. I mean, you mentioned that your parents migrated from India. Did your Indian heritage ever – did you ever have to negotiate any challenges from that in terms of holding a position of authority in in what I would assume are white majority spaces?

**PARTICIPANT 1:** No, not really. No. I don't think I did. My children don't, and my grandchildren don't. But my children have all married non-Indian wives. The grandchildren have yet to do so, they have yet to marry anyone. I wish they'd get on with it!

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, so, yeah. It's been a positive experience in terms of encountering any racism in society.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** No, no. I didn't. I think – no, that's that may be just – I don't know. I was too busy to worry about that sort of thing, right. I was too busy with A – getting on with my work and B – enjoying myself.

…

**PARTICIPANT 1:** There was a study done some years ago, not that long ago, by an academic in Manchester, and it was about selection of doctors for higher medical training, right? Yes. And they had the identical curriculum. Identical CVs for people with Indian names, subcontinent names, and those with English names. They both had [missed] [00:05:21]. And they showed, in fact, there was a major selection by basic bias there. It was published in the BMJ right. Yeah. You can look that up. But I've never found that.

**INTERVIEWER:**

So that wasn't your experience that sense of discrimination based on your name?

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, that's interesting. Yeah, no, I've certainly I've heard of a number of those studies where particular ethnic minorities are excluded or relatively excluded from career opportunities.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Yes, well, I haven't been, but I hope that doesn't disappoint you.

**INTERVIEWER:** No, no, not at all. I'm happy to hear that your experience was positive. And I think it's also important not to – part of the value of interviews is to draw out idiosyncrasies, and you know, the complexity of people's lived experience. So there isn't really one narrative of how that should go.

# Imperial experiences

**Kyffen Williams**

But you grew up being very conscious of empire then, did you?

Well I had so many relations who were in the Indian Civil Service and things like that. And the Empire was, when I was brought up it was such a powerful thing, I mean you opened the atlas and there was the British Empire red blazoned across the pages. You were very conscious that Britain was the top country really in the world, it's very odd, it was.

**White man**

**INT: Yes. One quick question I would be interested in your thoughts considering your background you know you will have noticed that there’s quite a lot of discussion publically at the moment about the Empire and I’m interested in your thoughts on whether you think that the sort of re-evaluation in a sense that we should be more upfront facing the negativity brought by the Empire and that it’s something that we should perhaps feel ashamed of as a nation. You know I’m just sort of interested in whether you feel that’s overblown and unhelpful or something that you subscribe to.**

RES: Well I don’t necessarily subscribe to it if there’s one thing that makes me grind my teeth it is people complaining about academics rewriting history it’s just what academics do all the time they don’t get to be a master of history by repeating what your predecessors have said. So you know I have no problem about reassessments of if you like the imperial experience. I mean fortunately for me in some ways my personal experience is pretty positive because my parents were educated they were both trained teachers. My father was Director of Education in Somaliland and then in Uganda and he wasn’t putting [unclear 01:10:09] in concentration camps or shooting demonstrators and all that sort of thing. His job was to educate Africans and he did it to the best of his ability. My mother was very much engaged in the job of she was particularly interested in the status of women both in Somaliland where she set up the first girls school in our garage and in Uganda where she’s a leading light of the Uganda Council of Women. So I don’t think we should forget that nor indeed should we forget of course slavery and all that. And we involved people if it was [unclear 01:11:15] in two world wars. So you know in a very mechanical way I have a balanced view on the one hand this and on the other hand that.

**South Asian man**

**INTERVIEWER:** That's interesting that Oxford's recruiting, or Oxbridge’s recruitment has also changed, and that's reflected-. And so, the next question, we're interested in your view of the British Empire, and more particularly, what's your assessment of the cultural re-evaluation of empire at the moment?

**PARTICIPANT:** So, I guess, I fear it's gone too far. I fear there's a case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, and I have really mixed views about the British Empire. I broadly take the view that it was a force for good overall, but it had lots of, obviously, lots of negative consequences, too.

Broadly speaking, you know, the spread of democracy, of professionalism in the civil service; so, the Indian civil service was one of the great things that the British Empire bequeath to India. So, despite all the layers of corruption in India, one thing which has always functioned really well, and maybe it's been overly bureaucratic, sometimes, but the Indian civil service function very well.

And that really was a legacy of empire. Democracy was a legacy of empire that has survived in India, despite all the problems. But it's complicated, because obviously didn't survive in Pakistan. But I think India was the inheritor much more than Pakistan, of the positive aspects of empire.

So overall, I think it was a force for good. Obviously, there’s a slight sense of wounded pride, being from an Indian background and being colonised, and so on. But I think there's a danger in saying that everything was wrong and negative, and so on. I don't think that's inaccurate in terms of the overall legacy of the British Empire.

So, I have complicated views about the British Empire. It's not as nuanced, I guess. And I wouldn't be here, I wouldn't. I love this country; I love being part of this country. I think it's a brilliant country, I wouldn't be here but for the British Empire, and I have a complicated relationship with it.

**INTERVIEWER:** No, that's interesting, that sense of both wounded pride, but also, you are here because of that history, and happy about being here. So that …

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes, and also, as a historian, I do take objection to some of the inaccurate rewriting of history. I'll just give you one small example, I went to see my daughter in Edinburgh, and there's a big statue of Lord Donbass in St. Andrew’s square in Edinburgh.

And it simply focuses on the fact that he delayed legislation to abolish the slave trade in Parliament. And actually, if you look into his background, it's really nuanced and complicated, and one of the reasons he did that was he was part of a compromise movement. And the calculation, if you read some accounts, was that it was very unlikely for pure abolition ever to get through Parliament at that point.

So, the compromise that he brokered, was designed to ensure a degree of abolition, but not total abolition, but to get progress in reducing slave traffic. But that is just portrayed, there's a kind of little plaque up the local council in Edinburgh has put up and it just portrays a negative, one-sided view of him, totally devoid of nuance or context.

And that is something I object to about some of the rewriting of history. There's been too much of a guilt trip around empire, I feel it's gone too far. And as with all things that, I guess, there'll be a backlash, and it will eventually settle at some equilibrium.

# Views on empire

**White man**

**INT: So here's another one, these are not small questions. Thinking about the Empire, British Empire, do you think it's something that we should be ashamed of, do you think that there's any sort of redeeming features that we should be proud of?**

RES: So not a historian, mathematician. I'm not sure that shame really works you now it's before our time. I think should still be keeping conscious, we should understand it much better than we do. You know Britain is one of those powerful countries in the world, with the CTAT, Security Council and all that, and it's nuclear weapons because of the Empire. People that want to look back to the good old days when, what does that actually mean. That means Empire and being rich on the backs of slavery, and no that isn't a good thing that's a bad thing. So it was totally appalling what we did to whole countries and its people and the impact of that lives with those countries now and this is a complicated subject obviously, but it plays into issues of race today and will in the future. God you know, it's not just us, it's not just our Empire but it's our one as well.

**INT: I mean everybody's thinking about these things at the moment, the cost and statue –**

RES: As a sign of a – yes, I didn't really know anything about Empire, really because I stopped studying history at the age of 16 for my GCSE O Level I was doing the Middle East, I think and something else, certainly not slavery or – I remember learning that the British set up the first concentration camps in the Boer War when I was about 55, going round a museum as a permanent secretary actually so [00:25:05] oh Christ. So what people are not taught, they're taught about the second World War about three times at school aren't they about how we beat the bloody Nazis, but people don't understand just how much destruction we caused in the world and what its impact is still today and yes so and also, you only get to be you know rich without having to work on the backs of other people, there it is.

**White man**

**INT: I mean, I’m sure you have thoughts on it based on your, your experiences in Africa in particular, but we are interested in people’s opinion of the empire. And I suppose the sort of re-evaluation culturally that’s going on at the moment in Britain about the empire, and I’m just sort of interested in your sense of it. You know, do you think it’s something that in general you know, you and us as a society should be ashamed of, or is it something we should be proud of, or is it neither?**

RES: My views have changed over the course of my life. So when I was young and being brought up by a family that was strongly in favour of empire, somewhat racist. Certainly, what’s the word? Patronising. That was what I grew up with so those were my attitudes, in the way it happens. I then rejected those attitudes and then went to work in Africa deliberately with a different framework, saying to myself, the empire is now finished, completely gone like the Roman empire, or Genghis Khan, or anything else. No, I think any empire was evil, I think. American economical imperialism is evil. I’ve been to China and I think that’s a very dangerous place. I’ve been to the Philippines.

So, yes, I have experience of empire and I don’t like it, and therefore, no, I don’t feel ashamed of it because I’m not sure, I mean the past is the past. But I do feel that we have something major to correct and try and sort of- People’s attitudes, and particular attitudes to ethnicity obviously. But attitudes [unclear 00:57:16]. So, yes, so, not shame but a need for things to change. And I think they are changing slowly. I mean compare with 20 years ago, we left the UK in 2000 and lived abroad for 20 years. We came back in 2020. So I had the opportunity to compare the Britain I’d left with the Britain I’d come back to.

**INT: Yes, interesting.**

RES: And some of it was much worse. But I had the feeling that at least attitudes to race, gender, class, money, at least they were being recognised now, which 20 years ago they were sort of shoved under the carpet, I think. Taken for granted.

**White man**

**INT: So another one you might remember from the survey which is obviously very topical at the moment is about the Empire. We’re just interested in the re-evaluation of the Empire that’s going on and how people make sense of this and whether basically to boil it down to your sense of the British Empire is something that we should be more proud or ashamed of or neither really?**

RES: I not the wrong person to ask in that I’m anti-historian. I look forward and not backward. I rarely look back. I don’t quite understand this obsession with the past. That’s obviously me because most people do seem to understand it. So there’s something disproportionate about me. The football results are more important to me than history etc. At one extreme I hate all the apologising that’s going on. It’s complete nonsense. I like the analysis and I get if you do look backwards, good analysis is important. I think analysis explanation deciding that people were ill-judged, criminals, devious whatever; it’s perfectly good if you’re interested in history and that’s what history is all about. It’s about situations and trying to learn for the future but apologising all the time. What the hell is that all about?

When I have a serious case in the NHS and we do something really horribly wrong in Croydon to some patient, the last thing I want to do apologise. I want to tell them we shouldn’t have done it and that we’re going to learn from the mistake and we going to make sure it doesn’t happen to somebody else but apologies are not going to help them. I’m exaggerating [00:50:00] but of course you have to apologise but I do think it’s overblown [unclear 00:50:07] attitudes.

**White man**

**INT: Yes. Another very big one, so you'll obviously be aware that there's kind of lots of debate about the empire now and a sort of re-evaluation of the British empire. I'm just sort of interested in your sense of that and whether you think the empire is something to be ashamed of or whether you think actually it should be a source of pride or neither really. Sort of when you hear these sorts of debates, I'm just interested in what your sort of overarching thoughts are.**

RES: I suppose it's- I mean, I don’t take a great deal of pride in it. It seems to me it is- I mean, it's exploitative and may help make the country rich at the expense of other things it leaves and has left, I mean we tried to reconcile with an awful [s/l legacy 00:54:55]. But I've always felt that.

But there's a person who I used to have chats with who teaches, who is now retired just about, so you know. I don't know if you came across someone called [s/l John Irish 00:55:11] who's an imperial historian. But John always told me that he went out to Africa and saw the constancy of colonialism, which is why he didn’t, as he would otherwise have done, gone into public administration for the civil service, and perhaps [unclear 00:55:34]. He became a historian of colonialism, and he said in order to be able to chronicle the misdeeds of the past, and I think there's something in there. I mean, it's a colonising country, but then, I mean, my being British is by happenstance, not in its-

**INT: And so, I mean, that’s interesting. I mean, do-**

RES: I thought [s/l I would have a 00:56:07] gentle relationship with the country.

**INT: Right. And do you think that that plays into the sort of sense of the extent to which, you know, both a sense of colonial guilt on an individual level but also a sense that there's a limit to how much a current generation should be held accountable for the deeds of our ancestors?**

RES: No, I don't see why we should be held accountable. I don’t think we should. I mean, it seems to me it’s produced no- I mean, we talk about loopholes in this country about may [unclear 00:56:44] through their experience. So, yes.

**White man**

**INT: Yes. One quick question I would be interested in your thoughts considering your background you know you will have noticed that there’s quite a lot of discussion publically at the moment about the Empire and I’m interested in your thoughts on whether you think that the sort of re-evaluation in a sense that we should be more upfront facing the negativity brought by the Empire and that it’s something that we should perhaps feel ashamed of as a nation. You know I’m just sort of interested in whether you feel that’s overblown and unhelpful or something that you subscribe to.**

RES: Well I don’t necessarily subscribe to it if there’s one thing that makes me grind my teeth it is people complaining about academics rewriting history it’s just what academics do all the time they don’t get to be a master of history by repeating what your predecessors have said. So you know I have no problem about reassessments of if you like the imperial experience. I mean fortunately for me in some ways my personal experience is pretty positive because my parents were educated they were both trained teachers. My father was Director of Education in Somaliland and then in Uganda and he wasn’t putting [unclear 01:10:09] in concentration camps or shooting demonstrators and all that sort of thing. His job was to educate Africans and he did it to the best of his ability. My mother was very much engaged in the job of she was particularly interested in the status of women both in Somaliland where she set up the first girls school in our garage and in Uganda where she’s a leading light of the Uganda Council of Women. So I don’t think we should forget that nor indeed should we forget of course slavery and all that. And we involved people if it was [unclear 01:11:15] in two world wars. So you know in a very mechanical way I have a balanced view on the one hand this and on the other hand that.

**Asian woman**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah. Absolutely. And we have another big question for you. So, I'm interested in your view of the British Empire, and particularly, what's your assessment of the cultural re-evaluation of empire that's going on in the UK at the moment?

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Yes, it's interesting how painful it is. It's interesting how... I don't come from a society that was directly impacted by empire. So, I don't have any personal societal roots in the empire, or investment in empire. So, I speak as a disinterested, impartial outsider. So, what strikes me, and what struck me when I came to England, was how country specific an awful lot of reference points were.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** And this struck me as an eight-year-old. And it struck me because I came from a society in which [01:11:33] [Missed] and Napoleon was a hero, to a society in which Napoleon was a villain, and it was very interesting to me to see cultural [01:11:42] [Missed], right from the get-go at the age of eight. So, what's interesting to me is how incredibly acute the division in the discourse is.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** The re-evaluation is being so painful for everyone, so that the acknowledgment... there's a kind of flagellation [01:12:09] [Missed] on one side, which is just a feeling that people are not able to yet find any kind of common understanding about what empire meant. Because the things that were good, the things that were bad, the things that were restrictive, the things that were enabling, the things that...

**PARTICIPANT 1:** And when a society has a lot of power in that way over another society, it leaves a very long and weird trail. So, I watch with some interest, without a dog in the game. There's quite a lot of working out to be done, isn't there, to the point in which can feel comfortable with their joint narrative.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yes, absolutely. It's very polarised currently.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Polarised, and weirdly polar, it doesn't take very long for people to start manifesting a discomfort.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah, and it's interesting to have that perspective of someone who doesn't feel a connection to that legacy of being colonised or being a coloniser, just being an observer in that sense.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Yeah, I mean, Iran finished colonising people a couple of thousand years ago, so... Got beaten back by the Greeks.

**South Asian man**

**INTERVIEWER:** I’m interested in your view of the British Empire and the cultural re-evaluation at the moment.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** So I am definitely biased, because I come from a colony and I have memories of that time. And my feeling is that there was a net plus and benefit to the British Empire because I saw order and organisation and management. I’m not saying that everybody was treated well, blah blah blah, but that was there.

And these people, subjects of the statues they want to get rid of, above all, they were managerial emissaries into places they thought were completely “primitive and disorganised”. So they say a mission for themselves and they were trapped by their mores. And I’m neutral about it, whether I think that – a person isn’t good or bad or evil, that’s how it was, damn it.

Leaving aside slavery, which doesn’t take brains to say it’s evil. But the rest was a kind of “Onward Christian Soldiers” type thing. They were just doing their bit. And there was a fair amount of skulduggery, yes, and the East India Company was not innocent, yes, but by and large they added an ingredient to those societies which didn’t exist.

And that includes to India, which I kind of know a bit more about these days. So I can’t see why it’s become a fetish about statues. I just think – leave it alone. It’s a bit like the Confederate statues. OK, so move them into a museum or something, if that’s what you want to do.

There is one differentiator. Which is not about Empire, it’s about those that you would regard were cruel or evil, and made their money that way. And I regard cruelty and evil behaviour as those of the slave trade and those who supported them, and that’s why I think the Confederate statue business is quite different to ours.

Unless you can identify people who were avidly slave owners and were doing seriously evil things, then I can’t see it’s such a big issue. I think the Bristol statue one was probably justified, because the guy was running an industrial scale slave trade, and doing that sort of thing. Why would we laud such an individual?

But the others were emissaries of their culture, in their field, a sort of Dr Spock of their Star Trek and they weren’t always – they weren’t heroes or heroines, but OK, whatever.

**South Asian woman**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** That's interesting. Something that actually links with you talking about going on that weekend away, and that focus on history. So, one of the questions we asked on the survey was, we were interested in peoples' views of the British Empire. And more particularly, your assessment of the cultural re-evaluation of the empire at the moment. Do you have any reflections on that? The current cultural moment.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** On the British Empire?

**INTERVIEWER 1:** On the British Empire, but also the current reassessment that's going on about that history in the UK.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Okay, let's start at the beginning. So, my view of the British Empire, being brought up in the Commonwealth, in India, I always thought it was a great thing. I always looked up to it. I remember going up and seeing the Queen in 1964, or 63, and because of my father's position, we were right at the front. So, I could almost have touched the Queen. And I remember thinking, "what a beautiful lady."

**PARTICIPANT 1:** So, I had very positive views, and then coming over to England, that was all part of, it was okay to be here, even when I was going through those horrible feelings and experiences, because we were part of the British Empire. And then, getting the damehood, and the fancy language you get, the certificate and everything, that felt quite good. And I remember waiting for my name to be called, and becoming quite emotional, quite overwhelmed, and quite proud of being British.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** And thinking, my god, all this pageantry, this pomp and ceremony, we do it so well. This is just amazing. And so, I was very proud of all of that. In terms of now, I feel very saddened by it, but in some ways, Britain has brought it on itself, because they haven't moved with the times fast enough. And certainly about slavery, I understand all that, and I accept it, but I don't think the statues should be removed and destroyed. I think they're part of history, and they represent a moment in time, which should be remembered, so that we don't go back to it.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** I think the only time that I felt anti-British was when I visited the Taj Mahal, and when we went into the mausoleum, right at the bottom, which is being sealed off to tourists, there's this beautiful ivory screen, with a diamond pattern, and there were holes. And I asked one of the tour guides, "why are there holes in this?" And he said, "This screen was studded with jewels, with diamonds, with rubies, sapphires, emeralds, and the British, before they left, came and pried every single one of them out." And that really hurt, and that's the time that I felt embarrassed about having the British passport. But other than that, I've been proud of it.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** But in terms of what's happening now, we're not Great Britain anymore. Things have changed. We have a history which shouldn't be forgotten. But we need to move with the times. We are the laughingstock of the world, let’s be honest, how can we be Great British, and have an empire. There is no [01:19:00] [Missed]. And we haven't done very much to endear ourselves to other people. There is this attitude of "we're better than everyone else." And that comes back to your question about authority, and I assume that I have that authority, because to me, I'm the same [01:19:15] [Missed]. I might have different knowledge, and different position, but that doesn't make me better. And I think that the thing with the British Empire is that it is an outdated concept now. We're not great anymore because of what we've been through as a country. And I think that since Boris Johnson came, we lost that privilege.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah, okay, so, if we're writing about the idea of an elite, and if we're drawing on who's who, and there's this ancient institution, to make sure that we're reflecting the migratory history and ethnic diversity of who might constitute that?

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I think that's a really important observation. And also, it kind of feeds into Britishness, which doesn't end at the borders of this island. It's a global...

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Yes, exactly.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** And that still resonates on who has a claim on Britishness.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** And what is Britishness anyway.

**Black man**

**INTERVIEWER:** I suppose, so another question we've been asking, which perhaps could relate to that. We've been asking people about their view of British Empire, but more particularly, your assessment of the cultural re-evaluation of empire at the moment?

**PARTICIPANT:** Oh, well, I think it hasn't gone, it hasn't gone nearly far enough. I think that the re-evaluation of the Empire is long, been long delayed; it's about time that it happened. And I think there's still a lot of sentimental claptrap about the Empire, and a failure to face up to its realities.

And we saw this with the Queen, all that stuff about the queen. And she was the monarch during the Empire, at a time when there was bloody repression happening in many countries, including my own, where the British set up concentration camps in Kenya and tortured people in large numbers.

And this was during her reign. They're not prepared, I'm not blaming her for it, but I'm just saying that all of this was just sort of invisible in all the stuff that we were hearing about, life and times of the Queen. And I think the young, I mean, the students I teach are very, very interested in all that.

And they think it's really important. And so yeah, so I think my answer to your question is a serious re-evaluation is what is needed, and not a half-baked sort of sentimentalised re-evaluation.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah. And I'm struck how that relates to your personal family history as well, or the geography that can you grew up in?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah. I mean, that's right. I mean, I was born in 1961, so Kenya was still a colony in 1961; I don't have an experience of the colonial era, but my parents certainly did and their parents certainly did.

And well, you know, there was a certain amount of unpleasantness, should we say, that went along with being the colonised. And when people talk about the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, I mean, I think of it as the war of national liberation, whereas the conceptualization from this end is, well, I (2 words, 1:15:28) insurgency or terrorism or whatever, however they want to describe it.

But it was a war of liberation, as far as I can see. So, that sort of thing needs to be, needs to be addressed much more, much more squarely.

**Black man**

**INTERVIEWER:** But very astute point, yeah. That’s really fascinating. And I suppose actually, I mean considering that you spent time in Bristol this next question may resonate in particular. But one of the things we’re asking is about interviewees’ view of the British empire, but more particularly your assessment of the cultural re-evaluation of empire at the moment. Yeah, just interested in your reflections on that.

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, I mean I think it’s, it has to be, it has to be opened up and reparations made. There is no way in which we can carry on as we are. And, you know, it absolutely galls me that the Queen Consort is even thinking about having the Kohinoor diamond on their head. You know, these are the sorts of things where, you know, when you actually live in India for six years, and this was pre-Modi, there is a very clear feeling that the colonial aspects are still too prominent, and the attitude is still one of benign patrionism.

It’s paternalistic, it’s not what is needed. So, you know, every time a Commonwealth country becomes independent I raise a salute and am pleased to see this happen. And I think, you know, that we, again it’s hard for someone like me to feel that empire was anything other than an absolute travesty. And again I think the steps that are being taken, albeit more symbolic than real, you know, Elgin Marbles, yeah, Benin Bronzes, yeah. These are tiny, tiny little steps.

And I think the sort of reparations that are needed are much deeper. And again it’s one of these things where it’s all tied up with monarchy and the ways in which Britain has made its money and continues to make its money.

**South Asian man**

**INTERVIEWER:**

So another general question here. We're asking people about their view on the British Empire, and more particularly, what's your assessment of the cultural re-evaluation of empire at the moment in the UK?

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Yes, I think there's a change, right. And it'll take years for the concept of imperialism to disappear entirely, right. It's, history to me, right.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** The National Front came into being, all that started, yes. But my views on the Empire is it should be regarded as history. People still feel – oh, about their parents or grandparents, you know, and so forth. It's going on in the Caribbean now, right. It's part of history, get on with it, right, make your life, etc, right. Become a cabinet minister. But if you do, for God's sake, get it right. [laughs]

**INTERVIEWER:** [laughs] Yeah, important that that happens at some point. Yeah. Okay. That's – it's kind of aware that perhaps people talk about your origin more with you than they used to, but ultimately, a sense that empire is in the past and, and you know, people can make the best of what – of the opportunities they have currently?

**PARTICIPANT 1:** You can't say that about Who – about Who's Who, right? I don't know, because they keep it secret, who is, you know, that right, who is asked to become a member? I've no idea, right. But, yes, I loot at – sometimes – I'm surprised at some of the people – not the people who joined, some of the people who haven't joined. But I don't know. Yes.

But now my great uncle was in Who's Who.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right. Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** He was. He was an Indian. He was a Parsee, right?

**INTERVIEWER:** Uh huh

**PARTICIPANT 1:** And he was a colonel in the army. And he became – he got a knighthood, and he got his knighthood, because I think he was toadying to the British. But anyway. He did well. He was remarkable. He went to Afghanistan. He was involved in a bit of doctoring, and a bit of shooting, I think, as well, right. I don't know, but my parents never talked about him and I think my father fell out with him. I think because my father didn't get on too well with his family that he decided to come to England. But the interesting thing is, I never asked him why he came to England.

**South Asian man**

**INTERVIEWER**: Yeah just that institutional support I guess another really big question here and as part of the broader project we ask in a survey people’s views on British Empire, but more particularly their views on the cultural re-evaluation of Empire at the moment, I was just wondering what your reflections are on this cultural moment and yeah, in your experience?

**PARTICIPANT**: Well ok, I’ve been brought up so being daughter of immigrants and being the daughter of a historian who I knew about I knew a lot about the British in India and the rest of the Empire actually, just because my dad was interested in it, and also because it was very relevant to my dad growing up, so for example I recall I recall learning about the Second World War or hearing about it at school or whatever, or doing some project about it and then I remember my dad giving me a very different version of the Second World War, because the way it was taught at school was that this was a World War and that everybody was supporting Britain you know against Germany and yet but what I heard from my dad was very different.

**P:** People you know in India for example weren’t necessarily—I mean there were lots of Indian soldiers who fought for the Empire but there were lots of people who basically were rooting for Hitler because they wanted Britain to leave India and they thought if Hitler defeated Britain then Britain would leave the Empire because there would be a new, you know there would be a new regime in place, so that was very different and I—and Churchill for example, I my dad had told me about Churchill and when he was in India as a solider, but also when he was Prime Minister and when he went back on his word about Independence for India.

**P:** So I always had an alternative view but I never ever I mean it’s interesting now that I’m thinking about it, I never ever said any of that to anybody any of my teachers or anything because I think I must have realised that it was not a good idea [laughs] to criticise Churchill or the British.

**P:** So yeah we’ve always had we’ve always had that as we were growing up because of my father so we read more about the British Empire, and then I’ve always been interested in the history of slavery as well, just seeing that as such an injustice and cruelty and then again I mean I really like architecture and the National Trust and everything, but then reflecting on the fact that most of the great houses and most of the great cities that are in Britain have been built up on the proceeds of slavery.

And that, I mean it was when I went to the museum in Liverpool that actually it which was quite a long time ago now but when it first opened that I realised I found out that actually most of middle class people are people who had a little bit of money so clergymen and shopkeepers and teachers had some kind of interest in the slave trade because they bought shares in it and this was not the rich noble people but just everyday people would, they would buy shares in the ship going over and so, and just thinking how shocking that was really.

**P:** So, and then the other thing that, because I’m Muslim as well. the history of the Muslims in the Middle East and the debacle of the early 1900s with the division of you know the Ottoman Empire, and then the division into countries the creation of countries like Iraq and Syria and all of that, and Israel and Palestine.

**P:** I’m afraid this doesn’t really make more very good reading nor does it make for very good, it’s not a very good publicity machine for Britain and its interference around the world actually, and so I find, I mean I love living, well I’m British, so I love living here, but at the same time I’m not so jingo—well I’m not jingoistic, but I’m not so naïve as to think that everything that Britain has done in the past has been good.

**P:** So I will, I find it I find it very difficult when you know someone in Parliament gets up or the Prime Minister get up and talk about upholding human rights, and the fact that Britain has to take a stand, when you think well actually, if you look at the history of Britain it’s never taken a stand it’s done what most countries do and what most empires do which is to act in its own self-interest.

**P:** So with the Gulf Wars and we’re now what’s happening with human rights and business [laughs] and China, Saudi Arabia though, yeah so I’m, I find even when you just start reading what’s happened in the past and when official papers become available, and you see some of the atrocities that were committed in the name of the government, whether that be in Kenya or whether it be in India.

**P:** The massacre of people in what—the Mau Mau in Kenya, and in India allowing them allowing the famine and basically saying let them get on with it. So I I mean it comes out in certain ways and now I’m not afraid of saying it either I think in the past I probably would have kept quiet because I just think, “oh, we’re having conversation, it’s polite not to start an argument”, but it’s not an argument I just say, well for example.

**P:** I never call it the Indian Mutiny; I always say the War of Independence, because you know just because with the way that I see it, and again you know Gandhi revered by Attenborough in his film, but we I know a different version of Gandhi just because of what I know about Indian history as recounted to me by my dad and then followed up by me by reading reading about it.

**White man**

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, yeah, that makes sense. So it's a professional status within that institution. And so I have a question, now. So this is one of the topical questions again, and I'm interested in your view on – recently, there's been a wide discussion of the British Empire in the UK and more particularly, a cultural reevaluation of empire and what that meant, and I'm just interested in what your thoughts are on, on this cultural moment, as it were, I suppose, as a historian and also your observations?

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Well, I'm a kind of pragmatist on that. The past is what it was. What we have to do is address the problems that face us today, and try and make as good a job of it as we can. History is going to judge us, and it will judge us by reference to the criteria of the future. That's partly the problem. If you zoned in on particular issues, my Cambridge college is Jesus, which had the recent furore over the memorial to this chap, Tobias Rustat, but it also had a furore over a bronze Benin cockerel that was in the hall.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** Now, so far as the bronze Benin cockerel is concerned, if it was obtained illegally by reference to the criteria that applied at the time, when it was grabbed, and then presented to the college, then the college was obliged to restore it. If it was not grabbed illegally, then the college has an option as to whether or not it sends it back to Benin, or keeps it, and it's a little unclear as to how that option should be exercised. It's a bit like the Elgin Marbles. You know, if the Elgin Marbles were obtained lawfully at the time, when Lord Elgin got them off the Parthenon, then it's an option as to whether or not they are returned to Greece.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** And a whole variety of different factors come into play when you're deciding how to exercise that option, but you're not obliged to return them. And this feeds into all this debate about empire and stuff like that. See, the thing is, history is history, it's happened. And you can look back into history. And I think you can criticise people if they did something that was contrary to the norms of the period in which they were living. But if they were acting in accordance with those norms, then the best that you can do is to say, well, we don't think that's the right way of behaviour today, and therefore we should not be behaving in that way, today.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** And you can go – I rant on and on about this, partly because I'm part Polish, and part Irish, and both my ancestors, or recent forebears, were the targets of genocide, in the case of the Irish more than once. But the thing is, you can't allow the past to define your present and what you do in the future. You learn from the past. And I think you have to acknowledge it. That means that I don't have a problem with a statue of Oliver Cromwell, which stands outside Parliament, despite the fact that he was a mass murderer. I don't have a problem with the statue of a slaver. I wouldn't put one up now. But if one is there, I would be happy with the addition of the park explaining the context. I wouldn't myself seek to tear it down. Now, if somebody else came along and – the local council, for example, and they said we don't want that here, I wouldn't object because I think that's a choice that you can make.

**PARTICIPANT 1:** But there are some aspects of the modern debate that I find illogical and potentially dangerous. You see, one of the ways – genocide is a term that is very often misunderstood. It's not the same as the Holocaust. Genocide is destroying a people, which you can do by destroying the elite. And also you can do by destroying their the identity of that people by attacking their culture and things like that. And the big problem about a lot of the things that are going around at the moment, is that they're verging, and I'm not saying that non-white people who are objecting to slavery are engaging in genocide, that's an absurdity. But I think the problem is that you've got to recognise the fact that if you attack the culture of a people, you may find you're going to get a reaction. And actually, you shouldn't be doing that. So people have to understand that there's an, if you like, a right way of criticising the past and making amends for the past, but there's also a wrong way, and the wrong way is when you get a bit over the top, there's got to be a certain amount of proportionality in this.

**White man**

**INTERVIEWER:** Mmm. Yeah, no I think really astute to bring up property as such a central aspect of that. So another really broad question, and this is about your view on the British empire, and more particularly what’s your assessment of the cultural re-evaluation of empire at the moment?

**PARTICIPANT:** I think when I was, you know, when I was at school empire was never taught as being a problem. I mean I think, you know, the East India Company, you know, people thought, oh that, but even sort of Clive of India and the East India Company at school were not taught as being an imperial, colonial problem. And, yeah my view now would be, you know, one of the good things about moving to London, and this is not the case in Newcastle, or even Norwich, or both, is having black friends and like people who have a very different attitude to a lot of things that you would take for granted. And when I moved to WHO, you know, I realised that disability, which I’ve been studying all my life, I’d only ever studied it in England, almost exclusively, or Britain, and therefore actually doing, understanding what the issues were in Africa was, you know, and working at the WHO, was really important for me.

It was quite interesting because I was offered a CBE, and I think because I was a successful academic, and also, you know, they try hard to be diverse, and I, and they said ‘you’ve got to tell us in a week’. And I said to my kids, ‘what do you think I should do?’ And they said ‘we don’t support it but you, you know, we’ll support you’, and I said to my brothers ‘what should I do?’ and they said ‘go for it’. And I said to one friend of mine, and he said ‘don’t have anything to do with it’. So I was really, and in the end I said yes, mainly because I looked at the people who’d got the CBE before and they were all, or OBE or MBE or whatever, and they were good people. They were not, you know, and I thought, well hang on a minute are you saying they’re all imperialists and monarchists? And I couldn’t, they were just, you know, pillars of their community. And the guy who said ‘don’t touch it with a bargepole’ later was entertained by the Qataris at the, you know, World Cup stadiums in Qatar and came back telling me how marvellous it was. And I thought, well I’m still a critic of the monarchy, I’m still a critic of the British [Missed] [01:10:14], even if I have letters after my name, whereas you’ve bought the bloody Qatari line hook, line and sinker. So that’s corruption.

Anyway I was at a dinner at the British Museum, which I was really, you know, pleased and excited to be invited to, and the guy ahead of me was a famous artist who had been ordered a CBE, and I said to him, because he said ‘oh hello Tom’, and I didn’t know him but he knew me, and so I said to him, his name is Yinka Shonibare, and I said to him, ‘Yinka you were really inspirational to me’, because he’s obviously disabled, he’s in a wheelchair, and I said ‘because you accepted the CBE. Will you tell me something about that?’ And he said, well [Missed] [01:11:03], because he’s originally, his ancestors were from Ghana, he said ‘I think it’s really important for the first generation of black folk to say no, and “we will not be part of this”’, but he said ‘they’ve done that, you know, and we can’t carry on doing that, and so sooner or later we have to say “no we’re British, we will accept this”’. So that’s why he had. And I remember feeling a big relief, because I thought well, and also my friend Bev Barnett, who I was in the Communist Party with, who’s a West Indian origin person in Britain, she’d taken the OBE or whatever it was. And so I thought, well a lot of my black friends have, so if they have then I’m not going to pretend that I’m better than them and say no, so. And you could argue that I’m a person of the British establishment so that’s why I said yes, but I wanted to check it out first I think.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah. It’s that, you know, that, you felt conflicted given its [Missed]

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, oh very conflicted, definitely, definitely, definitely.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah.

**PARTICIPANT:** And I remember I did an event for the Cabinet Office because they were trying to open, they’re trying to open up the honours system and make, and I kind of think, I looked at all the countries and they’ve all got honours systems, you know, like America has and France has and Republican places have, and they just have different medals. They have the Congressional Medal of Honor or the Legion d’Honneur or whatever it might be, they all have them. And so I thought, well, you know, and somebody said to me ‘well it’s just that the British do it with this strange initials’. And I said at the time I’d rather have, you know, a Certificate of British Excellence or Order of British Excellence or whatever, not British Empire, because it is, it is, it has associations that I would no longer feel happy about.

**White woman**

INTERVIEWER: The call will continue, it’s just a warning for the schedule. So the next question I have I have, it’s building on a question we asked in the survey, and I’m interested in your view of the British Empire, but more particularly of its cultural re-evaluation at the moment. And I wondered if you have any thoughts on that.

PARTICIPANT 1: The British Empire? Well it doesn’t exist anymore! You mean the Commonwealth!

[00:56:44]

INTERVIEWER: I mean the toppling of statues and the re-engagement –

PARTICIPANT 1: I think it’s all crazy, because what we have to look at and realise is that we've got to look at history. And this was history, and it’s changed. We don’t have to denigrate people for what they did in the past, we have to understand that they did things because they had to. And because that was the way one lived. There will be criticisms of things that we do these days which in the future people may say, “You should never have done that.”

[00:57:25]

So we don’t learn sufficiently from history, I think. Even now. And I can point to Liz Truss. [laughs] Or rather the Conservative Party at the moment. Boris has done us no favours, much as I like him. [laughs] He’s a brilliant, intelligent man, but he’s been so bloody stupid! And fancy coming back and saying he can take over again after 44 days! I mean, really! [laughs] As far as I’m concerned, he might be able to come back, once he’s been sorted with the parties in Downing Street, and people have forgotten some of what he’s done. But who knows?

[00:58:29]

INTERVIEWER: That certainly is a dramatic period for British politics.

PARTICIPANT 1: Unbelievable! One doesn’t really want to get involved but my God. I don’t listen to the programmes anymore, I don’t listen to it.

[00:58:45]

INTERVIEWER: I sense that Empire is in the past to judge it by today’s standards is wrong, but also a sense that we’re not learning enough from history in the present at the same time.

PARTICIPANT 1: That’s right.

**South Asian man**

INTERVIEWER: I suppose the last two questions now, this has been absolutely fascinating, thank you. So this is another general question. We’re interested in people’s view of British empire, and more particularly your assessment of the cultural re-evaluation of empire at the moment. I realise this is something that’s especially prominent in Cambridge for instance. Yeah, I just wondered what your reflections were on that.

PARTICIPANT: Yes. Now I feel it’s, all, basically different tribes of human beings are always inevitably beastly to each other, right?

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

PARTICIPANT: And actually for example say British behaviour in China itself, like the Opium War, you might regard as pretty negative.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

PARTICIPANT: But I might say also that the Treaty of Nanking resulted in Britain sequestering Hong Kong, and when the Communist revolution took place there was a large, China’s refugee movement into Hong Kong, and, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the existence of Hong Kong caused a large number of Chinese to have a good [Missed] [00:55:47], which they wouldn’t have had in mainland China. If you go to, if you take a British, so even though Hong Kong began on negative moral grounds think of the millions of people who have done well out of a rich colony. So what started in a morally dubious way has led to a lot of absolute good for many people.

INTERVIEWER: Right, yeah.

PARTICIPANT: I think the same goes for Malaysia, and Britain left behind in Malaysia a structure of laws which has made Malaysia relatively prosperous, and the same goes for Singapore. When I was growing up in Singapore not every house had a bathroom, you know? Now, as you know, they are richer than America.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

PARTICIPANT: But if you follow backwards to the history of Britain, even if the primary objective was plunder it incidentally created a large number of positives.

INTERVIEWER: Right, yeah.

PARTICIPANT: Now [Missed] [00:57:06] say, take for example Cecil Rhodes, right?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

PARTICIPANT: Now [Missed] [00:57:12] a significantly dubious character, you know, if you look at it at least in present morals, but think of what good the Rhodes scholarships have done in Oxford. And actually one of my views, because as you know in Oxford there is a big, a lot of talk about tearing down Cecil Rhodes’-

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

PARTICIPANT: -statue in, which I don’t like because I don’t like destruction of iconography, because then actually a memory gets lost, including negative memory. I would have rather leave Cecil Rhodes’ status there but put up a status of Nelson Mandela next to it.

INTERVIEWER: Right, right. I suppose-

PARTICIPANT: And it’s the riposte to Cecil Rhodes.

INTERVIEWER: Mmm, yeah. It reminded me of that dialogue that you’ve always pursued in education as well.

PARTICIPANT: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Oh that’s interesting. So, you know, as much as plunder was central to British empire your perspective is that, you know, there’s also been prosperous environments that have come out of that?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, yes, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And that if you remove memories of the past you lose something, and you’d prefer to have-

PARTICIPANT: Yes, yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: -more, more symbols from the past to create conversation rather than removing it?

PARTICIPANT: That’s right, yes. Yes. Inside the British Museum the Elgin Marbles and so forth, you know, that I find difficult to cope with because I tended now to see a museum, think of it as a, if you’ve got stuff from other people’s countries remember that stuff is a kind of representative of that country in your country.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

PARTICIPANT: So if you took that all away it would cause every country to only hold onto its own relics. And so what is international in a museum is as much a diplomatic service as having an ambassador.

INTERVIEWER: Mmm, mmm. Oh that’s interesting.

PARTICIPANT: You see for example if you think of the Egyptology stuff in the Ashmolean it’s a very sharp reminder that they were civilised long before we were.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. That’s a really-

PARTICIPANT: We should remember that, look at the beautiful tombs and the artwork they’ve done. We are not the only civilisation who have produced art. It’s a very important reminder of that.

**South Asian woman**

PARTICIPANT 1: The cultural reassessment? I must confess that I find it quite distressing that the discussion should be the way it's going. Cultural reassessment is about values, and it should be about self-evaluation of your values. Your own personal values rather than this. There's quite a lot of it, media-generated perhaps, I don't know, but if it is media generated or not, but certainly media promoted in terms of cultural evaluation. To my mind, there needs to be, and there should be cultural evaluation of values.

PARTICIPANT 1: Values based, personal values, and this, I think is all arriving because our leadership has been the focus, I think, in recent months, on values. In some way, people like me in [01:12:40] [Missed], such as I have, and had, it is all in the past now, I am a senior person. I have no leadership role. But I try actually to talk to young people about values. I think that values are the most important thing that we can promote now. Rather than this whole business of empire. I think this is now being used in an unseemly way, because it's not promoting values, really. We really need to realign our values. This is where I think all my things about school and medical school education come in, is about values, personal values. Which then move onto societal values.

**Black man**

P: As you know, I turned down an OBE.

P: I don’t do—I try not to do anything with a kind of empire connection.

INTERVIEWER: And I'm really struck at how careful you are in curating what you're doing. That is incredibly eclectic, but you talk about distancing yourself from empire, and I don't know, it’s a way of not selling out, or not becoming part of an establishment. Does that resonate?

PARTICIPANT: I think both of those things are true. I’m trying not to sell out and I’m not rich, and sometimes people do flash money in front of you and go, “Go and do this”, and the other thing you said, not selling out what was the other thing?

INTERVIEWER: So last question, we’ve been asking people about their thoughts on the cultural re-evaluation of British Empire, or whether you think that’s happening at the moment, in terms of toppling of statues and Black Lives Matter and the different conversations that are going on. I wondered what your reflections were on that?

PARTICIPANT: My personal take on it is that most compassionate, open minded people will see that the whole idea of empire needs to be re-evaluated. To understand Black Lives Matter, some people say, well all lives matter. Of course that’s true, but the problem is you’ve been neglecting one child. If you’ve got a family and your daughter comes in and says, “Mum you’ve neglected me. You’ve not fed me, you’ve fed the others and the mum says, “I love all my children”. “But you’ve neglected me.”

P: Black people are not saying that all white people are guilty. All white people must be aware. You’ve probably heard me say this before—when I realised what sexism was, I didn’t then go to women and say, “How is it going in your workshops?” I said, “You know what, I’ve gotta think about my attitude to women and the things I say, the things I do and the things I’ve inherited, that I’m probably not aware of.”

P: Doesn’t mean I’m a bad person, doesn’t mean that I hate women. This is what I grew up in. My dad was sexist or my uncles were sexist. Of course that’s gonna rub off on me. So I have to consciously kind of rub that off.

P: And that’s what white people have to do. They’ve inherited attitudes that are racist. It doesn’t mean they’re bad people. And when it comes to the toppling of the statues, yeah, I think some statues have to be toppled. I’m happy with them to be in museums.

P: But the bottom line for me, is I do genuinely think—I was gonna say the majority, I dont know if I can say that, but lots of people would say the same. I think our problem is the establishment. It’s the white establishment thinks that Winston Churchill is a hero.

P: He put Britain through a war. If you think that he was this faultlesshero, then it’s an insult to the Bengalis who were allowed to starve in the millions. I’ll never quite understand this almost putting Churchill as a saint. And all the things he said about women.

P: Now, I’m not saying he’s completely evil, either. But we have to be realistic and honest. And I think one... Imagine that we actually turned around and said, “You know what, we really have to be honest about what Winston Churchill did to the Bengali people and other people and what he said about women et cetera.”

P: And it’s not just Winston Churchill. It’s all these other characters in history. We really have—and I think this is something that’s not gonna happen in our lifetimes—we really have to go back and rewrite the books.

P: I mean, the curriculum would have to change drastically. And I just don’t think this country's prepared for that. I think it would be a better place. Because when a policeman stops me, he would completely understand, first of all that my life mattered, and that he’s not superior to me.

P: Now, you could say, well there’s Black police that could stop me. But that Black police officer wouldn’t be so obsessed with impressing white police officers.

P: We would be in a much fairer place. But I just think that the ruling class have got their interests at heart and they want to keep the status quo. They want to keep this narrative that empire was a force of good et cetera et cetera.

P: I’ve always said that even in the empire, even somebody like me who’s fought against empire all my life, can pick out things that the empire did that are good, relatively speaking, like English language—great language.

P: You can think of some sports. There are some other ideas—I mean, I do like the idea of a civil service. But do you have to invade and conquer, and you know, you could have given us that in a much more civilised way.

P: I used to make this analogy, and it’s a bit raw, so please excuse me, but there was a court case many years ago where a woman was raped by a man. And the woman said she felt violated—all the things that a woman would—but the judge let the man off by getting a very light sentence. Because the man said, “Look, I used a condom. And I gave her a bus fare home.”

P: When somebody says, “Well, we gave you these really good thing, and you’ve got English”, it’s a bit like that. You’ve raped us, you’ve destroyed us. And then you're gonna say, “Well, you got English.” It’s a weird analogy, but I remember for some reason that chimes with me. They kind of similar. You do something really bad to someone and then you're supposed to feel good because they left you some change.